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# ESSAYS

TOWARDS A

# CRITICAL METHOD

BY

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## PREFACE.



OF the following papers, that on "Science in Criticism" was the last written; so that the others, though selected from a number, are not presented as studied applications of the method or methods of judgment laid down in the introductory treatise. I trust there will be found, however, a substantial conformity between the critical essays and the general exposition, inasmuch as the former were made under the convictions and in part with the aims which led to the attempt at a comprehensive treatment of the art or science—whichever it be termed—of literary criticism.

Due heed will be given, one hopes, to the "towards" of the title. No reader can feel more strongly than I how far from finality are these attempts to bring into literary criticism methods of scrutiny and species of criteria such as will secure, in regard to literary values, the measure of demonstrability and of agreement arrived at in, say, moral, political, economic, and therapeutic science. In the three former cases, what is attained is a division of thinking men into tendential parties, in

each of which there is substantial agreement, resulting in different degrees from bias, prejudice, and reasoning towards consistency. Obviously, consensus of literary opinion cannot be reckoned on to a further extent than consensus in matters of personal conduct, legislation, and social action: all that can be hoped is that it may be carried as far. In therapeutic science, again, there is anarchy enough to show that tangibleness of subject matter does not involve certainty of interpretation.

Of the four essays now published, all save the first have already appeared; two in the magazine *Our Corner*; one ("Mr. Howells' Novels") in the *Westminster Review*. The two former, however, have been somewhat expanded for re-publication. I have not only added matter formerly withheld under exigencies of space, but improved and elucidated wherever later reading and reflection have enabled me to do so.

It was only after the introductory treatise was in the publisher's hands that I met with "La Critique Scientifique," the posthumous work of the lamented Émile Hennequin. It was impossible to read that able treatise without gaining new ideas and new points of view; and I weighed the expediency of readjusting my own essay so as to embody some of these. I soon concluded, however, that, though I would stand to lose, the purpose of both essays would perhaps gain by letting mine go as it was projected and written. I was struck, at the first glance over the schema of M. Hennequin, with the fact that we had approached the problem from different sides. He had asked himself "What is a book?"



or rather, "What is a work of art?": I had asked myself "What is criticism?" or rather "What is literary criticism?" Of the value of his inquiry and analysis there could be no doubt. On the other hand, given any however small value in my inquiry and analysis, there seemed certain to result a special gain, however small, from letting the two independent treatises furnish their different kinds of suggestion and message; seeing that, with their differences, they had so much in common at least of aim, and even of arrangement. Comparison on other grounds I need not anticipate, further than to say how clearly my own sense of shortcoming enables me to realize the loss sustained by intellectual France last year in M. Hennequin's untimely death.

His penetrating analysis has, among other superiorities, that of being as readily applicable to the arts as to literature. I had of course seen the desirableness of discussing art criticism as well as literary; but had the prudence to remain on the ground on which I was most at home.

In that connection I should say that it is likely I have profited by assimilation of some of the reasoning in the pamphlets of my friend Professor Geddes, entitled "Every Man His Own Art Critic;" my classifications or formulas showing resemblances to his, though it had not occurred to me, in planning them, to avail myself of the help which I might have remembered his work was likely to give me.





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## SCIENCE IN CRITICISM.

### I. HISTORIC PHASES.

A HISTORY of criticism is one of the labours still open to the German intelligence; and if it be true, as has been said, that a science is not really known till we know its history, it would follow that we must remain for the present a good deal in the dark as to the scientific discrimination of literary merit, supposing, what some deny, that there is anything scientific in the matter. On either view, it is impossible to raise the question without a glance at the phases which the habit of literary judgment has assumed at different periods. Criticism, of course, is a process that goes on over all the field of human knowledge, being simply comparison or clash of opinion; and literary criticism is thus only a department of inquiry entered upon from the same kind of motives as lead men to scientific research commonly so-called. These may be summed up as the impulses of curiosity and self-expression—the desire to know, and the need to express notions. The trouble seems to be that in this particular line of thought the

latter impulse has hitherto been more active than the former.

And yet, when we examine the critical literature of Greek and Roman antiquity, it cannot be said that it is notably less business-like, so to speak, than the studies of the same time in physical and ethical science. Like these, it does not now satisfy; it baulks the intelligence and compels retreat to new methods; but it is hardly less circumspect a performance, so far as it goes, than the others. Aristotle laid his wizard hand on this with something of the same ordering power as marked his grasp of other provinces of mind; linking the analysis of literary effects to his psychology; and so strongly did he imprint his thought on the subject that till our own day critics have been discussing and explaining him as an authority. It is doubtless, as Mr. John Morley protests,<sup>1</sup> a disgrace to human intelligence that men should so long have continued groping for the true sense of Aristotle's dictum about tragedy, instead of going to the phenomena for themselves; but at least it shows how weightily Aristotle had seemed to speak; his measure of authority, of course, proving mainly the unprogressiveness of his successors. When we turn from the mutilated and corrupt text of the "Poetic" to Longinus, this is already clear. The once-renowned treatise "On the Sublime" one reads now (and only the specialist reads it) with an unappeasable sense of futility; not because the criticism it embodies is felt to be bad—on the contrary, it for the most part satisfies

<sup>1</sup> "Diderot," ed. 1884, p. 223.



the judgment and exhibits great expertness within its limits ; but because it is become, as it were, parasitic and dilettantist, a pedant habit of tasting and relishing and objecting, with no real outlook on new practice, because conceiving only of imitative practice ; and with no suspicion that literature exists for the sake of life, and not life for the sake of literature. Longinus lives in a world built up of quotation. Writing six hundred years after Aristotle, he is conscious of no forward movement since Aristotle's time, and confessedly fails to conceive of any in the future. It is specially curious, to a modern sense, how in citing from Herodotus what we should term a touch of naïveté or old-world quaintness, the critic objects to it just as we should object to a puerility of our own day ; he having no sense of antiquity in Herodotus' style. His tests, in themselves, are mostly sound enough : the point is that he has exactly the same detail-tests for the seven-centuries-old writing of Herodotus as for that of his own day. It raises afresh for us the question whether Mr. Arnold or Professor Newman was right as to the kind of impression Homer would make on Sophocles. If Longinus could thus criticize Herodotus, it would almost seem as if Homer could not have had in Sophocles' time the flavour that Chaucer has for us to-day—that Mr. Arnold was haply right in his hesitating supposition, and the stronger scholar wrong.<sup>1</sup> But the final chances are rather that the Sophoclean age *was*

<sup>1</sup> See Arnold's lectures "On Translating Homer," p. 34 ; Professor F. W. Newman's reply, "Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice," pp. 33-7, and Arnold's "On Translating Homer ; Last Words," pp. 17-26.

alive to the personal note of the ancients, though the much later age of Longinus was not, because in itself senescent, or rather living intellectually at second hand, not even on its own memories, but on memories of memories. Longinus, in short, has the note of that great dissolutional epoch in which, for hundreds of years, physical science made no advance, morals changed without on the whole bettering, and philosophy became a hypnotic meditation on symbols, a changing series of "doubtful dreams of dreams." He lives the reflex life vivaciously and expertly, hence his somewhat preposterous authority with his contemporaries,<sup>1</sup> in itself a sign, as literary dictatorships always have been, of epochal paralysis. It may be objected that in a treatise on the Sublime he can only be expected to handle style; but the records of his fame show that, himself a capable stylist, his whole activities ran to connoisseurship; and the close of the treatise reveals him to us once for all as a man only artificially related to life, an impotent moralist and a futile citizen. The interlocutor whom he cites stands out for us a valid and estimable figure, beside whom the phrase-spinning Longinus is a man of letters in the poorest sense. But indeed the nullity of his relation to what of free life there was in his time is sufficiently plain from the fortuitously famous letter of defiance to Aurelian,<sup>2</sup> a piece of *rococo* plastique to which the grotesque tragedy of his betrayal by Zenobia

<sup>1</sup> See the preface to Smith's translation, following Eunapius.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

and his execution by the emperor is a fitting sequel. He is the hero and martyr of style.

