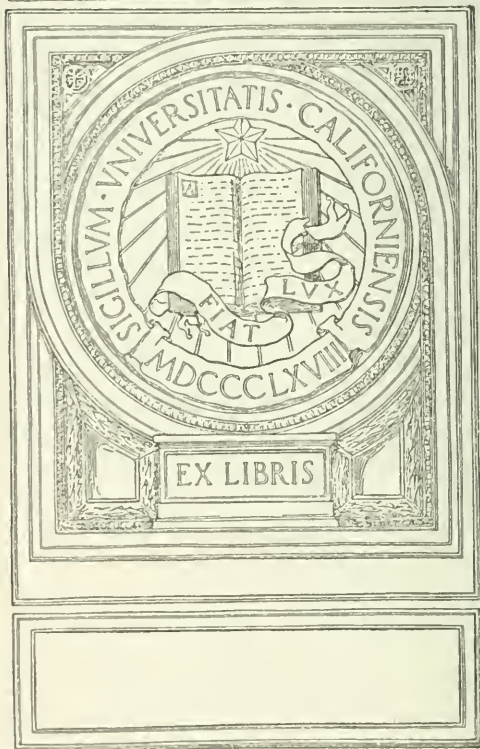




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# STUDIES IN SEVERAL LITERATURES

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HARRY THURSTON PECK, Litt. D.

AUTHOR OF "THE PERSONAL EQUATION,"  
"WHAT IS GOOD ENGLISH," ETC.



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## THE ODYSSEY.

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## THE ODYSSEY

It may be asserted as a general truth that no very long poem can be read at a sitting with pleasure and appreciation. However we may define poetry, it is certainly a more elevated and impassioned form of expression than prose. It demands a closer attention, a more alert attitude of apprehension on the reader's part. Wordsworth has very well said that the end of poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure. But this excitement, this tension of the mind and of the emotions, can not be very long supported before we grow conscious of a certain strain. The air becomes too rarefied for us to breathe quite naturally. As soon as this occurs, there is no longer "an overbalance of pleasure." We can not remain for a long time upon the heights. Our feelings grow relaxed. We seek the lower levels with a sensation of relief. We have been stimulated and exalted; but in a comparatively short time this stimulation and exaltation tax us too severely. Poe, in one of his critical essays, declares that a long poem does not exist, and he adds that

the phrase "a long poem" is simply a flat contradiction in terms. There is perhaps just one poem in the literature of all the world of which this is not true; and therefore, to my mind, this poem is the supreme poem, the noblest example of the poetic art.

Several years ago, Mr. Andrew Carnegie, who is always doing something interesting and unexpected, gave to the public his opinion as to the literary and ethical value of Homer. Not a few persons were inclined to mock at this deliverance and to recall the old maxim that the cobbler should stick to his last. Mr. Carnegie, they said, might know more about iron and steel than any other living man; but why should he put himself forward as an authority on classical literature? He himself would certainly not have listened with much respect to the views of Professor Gildersleeve or the late Sir Richard Jebb on the subject of iron tubing and steel rails.

To me, at least, such criticism seems decidedly unfair. It might well be not only interesting but instructive for specialists in any field to listen to the comments of those whose interests have lain wholly outside of that especial sphere, but who can bring to bear upon it a strong and highly trained intelligence, together with an unbiassed mind, and who, therefore, can look at it through fresh eyes and from a standpoint that would be wholly new. I should, for example, be intensely eager to hear what Mr. John D. Rockefeller would have to say about Aris-

## THE ODYSSEY

totle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, if he were to read that work in an adequate translation and ponder it with all his remarkably acute intelligence. Again, who would not like to hear just how Plato's *Republic* would impress the mind of ~~librarian~~ ~~Clark~~, of Montana; whether Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* would appeal to the taste of Mr. John Wanamaker; or how far Matthew Arnold's essays on *Culture and Anarchy* would have any attraction for Mr. Charles M. Schwab?

Therefore, what Mr. Carnegie said regarding Homer is really to be considered with respect. And Homer was an ideal choice for him, because the supreme glory of Homer is the imaginative quality of his poetry, and Mr. Carnegie is himself a man of imagination. He has shown this in the unusual and striking objects to which he has devoted a large part of his great fortune. Other multimillionaires have been relatively as generous, but they have given in conventional ways, and therefore will be forgotten when Mr. Carnegie is remembered. Hence, his judgment on Homer is to be regarded seriously and by no means to be cast aside with a flippant jest.

Mr. Carnegie saw in Homer nothing to commend or to admire. He found the *Iliad* tiresome. It was almost all a tale of fighting, of bloodshed, and of brutality—a poem that could teach no useful lesson and that was monotonous and dull to read. In some parts of his criticism Mr. Carnegie was in uncon-

scious agreement with Socrates and Plato; but classical scholars would be likely to bristle with indignation on being told that the *Iliad* is dull. Nevertheless, let us look at the Homeric literature fairly, to see whether there be not some basis for the censure; and then let us consider the topic with which we are immediately concerned.

In the first place, it was unfortunate that Mr. Carnegie chose to read the *Iliad* in Pope's metrical translation. That translation was characterised for all time by the great Hellenist, Richard Bentley, when he said to the author, with his usual bluntness:

“A very pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you mustn't call it Homer.”

And, in truth, nothing could be more incongruous than to take Pope's neat, trim, balanced, mincing lines as representing the splendid, surging, billowy hexameters of Homer. It is like stripping an ancient Greek of his flowing robes and trussing him up in doublet and hose and pointed shoes, with a periwig upon his head, and a gilt snuff-box in his hand. If one must read the *Iliad* in English, let him read it in the simple, manly prose of Lang and Leaf. Then the flavour of the original will not all be lost. Matthew Arnold's lengthy essay on translating Homer contains many admirable criticisms and suggestions; yet he seems to take it for granted that any version worthy of the name must be in poetry. Just here is where he goes astray. There are many



poetical renderings of Homer, from Chapman to Clough and Way; yet whether these are in English ballad-metre or in hexameters, they fail to satisfy the mind. If you translate the poetry of Homer into English verse, it is certain to suffer a sea-change and it becomes English not merely in language but in spirit. There are two features of the original Greek, for instance, one of which must necessarily be sacrificed in the translation. First there is the metrical effect, that peculiar, sinuous, sweeping, rolling movement which no translation can accurately give; and there is also what Mr. Arnold rightly calls "out-of-doors freshness, life, naturalness, and buoyant rapidity." There is, besides, a certain quaintness and simplicity which suggests a period when the world was young. The first—that is, the metrical effect—can to some extent be imitated in English and in German; but, after all, this is only the setting, the shell, the part that is external. Is it not better to sacrifice it, and by using prose, preserve those other qualities which are most essentially Homeric? Probably even a rude literal translation into prose, such as one hears in schools and in college classes, does, after all, bring one nearer to the primitiveness of the Homeric spirit than the finest and most polished paraphrases which a verse-rendering affords. One loves the familiar and delightful old friends which seek to convey the beautiful Greek compound words—"the far-darting Apollo," "the

shadow-casting spear," "the much-enduring Odysseus," "the well-greaved Greeks," "the much-roaring sea," and all the rest of that schoolboy vocabulary which we remember from our earlier years. For the spirit of the schoolboy and of the young barbarian in college is, after all, in a large measure, the spirit of Homer himself or of those rhapsodes whom we collectively describe as Homer. Their world was a world of fighting, of primitive emotions, of elemental and perfectly transparent craft, of sunshine and starshine, and a sweet smell of the forests and of the sea. And so, let us have our Homer not in English verse, but in English prose, if we are not to have it in Homeric Greek. In this way we shall gain much more than we shall lose.

But, apart from the matter of translation, is the *Iliad* world-literature in the sense that it has in it some quality which will survive the process of translation—even of a poor translation—and appeal not merely to classical scholars or to cultivated readers, but to every human being who has a brain to understand and a heart to feel? I should answer most emphatically "No," although this answer involves the rankest kind of heresy. I am willing to go even further and to say that, in the true sense of the word, there is but one epic poem in existence which meets the test, and is world-literature, and not merely class-literature, or race-literature.

The *Iliad*, for instance, is a splendid monument to

the Greek genius. In parts, it is fit to thrill or melt or awe the soul of any one. Yet this is true of parts alone. As a whole, Mr. Carnegie was right in calling it monotonous. It is tiresome even if you read it in the Greek and with a scholar's knowledge of its multifarious allusions, of its characters, and of the creative, restless people who at last read it as a sacred book, the fountain-head of all their knowledge—a book to be learned by heart in school, and quoted as the Bible is now quoted. But the interminable wrangle of the gods, the heroism of heroes who are invulnerable, the endless battles—one feels at last as if he had been listening to the banging of a brazen kettle. In the twenty-four books of the *Iliad* there are some twenty passages that deserve to be immortal. The rest belong to the classicist, the antiquarian, the philologist.

Of Vergil's *Aeneid* the very same thing may be said. From Lucan's *Pharsalia* there may be chosen bits of glowing declamation that stir the blood, with here and there a biting epigram, or a line that lives and glows. The Finnish *Kalevala* is race-literature, and so is the *Lusiad* of Camoëns. Who but a Frenchman (and how many Frenchmen?) ever read the *Henriade* of Voltaire? And as for *Paradise Lost*, it is an epic of Puritanism, clogged with seventeenth-century theology, and made ludicrous at its climax by that preposterous passage where the devils bowl the angels over with huge cannon-balls. Now and

then some German scholar will write an elaborate dissertation on it; but what foreigner could read it, and—to be frank—how many English or Americans have ever read more than stray passages from its laboured pages? So far as these poems just mentioned have exercised a world-influence, they are little more important than the gigantic Sanskrit epic that is eight times as long as both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined, and that contains a hundred thousand stanzas.

The truth is that all these long poems survive because they appeal either to the pride of some particular race or nation, or because they are made the subject of special study by highly educated persons, who master them, or at any rate mess in them, as a part of language-training, or antiquities, or culture-history. There is only one epic which, no matter how badly it may be translated, can be read spontaneously, for the pure pleasure of it, and which has gone beyond the limits of nation and of race, and down below the stratum of the cultivated, and made its way by a thousand channels into the knowledge of men and women of ordinary intelligence, and even into the prattle of children in the nursery. This is the *Odyssey* ascribed to Homer; and I am sure that had Mr. Carnegie read it as a whole in the fine English prose of Professor Butcher and Mr. Andrew Lang, he would have pronounced a very different verdict upon Homer.

The *Odyssey* is the one epic that has possessed and still possesses a fascination for the peoples of every age and every race since it was first completed. It is the only epic poem of which this is true, and it is, therefore, the greatest epic in all literature. I would venture to go still further and to pronounce it the most wonderful and beautiful single poem of which mankind has any knowledge. If we disregard the fact that it is in verse and not in prose, we may say that it is the finest novel, the most stirring romance, that ever has been written. Because it was essentially a novel, the Greeks were very late in evolving prose fiction. They did not need it.

For our present purpose we need not consider when or how it came into existence; whether it was the work of a single brain or of many; whether it represents a growth in which a multitude of legends slowly grouped themselves about a central theme and became blended into a seamless unity; or whether this process was hastened and made perfect by the genius of a great master of his art. Let us take the poem as it is, and be content to see in it a rare combination of the most primitive fancy with the sure touch and exquisite skill of the supreme artist. Embodied in the *Odyssey* is every kind of legend and tradition that floated down, detached and isolated, in the great stream of folk-lore. These stories belong to the childhood of the human race, and are rich with that glorious imagination whose warmth had not yet been

chilled by the sophisticated knowledge of civilisation. The rainbow hues of fancy irradiate these charming tales, which are not Greek alone, but the inherited treasures of humanity over all the world.

Thus, the adventure with the Cyclops, when the huge one-eyed giant is blinded by Odysseus, can be found in the legends of the Basques and Celts. The bag of Æolus, which held all the winds save one, is familiar in the folk-tales of the Lapps and Finns. The beautiful enchantress Circe, who changes the sailors of Odysseus into swine, was known centuries ago to the story-tellers of India. The descent into hell, which Vergil borrowed from the *Odyssey*, and which Dante, in turn, borrowed from Vergil, is a theme of fiction so widespread as to occur among the Finns and even among the savages of Polynesia. The Sirens, who by their sweet songs could charm the passing mariners and draw them on the rocks, were invented by sailors perhaps a hundred centuries ago. The towering cliffs which clashed together and destroyed the ships that sailed between them made a fearsome fable for the Aztecs, back in the mists of time, while still the Greeks were but a young people. In a word, the *Odyssey* contains a mass of curious, primeval, universal myth. It is the wonder-book of the whole world.

But all these myths and fables and traditions are not thrown together loosely so that they are only a string of episodes quite unrelated to each other, like

the stories in the *Arabian Nights*, for instance. They are strands which some one carefully selected and with consummate ingenuity wove together into a fabric that is artistically one. The plot of the *Odyssey* is a marvel of construction. It is worked out in such a way that no part of the poem can be detached. The bits of legend, whatever may have been their origin, are closely linked with the one absorbing theme of the return of Odysseus, and they are so treated as to give infinite variety, while never for a moment letting our attention wander from the plot.

Here, then, are at once diversity and unity and artistry combined. Out of all the epics that we know, the *Odyssey* alone compels attention from the first line to the last. It appeals to curiosity, to imagination, to humour, to pity, and in some of its great passages, to our sense of the sublime. The nature of the *Odyssey* explains why Poe's dictum that "a long poem does not exist" is untrue of this one great epic. The strain, the mental elation, which characterise other long poems fatigue the reader's mind because the poet calls only one set of emotions into play. Poe seems to think that only the sublime and the passionate have place in poetry. He does not remember that pity, curiosity, and even humour may also enter in. The principle of variety is a most important one; but no epic poet other than Homer has made use of it to the very full. Milton, for example, descends from his sublimities



to indulge in platitudes. Homer passes from his sublimities to different, but no less unfailing, sources of emotion. The reader's mind, therefore, is rested not by bathing itself in dulness nor by putting the book aside altogether for a time. It passes by a natural and easy transition from sublimity to beauty, from beauty to pathos, from pathos to expectancy, from expectancy to pleasurable entertainment, or to some climax which again raises it to the heights. Thus the *Odyssey* properly observes Wordsworth's principle of "an overbalance of pleasure."

The ultimate reason why the *Odyssey* has achieved the sort of immortality which no other epic poem ever won is found, I think, in the great prominence which it gives to the purely human element. The gods, instead of being always thrust before us, are seen only, as it were, hovering in the background; and it is the fate of men and women with which we are first of all concerned. Odysseus himself, the hero of the poem, though he is a great warrior and wise above all other men, is not always void of fear, any more than he is always free from folly. He has moments of weakness and unwisdom, like any man. He dreads the perils of an unknown shore. He yields to the fascination of Calypso. He rashly runs unnecessary risks when he makes his visit to the Cyclops, and thereby is forced to wander over sea and land for two long years. But his courage and his wisdom pull him through at last, and the climax of the poem



makes us thrill at the triumph of manhood over every obstacle.

And two women in the book are wonderfully true. Penelope, the loyal wife of Odysseus, beset by wooers, not knowing surely that her husband still survives—she is the type for all time of constancy and truth, of devotion to the man to whom her entire heart is given. What shall we say of Nausicaa, the island maiden? She was first drawn for us almost three thousand years ago, yet she is as winsome and as sweet as though we had just met her playing tennis. This island princess, the daughter of a rich and luxurious king, still goes with her companions to wash her garments in a little stream, and to romp with her attendant maidens. She blushes when she comes upon the shipwrecked Odysseus, and will not herself guide him to the palace through the city streets, lest people should gossip and say, “Where did she pick him up?” (*ποῦ δέ μιν εὔρει;*) Nausicaa is a genuine girl, with all a young girl’s modesty and sweetness and naïveté. She and Chrysothemis, in the *Electra* of Sophocles, are the only two genuine girls in all Greek literature—Nausicaa, a frank, lovable, and sensible young creature, and Chrysothemis just the least bit pert. Chrysothemis, in fact, is a good example of the shallow young girl who likes gaiety and does not very much trouble herself about the deeper things of life. In the play of Sophocles, she can not understand why her sister

Electra should go moping about, creating an atmosphere of unhappiness and discontent. To be sure, there was some sort of scandal back in the past about her mother's marriage with her stepfather; but why keep brooding over this forever? She would like to have the palace done over and to resume the usual festivities and entertainments. When Electra rebukes her, Chrysothemis is just a little bit cattish in her sharp replies. On the other hand, Nausicaa has a deeper, more affectionate, and steadfast nature. Once I happened to speak of these two dainty little Greeks to a very accomplished classical scholar, and he remarked laughingly:

“Yes, I'm sure that Chrysothemis wore side-combs.”

He would scarcely have said this in a public lecture on Greek literature, and yet it expresses absolutely the feeling that one has on first reading the few lines in which a master of psychology has given us a bit of everlasting human nature.

About Nausicaa, Charles Dudley Warner wrote that “nothing is more enduring in literature than this girl.” And he goes on to make some general remarks which seem to me peculiarly appropriate to the *Odyssey* as a whole. “All the elements of the picture are simple, human, natural, standing in as unconfused relation as any events in common life.” Here, indeed, we find “the true realism that is touched with the ideality of genius,” and this is “the immortal

element in literature." For the highest genius is marked first of all by a beautiful simplicity, a quality which appeals to the universal understanding, generation after generation, and age after age. This realism touched with ideality, this natural and simple and human element, are what make the *Odyssey* the first of epics, inimitable and unapproachable.

It is in the climax of the book that the human interest of the poem is most sharply and surely felt. Odysseus has wandered for ten weary years, seeking to reach his home in Ithaca, and always beaten back by the curse of Poseidon, which leads him through a strange and striking series of adventures. In his absence, and because he is thought to be long since dead, a swarm of suitors throng the palace, where his wife still hopes for his return. They are eager, lustful, arrogant young nobles who browbeat the aged father of Odysseus, quarter themselves upon the absent king's domain, eat and drink at his table, waste his possessions, and make loose love to the maidens who wait upon the queen, Penelope.

When, at last, Odysseus comes, it is in the guise of a beggar, mean and squalid in appearance. His anger blazes hotly in his heart at what he hears and sees; but he is wise, and he stays his hand until his vengeance shall be the more tremendous. His aged father does not recognise him, nor even his wife who loves him. His old hound, Argos, alone remembers the lord and king of Ithaca. Then comes the mo-

ment when the suitors are lolling over the wine-cups, and they mock the beggar-man. The great bow of King Odysseus is brought forth, and one after another the jeering youths essay to bend it, but their strength is not sufficient. At last the beggar takes it in his hands, and looks down upon the wanton revellers who have robbed him and would have dishonoured him. And as he looks, the meanness of the beggar gives way to the majesty of the monarch. He towers above them with blazing eyes, and with all the glory of triumphant and avenging power. The doors of the great hall are barred, and a peal of thunder shakes the heaven. Odysseus calls to his son, Telemachus, and "Telemachus girt his sharp sword about him, and took his spear in his grasp, and stood fast by his father's side, all armed with gleaming bronze, while Odysseus stripped himself of his rags and leaped upon the threshold, and poured out the swift arrows there before his feet."

It is superb—this vengeance of a king, who, returning home, stands forth magnificent in his just rage, and bends the mighty bow and slays with his shafts those who have insulted him and who have dared to treat his wife with less than honour. The story stirs the blood, whether we read it in the splendid, rolling measure of the Greek or in one of the many translations. It plays upon the elemental primitive emotions, and therefore it is a poem written for all time.

Alone among epic poems, the *Odyssey*, as I have said, has entered not merely into every form of later romance, but into the common speech of man. We find it largely drawn upon by Vergil in the greatest Latin epic, just as we find fragments of its fine gold scattered through the works of modern writers—the poetry of Tennyson, for example, or the child-prose of Hawthorne. So it is that even those who never read the *Odyssey* have come to possess at least a little of its treasure; for there are few who have not heard of the Sirens and of “Cimmerian darkness,” and of Circe, of the Cyclops, of Penelope’s web, and of the lotus-eaters.

The *Odyssey* has for its very heart the home toward which the hero is ever striving. It is a poem of the sea—the wonderful sea in whose enchanted isles are dreams of loveliness and also dangers that appal. It has all the magic and the mystery of the ocean—its endless fascination, the radiance of its sunlit waves, and the stern grandeur of its tempests. Thus, unlike any other epic, its music is infinitely varied; yet underneath it are always—so that it may be truly epic in its power—the “surge and thunder” whose deep tones haunt the ear and reach at last the very soul of him who reads.

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ALCIPHON

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## II

### ALCIPHRON

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IN just what way do men and women look on life? Year succeeds year, and decade follows after decade; and in this swiftly silent gliding on of time there is wrought out for us the curious succession of events which, when taken all together, make up our lives. For it is by events and experiences, and not by years, that we measure our existence and decide in retrospect whether we have been happy or unhappy. The successes and the failures, the opportunities and the limitations, the friendships and the enmities, the periods of intellectual growth and those of intellectual deterioration, the hours of contentment and the moments of passionate revolt or exaltation—these times, these episodes, are woven together into that multicoloured, blurred, uneven fabric of personal experience which each of us calls life. Every human being, indeed, is living a realistic novel whereof he is himself in his own belief the central figure, the person of supreme importance; and so he interprets every incident according to its relation to his personal concerns.

Naturally, then, he looks upon these incidents from a special angle—the angle of self—and he seldom

pauses to reflect that every other character in the story is looking upon the same episodes from quite a different angle, and that each one is equally convinced that he or she is the true hero, or the heroine. And as each views the whole with a vision and a knowledge that are necessarily restricted, it follows that the entire plot, the completed scheme, is actually and fully known to none, but that each sees something which the rest do not, and that each must also be quite ignorant of that which many of the others know.

Such are the inevitable conditions of human life; and therefore life is something to which no person holds the key, not even the key to his own small *tour d'ivoire*. In summing up the story of a life, the only things of which we can be approximately sure are the results, the concrete and plainly seen effects. Of the causes which have brought all these results to pass, we are infinitely and pitifully ignorant. We only sometimes think we know. When we analyse our basis of belief we find it always crumbling into dust. Could we but read the minds and search the hearts of others, we might perhaps approach the truth; yet even then we should often have to hesitate. For who can be so absolutely sure concerning his own secret soul as to single out in it the dominating influence which determines any action, amid the clash and interplay of conflicting motives, each striving for the mastery of will? An act, which to the world at

large seems noble, may have its hidden source in baseness. An apparent sacrifice of self may have been prompted by an egoism of which the world knows nothing and of which perhaps we are ourselves not fully conscious. So, when it comes to judging others, how utterly incapable is the very wisest, the most experienced and the most intuitive for such a task as that! Only the limping devil of Lesage could give the needed clue, or else some revelation such as that which Maupassant's profoundly morbid mind conceived in his strange fantasy, "La Morte." Each of us, in fact, lives out his life in a curious and almost dreadful isolation, a supreme and quite impenetrable ignorance of every other human soul; since every such soul is shut in by a prison-wall which nothing can remove. Wisdom can not shatter it. Faith can not surmount it. Immortal love itself, so radiant and all-compelling, finds here the limit of its power, and beats against the bars in vain.

In what way, then, do we see life? Only in unrelated fragments; never clearly and as a whole. Life is a volume from which many leaves are lost and of which many chapters are undecipherable. He who attempts to read it, is like one who tries to read a score of pages torn at random from a novel and seeks to reconstruct the missing parts. He can obtain a partial knowledge of the characters. He can get an inkling of the plot. He can with patient ingenuity make guesses at what happened in the part which he

has lost, and can fancy why it happened. Yet these are only guesses after all; and amid them, how is he to know which one is right and which are absolutely wrong? And it is so in life—in the life of every day, the decorous and apparently uneventful life which we share with those about us. You sit beside some woman at a dinner, and in her casual talk she perhaps lets fall some phrase, some sentence, or some opinion which seems to you a bit of quite unconscious self-revelation. It interests you, and it makes you curious to know her history. You form conjectures and construct a plausible hypothesis. In time, perhaps, you hear from some one else a scrap or two of gossip which in part confirms your theory and in part destroys it. You then construct another theory that will harmonise with all that you have heard and fancied. And then, most likely, you can learn no more. You never see or hear of her again. You have had a tantalising half glimpse of something hidden, as it seems to you—and that is all. In fact, it may be that there was no story and that you were altogether wrong in your belief; or it may be that the story was very different from that which you imagined, and one even more remarkable. Yet, whatever the truth may be, you will never know it.

And so it is with the whole complex structure of the life we see about us. Often before your eyes there are enacted comedies, the wit and fun of which escape you. You are yourself an unconscious actor in

tragedies whose poignant agony you never feel or dream of. That thing which in your belief seems full of meaning is in reality quite meaningless; that which you view as wholly unimportant may hold the key to all your future. For we all wear masks and we all speak with the smooth mendacity which convention teaches us; and as we move among our fellows, urbane and smiling and apparently at ease, we fail to perceive in one another the surging tide of quivering hope and baffled despair, nor do we note the scars which each of us conceals. Therefore, to every one who lives it, life is replete with trivialities, with coincidences which have no significance, and with episodes which may, indeed, be vital in their true relation to the whole, but which to us are only casual occurrences, half noticed at the time and almost instantly forgotten.

It is odd that the writers of modern fiction have never fully understood the truth of what has just been said, in its relation to the theory of literary realism. Our so-called realists profess to give in what they write an accurate transcript, a perfect reproduction, an untouched photograph of life, precisely as it is. To attain this end they strive with eagerness. They observe minutely, they study each detail, they spare you nothing in their desire that not even the most minute particular shall escape your notice. They insist that in all their pages you shall see everything, feel everything, know everything. And this

they say is realism—a truthful and convincing replica of life. But, as a matter of fact, it is wholly false to life, and it is false precisely in proportion as it shows us all and tells us all and leaves absolutely nothing to be guessed or to be given up as quite insoluble. Everything they show us has a meaning, a definite relation to the whole; and when we read the book, we learn just what this meaning is and just what is this relation. In life, however, we often miss the meaning and do not even dream of correlating half the facts which we have superficially observed.

You can see the falsity of the pseudo-realistic method even in its minor phases. Zola, for instance, will take us up some greasy staircase, and as he leads us on, he will catalogue the odours that we encounter, enumerating the source of each, the quality of each, the effect of each upon the sense of smell, until we have a perfect symphony of stenches. When we reach the room above, he will again set forth each article of furniture and every stain upon the wall. He will call attention to the broken window-pane with a soiled night-cap thrust into the jagged hole; he will nudge us, as it were, to make us see just how the battered washstand is propped against the wall; he will insist upon the condition of the towels, the appearance of the soapy water in the washbowl, and he will not pause until each square inch of squalor has been put beneath his microscope for us to gaze at. Yet in life one does not see things in this way. If

we go up the staircase by ourselves, an unpleasant odour may make us instinctively recoil, and then hurry on; but we never stop to analyse it or to consider the source of every separate and component stench. We simply get a swift impression of something which is repellent, and that is all. And when we enter a room, we get in like manner an impression of the room and of its most conspicuous features, but we do not notice every sordid, nauseous detail.

And in more important things, the pseudo-realism makes the same mistake in telling us too much and in insisting that we shall see everything. Zola and his school give us every external material detail reiterated over and over again. Bourget and his imitators let us into the innermost secrets of the brain so that we know their personages psychologically down to the last quiver of emotion or the last elusive turn of thought. And in the books which these writers have produced, every incident fits into every other incident just as the wheels of a machine fit into the cogs on which they turn. Every episode has a direct and definite relation to every other episode, and we are allowed to know just what the relation is. Nothing happens casually, or without a definite meaning. It is all wrought out so cunningly and with so perfect a balance, so logical a sequence, so inevitable an issue! The whole is marvellous as a work of art, yet it is preposterous as a bit of life;

for from it the element of the fortuitous, the insignificant, and the irrelevant is utterly excluded. We admire the dexterity of the artist who has done so neat a piece of literary joiner's work; but the very perfection of his art removes it wholly from the sphere of truth and nature. It lacks the largeness and the looseness of the life we live.

This fact has not escaped at least one modern novelist; or, at any rate, there is one modern novelist who has come far closer to reality. This is Count Tolstoi, of whom Matthew Arnold observed with great acuteness that he has not thought it necessary to make the action in his novels represent a unity towards which each episode and incident shall lead the reader, and upon which they shall all inevitably converge. Thus in *Anna Karénina* there are two distinct and separate "actions" (the word is Mr. Arnold's), or rather plots, the one relating to the connection of Anna and Vronsky and the other to the affair of Katia and Levine. As the tale develops, we pass from one set of interests to another with that freedom and actual inconsequence which belongs to the haphazard history of human lives. But there is something more to be observed, and Mr. Arnold has very clearly noted its significance.

"People appear in connection with these two main actions whose appearance and proceedings do not in the least contribute to develop them; incidents are multiplied which we expect are to lead to something important, but which do



not. What, for instance, does the episode of Katia's friend, Varinka, and Levine's brother, Serge Ivanitch, their inclination for one another and its failure to come to anything, contribute to the development of either the character or the fortunes of Katia and Levine? What does the incident of Levine's long delay in getting to church to be married, a delay which as we read of it seems to have significance, really import? It turns out to import absolutely nothing, and to be introduced solely to give the author the pleasure of telling us that all Levine's shirts had been packed up."

Objection has been made to this irrelevance as being an essential blemish on a work of art, and such, in truth, it would be were this remarkable book of Tolstoi's to be viewed as being just a work of art. But, as Mr. Arnold afterwards observes, it is a mistake to speak of *Anna Karénina* as the creation of an artist. We are rather to take it as a piece of life.

"A piece of life it is. The author has not invented and combined it, he has seen it; it has all happened before his inward eye, and it was in this wise that it happened. Levine's shirts were packed up, and he was late for his wedding in consequence; Varinka and Serge Ivanitch met at Levine's country-house and went out walking together; Serge was very near proposing, but did not. The author saw it all happening—saw it, and therefore relates it; and what his novel in this way loses in art it gains in reality."

Just one other modern novelist seems to have had an inkling of what this method means and of its value in giving an accurate impression of life. Anatole France, with all his grotesque jumbling of mysti-

cism and materialism, has in two of his novels—*L'Orme du Mail* and *Le Mannequin d'Osier*—exhibited the same appreciation of the inconsequent and the irrelevant as factors of true realism. Mr. Howells came very near doing the same thing in his book entitled *Letters Home*; but apparently his courage failed him and he felt that he must allow at least the reader of the book to know the whole story in its completeness.

Historically, however, neither Tolstoi nor Anatole France is the first to show us an effective example of this realism. To find the prototype we must go back some seventeen hundred years and open the pages of a Greek writer who lived in Athens two centuries after Christ. This person is Alciphron, a clever and amusing littérateur, who may be best described as a sort of Hellenic Hugues Le Roux. Practically nothing is known about his life or about his personality; but from the fiction which he has left us, we may infer that he was an easy-going man of the world, a keen observer, a student of human nature in all its phases, and a very graceful, entertaining writer. The task which he set before himself was that of delineating in fiction the every-day life of his own time, and in doing so to sketch character with an accurate understanding of its psychology.

Very few persons, very few classical scholars even, concern themselves with the history of Athens after it ceased to be a centre of political power. The

Athens which one most readily calls to mind is the Athens of the Golden Age of Greece—the Athens which both in arts and in arms was the supreme glory of the Hellenic world. This was the Athens of Pericles and Plato, of the great dramatists and philosophers and historians and poets, the Athens which beat back the Persian hordes, and which, even in the death-throes of its independence, gave to the world Demosthenes. But the Athens of Alciphron was a very different Athens. Its people under Roman rule had half forgotten the grandeur of their past and were content to lead a pleasure-loving life, embellished by all the refined luxury of the later Empire. The city was still a marvel of architectural beauty, and its inhabitants were still, as always, mercurial, clever, and intellectually brilliant. But their genius had ceased to be creative, so that culture and a certain polite erudition took the place of boldly original effort. Athens was the seat of a great university to which young Romans and Gauls and Spaniards, and even Asiatics, repaired in throngs to receive a modicum of that learning with which the name of Greece is forever associated. The town was very largely given up to a sort of genial bohemianism, so that it may be styled *le petit Paris* of ancient times. The society of this Bohemia was a light-hearted, merry, witty one, loose but not gross in morals, and distinguished chiefly by its perfect *savoir vivre*, its easy tolerance, and its general ap-

preciation of every one who showed himself to be a *bon enfant*.

This was the society which Alciphron has drawn for us in a series of fictitious letters supposed to be written by all sorts of persons representing pretty nearly every class—men-about-town, adventurers, professional diners-out, gamblers, peasants, fishermen, ingenuous youths, philosophers, anxious parents, and ladies of easy virtue. Taken together, these letters afford a curious kaleidoscopic view of Athenian life as it was known to the general run of men and women who were not distinguished, who were not “historical,” but whom we see through the eyes of Alciphron as going about their usual occupations and amusements quite unconscious that any one is studying them. In short, Alciphron has done for the every-day world of Athens precisely what Petronius did for the every-day world of Italy a century before. Alciphron, however, unlike Petronius, is not a cynic, and he sinks his own personality in that of the individuals who are supposed to write these letters. There are many glimpses in them of the seamy side of life. The amusements of his Athenians were not always harmless, and there is much that decidedly does not tend to edification. Yet, on the other hand, there is much that is humorous and kindly, with here and there a very charming touch of grace and innocence.

The peculiar feature of the letters is found in the

fact that they do not tell a story, but that they give you hints of many stories. It is precisely as though you had rifled the contents of a mail-bag and had before you the stolen letters. From them you would learn innumerable secrets; you would find clues to many a romance, to many a complication, to many a scandal; but the whole story in each case you would not know and could only guess at it. There is something peculiarly piquant in all this half-revelation, and it shows that Alciphron, almost two thousand years ago, anticipated the truly realistic theory of fiction which in modern times is exemplified alone in Tolstoi and in some of the writings of Anatole France.

The letters of Alciphron have never been fully translated into English. About a hundred years ago a version of some of them was published anonymously in London, the translators being two old-fashioned scholars named William Beloe and Thomas Monro.\* But their version is a perfectly impossible one. The easy, sinuous, rippling Greek of Alciphron, light as the petal of a flower or the wing of a humming-bird, is turned into stilted, pompous, eighteenth-century British prose that moves along with the lumbering gait of an elephant. It is as though the sprightly *Lettres de Femmes* of Marcel Prévost were to be rendered into the polysyllabic ponderosities of Dr. Samuel Johnson.

\* A privately published and limited edition of the Letters of Alciphron was made a few years ago.

Such being the case, I may venture to translate a few of these letters in a somewhat freer manner, endeavouring above all to preserve the spirit of the original. Some day the entire collection should be so translated both for its own intrinsic interest and also because of its importance in the history of fiction. Here, for example, is the letter of a young girl who lives in the suburbs of Athens, probably at the Piræus, which was the harbour town, in character a sort of Sanct Pauli to an ancient Hamburg. The girl's name is Glaucippe, the daughter of a fisherman. She is evidently a prototype of Little Em'ly, and has been betrothed in her innocence to a Piræan Ham Peggotty. So long as she had seen no other men, or, at any rate, none but men of her own class, she had been happy and contented in the thought of her coming marriage. But unfortunately for her, she has gone to Athens for a holiday, and has there made the casual acquaintance of a Grecian Steerforth—a man whose elegance and knowledge of good form have dazzled the poor girl and played havoc with her inexperienced young heart. Instantly the thought of the uncouth bridegroom whom her parents have provided for her becomes horrible. She shudders at him and she adores wildly and passionately the idle young Athenian who has made careless love to her. So she sits down and writes this letter to her mother:

“Dearest Mamma: I am quite distracted. I can't bear

the idea of marrying that pilot's son as papa wants me to. I have met Ephebus in the city where you let me go for the holidays at the time of the festival in which he took part. He is, oh, so handsome, mamma, and more than that, he is perfectly fascinating! He has the most beautiful curly hair and such a smile! His eyes are as blue as the ocean when the sun first rises; and altogether his face makes you sure that he is a favourite of the Graces. You ought to see his lips. They are as red as roses. I have simply got to marry him. If you don't let me, I'll throw myself into the sea like Sappho."

Naturally Glaucippe's mother takes a different view of it. Her answer is brief and very much to the point.

"Child, you certainly *are* distracted. You must have gone crazy. You seem to have lost all your modesty and need good sharp treatment. Stop your nonsense right away and hold yourself in, until you get this crazy notion out of your head. If your father finds it out he'll make fish-bait of you in half a jiffy."

This is all we know about the love affair of young Glaucippe. Perhaps it turned out as Little Em'ly's did; or perhaps Glaucippe, being duly taken in hand, became tractable, and married her young pilot. But if so, it is pretty certain that she kept scornfully comparing him with the fascinating Ephebus, until middle age and many children stilled in her heart the voice of sentiment.

Here is a letter from a mercenary young lady with more wants than scruples. A sentimental youth named Simalion is hopelessly in love with her. He is



evidently very young and wholly under the control of his parents, who allow him very little pocket-money. Hence, the following letter to him from his Petala. She certainly makes her meaning very clear. She knows with the unfailing instinct of her kind that he is so infatuated that even her contempt will only stimulate his unreasoning love, and that sooner than lose her he will stick at nothing.

“Well, if a girl could live on tears, what a wealthy girl I should be! You’re generous enough with *them* at any rate. Tears are not quite enough for me, worse luck! Money is what I want. I’ve got to have jewelry, clothes, servants, and all that sort of thing. Nobody ever left me a fortune or a block of stock, and that’s why I have to depend on little presents which gentlemen make me. I’ve known you a whole year, and how much better off am I, I should like to know? My hair is a perfect fright just because all that time I haven’t had anything to dress it with; and as for clothes—why, the only dress I’ve got in the world is so ragged that I’m ashamed to be seen with my friends. And yet you imagine, I suppose, that I can keep on this way forever without any other means of support. Yes, of course, you cry, but you won’t cry forever. I’m really surprised to see how many tears you can shed; but if somebody doesn’t give me something soon, I shall starve to death. I know you pretend that you’re just crazy for me, and that you can’t live without me. Very well, then, isn’t there any silver in your house? Can’t you get hold of some of your mother’s jewelry? Hasn’t your father got anything that you can raise some money on? Other girls are luckier than I am. They have lovers, but all that I seem to have is a sort of mourner, who keeps sending me roses and wreaths and garlands of flowers as if I were dead and going to be buried; and he says he cries for me all night. Now, if you can manage to rake up something for me, then you can come here without



having to cry and cry; but if not, just keep your tears to yourself and let me alone."

Here is still another letter. It is written by an unsophisticated person, who was unfortunate enough to try his luck in a gambling house in one of the disreputable quarters of the city.

"Maybe you would like to know what's the matter with me and how I got my head broken and my clothes all torn to pieces. Well, the fact is, I broke the bank at a little game; but I wish I hadn't. For what's the use of a man like me running up against a lot of heelers? You see, after I had raked in all the money in the place and they hadn't a red cent left, they all jumped on my neck and punched me and stoned me and ripped the clothes up my back. All the same, I hung on to the money as tight as I could, because it nearly killed me to give it up; and I *did* hold out quite a while. I didn't give in when they hit me or even when they twisted my fingers. I felt like a Spartan who lets himself be whipped just to see how much he can stand without giving in. Unfortunately this isn't Sparta but Athens, and I was up against the toughest kind of a gang; and so when I was pretty near fainting I had to let them rob me. They went through my pockets, and then after they had cleaned me out, they skipped. Anyhow, it's better to live without money than to die with your pockets full of it."

Finally, let me cite part of a beautiful love letter, supposed to be written to Demetrius, the soldier and statesman, by a girl named Lamia. It is touching in its humility—the humility which genuine love teaches, in making the reality seem too wonderful to be true.

“You will think it bold of me to write to you, my prince, and you will care little for my letters now that you have won my love. Indeed, when I see you among your guards and surrounded by your soldiers and ambassadors, and crowned with your diadem, I am wholly overcome and turn away from you as I would turn my eyes away from the blinding sun; for then I know that you are really Demetrius the great soldier. How imposing, how like a conqueror you look! And then I feel quite hopeless and say over to myself: ‘Oh, Lamia, is this really the man who spends his evenings with you, who likes to hear you sing, who writes you letters, and who prefers you to any other?’ I can only keep silence and pray that you will come to me again. But when you do come to me and I kneel at your feet and you take me up into your arms—then I wonder whether this is really the stormer of cities. And with my lute I lay siege to the besieger and try whether he who has conquered others will himself be conquered.

“I shall never attempt to win you by any arts. I shall never lie to you as others do or be unfaithful. Since you first loved me, no other men have even looked at me, much less made love to me. Love comes quickly and it goes without a warning. The man who still has something to receive comes as it were on wings, while he to whom everything has been given, grows tired and goes away. I know this, and I know that many women seek to hold their lovers by always keeping something back; and yet with you I can not do this thing; for I trust you, and I do not fear that you will ever tire of me. It might be different with others, but upon you who are bound to me and who are so proud to have others see you with me, I could not practise these small arts, or use even the most insignificant deceit. I should be a fool to do so, for I should think it a small sacrifice to give up everything to please you, even life itself.”

Only by quoting very many of these letters could an accurate idea be given of the extremely vivid way

in which they reproduce for us the throbbing life of a great and luxurious city. In the pages of Alciphron we find ourselves actually in Athens, elbowing in its crowded streets a hundred various types—the gilded youth, the staid and cautious merchants, the barbers standing at their shop doors and begging customers to enter, the bunco men, the jugglers, the drunken soldiers, the market women—all, in fact, who make up a city's throng. We go with Alciphron into the houses of the Bohemian set and take part in their jolly dinners at which poets and artists eat and drink and talk and sing; and as we watch them, all the centuries that lie between us melt away, and we see once more that human life and human nature are essentially the same in every age and every land, and that the fascination of them is unalterable and eternal.

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MILTON

SHAKESPEARE and Milton are the two great columns that support the splendid structure of English letters. Almost instinctively, when we name one of them, the other comes to mind. And yet there are few points of resemblance in the two. There are many points of contrast. We know very little indeed about the life of Shakespeare; but all that we do know is consistent with a single character. It is possible to visualise a Shakespeare to ourselves—a brilliant, ready, versatile man of the world, a friend of the great no less than of his own early associates, a practical man of affairs, and withal one whose inner soul was pregnant with sublimities and beauties. The character is congruous in every part.

But when we come to Milton, of whom much is known, the difficulty is infinitely greater, the contradictions are far more numerous. According as we view him from one angle or another, he seems quite inconsistent with himself. Indeed, there are several Miltons, each of them almost unrelated to the others. What has the young Milton, expanding under the blue skies of Italy, writing sonnets to

pretty girls or singing in blithesome mood of “spicy nut-brown ale” and “tipsy dance and jollity”—what has he to do with the dour Latin secretary to the Commonwealth, inditing grave despatches of state, or hurling foul names at the Lord Protector’s enemies? And still another Milton is the Milton who wrote *Paradise Lost*—dignified, austere, and yet benignant. We are apt to think of Milton as the strictest of religionists, and it is hard to reconcile this aspect of the man with his neglect of public worship and with the fact that in his later years he had no prayers at home. And then there is the harsh, stern, tyrannical Milton who made even his children hate him—the schoolmaster and writer on education, who, nevertheless, would not have his eldest daughter even learn to write.

Here we find what seems to be a paradox, or rather a whole series of paradoxes embodied in one man. How shall we analyse a character such as this? How shall we make him seem reasonable and consistent? The problem has puzzled many students of English literature. The late Dr. Richard Garnett made the most lamentable failure in his treatment of it. James Russell Lowell came nearest to the truth. It may be well to review the traits of Milton as seen at different periods of his life, and then, perhaps, attempt to find some link that will unite them all.

Dr. Garnett wrote: “The author and his books are set at variance, and an attempt to conceive his



character as a whole, results in confusion and inconsistency." But he goes on to say, "Milton seems as perfect a representation as any of his compeers of the sensitive and impulsive passion of the poetical temperament." So apparently, it is all a question of temperament, a thing in whose name as many blunders are committed as there were crimes committed in the name of liberty, according to Madame Roland. Let us see.

It must be remembered that Milton, whose three hundredth birthday fell on December 9, 1908, was one who, from the first, enjoyed an unusual independence. His father was a man of what might be considered wealth and was, besides, a writer, an excellent musician, and keenly alive to the nascent genius of his son. Therefore, young Milton was free to follow his own inclinations and to live the sort of life that he preferred. It was a grave and sober life for a young English boy—a life of much study and hard reading and serious thinking, yet not the life of a recluse or of one who has to think of a profession. It was, on the other hand, the sort of life to "emancipate the ego," to make the boy think well of himself, and to care very little for what others thought. So, at Christ's College, Cambridge, he resented the overbearing manner of his tutor, whereupon his tutor, as it is recorded, "whipt him," this being the last instance of corporal punishment inflicted at either of the two great English universities. There is some-

thing piquant in the thought of the poet of heaven and hell being "whipt" by a self-sufficient tutor. Milton was then rusticated, or perhaps withdrew to recover from the indignity. He returned to take his degree, but thereafter he had no love for Cambridge. He had thought of taking orders in the Church of England; but he hated all authority, and would not subscribe to a written creed.

Then came the period of his journey through France into Italy, where he practised his Italian in writing complimentary sonnets—now to scholars and now to an anonymous lady at Bologna. It is unlikely that she made any great impression on his heart, for his sonnets to her are written with much more concern for the correctness of the style than for the favour of the lady. In Italy, Milton again showed his personal independence. Opposed to the Catholic Church, he could at most be made to promise not to bring theological topics into his talk. If others did so he would speak out boldly what he thought. He also paid a visit to the blind Galileo, who was out of favour with the Church; and Milton must have remembered this visit long afterward in the days of his own blindness, which joined him to the list of sightless great men: with the mythic *Œdipus* among kings, with the mythic *Homer* among poets, with the mythic *Samson* among warriors, with *Galileo* among men of science, and, still later, with *Bach* and *Händel* among musicians.

But as yet Milton was young, and he enjoyed the life and the half-pagan lore of Italy, returning to England at the early rumblings of the great civil war. In London, he taught a very small private school, living austerely on the simplest fare; yet, oddly enough, breaking away from his sobriety to visit sundry festive young friends of his at Gray's Inn, with whom, as his nephew wrote, "he would so far make bold with his body as now and then to keep a gaudy-day." Just what this means is by no means certain; but it was obviously a reaction against too much theology and too little cheer. At this time, when he was about thirty-five years of age, he married his first wife, Mary Powell, the daughter of an Oxfordshire Cavalier squire, accustomed to fun and frolic, to hunting and to the jollity of house-parties. Milton brought her to his home in London, and there seem to have been for her few "gaudy-days" in that ascetic habitation. For Milton had now become possessed of a fixed idea. He was no more plain John Milton. He was a power in Church and State. He was writing tractates on religion, and others on education, and was making ready to share in the strange misrule which Cromwell was to force on England.

He had little thought to give a wife, and little leisure; and so, after a single month, she left him and returned to her father, as for a visit. But, as time went on, she did not return to London, Milton

wrote her again and again, but received no answer. He sent a messenger, who was insulted. It is not likely that Milton cared much for her, yet it made him angry to be treated with contempt. No woman ever received serious consideration from him. His opinions of them were like those of Lafcadio Hearn. But they must take *him* seriously, and so he set forth in several pamphlets the doctrine that a man, without any legal process, may, of his own free will, divorce a woman who has failed in her obedience to him. Before long he had come to regard Mrs. Milton as non-existent, and had set himself briskly to courting another girl.

But, by this time, the civil war was well under way. The Royalists were shaken by the sledge-hammer blows of Cromwell. Milton's father-in-law was not unwilling to receive protection from his Round-head son-in-law. The wife fell at Milton's feet and wept and begged him to forgive her; and presently both she and her immediate relatives were sheltered safely in Milton's home. Her spirit had been broken, and nothing more is told of her from this time until her death a few years later.

The whole episode of Milton's domestic life is too well known for repetition. His eldest daughter, Anne, was a cripple and defective in her speech, yet exceedingly attractive. His second daughter, Mary, who never married, was plain and peevish, and it was she most of all who was drilled and disciplined by her

father into learning to pronounce and read aloud to him in seven languages without understanding a word of what she read. The third daughter, Deborah, had some share in this training. But she escaped at last by marrying a weaver, and long afterward, when ignorant and old, she was sought out by Addison, and her father's mask of *Comus* was performed for her benefit. But she herself knew nothing of *Comus*, or of what a benefit meant; though she was glad to get the hundred and twenty pounds which it brought to her.

There is something very sordid and unpleasant in the thought of Milton's life at home after his blindness came upon him. His daughters were his slaves, and, like all slaves, they united against their master. Thus, if Milton made them read to him for long hours and rated them for their mistakes, they took their revenge in petty pilfering, and they sold for their private gain many of the books he loved. Four years after the death of his first wife, he married one Catharine Woodcock, who must have made him happy, for he wrote a sonnet to her memory. But she lived only a short while. When he was fifty-five he married for the third time, a very pretty girl, Elizabeth Minshull, thirty years younger than himself. She seems to have been made his wife so that she might care for him and keep him from "the unkind children," whom he mentions so bitterly in his will. It was understood that as a reward she was to be his

sole heiress; and once, when she had prepared a favourite dish for him, he said with pleasure, "Why, God ha' mercy, Betty! I see thou wilt perform according to thy promise; and when I die, thou knowest that I have left thee all." In his will he did leave her all, but the will was broken; and out of fifteen hundred pounds, three hundred were divided among the daughters evenly. How Mary Milton, the reader of seven languages, felt toward her father may be gathered from what she said when it was told her that he was to marry Mistress Minshull.

"That is no news," she snapped out with a flirt of her head; "but if you were to tell me he was dead, *that* would be something!"

It is pleasanter to draw a veil over this chapter of a great man's life. His public fame began after Charles I. was executed by the leaders of the army. All Europe stood aghast at such a deed. Englishmen, even those who had fought against the armies of the king, were for a moment hushed. Then, strong and clear in sonorous Latin, came a justification of the regicides. The voice was Milton's, and from this time until the Restoration he was a man of mark. His command of Latin—the diplomatic language of that century—was notable. His periods were turned with skill. He had a wonderful vocabulary of abuse. Charles II., in exile, commanded Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise) to defend the late king's acts. Salmasius and Milton were pitted one against the other like

two gladiators. They hurled back and forth the vilest epithets in Latin. "Swine," "dog," "eunuch," were among the tamest of these compliments. Milton twitted Salmasius with having a shrew for a wife, and when Salmasius died soon after, it is said that Milton was pleased to imagine that his opponent had died of mortification. But Nemesis awaited Milton also. When he began his controversy with Salmasius he was told that his eyesight would not stand the strain of carrying it through. He did not hesitate, but went on to the end, and he became blind. Then the Royalists declared with a grin of joy that Milton's blindness was the punishment which Heaven had sent upon him for defending the slayers of the king. To-day one may at least regret that it came from his intense determination to outwit a brother scholar in foul language, even though that language had a classic form.

Indeed, when the facts are fully understood, it is impossible to admire Milton for his share in this rather famous controversy. It has been said that his conduct was heroic; that he felt so driven on by what he thought to be his duty that he risked his eyesight recklessly yet nobly; and that in consequence, he affords a fine example of self-sacrifice and of loyalty to a cause. But his polemic was not inspired wholly by his hatred of King Charles or by his devotion to the regicides. Salmasius was then the most conspicuous Protestant scholar in Europe.



He held a high position in Leyden. Whoever should attack him would run no risk, since defeat would be generally expected, while success would be a dazzling triumph. And so Milton hurled his invectives at the man who was so conspicuous a mark, just as that master of vitriolic language and shameful innuendo, Kaspar Scioppius, at Ingolstadt, had flung his poisoned shafts at the great Scaliger. Scaliger died soon after this polemic just as Salmasius died soon after Milton had covered him with scorn. It was a fierce, unsparing age in which no quarter was given or expected, and where the weaker must go unpitied to the wall. Milton loved controversy. He was grim, pugnacious, and full of self-esteem. The sort of glory which would come to him from meeting so famous an adversary was the sort of glory that he loved the most. And there is something else to be observed. Milton received a reward more tangible than praise. A thousand pounds were paid him, a sum equivalent to several times that amount to-day, and, in fact, constituting two-thirds of the estate which he afterwards left behind him at his death. Finally, he was made Latin secretary to the Council of State, at an annual salary of two hundred pounds.

For England had now taken on a new form of government. Cromwell, with his sable garments covering a steel corselet to turn aside the assassin's dagger, had gone in state to take the oath as Lord Protector, with a single House of Parliament and a



subservient Council. Charles I., the lawful king, had been tried and slain for ruling without Parliament, and for raising taxes of his own imposing. The Lord Protector now divided England into ten military districts, with ten major-generals to govern them by the strong hand; and he taxed the nation far more heavily than the king had ever done. But Cromwell never held that the majority should rule; he believed in the right which comes from force of brain and arm. When Milton was made Latin secretary to the Council, it became his duty to turn into Latin all diplomatic papers, and to answer all attacks which were made upon the Lord Protector. He was, therefore, Cromwell's literary bravo. Many have thought that he was the personal secretary of the Lord Protector, and one would like to imagine the intercourse of two such extraordinary men. But, as a matter of fact, there is not even a scrap of historical evidence to show that they ever met. The famous painting which depicts Cromwell as dictating to Milton a despatch intended for the Duke of Savoy, on the massacre of the Vaudois, is due only to the imagination of an artist. Milton speaks of himself as living in retirement and as having no influence in the councils of the great. Still, in his second "Defence of the English People," he inserts a noble apostrophe to Cromwell; while in a sonnet addressed directly to "the Lord General" occur two famous lines which would make any man immortal.

Peace hath her victories  
No less renowned than war.

To cite these lines is to suggest the question, Why is Milton set side by side with Shakespeare? He is much less widely read. The appeal which he makes is less truly universal. His greatest poem is an epic, and much of it belongs to an age of a now outworn theology. Taine, with a touch of genuine French *malice*, lets his wit play around the theological portions of *Paradise Lost*. Thus, says Taine, "Adam entered Paradise by way of England. . . Adam is your true paterfamilias, with a vote, an M. P., an old Oxford man, consulted at need by his wife, dealing out to her with prudent measure the scientific explanations which she required." An angel comes to dine with them, and as the dishes are not cooked "no fear lest dinner cool." The angel, says Taine, "though ethereal, eats like a Lincolnshire farmer, 'with keen despatch, of real hunger, and concoctive heat to transubstantiate.'" "At table, Eve listens to the angel's stories, and then discreetly rises at dessert when they are getting into politics." The Deity, as conceived by Milton, is half theologian and half despot. "Goethe's God, half abstraction, half legend, source of calm oracles . . . greatly excels this Miltonic God" who is only "a schoolmaster foreseeing the fault of his pupil and then telling him beforehand the rule of grammar so as to have the pleasure of scolding him without discussion."

Nevertheless, one ranks Milton with Shakespeare because, like Shakespeare, he had the rare, divine, and unmistakable gift of fusing thought and language in such a way, and with such fire of genius, as to render the combination overwhelming, never-to-be-forgotten, irresistible. It is not the trick of the facile phrase. It is the supreme dominance of the lure of language. Indeed, there are not a few of Milton's passages which, if quoted offhand, would, even by many intelligent people, be at once ascribed to Shakespeare. Such are the two lines already cited. Such, again, are the following:

That last infirmity of noble minds.

To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new.

He touched the tender stops of various quills.

Of linkèd sweetness long drawn out.

Hell  
Grew darker at their frown.

Myself am hell;  
'And in the lowest deep a lower deep.

Heaven opened wide  
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound,  
On golden hinges moving.

There are lines and phrases from *Paradise Lost* which many believe to be Biblical, rather than Miltonic. They all have a quality of crag-like greatness,

as do some of the splendid passages of his prose. It is not true, as Addison remarked, that "our language sank under him," or, as others of later date have written, that he is too uniformly majestic, so that we hear only organ strains in Milton's music. In his lovely poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, which were written at Horton, near Windsor, when he was twenty-five, there is a whole fairy orchestra of chiming bells, and flutes, and harps. There is playfulness as well as the rarest poetic fancy. Who will not recall:

Sport, that wrinkled Care derides,  
And Laughter holding both his sides.

Come and trip it as ye go,  
On the light fantastic toe?

And again,

Where glowing embers through the room  
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom.

And wonderfully Shakespearean is that daring mixture of metaphors in *Lycidas*:

Blind mouths, that scarce themselves know how to hold  
A sheep-hook,

which can fairly be set beside that other expressive paradox in *Paradise Lost*,

No light, but rather darkness visible.

Here, briefly, we may see why Milton, in the history of our language, stands second only to Shakespeare, and how, though harsh and rough at times, he can evoke the very soul of music.

Milton's Latinity was classical, though not precisely Ciceronian or Vergilian. Nor is it always above criticism. In fact, Dr. Johnson rather neatly pointed out that in one sentence which takes Salmasius to task for an alleged syntactical slip, Milton himself makes a worse one. He tends to ignore the subjunctive mood, thereby losing certain shades of meaning just as Johnson himself did when he wrote that famous but rather faulty line for Goldsmith's epitaph:

*Nihil tetigit quod non ornavit.*

Milton, like every writer of modern Latin whose own personality is strong, broke through the trammels of Ciceronianism and left a subtle impress of his modes of thought upon the classic diction. One feels a difference which is often not easy to describe but which is there. The words are the words of a Roman, but the voice is the voice of an Englishman. Then, again, he admits of necessity to his pages a great many modern proper names and other barbarous expressions, such as *hundreda*, *bombarda*, and the like. Perhaps, also, one is repelled by his fondness for extremely physical and sometimes disgusting imagery, which is a defect that mars his English prose as well. Horatians ought never to

forgive him for his woeful rendering of the pretty Pyrrha ode into English "without rhyme, according to the Latin measure, as near as the language will permit." Obviously the language was obdurate and permitted very little, for the Miltonic version blunders and stumbles along with no approach whatever to the rhythm, not to say the ease and grace, of the Latin. I suppose that every English or American scholar who has annotated the Odes of Horace, has faithfully recorded Milton's abominable translation of *simplex munditiis*. "Plain in thy neatness."—"Plain"! forsooth, and "neatness"! One would suppose that Milton was describing some English dairy maid. You can almost see the cap and apron and the red hands. How far removed from this is the Pyrrha of Horace—a graceful, exquisite, coquettish girl, simple in her daintiness, standing before the dark background of a cool grotto with a great mass of vivid roses clustering above her head. It is strange that he who wove together so many light fancies in his youthful poetry should have failed so utterly to reproduce the charm of Horace. Miltonists, therefore, call it merely "a metrical experiment," yet this is hardly an excuse. It is the inalienable right of every man to make an ass of himself in the seclusion of his own library; but when he publishes his "experiments," he is fair game for every critic.

The apparent contradictions of Milton's character

are apparent only. He is essentially the idealist who associates his ideal too closely with himself. The doctrine of the Independents of his time—a fierce rough time—is not so far removed in essence from that of the New England transcendentalists of two hundred years later. Milton drifts from Episcopacy, from Presbyterianism, into Free Thought and Unitarianism, very much as Emerson drifted when he preached his last sermon and resigned his pulpit. Milton was no exponent of a creed, though he studied the Scriptures with deep care. His view of woman was part of his indifference to what he thought the minor things of life. Old Johnson said of him rather grimly, “He thought woman fitted only for obedience, as he thought man fitted only for rebellion.” Indeed, some lines spoken by Adam in *Paradise Lost*\* no doubt convey Milton’s own opinion of the other sex:

Oh, why did God,  
 Creator wise, that peopled highest heaven  
 With spirits masculine, create at last  
 This novelty on Earth, this fair defect  
 Of Nature, and not fill the World at once  
 With men as Angels, without feminine;  
 Or find some other way to generate  
 Mankind?

Milton’s youth was one of purity and seriousness. At his college he was nicknamed “the Lady.” The brief Italian period of his life had the tempered

\* x., 888.

brightness of a winter morning. After that he became what circumstances made him. Scarcely any other author of such great renown has been so essentially the result of his environment. On him the fierceness of religious controversy and the grim scenes of civil war set their mark deeply, until it was seared into his very soul. Then his blindness came and left him a brooding, introspective creature who saw solemn and majestic images; so that, shutting out this world, his sightless eyes were turned, as it were, to the world of which he had read in the majestic utterances of the Hebrew prophets. A recent English writer has observed that nowhere does Milton show any sympathy with animals. It is an acute remark because it extends much farther. He had little sympathy, indeed, with anything which concerned the gentler side of life. Before his fancy there loomed gigantic shapes and the vast illimitable stretches of another world. His daring imagination carried him not only to the gloomy gulfs of hell, but upward to the very throne of God. And so his greatest poem, over which he brooded for more than twenty years, lacks softness and atones for it by sheer sublimity.

One prefers to think of him as he appeared in his old age, enjoying a modest income, already secure of his fame, visited by many friends and warmly praised by Dryden. At his home, he sat in the sunshine, or played upon the organ, the cares and passion of his middle life having long since died away.



He had given new splendour and fresh power to our noble English speech. If much that he wrote is no longer widely read, it still resembles some gigantic monolith covered with written records in characters which few are able to decipher. Their purport has none the less passed into the life and speech and thought of myriads who unconsciously preserve them and thereby do them reverence.

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# THE LYRICS OF TENNYSON

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## IV

### THE LYRICS OF TENNYSON

A GREAT author, as he passes through the centuries, resembles somewhat the master of a caravan who passes through the difficulties and dangers of a dreary desert. When the latter sets out, he has, let us suppose, all the appointments required for the journey—the luxuries as well as the necessities. As he proceeds, however, day after day, encountering dangers, unforeseen accidents, sand-storms, and the hardships that weary his pack-animals, he finds it necessary to dispense with much of his equipment. One thing after another is cast away—first those things which are really superfluous, and then those which, though greatly needed, are not absolutely indispensable. When he reaches the end of his journey he has with him only such as could not possibly have been spared. They represent the inevitable residuum. Because they were the most necessary of all that he had, they have become the most precious. For this reason they have stayed with him until the very end.

So it is with the author who has written much. The men and women of his own time can not be sure which of his works are the finest and the most likely to endure. Some will prefer one, and some another, according to their particular tastes. It is only after

the writer has died, and when he begins, so to speak, his journey through the ages, that the real test comes which will sift out of all his writings those that can best be spared, and will save the few that most deserve to live and that can not be spared at all.

There are numerous illustrations of this in literary history, and it is not necessary to look back many centuries in order to find some very interesting ones. Thus, out of the mass of plays and stories which Cervantes wrote, *Don Quixote* is the only work that has endured. Of Dryden's multifarious writings the world remembers now only his *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*, and the single play, *All for Love*, which tells the story of Antony and Cleopatra in a manner rivaling even that of Shakespeare. Coming nearer to our own time, Goethe will be remembered by the world at large only through the first part of his *Faust*. Sir Walter Scott's long string of novels and romances are likewise being sifted out, so as to leave only half a dozen which any one but special students of English literature will care to read. Robert Southey wrote every day from nine o'clock in the morning until noon; he corrected proofs through the afternoon; and in the evening he made memoranda for new works; but out of all his epics, poems, satires, and histories, which he thought would live forever, there remains practically nothing except the little nursery classic known to every child as *The Three Bears*. And these examples could be multiplied indefinitely were it worth our while. Only in the case

of a genius of the highest order, such as Shakespeare, is every scrap of his work preserved and cherished; and even of Shakespeare's, there are many plays which are never put upon the stage, and which interest only the critic and the scholar.

With Alfred Tennyson, though he died only seventeen years ago, the sifting process has begun. In fact, it may be said to have begun before his death. His own ambition was to write historical dramas, and he did write three which can be admired from many points of view; yet they failed when acted in the theatre. Nor can it be said that this fate befell them because they were written in Tennyson's old age. A little poem which he published only three years before his death, and which was set to music by Leveson-Gower, struck an answering chord all over the English world, and is very sure of immortality. This is *Crossing the Bar*, two stanzas of which could have been written by no one save Tennyson—a master of that artistic simplicity which blends melody and feeling within the compass of a few naturally uttered words that every one can understand.

But such a tide as, moving, seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell  
When I embark.

These are almost the last lines that Tennyson ever wrote. On the day of his death the present writer was in London, and it seemed as if nearly every human being had in his hands the words of this infinitely appealing poem. It will be noted that it is a lyric. Tennyson's fame, indeed, began when he gave the world his first book in 1830—a slender little volume entitled *Poems Chiefly Lyrical*; and his last poetic breath, so to speak, sought instinctively a lyrical expression. To-day this greatest poet of the nineteenth century is admired for many splendid achievements; but I believe that in the end, when the inexorable process of time shall have eaten away the memory of what many now think to be his finest work, there will remain, as an imperishable part of English literature, those poems which are “chiefly lyrical.”

The lyric is the most interesting form of poetry that we have. It affects more human beings than any other kind. It is elemental. It is undoubtedly the first type of poetry that was ever evolved, the type out of which sprang all the others. For what is the lyric when you come to analyse it? It is the simplest and most natural literary expression of unmixed emotion—usually the emotion of an individual. It may be personal, or religious, or amatory, or patriotic; but in the beginning it must have been removed by only one stage from cries, ejaculations, shouts—primitive expressions of pure feeling. Now, just as, all over the world, a cry of passion or of pain is



understood by every human being, so is the lyric the nearest literary representative of an inarticulate cry. It began probably, as soon as language did, in simple lines and with a short refrain. It gradually developed into a longer and more artificial kind of verse. But because ~~it represents feeling~~ rather than complex thought, it goes straightest and surest to the human heart. Men and women who care nothing for any other sort of poetry instinctively love the lyric in some of its many forms, as the old familiar "pennyroyal hymns" of the New Englander, or the patriotic song, or the love poem, or the battle chant—all the way up the scale of genius from Wesley to Campbell, and from Campbell to Burns and Longfellow and Tennyson. The lyric speaks out from the heart the things which belong to every nature; and thus it is the most primitive kind of poetry.

Hence, I think that if Tennyson was the greatest English poet of the nineteenth century, this was not because of his dramas, or his idyls, or any half-fantastic poems such as the narrative part of *The Princess*; but because his genius at its very highest was neither dramatic nor epic, but lyrical. He caught the ear of the public first with such wonderful bits of harmony as *Airy*, *Fairy Lillian* and *Mariana*; and soon afterward the whole English-speaking world was wondering over the exquisitely undulating lines of *Locksley Hall*, almost every couplet of which is

a golden memory to lovers of pure poetry. Just one phrase in it seems to describe the whole cluster of Tennysonian lyrics, which

Glitter like a swarm of fireflies tangled in a silver braid.

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Can any of the following lines ever be forgotten while the English language lasts?

Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands;  
 Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.  
 Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with might;  
 Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore,  
 And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.

Greek and more than Greek is the choric song which forms a part of *The Lotos-Eaters*. It seems to me that nothing in any language can surpass the almost cloying sweetness of these lines.

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,  
 With half-shut eyes ever to seem  
 Falling asleep in a half-dream!  
 To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,  
 Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height;

To hear each other's whisper'd speech;  
 Eating the lotos day by day,  
 To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,  
 And tender curving lines of creamy spray.

In quite another strain is *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*. It appeals to honest manhood with all that noble independence which thrills through the most famous lyric of Robert Burns. One single stanza of Tennyson sums up the creed of that true aristocracy which is not of blood but of achievement and high character:

How'er it be, it seems to me,  
 'Tis only noble to be good.  
 Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
 And simple faith than Norman blood.

The deep yet profoundly thoughtful melancholy of *In Memoriam* is shot through with glimpses of nature which show one "the pleasant fields and farms," the little shallop "at anchor in the flood below," the grey old grange, the sheep-walk on the wold, "the runlet tinkling from the rocks"—

Till from the garden and the wild,  
 A fresh association blows.

Besides this there are such memorably impressive lines as the two which make loom before us:

The shadow cloaked from head to foot  
 That keeps the keys of all the creeds;

while toward the end of the poem comes that famous lyrical outburst of hope and prophecy:

Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
 Ring happy bells, across the snow:  
 The year is going,—let him go;  
 Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring in the valiant man and free,  
 The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
 Ring out the darkness of the land,  
 Ring in the Christ that is to be!

What shall one say of the marvellous lyrics which glitter throughout *The Princess*? They have no direct relation to the theme of the main poem, but they are jewels of song with which nothing else in English can be compared. I should like to quote them here, yet they are too well known. Who does not recall *Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead*, and *The Bugle Song*, and *Sweet and Low*, and *Tears, Idle Tears*, than which music can afford nothing more melodious, and poetry nothing more fragrant of delicate suggestion?