At the outset of a treatise on criticism I have thus attempted, not uncalculatingly, a brief judgment on a critic of antiquity, though it will be part of the coming task not only to seek for the criteria of just or scientific judgment, but to inquire whether there should be any judicial criticism at all. The immediate purpose is to set forth the kind of impression Longinus may be held to make on the unconventionalized modern mind, and in so doing to make good the proposition that the criticism of antiquity, like its other science, was unprogressive after the democratic period. The same lesson must needs be learned from the literature of Rome, in which Horace's "Art of Poetry," based to begin with on an early Greek treatise, still represents, with his other criticism, the dynamic judgment of a living artist; but is necessarily followed only by static commentary, since literature all round from the same point began to lapse into merely imitative life. A treatise like Quintilian's, which was but one of many, is at once the sociological and the literary testimony to the stoppage of innovating mental movement. And if Greece and Rome thus evolved towards inanition, it was very natural that the fresh mediæval intelligence, to which the recovered past came as a splendid treasure-trove, should be absorbed in homage, and should set up the old standards of static criticism, to last till the influx of new knowledge on all hands wrought the inevitable disuse of the classic moulds.



(Literary criticism is, in the fuller sense (to speak somewhat technically), the wording of the active or energizing result of the mental impression made by books; as all art, including verse, and all literature as apart from criticism, is an energizing result of an impression made by things or actions.) Its relative importance is therefore measurable to the common sense (which must needs repeat the critical process) by the scope of its ministry, just as is the importance of works of art, of history, of science, and of general didactics. The test is, how far does it instruct; or, more precisely, how far can it stimulate or control energy—that is, not merely by direct enlightenment, but by touching any side of the percipient intelligence. Thus if, as the ancients felt, Homer and Virgil stimulated and controlled action directly by presenting examples, and mediately by acting on the sense of literary beauty, so setting up habits of thought which told on both inner and outer conduct, the most important criticism of Homer and Virgil would theoretically be that which furthest followed the possible impressions from the authors dealt with. Such criticism would envisage afresh the poet's world and would sum it up in terms of the critic's relation to *his* world, which in the terms of the case would include their presentment of theirs, so far as he was awake to it. Further, his criticism would analyse the effects of style and set forth which were pleasing and which unpleasing, and on what grounds of experience or analogy. The impressions he made would thus tend constantly to impinge on



those made by the poets, and to deepen or modify them.

All this, no ancient criticism appears to have done. Aristotle's greatness lay in his power of coördinating phenomena of all kinds; and to him literature was a department of phenomena like another, to be criticized only in the sense of being analysed and systematically described. Nor did any mind of similar scope arise to instil purpose where he classified facts and explained causes. It remained still possible, however, either to discuss the moral world of the poets on the one hand, or to discuss their style on the other, and both of these things were attempted. Thus, when Plato and Plutarch in their different ways and epochs condemned the theology of the old singers, they were doing important and necessary criticism (seeing that they knew the crass religion of the poets to have an undesirable influence on many) though they did not cover the whole literary ground. When, on the other hand, the later literary criticism discussed literary effects proper, it was seriously restricted inasmuch as it included almost no such forward impulse as underlay the comments of the moralists. These were essentially creative in tendency; as truly creative on the moral side as were the poets on the imaginative; and a corresponding literary criticism would have implied a new movement of imagination, which conceivably could quite well express itself by way of demand for a fresh seizure of life, artistic and moral. But Longinus has no notion of such fresh seizure. He sets out to supersede

Cecilius, who had given a multitude of samples of the Sublime without explicitly suggesting how it was to be attained; but he supposes himself finally to gain his end by suggesting (c. 13, 14) that the way to be sublime is to remember how the poets managed it. Of course he enumerates the categories. Be grand and bold, he prescribes; be pathetic, be finely figurative, be pregnant and elegant in style, be careful of the movement of your periods; and he tastefully enough notes where success is attained by simplicity. But his prescription has thus, on the face of it, little or none of the conceivable importance of the moral criticism of Plato and Plutarch, because right style is by him always conceived of as the putting things after the very manner of the classics, which was in fact a sure way not to put them effectively at all. His real success consists in the vivacious giving forth of his own impressions: of true dynamic impulse, of the further-reaching influence on literary conduct, he is devoid, because on the side of the total literary treatment of life he has no such urging sense of inadequacy or incompleteness as speaks in the reforming moralists. His relation to literature is thus finally of a piece with his supine relation to things social: he has no message.

Horace, again, had exhibited his message in that fresh seizure of life which he made in his own performance; and, himself in contact with things, he could not but point in his criticism to the springs of movement.<sup>1</sup> Yet even he is sufficiently touched with

<sup>1</sup> "De Arte Poetica," vv. 286-88, 309-22. Epist. ii. 1.

the spirit of the age to play the registrar as much as the thinker, superfluously prescribing conformity to mythic tradition,<sup>1</sup> and adhesion to the arbitrary rules of the drama.<sup>2</sup> There was partly lacking to him too the forward-reaching temper, which in things literary seems to be analogous to that projection of the mind beyond experience which in science means discovery and new knowledge; and though later in Apuleius we have something of creative originality, with all his antiquarianism, it is evident that the literary world grew ever more absorbed in bookish retrospect, anticipating in letters the history of the State.

[It was small wonder, then, if in the Renaissance the critical practice was similarly restricted to a prescription of how best to be classic.] Not till a new treasure of ideas was slowly amassed could criticism even catch up the new imaginative literature that arose out of these. [Hence a series of schemes of the art of poetry which did but echo and expand Horace, Aristotle, and Longinus.] Vida, the "Immortal Vida" of Pope's "Essay on Criticism," produced an "Art of Poetry" that fairly typified the criticism of his era, setting forth with much versification the abstract principles of good writing, eked out by particularization of fine things in the classics. [You were to do everything Horace had said; and you were further to learn style from Horace; but also from the Holy Scriptures. You must not go beyond your powers; you must choose a subject to your own taste; you must treat it carefully, taking

<sup>1</sup> "De Arte Poetica," *vv.* 119 *sqq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* 189 *sqq.*



great pains about your words; you must be natural, even as the classics were natural; and for the rest you must study them to see how to attain great effects. It is the criticism of the schoolmaster supervising the manufacture of Latin verses: living literature is not within sight. Such tuition indeed helped the pupil to detect classic beauties, the teachers being men of taste; and this is of course worthy work enough, so far as it goes. What we have to note is that only thus far did the Renaissance classic criticism go, and that, in the terms of the case, this was thought to be the entire function of criticism.

In Europe, after several false or partly frustrated starts, such as that represented by Chaucer in England, modern literature may be held to have come of age (though only to enter on a generation of premature artificiality), with the controversy over the relative merits of ancients and moderns—a dispute that also marks the time about which it ceased to become a matter of course that works of study should either be written in or translated into Latin. It would seem indeed as if the very struggle for his inheritance had at once exhausted and tamed the heir of all the ages, so retrospective and so conventional, at first, is the critical tone and temper of the new period. We to-day, indeed, regarding our own as specifically the century of criticism, are apt to assume, in our dissatisfaction with the *débris* of the old codes, that it is only among us that criticism has really attained importance. “Until the last thirty or forty years,” recently

remarked one English writer of ability, though of chequered practice, "nobody here had ever dreamt that a critic ought to look at a book or author from anything higher than the standpoint of his own immediate passing likes and dislikes, or that criticism need be anything different in kind from the comments which young ladies make upon the novels that they recommend or condemn to one another at the door of the circulating library."<sup>1</sup> That is of course extravagant: methodic criticism is no such novelty even in England.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Mr. Ward, "English literature abounds in well-meant attempts, from Putten-