It is odd that no one seems to have noted how deeply indebted to Tennyson's art is Rudyard Kipling in those ballads of Kipling's which rise above the strife and clamour of the barrack-room and display the deeper feeling that is always hidden somewhere in the Anglo-Saxon nature. Tennyson's deftly managed alliteration, his bold simplicity of phrase,

his compactness, and his high-strung spirit, are all to be detected in Kipling when at his best. Kipling is not a copyist of Tennyson, but he has felt Tennyson's influence very deeply. If we did not already know that these eight lines were written by the laureate, we should without any hesitation ascribe them to the author of *The Recessional*:

Thy voice is heard through rolling drums,  
That beat to battle where he stands;  
Thy face across his fancy comes,  
And gives the battle to his hands:

A moment, while the trumpets blow,  
He sees his brood about his knee;  
The next, like fire he meets the foe—  
And strikes him for thine and thee!

It is almost certain, too, that Swinburne learned much of his art from Tennyson. Indeed, he may be described as a sensual Tennyson, as Kipling may be called a ruder, rougher Tennyson.

Tennyson was markedly an English type. No poet in our time has probably been so truly English as was Alfred Tennyson. In his veins there ran the blood of the three great peoples whose gradual union made England what it is and what it has been for the past thousand years. His father's family was of Danish extraction, descended from the invaders who occupied the north of England in King Alfred's time. Upon his mother's side there

were French ancestors to represent the Norman influence. These two elements in every century had been blended with the pure Saxon strain.

Hence, Tennyson himself was almost an epitome of the English race, and his poetry shows signs of each of the three racial influences. From the French blood that was in him he derived his perfect clarity, his flexibility of diction, and his appreciation of the exact and fitting word. From the Danish strain came the eery picturesqueness, the touch of Northern wildness which are found here and there glimmering through his poetry. From the Anglo-Saxon came the strength and sturdiness, and the enduring power which bound all the other qualities together.

In the *Idyls of the King*, the French and Danish traits predominate; but it is the Saxon that we see most clearly in such domestic, homely poems as *The May Queen*, and *Enoch Arden*, and in the rough, stirring, hard-hitting, irregular metre of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. This last poem, it is interesting to know, was struck off at a white heat immediately after reading in the *London Times* an account of the charge at Balaklava. In the newspaper despatch, Tennyson noted the phrase "some one had blundered," and this phrase gave him alike his inspiration and the metrical scheme of the poem. Oddly enough, this is the line which was most criticised at the time. In the mid-Victorian period, literary taste was rather finical; and the blunt phrasing was

thought to be a blemish on the poem. Yet both in movement and in sound it fits in admirably with the rest, suggesting, as it does, the rhythmic gallop and the thunder of the horses' hoofs.

It was not often, however, that Tennyson wrote so rapidly. His *Idyls of the King* was planned by him as early as 1830; but not until after more than twenty years did he publish a first instalment of the poem. Not for another period of thirty years did he finish the twelve books, and thus round out one of the noblest monuments of our literature. So, too, *In Memoriam* is a growth, an evolution, since the stanzas of it were written at many different times and places. This poem, more than any other of the Tennysonian cycle, is lyrical in the broadest sense of the word; for here, although the author speaks in his own person and of a personal grief, he regards himself as doing so in terms of the Universal; and, as he once described it, "the voice of the whole human race is speaking through him."

The Saxon side of Tennyson came out most strongly in his private intercourse with those who knew him best. This master of the most delicate harmonies spoke with a Lincolnshire burr. His vocabulary was full of common words, some of which were often coarse. When Longfellow visited him, the sensitive New England poet was disturbed by the broadness of the stories which Tennyson told him and by the roughness of his manners, for which, indeed, Ten-

nyson afterward apologised in a letter. All this represented the yeoman side of his nature, and it was wonderfully characteristic of the Englishman. Yet it really sprang from his intense individuality, and is therefore of itself significant. In it we see just why the highest form of poetical expression is the lyrical; for the lyric, as I have already said, is the spontaneous expression of a strongly dominant individualism.



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LONGFELLOW

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## V

### LONGFELLOW

WHAT sort of human being is the typical American? There are Americans of the East and of the West, of the North and of the South, and they are distinguished from one another by all kinds of external traits; so that superficial observers have said that there is no single American type at all. This would be true if we considered only habits of speech, local customs, and perhaps idiosyncrasies of manner. But these things are of the surface only. Is there not somewhere, deep down, a sentiment, a mode of feeling, a temperamental quality, which all our countrymen, taken in the mass, possess in common, and which enables us to say that, after all, there does exist a typical American and an American ideal?

Foreign critics are apt to select eccentric traits which are sometimes found among us and to call them national, instead of accidental and individual. To such as these the genuine American is a loud-mouthed braggart, worshipping bigness, glorifying materialism, and caring nothing for what pertains to beauty or for what belongs to the spirit and the soul. Very lately a comment like this was made upon us by two Russians—Maxim Gorky, the novelist, and Gregory Maxim, the sociologist. Sometimes such

criticism is accepted as true even by our own countrymen, and it is exaggerated with that perversely humorous instinct which so many Americans possess. And at first sight there is much to justify it. As a people we do undoubtedly love to see things done upon an enormous scale. We are eager for success, for material prosperity, for money, and for power. But, after all, are these the things for which Americans care most? Is there not another side more subtle, more profound, and less obvious to the casual eye than mere noise and tumult and concrete immensity? It is not to stock exchanges and manufacturing establishments, or to the pulsing heart of cities, that one ought to go in quest of what is most indicative of the character of any people. Of the eighty millions of our countrymen and countrywomen, only a comparatively few are dragged into the vortex of this struggle for life; and even those who are engaged in it have times and seasons in which they can be themselves, and find leisure for what Robert Louis Stevenson called "pleasure trips into the Land of Thought," where, as Burns said, there are hours for "happy thinking."

The genuine characteristics of the nation may be tested in many ways; but the test of literature alone is very striking, and ought to bear conviction with it. If Americans were in reality a people of strident voice, of crass materialism, and of a thinly disguised brutality, their favourite poet should beyond all ques-

tion be Walt Whitman. Whitman of the red shirt and unkempt hair, Whitman despising all conventionalities, Whitman glorifying hugeness, and, as he said, "sounding his barbaric yawp over the rooftops"—surely here is the poet who would make an instantaneous appeal to that typical American whom foreigners believe that they have seen. He was, as Sidney Lanier admirably expressed it, "poetry's butcher," offering as food "huge raw collops cut from the rump of poetry," arguing that because a Western prairie is wide, therefore, debauchery is admirable, and because the Mississippi is long, therefore, every American is a god.

But, as a matter of fact, Whitman's poetry, if it can so be called, tells of those national traits which are only on the surface. That he speaks with eloquence and power, at times, is undeniable. When he pictures a great locomotive in winter, plunging its way through the snowstorm, and apostrophises it as

Fierce-throated beauty!

Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music,

he is superb. And, too, when in the great Platte Cañon of Colorado he describes

These tumbled rock-piles, grim and red,

These reckless heaven-ambitious peaks,

These gorges, turbulent-clear streams,

he is again superb, and undoubtedly American. In

a sense, also, his lawlessness, his glorification of himself and of his physical desires, compel, at times, one's admiration. They are so unfettered, so defiant, and so magnificently insolent.

Yet, at heart, the American of reality is not the American whom Whitman knew. The true American's ideal is not found in a machine of iron and brass, however powerful it may be. His love of nature is not stirred merely by gigantic and misshapen products of volcanic convulsion. His love of woman is not satisfied by the purchased favours of a strumpet. And so, as a matter of actual fact, Whitman has never been very widely read by his own countrymen. Curiously enough, his most numerous admirers are to be found among aliens who imagine him to be American just because he is blatant and boastful and grotesque. His praises have been loudest sung by foreign poets, such as Swinburne, in whom the erratic and the erotic are ingeniously interwoven, and who look upon this transatlantic roisterer as they would look upon any freak of nature, because it is something strange and novel and, therefore, interesting. But the America of Whitman is neither that of Washington, with his grave dignity, nor of Franklin, with his quiet humour and good sense, nor of Lincoln, underneath whose uncouth exterior were hidden nobility and tenderness.

The true American laureate, the poet of our people, and in a sense of the whole English-speaking

race, is Longfellow, born little more than a century ago. No one could be more utterly unlike the crude conception of the American; yet no one else has written lines that have sunk so deeply down into the national consciousness, making their strong appeal to men and women of every rank and station, and of every degree of culture and refinement.

In England he has been more read than Tennyson. His bust is in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. In the United States he has, for fifty years at least, stood first, and with no rival. His lines are recited in the country school; they are read in the remote farmhouse; they are part and parcel of the intellectual equipment of every man of letters. Yet Longfellow is the very antithesis of Whitman. His verses are, for the most part, as smooth and as musical as the other's are rough and formless. Their beauty is as exquisite as the ugliness of much that Whitman wrote is startling and repellent. Critics sometimes say that Longfellow lacks vigour and virility; but in such poems as *The Skeleton in Armour*, in his Norse ballads, and in *The Building of the Ship*, one may hear the roar and thunder of the sea and feel the daring spirit of the primitive man who is elemental in his emotions, yet who, nevertheless, stands far above the brutes that perish. Listen to these stanzas, for example, which are familiar yet ever new:

Then launched they to the blast,  
 Bent like a reed each mast,  
 Yet we were gaining fast,  
     When the wind failed us;  
 And with a sudden flaw  
 Came round the gusty skaw,  
 So that our foe we saw  
     Laugh as he hailed us.

And as to catch the gale  
 Round veered the flapping sail,  
 Death! was the helmsman's hail,  
     Death without quarter!  
 Mid-ships with iron keel  
 Struck we her ribs of steel;  
 Down her black hulk did reel  
     Through the black water!

And for conveying the dour strength of the  
 primitive man, what could be better than this from  
*The Saga of King Olaf*:

Ploughing under the morning star,  
 Old Iron-Beard in Yriar  
 Heard the summons, chuckling with a low laugh.

He wiped the sweat-drops from his brow,  
 Unharnessed his horses from the plough,  
 And clattering came on horseback to King Olaf.

He was the churliest of the churls;  
 Little he cared for king or earls;  
 Bitter as home-brewed ale were his foaming passions.

Hodden-grey was the garb he wore,  
 And by the Hammer of Thor he swore.  
 He hated the narrow town, and all its fashions.



Small wonder that in Kipling's curiously fascinating tale, *The Finest Story in the World*, Charlie Mears, the undersized, underbred, cockney bank-clerk, in whom are reincarnated the viking and the Greek galley-slave, should be roused to a dim consciousness of his former lives by hearing these Norse poems of Longfellow, and that for a moment he should get a vanishing glimpse of an existence which he had led centuries before, shackled to the seat of a rocking, sea-tossed ship under the savage, red-haired, red-bearded chieftain who steered straight through surging waves to Furdurstrandi and the "Long and Wonderful Beaches." Longfellow could, indeed, at times use English with the same rude strength which belonged to Tennyson, as when the latter wrote in *Enid*:

The brawny spearman turned and let his cheek  
Bulge with th' unswallowed piece.

Perhaps this is why Tennyson was a little jealous of Longfellow, who could almost match him in so many ways.

But where Longfellow is inferior to Tennyson is in having only a very superficial knowledge of classical literature, while Tennyson is vocal with faintly charming echoes from the Romans and the Greeks. It was a rather temerarious venture of Longfellow to essay the dactylic hexameter

in writing *Evangeline* and *The Courtship of Miles Standish*. In a sense, the attempt has been justified, and may be said almost to have grafted that splendid measure on our poetry; so much is there in these poems of his that delights the ear and makes pictures before the mind. Yet, on the whole, Longfellow's hexameters are not very good. One willingly accepts the accentual system in place of the quantitative, for this we find also in the later Latin writers. What Longfellow, however, seems not to have understood is that if you write accentual poetry you must abide strictly by its laws. The verse must "read itself," quite as easily as any other kind of verse, and must not compel us to lay stress on syllables which would not be stressed in prose. Professor C. E. Bennett, writing of Latin poetry, says what is also true of English: "Anyone who can read prose with accuracy and with fluency has no difficulty in reading poetry. The poet arranges the words in such wise that they make poetry of themselves if they are only properly pronounced. No other kind of poetry was ever known in any language. No other is conceivable." But in Longfellow's hexameters we are too often compelled to place the accent incorrectly in order to make out the line. That is, the verse becomes poetry only when improperly pronounced. Thus, again and again in *Evangeline*, there are lines which begin with little unaccented words like "and," "as," and with pronouns which

are not emphatic. Take, for example, such hexameters as these:

*As* apart by the window she stood, with her hand in her  
lover's,  
Blushing Evangeline heard the words that her father had  
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*And* as they died on his lips the worthy notary entered.

Now in the first of these three hexameters, we are obliged to stress the word “*as*,” although we should not stress it in prose. Yet unless we do so here, the first foot is a pyrrhic instead of a pseudo-spondee (trochee) as Longfellow meant it to be. In the last hexameter, unless we strongly stress the initial word “*and*”—which we should never think of doing in prose—we get a tribrach in place of a dactyl. Indeed, Longfellow had little understanding of the classic metres except such as came to him by ear, imperfectly. On one occasion he composed, in a humorous vein, an elegiac couplet in English; and in the second half of the pentameter he introduced a spondee, whereas the classic rule is a rigid one in requiring two dactyls after the cæsuræ.

Much of what he wrote has been so often quoted and so many times recited as to seem, it may be, trite; but his *Psalm of Life*, and even the imperfect stanzas of *Excelsior*, have power to stir the blood; and what is more, they point always upward to a noble and inspiring ideal of human life—a life that is more than the life of the flesh, since it means

strenuous effort and high endeavour toward truth and righteousness and justice. Indeed, here is the essential distinction between Whitman and Longfellow. The former never saw the moral background of our daily life; the latter never failed to see it and to make his readers see it. Whitman finds in cattle a rather admirable type of the existence which pleased him, since cattle "never have to be respectable." Longfellow, on the other hand, with courage and manliness, exclaims:

Be not like dumb driven cattle—  
Be a hero in the strife!

It is, however, in another sphere that Longfellow draws closest to the inner heart of those for whom he wrote. This is the sphere of what has lately come to be known as "the simple life." Here the poet's eye can see the fineness and the charm of what belongs to every-day experience. The village blacksmith, swart and strong beside his forge, where the flames flare out from the blown fire, and the sparks leap in coruscating cascades as his hammer smites the red-hot metal on the anvil; the wreck of the coasting vessel overwhelmed by mountainous billows while the captain's daughter prays to the Christ who stilled the sea at Galilee; the old clock chiming on the stairs; the hanging of the crane in the new home; the musing figure on the historic bridge—here are themes which in their usual aspect are quite commonplace, but which under Longfellow's magic touch have become

instinct with an exquisite beauty to which he has opened every reader's eyes.

More than all, it is Longfellow's sympathy with children and with women that gives him the firmest hold upon his countrymen. There are the quietly playful verses of *The Children's Hour*, when the poet is made a willing prisoner by the laughing little elves who swarm into his study and take him captive. There are the blind girl of Castel-Cuillé, and the sleeping child for whose waking smile the father watches, fearful lest it may be dead and not asleep. There are the happy children who play upon the stairs about the ancient clock, and there are the village urchins who, coming home from school, look in at the doorway and watch the blacksmith at his task.

When Longfellow thinks of women he thinks of them as the native-born American always thinks of them—whether he be a clergyman or a cowboy—with reverence and respect. One sees the poet smile with quiet amusement at the charmingly coquettish girl of whom he writes, almost as Horace wrote of Pyrrha, "Trust her not, she's fooling thee"; and again he makes us feel and see the grace and glory of that moment when she who is no longer girl nor yet wholly woman, but is

Standing with reluctant feet  
Where the brook and river meet.

And we can not turn many pages without coming upon lines both tender and impassioned, written to the

wife who filled his home with a radiant gentleness that made of it an earthly paradise.

In a larger sense is Longfellow to be regarded as the American laureate. Had he written only his three poems of *Evangeline* and *The Courtship of Miles Standish* and *Hiawatha*, he would still have rightly won the laurel crown. Through these poems he peopled the waste places of our then prosaic land with the creations of his fancy. In *Hiawatha* he stretched out his hand and set the mark of his genius upon the West, giving us a poem which is not far from being an epic, sprung from the soil and from the forests of aboriginal America. He had, indeed, the epic poet's gift of true constructiveness. As Mr. Horace Scudder said of him, "He was first of all, a composer, and he saw his subjects in their relation, rather than in their essence," though he saw them in their essence, too. What could be nobler, and what could sound more perfectly the *motif* of *Evangeline*, than the wonderful proem in which the forest primeval with its murmuring trees, its long, dim vistas, and the far-off disconsolate accent of the ocean, attune our minds, as it were, to a symphony in which unsophisticated nature and the sorrow of love are curiously and poignantly intermingled? Here Longfellow is certainly American in theme and thought alike; nor is there any trace of that bastard Americanism which is sordid, or boastful, or ignoble.

One finds the same type of Americanism—the highest and therefore the most representative of all—in Longfellow's own personality, in the urbanity of his tone, the perfection of his breeding, and the fineness of his manner. To me, one of the most striking traits of Longfellow has always been his innate gentility, which must have come first of all from nature, and which was merely fostered and ripened by the circumstances of his life. Born in what was then a parochial country settlement, educated at a provincial college, and finally transferred to Cambridge, which was still only a small, self-conscious, and somewhat pedantic community, Longfellow was from the very first not only a man of refinement, but one who had that indescribable tone and feeling which come to most men only from long contact with the world. His early letters make this plain. His correspondence with old Josiah Quincy, then president of Harvard College, shows a striking contrast between two types of men. Quincy is upright, just, and, in his narrow way, benignant; yet he is after all a sublimated sort of schoolmaster; while Longfellow, in what he writes, reveals in every line the courtesy and taste and breeding of an accomplished gentleman whose scholarship is but one of his claims to distinction.

His life was like his poetry, simple, yet beautifully true. His hospitality was gracious and unvarying; and his historic home at Cambridge was the literary

Mecca of our country. Yet he was not aloof from public interests. It is noted by one of his biographers that he always voted at elections, that he took a keen interest in local affairs—that he was, in fact, a good citizen as well as a great poet. With all this he preserved “that integrity of nature which never abdicates,” and, like Emerson, because of the power of his personality, “he dwelt in a charmed circle beyond the lines of which men could not penetrate.” The thought of money-making never came into his mind; and though, toward the end of his life, he had a comfortable income, he made no change in the manner of his living. For many years he was what most men to-day would call quite poor; and it is related by a friend of his that he felt himself exceedingly well off when he had in the bank so large a sum as eight hundred dollars.

In all this he seems to be the type of the American citizen—American not merely in his poetic themes, but in the homelike qualities of his existence. His personal dignity, his quiet humour—of which he possessed an abundant store—his love of what is sane and wholesome, his cordial friendships, and his united household—all these together sum up the things which, as we like to think, belong to the American ideal of what life means. When his bust was placed within the consecrated walls of Westminster Abbey, his friend and fellow-poet spoke of him some words that should not be forgotten. Lowell said: “Never



have I known a more beautiful character. I was familiar with it daily—with the constant charity of his hand and of his mind. His nature was consecrated ground, into which no unclean spirit could ever enter.”

Hence, it is not wrong to say that in Longfellow we find the traits which, notwithstanding an assumed indifference or bravado, Americans at heart most value. His is not a personal ideal, but an ideal that is national. And rightly so; since when we grasp the highest possible conception of our republic it is not to be found in a sordid herding together of the uncouth and the avaricious, since of all forms of government a republic must depend—to quote Lanier once more—upon the self-control and the fitness for rule of its every member. “You can not make a republic out of muscles and prairies and rocky mountains. Republics are made of the spirit.” And of our American republic the essential, vivifying spirit speaks with clear, unerring tones in all the lines and through the voice of Longfellow.

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**POE AS A STORY-WRITER**

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## VI

### POE AS A STORY-WRITER

OF those who admire Edgar Allan Poe, some admire him chiefly as a poet, while others admire him chiefly as a writer of prose. If we analyse both his poetry and his prose, and try to understand the true nature of his genius, we shall find that fundamentally he was first of all a mathematician.

Now most persons think of a mathematician as a mere vulgar weigher and measurer and calculator—a very prosaic person, utterly devoid of all imagination. Poe himself seems to have held this view; for in one of his most famous stories—*The Purloined Letter*—he makes his ingenious hero, Dupin, say of another character: “As a mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all.” And then he goes on to remark that because the person in question was both a poet *and* a mathematician, he could reason well, and was, therefore, a very dangerous opponent.

Yet Poe, of all men, should have known that imagination is just as necessary to a really great mathematician as it is to a lyric poet, since the great mathematician does not limit his speculations to finite truths, but passes into transcendental regions of thought, where finite truths have no validity. In

other words, it is wrong to say, as Poe does, that a mathematician *may* be a poet. Rather is it true that a great mathematician *must* have many of those qualities of mind which make a poet. It is only thus that he can rise above the finite to the infinite, and form those bold conceptions which do not, indeed, belong to arithmetic and to the theorems of Euclidean geometry, but which are absolutely vital to the higher mathematics.

That Poe's natural bent was mathematical is seen in many facts. Even in his early youth, when he was a cadet at West Point—he was then only nineteen years of age—it was recorded of him by a friend, "He had a wonderful aptitude for mathematics." Toward the end of his life, disregarding all that he had previously written as being relatively unimportant, he planned his so-called prose poem, *Eureka*, which he said and thought to be his strongest claim upon the remembrance of posterity. He went to Mr. Putnam, the publisher, all quivering with excitement, and declared that this prose poem was of momentous interest, and that a first edition of fifty thousand copies, if Mr. Putnam would publish it, would be only a small and inadequate beginning. Remember that in those days publishers regarded an edition of two thousand copies as a large one, and it will be plain that Poe really thought this book to be his greatest work. In his preface to it he declares *Eureka* to be "an art product," and says that only

as a poem does he wish it to be judged after he is dead.

Now, what is this *Eureka*, on which Poe desired to rest his final reputation? It is a work of minutely analytical reasoning of the most abstract character, intended to explain the process of creation and the constitution of the universe. In it, like some ancient Greek—Empedocles or Leucippus, for example—he discourses of primordial atoms thrown off in a number directly proportioned to the surface of the particular sphere which they had occupied; and he argues that since the surfaces were directly proportioned to the squares of their distances from the centre, the radiating force was directly proportioned to the squares of the distances to which the several atomic showers were driven. Poe then assumes a recoil of the atoms and a tendency which represents the mutual attraction of atoms with a force inversely proportioned to the squares of the distances. Again, in some still later papers, he busies himself with a mathematical explanation of Kepler's planetary laws, and with certain mathematical deductions from Newton's theory of gravitation.

In all this complex speculation who discovers the author of *The Bells*, *The Raven*, and *The Haunted Palace*? Who readily detects the mind which constructed the story of *The Gold Bug*, or *The Purloined Letter*, or *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*? Apparently very few. Even Professor Woodberry, in his

admirable biography, explains these scientific labours as "showing how egregiously genius may mistake its realm." Yet they certainly do show that Poe felt a powerful impulse toward mathematics and the related sciences. As I see them, the same qualities which appear in *Eureka* are the qualities which are conspicuous in his poetry, and no less so in the stories which every one had read, though no one reads *Eureka*. In the present chapter I have nothing to do with the poems; but I venture to propound the thesis that both the merits and the defects of Poe's short stories are largely traceable to the fact that their author was before all else a mathematician, with a mathematician's mind and temperament.

Let us take a few of these short stories by way of illustration. First of all, there is *The Purloined Letter*, of which the hero, Auguste Dupin, is a man saturated with mathematical knowledge, even though he has a species of contempt for algebraists and geometers. To him comes the prefect of police, begging his assistance to recover a letter which is known to be in the possession of a minister of state, and which is probably in the house of the minister; yet which the most minute ransacking of the house by the police has failed to bring to light. Every inch of space in every room has been examined. The legs of the chairs and the cushions on the couches have been bored into or ripped open. The very books in the library have been taken down one by one; each page has been turned, and even the bindings have



been tested. The prefect is in despair; for the letter is a compromising one, and its possession by the minister may lead to serious political results.

Dupin listens, says very little, and soon the prefect goes away. A month later he once more visits Dupin, and again expresses his despair. The letter has not yet been found. An enormous reward has been privately offered for it. The prefect would himself willingly give fifty thousand francs to any one who should recover it. Then Dupin, who has been puffing at his pipe, tosses a cheque-book to the prefect and says:

“You may as well fill me up a cheque for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it I will hand you the letter.”

The prefect gasps and stares, then makes out a cheque for fifty thousand francs and gives it to Dupin. Thereupon Dupin quietly unlocks a writing-desk, takes out the missing letter, and hands it over to the thunderstruck official.

This is an extremely interesting and dramatic story. Merely as regards incident, it is absolutely perfect. Then, when Dupin comes to explain how he got possession of the letter where the police had failed, his explanation is a beautiful blending of mathematics and psychology. To be sure, it seems at first sight to be a criticism of mathematics, yet it is just the sort of criticism which a transcendental mathematician would bestow upon a mathematician of the ordinary type. We have here, in reality, a

suggestion of mathematical imagination applied to a psychological problem. Dupin has read the mind both of the prefect of police and of the minister, and he reasons from thought to action with the close logic of the advanced mathematician. By so doing he has been able to arrive at a solution which the professional detectives absolutely failed to hit upon.

Again, there is the story of *The Gold Bug*, in which the discovery of a hidden treasure depends upon the deciphering of a cryptogram composed of numbers. Cryptography was a subject in which Poe always took an extraordinary interest. When he was connected with a Philadelphia periodical, he issued a sort of challenge, declaring that he could read anything that might be sent to him written in cipher. In consequence, many cryptograms reached him from all parts of the country, some of them concocted by persons who did not observe the conditions of the challenge, but either used foreign languages or blended several alphabets in the same cipher, or even ran words and sentences together without any indicated intervals. Yet Poe solved all of these intricate puzzles, except one which was meaningless, being made up of a jargon based upon characters used at random.

Afterwards, Poe wrote a series of papers on Secret Writing, which appeared in the pages of *Graham's Magazine*. In these papers he analysed the methods by which cryptograms could be deciphered, and he

did so with an obvious zest in that sort of mathematical trick-work. In all this we see the mathematician at play. The story of *The Gold Bug* is written around a cryptogram just as his poem, *The Raven*, was built up around the single word "Nevermore."

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Another famous tale, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, affords a still more extraordinary instance of Poe's logical and mathematical skill. As every one is aware, a young girl named Mary Cecilia Rogers, well known in New York, was found murdered in Hoboken. The police were unable to discover any clue to the mystery of her death. The problem baffled all investigation. Then, Poe, merely from putting together the facts that had been reported in the newspapers, composed a story in which, laying the scene in Paris and substituting French names and places for the real ones, he unravelled the tangled skein of evidence and explained just how and why the murder had been done.

His flawless, relentless reasoning is remarkable, and the story itself ends with a paragraph which is essentially mathematical, referring directly to the calculus of probabilities. It also contains the following very striking sentence:

This is one of those anomalous propositions which, seemingly appealing to thought altogether apart from the mathematical, is yet one which only the mathematician can fully understand.

This sentence may well be applied to the working of Poe's mind in all of his most famous stories. His mathematical exactitude was confirmed in regard to the Mary Rogers case when, long afterward, the confession of two persons proved that Poe's deductions had been absolutely correct.

The same intense mathematical reasoning was brought to bear when Dickens began to put forth in serial form the novel, *Barnaby Rudge*. Before many numbers had appeared, Poe published an exposition of the entire plot of the story, and he did it so accurately that Dickens was aghast. "Are you the devil?" he asked of Poe. Here again was a mental feat, not obviously mathematical, yet one which only a mathematician's mind could successfully accomplish.

Poe's great popularity in France is largely due to the scientific lucidity of his thought; for the French are a mathematical people, ruthlessly logical, and with a love for what is definite and precise. Their instinct for the dramatic accounts for the toleration of his stilted rhetoric, which at times offends the taste of the Anglo-Saxon reader. Perhaps the fact that Poe rants in some of his stories is due to hereditary influences, for both his father and his mother were actors. Take, for example, these sentences from his greatly overpraised *Fall of the House of Usher*:

And now—to-night—Ethelred—ha! ha!—the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangour of the shield! Say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh, whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon?

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This is surely Eracles' vein. It will not do to say in Poe's defence that this sort of overwrought declamation was characteristic of the style in which men wrote at the time when Poe composed the story. He himself by no means lapses very often into verbal hysteria. In the best of his tales he writes with the same naturalness that we expect to-day of even second-rate authors. The real defect of Poe is not to be discovered in his occasional bombast. It is a defect that is far less superficial and far more profound; and it deserves not only mention, but concrete illustration.

The mathematical quality of Poe's mind gave singular effectiveness to his fiction. His imagination was a constructive one. It worked in harmony with his reasoning faculties, and he proceeded bit by bit to build up an almost flawless literary structure. Dr. Charles Sears Baldwin has very well said of Poe:

When he talked of literary art, he talked habitually in terms of construction. When he worked, at least he planned an ingeniously suspended solution of incidents; *for he was always pleased with mere solution.*

It is true that because of his invention, his con-

structiveness, and his correlation of details, Poe is one of the great masters of the short story. But I should be unwilling to say with Dr. Baldwin that "from his brain was born the short story as a complete, finished, and self-sufficing whole." This seems to imply that Poe originated the short story in its perfection. It is difficult to understand how a professor of English literature or, for that matter, of any literature whatever, could make so extraordinary an assertion. What does Dr. Baldwin think, for example, of Balzac's short stories, such as *El Verdugo*, *La Grande Bretèche*, and *Le Colonel Chabat*—not to mention others? Every one of these is superior to Poe's, while still representing "the grotesque and the arabesque." Or, if Dr. Baldwin pleads that Balzac was a contemporary of Poe, what could be more nearly perfect than Sir Walter Scott's horror-story called *The Tapestry Chamber*—wonderful in its simplicity, yet so powerful in its effect that, after reading it, men of the strongest nerves are unwilling to go to bed immediately or to be left alone in the dark? But retrace our steps still further to the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, or still further to the Milesian Tales which are interwoven by Apuleius in his *Metamorphoses*. The story of the commercial traveller in the first book, and that of the robber in the fourth book, are "complete, finished, and self-sufficing." And how about the tales in Herodotus, that superb story-teller? The narrative of *Rhamp-*

*sinitus and the Robber* has invention, directness, and suspense as its chief qualities. And we may continue our researches and look at some of the short stories in the Bible, of which, for example, the story of Joseph and his brethren, of Samson, of Esther, and of Job, have always been fascinating to men and women and children, and they show that the true genesis of the short story antedates Christianity as it probably antedates any written records which the world possesses. It would surely have been odd if men had been obliged to wait until the year 1830 for a short story that was "complete, finished, and self-sufficing"! Yet my principal reason for dissenting from Dr. Baldwin's dictum is found in the very limitations which were imposed upon Edgar Allan Poe by the mathematical bias of his mind.

A truly mathematical mind dwells, as it were, in a sort of vacuum. It conceives order, harmony, proportion, form—that is to say, every sort of abstraction. It does not often, however, possess sympathy and an understanding of the emotions in their wider range. This truth is admirably and rather pathetically exemplified in Poe. He can construct a plot and compress it within small compass. He can work out its solution with marvellous ingenuity. He can excite wonder, curiosity, and terror. But the one thing that he can not do is to create character.

In this respect, his short stories are just as defective as the short stories which the Greeks com-



posed three centuries before Christ. His personages are dummies. What they do is extremely interesting; what they are and what they feel, no one knows or cares. Thus, M. Dupin is a thinking-machine, an embodiment of reason, impassive, impersonal; but he does not live for us as a man, since he is not a man.

Compare him, for example, with Sherlock Holmes as drawn by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Conan Doyle has not so original a genius as Poe had; yet, none the less, he has some qualities which make his best work more pleasing and far closer to the universal understanding. The proof of this is found in the fact that the name of Sherlock Holmes is known all over the civilised world; while if you mention M. Dupin to the man of average intelligence, it is long odds that he will not remember and recognise it.

Let me illustrate this sharp distinction by examining a famous short story of Poe's, and by comparing it with a short story of Conan Doyle's which was clearly suggested by the other.

*The Cask of Amontillado* is one of the shortest and also one of the best known of Poe's fictions. It is supposed to be narrated by an Italian who has suffered insults at the hand of a professed friend, Fortunato. He plans revenge; and at the time of the carnival he asks Fortunato's advice about the merits of some Amontillado wine. Fortunato is a connoisseur of wine, and willingly consents to go down into the vaults where the great cask is supposed to be.



His enemy really conducts him into the catacombs, through heaps of bones—a slimy, gloomy, terrifying place, beneath the river's bed, and reeking with the moisture which has oozed down through the walls. Fortunato enters a sort of niche, only to find that his progress is arrested by solid rock. In an instant his enemy has shackled him to the wall, and almost at once begins, with stone and mortar, to close up the entrance to the niche and to make of it a tomb where Fortunato must perish in the dark. The story is told most vividly; and at the end one hears the shrieks of the victim and the tinkle of the bells that he wore upon his carnival attire. The sound ceases; the vault is closed; and vengeance is achieved.

Now, this narrative is made to thrill us with a sort of nameless horror; yet the defect in its art lies in the fact that our sympathies go out entirely to Fortunato, and we regard the man who seeks revenge in this dreadful way as far worse than an ordinary murderer. Poe has not made us feel the justice of the act. He merely speaks quite casually of "the thousand injuries of Fortunato" without giving any clue to what they were. Hence the effect of the story is impaired by our natural human sympathies, of which the author has taken no account.

Compare now Conan Doyle's story called *The New Catacomb*, the plot of which is directly borrowed from this theme of Poe's. It is told by one Julius Berger, a German student in Rome, who has deeply loved

an English girl and has hoped to marry her. A dissolute Englishman, however, has wronged her, and has cynically told his friends of what he deems a gay adventure. The girl's honour is lost, and she disappears in order to hide her shame. The Englishman does not know that she had first loved Julius; and in talking with him, he makes a jest of the whole affair.

Here the art of Conan Doyle is higher than the art of Poe. He has appealed to our humanity, and has aroused in us a lively indignation, so that we are prepared for the terrible revenge which Julius takes. The German student has discovered a catacomb of which no one else has learned the secret; and he invites the Englishman to accompany him through its mazes to the central chamber. When there, Julius, who knows every turn of the catacomb, suddenly extinguishes the light, retreats backward into the appalling darkness, and in a voice which echoes strangely through the hollow vaults, tells the reason why he has done this deed. The story ends with an impressive awfulness which is not inferior to that attained by Poe, and which affects us far more, because we feel that justice has been done, and that innocence has been avenged.

Herein, briefly, lies the difference between the short story, as Poe wrote it, and the further development of the short story which is not inferior in invention and constructiveness, while it is otherwise superior, be-

cause in it the cold-blooded impersonality of the mathematician has been replaced by a warmth of feeling which belongs to men and women who have hearts as well as heads, and in whom the whole gamut of emotion can be stirred by the hand of a master who knows how to make an instantaneous appeal.

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HAWTHORNE AND “THE  
SCARLET LETTER”

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### III

## HAWTHORNE AND "THE SCARLET LETTER"

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IF Nathaniel Hawthorne had never written *The Scarlet Letter*, it is almost certain that to-day he would be remembered only as one of America's minor writers. *The Scarlet Letter* has won readers for his other books and has raised him to the position of a classic. When he began its composition, he was in the forty-fifth year of his life. He had struggled hard to win success in literature and had lamentably failed. His inventiveness had given him material for scores of tales and sketches. He had edited the manuscripts of other men. He had contributed to many publications. Yet only a very few paid much attention to him as a writer, and those few were largely influenced by their personal regard for him. His pen could not provide for him even a meagre livelihood, and he felt the pinch of actual poverty. There was a time when, with his devoted wife, he lived at Concord on the products of his kitchen-garden. He chopped wood, and cooked the scanty meals, and even washed the dishes in the back-parlour of the Old Manse. He recorded the *menu* of his Christmas dinner in 1843 as "quince, apples, bread-and-cheese, and milk."

But soon even bread-and-cheese and milk became

almost too much to hope for. The wolf was not only at the door, but was forever thrusting its gaunt head within. And to all this anxiety for the morrow, there was added the bitter thought that he had failed. "I am the obscurest man of letters in America!" said he on one occasion; and he was, indeed, obscure. Then, at the moment of his dire need, there came, through his old college friend, Franklin Pierce, an appointment to be surveyor of customs for the port of Salem. It meant bread and butter to the discouraged writer; and he turned his back on literature, to sit in a dingy office on a rickety wharf, where his physical outlook, as he has described it, was limited to "glimpses of the shops of grocers, block-makers, slop-sellers and ship-chandlers." The name of Nathaniel Hawthorne ceased for a time to appear in books, but was instead "imprinted, with a stencil and black paint, on pepper-bags and baskets of anatto, and cigar-boxes and bales of all kinds of dutiable merchandise."

It seems, as we look back upon it, almost a desecration that one with so fine an intellect and so remarkable a personality should have been compelled to drudge amid surroundings so uncongenial. Still, it is almost certain that this was in reality a period of recuperation, of germination. Hawthorne needed exactly such a physical and mental change. His literary faculty was a peculiar one. When he did more than a slight amount of creative work, he always experienced a sort of intellectual exhaustion.



His fancy must lie fallow for a time. He exhibits, when one studies him, a certain low vitality which he shared with some of his contemporaries, though in a degree far greater. This low vitality, which one may call an intellectual anæmia, is felt sometimes in Emerson. It was very marked in Bronson Alcott and in William Ellery Channing. Even in Longfellow it has been made the basis of a criticism that he is defective in virility and force,—that he is at once too gentle and too fond of what is commonplace. Indeed, in most of the New England penmen one finds a thinness and lack of body, affording a strong contrast with the full-blooded, hearty strength of Old England's writers. Plain living may induce high thinking, but it must not be so very plain as to afford imperfect nourishment. To make a frivolous comparison, the Yankee writers of the middle nineteenth century seem to have been fed on pie and pickles, when a more normal fare of good roast beef and ale would have given them much stronger bodies to support still sounder minds.

Hawthorne, at any rate, could never safely spur his Pegasus. His multitudinous short stories show this plainly. Almost every one of them contains the germ of an original and often quite remarkable idea. Here are imagination, mystery, a fondness for the dark things of human life and of the supernatural. In the hands of Poe or of Hoffmann these conceptions would have been worked out into concrete

masterpieces, Hawthorne, however, lets them, as it were, slip through his fingers. His hands are nerveless; and in the actual moment of execution, he falters and drops into sheer futility. He knows so well just what he wants to do, and yet he can not do it! The result is shadow and not substance, a mirage in place of what might well have been a miracle. And, therefore, out of the hundred tales which are the work of his first period, only a dozen or so are read to-day by any save the conscientious student of American literature.

The cause of this futility was the author's lack of intellectual robustness, the devitalised condition into which he often fell. Had he written twenty stories instead of five times twenty, resting between whiles, every one of them would have been upon his highest level of achievement. As it is, let us not deplore the fact that three years of his life were spent among dull custom-house inspectors and bluff sea-captains and the tarry-salty smells of Salem's wharf. Those three years of lull were a lucky chance for Hawthorne and for our literature. He hated them at the time, though he found some comfort in the thought that both Burns and Chaucer had been in the customs-service in their day. But he also hated and resented his summary removal from office when President Taylor succeeded Polk. Hawthorne was once more cast out upon the world. His friends subscribed a sum of money to meet his immediate neces-

sities; and Mr. James T. Fields, the publisher—a bustling, cheery optimist—coming down to Salem, found that Hawthorne had again begun to write with the zest which years of abstemiousness had given him. Fields begged to see what he had written. Hawthorne, with his habitual faintheartedness, drew back.

“Who would risk publishing a book for me, the least popular writer in America?”

“I would,” responded the jovial Fields. “I’ll begin with an edition of two thousand copies of anything you choose to write.”

“What madness!” cried Hawthorne. “Your friendship for me gets the better of your judgment.”

There was a long and friendly wrangle between the two. At last, when Fields was leaving empty-handed, Hawthorne shamefacedly thrust a roll of manuscript upon him.

“There,” said he; “it is either very good or very bad—I don’t know which.”

The manuscript contained the first draft of *The Scarlet Letter*. The novel in its final form was published in 1850. Two editions of it were almost immediately exhausted. At the age of forty-six, the “obscurest man of letters in America” took rank among the few who have achieved a lasting fame.

When Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, he did, for the one time in his whole life, exactly what he meant to do. He has himself recorded that he penned its pages at a white heat, thrilled by the emotions

that were excited in him,—“as if I were tossed up and down upon an ocean.” For once, his grasp was firm. Physical energy sustained the effort of intellectual power. And so, in its own way, the story is very nearly perfect—all except the anticlimax of the last few pages.

There were reasons for Hawthorne's doubt, expressed to Fields, as to whether the book was very good or very bad. Had its author been merely a clever writer and not a man of genius, his work would have sunk to the level of melodrama. As Hawthorne actually wrought it out, it is dramatic and something more. It may, indeed, be styled theatric, and I might go still further and call it operatic. No wonder that it has been taken by a living composer for musical interpretation. The libretto fairly leaps out of its pages. The scenes are already indicated with sharp distinctness, for the whole tale is episodic. The grim and weather-beaten prison with its oaken, iron-clamped door—the pillory—a balcony projecting from beneath the church's eaves—beyond, the harbour with a glimpse of high-decked ships—a beautiful but guilty woman wearing the Scarlet Letter on her breast and passing from the prison to the pillory—here is a strangely vivid setting for the *lever de rideau*. How much colour and picturesqueness in the chorus, or the stage mob, if you please! Aged women and young girls, stern Puritan inhabitants of Old Boston with bell-crowned hats and

gloomy looks, an Indian or two in paint and feathers, and a group of swaggering buccaneers, garbed strangely,—it is of the essence of the operatic stage.

Then think of those especial episodes which stand out most vividly. The chorus greets Hester Prynne as she walks proudly to the pillory, and it gives the clue to what has gone before. Then comes the trio between Wilson, the old clergyman, Arthur Dimmesdale and Governor Bellingham; followed by the impassioned appeal of Dimmesdale to Hester, urging her to tell the truth, if it be for her soul's peace. His appeal is broken by her short and sharp refusals, and by the deep voice of Roger Chillingworth—obviously a basso. Think also of the operatic possibilities of the prison scene, where Roger plays the physician and is alone with Hester, the wife who dishonoured him by reason of her love for some man whom he threatens to discover and of whom he says: "Let him live! Let him hide himself in outward honour, if he may. None the less, he shall be mine!"

And again, the crafty, stealthy arts of Chillingworth, suspecting Dimmesdale, and playing with malignant skill upon that tortured conscience, until at last, the misshapen seeker after vengeance learns the secret of the minister, and finds upon his breast the great scarlet A. And the forest scene, where Hester meets her former lover, while the uncanny little Pearl sports near them, is full of dramatic and operatic possibilities. The powerful climax is worked up with

all the mastery of stage effect that the most skilful playwright could imagine. Here the chorus is diversified by the introduction of soldiers in burnished steel who enter to the strains of military music. The procession of the Governor and magistrates varies the spectacle, while the tense excitement of the moment is raised to a still higher pitch by the seaman's message which shows that the devilish Roger has prevented the escape of Dimmesdale and Hester. And at last, Dimmesdale, in the hour of his seeming triumph, which is also the hour of his death, mounting the scaffold where once Hester stood, reveals his guilt, and with convulsive hand tears open his black vestment and displays the scarlet symbol of his shame and hers.

The genius of Hawthorne is clearly shown in the art with which he has done so much with such slight material. There are only three characters in the story. There is, first of all, Hester Prynne, noble and strong and pure of heart, in spite of the transgression which has marred her life. If she has sinned, it is because of the great law of Nature which gives to every woman the desire for love. There is Arthur Dimmesdale, gifted, sensitive, and with the instincts of a saint; yet still a sinner, guilty of a double sin because of his holy calling, and swayed by moral cowardice which ties his tongue until the end and lets him live a hypocrite. And finally, there is Roger Chillingworth, cold-hearted, implacable, and showing

that malignant spirit which so often goes with physical deformity. These three—the confessed and branded sinner, the undetected sinner, and the man who is a self-appointed instrument to scourge the other two—these are the only figures on which the author has concentrated the glaring light of his imagination. Yet out of what would seem to be the meagerest of material, he has created something for which there is no parallel in English literature. How skilfully he manages the physical aspects of his story! In it he was almost the first to cast the glamour of pure romance about the harshness and severity of New England. Old Boston, as he limns it, is as quaint and full of fascinating possibilities as any Rhenish town with a whole millennium of legend. The trackless woods which circle it, seem, under Hawthorne's magic touch, to teem with mystery as though he had transported the Schwarzwald to the Western world. The beauty of its silent glades, where the sunlight sifts through the greenery, makes it enchanted ground; while the lurking Indians who now and then appear so silently, take not so strong a hold upon the fancy as do the dark hints concerning what takes place at night when in the gloom, grim hags steal out to meet the Black Man who has bought their souls. There is a smell of witchcraft in the air, as Hawthorne tells the story; and his reticence and half-spoken intimations are proofs of his consummate art.



Hawthorne was a symbolist, one who spoke in allegory, and let the concrete always serve as a clue to the intangible yet more intense reality of what lay behind it. Thus, the scaffold on which Hester stood to be stared at by a thousand eyes, is a symbol of her public shame. The prison is another symbol. The forest, where she yielded to her lover, reminds us always of the guilt that has been hers as well as Dimmesdale's. But it is the scarlet letter which is the one pervasive and almost terrifying symbol, giving in itself the *motif* of the whole. As Mr. Woodberry has well expressed the thought: "It multiplies itself, as the tale unfolds, with greater intensity and mysterious significance and dread suggestion, as if in mirrors set round about it; . . . and as if this were not enough, the scarlet letter, at a climax of the dark story, lightens forth over the whole heavens as a symbol of what can not be hid even in the intensest blackness of night." This recurrence of a physical object to keep the meaning of the book before the reader's mind forever, is an instinctive bit of art in Hawthorne. It was employed with conscious purpose by Émile Zola three decades later, in the great brazen still of *L'Assommoir*, in the reeking mine-pit of *Germinal* and in the Napoleonic bees of *La Débâcle*.

But it is not the outward aspects of *The Scarlet Letter* that excite the deepest and most lasting interest. This is to be found in its subtler phases, in its moral lesson, if there be one, and in its revelation



of the inner mind of him who wrote it. And to understand these things, we must ever so briefly scan the lesson of heredity which helps explain so much. Hawthorne's first ancestor on American soil exhibited a strange *mélange* of tastes and tasks. He was a warrior, a preacher of great eloquence, a reader of fine English prose, and a stern magistrate who ordered the public whipping of women because they were proven to be Quakers. His son condemned to death women who were reputed witches; and he showed such savagery and blood-lust in the court-room, that one whose wife was sentenced by him, cursed him and the children of his children's children, in a curse that was Oriental in its fury and completeness, and that was not forgotten after many generations.

Hawthorne's father was a sailor, the captain of a Salem vessel, and he bore the reputation of being black and stern to those whom he commanded. When he died, in far-off Surinam, his wife was only twenty-seven years of age. Yet she, too, had the intensity and deep passion of the family which she had entered. She called young Hawthorne, with his sisters, to her room, and told them dryly that their father was now dead. Then she sent her children to her own father's house and for forty years lived in a solitude that was rarely broken. Long after Hawthorne had grown to manhood, he wrote to a friend of having eaten dinner with his mother—"for the first time in my life that I can remember."

Recalling, then, his ancestral traits, we can in part explain Nathaniel Hawthorne as a man, and more especially the Hawthorne of *The Scarlet Letter*. All the sunshine of his nature was lavished on his wife and children, with whom his every hour was an hour of unclouded happiness. But to the world at large he was the true descendant of the men who scourged the Quaker women and doomed the witches and terrified the sailors, as he was also the son of her who let her whole life wither for what she felt to be a "principle." Hawthorne had friends who loved him well, yet he never spared them in his criticism. He was burdened with a secret pessimism which was ever a dark blot on his secret soul. He wearied both of men and places in a little time. When he left his native Salem, he described it as "an earthly cavern." When he left Brook Farm, he wrote: "Even my custom-house experience was not such a thralldom and weariness." When at last, by the kindness of President Pierce, he left America for the lucrative consulship at Liverpool, he was glad, so his biographer informs us, "to get away from his native land, upon which . . . he looked back with the feeling that he never desired to return to it." Yet in England he was wholly discontented and displeased. He refused to meet many of the famous men who would have been glad to offer him their hospitality. One instance of almost incredible tactlessness has been preserved in a brief, surly note which he penned

from Liverpool to a Mr. Bright, who had striven to make this difficult genius happy. "Dear Mr. Bright," wrote Hawthorne, "I have come back (only for a day or two) to this black, miserable hole." His contempt for England he has recorded in the pages of *Our Old Home*. The English he described as "beefish, muttonish, portish, and porterish." Yet he was unwilling to meet such Englishmen as Tennyson and Thackeray and Macaulay, who were not beefish and muttonish. He did not care for men of letters. It is hard to say for what, precisely, he did care. At heart, he was a pessimist, a man of gloom, a fatalist, a Yankee Heraclitus. And with it all there was a moral sternness, a relentlessness which his biographers have called Puritanism. Yet in Hawthorne it was not really Puritanism, since the deep religious conviction which was the moving force, the main-spring, of Puritanism, was in his case lacking. For Puritanism, while ascetic and severe in doctrine, was not always unsparing, pitiless, relentless. There were the "uncovenanted mercies of the Lord," and even Jonathan Edwards did not forever preach of dire damnation and the glaring flames of hell. There was a place even in his stern creed, for charity and hope. Therefore, it seems to me that Hawthorne's ultimate belief was rather Paganism—not the joyous, gladsome, irresponsible Paganism of the Greeks, but Paganism of a darker hue,—the Paganism of the Orientals.

In this sense, *The Scarlet Letter* is the fullest revelation of his innermost convictions. Hence, in its last analysis, it is a deeply hopeless book, tinged with morbid thoughts. It means that sin can not be forgiven in this life; that its taint, of which the scarlet letter is a symbol, must remain forever. That which is done can never be undone. Though years of expiation pass, though the sinner repent in tears, and sweat great drops of blood, and eat the bread of bitterness, his sin is unforgiven. If he confess it, he is exposed to public shame. If he conceal it, he is riven by remorse. Love and affection may minister to him, as wild-flowers and green ivies grow about a fire-scarred trunk in the forest—yet the marks of scorching flame are there, and the charred stump can never be again a stately tree. In all this there is no Christ, no hint of gentleness and grace and pity. *The Scarlet Letter* brings to mind a very different work of genius written by a very different type of man, yet one of which the moral is the same,—Rossetti's *Jenny*. There the man of much experience muses over the street-waif as she sleeps, and he thinks of all the problems of existence. He, too, like Hawthorne, feels the mystery of life and death, of sin and sorrow, and he turns away perplexed; for though it is a mystery that stares men always in the face, not one has ever fathomed it.

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EMERSON

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## VIII

### EMERSON

SOME of these days there will have to be a general readjustment of values in the accepted criticism of American literature. For a long, long while our people were necessarily so given over to material things as to have little time for cultivating any of the arts. In this respect, Americans were like the Romans of the early period. They were engaged in a struggle for existence. Their thoughts were turned toward what was useful rather than toward what was beautiful. Hence, in this country, as in early Rome, the artistic instinct was approved only when it seemed to have in it an element of the practical. Thus, while painting was not entirely discouraged, it was only the portrait-painter who could make a living in the young commonwealth. He could transmit to posterity the features of his conspicuous contemporaries; and so they let him paint them, being moved by that pride which was shared alike by Puritan and by Cavalier. Again, in literature it was only the historian and the orator who were viewed with approbation. The historian could record the exploits of soldiers and of nation-builders. The orator, whether political or theological, could influence his hearers to action. Therefore, histories and speeches and sermons were committed to writing,

and were printed and even read; but poets and dramatists and essayists were for a long time scarcely known. When, in the early nineteenth century, they finally appeared, they wrote for a public which had long since lost all the finer standards of appreciation. It was thought to be remarkable that any one could write a book at all. Even a newspaper poet was worth consideration, and had at least a local fame; while professional authors, though they made but little money, and wrote, as Prescott once did, for a dollar a page, were viewed with indiscriminating admiration.

This is why, if you open one of the early American anthologies, such as Griswold's, or if you turn over the pages of the "literary keepsakes" and "gift-books" of that generation, you will find the productions of a few men of talent indiscriminately mixed with the crudest scrawls of mediocrity. The reading public could not feel the difference, for example, between the early writings of Longfellow and those of Maria Brooks; between the strange harmonies of Poe and the slipshod verse of Amelia Welby; or between the graceful, accurate scholarship of Prescott and the ponderous pedantry of Bancroft. Poe himself pilloried Longfellow as a mere plagiarist, while praising very highly women scribblers whose verse was mawkish to the last degree.

It came about, therefore, that American literature, as our first critics understood it, was really a most



*bizarre* assemblage of unequal work—a sort of crazy-quilt in which silk and velvet were cobble-stitched to calico. Only by very slow degrees did there begin a process of sifting, and even now this process has not been fully carried out. Take any recent history of American literature—like that, for example, of Professor Trent—and you will find serious attention given not merely to Irving and Cooper and Hawthorne and Lowell, but likewise to such feeble folk as Thomas Prince and John Woolman and Joseph Denis and John P. Kennedy and Enos Hitchcock.

So, as I said before, the time is coming when all this literary underbrush must be rooted out remorselessly. Then we shall have remaining a number of writers to whom new values will be assigned. At the present time the practice is to rank them as being almost equally important. Soon, however, it will be no longer necessary to hold that Cooper was a very great romancer, that Hawthorne was in every book of his a genius of extraordinary accomplishments, that Bayard Taylor was very much of a poet, or that Oliver Wendell Holmes possessed more than cleverness and facility. We shall have to balance these earlier writers with those of our own time, and to judge them, not by parochial standards, but by the criterion of world-literature.

When this is done, we may be sure that two men, at least, will meet any test that shall be applied to them. Longfellow and Emerson have nothing to

fear. Their place is fixed; or, if it be changed at all, they will be advanced to still greater heights.

I need not speak of Longfellow, because I have already done so in this volume. His fame has grown each year. He is no longer a poet of America alone, but of the whole English-speaking world. Yet he must yield to Emerson, and for a reason that is very plain. In Longfellow, one admires most of all the beauty and fitness of the form in which he has embodied what he thought and felt. Apart from the form, his thought and feeling are not remarkable. Translate him into any other language, and his poetry would not rise very much above the level of the commonplace. It is the exquisite gift of expression which makes his lines so lovely, so touching, and so impossible to forget.

Emerson, on the other hand, unites the intellectual quality with the emotional, fineness of form with originality of content. Longfellow soothes and charms and pleases. Emerson stimulates and inspires. In one you find a certain sensuousness and sweetness as in music. In the other there is that which energises the brain and is a trumpet-call to action.

What is remarkable about both these men is the circumstance that, although their surroundings in the formative period of their lives were plain, provincial, and almost rustic, they both wrote in the language of a larger world—a language that was

and still remains devoid of what is local. Emerson, speaking at Oxford or at Edinburgh, would not have been recognised as a citizen of the New World. Far less would one think of him as a rural Yankee who invariably breakfasted on pie, who picked peas in his little garden, who was regular in his attendance at "town meetings," and who entered into all the interests of the hamlet where he lived. Matthew Arnold, the most fastidious of critics, tells us of the impression made upon him by the first reading of Emerson's early essays:

There came to us in that old Oxford time a clear and pure voice, which, for my ear, at any rate, brought a strain as new and moving and unforgettable as the strain of Newman or Carlyle or Goethe. To us at Oxford, Emerson was but a voice speaking from three thousand miles away. But so well he spoke that from that time forth, Boston Bay and Concord were names invested to my ear with a sentiment akin to that which invests for me the names of Oxford and of Weimar.

It is odd, yet it gives proof of the American lack of critical power at the time, that Emerson's own countrymen by no means greeted him with the same enthusiasm. In 1840, Dean Stanley, meeting some Americans at Malta and desiring to please them, spoke with hearty admiration of the *Essays*, which had just been published. Whereupon the Americans shook their heads and said that, in the United States, Emerson was thought to be much too "greeny." It

was the very perfection of his style and the originality of his mind that made his sentences appeal with far more force to cultivated foreigners than to the home public, which preferred the obvious, dressed up in tawdry rhetoric.

It is, indeed, impossible to discover just how Emerson acquired the felicitous touch that gives his writings such distinction, the wealth of illustration that enriches them, the penetration of thought that fills them with so much power. He was but an indifferent student in his college days. His reading was very wide, but very desultory. His allusions are often quite inaccurate. None the less, in some strange fashion he absorbed the essence of Platonism and an understanding of the great German philosophers, together with a myriad facts and fancies from all the world's best writers—facts and fancies which he unconsciously assimilated so that they gave brilliancy and beauty to his own most esoteric thoughts.

He was a most unusual figure, this man of Concord. He lived a life which touched the world at many points, though he was scarcely of the world himself. His consistent attitude was one of intellectual detachment. He had many friends, yet no one really knew him. No one ever clapped him on the shoulder and called him Waldo. There was something almost Buddhistic in his serene aloofness in that small community where every one knew everybody else, and where, for most men, there was little

privacy. Yet Emerson was quite apart, composed and tranquil, friendly, but with little heat of friendship. He seldom laughed. He disliked loud laughter in others, or loud speaking. He detested the superlative degree in everything.

Perhaps this sensitiveness may have been partly physical in its origin. Writing once to Carlyle, he used the phrase "my vast debility." It was surely not a debility of mind. It was perhaps a debility of body which made the noise and bustle of what he called "this great, intelligent, sensual, and avaricious America" distasteful to him. Even in good causes he deplored the strenuous attitude. He wrote:

Nature does not like our benevolence or our learning much better than she likes our frauds and wars. When we come out of the caucus, or the bank, or the Abolition convention, or the temperance meeting, or the Transcendental Club, into the fields and woods, she says to us: "So hot, my little sir?"

And thus to Emerson all the actualities of material life were more or less a dream. At least, they never stirred his depths. When, as a clergyman, he found himself unable, by reason of conscientious scruples, to administer the sacrament, he caused no schism in the church. He merely told his people of his changed belief; and when they could not follow him, he left the pulpit very quietly and put aside the clerical profession. Whenever he received offence in private life—which was but seldom—he showed no an-

ger, but simply withdrew into himself and ceased thereafter to know the persons who had offended him. Though he sympathised with the Abolition movement, he took no active part in it. Though the Brook Farm experiment in socialism interested him, he would not himself become a member of the brotherhood. Politics repelled him. Of personal ambition he had none.

A great deal has been said and written concerning the philosophy of Emerson, and a great deal of what has been said and written is little better than nebulous nonsense. Emerson, in truth, had no philosophy—at least, no system of philosophy which can be reduced to any definite form. He was rather a great fountain of isolated thoughts which he put forth in essays, some of which have no structural coherence. At times, as in his essay on “The Over-Soul,” he scarcely apprehended what he wished to say, but merely struggled amid a flood of half-shaped ideas. As Oliver Wendell Holmes has well expressed it: “His paragraphs are full of brittle sentences that break apart and are independent units, like the fragments of a coral colony.” Of course, his thoughts were fundamentally Platonic. His quest was for ideals. He had a truly Oriental belief in the transmigration of souls, and this was supplemented by a kind of pantheism; since he believed that God is omnipresent, that He pervades every living thing, and that our souls are but a part of the Divine Soul which

is the very essence of the universe. Philosophically, there is nothing new in Emerson. What made him so remarkable a figure in his time and country was his splendid advocacy of free thought, of the right of every mind to think precisely as it would. It was because of this that Carlyle wrote to him with a touch of Scottish condescension: "You are a new era, my man, in your new, huge country."

It was his championship of intellectual freedom that burst through the petty, narrow, provincial way of thinking which had clamped New England in a strangling grip. His doctrine worked like new yeast upon the brains of those who heard and read him. Some of these brains were very feeble brains, and they were responsible for much babbling and for much of the absurdity of Transcendentalism. The cheap cleverness of Margaret Fuller and the bore-some, windy platitudes of Bronson Alcott are rather favourable specimens of the occasional miscarriage of Emerson's inspiration. But in the end, his influence was tonic and stimulating; and after he had taught for many years, his influence led his countrymen into a wider world of thought, just as it made for courage, for self-reliance, and for a love of truth eternal.

It may seem odd to couple the names of Emerson and Walt Whitman, since no two human beings could have lived more different lives; yet each of these two men gave his supreme devotion to the doc-



trine of an intense individualism. Whitman, however, seems to feel only the intoxication of physical well-being. He is drunken with the pride of flesh and blood, the joy of sense, the glory of the outward man. Emerson, striking a far higher note, yields not to Whitman in his exaltation of humanity. But to him, man is not a mere eating, drinking, loafing, sprawling creature, likening himself to cattle because they are not "respectable," and approving lust because untamed nature prompts it. Listen to Emerson and see how gloriously he rises above the purely sensual view of life:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. We are now men, and must accept from the highest minds the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, nor cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

The nonchalance of boys, who are sure of a dinner and would disdain as much as a lord to do or say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of human nature.

We are wiser than we know. If we will not interfere with our thought, but will act entirely, or see how the thing stands in God, we know the particular thing, and everything, and every man. For the Maker of all things and all persons stands behind us and casts His dread omniscience through us over things.

No society can ever be so large as one man. He in his friendship, in his natural and momentary association, doubles or multiplies himself; but in the hour in which he mortgages himself to two, or ten, or twenty, he dwarfs himself below the stature of one.



That country is the fairest which is inhabited by the noblest minds.

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Every great man is unique. Do that which is assigned to you, and you can not hope too much, or dare too much.

Let a man, then, know his worth and keep things under his feet.

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Here is a proclamation of the grandeur and dignity of man, as forcible as Whitman's, yet delivered as it were in clear tones from a mountain-peak, while Whitman bellows vociferously in a valley.

These sentences alone would give one who had not read him a very good understanding of the rare quality which Emerson possessed of concentrating a pungent thought within the compass of a few words. He teaches in aphorisms. 'As I have already said, his essays seem often a collection of unrelated units. One might liken each essay to a quiver filled with arrows. Every shaft flies forth unerringly to its mark. It is a mere accident that they all leap, as it were, from a single bowstring. Each sentence is often in its effect equivalent to a long disquisition by a writer whose phrases are less pregnant. I can think of no parallel to certain of these papers except, perhaps, in some of the Epistles of Horace, where maxim after maxim, and epigram after epigram, strike the mind as a succession of lightning-flashes strikes the vision. Take, for example, the famous essays on "Compensation" and "Circles," and note these remarkable sayings which, as you pass from

page to page, scintillate like a rivière of diamonds in a golden setting:

Every excess causes a defect; every defect an excess. Every sweet hath its sour; every evil its good. Every faculty which is a receiver of pleasure has an equal penalty put on its abuse. For every grain of wit, there is a grain of folly. For everything you have missed, you have gained something else; and for everything you gain, you lose something.

Nature hates monopolies and exceptions.

The only sin is limitation.

The world globes itself in a drop of dew.

Character makes an overpowering present. Character dulls the power of particular events. When we see the conqueror, we do not think much of every one battle or success. We see that we had exaggerated the difficulty. It was easy to *him*.

Thus is the universe alive. All things are moral. That soul which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is a law. The dice of God are always loaded.

Our strength grows out of our weakness.

A great man is always willing to be little.

Blame is safer than praise. I hate to be defended in a newspaper.

The man is all.

Every evil to which we do not succumb is a benefactor. We gain the strength of the temptations we resist.

Horace is the most quoted writer of classical antiquity. Emerson is certainly the most quoted writer who holds a place in American literature. It is probably to the fact that these single, poignant thoughts of his have found a lodgment in so many minds that we may ascribe the power which he has exerted for several generations. He may be criticised for unevenness, for a lack of philosophic sys-

tem, and for many other things. Yet all such criticism is but the cheep of insects when we consider how splendidly this one writer has combated the forces of materialism, how he has taught men to look upward to the ideal truth, and how he has given a multitude of lofty thoughts to instil nobility in minds which would have been ignoble had he never lived and written.

So far as our native literature has advanced in its gradual evolution, there can be no doubt that Emerson to-day is the very foremost of those who have shed lustre on its annals.

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THACKERAY AND "VANITY  
FAIR"

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## IX

### THACKERAY AND "VANITY FAIR"

To set oneself the task of writing about *Vanity Fair* recalls Schopenhauer's famous saying: "Everything has been thought, everything has been done, everything has been written, everything has been said." It would not be possible, for example, to discover anything in Becky Sharp which had escaped the observation of a host of critics long ago. From Dobbin and Amelia and Lord Steyne, with his buck-teeth and great jarring laugh, and old Osborne, and the gluttonous Jos, down to Kirsch, the courier, and the frowsy German students dabbling their blond moustaches in their beer-mugs at Pumpnickel, all the people in the book have been held beneath the microscope since the time when they were first created for us, sixty years ago. There is not one of them that lacks the breath of life; but for this very reason they are too familiar to need interpretation. Like old acquaintances, we have come to know them down to the very last detail. We do not dwell upon their virtues or deplore their vices. We simply accept them as they are and take them quite for granted.

Nevertheless, of the book itself there remains, perhaps, something still to say. The most curious

thing about it is the circumstance that, when Thackeray set out to write it, he did not in the least suppose that he was going to produce a masterpiece. He had been scribbling nearly all his life, often for the sheer love of self-expression, and later, after he had lost his fortune, because of the money which his pen would bring him. As a college boy, he had written skits in verse and prose for an undergraduate journal. Afterward, even while he imagined that he was studying art in France, he was filling voluminous note-books with his impressions of men and things and places. At twenty-five he had gambled away a very considerable sum of money, and was thrown upon his own resources. It was then that he took to writing for the magazines and newspapers—especially for *Fraser's* and for *Punch*. He even consented to contribute to a newspaper in New York—the *Corsair*—for the sum of a guinea a column.

Nearly everything he wrote was in a vein of irony or humour. He took nothing very seriously, least of all himself and his own writings. What he actually valued most was his bent for art. This is only another example of what we so often see—the ambition of a gifted man to shine in some sphere other than that for which his native genius fits him. Thackeray really thought himself an artist of the brush and pencil, and he was hurt when Dickens would not employ him as an illustrator for the early books of “Boz.” He was pleased that *Punch* would



accept and publish his faulty drawings. So Dickens, in his turn, valued more the perfunctory praise which he won in amateur theatricals than he did the true fame which came to him spontaneously as an author.

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Finally after having written an immense deal that is hardly worth recalling, and some other things which do not deserve remembrance, Thackeray put forth, on New Year's Day in 1847, the first number of *Vanity Fair*, in a yellow wrapper. He was led to begin a story to appear in parts by the great success which Dickens had won in the same way. But *Vanity Fair* at first seemed likely to be an utter disappointment. When four numbers had been issued, the publishers were so assured of its failure that they proposed to discontinue it. It is probable that Thackeray himself had no great hope. Then, with the fifth number, the tide turned, and all literary London began talking of the story which in spirit and in manner was something genuinely new.

Nevertheless, if it succeeded, it did so almost in its author's own despite. Thackeray had really planned it as a burlesque. If any one will compare the first edition of it with the form in which we have it now, it will be plain enough that the novel was meant to be written in a comic vein. Whole passages that were farcical were afterward eliminated. In one of the earlier chapters, for instance, the author stops the progress of the tale to explain, with a sort of side-wink to the reader, that, had he chosen, he

might have written the adventures of Jos and Becky and Amelia in one of two other manners. Thus, he says, he might have promoted all his characters to the peerage; or, on the other hand, he might have copied the Bulwer-Lytton of his time and made them lackeys and roughs and burglars, who patter thieves' argot—"beladle your glumbanions and bimbole your chickeys"—whatever that may mean. He even writes in a little scene as a specimen of what he could do in the latter *genre* had he but chosen. As he went on, however, his "novel without a hero" took strong hold of him. He afterwards confessed that he "wasn't going to write it in that way when he began." He started out to perpetrate a caricature. He ended by producing a finished painting.