<sup>1</sup> Grant Allen, "The Decay of Criticism," *Fortnightly Review*, March, 1882, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> A similar extravagance marks the following statement:—"Criticism in Shakespeare's day must have been in great part an unknown quantity, though Greene has left us his 'Groatsworth' and Ben Jonson his colloquies with Drummond. In Pope's day, and later, it was confined to the pamphleteering of the Dennises, Ralphs, and Kenricks. In Fielding's day it took sometimes a less fugitive shape, if we may judge of its character from the prefatory chapters to his books. But not yet had literary criticism become in any sense a profession. . . . It was therefore at the beginning of the nineteenth century that English critical literature, properly so called, began" ("Cobwebs of Criticism," by T. Hall Caine, 1883. Introd. pp. xx-xxi). Mr. Caine has paid less heed to the earlier than to the later critical periodicals. Goldsmith in 1759 complains ("Present State of Polite Learning," ch. ix.) that "we have two literary reviews in London, with critical reviews and magazines without number," which he denounces for their malignity. And I have before me a dozen volumes of monthly critical periodicals, "New Memoirs of Literature" (written by "the ingenious and learned Mr. La Roche" "with general applause"), "The Present State of the Republick of Letters" (also carried on by one writer, who refers to "the other journalists"), and "Historia Litteraria" (more comprehensive)—these covering the years 1725-33. In these, however, the aggressiveness reprobated by Goldsmith does not appear, the ambition being simply to give an account of new books.

ham downwards through Sidney and Spenser and King James I. himself, to discuss the *rationale* as well as to exemplify the particular forms of the poetic art.”<sup>1</sup>

Puttenham, indeed, like his less scholarly predecessor, Webbe, does little that is serious, beyond setting forth in English, with a touching naïveté,<sup>2</sup> what was already familiar in the schools in Latin; and James’s “Reulis and Cautelis to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie” is just such a dominie’s lesson as was to be expected from him. Sidney, too, while contending for unity of time in drama “both by Aristotle’s precept and common reason,” must needs go to negative precedent for a caveat against Spenser’s archaism:—“That same framing of his stile, to an old rustick language, I dare not alowe, sith neyther Theocritus in Greeke, Virgill in Latine, nor Sanazar in Italian, did affect it.”<sup>3</sup> But Webbe, Puttenham, and Sidney are in a general way reasoners, even if they reason from precedent; and to some extent, at least in the case of Sidney, they hint of the stir of intelligence that was already sending forth that leafage of fresh literature, of which the remarkableness as compared with its immediate antecedents

<sup>1</sup> Globe ed. of Pope, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> His remark on parenthesis is typical:—“This insertion [in a youthful performance of his own] is very long and utterly impertinent to the principall matter, and makes a great gappe in the tale, neverthelesse is no disgrace but rather a bewtie and to very good purpose, but you must not use such insertions often nor to thicke, nor those that bee very long as this of ours, for it will breede great confusion to have the tale so much interrupted” (“Arte of English Poesie,” Arber’s reprint, p. 181).

<sup>3</sup> “Apologie for Pœetrie,” Arber’s reprint, p. 63.



will long justify even the tribute paid to its less permanently valuable parts.

Unquestionably the treatises of Webbe and Puttenham are grotesquely incommensurable with the literature of the generation which dates from about the time of their appearance (1586, '89), though they seem, on the other hand, to relate naturally enough to the factitious verse of Surrey and Wyatt, of the previous generation. Both writers are essentially pedantic statisticians, duly proceeding to catalogue those large facts of life with which poetry is concerned, but ripe commonplacers in their own thinking. Sidney, in comparison, has the virile note of the epoch, his apology carrying the ring of creative energy; though he too is fully half pedant. Neither in art nor in temper had the writers of the time much to gain from such treatises; the genius of the language evolving its blank verse with no countenance from them, and the new drama wholly transcending their conception of literary possibility. Webbe, though he praised the "Shepherd's Calendar" with none of Sidney's reservations,<sup>1</sup> aimed at an English verse with Latin rhythms, and turned the song in the fourth eclogue of the "Calendar" into unspeakable sapphics.<sup>2</sup> Sidney even

<sup>1</sup> "Discourse of English Poetrie," Arber's reprint, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Which have, however, won the praise of Mr. Ellis by their quantitative correctness. See his translation of Catullus, *preface*. Webbe's first stave runs thus, by his own scansion:—

O ye nymphes most fine who resort to this brooke  
 For to bathe there your pretty breasts at all times,  
 Leave the watrish (!) bowres, hyther and to me come

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in 1595 could see nothing in the new drama but its violation of the unities; and Puttenham's laborious pedantry<sup>1</sup> and laborious trifling<sup>2</sup> are divided by the whole current of things from the living work of his contemporaries. They indeed suggest the later running-to-seed of English invention, and may have partly inspired the lesser Donnes and Cowleys, who doubtless gave them the study which the Marlowes and Shaksperes did not.<sup>3</sup>

An efficient criticism, it is obvious, comes of an efficient culture; and an efficient culture, which means comprehensive knowledge brought into organic relation with life, only begins to be widely predicable of England towards the close of the Commonwealth—that is, precisely at the time when strong political and social influences were about to work intellectual reaction in various directions. Shakspeare, of course, is as much the soul of judgment as he is the soul of poetry in the Elizabethan and early Stuart period; his being the rare fortune by force of genius to assimilate all his knowledge; and his unimprovable critical

But the last stanza goes prettily and Englishly enough:—

Daffadowndillies all a long the ground strowe,  
 And the Cowslyppe with a pretty paunce let heere lye,  
 Kyngcuppe and Lillies so belovde of all men,  
 And the deluce flowre.

<sup>1</sup> See his list of "the names of your figures auricular" ("Arte of English Poesie," Arber's reprint, p. 318).

<sup>2</sup> See, in particular, the chapter "Of proportion in figure," *id.* p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Compare the chapter just cited with Addison (*Spectator*, 58, 63) who finds in his own day a fashion of trifling such as Puttenham had helped to set.



passages are the foremost of the many explicit proofs that, in Shenstone's phrase, "every good poet includes a critic;] the reverse will not hold."<sup>1</sup> After him, decline in judgment is only another side of the decline in poetic strength, which again correlates with the amassing of unassimilated learning. The age in which flourished the "metaphysical" poets cannot have had the kind of culture that yields dynamic criticism, save as regards just the issues on which Puritanism expressed itself for good and for evil.

[From the time of the Restoration, however, or even earlier, there begins to be apparent a real correlation of non-religious culture with action, of which the sociologically better side is seen in the scientific and free-thinking movements, and the rationalism, as apart from the poetry, of the verse; and the worse in the either restricted or corrupt artistic handling of concrete life which arose naturally from the socio-political reaction.] Even that, it has to be noted, is related to the rational tendency of the period, Pope presenting the moral and the dramatists the immoral side of it. [The resulting literary criticism thus tended to be corrective or negative;] and indeed, with the examples of Donne and Cowley before them the new generation might well recoil towards sanity. [Viewed in this light, the circumspect art of the Restoration and "Augustan" period is no mere retrogression, but a potential gain to the language and literature, as curing a morbid tendency.] In the words of Mr. Arnold, it is "an age

<sup>1</sup> "On Writing and Books," lxxviii. (Works, 1774, ii. 192).

of prose and reason." It is, however, the summing-up of that literary epoch that the general social reaction served to maintain the inexpansive temper.

The typical critique of the period, then—if a solitary masterpiece can be said to be typical—is Pope's essay "On the Art of Sinking in Poetry," which was, however, only posthumously published in 1741. Pope was, within his sphere, proportionally as much of a critic as Shakspeare; and here we have him at his critical best, laying his finger, consciously or unconsciously,<sup>1</sup> on faults he himself committed, just as Shakspeare might; burlesquing Blackmore—a kind of Augustan Cowley, bent on epics,—as Shakspeare burlesqued bombast in Pistol, only more comprehensively. This *was* efficient criticism, and certainly destroyed Blackmore in the long run, in the teeth of the successive support of Addison<sup>2</sup> and Johnson.<sup>3</sup> It is curious to contrast with the confident energy of Pope's derision of work that is devoid of judgment, the anxious courage and careful

<sup>1</sup> There is a story that some of his burlesque examples are drawn from his own early miscreations. See note in Roscoe's ed.

<sup>2</sup> *Spectator*, Nos. 339, 543.