The reason why *Vanity Fair* succeeded at the time is to be found in its freshness of manner. The historical romance, which had been so splendidly developed by Scott, had grown stale in the hands of G. P. R. James, Harrison Ainsworth, and a hundred smaller men. The sentimental romance pure and simple had reached the verge of mawkishness with Miss Landon and Bulwer-Lytton. The latter had also led the ranks of writers who revelled in low life and the psychology of crime. Then upon the scene came Thackeray, to give the English-speaking people a novel of manners, of social experiences, of life as men and women of the world beheld it. Every one had become tired of "fine writing," and Thackeray

gave them good writing instead—writing that was often half colloquial and still more often wholly so. Men read him with that sense of relief which, in an earlier generation, they had felt in passing from the rhodomontade of Mrs. Radcliffe and her school to the sturdy, vigorous manner of Sir Walter Scott. But Thackeray pushed the easy style a stage farther. He left rhetoric alone and spoke in that level, easy tone which marks the talk of the club smoking-room rather than the library of the professional man of letters. It was sophisticated writing, but still it had the effectiveness of simplicity.

The men and the women who appear in *Vanity Fair* are also, if not themselves sophisticated, at least seen through sophisticated eyes. Thackeray called the book "a novel without a hero." It is just as truly a novel without a heroine, at least in the old sense of that word. There is, indeed, nothing heroic in any of the characters. There is not one of them who is free from vice or folly or from some petty failing. Thackeray himself declared that he meant to make "a set of people living without God in the world." He did not really do this; yet, none the less, he has created a set of people who are always far below the level on which we can unfeignedly admire them. Amelia Sedley, for example, is almost worse than Becky Sharp. She is quite as selfish, and she has no brains. She can be maudlin over the cockney dandy who married her almost against his

will, and she can weep over her little son, who is as selfish as his father was; but she can not understand the loyal love of an honest man. She will use it unscrupulously for her own convenience, and she will give it no reward except at the last, when she is forced to take it because she needs its strong protection. Thackeray never intended to let Dobbin marry Amelia; but he was urged to do so by his readers until at last he yielded, saying pettishly:

“Well, he shall marry her; but when he has got her, he shall not find her worth the having.”

What a wonderful panorama of human weakness is unrolled before our eyes in the chapters of *Vanity Fair!* Try to recall one character whom you can admire without reservation. Dobbin, perhaps, stands forth a finer person than the rest. In character and in mind he makes a strong appeal; yet his awkwardness and loutishness of bearing are continually harped upon. Again and again he appears to be entirely ridiculous. His foolish infatuation for Amelia almost makes one's blood boil, it is so utterly unjustified. For the rest, think of the miserly and clownish old baronet, Sir Pitt Crawley; his fox-hunting, hard-drinking parson brother; his graceless, selfish, and bewigged old sister, and his two sons, one a dissolute bully, and the other a feeble prig. Think of Wenham, the smooth pander, of the senile old general just before Waterloo, and of the cowardly and gluttonous Jos Sedley!

It must be confessed that in this maze of living meannesses, Becky Sharp stands out by contrast almost a good woman. At least, she is consistent from beginning to end. If she is selfish, she is thoroughly good-natured. She is fighting for her own hand, but she does so with wit and grace and astounding cleverness. At the last she is willing even to efface herself to help Amelia, although, of course, she does so only after Amelia's environment begins to bore her. When you close the book you rather sympathise with this free-lance of society; for she is a gallant little campaigner, and she has had to deal with persons who are worse than she, or else infinitely stupid. One resents a little the fact that she fooled poor old Miss Briggs, because Miss Briggs was fooled so very easily; but that she fooled George Osborne and the Crawleys, young and old, is only fitting. Her magnificent insolence to Lady Bareacres in the hotel courtyard at Brussels is really delightful. And when she actually fools Lord Steyne our admiration is unqualified. Indeed, as the reader will remember, it extorted admiration from that hardened sinner himself when he found out that Becky had by tears and pitiful pleas got money from him, ostensibly to pay Miss Briggs, and had then kept it for herself.

"What an accomplished little devil it is!" thought he. "What a splendid actress and manager! She had almost got a second supply out of me the other day, with her coaxing

ways. She beats all the women I have ever seen in the course of all my well-spent life. They are babies compared to her. I am a greenhorn myself, and a fool in her hands—an old fool. She is unsurpassable in lies!”

His Lordship's admiration for Becky rose immeasurably at this proof of her cleverness. Getting the money was nothing—but getting double the sum she wanted, and paying nobody—it was a magnificent stroke.

From Thackeray's standpoint, he was, after all, merely stripping off the false pretences, the hypocritical masks, behind which every one must hide himself while in the confines of *Vanity Fair*. The picture is true to life itself, though it is not true to all of life. In this respect Thackeray is like *Maupassant*. Every human being whom he draws is drawn with a pitiless realism. Each separate impression is veracious. The only false thing is the tacit assumption that all the world is peopled by such types as we discover in *Vanity Fair*, and that there are none who are wholly pure-minded, generous, and noble.

Thackeray, in his book, has looked at human nature, not face to face and in the open air, but rather through the bay-window of a club. His philosophy is the philosophy of the man who lives in clubs, and who listens to the talk which comes buzzing to the ear in club-room corners. It is talk made up of *risqué* stories, of hinted scandal, of cynical observation and of worldly aphorisms. So far as it goes, it conveys the truth while it looks only at the seamy

side of character. It questions motives with a sneer. It dissects and vivisects and analyses with consummate cleverness. It strips away illusions, and pries into hidden meannesses. But it takes no account of another and fairer world in which men are not debauchees, or card-sharps, or tuft-hunters, or snobs and social climbers, but where they believe in right and justice and in God, where they treat women with respect, and where women are deserving of respect. *Vanity Fair* displays for us a microcosm. Its art is microcosmic.

It was not unnatural that Thackeray should view life from this standpoint. He himself was essentially an inhabitant of clubs. The insanity of his wife had deprived him of a home. He had roamed about in the Bohemia of Paris and the Bohemia of London; and the club-window was the nest on which he settled down as other men repose before their firesides. Later, when many homes were open to him, he knew a world which had not forgotten God; and then we find him writing in a nobler vein, quite as rich in observation and richer far in a perception of what is fine and true. *The Newcomes* shows far less the influence of the club *fumoir*. In *Henry Esmond* we breathe the free air of the greater world which reaches beyond Hyde Park and Piccadilly, beyond London, and even beyond England.

The comparison of Thackeray and Dickens is an old, old literary game. As it is often carried on,



nothing can be more absurd. From the standpoint of their art, in a limited way, it is like comparing the *Æneid* with the Binomial Theorem. Indeed, the two men and their work are not properly comparable at all. They can not, so to speak, be reduced to a common denominator. Yet, in a broad way, some comparison may be instructive. Both of them were intensely English; but Thackeray was an Englishman of London, while Dickens was an Englishman of England; and his imagination, grotesque and strained as it sometimes is, reaches out beyond the sphere of the Particular up into the illimitable spaces of the Universal. His pathos may be at times theatrical. His humour may be often farcical. Yet, in his mightier moments he appeals to something to which every human heart responds. Thackeray, on the other hand, is technically the greater artist. He is the truest realist that England has produced, except his contemporary, Trollope. But in *Vanity Fair* his realism is a realism that is shrunken to a single corner of his country. It is not large enough and broad enough to comprehend the hearts of men and women everywhere. *Vanity Fair* is a wonderful example of urban literature. Yet unless you are a Londoner, unless you are worldly-wise, unless you have yourself a touch of cynicism in your nature, you will not greatly care for Thackeray. To prefer Dickens to him is to show yourself more broadly human.



This is why both the young and the old can always find in Dickens something that will please and touch them. And this is why thousands upon thousands turn away from Thackeray. To enjoy Thackeray, you must have a [certain \*talent\*](http://www.vocabulary.com), whereas, to enjoy Dickens, you need only have the mind and heart and soul which belong to every normal human being. Thackeray is little read outside of England, and among sophisticated Americans who know English life and London life. Dickens is read all over the world, in many countries and in many languages. Foreigners are often puzzled by his burlesque. They are sometimes startled by his humour. His pathos affects them in a way far different from that in which it moves the Anglo-Saxon. Yet, none the less, they read him when they have never even heard of Thackeray; and thus they pay unconscious tribute to the sort of genius that is universal.

Here is an odd fact which proves how impossible it is for mere environment to make of any man that which he was not made by nature at his birth. Thackeray, born in India, long resident in France, a visitor at Weimar, where he met Goethe—Thackeray, widely travelled in the East—was far more insular, far more local than Dickens, who, when he wrote his greatest novels, had scarcely ever been outside his native land. Thackeray could draw individual Frenchmen and Germans from life with the deft touch of a portrait-painter. In *The Newcomes*, M. de Florac is deli-

ciously French, yet Thackeray could never have given us the impressive, overwhelming picture of France in the throes of the Revolution which Dickens spreads before us in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

To the last Thackeray remained the Englishman of London. He never understood the French. His judgments on them are oftentimes absurd. He set Balzac far below such second-rate French authors as Bernard and Reybaud, whom the world has long ago forgotten. He declares that he could not read Dumas "without a risk of lighting upon horrors." He is sometimes still more smug, as when in Athens he sees nothing but its shabbiness, "which beats Ireland." His smugness is equally apparent in the pages of *Vanity Fair*, whenever he breaks off his marvellous portrait-painting to preach sermons, or again as where he spoils a passage of fine pathos with a sort of cynic leer, so that, as Mr. Whibley says, "he seems to snigger amid sobs." It is equally true that he often sobs amid sniggers. He can not be the artist pure and simple—all of one piece, consistent, whole. He is a product of the clubs, and yet one thinks of him, perhaps, as sneaking out of his club to appease his conscience with an evening in a Wesleyan chapel. This would be commendable did he go boldly to the chapel; but he certainly does not do that. He discovers his place of worship in some remote back alley where his fine friends will not see him; and then, returning and sitting once more in

his club-window, he will light a fresh cigar and sneer at the devout.

*Vanity Fair* is one of the greatest books in English literature, but it belongs to purely English literature, and not to the great masterpieces which the whole world owns and to which it gives an unforced admiration. If you can breathe its atmosphere, you will read it over and over to the end of life. Otherwise its author will be to you simply a remarkable English novelist whom Englishmen will always place in the first rank of their fiction-writers.

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ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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## X

### ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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WHATEVER else may be said or written concerning Anthony Trollope, one thing at least must be conceded—that of all writers of British fiction he is the most typically English. A famous passage written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1860, while Trollope's reputation was still wholly insular, has been often quoted, because it gives in the fewest possible words the truest estimate of Trollope's literary work. Trollope himself in his *Autobiography* has cited it with pleasure, and it may well be repeated here:

Have you ever read the novels of Anthony Trollope? They precisely suit my taste—solid and substantial, written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, and just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all the inhabitants going about their daily business, and not suspecting that they were being made a show of. And these books are just as English as a beefsteak. It needs an English residence to make them thoroughly comprehensible; but still I think that their human nature would give them success anywhere.

This marvellously apt and felicitously worded piece of criticism contains two points that are essential to a thorough understanding of Anthony Trollope and of his place in the history of English letters.

First of all, it makes clear the intensely national character of his realism; and, in the second place, it recognises the fact that his art can give us something broader and deeper than what is purely national, since it is an art which finds its ultimate source in a profound and comprehensive knowledge of humanity.

In order to appreciate and explain the enduring existence of Trollope's finest work, one must know something of the man himself, of his training, of his life, of his surroundings, and more especially of his own character and temperament. There is, indeed, a striking contrast to be found between the man as others knew him in the casual intercourse of daily life, and the inner man as he revealed himself in that curiously frank, and at times pathetic, series of confessions which was given to the public only after his death. The man, in external things, was largely the creation of his environment. He was a bluff, self-assertive, dogmatic, thoroughly aggressive Englishman, brusque, burly, money-loving, and singularly matter-of-fact, so that even among his own countrymen and the men of his own set he was never generally popular. The man who dwelt within, however, and whom only his most cherished intimates ever really knew, was genial, tender-hearted, kindly, and, more than that, intensely sensitive to all the pain and all the pathos of human life. Both sides of his nature are felt in what he wrote, and both were necessary to



his greatness as an author. He had power and force; he had humour and a rich vein of wholesome English fun; he had insight into character and motive; and, finally, he had a wide and accurate first-hand knowledge of men and women, gained from the circumstances of his various vocations.

Anthony Trollope was born in London in the year 1815. His father was a gentleman, a scholar, a former Oxford man, and, at the time of Trollope's birth, a Chancery barrister of some ability in his profession, but one from whom fortune had withheld the successful temperament. Born to a small fortune, he muddled it away; trained to a learned profession, he offended and repelled his clients by his execrable temper. By the time that young Anthony was old enough to enter upon the period of his education, the elder Trollope had been forced to give up his London home and to take shelter in a wretched farmhouse on land which is accurately described in *Orley Farm*. The mother of the future novelist was a clever, jovial, coarse-grained woman, with a natural gift of observation—powers which are shown in her most unfair yet eminently readable account of the domestic manners of the Americans, and in a number of novels which, though hastily and superficially composed, enjoyed a certain temporary vogue. When Anthony was of an age to be sent to school, his mother had not yet begun to write, and the fortunes of the family were at their lowest ebb. He was en-

tered at Harrow, where he passed three most unhappy years, and which he left with a reputation for slovenliness of person and invincible dulness of mind. This reputation was not redeemed at a private school to which he was transferred, nor at Winchester College, where the poverty of his parents made him contemptible not only in the eyes of his fellows, but in those of his masters also. Big, ugly, and uncouth, he skulked about the place, feeling himself to be despised, ill-dressed, and dirty; and ere he left he had acquired a conviction that his life was destined to be an utter failure. The story of his next few years is painful reading; for it is a story of hopeless effort, of unrelieved dejection, of indignities, of failure. He tried to study, but for study he appears to have had no aptitude. He tried to teach, but he had neither knowledge nor self-confidence. He endeavoured twice to win a sizarship at Cambridge and again at Oxford, but failed ignominiously in both attempts; so that he gave up once for all the notion of a university career. It was at this period that a gleam of light appeared, almost for the first time in his life. His mother's book of travels in America succeeded with the public, so that within a few months she received from her publishers the sum of £800. The family's pecuniary difficulties were somewhat lightened; yet none the less there was illness and there were debts, and finally there was death; and in the end it became necessary for Anthony Trollope to choose a definite career.

The singular offer was made to him of a commission in an Austrian cavalry regiment, and he actually set about the study of the German language, so that he might be qualified for this command; but at the end of six weeks he had another offer of a very different character, and immediately accepted a clerkship in the General Post Office, with which branch of the public service he remained connected until 1867—a period of more than thirty years.

During seven of these years he held the office of a junior clerk, with an income which began at £90 a year and slowly rose to £140. These seven years, at first sight, seem almost a continuation of what had gone before. Trollope was always in debt, he was almost always in trouble, his superiors disapproved of him, his companions led him into card-playing, which he could ill afford, and into the drinking of much whiskey and water, and the consumption of much tobacco. He had trouble with money-lenders, and especially did he have trouble with a certain young woman, whose mother once appeared in the midst of the office, demanding of Trollope in a loud voice when he was going to marry her daughter. Nevertheless, there was another side to this life of his which must not be overlooked. He made some friends who were not only an inspiration to him, but who in their own homes gave him a saving glimpse of what was good and wholesome. Partly through their influence and partly from that gradual development of

taste which comes slowly to men like Trollope, he began to read; and even in those days it occurred to him that he might at some time write a novel. Though he studied little in a systematic way, he taught himself to translate both French and Latin; he came to know Horace from beginning to end; and he eagerly absorbed whatever was finest in English poetry. His imagination had now begun to stir within him, and the form in which it was first manifested is described by him in an interesting passage:

Study was not my bent, and I could not please myself by being all idle. Thus it came to pass that I was always going about with some castle in the air firmly built within my mind. For weeks, for months, if I remember rightly, from year to year, I would carry on the same tale, binding myself down to certain laws, to certain proportions, and proprieties, and unities. Nothing impossible was ever introduced—nor even anything which from outward circumstances would seem to be violently improbable. I myself was, of course, my own hero. Such is a necessity of castle-building. But I never became a king or a duke. I never was a learned man, nor even a philosopher. But I was a very clever person, and beautiful. Young women used to be fond of me. . . . There can, I imagine, hardly be a more dangerous mental practice; but I have often doubted whether, had it not been my practice, I should ever have written a novel. I learned in this way to maintain an interest in a fictitious story, to dwell on a work created by my own imagination, and to live in a world altogether outside the world of my own material life. In after years I have done the same,—with this difference, that I have discarded the hero of my early dreams, and have been able to lay my own identity aside.

These years then, in spite of all their shabbiness and their Bohemianism, were in reality the years in which the foundations of the future novelist were laid. He had come to know at least one side of life; he was learning from the great masters of literary style; he had begun, without knowing it, the study of his technique; and, in a way, he had begun also to garner the rich material out of which he was afterward destined to construct so much that is solid and enduring. Even to his squalid experiences, to his dreary life in lodgings, to his squabbles with his superiors, and to the trouble with the young woman already mentioned, his readers have good cause for gratitude, since upon these things are based some of the most interesting episodes in the story of young Eames, as told in *The Small House at Allington*.

In 1841, came a gleam of the success which had hitherto appeared to be quite unattainable. In that year, at the age of twenty-six, Trollope accepted a surveyorship in connection with the Post-Office Department in Ireland, which at once removed him from the scene of all his past unhappiness and adversity, and gave him a position of comparative independence, with an income, during the very first year, of £400. "This," he says, "was the first good fortune of my life." From that time on, he rose steadily in the postal service; and whereas his character in London had been officially regarded as extremely bad, after the day of his transfer to Ireland he never heard

one word of censure, and he speedily acquired the reputation of a most efficient public servant. It was in Ireland that Trollope acquired the passion for hunting, which had a most important influence on his literary work; and it was in Ireland also that he married. Finally, it was in Ireland that he wrote his first novel, *The MacDermots of Ballycloran*, which was begun in 1843 and finished in 1845, but was not published until 1847. It was an utter failure, although Trollope himself in after life declared that he had never made another plot so good. The book was never noticed in the reviews; the author never got an accounting from his publisher; and to that publisher he never wrote a single letter with regard to it. Undismayed, however, he tried a second story—again an Irish one—and again he failed; for of *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* only one hundred and forty copies were sold, and the publisher incurred a loss of something like £60. He now tried an historical novel, *La Vendée*; and it was, perhaps, the most utter failure of them all. By this time even Trollope himself, although still sanguine as to the merits of what he had written, began to disbelieve in the possibility of success. After experimenting with a comedy which was at once condemned by a critic to whom he had submitted it, and after vainly offering to prepare for a London publisher a handbook of travel for Ireland, he turned to his official duties, and for several years put forth no book.

These years may well have seemed to be just so much valuable time deducted from the novelist's literary life. Yet nothing is more certain than that to them and to the experiences which they gave him, Trollope owed a lasting obligation. Transferred from Ireland to England, he was assigned to the special service of devising an improved plan for the delivery of letters in the rural parts of England. In the discharge of this duty it became necessary for him to visit personally almost every nook and corner of Devonshire, Cornwall, Somersetshire, Dorsetshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Worcester-shire, Hertfordshire, Monmouthshire, and six of the Welsh counties, besides the Channel Islands.

For two years he almost lived on horseback, going back and forth continually through this tract of country, which contains some of the most beautiful and romantic scenery of Britain. He came to know it by heart—the towns and villages, the manors and the granges, even the woods and copses, the lanes and bypaths. And what was infinitely more important, he came to know the people; for the nature of his mission brought him into personal contact with men and women of every type and class. He entered the hovel of the peasant and the mansion of the nobleman, the tradesman's shop, the tap-room of the village inn, the lonely farmhouse, the pretentious villa, the country parsonage, and the bishop's palace. He chatted with the yokels, he made friends with the



sturdy, shrewd, hard-headed yeomen and their buxom wives, he visited and rode to hounds with the country gentlemen. He was, to be sure, the government official, but he was also the keenly analytical observer of human nature. He loved to study men and women, to learn their ways of thinking, to understand their interests and their prejudices, to fathom their motives, to watch the play of their activities; and so the two years of this close contact with the most English part of England were not two years of wasted opportunity or of neglected effort, but rather they were two years of the very richest gain; for he was all the while unconsciously absorbing a minute and sympathetic knowledge of his countrymen and acquiring that insight into their character which was to make him the most profoundly national of England's novelists.

One midsummer evening, in the Close at Salisbury, as he stood watching the mellow moonlight shimmer on the spire of the great cathedral, there came to him the first conception of a novel that should depict the life of a cathedral city, with all the varied interests and intrigues that gather about the society of such a place. The general plan of such a novel having once possessed his thoughts, the individual details soon worked themselves out swiftly and harmoniously. The characters began to grow into life; the scenes and incidents began to stand out vividly before his mental vision; and at last, in July, 1853, he sat down



with a full mind to begin the composition of *The Warden*—the first of those remarkable novels which, in the minds of all who are familiar with her fiction, have given to England a new county, Barsetshire, and have created for us a whole group of men and women who are as real as any of the men and women whom we meet and know in actual life. *The Warden* appeared in 1855, and for the first time Trollope was made to feel that as a writer he had within him the elements which go to make success. *The Warden*, to be sure, caused no great stir at the time of its appearance; but its author knew that at least it had not failed. The critics noticed it; and Trollope could discover that those about him were aware that he had written a book. From a commercial point of view the result might have seemed almost as discouraging as was the case with his early failures.

By the end of 1857, exactly ten years from the time when he published his first book, he had received altogether from his novels the paltry sum of £55. As he says himself, he could have done vastly better had he spent the time in breaking stone. He had, however, received sufficient recognition of another kind to give him heart; so that he took up the writing of *Barchester Towers* in an optimistic spirit, such as before had never animated him. The writing of it, as he tells us, was a source of great delight to him; and his pen moved swiftly over the pages of that novel, upon which, perhaps, more than upon any

other single book, his fame must rest. It carried on the story of *The Warden*, but with a broader scope, a firmer grasp, a finer fancy, and a most remarkable fertility in the drawing of characters; while the discursiveness that is the bane of several of his later novels is almost wholly absent from this fascinating book. *Barchester Towers* at once made Trollope generally known; and from this time a definite position in the world of letters was assured to him. He was no longer simply an official of the General Post-Office; he was Anthony Trollope, a man whose name stood for something definite and admirable. A little while before, promotion in the postal service had more than doubled his official income; so that now at last he was in a position of ease, lifted above the minor worries of practical life, and with the path to a successful literary career made smooth before him.

Then came a period not only of success, but a period also in which he was destined to round out and complete the cycle of experience that was to fit him not merely for describing localities and partial phases of existence, but for the understanding and the analysis of life and of society as a whole. Hitherto he had known Great Britain only; but now he could indulge a taste for foreign travel. He visited the Continent as a tourist, and in 1858 the government sent him to Egypt to make a postal treaty with the Pasha. Somewhat later a similar errand took him to the United States, to Cuba, and to Central

America, and he afterward visited Australia and South Africa, and made a voyage to Iceland. Besides the broadening effects of foreign travel, he was to make acquaintances and to form lasting friendships, whose inspiration was of a value quite inestimable. Changing his home to London, which he had left years before as a debt-ridden junior clerk in the post-office, regarded alike by himself and by others as something of a pariah, he now received a cordial welcome to that inner sanctuary of London life in which is to be found all that is best of English intellect and English *bonhomie*, where statesmen and scholars and artists and men of letters meet with utter unreserve to give to one another the very choicest vintage of their genius. Among the friends that Trollope made were such political luminaries as the Earl of Derby, Lord Ripon, Lord Kimberly, Sir William Vernon-Harcourt and George Bentinck; the world of letters was splendidly represented by Thackeray and Dickens, by George Eliot, Charles Reade, Lord Lytton, George Henry Lewes, Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins, Tom Taylor, Tom Hughes, and Lord Houghton; while statesmanship and literature were both combined in the enigmatically fascinating person of Disraeli. A more brilliant set of associates had not been gathered together since the days of Elizabeth; and among them Trollope moved as one who by his own unaided genius had made himself their equal.

Precisely, then, as Trollope's two years on horse-back amid the English rural countries had yielded an extraordinary knowledge of that English life which is racy of the soil, so his years in London gave him no less an understanding of the tone, the ways, and the modes of thought that characterise the governing class of Englishmen—the class also that establishes the intellectual standards of the English race. Foreign travel, too, was for him a salutary antidote to the narrowness that sometimes afflicts the British mind. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if in the splendid series of novels which Trollope now composed, he drew a broad and comprehensive and minutely accurate picture of England as it is and of English men and English women as they are. He trusted nothing to imagination pure and simple, nor was he willing even to evolve his facts and scenes from out his inner consciousness. Had he not stood for Parliament himself, he would never have given us those extraordinarily vivid impressions which are to be found in such of his novels as have to do with the strife of parties. Had he not, week after week, sat in the gallery of the House of Commons, listening patiently to the debates and noting all the special usages and customs of that interesting place, he would never have planned and carried out the brilliant series of novels which relate to parliamentary life, and of which *Phineas Finn* was the precursor. He wrote only of what he ac-

tually knew; and when he wrote he wrote with a perfect knowledge and a wonderful power of making it intensely real; for he himself in his own person had seen and felt and understood it all.

The latter years of Trollope's life were not eventful save for their literary performance and the measure of success which it received. Before his death in 1882 he had written and published forty-six novels, besides having in manuscript one completed novel (*An Old Man's Love*) and one unfinished novel (*The Land Leaguers*). He had likewise published four books of travel, five volumes of stories, and four biographical works. After his death appeared his *Autobiography*, a singularly frank and interesting revelation of his personal experiences and of his personal opinions and theories regarding his own literary work. The narrative ends with the year 1879, and it is supplemented by a few pages from the pen of his son Henry, who edited the book.

Having so far considered the main features of his life and of his environment, it remains for us to estimate the character and the value of his achievements as a writer, and to hazard also some observations as to the place in English literature which is likely to be assigned him by the judgment of posterity.

In the decade which succeeded Trollope's death there is no doubt that his reputation as a novelist almost immediately waned. From the time of the

production of *Barchester Towers* down to the year in which he died he had remained steadily a favourite writer with a very large and discriminating public. No single novel that he wrote ever produced what is popularly called "a literary sensation." That was not the day when novels by writers known or unknown leaped at once to the sales that require six figures for their computation, any more than it was the day when novels were produced to be read by every one in the course of a few short months, and then to be forgotten absolutely. Yet if Trollope's success had not been spectacular, nevertheless it had been substantial. A new novel from his pen was always looked for with keen interest, and its appearance was always an event. Why, then, almost immediately after his death did this interest decline, and why until within the last few years have his books appeared to be gradually passing into a species of oblivion? If these books have within them, as they most surely have, all the essential qualities that give vitality to fiction, why should they have suffered a decline in the estimation of the reading public? There are, I think, two explanations to be given of this phenomenon, and both these explanations are quite consistent with a belief that Trollope's obscurity is but a passing phase, and that even now he is beginning to take high rank and an enduring place among the very greatest masters of modern fiction.

First of all, there is no doubt that the publication

of his *Autobiography* did him serious harm, not only with the critics, but with his own admirers—with all, indeed, who entertain and who love to entertain what may be termed the inspirational theory of literary creation. In the fancy of these persons an author still retains something of the traditional sanctity which clung to him in the days of Greece and Rome, when, garlanded with bays, he was supposed to write under the guidance of the Muses whom he invoked, and who were thought to touch his lips with the fire of inspiration. Trollope, however, roughly and almost brutally rejected the notion that a producer of literature is anything more than any other kind of a producer. His chief motive for writing is to be found, not in the love of fame or in the worship of art for its own sake, but in the desirability of money. Read his own words upon this subject:

I am well aware that there are many who think that an author in his authorship should not regard money—nor a painter, or sculptor, or composer in his art. I do not know that this unnatural self-sacrifice is supposed to extend itself further. A barrister, a clergyman, a doctor, an engineer, and even actors and architects, may without disgrace follow the bent of human nature and endeavour to fill their bellies and clothe their backs and also those of their wives and children as comfortably as they can by the exercise of their abilities and their crafts. They may be rationally realistic as may the butchers and the bakers; but the artist and the author forget the high glories of their calling if they condescend to make a money-return a first object. They who preach this doctrine will be much offended by my theory;



and by this book of mine, if my theory and my book come beneath their notice.

The last sentence has, I think, been justified by the event. His book did come beneath the notice of many who preached the altruistic doctrine of literary production, and they were, indeed, offended both by his theory and by his book. Again, as a sort of corollary to his original proposition, the account that he has given of his own methods of writing, undoubtedly did much to discredit him with the critics. As, in the passage just quoted, he compared the work of the author and the artist with the work of the butcher and the baker, so was he fond—undoubtedly too fond—of saying that the methods of the author need not differ in kind from the methods of the tradesman or the artisan. The following passage is extremely characteristic:

I had long since convinced myself that in such works as mine the great secret consisted in acknowledging myself to be bound to rules of labour similar to those which an artisan or a mechanic is forced to obey. A shoemaker when he has finished one pair of shoes does not sit down and contemplate his work in idle satisfaction. "There is my pair of shoes finished at last! What a pair of shoes it is!" The shoemaker who so indulged himself would be without wages half his time. It is the same with a professional writer of books. An author may, of course, want time to study a new subject. He will, at any rate, assure himself that there is some such good reason why he should pause. He does pause, and will be idle for a month or two while he tells himself how beautiful is that last pair of shoes which he has finished!



Having thought much of all this, and having made up my mind that I could be really happy only when I was at work, I had now quite accustomed myself to begin a second pair as soon as the first was out of my hands.

And, again, occurs a curious passage, written down soon after he had been requested by the London *Graphic* to write for it a Christmas story:

I feel with regard to literature somewhat as I suppose an upholsterer and undertaker feels when he is called upon to supply a funeral. He has to supply it, however distasteful it may be. It is his business, and he will starve if he neglect it. So have I felt that when anything in the shape of a novel was required, I was bound to produce it. Nothing can be more distasteful to me than to have to give a relish of Christmas to what I write. I feel the humbug implied by the nature of the order. . . . Alas! at this very moment, I have one to write, which I have promised to supply within three weeks of this time—the picture-makers always require a long interval—as to which I have in vain been cudgelling my brain for the last month. I can't send away the order to another shop, but I do not know I shall ever get the coffin made.

If this was Trollope's theory, he certainly carried it out in actual practice. He was an official of the post-office as well as a novelist, and in consequence he could not always pick and choose the times and places for his literary labour. The inspirational theory, therefore, was impossible to him; for the moments of his inspiration would frequently be sure to clash with the moments of his opportunity. Hence quite early in his literary career he resolved that

every day he would devote three hours to composition, and that these three hours should be taken whenever they could be, and from whatever time was at his disposal, no matter where he chanced to be. This rule he never broke. If he were at home, he sat before his desk and wrote. If he were on a railway journey, he carried with him a writing-pad, and in the railway carriage pursued his task, regardless of his surroundings until his daily stint had been completed. If he were making a sea voyage, he had a little table screwed to the side of his stateroom; and upon it, even in the stormiest of weather, when the ship was pitching and rocking, and when he himself was suffering from the direst qualms of seasickness, he wrote each day until he had produced three thousand words—for he exacted of himself at least two hundred and fifty words each quarter of an hour—and with his watch before him he would labour with all the exactness and precision of an accountant.

Now, all these things—his liking for money, his bourgeois views about the literary profession, and the stolidly methodical way in which, apparently, he did his work—seemed very shocking to very many persons. The critics all cried out in reprobation, and thousands of those who had read his books with intense delight grew speedily ashamed of their enthusiasm when they learned just how these books had been composed. They experienced a sort of

disillusionment. They suddenly perceived all sorts of defects of which before they had been utterly unconscious. It became the fashion to speak of Trollope as a mechanical and uninspired writer, and, being mechanical and uninspired, as one whose writing must of necessity be dull. In course of time this judgment passed into an accepted formula, and I have often heard it repeated by intelligent men and women who, upon being questioned, were forced reluctantly to admit that they had never read a single line of Trollope in their lives. They were simply parroting the dicta of Mr. Henry James and other critics of the Transcendental School. They did not see, and the critics did not see, that it makes no difference how or when or by whom or with what theory a book is written; since it can be rightly judged only by what it holds within itself. If it be good, if it be true to life, if it can make you laugh with its humour and thrill with its passion, if it can make your heart beat faster by its power, and your lip quiver and your eyes grow dim by its pathos—why should you listen to the arid little judgments of some paltry critic, equipped with a yardstick and a set of rules rather than with a heart to feel and a brain to understand? There are those who can see none of the splendour of Byron's poetry because Byron was himself a mocker and a rake. There are some who will not take the trouble to become familiar with the exquisite beauty of Newman's prose, because

they think of him as a recreant to the faith in which he had been born. Philistines such as these may scoff at Trollope and may say that he was uninspired and mechanical because he wrote three hours a day with his watch before him; but no man who reads his books and feels their magic and their elemental vigour and virility can deny that Anthony Trollope was, in his own sphere, just as great as Thackeray, and (with certain definite limitations) almost the peer of Balzac.

It is not, however, necessary to defend him only in this way. The impartial critic should recall not merely all those passages where Trollope has flouted at "inspiration" in its hackneyed sense, and where he has half-defiantly and, as it seems to me, with a conscious exaggeration, crammed down the critic's throat a bluntly phrased repudiation of pure art. There is another side to this; for there is something else that Trollope tells us which should modify the judgment of even the most captious and fastidious. A few sentences that he has himself written about Thackeray will give a clue to what I have in mind:

Late in Thackeray's life—he never was an old man, but toward the end of his career—he failed in his power of charming, because he allowed his mind to become idle. In the plots which he conceived, and in the language which he used, I do not know that there is any perceptible change; but in *The Virginians* and in *Philip* the reader is introduced to no character with which he makes a close and undying acquaintance. And this, I have no doubt, is so be-

cause Thackeray himself had no such intimacy. His mind had come to be weary of that fictitious life which is always demanding the labour of new creation; and he troubled himself with his two Virginians and his Philip only when he was seated at his desk.

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This criticism by him of a brother author throws a flood of light on what has been so carelessly described as Trollope's mechanical process of composition. Did Trollope trouble himself with his creations only when he was seated at his desk? If so, then it may be that he deserves the reproach of being a mere literary artisan. Nothing, however, could be more untrue. His hours of real composition were not the hours when he was writing, but when he was alone, untroubled by society, free from all other cares and other duties and able to pass from the world of fact which lay about him, to that other no less actual world which he himself created. It was then that he wrought out his plots, and called into existence the men and women whom the world has learned to know, and when (though he himself rejected the idea) true inspiration came to him. I have quoted the words for which his critics have condemned him. Let me now quote the words which make that condemnation utterly unjust:

At such times I have been able to imbue myself thoroughly with the characters I have had in hand. I have wandered alone among the rocks and woods, crying at their grief, laughing at their absurdities, and thoroughly enjoying

their joy. I have been impregnated with my own creations till it has been my only excitement to sit with the pen in my hand, and drive my team before me at as quick a pace as I could make them travel."