<sup>3</sup> "Lives:" Blackmore. According to Warton (note on "Art of Sinking," in Roscoe's ed. vii. 119) "it is remarkable that Swift highly commends Blackmore in more than one place." I cannot discover the places, but on the contrary find Swift to have frequently spoken of Blackmore's verse with small esteem, though Blackmore was his personal friend and physician. The verses he drew up for inscription under Blackmore's portrait are in a spirit of merciless banter. The knight, however, had plenty of praise from other quarters; and the need for Pope's assault may be gathered from the language of the translator of Bossu (in 1719), who, though a man of some judgment, and disposed to criticize Blackmore on some points, yet attributes to him a genius "that comes but little behind that of the two ancient poets" (*Pref.*).

contention of Addison's defence of Milton, a performance as to which, in view of the critic's eulogy of Blackmore, it is not quite easy to decide how far his theological tastes primed the literary. Still, it is an essentially rational and discriminating criticism, efficient up to the point of Addison's considerable moral and artistic efficiency, and thus productive of movement of another order than the Augustan-pedestrian. Addison's plea for Milton, indeed, may be taken as happily representing, on the literary side, the seminal Puritanism that more or less obscurely persisted in the national breed all through the Restoration period and the next,<sup>1</sup> showing itself even in Pepys, as it did more in Evelyn and so much more in Bunyan; that took fresh start in the Neo-Puritanism of the Wesleyan revival; and that has chronically coloured our literature down to the present day. On other matters, Addison is mainly static, though generally and often energetically judicious; and it is not till the next generation that there appears, as part of the now broadened and deepened movement of historic rationalism, a deliberate and methodical survey of the bearings of modern literature, taken as something else than an imitation of the ancient.

7 This is on the whole not too pretentious a description to give of the systematic attempt of Lord Kames to explain and adjudicate on literary effects somewhat

<sup>1</sup> The Earl of Roscommon, who before Addison praised Milton in his rhymed "Essay on Translated Verse," was indeed not exactly a Puritan in his life, but Pope ("Imit. of Hor.," *Ep. to Aug.*, 214) accords "unspotted bays" to him only "in all Charles's days."



after the manner of Longinus, but more comprehensively and circumspectly. The "Elements of Criticism," published in 1761, represented in its way the expression, in the walk of *belles lettres*, of that movement of fresh analysis of knowledge which, reaching Scotland, partly by way of France, in a period of quietude after the long fever of fanaticism, yielded such remarkable results alike in physical and mental science, historic research, and economic theory. Kames will hardly rank with Smith, Reid, Cullen, Black, and Hutton, not to mention Hume, but he will perhaps compare well enough with Robertson and Adam Ferguson; and, after all, his "Sketches of the History of Man" is a vigorous and original if impermanent work. In any case the "Elements of Criticism" went through seven editions in twenty-seven years, and certainly counted for something as a culture force. Perhaps following ancient usage rather than freshly seizing a principle, Kames in his introduction speaks of criticism as "a rational science," "a regular science, governed by just principles;"<sup>1</sup> and he bottoms his series of stylistic judgments on an independent psychological analysis. An implacably conscientious analysis it is, recalling Mr. Bagehot's account of those unread works of Cornwall Lewis which so comprehensively explained what nobody thought strange;

<sup>1</sup> "Elements of Criticism," 7th ed. 1787, i. 7. *cf.* pp. 8, 9. Burke had used the phrase "as the arts advance towards their perfection, the science of criticism advances with them" in his "Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful" (Introd. 5th ed. p. 21) in 1756.

and indeed Kames throughout yields a musty odour, as of dry-rot, bodefully significant to those of us who follow his craft. Still, he put in circulation a mass of detail-criticism, often acute, almost always sound, and singularly catholic considering the environment. He always visibly thinks for himself. "Bossu, a celebrated French critic," he observes,<sup>1</sup> "gives many rules; but can discover no better foundation for any of them, than the practice merely of Homer and Virgil, supported by the authority of Aristotle. Strange that in so long a work he should never once have stumbled upon the question, Whether, and how far, do (*sic*) these rules agree with human nature."<sup>2</sup> Somewhat similarly had Longinus proposed to supersede Cecilius; but the hard-headed northman makes out his point rather the better of the two, harder though it is to make out.

X Nor was the undertaking of Kames the only attempt made "here," last century, to bring method into literary criticism.<sup>3</sup> Not to mention transient treatises, there is

<sup>1</sup> "Elements," p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps less than fair. The ancient criticism which Bossu followed, recognized that art rested on congruity. See the passage from Cicero, "De Oratore," i. 41-2, cited by Warburton on Pope's "Essay on Criticism," l. 88, and that cited by Pope himself (l. 98) from Quintilian. And surely the French critics saw as well as Pope that

Those Rules of old discover'd, not devis'd,  
Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd,

though they did think so much more of precedent than of fitness. Kames himself assumes (i. 378) that "no person doubts but that our sense of beauty is the true test of what is beautiful, and our sense of grandeur, of what is great or sublime."

<sup>3</sup> A general æsthetic method, indeed, had been aimed at by Burke, who, as before noted, had published his essay on the "Sublime and Beautiful"

the performance of Hume, who gave seven of his always acute essays to matters of literary discrimination. Neither writer views the task of criticism in the modern light as an estimating at once of authors and their work; though Hume insists<sup>1</sup> on the invariable application of moral standards, and Kames never scruples to indicate a low opinion of an author's faculty. Yet Kames, in deciding on the elastic dispute between Boileau and Huet as to whether the "Let there be light" of Genesis is "sublime," at once notes, while on the whole agreeing with Huet that "sublime" is not the word, how the piety of the latter would tend to make him more readily sensible than Boileau of the "depressing" significance of the fiat; and thus brings a gleam of sane science into a sufficiently hopeless controversy. On the final critical problem of the conflict of judgment, however, it is not too much to say that Kames blenched, contenting himself with an unconvincing assumption of security. He ends abruptly in the all-important chapter on the "Standard of Taste," just where the modern reader would like him to go on; and it is plain enough that he felt himself in presence

in 1756. That treatise, usually underrated, has many just observations, which in their day were original enough. As this:—"On the whole it appears to me that what is called Taste . . . is not a simple idea, but is partly made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the various relations of these and concerning the human passions, manners, and actions" (5th ed. p. 17). And again:—"I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power" (p. 64).

<sup>1</sup> Essay "Of the Standard of Taste."



of a difficulty. The argument establishes, easily enough, that "my disgust is raised, not by differing from me, but by differing from what I judge to be the common standard;"<sup>1</sup> but that, of course, does not take us very far. "Those who depend for food on bodily labour, are totally void of taste (!); of such a taste at least as can be of use in the fine arts. This consideration bars the greater part of mankind; and of the remaining part many by a corrupted taste are unqualified for voting. *The common sense of mankind must then be confined to the few that fall not under these exceptions.*"<sup>2</sup> This "selection," it is justly allowed, "seems to throw matters again into uncertainty;" and the critic is fain to conclude abruptly by claiming that when select tastes differ the appeal must lie to those psychological laws which he had sought to analyse; a perfectly consistent but not practically conclusive decision.

But Hume had already, in his essay "Of the Standard of Taste," gone further into the problem; had indeed analysed it with his usual thoroughness; and Kames, though following him, had not fully profited by his work. In other essays Hume had studied the conditions of literary advance, and the elements of permanent beauty in style; and here he laid his finger securely enough on the main sources of variation in judgment—degree of delicacy of taste, degree of practice, and prejudice; ending by allowing for inevitable differences of taste coming of individual development, idiosyncrasy of choice as between different writers all confessedly good,

<sup>1</sup> ii. 494.<sup>2</sup> Pp. 499, 500.

and national or sectarian prejudice. Reading him now one feels, not that his grasp was inadequate to his problem here any more than in metaphysics, but that his treatment of it is bounded by the rather strait limits of the literary spirit of his time. In practice, he was one of the best judges of his day. The essay "Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing" says a number of things once for all; and it would be difficult to improve on the purport of his formal restatement of an informal proposition of Addison: "Fine writing, according to Addison, consists of sentiments which are natural, without being obvious. There cannot be a juster and more concise definition of fine writing."<sup>1</sup> In an age which had little of the genius of Catullus he declared that "each line, each word, in Catullus has its merit; and I am never tired with the perusal." For the same reasons, "It is sufficient to run over Cowley once; but"—it was before the publication of Collins's odes, which Hume might have been trusted to appreciate if he ever saw a copy<sup>2</sup>—"Parnel, after the fiftieth reading is as fresh as at the first;" a judgment which startles posterity, and indeed is over-enthusiastic, but is not quite unintelligible. Hume is clearly not of the tribe of Rymer. Yet he as clearly inherits the "Augustan" temper, and thus gives vent to it: "Whoever would

<sup>1</sup> This may be a quotation from Addison, but I cannot find the passage. The purport, however, lies in *Spectator*, No. 62, par. 2, and No. 279, pars. 3, 7.