Are these the words and is this the feeling of a literary artisan? Could the most brilliant writer whom the world has ever known bring to our minds more vividly the creative spirit, the throbbing brain, and the living soul of the inspired artist? And, as a last quotation, let me cite these sentences which Trollope wrote down very soberly in summing up his thoroughly matured opinions of his own profession:

The novelist has other aims than the elucidation of his plot. He desires to make his readers so intimately acquainted with his characters, that the creatures of his brain should be to them speaking, moving, living, human creatures. This he can never do unless he know those fictitious personages himself; and he can never know them unless he can live with them in the full reality of established intimacy. They must be with him as he lies down to sleep and as he awakens from his dreams. He must learn to hate them and to love them. He must argue with them, forgive them, and even submit to them. He must know of them whether they be cold-blooded or passionate, whether true or false, and how far true, and how far false. The depth and the breadth, and the narrowness and the shallowness of each should be clear to him.

It is so that I lived with my characters, and thence has come whatever success I have obtained. There is a gallery of them, and of all in that gallery I may say that I know the tone of the voice, and the colour of the hair, every flame

of the eye, and the very clothes they wear. Of each man I could assert whether he would have said these or the other words; of every woman, whether she would thus have smiled or so have frowned.

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These passages and others like them make it clear enough that Trollope's three hours a day of writing and the imposition upon himself of a stated task are to be viewed quite differently from the way in which the critics view them. These three hours were not hours of composition in the real sense of the word. When he came to his desk he did not come to it with an empty mind and with a feeling of uncertainty as to what he was about to do. He came to it with the work of composition and creation already quite accomplished, with everything thought out, and with a mind, as he himself described it, impregnated with his own creations; so that all he had to do was to take his pen in hand and transcribe with the utmost rapidity the scenes, the incidents, the dialogue, and the reflections with which his active brain was teeming. His three hours of daily work, then, were hours of clerical work alone. The real labour had been already done.

Therefore, it is unfair and almost dishonest to take a part of what he has revealed to us regarding his own method, and to ignore the other part which is necessary to a perfect understanding of it all. Trollope was not uninspired. He was not mechanical. His novels were not turned out as a cobbler



turns out shoes, nor as an undertaker turns out coffins. But they were called into being as every great artistic creation is called into being, with pain and travail and joy and exultation, by a mind aroused to put forth all its powers, an imagination splendidly aflame, and a soul pierced through and through by poignant birth-pangs. And the novels themselves show all of this quite plainly to one who reads them with a sentient mind. If Trollope, with a certain healthy contempt for the dilettante and the amateur, has sometimes seemed to hold all art in slight esteem, and to blurt out bluntly that there is no art, and that he wrote his novels in the spirit of a man of business, then there is always at hand the reply which a critic once made to Mr. Rudyard Kipling in answer to a brilliant gibe of his directed against Art. The critic in question took down a volume of Mr. Kipling's poems and, turning to that wonderful ballad "Mandalay"—a ballad curiously blended of human passion and oriental colour and haunting music—he simply said, "But, Mr. Kipling, *this* is Art."

I have remarked, however, that for the temporary decline of general interest in Trollope's work there is another reason, and it is one that has reference to the literary history of our own times. It was near the date of Trollope's death that the English reading world began to feel the influence of the so-called naturalistic school of French fiction. In 1881,



after the appearance in England of the two novels (*L'Assommoir* and *Nana*) that are the most famous if not the best of all that he ever wrote, Émile Zola first became known and was first seriously read in England and the United States. The almost epic power of this man took a strong hold upon every class of readers, while his grossness and brutality, though at first they horrified, at length came to possess a morbid fascination for those to whom the combination of extraordinary genius and unbridled license had been hitherto unknown. The more wholesome and self-restrained realism of native English writers like Thackeray and Trollope seemed for the moment to be pale and cold beside the panorama unrolled before the eyes of Zola, in which all that was morally hideous and physically loathsome was exploited with the utmost frankness, and in which every form of vice stood out in bold relief against a background glaring with infernal fires.

Then began and then continued for a time the cult of the Unmentionable. American and English readers and students of literature went through a strange experience, from which not even yet do they seem to be recovering. The Gallic influence was paramount. French writers, hitherto but little read outside of France, were hastily translated. We went back to Stendhal and the Goncourt brothers. We read and re-read Balzac and Flaubert. We hailed the rise of Maupassant in his cynicism, of Mendès in

his monstrosity, and of Huysmans in his degeneracy. With a few, all this was an initiation into new theories of fiction. With the many, it was a baptism of filth. The fashion spread, and at last in English we had rivals of the French—George Moore and Gissing, and (*longo intervallo*) Edgar Saltus and Flowerdew and Frank Norris—while English playwrights arose to present the same distorted views of life in a dramatic form. This naturalistic movement ran a rapid course. It was a strange infection, a furious fever, and it has left lasting traces upon our intellectual life; but as an infection and a fever it will pass away, and men and women will revert once again to healthier tastes and saner literary pleasures—to an appreciation of the Romantic and a preference for that truer realism which views life as a whole and does not find its normal phases in a gutter.

Of this truer realism there have been just three great masters, and these are Balzac, Thackeray, and Trollope. All three of them are free alike from any taint of Naturalism and from the paltriness of Trivialism. By universal consent Balzac stands pre-eminent among the three, not because he alone saw all of life, but because he alone both saw it and had the courage and the power to set it forth. The real supremacy of Balzac is not to be found in his mastery of detail, in the completeness and perfection of any single book of his, or in the unique fidelity to life

of any single character or single set of characters portrayed for us. No one of the many novels which are linked together to form his wonderful *Comédie Humaine*—no one of these, I say, not even *Eugénie Grandet*, or *Père Goriot*, can, taken by itself, be favourably compared with *Pendennis* or *The Newcomes* or even with *Vanity Fair*. He has drawn no characters more absolutely true to life and more enduring in the minds of men than Becky Sharp and Lord Steyne and Major Pendennis and Harry Foker and Colonel Newcome.

Balzac's supremacy really lies in the vastness and fulness of his achievement, in the immensity of his canvas, in his Titanism. He at times works roughly, but he is not cutting delicate little figures upon a gem; he is always hewing monumental sculptures out of a gigantic crag. To know him as he is, we must know every line he wrote; for only in his entirety can he be really known at all. His conspicuous merit is not that he has given us an accurate and artistic picture of this or that or the other section of human life, but that with an almost super-human sweep of vision he has revealed to us in one immortal picture all of life in its completeness. Thackeray has not done this. He doubtless saw all life, but he never drew it all. He had not the audacity, he had not the energy and the tremendous vitality, both of body and mind, for such a task; and he was hampered by the conventions of

much in human life from which not even transcendent genius may draw aside the veil. Thackeray's work, therefore, is the work of one who laboured under limitations—limitations that were partly self-imposed—and the result is a wonderful reproduction of his own sphere of life and of all that entered into it, with glimpses also, though they are only glimpses, of the half-world that lay beyond. His artistry is perfect; his feeling for his subject is, perhaps, even more true than that of Balzac. Yet blot out the city of London from the world of his creation, and how little is there left! With him, in his finer work, all interest centres there.

When we come to consider the relative place of Anthony Trollope in the realistic triad, we must bear in mind precisely the same standards that have been applied to Balzac and to Thackeray. No single book of Trollope's, not even *Barchester Towers* or *He Knew He Was Right*, can be favourably compared with any of the three great Thackerayan novels. Like Balzac, Trollope is inferior to Thackeray in execution and in mastery of detail, though quite his equal in his insight into character; for Mrs. Proudie and the Bishop of Barchester and Lady Glencora and Lizzie Eustace and Lily Dale and Mr. Chaffanbrass have long since won a place among the immortals. But, like Balzac, he reveals to us a larger world than Thackeray's, and always with a perfect comprehension of it. It is a Briton's world,

as Balzac's is a Frenchman's; but it is not, as is Thackeray's, the world of a mere Londoner. Trollope gives us London life, too, and much more fully than Thackeray has done; for he shows us in a series of brilliant novels the very penetralia of the political world as Thackeray never could have done, because he lacked the knowledge. Trollope performed the task with such success as to extort a wondering applause from the men who lived the life that was lived by the Mildmays and Daubeneyes, the De Terriers and Monks, and all the smaller fry whose ambitions and intrigues are inextricably tangled with the work of government.

But Trollope has done more than this. He has given us also rural England and provincial England—an England with which London has no close association. Thackeray never created for us a cathedral city like Barchester, much less an entire county like Bassetshire. We can not go with him among the yeomanry, among the boors, among the country gentlemen, among the small tradesmen, among the local lawyers and provincial clergy, and get, not merely passing glimpses of the life they lead, but a thorough knowledge of it in all its phases. Again, Trollope has shown us Ireland, which he knew as few Englishmen have ever known it, in all its wit and pathos and squalor and improvidence. And in this, as in all he wrote, there is everywhere, as Hawthorne said, the human nature that must make these novels

universally successful in their appeal to human interests and human sympathies.

Take, then, these three great writers and compare them. Balzac, first of all, the master of his craft, the artist and the psychologist, who in drawing all of France drew also, broadly speaking, all humanity. Then Trollope, far more limited than Balzac, because there were depths that he could not sound, as there were unclean haunts that he refused to penetrate, yet still one who revealed his country and his countrymen more fully and more truly than any other Englishman has ever done. And, finally, there is Thackeray, superior in some things to Balzac, and to Trollope, but working in a field so narrow, and producing what is comparatively so very little, as to deserve the third place when regarded from the standpoint of his actual achievement.

There are many things that make a parallel between Balzac and Anthony Trollope very interesting. Each passed through a long apprenticeship to poverty; each gave much thought to money and to material things; each laboured with an energy that was astonishing; each was the most prolific writer among his contemporaries; each knew his country and his countrymen of every class and type and station; each drew them as they were and are, and with a thorough understanding of humanity at large; and each stands forth as the novelist of a nation. Trollope has written nothing that can be

matched with Balzac at his best; yet he has never descended to the inanity of Balzac at his worst. If he could not have penned a book so sombre and so terrible as *Cousine Bette*, neither could he have brought himself to perpetrate so wildly meaningless a screed as *Séraphita*. If his pages do not sting with epigram, they glow with humour. If he often shuts his eyes to what is foul and morbid and revolting, he sees more clearly still that which is good and true and tender. In a word, if he lacks something of the brilliancy and something of the hardness and something of the unpitying logic of the Frenchman, all this but makes him the more typically English, and gives us one more reason for believing that, in the end, when the swift years shall have swept away the cobweb reputations which confuse men's judgments for the moment, the name of Anthony Trollope will rightfully be recognised as first upon the roll of England's realistic novelists.

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EMILE ZOLA

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## ÉMILE ZOLA

HAD Emile Zola died some fifteen years earlier than he actually did, the comments and appreciations called forth by his death would have had for their main themes the peculiar theory of fiction-writing which he so passionately upheld, the merits of the naturalistic movement, of which he was the guiding force, and finally those literary productions in which alike the theory and the practice of literary Naturalism received a concrete demonstration. The pages of his controversial monographs, *Le Roman Expérimental* and *Les Romanciers Naturalistes*, would have been restudied by the critics, and the views expressed in them would have been again attacked, defended and discussed with all the heat engendered by a novel cause that is still *sub iudice*.

But in 1902 the note of interest in that bygone controversy was no longer sounded, even as a reminiscence. Not even the death of the great master revived the curious feeling of astonishment and incredulity that passed like a wave over so many minds when Zola first enunciated the formula whereby he thought that he had transmuted the indefinable magic of an art into the precise and definite dulness of a

science. The intervening years have long ago deprived his theory of even its piquant flavour of originality. His belief that literature is comparable, not to painting or sculpture or music, as the case may be, but to anatomy and physiology; that the novelist is a demonstrator; that his study is a laboratory; and that he can, by observation and research, illumined by imagination, arrive at new and unsuspected truths possessing scientific interest and artistic value—all these assertions were whistled down the wind so long before his death as to make the simple statement of them now appear preposterous.

An artist's theory of his own creative processes is never of much general interest or real worth. In the long run the world does not care much about the fancied method or technique through which memorable things are done. It is the purest folly to analyse an inspiration or to attempt the vivisection of elusive genius. For, at the very last, one must be judged by what he has in fact achieved, and not at all by the peculiar means through which achievement was accomplished. So, if Zola, when he sat down to his desk each day to write the four pages which constituted his diurnal task, loved to regard himself as a biologist and not a novelist, as a demonstrator in anatomy and not an artist, that circumstance possesses no more real importance to the world at large than the fact that Dumas found it necessary to wear jack-boots and a long scarlet coat before he could

compose with fluency, or that Flaubert could do no literary work until he had arrayed himself in velvet.

These were the idiosyncrasies of remarkable men, and they have a personal interest as being bits of intimate and curious gossip. Our knowledge of them does not, however, affect even in the most imperceptible degree our balanced and matured opinion of either *L'Assommoir* or *Monte Cristo* or *Madame Bovary*. It is not what Zola thought about himself for which we care. It is rather by his completed work, no matter how it may have been produced, that we judge him and assign to him his place in the Pantheon of creative genius.

Zola has been most woefully misunderstood outside of France by those whose judgments have no reference to careful knowledge. By many he has been condemned offhand as one who sought for pornographic notoriety because it promised him pecuniary gain. He has been accused of deliberately striving to secure success by sensational and unworthy means, by pandering to pruriency and becoming for pay a sort of literary seneschal to sensuality. In other words, these critics would not discriminate between Zola, grimly and powerfully working out a great, though terrible, conception, and such enervating disciples of commercial lubricity as Adolphe Belot and Paul Ginisty and Octave Mirbeau.

Others, again, such as Max Nordau, would have us see in Zola not a conscious trader in literary nasti-

ness, but an unconscious pervert, essentially neurotic, "a high-class degenerate with some peculiarly characteristic stigmata which completely establish the diagnosis" afflicted with onomatomania and coprolalia. How utterly untrue are both of these detestable hypotheses, a very brief consideration of the facts will serve to show. In the first place, we must consider the literary movement in which he became at last the dominant and directing influence; and then we must recall the circumstances of his own career.

Realism as a literary motive is no new phenomenon. It is as old as Euripides and Alciphron among the Greeks. It was developed almost to its very fullest possible expression by Petronius among the Romans. After the Renaissance it is seen in the picaresque romances which represent a reaction from the stately tedious tales of chivalry, just as in Fielding it represents a like reaction against the fine-spun sentimentalism of Richardson. But it can scarcely be regarded as embodying a conscious purpose or a definite theory before the early decades of the nineteenth century, when Henri Beyle began under the pseudonym of "Stendhal" to dissect with an unshaking, ruthless hand the society that he saw about him, laying bare as with a surgeon's knife the hideous ulcers, the angry flesh and the rotting bones which others had so decorously hidden beneath the flowers of their fancy.

Historically, it may be that Rousseau in his *Confessions* gave the first suggestion of the tremendous force which lies in naked truth; but if so, it was only a suggestion; and in fiction, at any rate, the beginnings must be traced to Stendhal. Realism, however, was not a creation or a rediscovery by any one particular man. Its germ was in the air. It was and is essentially consistent with the whole tone of modern thought, which limits the scope of the imagination, rejects illusions and demands in a spirit of hardy scepticism to view the thing that is, rather than the thing that seems to be. Democracy in politics, rationalism in theology, materialism in philosophy and realism in literature, are very closely linked together. They are, one and all, simply different phases of the same mood and the same mental attitude toward life. The centuries of dreaminess have gone by perhaps forever, and to-day man looks with keen unclouded vision into the verities of his existence, asking no one to prophesy smooth things, but banishing illusions, uncovering nakedness, and facing with a certain hard composure born of cynicism, the ghastly facts that render human life so terrible.

This being so, it is not surprising that withersomever we may turn in the history of modern fiction we find traces of the tendency away from the romantic, and not least of all in the very romanticists themselves. Even as early as Chateaubriand, whom lit-

erary historians are wont to style "the Father of Romanticism," you can detect resemblances to the latter development of Realism, and even of Naturalism. His curious, nauseating book, *René*, is from one point of view almost the prototype of *À Rebours*; for in each of these apparently antithetical studies the central theme of morbid egoism affects the reader in precisely the same way, so that *René* is morally the twin brother of *Des Esseintes*. Indeed, Chateaubriand's debilitating story goes even farther and invokes in certain of its episodes the stark monstrosity upon which Mendès in our own time reared the structure of that shameful and vertiginous delirium, *Zo'har*; and in Victor Hugo, too, there are innumerable chapters which are realistic in the fullest meaning of the word. A single scene of *Notre Dame*, where in the Cour des Miracles all the leprous, loathsome life of the social sewer is revealed to us by an effective *tour de force*, may be safely set beside anything that Zola ever wrote for its sheer lavishness in squalor, its multitudinous heaping up of sordid and unsavoury details, and a certain breadth and sweep in its vivid rhyparography which render it a sort of minor epic of the slums.

The general drift of the realistic movement from Stendhal to Flaubert is too well known for recapitulation here. We see it mingled with idealistic tendencies in the colossal life-work of Balzac. We find it meretriciously, yet most effectively, appearing in



*Germinie Lacerteux* of the brothers Goncourt, a book which doubtless gave to Zola many a subtle hint. It reaches absolute perfection with *Madame Bovary*, into which novel Flaubert laboriously distilled the thought and observation and minutely technical stylistic preciousness of a lifetime. Realism, as such, can never go beyond what Flaubert carefully wrought for us in this one exquisitely-finished etching, of which every line is bitten out as by an acid upon metal, and of which, in consequence, the sombre memory can never die. Nothing that Stendhal wrote, no single work of Balzac even, is comparable with this depressing masterpiece of Gustave Flaubert, whose art is flawless as a gem, and whose accurate dissection of the human soul is as disquieting as the sting of an awakened conscience. After Flaubert came Zola,—not to work further miracles in the name of Realism, but to give to Realism a new development and to call it Naturalism.

It should be always borne in mind that Émile Zola never was, in any sense, Parisian. It is only on his mother's side, indeed, that he was French. His father was of Italian origin. His grandmother was a Greek of Corfu. The influence of atavism, which he himself selected as the central motive of his most striking studies, is clearly seen in Émile Zola. From his Italian father, the successful engineer and would-be author, came the ambition for great achievement, the love of letters, the passion and energy of

an intense nature, and the imagination of a tragic poet. To the Greek strain in him is to be ascribed an instinctive love of beauty, which by a curious psychological permutation he displays so often in an inverted form. From his Norman mother came the steadiness and shrewdness which stamp the *bourgeoisie* of Northern France.

His childhood, like Balzac's, was passed wholly *en province*, away from Paris, in the freedom and healthfulness of the country; and it was only when the years of early manhood came, that the youthful Zola was thrust into the strife and turmoil of Parisian life to make his own way, quite unbefriended and pitifully poor, in the most beautiful and most heartless city of our modern world. Some account of the squalid years through which he lived in that depressing period, he gave himself not long before his death; yet even he was chary of recalling too particularly all he saw and felt and suffered.

In the foul environment of a *hôtel borgne* he beheld about him every type of want and degradation and debauchery. His eyes perpetually rested on strange scenes of sin and shame in that underworld where men and women herd together reduced by pitiless despair to the condition of mere animals, knowing no law but the law of their own appetites and preying upon one another to satisfy their hunger, their greed, or the craving of their elemental lusts. His senses felt the heavy burden of physical distress

in all the sights and sounds and smells of that un-savoury habitation. The greasy stairs, the oozing walls, the pungent stenches as from a wild beast's lair, the darkness even at midday, the wailing of diseased and dying children, the vociferous obscenities of the brutal bully, the yell of the enraged prostitute who is cheated of her hire, and the whimpering and maundering of the sodden drunkard on the landing—who that has once set foot within the walls of such a place for even a brief moment has not had the loathsome memory of it burned into his brain forever?

Yet for two long years amid these scenes of physical and moral horror into which he had come straight from the sweet tranquillity of the sunlit meadows, young Zola lived and learned by heart the lesson of it all. Even then the creative impulse was strong upon him. At night (the only time that was his own) he shut himself within his miserable room, and when he could afford the luxury of a candle he wrote, with fingers numbed by cold, such stories as would in imagination free him most completely from the squalors that oppressed him. He was still an idealist at heart, and perhaps the illusions of his boyhood still cast their spell upon him; for there was as yet no trace in either subject or in style of the Zola whom the world best knows. Romantic fancies came most readily from his pen, and, strange as it may appear, he even gave his thoughts expres-

sion in poetic form. At last, however, his circumstances gradually improved. He secured a very humble place in the publishing house of Hachette, and in 1864 saw his first book issue from the press. This book was the collection entitled *Contes à Ninon*, than which nothing could be more unlike the later Zola. It brought him nothing in the way of money, but it made him friends, and he began to write ephemeral articles for the press while still continuing his work in fiction. Entrusted with the art criticism in the *Figaro*, he wrote with a boldness and a vigorous independence which defied restraint, so that he soon lost the post in gaining enemies, among them the editor himself, the influential Villemessant. Almost at the same time, a novel of his, *La Confession de Claude*, to which the censorship objected, led to the severance of his connection with Hachette, so that for a time he was once more dependent upon his own resources, and the precarious earnings of his pen. These facts alone are quite sufficient to convince a reasonable mind that Zola from the very outset of his career possessed the courage of his convictions, and that no man was less likely than he to sell his literary conscience for a price.

Success came to him very slowly. He was long in finding what it was he wished to do and in concentrating his intensely energetic nature on the task. The first clear light that dawned upon him was when he wrote *Thérèse Raquin*, forever to be ranked

among his masterpieces, and standing almost alone as a searching, horrifying study of remorse, of which Vapereau remarks that it depicts "adultery taking refuge in murder and finding only agony." Yet remarkable as is this novel, its interest for us is less than that inspired by the first of the Rougon-Macquart series, *La Fortune des Rougon*, which appeared in 1871. With this book the author once for all sets foot upon sure ground, and in the plan which he had outlined two years before, he shows a consciousness of his own great powers and boldly challenges comparison with Balzac.

In explaining his purpose in commencing this *Histoire Naturelle et Sociale d'une Famille sous le Second Empire* he wrote of it as follows:

I desire to explain how a single family, a little group of human beings, comes into relations with society at large, as it increases by begetting and giving birth to ten or twenty individuals, who, though at first sight they seem quite dissimilar, when analysed reveal how intimately they are bound together, since heredity has laws as well as mathematics. The members of the family Rougon-Macquart, the one group that it is my purpose to depict, have as a family trait the gnawing of lust, the appetite that leaps to its gratification. Historically they are a part of the people; they make themselves felt by contemporary society; they rise to see spheres of life by that characteristically modern impulse which the lower classes feel; and thus they explain the Second Empire by their individual histories.

In these words Zola introduced that remarkable group of twenty novels, beginning with *La Fortune*

*des Rougon* and ending in 1893 with *Le Docteur Pascal*. To this group belongs the very best of all that Zola did. When it was finished he had done all that makes him a distinctive figure in the world of letters. The plan of the series, sketched in 1869, was based upon a genealogy which he had carefully worked out. In this genealogy the starting point is with Pierre Rougon of Plassans, his half-brother Antoine Macquart, and his half-sister Ursula Macquart. The mother of the three developed a congenital neurotic disorder, which appears and reappears in her descendants of two generations, these being the principal characters of the different books. Lisa, in *Le Ventre de Paris*, exhibits a clinging, cloying sensuality; Gervaise, in *L'Assommoir*, reverts to the alcoholism of her grandfather; Nana, in the novel of that name, typifies triumphant harlotry; Jacques, in *La Bête Humaine*, is cursed with homicidal mania; while in the Rougon branch of the family, the protagonists exhibit an intense ambition, as for money in *L'Argent*, for scientific achievement, as in *Le Docteur Pascal*, for political power in *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon*, where Zola has drawn with a sure, firm touch the portrait of Napoleon Third's powerful minister Eugène Rouher. These are but a few of the ramifications of the Rougon-Macquart stock; yet it will be seen, even from this incomplete enumeration, how many sides of life the author necessarily touches in delineating them—

passing from the garret, the *brasserie* and the gutter, to the camp, the Bourse and the imperial palace.

Some timid, twittering literary scribblers have sapiently asked of late whether Zola's works will live. The question is the acme of fatuity. That all he wrote will live, in the sense that it will be generally read, is, of course, untrue. In this sense it can not be said of any modern author, outside, perhaps, of a group of three or four, that his work will live. Zola was a very prolific writer, and his successes were surpassed in number by his failures. Even now, few persons who are not professional students of literature know anything of *La Confession de Claude* or *Madeleine Férat* or *Celle Qui M'Aime*; and before long, many of Zola's other novels, such as *La Joie de Vivre* and *L'Oeuvre* and that glorified guide-book, *Rome*, with his other works of his last ten years, will be remembered by their titles only. Not all of the Rougon-Macquart series will stand the test of time. *L'Argent* and *Germinal* and *La Terre* will always find some readers among the discriminating, though not belonging to the imperishable literature of the world. Out of the whole mass of Zola's works, however, there loom up three colossal masterpieces, so wonderful, so overwhelming in the evidence of genius which they afford, and so impossible to forget, as to be assured of an unquestioned immortality.

These three masterpieces are *L'Assommoir*, *Nana*,



and *La Débâcle*, and they are linked so closely in their purpose and in the development of one dominant idea, as to form a trilogy from which no member can be removed. They are the residuum—the enduring residuum—of the whole ambitious series of the Rougon-Macquart; and they, above and apart from any of their companion volumes, effect the purpose which Zola formed in 1869 of explaining through the medium of fiction the social life and the political decadence of the Second Empire. This is precisely what these three extraordinary books accomplish; and in writing them their author was inspired far more than perhaps he ever knew. For the three exhibit an unbroken sequence, and they work out with all the precision and the sureness of a scientific demonstration the thesis which was in the writer's mind. In *L'Assommoir* we have to do with individuals; in *Nana*, with society; in *La Débâcle*, with an entire nation. In *L'Assommoir* there are exhibited to us the vicious influences which beset the proletariat, the leaven of evil and uncleanness working amidst the haunts and hovels of the degraded poor. In *Nana* the poison spreads and eats its way like a cancer into the homes of those who live in the great world. In *La Débâcle* we see a chivalrous and gallant nation infected with the foul disease, and smitten to the earth because of the rottenness that has eaten out its manhood and destroyed its strength.

*L'Assommoir*, as we have said, deals with indi-



viduals, the central figures being the *blanchisseuse*, Gervaise, and her husband, the tinsmith Coupeau. Gervaise is one of the most pathetic characters in fiction—and all the more because she is drawn so simply and so naturally, and because there is not the slightest touch of the melodramatic in her story, no high lights, such as Hugo loved, no false sentiment and no moralising. She is a figure stepping before us straight out of life itself. A womanly, affectionate, naturally gentle creature, she appears in the first chapter of the book as the cast-off mistress of a vulgar *maquereau*, one Lantier, whom she has sincerely loved, but who has suddenly deserted her and her children. In time she meets the tinsmith, Coupeau, who marries her, and with whom she begins her life anew with every prospect of a good, hard-working, happy, uneventful, every-day existence. But Coupeau suffers an accident which disables him for a while and he acquires the habits of idleness and drink. He lives upon his wife; she also takes to drink; and there begins a gradual degradation which is detailed with patient minuteness through all its squalid, shameful, sickening stages until it ends in a dog's death for both—Gervaise a bedraggled street-walker, sodden, hopeless and void of any feeling, even of despair, and Coupeau a furious maniac, meeting his death with frantic yells of horror at the hideous fancies of his gin-crazed brain.

Around these two poor wretches the action of the

story surges, panoramic in its multitudinous life, gigantic in its sweep and breadth and terrific in its concentrated vitriolic power. The whole stratum of that world to which Gervaise and Lantier and Coupeau belong is revealed so vividly and so unsparingly that there is nothing left to ask or tell. We know not merely the Coupeau *ménage*, but we know also a whole swarm of human beings, each one distinctly individualised,—artisans, petty shopkeepers, policemen, washerwomen, bullies, panders, drabs and drunkards—the whole population of the slums. There are some *genre* pictures in the book that are extraordinary in their stark veracity—the marriage of Gervaise at the *mairie*, and the wedding breakfast at the Moulin d'Argent; and later in the book the maudlin revel amid which Lantier, the former lover of Gervaise, once more appears as a bird of evil omen. Heart-rending is the story of the poor, patient child, Lalie, whose drunken father, Bijard, flogs her to make her dance for him until she says quite gently and very simply: “Je ne puis pas, comprends-tu? Je vais mourir. . . Sois gentil à cette heure, et dis-moi adieu, papa.” And among the most awful of all episodes in fiction is the chapter where Gervaise, tempted by Lantier to renew her old relations with him, returns to her home to find her husband stretched across their chamber floor, helpless with drink and wallowing in his vomit, so that Gervaise, repelled and overcome by the sickening sight, yields

to Lantier's entreaties and passes with him into the inner room, while her child Nana, unobserved, peers through the dusky window with eyes illumined by a vicious curiosity.

In *L'Assommoir* is best studied the climax of Zola's so-called Naturalism, which has been defined as "an attempt to reach the beast in man. . . the beast which his (the writer's) temperament leads him always to see and to see exclusively. A swarming, huddled mass of grovelling creatures, each hounded by his foul appetite of greed and lust." And Zola finds the beast unerringly; nor does he spare us one detail of its bestiality. His beasts growl in the language of their kind. Those words which one is startled to behold in print are all set down with an unflinching accuracy. The oaths, the blasphemies, the obscenities of the vilest of men and women, their strange, repulsive argot, half-unintelligible yet full of sinister significance, are reproduced for us, and show the knowledge gleaned in the unsavoury precinct of the *hôtel borgne*. For Zola has a purpose in his frankness. He desires us to see as in a sociological clinic the muck-heaps over which society has builded, that he may prepare us for a demonstration of the logical result.

Such a demonstration is given us in *Nana*. The purpose of this book is admirably described by an American critic as an attempt to show us how the crushed and mud-stained rabble inflicts upon the

classes that are gorged with wealth and insolent with power a kind of hideous retribution. Nana is the daughter of Gervaise, born among the lowest haunts of Paris and nurtured in close proximity to the gutters. Depraved even as to childhood, an association with other children prematurely initiated into every form of vice, she breathes of sensuality and exhales the very aroma of lasciviousness, so that men of every rank and station feel her strange, tormenting physical fascination. Yet she is not herself a devotee of passion for its own sake. She loves as the caprice of the moment moves her—now the inexperienced boy whom she corrupts, now the aristocratic courtier, and again, and perhaps most of all, the goat-faced acrobat, Fontan, who beats her and who lives upon her shameful earnings. But she is, first and foremost, wanton greed personified. To quote again:

She is conceived as some fair ogress into whose yawning cave multitudes of men in hurried and endless procession descend and are engulfed. There is room for all ranks and grades of this social hierarchy. . . It is merely indispensable that each shall bring an offering of some kind in his hand. He that can not defray the charge of the establishment may pay the dressmaker; another shall furnish pin-money; another trinkets and bouquets. There is a certain breadth and grandeur in her insatiate greed and comprehensive harlotry; her net drags great and small; she seems to have infected a whole city. . . She has grown like a rank weed amid the garbage of the Parisian pavement; she has the gorged luxuriance of a plant whose turgid leaves betray its compost bed. With the superb curves of her delicate flesh she avenges the beggars and outcasts who gave

her birth. She becomes a malignant force of nature, a pestiferous yeast, tainting and disintegrating Paris, turning it sour like curdled milk. In one chapter she is compared to a gold-spangled horsefly, spawned from ordure, hovering above the carrion that lies rotting by the wayside, sending vermin from its putrescence, and poisoning the wayfarer whose cheek it brushes with its fetid wing. . . . At length the task of ruin and death is completed; wretchedness has spent its store of venom; Nana has exacted blood-money for her bruised and smarting kindred. The beggar and the outcast are avenged.

The whole book is a minute and startling study of the infection not only of Paris but of France; and its multiplicity of details and its extraordinary first-hand knowledge of the darker side of Parisian social life astonish and appal. For Nana is only one of a number of her kind who flit across the scene; and in the tainting influence which they exercise, we feel instinctively the doom of an Empire in which a plague-spot such as this is festering and spreading. It is not alone the wantonness of Nana that we recognise; it is the presence in the background of influences far more sinister than hers. The enigmatical episode of Mme. Laure and the implications in the story of the girl Satin are full of strangely baleful import when read between the lines. And, as the book proceeds, we see quite clearly that the menace of its meaning is more than a menace to mere individuals, and that the very vitals of a nation are growing putrid with disease and death. The last few pages indicate almost symbolically the doom that is im-

pending over France; for while Nana lies dying, with her once seductive face transformed by smallpox into a repulsive mask, we hear, outside, the rabble, drunken with war's blood-madness, give utterance to the frantic cry of "À Berlin! À Berlin!"

*La Débâcle* shows the garnered fruits of what has gone before. A debased and brutalised proletariat, corrupting its masters with noxious vices that rise from the social cesspools into the mansions of the great, has done its work, and now the moment comes when the ruin is revealed. France, challenged in her supremacy, has thrown down the gage of war, and the trumpets sound to battle. The helmeted hosts of Germany have crossed the Rhine; the trail of their huge columns desecrates French soil. The old martial ardour leaps again to life, the *furor Gallicus* flames up once more, apparently as invincible as in the days of Jena and of Austerlitz. But alas! France is herself no longer. Her brain has been drugged by years of luxury; her energy is sapped by vice; she reels and totters to her fall. Here individuals no longer count; and Zola rises to an epic vastness of execution as he draws that masterful picture of blended defiance and despair in the armies which go forth like misdirected mobs—their aimless marching and countermarching, their woful lack of leadership, their pitiful privation in the midst of plenty, until at last their splendid courage becomes abject cowardice when they are paralysed by the ter-

rible conviction that they have been betrayed. The vividness of all this portion of the story is indescribable. The reader is hurried on with breathless interest from scene to scene—the bloody struggle at Bazeilles, the horrors of Sedan, the glaring flames that mark the triumph of the mad Commune. And here and there we get a glimpse of the infinitely mournful figure of the Third Napoleon, dragged along at the tail of his army, unnoticed, helpless and despairing, as his haggard face, made still more ghastly by its rouge, peers forth above the golden bees that symbolise his fallen dynasty. For sustained and almost savage power, it is safe to say that no prose work of the nineteenth century can fully equal *La Débâcle*.