<sup>2</sup> It must be admitted, however, that he spoke in his latter years with comprehensive disesteem of the English literature of his time, making no exception of Collins.



assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton, or *Bunyan and Addison*, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole hill to be as high as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean." Something has of course to be allowed for the revolt of Hume from superstition (his strongest hostility next to his dislike of mobocratic and democratic politics); and in any case his contempt of Bunyan is perhaps not so preposterous as it may seem to a generation in which Bunyan has had a factitious vogue; <sup>1</sup> but the critic had himself expressly laid it down in the same essay, <sup>2</sup> that "of all speculative errors, those which regard religion are the most excusable in compositions of genius; nor is it ever permitted to judge of the civility or wisdom of any people, or even of single persons, by the grossness or

<sup>1</sup> In Burke's essay on the "Sublime and Beautiful" (1756), there is a remark on the possibility of making some readers understand the refined language of the *Æneid* "if it was degraded into the style of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.'" A curious tone, too, is taken up towards Bunyan in the advertisements of Cooke's Pocket Library, a cheap series published at the end of last century. The "Pilgrim's Progress" is included in the section of Sacred Classics, but there is added this note:—"Although Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' cannot come under the Denomination of a Classic Production, we have introduced it in the Sacred Classics, as it exhibits a very curious Specimen of the Allegorical Style of Writing; and from its moral Tendency serves to co-operate with other Works in promoting the important cause of Religion and Virtue. In an Age of Erudition and Free Enquiry, it must give a sensible Pleasure to reflecting Minds, to see Instruction mingled with Amusement, and the most serious and important Truths introduced to our Notice in the Garb of Pleasure and Entertainment." It is a "far cry" from this, in 1797, to Macaulay in 1830. Macaulay mentions, too, how Cowper had feared to name Bunyan in his verse for fear of raising a sneer.

<sup>2</sup> "Of the Standard of Taste."

X refinement of their theological principles." The verdict then is invalid by reason of literary conventionality. And there is a similar note, along with that of acute observation, in the account of the development of English prose in the essay "Of Civil Liberty":—

1 "The elegance and propriety of style have been very much neglected among us. *We have no dictionary of our language, and scarcely a tolerable grammar.* The first polite prose we have was writ by Dr. Swift, a man who is still alive.<sup>1</sup> As to Sprat, Locke, and even Temple, they knew too little of the rules of art to be esteemed elegant writers. The prose of Bacon, Harrington, and Milton, is altogether too stiff and pedantic, though their sense be excellent. Men in this country have been so much occupied in the great disputes of Religion, Politics, and Philosophy, that they had no relish for the seemingly minute observations of grammar and criticism. And though this turn of thinking must have considerably improved our sense and our talent of reasoning, it must be confessed that, even in those sciences above-mentioned, we have not any standard book which we can transmit to posterity: and the utmost we have to boast of are a few essays toward a more just philosophy; which indeed promise well, but have not as yet reached any degree of perfection."

Professor Huxley seems to me to go astray in his comments on this passage;<sup>2</sup> but it certainly indicates

<sup>1</sup> On this point Hume partly changed his opinion later. In a letter to Robertson in 1769 he speaks of Swift as a writer "whom I can often laugh with, whose style I can even approve, but surely never admire. It has no harmony, no elegance, no ornament; and not much correctness, whatever the English may imagine. Were not their literature still in a somewhat barbarous state, that author's place would not be so high among their classics" (Stewart's "Life of Robertson," in Robertson's "Works," ed. 1821, i. 51; Burton's "Life of Hume," ii. 413).

<sup>2</sup> "Hume," English Men of Letters Series, p. 22. In writing that Sprat is here "astoundingly conjoined" with Locke and Temple, Dr. Huxley must have been unaware of the extent and nature of Sprat's reputation last century. Steele (*Spectator*, No. 114) in 1711 calls him an elegant writer; and Johnson not only praises him highly but speaks of him as a recognized classic: "an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him high in the ranks of literature" ("Lives of the Poets:" Cowley); and again, with reference to his

inappreciation of the strength of the præ-Augustan literature. Thus Hume saw the problem of criticism restrictedly,<sup>1</sup> and without foresight of coming developments, even while asserting the backwardness of his time; so that, while it may not be possible to carry the analysis of judgment much further than he did, or even to carry the psychology of style much further than did Kames, it is perhaps possible to ascertain more accurately than they did how far we have got, and so to make our criticism a little more comprehensive.

What the Scotch critics did not do, had not been accomplished elsewhere; though France had produced

history, as follows:—"This is one of the few books which selection of sentiment and elegance of diction have been able to preserve, though written upon a subject flux and transitory. 'The History of the Royal Society' is now read, *not with the wish to know what they were then doing, but how (sic) their transactions are exhibited by Sprat*" (*Id.* "Life of Sprat"). Goldsmith writes that Sprat "in his diction falls far short of the abilities for which he has been celebrated" ("Account of the Augustan Age in England," in *The Bee*, No. 8), but this admits the celebrity. Dr. Huxley misses the point, again, when he complains that "Clarendon, Addison, and Steele (the last two, surely, were 'polite' writers in all conscience) are not mentioned." Swift surely preceded Addison and Steele in the writing of "polite" prose. His first pamphlet was published in 1701; the "Meditation on a Broomstick" and the "Tritical Essay" written in 1703; the "Tale of a Tub" and the "Battle of the Books" issued in 1704, and the "Argument against Abolishing Christianity" in 1708. Already in 1705 Addison presents his book of travels to Swift as "the greatest genius of his age;" and the *Tatler* only began to appear in 1709 and the *Spectator* in 1711. Addison's earlier work counts for little.

<sup>1</sup> A striking proof of the narrowness of Hume's grasp of literary effect is to be seen in his treatment, in the History, of the old story of Bruce's saying "I doubt I have killed the Comyn," and Kirkpatrick's grim answer: "Ye doubt? I mak siccar." Hume gives it thus:—"Sir Thomas Kirkpatric, one of Bruce's friends, asking him soon after, if the traitor was slain; *I believe so*, replied Bruce. *And is that a matter*, cried Kirkpatric, *to be left to conjecture? I will secure him.*" The episode is reduced to burlesque.



a body of criticism which influenced all European literature. ] Pope's "Essay on Criticism"—every way, of course, a less significant piece of polemic than the "Art of Sinking"—does but reflect it, or rather, perhaps, the ancient criticism<sup>1</sup> to which that turned all eyes; professedly finding authority in Nature for the rules, but always insisting on the classic example and the French precept, and so far from fully grasping the professed principle as to speak of an innovating success as a happy "fault" or "license," or "a grace beyond the reach of art," as did Addison. Dryden<sup>2</sup> had found Boileau and Rapin the greatest critics of his age; and it was just their special influence that affected for the worse his proper critical judgment. Rapin's criticism may

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Mr. A. W. Ward, Globe ed. of Pope, p. 48:—"His [Pope's] chief obligations lie to the ancients whom he enumerates in this essay, rather than to the moderns, to whom at the most he owes particular felicitous thoughts and expressions." And Voltaire, after praising Horace and Boileau as on a par, writes:

Mais Pope approfondit ce qu'ils ont effleuré;  
D'un esprit plus hardi, d'un pas plus assuré,  
Il porta le flambeau dans l'abîme de l'être,  
Et l'homme avec lui seul apprit à se connaître.

("La Religion Naturelle: Poème au Roy de Prusse.") This chimes to some extent with the judgment of Mr. Swinburne on the relative merits of Pope and Boileau. But Pope's drift and bias were surely set by the French influence. Rapin, Bossu (on the Epic), Fontenelle (on the Pastoral) and Dacier (on Satire) were all translated early in the century.

<sup>2</sup> "Works," Scott's ed. v. 108-9 ("Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence"). Rapin, says Dryden, "is alone sufficient, were all other critics lost, to teach anew the rules of writing." "Impartially speaking," he says elsewhere ("Ded. of the Aeneis," Scott's ed. xiv. 159), "the French are as much better critics than the English, as they are worse poets."

be summed up as a species of Aristotle by machinery. His work and that of Bossu,<sup>1</sup> though representing a good deal of intellectual labour in the way of formal analysis and collation, is not the spontaneous expression of a set of living judgments on current living phenomena, but as it were the decisions of an official

<sup>1</sup> Bossu [1631-1680] was pronounced by Harris to be "the most methodic and accurate of . . . all" the French critics ("Philological Inquiries," 1781, i. 18="Works," 1781, iv. 18). But in 1797, Joseph Warton, editing Pope, on ch. 15 of the "Art of Sinking" has a note beginning:—"A severe animadversion is here intended on Bossu; who, after he has been so many years quoted, commended, and followed, by a long train of respectable disciples, must, I am afraid, alas! be at last deserted and given up as a visionary and fantastical critic; especially for imagining, among other vain and groundless conceits and refinements, that Homer and Virgil first fixed on some one moral truth or axiom, and then added a fable or story, with suitable names and characters, proper to illustrate the truth so fixed upon." Thus four of the leading French critics were successively awarded the highest rank by English critics; Dryden crowning Boileau and Rapin; Addison Bouhours (*Spectator*, 62), and Harris Bossu. Harris is himself a critic of much disputed rank. Johnson called him, to Boswell's perplexity, "a prig, and a bad prig" (Boswell, ch. xxxvi.); and Mr. James Sime rejoins that he was "at any rate a prig with a remarkably penetrating critical judgment" ("Life of Lessing," i. 250). Lowth, again, declared the "Hermes" to be "the most beautiful and perfect analysis . . . since the days of Aristotle:" Horne Tooke pronounced it "an improved compilation of almost all the errors, which grammarians have been accumulating from the time of Aristotle down to our present day of technical and learned affectation" ("Divisions of Purley," *Introd.*). Hazlitt too ("Spirit of the Age," ed. 1886, p. 90) characterized the "Hermes" as "a work in which there is no analysis at all;" and Coleridge ("Table Talk," May 7, 1830) declared that Horne Tooke's "abuse of Harris is most shallow and unfair;" though admitting that Harris dealt "not very profoundly, it is true," with his subject. Finally, Dr. Richardson, Horne Tooke's admirer and expositor, inclines to agree ("On the Study of Language," 1854, p. 2) with Lowth, as regards the "skill of the workmanship" of Harris. Such are the diversions of criticism. The main value of the "Philological Inquiries," it may be said, lies in the historical section, which was translated into French. Harris's best performance, perhaps, is his "Dialogue on Art."

bureau whose business it is to see that all papers presented are in proper form, as per precedents accepted by all parties. It is indeed the bureaucratic enforcement of the static classicism of the Renaissance; though at the same time it typifies tendencies always likely to be set up in literature in certain social conditions. Briefly, it is the critique of conservatism in a consciously conservative society, whose period of unrest is held to be over. We are here once more in a period of crystallization, with critical dictators and a dutiful audience, facing a literature in livery and a society devoid of initiative, of ideas, of sincerity, of aspiration, but finding an intellectual gymnastic in scholarship.

This temper it was that naturally spread to England at the Restoration, political conservatism and reaction against late innovations necessarily involving reaction against the literary tradition of freedom, as far back as the great creative outburst after the settlement under Elizabeth; as well as against the obvious follies in which the old literature had ended. Actual intercourse of course strengthened the bias of the new generation to French models. Rymer was Rapin's translator and echo; and we know from Addison how the French authorities in general operated on English judgment.<sup>1</sup> "A few general Rules extracted out of the *French* Authors, with a certain Cant of Words, has sometimes set up an illiterate heavy Writer for a most judicious and formid-

<sup>1</sup> Bossu and Bouhours, like Rapin, had great vogue in translation.



able Critick." <sup>1</sup> If it be just to concede, what is urged by Mr. Ward,<sup>2</sup> that "Boileau was as little as Pope an apostle of the pseudo-classicism of the so-called Augustan age of French literature; . . . and the classical simplicity which he preached was not in his opinion attained by the sham revival of stock subjects of ancient poetry;" yet none the less was his influence mainly one of stereotype and convention, applying the tests of "*bon sens*" only to the extent of the critic's own narrow and inelastic relation to life and art. In him we have one more illustration of the interdependence of a man's general judgment in literature and his philosophy or scheme of life. A professed courtier, he as such recognized, roughly speaking, only one kind of excellence, that of judicious reflection and apt expression—qualities which are, however, allowed to be absent from some of his own most ambitious work—and his whole critical influence, while certainly resisting extravagance, made for the restriction of effort to these ideals. He was even disloyal to his own sense of merit, earning by his attitude towards Corneille the just blame of literary posterity,<sup>3</sup> and pushing at all costs that order of ability which best adapted itself to courtly standards. As the most influential "literary dictator" of his period [1636-1711]—following on Rapin [1621-1687] and contemporary with Bouhours [1628-1702] and Bossu—he may indeed have had some

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 291. See Professor Morley's note, in his editions, for an account of the more important of the critics in question.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*      <sup>3</sup> Saintsbury's "History of French Literature," p. 284.

of the merit claimed for him by his admirers<sup>1</sup> as bringing "*justesse*" and "*solidité*" into French literature, somewhat as the conventionalism of the post-Restoration period in England in large part got rid of the vices of the "metaphysical" school; but even on this view his work remains only a success of the pruning-hook. Certainly it was due to no seminal virtue in him that French literature later flowered afresh: devoid of artistic initiative, of human foresight, of intellectual *élan*, he had no help to give towards progress, no stimulus to creation; and as must always happen where the critic is intellectually inexpansive, his very rules for style, however just so far as they go, were inadequate and misleading by force of assuming to be the beginning and end of poetic art. To his influence X might fairly be ascribed the long postponement of poetic innovation in France as compared with England. But, as we have seen, he belongs to and represents a sufficiently remarkable critical period in French literary history—a period in which the national genius for criticism, for orderly discrimination, is once for all made manifest; but of which the permanent critical service to humanity is but small, by reason of the prematurity of the intellectual and social synthesis, as Comtists would call it, of the age.

(A clearer idea of the relation of the political and social thought to the literary art of the time) may be had by

<sup>1</sup> "Œuvres de Boileau," ed. La Haye, 1729, ii. 3 (*Avert. sur L'Art Poétique*). Cf. Demogeot, "Hist. de la Litt. Française," ed. 5<sup>e</sup>, p. 420. The latter writer, however, makes judicious reservations, though unduly ignoring other critics.

glancing into such a book as the Jesuit <sup>1</sup> Le Moyne's "Art both of Writing and Judging of History," translated into English in 1694, in which the same unprogressive and pedantic view is taken of historiography as we have seen taken of poetry. It is gravely discussed whether the historian should tell the truth; and the affirmative conclusion is come to. With regard, however, to some things recorded of Charles V. it is asked "what need that future ages should be made acquainted, so Religious an Emperor was not always Chast?" <sup>2</sup> and it is warmly contended that History in general had better "suppress the Vices of the Great than publish them;" Suetonius' "Lives of the Cæsars" being reprobated as an "Infamous School of Vice," dangerous to the morals of readers, male and female; and the translation of it into French as a scandal.<sup>3</sup> Of any philosophic notion of history there is of course no sign; but there is careful consideration of the question when and to what extent the historian should introduce, that is, invent, "harangues," after the classic and neo-classic manner. It is a relief to find so much of the play of free ideas as is contained in a story of an old man punished for reading madrigals by being "condemn'd by universal Consent to the reading an *Harangue* in *Guiccardin*."<sup>4</sup> But we are still under the reign of the "harangue"—tempered by epigrams.