The two writers with whom Zola must inevitably be compared are Balzac and Victor Hugo,—Balzac because the whole conception of the Rougon-Macquart was suggested by the *Comédie Humaine*; and Hugo because he, too, like Zola, was dynamic in his method. The comparison with Balzac only leaves us with a heightened sense of that great master's sure supremacy. Not merely was his plan the vaster, but although his death left it unfinished in details, he really did complete it, and at the moment of his death was still possessed of all his pristine power.

There is no part of the *Comédie Humaine* that any lover of immortal genius can neglect or overlook; while Zola, working out a smaller plan, grew weary



of his task, and wrote the last volume of the series with a flagging, hesitating pen. But with Hugo the comparison brings out into the clearest possible relief the immense superiority of Zola. For while Hugo is at times stupendous in the gigantic energy with which he works, he never ceases to impress us as theatrical. At his best he is less dramatic than melodramatic; and while we admire and are astonished, it is with the kind of admiration and astonishment that we give to a carefully prepared and gorgeous spectacle upon the stage. We marvel at the ingenuity of his effects; but even as we marvel we find ourselves considering them a miracle of stage management rather than a spontaneous creation of artistic genius. With him sublimity shades off into the grotesque, and his most tremendous imagery forever trembles upon the verge of the fantastic. He knew not when to stay his hand, and the unerring instinct which teaches the true artist where to pause was never his. He is sometimes magnificent, but he is oftener *bizarre*. The eternal vanity of Hugo, his self-consciousness and his *pose* make almost everything he wrote ring false.

But with Zola the case is otherwise. The great, unbending, pitiless sincerity of the man grips you as in a vise, and at his best he masters emotion, imagination and belief with a spell which is impossible to break. Compare the greatest scenes in Hugo—that of the devil-fish in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, that of the life-and-death struggle in *Bug-Jargal*,



that of the battle between man and cannon in *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*—with the most famous things in Zola, and the difference is the difference between the acted tragedy of the theatre and the crushing, poignant tragedies of human life.

Since Shakespeare's time no English writer, with the possible exception of Sir Walter Scott, has arisen fit to be compared with any one of these great Frenchmen for sheer vitality and overwhelming power. How cold and pale our Anglo-Saxon fiction looks beside the splendid unrestraint of the masterpieces of French genius! Even Thackeray seems merely an amiable, mildly cynical, grandfatherly sort of person when we come to him straight from the reading of *Cousine Bette* or *L'Assommoir*; while Dickens shrinks to the proportions of a Cockney sentimentalist whose maudlin moments are varied with sporadic bursts of forced buffoonery. Whatever France has come to be among the political forces of the world, her sons still keep the flame of genius brilliantly aglow. And not the least among them was Émile Zola—in temperament an epic poet, in ambition a literary sociologist, in fact a cyclopean panoramic artist. Of his own theories and of his own motives nothing new can now be said, nor does it matter what one thinks of them. His work speaks for itself; and literary analysts who know and understand that work must feel that in his death a mighty elemental influence passed away from earth.

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TOLSTOI'S "ANNA KARÉNINA"

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## XII

### TOLSTOI'S "ANNA KARÉNINA"

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OPINIONS may perhaps differ as to which one of Tolstoi's novels should be set first among his great literary achievements. Some may incline to *War and Peace*, that astonishing prose epic which, in its own way, recalls Zola's cyclopean picture of the Franco-Prussian War. Over this work Tolstoi certainly brooded longest. His wife copied the manuscript of it seven times; and each time that she copied it, Tolstoi altered, added, and erased with the minutely critical assiduity of a Balzac. Others again may see in *Resurrection* the crowning proof of his peculiar genius, because it so sweepingly denounces what most of us believe to be the fundamental laws of social and political stability. But, on the whole, one's thought rests longest upon *Anna Karénina*; and this remarkable book, written in its author's mid-career, seems worthy of the highest place.

There are two reasons which support this judgment. In the first place, the novel represents more completely than any other modern book yet written, a somewhat unusual theory of fiction-writing. In the second place, as Tolstoi long afterward himself declared, a good part of it is autobiographical. In

it, Tolstoi has painted his own portrait for us. Therefore, *Anna Karénina* has some of that special interest for the students of Tolstoi which *David Copperfield* possesses for the admirers of Dickens. So far as the power of it goes, this is fully equal to the power displayed in any of his creations. The added value of his literary theory, and the frankness of his unsparing self-revelation, seem to place the story at the very head of the long list of books which this strange, pessimistic Russian has given to the world.

*Anna Karénina* was completed in 1876, having been published as a serial in a Russian newspaper. It had no great success in Russia at the time. Later it was analysed and praised by Matthew Arnold in England and by William Dean Howells in this country. From that time began its vogue. Arnold, with his usual acuteness, saw at once just how this story differed from ordinary novels, and even from the other novels of Tolstoi himself. He laid an unerring finger on the fact which explains just why the book was long in winning a general recognition of its merit.

The conventional novel must belong to one of two classes. In the one case, it is written with a definite plot, more or less intricate, and worked out with more or less ingenuity. It is meant, for a time, to puzzle and fascinate the reader by curious complications which resolve themselves under the author's touch, until we reach what is sometimes called "a

logical ending," either happy or unhappy, as the case may be. Such, for example, is Scott's *Guy Mannering*, or Dickens's *Bleak House*, or Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*. On the other hand, the conventional novel may not have any definite plot; yet none the less, its author interests us by the skilful development of character, and in so doing he eliminates everything which will not throw a clear light upon the motives and the acts of the principal personages. Trollope's novels are of this sort, and so are Maupassant's. But in either case, the conventional novel is constructed with conscious art, and bears out Michelangelo's definition, which says that "art is the purgation of superfluities."

Now, this purgation of superfluities, this elimination of everything that is not strictly essential, makes a work of fiction compact, symmetrical, and, therefore, interesting. Nothing is told that does not "play up" to the central theme. Everything that is irrelevant is excluded. Nothing happens which does not have a special significance. This method of writing fiction is essentially artistic, but it is not true to life. Life is full of things which are really meaningless. It is replete with trivialities, with coincidences which have no importance, with episodes which have no relation to the whole, which we scarcely notice at the time, and which we almost instantly forget.

Almost all novelists prefer the artistic treatment.

Tolstoi has preferred, in *Anna Karénina*, to write a book which shall show us not merely the comedies and tragedies of life, but the inconsequence of much of it. Matthew Arnold saw this very clearly, and as none of his contemporaries saw it. He wrote:

There are many characters in *Anna Karénina*—too many, if we look in it for a work of art in which the action shall be vigorously one, and to that one action everything shall converge. People appear in connection with the two main actions whose appearance and proceedings do not in the least contribute to develop them. Incidents are multiplied which we expect are to lead to something important, but which do not.

Mr. Arnold very justly says that we are not to take the book as work of art at all, but rather as a piece of life.

A piece of life it is. The author has not invented and combined it. He has seen it. It has all happened before his inward eye, and it was in this wise that it happened. The author saw it all happening so—saw it, and therefore relates it; and what his novel in this way loses in art, it gains in reality.

This is admirable criticism. So far as it goes it can not be gainsaid. Nevertheless, it does not tell us that this disjointed and therefore truly realistic method, is far from being original with Tolstoi. In an earlier chapter of this book we have seen that Alciphron of Athens worked out the same method in his imaginary letters, which do not narrate a story



from beginning to end, but which give hints of many stories. Alciphron, like Tolstoi, saw life just as it goes on around us, and he deliberately rejected art by admitting irrelevancies and superfluities. In our own times, Anatole France has done precisely the same thing. His novels are so full of this same looseness of construction that some persons scarcely think them to be novels at all, and, therefore, read them only for their delicate analysis of passion, their irony, and their vivacity.

Another thing which Matthew Arnold failed to note was the fact that in *Anna Karénina*, Tolstoi did not cut loose completely from the conventional and artistic method. He has given us in the story two main themes, or "actions," which have no real relation to each other. The first of these has to do with the illicit love of a rich and handsome type of the high-placed Russian, Count Vronsky, and Anna Karénina, the charming wife of a very tiresome and pedantic bureaucrat. This theme is developed quite in the traditional way—very much, indeed, as Flaubert might have developed it. So far as these two persons are concerned, the story runs on after the fashion of the artistic novelist. It is good drama from beginning to end—Vronsky's sudden infatuation for Anna Karénina, with whom he falls in love at first sight, to whom at once he makes hot love, and in whom he inspires almost instantaneously a mighty passion. This continues until Anna is completely

compromised, so that at last she leaves her husband and takes up her home with Vronsky, whose love for her is boundless. He surrounds her with luxury. He responds to her every wish. He lives wholly for her. Yet Anna is not in love with him alone. She has a deep affection for her son, whom she has left in her husband's home. Her husband is willing to divorce her, so that she may marry Vronsky, but naturally he will do so only on condition that he retain possession of the child.

Here begins the conflict between the passionate side of Anna's nature, which responds to Vronsky, and her maternal instinct, which rejects the thought of giving up all claim to her little son. She is torn between these two distinct currents of emotion; and therefore she will neither accept a divorce, which would unite her legally and morally with Vronsky, nor will she, on the other hand, give up Vronsky and return to her husband and her son. Passion and maternal instinct are evenly balanced in her nature, and the struggle between the two makes her at last profoundly morbid. She becomes unjust, suspicious, and distrustful of her lover. She broods continually over her separation from her son. In the end, yielding to an impulse of despair, she throws herself under a passing railway train, and dies horribly.

All this part of the novel is told with the vividness and swift movement of an accomplished fiction-writer. The action moves forward steadily and with

no interruption. There is, however, the second theme, or "action," of which I have spoken, and which is the autobiographical portion of the tale. It has to do fundamentally with the mental and spiritual development of Constantine Levin, who is no other than Tolstoi himself.

Levin is represented as belonging by birth to the greater world, and yet by inclination living remote from cities on his landed property. He reads and thinks. He is conscientious, and busies himself with the people on his estates, with schools and agriculture, and with the social improvement of the peasants. He falls in love with a girl named Katia, the daughter of a prince; and after a long and tedious courtship, which is full of uninteresting details, he wins her and marries her, and takes her home.

This second "action" of the novel is endured by most people because it is somewhat interwoven with the affairs of Vronsky and Anna. It is perhaps studied carefully by those who wish to understand the peculiar views and personality of Tolstoi. Levin goes through the various phases which marked Tolstoi's own career. We may, indeed, turn away from Levin and speak directly of Tolstoi's spiritual and mental evolution.

Some one has said that Tolstoi spent the first half of his life in the pursuit of pleasure, and the last half of his life in doing penance for that pleasure. Many have a notion that in his youth he was not

merely gay, but dissipated. This is inferred from his *Confessions*, published in 1885, in which he writes with something of the morbid agony of a mediæval ascetic. Because, as a young man, he was an officer in the army, commanding a battery at Sebastopol, he now calls himself a murderer. Because he collected the rent from his tenants and spent the money, he now declares himself to have been a robber. Because he made careless love to the ladies of the court, and even because he subsequently married and had children, he now thinks of himself as one whose life was tainted by profligacy.

This view may appeal to his immediate disciples, but most sane men and women will properly regard it as morbid nonsense. The fact that he can clothe these strange ideas in glowing language, and hurl them at you with the force of genuine conviction, does not make them fundamentally any more sound than the ravings of an ordinary man who has no genius. In the end, he proceeded to cast aside man-made theology, to hate the social structure as we know it, to forswear belief in human law, in all political institutions, and in pretty nearly everything which normal human beings recognise as true. The sum and substance of his final teaching is comprised in a rule of life summed up in five commandments:

Live in peace and allow no anger.

Let there be no libertinage and no divorce.

Never take an oath of service to any one, or of any kind.

Employ no force against an evil-doer, but bear the wrong he does you without endeavouring to have him punished.

Give up all feeling of nationality.

This curious evolution of belief, which, if it should continue, would dissolve society, represents the drift of what we find in the story of Levin in *Anna Karénina*. Levin is comfortably off. He has estates and duties and friendships. He is happily married. He has children. Nevertheless, he is a self-tormentor, sometimes because of things external, as when he is unreasonably jealous of his wife, but often because of the restlessness and ceaseless striving of a morbid mind. The story is full of aimless talk, of unmeaning happenings, of intolerable digressions. Did the novel contain only the second "action," which relates to Levin, it would be simply a socialistic tract. It becomes a masterpiece only because of the dramatic and brilliant way in which the tragedy of Anna Karénina herself is wrought out by a master hand.

After we have thrust Levin aside, we see the real greatness of the book. Tolstoi takes us into the very heart of the ruling classes of Russia. He draws for us a score of portraits to the very life—Anna herself, with her great masses of hair, her half-closed yet observant eyes, her passionate nature, her grace and beauty. There is Katia, the innocent young

girl who flutters over the attentions of attractive men, and feels that ordinary compliments have deep significance. There is Daria, the worn and anxious wife of Stiva Arcadieitch, faded while still young, anxious for her children, stinted in money, badly dressed and with the bitter certainty that her husband no longer loves her—yet still an honest, affectionate creature, conscientious to the last degree even while she doubts whether virtue may not be, after all, a sad mistake. Best, perhaps, is Stiva himself, whom we meet at the very opening of the book, worried because his wife has discovered his fondness for the French governess. Stiva is a wonderfully well-drawn human being—selfish, attractive, pleasure-loving, susceptible, a jovial companion, open-handed—the sort of man whom everybody likes and whom everybody is bound to help along. We see him very vividly in this single paragraph:

When Stiva Arcadieitch had finished his toilet, he sprinkled himself with perfume, drew down his cuffs, filled his pockets with cigarettes, his letter-case, match-box, and his watch with its double chain and charms; and then, feeling clean, well-scented, fresh, and physically well, in spite of his domestic troubles, he strode lightly into the library, where his coffee was awaiting him.

Stiva is a type of the easy-going man of the world, wherever found. He is pleased with himself. Other persons, from princes and nobles down to the waiters in his club, take pleasure even in looking at

him. He is always lunching or dining in restaurants on oysters and capons and French wines. He likes to make other people happy. He is sorry that his wife is grieved. He loves his children. He loves also to flirt, to scatter money—to live, in short, in a state of physical and mental well-being “in a land flowing with roubles and champagne.” Vronsky is a far higher type, yet he is less interesting. He is a man of great capacity, genuine power, of real nobility of character. When he falls in love with Anna Karénina, it is genuine love. He would marry her if he could. As it is, he sacrifices his position at the imperial court for her sake, and devotes himself to her happiness. After her tragic death he loves no more; and the book leaves him in command of a body of volunteers whom he is to lead against the Turkish troops in the hope that a bullet will finish his existence.

Altogether, *Anna Karénina* is a great canvas upon which there have been painted, not impressionistic pictures, but a series of portraits rendered with the minute fidelity of a Meissonnier. The combination of detail puzzled the reading public for a while; but as has been well said, “the effect was at last recognised to be the very acme of throbbing, breathing life itself.”

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ALPHONSE DAUDET'S MASTER-  
PIECE

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## ALPHONSE DAUDET'S MASTERPIECE

WHEN Alphonse Daudet wrote *Sappho*, in 1884, he inscribed it: "For my sons when they are twenty years of age." Could an American or English author have designed a book like this, he would surely have designed it for readers more mature than boys of twenty. Yet French youths are in some things more mature than English and American boys of twenty. Their temptations are different and greater. They know of many sides of life which are, perhaps, never revealed at all to the majority of English-speaking men and women. And, therefore, Daudet's dedication to his sons must be regarded as no pose, but as evidence of a sincerity and seriousness which are, indeed, quite plainly felt throughout the entire book.

Written by one of the few genuine humourists whom France has yet produced, the creator of the amusing Tartarin and the truly comic Delobelle, in *Sappho* there is not a trace of levity. On the other hand, there is nothing cynical. A great gulf here separates Daudet from Maupassant. Compare the latter's novel *Bel Ami* with *Sappho*, and note how

differently each analyst looks on life. Maupassant sees only what is base or vile or venal. His men and women are, almost without exception, cowards or sharpers or dupes or drabs. The psychology of every type he draws is pitilessly true, yet the aggregation of them is lamentably false. We do not live in such a world as Maupassant delineates; for no such world could last a year.

But Daudet sees life clearly, and he sees it as a whole—the good, the bad, the mediocre, the noble, and the weak. To him its very vices are often only a perversion of its virtues. Its goodness shines out clear and beautiful amid the murk of its depravity. And nowhere do we feel this more acutely than in *Sappho*—a story written with perfect purity of purpose, even though it leads us through the depths of degradation. It is profoundly touching—a moral tragedy—the more impressive in that it is simply told, with none of the pauses for that sort of preaching which Thackeray, for instance, loved too well. There is not a word that can offend the most censorious. Its lesson is writ large in the mere narration of the story; yet its severe simplicity is the product of consummate art, revealing all the subtle genius of a master.

Some have said that in this book is to be found a key to all the mysteries of woman's nature; that every phase of the Eternal Feminine is here revealed; and that *Sappho* is, therefore, the clue to woman-

hood, given in a single book. This assertion I believe to be absolutely true, yet not quite in the way that critics have intended it. They would have us think that Daudet has drawn for us a dozen or more women, each representing a special type of character. Thus, the pure young girl is shown to us in the charming figure of Irène Bouchereau, whom the distracted hero of the novel really loves and whom he would marry were it not for the strangely evil fascination which Sappho exerts upon him in his own despite. The cold, patrician woman who bears her wrongs in uncomplaining silence is drawn in Mme. de Potter, the great musician's wife, neglected by him for the vulgar, insolent circus-woman Rosa, who treats him like a dog, yet holds him through long-continued habit. And there is Mme. Hettéma, fat, lazy, dull, and desiring, with her burly husband, only to be sated with the grossest of animal comforts—the pair being at their best mere human cattle—“companions of stall and litter.” Hettéma himself sums up their swinish ideal of happiness:

“I come home muddy and wet and worried, with all the weight of Paris on my back, to find a good fire, a bright lamp, a savoury soup, and under the table a pair of wooden shoes stuffed with straw. Then, after I have eaten plenty of cabbage and sausages and a piece of Gruyère, kept fresh under a cloth, and have emptied a bottle of liquor, isn't it fine to draw my armchair to the fireside, light a pipe and drink my coffee with a thimbleful of brandy in it; and then, seated opposite each other, to indulge in forty winks while

the hoar-frost is making patterns on the windows outside? Afterward, when the wife clears everything away, turns down the bed, gets the hot bottle out, and has warmed a place, I turn in and feel as cosy as if I had crept bodily into the straw of my wooden shoes."

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The pathetic figure of Alice Doré, the poor little Parisian waif, picked up by a rich and careless sybarite amid the motley crowd of a skating-rink in order that she may satisfy a moment's whim—how vividly she stands out in the few pages that tell her piteous story! A quiet, mouselike little creature, so gentle and by nature so refined, she is at heart still virginal, though in all her life she has never known respect, or any of that deference which some men show to every woman. Her temporary possessor, Déchelette, bears her away to his palace of a home, where he treats her with the tenderness of a devoted lover. She forgets the noise, the oaths, the coarse jests, and the meretricious strife that have surrounded her; and amid the palms and flowers and luxury of her new abode, finds what to her is heaven. It is but for a few days. She knows she must return to the old life, and that Déchelette will think of her no more. Then the child, after a short and piteous plea that she may stay, grows silent, dries her tears, and flings herself to death from an open window. She is the woman who was born for goodness, but whom Fate condemned to a life of shame and outrage. When she came to know that there was something better in

the world, she died because she would not go back to the horror of her old existence.

Then there are other figures no less sharply and clearly drawn, and each as sharply differentiated. There is Divonne, the pleasant woman, married to a fatuous scion of a good old family, of whom she makes a man by her strong sense, her patience, and her tact. Divonne is in refreshing contrast to the enervated and enervating Parisienne. Her physical perfection, graceful yet strong; her rustic beauty, her love of home, her cleanly mind, and her wifely faithfulness, are all as wholesome as mountain air, giving us a sort of moral tonic that restores our faith in righteousness. And, finally, there is Sappho herself, who is the incarnation of light love and of the ruin which light love works in man.

Taking these vital figures, together with some minor ones which it is unnecessary to mention in detail, this great novel of Daudet is quite truly the condensation of all experience, the complete psychology of what, with unconscious absurdity, is often called "the weaker sex." Yet, as I shall presently attempt to show, this view of it, while it is entirely correct, takes no account of the most curious fact of all.

Sappho is the nickname given to Fanny Legrand, the daughter of a full-blooded, liquorish old cabman and of a mother whom she can not recall. She has grown up in the streets of Paris, learning everything

that Paris has to teach such girls as this. She has been an artist's model; she knows the life of the studios; and she has loved, sometimes with terrible intensity, men of the brilliant Bohemia by the Seine. From each one—poet or painter, musician or sculptor—she has picked up accomplishments. Each of her liaisons has left its trace upon her mind. Now she is well past thirty—still graceful, charming, and ripe for that last great love which Balzac says can be satisfied in woman only by the first fresh love of man.

At a studio entertainment she meets a handsome young fellow from the country—Jean Gaussin—who is in Paris, preparing to pass the examinations for a place in the consular service. Fanny flings herself upon him with an abandonment and an intensity of passion that surprise him. He thinks that she is but the acquaintance of an evening; but he soon finds that he can not shake her off. She sits waiting outside his door night after night. She writes him letters, touching in their humility and devotion. At last, she nurses him through a fever, and a bond between them is established. She forgets that she has ever loved before. This creature of the studios displays the tenderness, the self-sacrifice, and the ardent fondness of one who for the first time feels the breath of passion. It is understood between them that some day this must end; but Jean can never shake her off. She has bound him fast with the silken



cords of intimacy—of that strange habitude of continued association of which Petronius has tersely said: *Antiquus amor cancer est.*

Still, Jean does not in his heart of hearts feel any ennobling love for her. He yields rather to her strange subtleties of corruption, even while he sees, at times, the woman as she really is—one who conceals beneath her often radiant charm the beginnings of complete putrescence. He can hear, in her frequent bursts of rage, the raucous voice and the foul speech of the common courtesan. He can see, in the hardening lines of her face, in her broken tooth, in her thinning hair, the approach of an unlovely age. And he knows too well that she has been the plaything of others, whose tricks of speech and manner, as well as their opinions and their tastes, he can detect in her. From one lover she had got her preference for a special brand of cigarette; from a second, a sculptor, she had acquired the habit of sticking out her thumb “as if to mould or fashion something”; from a third she had learned the trick of clipping her words; still another had taught her an arrogant, scornful intonation. She was, indeed, a human phonographic record, upon which a thousand scratches blurred and altered the tone produced.

Again and again Jean seeks to break the fetters that grow every day more galling; but Sappho has possessed his whole nature. When he revisits his

country home, it seems changed and dull. Its wholesomeness makes no appeal to him. He falls in love with a beautiful young girl, and hopes that marriage will destroy the sway of Sappho. None the less, in the end, he abandons home, breaks off his intended marriage, and becomes an outcast. Sappho has played upon his jealousy, and he plans to go with her to South America, there, in a strange land, to have her to himself.

But the woman herself shrinks from this final step. She knows that she will soon be old, and that all her lures and wiles will fail to hold him. And so, at the seaport whither he has gone to meet her, he receives from her a letter of farewell. She has blasted his career, yet she must protect herself. She writes:

Five years ago, in the happy days, a sign from you would have caused me to follow you to the other end of the world; for you can not deny that I loved you passionately. I have given you all that I had, and when it became necessary to part from you, I suffered as I never did for any man before. But such a love wears out. To know you are so handsome, so young, would make me tremble—always so many things to guard. Now I can not. You have made me live too much, made me suffer too much. I am exhausted—you are free; you will never hear me spoken of again. Farewell. One kiss, the last, on the neck, my own.

Superficially, in spite of all its marvellous touches and the supreme artistry with which it is told, this story may appear to be only a study of what the French describe as *la femme collante*. The expres-

sion is one that has no equivalent in English; and haply, outside of France, there is seldom any need to use it. The *femme collante* is the woman who glues herself to one man or another, who lives wholly in her emotions, and who sacrifices to them everything—all self-control, all traces of reserve, and even tranquil happiness; for, if she can not be emotionally happy, she prefers to be emotionally miserable. One of the characters in *Sappho* describes the type in speaking of Fanny Legrand:

“Ah, catch her killing herself! She is too fond of love, and will burn down to the end, down to the very socket. She is like the tribe of young comedy actors, who never change their class of characters, who die without teeth or eyebrows, but are young lovers to the very last.”

The gradually strengthening hold, the almost imperceptible deepening of the taint which Fanny Legrand displays as her intimacy with Jean increases month by month, are set forth with extraordinary vividness in the following passage:

There was greater freedom of manner and expression, a consciousness of her power, strange confidences unsought by him concerning her past life, her old debaucheries and follies. She did not deprive herself of smoking now; she rolled, and in her fingers, put down on the furniture, the eternal cigarettes which help to pass the unconventional woman's day; and in her conversation she let fall her views of life, the infamy of men, the treachery of women,—the most cynical theories on all subjects. Even her eyes assumed

a different expression, dimmed by a film of moisture through which flashed a libertine laugh.

And the intimacy of their affection also changed. At first restrained by the youth of her lover, of which she respected the first illusions, the woman having seen the effect on the man, of her roughly disclosed, debauched past—did not now trouble herself to restrain the unwholesome fever with which she had infected him. So the wayward caresses long restrained, all the delirious words which her closed teeth had shut back—she let loose now, showed herself in her true colours, in all the nakedness of the amorous and practised courtesan, in all the horrible glory of Sappho!

Yet this book of Daudet is something infinitely greater in its importance than a study of *collage*. I have already quoted the opinion of those who call the novel a comprehensive study of woman, because of the great range of feminine types which it contains. To my mind, this is not giving it all the praise which it deserves. It is not in the multiplicity of types which Daudet has collected that he has depicted femininity. He has done what is far more remarkable than that. In the single character of Fanny Legrand herself, he shows us womanhood, complete—crowned and glorious upon the heights to which it often soars, and again, bedraggled and befouled, in those abysses which are deeper than any into which man ever falls.

In the book it is said of Fanny Legrand that she represents *toute la lyre*; and the phrase has reference only to her faults and vices. It might more truly refer to both her virtues and her vices, for in

reality she represents the entire gamut of those traits and attributes which go to make up the complex character of woman in her full development. Fanny possesses charm, quick wit, and great intelligence, surpassing in its rapier-like flash and penetration the intelligence of man. She has the tenderness and material sweetness which are also woman's, as when she nurses Jean and cares for the strange little child, the son of a former lover. She is capable of supreme self-sacrifice. She can endure poverty and distasteful toil for the sake of Jean.

Yet, on the other hand, all these nobler traits are displayed only to those for whom she cares. She can be brutally unjust and hideously insulting to a discarded lover. One feels the shock precisely as Jean felt it when Fanny, at one of their first meetings, reveals the dual quality of her nature. She had been so gentle, so womanly, and so submissive that he is charmed into a delicious dream. Then she is called suddenly to an outer room into which a former lover has just forced his way. Jean hears the sound of a fierce quarrel. "A man's voice, irritable at first, and then imploring, in which the outbursts were choked with emotion and pleading, alternated with another voice which he did not immediately recognise—hard and hoarse, full of hatred and vile epithets, assailing his ears like a brawl in a low tavern." Fanny returns, out of breath, and twisting her flowing hair with a movement full of grace.

“What a fool a man is who cries!” she says.

Daudet’s comment is illuminating:

Jean thought her cruel. He had not yet learned that a woman who loves has no pity except for her love. All her feelings of charity, kindness, good-nature, and pity, and devotion, are concentrated in one individual and in one alone. . . . He felt a great disgust, when, after his night of love, he had heard the sobs of the deceived lover mingling with her washerwoman’s oaths.

Fanny Legrand, indeed, has no faith in her own sex, and she thinks that all other women are like herself. Even when she loves Jean most intensely, she lies to him because of a stray sentiment which she cherishes for a convict. At the last supreme crisis she thinks of self; and, having ruined Jean, she deserts him and makes for herself another home in which she will be adored without the trouble of adoring in her turn. Here Daudet has revealed the extraordinary inconsistency and contradiction which enter into a woman’s passion—its lack of logic, its unreasonableness, its fickleness, and its heats which come and go like lightning-flashes shuddering across a summer sky.

To have wrought this out in the drawing of a single character makes the book a memorable achievement. It will endure beyond the life of all its author’s other books. It will, I think, remain forever one of the great books of the world; for it embodies

everlasting truth. As Mr. Sherard says, it is a book which should be written in Latin, or, as an equivalent, carved on imperishable bronze or marble; "for, when the French language may be a forgotten tongue, and when all your paper shall have crumbled into dust, there will always be the love of man and woman." And no other book has told so subtly, and with such impressive force, the power of that love for evil and for good, and the mighty hold it has upon the lives and souls of those who let it sway them as it will.

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THE DETECTIVE STORY

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## XIV

### THE DETECTIVE STORY

SUPERCILIOUS persons who profess to have a high regard for the dignity of "literature" are loath to admit that detective stories belong to the category of serious writing. They will make an exception in the case of certain tales by Edgar Allan Poe, but in general they would cast narratives of this sort down from the upper ranges of fine fiction. They do this because, in the first place, they think that the detective story makes a vulgar appeal through its exploitation of crime. In the second place, and with some reason, they despise detective stories because most of them are poor, cheap things. Just at present there is a great popular demand for them; and in response to this demand a flood of crude, ill-written, sensational tales comes pouring from the presses of the day. But a detective story composed by a man of talent, not to say of genius, is quite as worthy of admiration as any other form of novel. In truth, its interest does not really lie in the crime which gives the writer a sort of starting point. In many of these stories the crime has occurred before the tale begins; and frequently it happens, as it were, off the stage, in accordance with the traditional precept of Horace.

The real interest of a fine detective story is very

largely an intellectual interest. Here we see the conflict of one acutely analytical mind with some other mind which is scarcely less acute and analytical. It is a battle of wits, a mental duel, involving close logic, a certain amount of applied psychology, and also a high degree of daring on the part both of the criminal and of the man who hunts him down. Here is nothing in itself "sensational" in the popular acceptance of that word.

The reasoning, for instance, in Poe's story of *The Purloined Letter* would excite the admiration of a mathematician or of a student of metaphysics. In the same author's most famous story, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, there are to be sure some details that are terrible to read—hideous traces of a monstrous crime; but these details are necessary. The perpetrator of the crime is not a human being, but an orang-outang, and this fact compels a description of the unhuman and frightful manner in which the murders were committed. But in general, not only in Poe, but in Ponson du Terrail and Gaboriau and Boisgobey and Conan Doyle, the evil deed which is the cause of the whole action is usually passed over lightly, and very often it is not a crime of violence. Indeed, the matter may turn out to be no crime at all, but simply a mysterious happening, which the quick-witted, subtle hero is called in to solve, as in Doyle's *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, or the same author's slighter tale, *A Case of Identity*.

Therefore, when we speak of the detective story, and regard it seriously, we do not mean the penny-dreadfuls, the dime-novels, and the books which are hastily thrown together by some hack-writer of the "Nick Carter" school, but the skilfully planned work of one who can construct and work out a complicated problem, definitely and convincingly. It must not be too complex; for here, as in all art, simplicity is the soul of genius. The story must appeal to our love of the mysterious, and it must be characterised by ingenuity, without transcending in the least the limits of the probable.

The origin of the detective story is to be found in Voltaire's clever romance, *Zadig*, which he wrote under peculiar circumstances. He had fallen out of favour with the French court, because he had intimated that some of the members of the royal circle were guilty of cheating at cards. This brought upon him the keen displeasure of the queen. He feared lest at any moment he might be arrested and imprisoned in the Bastille. Within the hour, almost, he had his carriage prepared, and hurried away at half-past one in the morning. Arriving at a little wayside inn, he sent a letter to the Duchesse du Maine, begging her to hide him in her château until he had been pardoned. For a month he lived in two rooms, which she provided for him, behind barred shutters, and with candles burning night and day.

There Voltaire wrote and wrote continually in his

cramped hand, while his valet copied the sheets which his master kept tossing upon the floor with the ink still wet upon them. At two o'clock in the morning, Voltaire would go softly down to where the duchess was awaiting him, and eat a little supper in her presence, amusing her by his brilliant talk. Then he would creep back to his prison, and after a brief interval of sleep, would once more fall to writing. It was under these strange circumstances that he composed the miniature masterpiece of romance which he called *Zadig*. *Zadig*, of course, is not a detective story. It is an oriental tale, and its hero, *Zadig*, is a marvellous philosopher and acute observer. One passage in the story tells how he described to the Persian king's attendants a horse and a dog which had been lost, and which *Zadig* had never seen. Nevertheless, he was able by his powers of observation, and from certain indications, not only to describe the dog—its sex, size, and condition—but to tell correctly what sort of a bit was in the horse's mouth, and with what sort of shoes the animal had been shod.

It should be noted that the suggestion of this story, *Le Chien et Le Cheval*, was not original with Voltaire. The tale is found in a slightly different form in De Mailly's *Voyage et Aventures des Trois Princes de Sarendip*, which appeared in 1719, or twenty-eight years before *Zadig* was written, and

1799

was even rendered into English twenty-four years before Voltaire conveyed it. But careful investigation has shown that De Mailly himself was not the originator. His story professes to have been translated from the Persian, but was, in fact, taken from an obscure Italian writer, Cristoforo Armeno, whose book was printed in Venice in 1557, and translated into French as early as 1610. As a matter of fact, the episode with which we are all familiar in Voltaire has an oriental ancestry which can be traced through Arabic, Turkish, and Persian literature, and Talmudic Hebrew, until the clue is lost in the mists of a remote past.<sup>1</sup>

In all these tales occurs the same kind of deductive reasoning which plays so great a part in the best detective stories of modern times. Just as Voltaire derived his hint from De Mailly, so Poe, who was steeped in French literature, must have drawn from Voltaire the same idea which he so brilliantly developed in his story, *The Purloined Letter*. It is interesting to remember that the scene of all three of Poe's most famous detective tales—*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Purloined Letter*, and *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*—is laid in France.