<sup>1</sup> The number of clerics who took to criticism is remarkable. Bouhours was a Jesuit, so was Rapin; and Segrais, "the Voiture of Caen" (highly praised by Dryden), like Fontenelle and Diderot was taught by the Jesuits. Bossu was a canon; Du Bos and Batteux abbés; and Vida a bishop.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 71-2.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 107, 116.

<sup>4</sup> P. 180.



With the generation after that of Boileau, however, there begins in France a movement as recognizably scientific as that of the Scotch criticism which comes later. The Abbé Du Bos, who caught Hume's eye with his basic proposition that the human mind is always striving to escape the tedium of inanition; and whom Hume pronounced<sup>1</sup> one of "the few critics who have had some tincture of philosophy," came on the scene as Boileau was leaving it, and in his "Réflexions Critiques sur la Peinture et sur la Poésie" (1719) introduces a new method, marked by alertness and curiosity; psychological and analytic where the previous habit had been pedantic and prescriptive; one of the first breaths of the great critical movement which was to work such a tremendous change ere the century closed. Du Bos is to this day good reading enough. He goes straight to a number of central positions; making it a datum that poetry always has been and always will be read for the sake of pleasure and not of instruction;<sup>2</sup> that style-value is that which counts for most and best endures;<sup>3</sup> that it is "poetry of style" and not of measure that makes the great difference between verse and prose; <sup>4</sup> that dogmatic poetry is at a permanent disadvantage as beside elegiac and "bucolic," since we will always be most moved by that kind of poetry whose subject matter is most moving.<sup>5</sup> He is not a pedant, though he is a scholar; and he makes no

<sup>1</sup> Essay "Of Tragedy."

<sup>2</sup> "Réflexions Critiques," ed. Utrecht, 1732, i. 36 (sec. 9), 159 (sec. 34).

<sup>3</sup> i. 153-7 (sec. 33) and 159.

<sup>4</sup> P. 156.

<sup>5</sup> i. 34 (sec. 8).

claim, as did the too famous Bouhours,<sup>1</sup> to convey an art of forming a right judgment on all literary matters; being content to analyse and reason on general principles. But he is admitted to have influenced Lessing by his discussion of the relations of poetry and painting; and his fresh resort to and explication of æsthetic impressions forecasts Diderot and still more modern types of critic. He too, however, collapses significantly enough over the attempt to settle a standard of taste, desperately affirming<sup>2</sup> that "La posterité n'a jamais blâmé comme de mauvais poèmes ceux que les contemporains de l'Auteur avoient loués comme excellents. . . . Nous ne voyons pas de poème qui ait ennuié les contemporains du Poète, parvenir jamais à une grande réputation;" for which last generalization he quotes the earlier one of Curtius: "Tantumdem quoque posterī credunt, quantum præsens ætas sponderit."

To mention Diderot and Lessing is to enter at a stride on that strictly modern time to which the creative work of the old critical period is itself

<sup>1</sup> It is only just to say of Bouhours, however, that he is a much more helpful critic than Bossu and Rapin, bringing a keen and supple judgment to bear on the logic of expression, instead of grinding out rules and formulas. His taste is not ours, but it is ripe in its kind. His "Manière de Bien Penser" is still very readable; though he seems likely to be known in future, at least in English literature, mainly by Carlyle's citation of his once very pertinent question as to whether a German could possibly have *esprit*. Addison learned from him; and so, I think, did Pope. M. Demogeot seems to me to commit an oversight when, not once naming Bouhours, he gives to Boileau the credit of first bringing discrimination into the literary judgment of the time.

<sup>2</sup> ii. 205 (2<sup>e</sup> partie, sec. 26).



"classic"; but classic under the modern reservation of universal right of re-judgment. (So strong was the mesmerism of antiquity still, that rationalist Frenchman and rationalist German alike profess to convict modern pseudo-classicism of its shortcomings by contrasting it with antiquity;¹ but there is no mistaking the difference between this classicism and the old. A spontaneous judgment of life and art, a creative relation to things, is now the inspiration; and the citation of antique authority and precedent will not always bear looking into even as a backing to the new gospel. Nothing more decisively marks the trend of the new epoch than the range of its critical activity, as seen in the two types under notice. All branches of art, ethics, philosophy, sociology, history, are now alike embraced and alike reasoned upon.) Milton and Swift, Montaigne and Pascal, had indeed pronounced on many a phase of life; but never before had analysis so impartially and so insatiably fastened on every phase of speculative opinion. The work of Addison, intelligent and versatile as it had been for its day, is timid and conventional in comparison. (But indeed the transition is precisely one from an age of political and literary crystallization to one of disintegration and reconstruction; and the men typify their periods.) Diderot, "the most German of the French," the atheist successor of the deists, dismisses all old formulas, and in flashes of insight reaches beyond logic to new. The founder of dramatic

¹ See Lessing's "Dramaturgie," *passim*, and Diderot's "Paradoxe sur le Comédien" (ed. Bibl. Nat. p. 95).

naturalism for modern France, after first influencing chiefly the drama of Germany;<sup>1</sup> he is also, in Mr. Morley's phrase, the inventor of German criticism,<sup>2</sup> as Descartes had been said to have invented German philosophy. Lessing, half-consciously perhaps, made nationalist amends for his admitted debt to Diderot<sup>3</sup> and Du Bos by turning against the French drama, not always quite judicially, the inspiration he had derived from that of England; thus continuing the movement set up by Bodmer, who in 1740<sup>4</sup> had championed Milton against Gottsched, the then reigning German representative of the French Rapin-Boileau critical tradition. What we have to note, here, however, is not specific national tendencies but the quality and scope of the new criticism. It corresponds, in a manner, to the Revolution it heralded, as being a *tour de force* with which the world's intelligence could not keep pace; for in France the reaction certainly embraced criticism in general; and if in Germany Goethe and Heine successively sustained criticism as well as poetry and fiction, they can hardly be said to have had successors. It was with the democratic reaction in France that another great critical movement began—a movement which to describe in detail would need a

<sup>1</sup> See Lessing's "Vorrede" to the second edition of his "Das Theater des Herrn Diderot, aus dem Französischen übersetzt" ("Werke," ed. 1869, v. 243) and "Dramaturgie," § 14 (v. 49).

<sup>2</sup> "Diderot," p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* citing "Handb. Dramaturgie," § 85. Cf. Lowell, "Lessing."

<sup>4</sup> In his work "Vom Wunderbaren in der Poesie." Lessing, in fact, pronounces "Paradise Lost" the first epic after Homer ("Laokoon," c. xiv.).

separate treatise; and of which it must here suffice to speak summarily as having broadened for now forty years into the most comprehensive play of competent criticism that the world has yet seen. It is indeed too comprehensive for my present power of survey; and I can only surmise how inadequate, in comparison with that scope, is an attempt to suggest a scientific view of the business of criticism in respect mainly of English practice. But we must at least do our own criticism; and there seems rather pressing need for attempts such as that now being made.