<sup>1</sup> See an interesting paper by Mr. Leon Fraser entitled "A Study in Literary Genealogy," published in *Modern Language Notes* under date of December, 1906. (Vol. xxi. pp. 245-247.)

As has been said elsewhere in this book, no one has surpassed the ingenuity of Poe in the construction of these stories. It was noted, however, that one's admiration ends with the matter of his constructiveness and reasoning, and I ventured to say that the defect in all these tales lies in the fact that their author could not create a living, breathing character. His personages are nothing but abstractions. He moves them about like chessmen on a board, and we are interested, not in them, but in the problem with which they have to do.

In order that the detective story should be something more than mathematics applied to fiction—or, perhaps, fiction applied to mathematics—it was necessary that what Poe did should be combined with a sympathetic understanding of human nature. This combination was effected—imperfectly, to be sure, but still with great ability—by Émile Gaboriau in the best of his detective stories, *M. Lecoq*.

Gaboriau was a journalist before he turned a novelist; and as a journalist he came to be interested in the problems with which the police of Paris had to deal. This was under the Second Empire, when Napoleon III., for his own personal safety, had established a marvellously elaborate system of espionage. The police records contained the daily history of almost every human being within the boundaries of France. Enrolled in the organisation were not merely the usual police, but a host of un-



known spies. These might apparently be shopkeepers, janitors, labourers, or whatever else seemed best; but apart from their ordinary occupations, they were the eyes and ears of the men who controlled them all at the central prefecture of police or the mysterious Black Room in the Tuileries, and to whom they reported daily. Every foreigner, even though he were known to be merely a traveller for pleasure, was watched, and everything that he did was carefully recorded. An inquiry addressed to the minister of police could bring from him at once complete particulars concerning almost any man or woman—where they had been at a given time, who were their friends, how they amused themselves, and a great deal more besides. All this information might not be used, and much of it was never used, yet scarcely anything was unknown to the men who cast this great spider's web over France, and who could from their files produce facts which, if generally known, would have wrecked families, destroyed reputations, and laid bare the dark secrets of many a life that seemed wholly spotless.

Gaboriau became fascinated by the thoroughness and precision of this remarkable system. He studied it in all its phases, and with the greatest care. As a result of this study, he wrote the novels which, with all their blemishes, are still read eagerly in many countries and in many languages.

Of these novels, the one best constructed and

most deserving of fame is that entitled *M. Lecoq*, which he published in 1869, not many years before his death. In it is seen an ingenuity equal to that of Poe, while there is also shown a fair success in sketching character. Moreover, the author has introduced a new type of deductive reasoner which suggested to Conan Doyle the interesting Mycroft Holmes, brother of Sherlock Holmes, and that great detective's superior in the subtlety of his intellectual processes.

It will be remembered that the story of *M. Lecoq* opens with the commission of a crime, which, on the face of it, was not mysterious, but was apparently just one of those everyday tragedies that take place in the lowest quarters of Paris. Several detectives are making their rounds in the outskirts of the city, on a winter night, when they hear cries and pistol-shots from a low drinking-den of evil repute, situated in an open field on which the snow lies deep. The detectives hurry to the scene, surround the house, break in the door, and see, by the light of some flaming pine knots upon the hearth, that an act of violence has been committed. Tables and chairs have been overturned. Two men are stretched dead, while a third is already in the throes of death. Behind an oaken table stands a young and stalwart man, clenching a revolver. His torn garments resemble those of a railway porter. He declares that he has shot the men in self-defence,

because they made a desperate attack upon him, believing him to be a police spy.

On the face of it there is nothing improbable in this. His story is believed by the men who arrest him, and especially by Gevrol, a police-officer of some rank. The youngest of the detectives, however, whose name is Lecoq, feels a vague suspicion that the prisoner is not what he declares himself to be, and that underneath this crime there is hidden a tale of peculiar mystery. Two women are known to have been present, but they have escaped. There are also, to the mind of Lecoq, indications that the prisoner, in spite of his common clothing, is no common person; that he is a man of education, of great natural ability, and perhaps of rank; and finally that he had a male accomplice. These deductions of Lecoq are scouted by Gevrol; but nevertheless the young detective resolves to establish his theory and to solve the problem. From that moment there begins a conflict of wits between the prisoner on the one side and Lecoq on the other, the latter having the sympathy and confidence of the examining magistrate. The scene of the prisoner's examination by this magistrate is one of thrilling interest, and it gives to us Anglo-Saxons a vivid picture of the workings of French law in its assumption that a prisoner is guilty unless he proves his innocence. The long, searching inquiry in which the judge alternately pleads with the ac-

cused and browbeats, threatens, and tortures him, hoping at last to break him down and wring from him a full confession, is wonderfully written.

The prisoner tells the magistrate a perfectly straightforward story, and yet there are parts of it which, under a keen cross-examination, show weakness and self-contradiction sufficient to strengthen the suspicion of Lecoq. Nevertheless, the detective is for the time quite baffled. All the external evidence that can be found, curiously confirms the prisoner's story. Lecoq becomes convinced that there is a shrewd accomplice acting from without, who, in some mysterious way, is working as the prisoner's second self. The accused is kept in prison. His every action is watched, both night and day. Extraordinary tricks are devised to compel him to betray himself. They completely fail.

At last, Lecoq arranges matters so that the mysterious criminal may escape. Lecoq's plan is to follow him after he has escaped, and thus discover who are his friends and who he really is. The escape takes place. The prisoner threads his way through the most intricate mazes of criminal Paris, followed by Lecoq, who carries on the pursuit with the keenness of a hound; but at the end of the long hunt the object of it unexpectedly disappears over a high wall, which surrounds the magnificent grounds and mansion of the Duc de Sairmeuse, one of the noblest members of the French aristocracy.

Though Lecoq and the police at once enter the mansion, and search all the rooms in it, their bird apparently has flown. A ball and reception are in progress in the great house. There are no traces in it of the fleeing criminal, and Lecoq for the time confesses himself defeated, suffering in silence the jeers of his associates, and especially of Gevrol, who has become jealous of his able and enthusiastic subordinate.

Lecoq finally betakes himself to the house of an old retired tradesman, who is an amateur in criminology and detection. This person, named Tabaret, but known to the police as Père Tiraclair, is much of the time confined in bed by gout. For his own amusement, however, he collects all the details of every conspicuous crime and studies them with intense avidity, not as crimes, but as psychological problems. Given all the facts, he can, by the unerring processes of pure reason, sift out the false from the true, the irrelevant from the essential, and go swiftly to the heart of any mystery. It is he who gives Lecoq the clue to the identity of the escaped prisoner.

Here is the original suggestion of Mycroft Holmes, who, it will be remembered, was fat and lazy, spending his spare hours in the Diogenes Club, of which no member ever spoke to any other member. Mycroft Holmes does not trouble himself with any active work. He relies entirely upon his deduct-

ive powers and relentless logic. It may be said that this is only a copy of Poe's Auguste Dupin, but such is not the case. Dupin did "outside work," personally visited the scenes of crimes, inserted advertisements in newspapers, and, in fact, employed the whole machinery of detection. But Mycroft Holmes, like old Père Tiraclair, simply thought out the problem presented to him, and then directed others what to do. Here we find a conception more attractive even than that of Poe; and the literary touches of Gaboriau and Doyle give us a genuine personality that far surpasses the interest of a mere calculating machine.

It is true that Gaboriau mars his story by injecting into it a long secondary narrative. Conan Doyle made precisely the same mistake in his first successful detective tale, *A Study in Scarlet*; but it was a mistake which he never repeated. Gaboriau, therefore, is a link between Edgar Allan Poe and Conan Doyle, just as Poe himself is a link between Voltaire and Gaboriau.

Conan Doyle is the supreme writer of detective stories. He, like Gaboriau, plays the game fairly, since he lets the reader have all the knowledge which Holmes himself possesses. It has been written of his tales:

The really remarkable thing about these stories is that, before the mystery is solved, the reader is put in possession of every fact material to its solution. The Chinese puzzle

is handed over with no missing pieces. We are freely offered every single bit of evidence which could convince the detective. That is, the reader has been kept in exactly the mental state of the ingenuous Dr. Watson, or the blundering officials, Lestrade and Gregson. He has seen all there is to be seen; and if he fails to interpret events aright, it is simply because his own acuteness does not equal that of the detective.

In other words, the cleverness of Doyle lies in his simplicity and frankness, and also in the fact that his people are living, breathing human beings. One grows fond of Sherlock Holmes, not only because of his wonderful mind, but because of his faults and failings. His addiction to the cocaine habit, his dislike of women, his skill as a boxer, his need when thinking out a problem of smoking great quantities of shag tobacco which he keeps in an old slipper, his trick of shooting bullets into his mantel-piece so as to form the royal initials (V. R.), the general disorderliness of his housekeeping—all these things give him individuality. We feel that we actually know him. We are almost as much interested in his personal whims and prejudices, and in his casual talks with Watson, as we are with his triumphs of detection.

And the same interest adheres to Watson, that admirable, commonplace, and usual Briton, and in a less degree to the official police who employ Sherlock's skill and then take credit to themselves. No imitators of Poe, or of Doyle himself, have been successful in this thing. They can think out prob-



lems, but they can not create men and women. Compare, for instance, the detective stories lately written by Mr. Jacques Futrelle and M. Gaston Leroux. Their work is purely machine work. To go further back, even Balzac, who made an attempt at detective fiction in his *Ferragus*, was wise enough to see that this was not his forte. He and Ponson du Terrail in this one particular field seem stodgy and mechanical. Yet even Gaboriau is superior to Poe. Had there been no Gaboriau, we might never have had that fascinating cycle of stories which Conan Doyle has written around the great detective who lived in Baker Street, and whose name is as well known all over the world to-day as that of Shylock, Falstaff, or any other creation of Shakespeare himself, with, perhaps, Hamlet as the one exception.

Of course, this seems extravagant; but the contemporary public is seldom a good judge of what is best or of what is worst in the writers of their own time. They either overpraise or underestimate. It is, or ought to be, a truism that professional critics of literature are generally the very last persons in the world to recognise the value of new literature when they see it. This is partly because such standards as they have are purely conventional, and partly because they themselves are timorous and mistrustful and afraid of making mistakes. Hence they hesitate to commit themselves



to a definite opinion until they are pretty sure that they are on the side of the majority. The result is that they follow where they ought to lead, and are apt to come in at the tail of the procession when they ought to come in at the head. Just as the venerable Austrian commanders in Italy were convinced that Napoleon knew nothing about the art of war because he was defeating them in reckless defiance of the rules laid down in the military text-books, so our literary critics would not admit that Kipling's first five books had any value; for these were brilliant in an utterly new way, and not in the thoroughly recognised old way. Originality is terribly disconcerting to unoriginal people. They think it frivolous or "unsound" or "queer." They never quite approve of it. Therefore, they glorify Robert Louis Stevenson for those productions of his that are good in a conventional style, but ignore his one extraordinary *tour de force* which is unique in literature. For, a century hence, *Treasure Island* and *The Master of Ballantrae* and all the essays will be only names to the reading public, while *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* will stand as the most striking allegory ever written on the curious duality of man's moral nature.

The case of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is almost as interesting as the case of Mr. Kipling, in kind though not in degree. Sir Arthur does not take himself and his writings very seriously. Neither did

Plautus or Shakespeare, for that matter. Sir Arthur Doyle is a genial, wholesome, sensible Anglo-Celt who turns off his work in a comfortable sort of way. He is not a genius of the highest order, but he has a leaven of genius in his make-up, and he is a born story-teller as truly as was Herodotus or Defoe. Most of his books are just admirable examples of the story-telling quality which in some mysterious fashion makes its possessor able to give real interest to even a commonplace narrative. In fact, the least important of his stories—as for instance some of those in *Round the Red Lamp*—are worth reading many times. They may be as improbable as the one about the resuscitated Egyptian mummy or the electrocution at Los Amigos; but all the same you will be glad to know them and you will wish for more. In his historical novels, *The White Company* and *Micah Clark*, this story-telling is of a high order, yet still not going beyond the limits of great cleverness. The critics, however, would select these books as containing the best of which Doyle is capable. The one thing of his that is really indicative of creative genius they merely smile upon indulgently, and pass by with as little notice as they would give to a dime-novel, and with much less notice than they often devote to some schoolgirl's machine-made historical romance. It never occurs to them that English fiction was permanently enriched when Dr. Doyle, as he then was,

began the cycle of stories whose protagonist is Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

It is likely that most literary critics, if asked to give an opinion about these remarkable stories, would at once compare them with those of Gaboriau and feel that there was nothing more to say. But, as a matter of fact, the Sherlock Holmes stories are not only immensely superior to anything of Gaboriau's, but in some respects the best of them are better than those tales of Poe which treat of crime and its detection. Gaboriau is an excellent literary artisan. His mysteries are very neatly constructed. The parts all dovetail perfectly. But they have little artistic value, and the unravelling of their complicated plots is like the dissection of a Chinese puzzle which interests by its ingenuity, but appeals neither to the intellect nor to the imagination. Poe, on the other hand, is highly intellectual, and in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, for instance, he stirs the imagination very powerfully. He can rouse the sense of horror and make his mystery deepen into ghastliness and terror.

Conan Doyle, however, can do these things and give us still another ingredient—the human element. Sherlock Holmes, as has been said, would interest us simply as a man. His curiously varied tastes, his fondness for good music and rare books, his disorderly rooms, his utter boredom when not absorbed in disentangling mysteries, his prodigious

consumption of shag tobacco when working out his problems, his addiction to the cocaine habit—a curious touch—all these things amuse or interest or pique us until we grow fond of him and get at last to know him almost as well as though we, too, shared his rooms in Baker Street. Watson is another creation. Like all true artists, who do their best work by instinct rather than self-consciously, it is probable that Doyle had no idea of how supremely clever a thing it was to make Watson the companion and chronicler and also the foil of Sherlock Holmes. Watson, the matter-of-fact, sensible, and friendly surgeon, always planting both his broad feet squarely on the earth, is a typically British character, and his lack of insight makes Holmes's wonderful intuition appear twice as wonderful by the force of contrast. Moreover, by letting Watson be the narrator of the stories, they are made to seem always plausible to the reader, because of their sober, unemotional manner. Lestrade and Gregson, of the regular detective force, are also types drawn adequately with a few broad strokes. Beside them Gaboriau's Gevrol is shadowy and unreal. The creation of Mycroft Holmes was a stroke of genius. That Sherlock Holmes should have had a brother, superior in inductive reasoning even to Sherlock himself, is interesting; that he should be fat and luxurious and far too lazy to use his gifts in any practical way, is delicious. The

likeness of mind and the utter unlikeness of temperament between the indolent Mycroft and the keen, nervous, high-strung Sherlock is fascinating. That Mycroft Holmes is introduced in but a single story—that of the Greek interpreter<sup>1</sup>—shows a remarkable artistic self-control on the part of Doyle. The glimpse that is given of him is tantalising. One longs to know more about him, but his creator very wisely stayed his hand.

The very best of all these stories are not the long ones—*A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of the Four*—though each of these contains many very striking things, and the first of them (of which Dr. Doyle himself is said to have thought so little that he sold the manuscript outright for \$125) introduces us to Sherlock at the outset of his career. There is no doubt that the most finished and most effective tale is that of *The Speckled Band*. This is a marvel of construction and of execution not merely worthy of Poe, but better than Poe's best. From the very first page the reader's interest is riveted upon a mystery which, as it develops, is utterly inscrutable and fascinates one by its undefined yet very evident horror. The inexplicable death of the elder sister, the warnings given to the surviving girl, the peculiar whistle in the night, the clanging sound of metal, the strange discoveries

<sup>1</sup> He is seen again, to be sure, in *The Final Problem*, but only in a casual way, having no "speaking part."

made by Holmes, and then that nerve-racking vigil in the blackness of midnight with the hideous revelation at the end of it—I know of nothing in fiction of this *genre* which possesses an interest so absorbingly intense. [www.libtool.com.cn](http://www.libtool.com.cn)

Of a different character is *The Naval Treaty*, which I place next to *The Speckled Band* in merit as a story. This tale affords a good example of the method by which the circumstances of a mysterious event are set forth quite frankly and yet in such a way that the perfectly simple and obvious explanation never once occurs to you. The draft of a secret naval treaty between England and Italy is to be copied by young Phelps, of the British Foreign Office, who is a near relative of Lord Holdhurst, the Foreign Minister. No one but Phelps and Lord Holdhurst know of it. The reputation of both these men is at stake, if the terms of the treaty shall be discovered; and, moreover, serious diplomatic complications will ensue. Phelps has remained at his desk in the Foreign Office after every one but the janitor has left, and then he begins to make the required draft. Finding that it will keep him later than he had expected, he goes downstairs to ask the doorkeeper to get him a cup of coffee. While he is giving the order, he hears a bell in his room ring, and, rushing back again, he finds the room empty and the treaty gone. Now, in the first place, as no human being knew that the treaty was

there, and, in the second place, as the thief, instead of stealing it and sneaking quietly away, rang the bell to announce his presence, the problem seems on the face of it insoluble; yet the explanation of it, when it comes, is really the simplest and most natural thing in the world. Herein Doyle's plots differ utterly from Gaboriau's. Those of the French writer are complex to a degree; those of Doyle are simplicity itself. The reader is just as hopelessly puzzled by them, but the solution, when it comes, comes not as a mathematical demonstration, but as a flash of light in a dark place—illuminating, surprising, delighting, all at once.

After the two stories just mentioned, I should place, without attempting to assign them a definite order of merit, *Silver Blaze*, *The Resident Patient*, *The Engineer's Thumb*, *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, *The Five Orange Pips*, *The Reigate Puzzle*, and *The Final Problem*. Three stories make too strong a demand upon the reader's credulity. These are, *The Red Headed League*, *A Case of Identity*, and *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, yet the first of them is none the less one of the most absorbing interest. There is, indeed, not one story in the whole cycle which does not contain many touches that positively fascinate one by their ingenuity and unexpectedness.

Doyle will sooner or later get the recognition from the critics which he has already won from the



reading public. His hold upon that public is an extraordinary one. Many books of the day sell by the hundreds of thousands, yet they are not talked about and no one clamours for more from their authors' pens. But in the case of the Sherlock Holmes adventures, the public not only buys and reads, but discusses them continually; and it has so strenuously insisted upon having more that Dr. Doyle has been obliged to yield to the demand. This compliance has been most unfortunate for the author's reputation. He has written not because he wished to write, but because he was made to do so. Hence, the later stories about Sherlock Holmes are feeble trash with the exception of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Whatever is best in his studies of the great detective will be found in the *Adventures* and the *Memoirs*. The others will be forgotten, just as *Dred* has been forgotten, while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is sure of immortality. But when the dross shall have been purged away, there will remain a group of stories so fascinating as to give their author the highest rank among those who have attempted this very interesting kind of fiction.



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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE  
PRINTED PAGE

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## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE PRINTED PAGE

THERE used to be a perennially recurring gibe directed against amateurs in writing, and especially against women amateurs, to the effect that the "copy" which they sent to editors was in the form of manuscript written on both sides of the paper and tied with a blue ribbon. In these days, and since the invention of the typewriter, even amateurs know better than to do a thing like that; yet neither they nor many professional writers and makers of literature consider with sufficient care the value and the very serious importance of the external form in which their thoughts, their narratives, and their descriptions are laid before the editor and, after him, the public. The subject is not a trifling one; and an analysis of it and of some of the elementary principles that underlie it is well deserving of attention.

To go back to the very beginning, why is it better, in submitting anything to an editor or to the reader for a publishing house, to have it typewritten rather than to send it in the form of manuscript? Ninety-nine persons out of a hundred will answer immediately: "Oh, because typewriting is easier to

read than handwriting; and very likely an editor will not trouble himself over a manuscript; whereas, if it had been typewritten, he would be quite willing to examine it." That theory has no truth in it, at least according to the ~~literary~~ ~~medium~~ ~~which~~ it is intended to convey. An editor or a publisher's reader examines everything that is submitted to him; in the first place, because it is his business to do so, and in the second place, because he is always on the alert for something original and striking, and he never knows before reading it, whether even the roughest scrawl may not contain something that is worth his while.

The real advantage of the typewritten copy over the manuscript is one that depends upon a principle which Herbert Spencer was the first to notice carefully. This is the principle of the Economy of Attention, and its relation to the subject now under discussion ought to be well weighed by everyone who writes for publication. When this is done, the reason will be plain why it is more advantageous for an author to have his copy read in a typewritten form rather than in his own handwriting. In examining any piece of literary work with intelligence and critical judgment, it is greatly to be desired that the mind should not be distracted from the real task before it, and that it should be directed wholly to the thought, the style, and the feeling of the writer, and to nothing else whatever. Now, in reading a manu-

script in almost anyone's chirography, the mind can not possibly concentrate its whole attention upon the only things that really count. First of all, some little time is needed to adjust one's eye to the ordinary peculiarities of the writing; and this, at the very outset, divides the attention and makes necessary a conscious effort which is unfavourable to concentrated thought. Then, again, there are always special peculiarities which occur and re-occur; and every time that one of these is met, it checks to some extent the current of thought and, if often repeated, results in giving a blurred impression in place of an impression that is clean-cut and distinct. Of course, when the handwriting is very bad, this is all very much intensified; and it often happens that after the reader has laid down the manuscript, he can remember very little about its contents, because his attention has been so greatly divided that he has really given the larger part of it to the purely mechanical difficulties of his task.

Yet there is something else which is less obvious than what has just been described, though fully as important. In reading manuscript, you necessarily (and because of the reasons already mentioned) read it line by line—sometimes almost word by word; whereas, if set forth in print, you get a certain perspective and a certain completeness as you read, so that you see not only the isolated expressions and the separate phrases, but also their relation to what

goes before and to what comes immediately after. In other words, you can easily criticise the writer's sense of unity and harmony and proportion.

Reading anything in manuscript is like judging an army by inspecting each soldier individually. Reading a printed page is like seeing an army in the field and watching its evolutions, which exhibit not only the individual soldiers, but the formation and the inter-relation of companies, battalions, regiments, and brigades. It is, indeed, impossible to judge accurately any piece of literary work until you read it with a perfect unconsciousness of everything that is external to the writer's thought and to his expression of it. The typography, the mechanical means by which thought and expression pass through the eye into the brain, ought to be like a sheet of flawless crystal, so clear that you can gaze through it without ever being conscious that it is there. To my mind, indeed, the innermost soul of any literary creation can never be seen in all its clarity and truth until one views it through the medium of the printed page, in which there must be absolutely nothing to divide attention, to interrupt the thought, or to offend one's sense of form.

This last remark inevitably opens up another phase of the subject that I have been considering, and it takes us into a wider and more interesting field. In the printed page, apart from typographical errors (which, as they are mere accidents, need not

be mentioned), what is it that may enter to divide attention and to offend our sense of form? And, moreover, if the typographical arrangement can interfere with one's pleasure and can do something to mar the effect of what we read, may it not be possible, on the other hand, that there are certain principles of typography which if properly observed may augment that pleasure and heighten the satisfaction of the reader without his ever being conscious of the cause, just as some of Mr. Swinburne's concealed alliterations charm the ear and give to the lines a hidden harmony whose source we do not recognise until we come to analyse the verses? Or, to put the question more directly, can an author, by taking thought about the typographical arrangement of his printed work, give to that work a greater power to interest and attract than it would possess were its arrangement left to the mercies of the proof-reader and compositors who follow blindly an "office system"?

I think decidedly that he can. In fact, I would go still further and say that while a really interesting book can not be made dull nor a dull book interesting, even by a psychological typographer, it is entirely possible to print an interesting book in such a way that at first sight it shall seem to be a dull one, and in like manner to print a dull book in such a way that at first sight it shall seem to be interesting. Every one of us has many times picked up a book and turned its pages over in a casual sort

of fashion and then put it down with the remark: "That looks like a tiresome book," or again, "That book looks readable." How is it that we come to form such instinctive judgments as these? Why does one book "look tiresome" and another seem to be attractive? For either opinion there is always a good and sufficient reason, and it would be well if authors, in their own interest, should try to learn just what the reason is.

A book is like a human being. You meet a person for the first time and your immediate impression of him is necessarily based upon what is wholly superficial. You judge him by his face, his manner, his voice, and even by his clothes; and you are attracted or repelled by the combination of all these purely extraneous attributes. Further acquaintance may show that your first impression was incorrect. The man whose eye is dull, whose manner is awkward, and whose appearance is slovenly, may turn out to have an interesting mind and a heart of gold. Another, whose face attracts you, whose manners are perfect, and whose personal appearance is immaculate, may have an empty head or an evil heart. But just as it would be better if all of us could possess not only internal merit but external polish, so is it also with any book. In what way, then, can the typography of a printed page contribute to the reader's interest without dividing his attention? There enter here two principles, of which the first is the principle of



Variety, and the second the principle of Fitness. Both of them in part subserve the principle of Economy of Attention.

The principle of Variety is first involved in the division of the text into paragraphs. This is the initial step toward making the printed page take on an interesting look. A solid unbroken mass of words is of all things the most repellant to a person who takes up a volume and looks it over; for here solidity of appearance is taken as synonymous with heaviness and even dullness of content. This effect is largely eliminated and the page is noticeably lightened as soon as it is judiciously paragraphed. We then feel that our author is not wearily pursuing a single train of thought, but that he possesses the mental mobility which allows him to shift his ground before he becomes monotonous. The division into paragraphs, however, should be very carefully made, and not in any arbitrary fashion; since the perfect paragraph contains the development of a single idea, and it ought not to end until that development has been fully rounded out. There is, however, almost always a slight transition in the thought as one develops it, from one phase to another, and at this point of transition a new paragraph may always very properly begin. Too short paragraphs are quite as bad as paragraphs that are too long; for while the latter make the page seem heavy, the former make it seem scatterbrained and scrappy, as

though the writer had dashed from one idea to another without giving adequate treatment to any one of them. This is a great defect in many of the books that are printed in France, which sometimes commence a new paragraph almost with every sentence. I fancy that this practice began with the *feuilletonistes* of the Parisian journals, who are paid by the line and who, in paragraphing liberally, eke out a few more francs by splitting up their text without any reference to unity or continuity.

In writing a novel, a solid paragraph at the beginning is a bad thing. The reader has not as yet become interested; and when he meets at the outset a long piece of description or a diffuse preliminary explanation, he feels that he is being compelled, as it were, to work his way into the story and to submit to a certain amount of boredom before his interest is aroused. This is a terrible defect in Sir Walter Scott's first novel, *Waverley*, wherein the real action of the story does not commence until one reaches the end of about forty pages of almost irrelevant discourse. Scott's was a leisurely and easy-going age, and the traditions of Mademoiselle de Scudéry still lingered in it. Were *Waverley* to appear to-day for the first time, it is doubtful whether anyone would ever have the patience to get far enough along in it to discover that it is, after all, a work of genius. The novel which commences with a conversation is the novel which commences best. When you take

it up, you see that there is no preliminary penance to be exacted of you, but that you can plunge at once into the middle of the action; whereas the long introductory paragraph gives you the same feeling that you have when you write you have called and are kept for half an hour waiting in the drawing-room, with this additional disadvantage in the case of the novel that you are not even aware in advance whether the person on whom you are calling is one whom you really care to see after all.

Variety and lightness are still further gained by the judicious use of capital letters, of italics, of quotation-marks, and sometimes (though sparingly) of a line or two of verse, which requires the use of a smaller type. Capital letters, of course, come in mainly through the employment of proper names. In novels and stories this, from the nature of the case, adjusts itself. In other kinds of writing, however, as, for instance, in essays and exposition, the author ought to bear the point in mind. Lest someone should say that this is an absurdly mechanical way of looking at literary composition, I would point out that the principle involved rests upon a very sound psychological basis. Why, in an essay, for example, does a page appear to be more readable when it contains a number of words commencing with capital letters? It is not merely because these letters afford variety to the eye, but it is because they indicate that the writer is not indulging in gener-

alities or in abstractions, but that he is giving concrete instances, illustrations, and examples—in other words, that he is interesting. For in all writing, the strongest effects are produced by the citation of specific instances, since these come home with the greatest force to the reader's mind—a principle laid down by Horace when he said that the story-telling Homer was a more effective teacher of moral philosophy than was the abstract reasoner, Chrysippus.

Italics, here and there employed, afford another very useful means of securing the effect of variety. When used to indicate the title of a book, the name of a ship, or the introduction of a foreign word or phrase, they produce the impression of vivacity and colour, and never fail to catch the eye as one looks along the printed page. Quotation-marks are even more valuable as a means to the same end. They embody the suggestion of something piquant, unexpected, or unusual, because they imply that the writer has quoted something that is particularly worth the attention of the reader. By all these devices, therefore, a printed page may be transformed, in appearance at least, from one that is characterless and tiresome into one that has the outward indications of attractiveness and personality and interest.

Some may say, of course, that the principle of Variety seems on the face of it quite contradictory to the principle of Economy of Attention. Does not variety itself imply an attention that is divided?

Hardly; for the variety which interests and which is an essential part of an impression as a whole is one of the most powerful factors in riveting attention upon the work in hand. Indeed, there are few things more fatal than monotony to continuous and undiverted mental effort. Take down a volume of Lucretius and read three pages of his poetry aloud. His hexameters have the same majestic roll and cadence that mark the later lines of Vergil; but in Lucretius this roll and cadence soon take on a certain sameness, so that presently you discover that your thoughts are wandering from his argument to other things, and that you are conscious only of the sound. With the hexameters of Vergil this is not the case, since he has introduced into them the principle of Variety by contriving with consummate art so many delicate changes of rhythm, so many shiftings of the *caesura*, and so delightful a diversity in the division of his lines, as to destroy monotony and thereby keep the mind intent upon what he is saying, while the ear is still ravished by his harmonies.

The principle of Fitness is the principle which controls and subtly limits the principle of Variety, and in doing so subserves, as I have said, the principle of the Economy of Attention. Its essence is good taste and a sensitive appreciation of what is allowable. For, while variety is always to be sought, it must be discreetly sought and in a way that will gently stimulate the attention and not distract it.

For example, in the use of capital letters, apart from proper names in the strictest definition of that term, there are many words regarding which diversity prevails. Shall we capitalise such titles as "Czar," "Mikado," "King?" Yes, when they relate to a specific czar, mikado or king, but not when they are otherwise employed. In the first instance they are truly proper names, and they bring to the mind a distinctly personal and definite conception. Hence, to capitalise them gives variety to the appearance of the printed page, thus not only catching the attention of the reader, but retaining it; whereas to print "the czar," "the mikado" and so forth, since it is not what one is looking for, gives us pause and checks, if ever so slightly, the train of thought.

So with certain other words that stand out as important. There is a newspaper which I have in mind that is guilty of such anomalies and crudities as "Park row," "Maiden lane," "Grand street," "War office," and "Land league"—expressions in which the last word is just as much a part of the name as is the first—and also "dreibund," "treaty of Paris," and "declaration of independence." These last are quite as specific, as important and as individual as the names of persons; so that when you find a neglect to capitalise them properly, you stop for the moment in your reading, your thought wanders from the subject, and you feel a little stirring of resentment which puts you, half unconsciously,

out of sympathy with the writer. On the other hand, to use capitals lavishly, as a German does and as Carlyle did, is an affectation which equally offends you; for it also hinders mental concentration.

As to the use of inverted commas or quotation-marks, a whole treatise might be written; but the general principles can be summed up briefly. The misuse of quotation-marks is the surest sign of the amateur in writing. It is the hall-mark of the literary novice. Apart from their principal function of indicating actual quotations of what some one else has said, quotation-marks may be made to serve two distinct purposes. The first is the purpose of indicating that the writer has employed a word or a phrase that is unusual and of showing that he is perfectly aware of the fact. The unusual word or phrase may be one that has just come into use and is not generally known; or it may embody an allusion that is a bit abstruse; or it may perhaps be just a bit undignified. In the first two instances the quotation-marks mean that the writer desires to avoid the responsibility of the quoted words. In the third instance they explain that he is well aware that he is unbending a little too much, and wishes to have it known that he does not usually employ that sort of diction. In all these cases they convey a tacit apology. Now the literary amateur shows his amateurishness by not knowing precisely what words and phrases fall under these several heads. If he is the



editor of a country newspaper, he will write (with quotation-marks) of "the wee sma' hours" in which the surprise party given to the village pastor terminated; and he will describe the local tavern-keeper as "our genial host." If he is a somewhat less rudimentary person, he will perhaps quote such expressions as "survival of the fittest" and "new woman" and "vingtième siècle," and "epoch-making." To say that a thing is epoch-making is, of course, entirely proper; but an experienced writer knows that all cultivated men and women are now perfectly familiar with this importation from the German, and so he would not dream of setting it off by quotation-marks, because it is already naturalised in our everyday vocabulary.

The second use of quotation-marks is to convey a sort of contempt when one employs an expression which is rather usual and by amateurs regarded as allowable, but which the professional person wishes to discredit. Such are the words "brainy," "talented," "locate," and a host of others. Mr. E. L. Godkin was a master of the art of making a current phrase ridiculous by this typographical device. Such political expressions as "point with pride," "jamming it through," "visiting statesmen," "something equally as good," "leading citizen" and "a friend to silver" were so pilloried by him in this way that only an amateur can now ever dream of using them with any serious intent.



A regard for the principle of Fitness will take all these things into careful account and will never dismiss them as being of slight importance. Side by side also with other typographical matters is the question of punctuation, which most writers unwisely leave wholly to the compositor and proof-reader in the belief that punctuation is a purely mechanical and formal thing for which there exist definite, rigid rules that can be applied by any one. There never was a more egregious error. There are rules for punctuation as there are rules for painting and rules for elocution; but these rules are for the guidance of the ignorant beginner in his earliest attempts. They do not guide the finished artist or the consummate orator. And so with punctuation. Its rules are general rules, and at the best are only roughly true. The higher punctuation has an unrecognised, yet in its way an important, share in aiding the perfect utterance of recorded thought. It rests wholly upon psychological principles, since it is a device to make the writer's meaning absolutely unmistakable, and hence it, too, is an expression of his personality.

The summing up of the whole subject is that the arrangement, the typographical system, and the punctuation of the printed page, if studied carefully and with discrimination, can do very much for any author. A knowledge of them can not make the fortune of a book that ought to live, nor can it save

a book that ought to die. But it may secure for the first a quicker recognition, and it may sometimes preserve the latter from that severest condemnation of the critic which takes the form of an impenetrable silence.

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