Reaction in England, so to speak, did not need to wait for the Revolution. Literature indeed progressed far beyond the transitional "Augustan" stage: after the seminal Defoe and the pre-eminent Swift came Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith, in prose fiction; and after Goldsmith, in verse, came Cowper and Crabbe, forerunners of Wordsworth. But, barring Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," and perhaps the essays of Goldsmith,<sup>1</sup> there is no dynamic English criticism

<sup>1</sup> The essay "Of Taste" (xii.) is notable as making a vehement protest (*cf.* the "Present State of Polite Learning," ch. ix., concerning "disgusting solemnity of manner") against the artificial diction of the time, quite in the modern spirit; and there is value and point, though not enough of breadth, in his criticisms of poetry (Essay xv.). The onslaught on Hamlet's soliloquy (*cf.* the outburst in ch. x. of the "Polite Learning") deserves more attention than it has received from an audience which loves Goldsmith enough to be able to forgive him any blasphemy against Shakspeare; and his remarks on music and the drama are always worth reading. But Goldsmith's limitations are obvious, and the close of his essay (xviii.) on "Versification" proves his part in his age:—"The Greek and Latin languages, in being copious and ductile, are susceptible of a vast variety of cadences which the living languages will not admit." The "Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning," is interesting, but not powerful, save



between Kames and Wordsworth; certainly none that overtook and overpassed the European literature of the period as did that of Diderot and Lessing. These were creative thinkers: it is impossible to speak of Johnson as creative. The religious and social reaction against the great deistic movement affected criticism of every order, Middleton and Gibbon being successively met by a renewed ecclesiastical resistance; though of real theological revival, as apart from the Wesleyan "enthusiasm," there was none. And when, finally, Burke gave his strenuous lead to *the* great reaction, criticism could not but exhibit the prevailing tendency. That it made progress at all was due (apart from the, so to speak, singularly *unconditioned* genius of Lamb) to the fact that Wordsworth and Coleridge had in youth drunk so deeply of that very revolutionary spirit against which they afterwards turned like their neighbours. Hazlitt's inspiration was similar; but whereas his critique was only acceptable as regarded *belles lettres*, Wordsworth and Coleridge were able to make for general conservatism of opinion while promoting, with Shelley and Byron, innovation in poetic practice.

Thus it is that the subsequent criticism of Macaulay, Carlyle, and Hallam, has for the student the effect of a

perhaps in the chapters 8 and 9, "Of rewarding genius in England," and "Of the Literary Decay in France and England." On his remarks on criticism, see the closing section of this paper. His forecast of the future of the drama is worth noting: "For the future, it is somewhat unlikely that he whose labours are valuable, or who knows their value, will turn to the stage for either fame or subsistence, when he must at once flatter an actor and please an audience" (ch. x.).



fresh start, expressing as it does independent judgment, but at the same time ignoring what had been done in critical science in the previous century. We are confronted by a body of critical statement obviously apart from and more important than the work of the Jeffreys, the Smiths, and the Wilsons, and of course more significant than that of Scott; but we are still far from the all-round freedom, the eager analysis and the artistic initiative of Diderot and Lessing. Carlyle's work in practical philosophy speaks for itself; but his demonstration against religious orthodoxy never gets well beyond a feint; and Macaulay's business-like discrimination between Church and State was perhaps the more important demonstration of the two, though he too can be seen to have kept silence on many things; while Hallam only indirectly worded certain of his oppugnancies. For the rest, well-judged as is much of the criticism of all three writers, it remains substantially arbitrary, making little attempt at argumentative persuasion in matters of taste, and, in Carlyle's case, none too much in other regards. With them, we are still in the generation before the great campaign of science; and Buckle, who marks the transition, sinks on his march, leaving us to gather from his compendious though brief display of catholic appreciation, a baffled notion of what is possible to a really catholic culture. He is still our one distinguished writer who had mastered alike history, literature, and science.

It is specially significant of modern developments, however, that Macaulay, Hallam, and Carlyle, the three

most considerable English critics (after Wordsworth, Lamb, and Coleridge), of the first half of the century, are all historians. We have definitely come, it is plain, to a point of view from which all human phenomena are to be reconsidered; and if English convention brings it about that three writers of such authority ignore or evade matters of the most fundamental importance, which in the previous century had been discussed abroad and even at home with freedom, on the other hand they illustrate the practical philosophy of life, among them, copiously enough. It is perhaps not superfluous just now to claim for Macaulay, with all his irritating shortcomings, an endowment of humane knowledge and strong understanding that have made him perhaps as valuable a force for good in his nation as the differently gifted and more searchingly yet more perversely thinking Carlyle. Neither can be called the ideal critic; and yet nobody of equal influence has taken up criticism in England since their time of activity. Carlyle and Macaulay are at this moment among our most popular writers: Mr. Arnold is not.

Compared with the work of the three critic-historians aforesaid, indeed, that of the critics of the next generation seems at first sight restricted and unenergetic; Mr. Arnold, Mr. Leslie Stephen, Mr. Dowden, and Mr. John Morley, having all failed to take high literary rank by any one eminently important critical or historical performance; but the difference of range is only apparent. There is no narrowing of the sphere of critical activity: the writers in question—and the generalization holds

good of many more, as Emerson, Poe, Mr. Lowell, Mr. Harrison, the late W. R. Greg, and Walter Bagehot — treat of ethics, politics, history, philosophy, *belles lettres*, and theology, with, in most cases, proportioned attention. The new generation is abandoning the conventions of its predecessor; and already Mr. Greg, Mr. Arnold, Mr. Stephen, Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Morley have in their turn taken “unpopular” courses, and found them, as of old, not so unpopular as had been supposed. So strong and so general, indeed, has been the interest in the deeper questions of human faith and destiny, since the general forward reaction that partly began with Strauss, was reinforced by Mill, and was solidified at once by Spencer, by Buckle, and by Darwin,—that pure *belles lettres*, or at least the simple criticism of *belles lettres*, no longer receives relatively so much consideration as it did in the time of Hazlitt and Campbell. But on the other hand the belletrist essays of Mr. Lowell have had a wide public; and there has arisen a movement of æsthetic specialism, involving elaborate study of particular poets, which if it has not been marked by effective criticism at least shows that method is being brought to bear on the study of imaginative literature as on other matters. In detail, indeed, this movement has appeared to hinder criticism, fostering on the contrary a kind of sectarian enthusiasm which allows of no just discrimination of merit in the given author, and still less any comprehensive view of literary relativity. That, however, cannot be a permanent culture phase; and criticism must supervene



in due time, all the more effectively because of the interlude of fanaticism.

This fanaticism is in a sense, indeed, an outcome of and a protest against inadequate criticism. In that department the comparative method has yet to be applied; and the conflict of notions is at first sight quite sufficient to raise doubt of the value of any. As the strifes of *apriorism* drove men to phenomena, so the collisions of dicta on literature repel them to the books, with a kind of horror, for a time, of all general judgments whatsoever, and a lothness even to confess that anything displeases them. What must come, of course, is a new process of judgment, in which, if the study have been comprehensive enough, the conclusions will be logically related to many established trains of ideas, and will thus have the persuasive virtue of consistency. That attribute in any body of opinions gives a presumption of their general truth, and the next test is their consistency with other processes of thought; the criterion always being that universal logic by which facts and principles are settled in natural science. Now, criticism has hitherto at most sought to secure consistency of dictum within an arbitrarily limited area of impressions; such being the achievement of the classicist system of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and modern English criticism, with its much wider outlook, has not even circumspectly aimed at consistency in comparative æsthetics; while the further-reaching consistencies of æsthetic and sociological opinion have come still more badly off. On the



one hand, inferior poetry has been praised because of acceptance of its teaching: on the other, rejection of teachings has led to indiscriminate blame of their artistic expression. Faults in esteemed authors have been not merely slurred over but extolled as beauties; ethical standards have been applied at random; and the inevitable obstacles of conservative aversion to the new, and customary esteem of the old, have been present in every department of literary criticism as in social action generally. It is not that criticism is any more anarchic than politics; but in the latter department there is (certainly not more consistency! but) a more obvious sequence of cause and effect in categories of opinion, so that men get to accept strife of social judgment as exhibiting law rather than negating it. In criticism, motives vary so much more minutely as to seem untraceable and inexplicable; and whereas nobody in practice denies the possibility of political science because of the strenuous hostilities of parties, or of biological science because of disputes (a) among evolutionists and (b) between evolutionists and supernaturalists, pyrrhonism in matters literary is often more or less explicitly avowed. The reasonable attitude is, of course, not that of pyrrhonism but that of research.

In our own time, this attitude has been prescribed. Twenty-eight years ago, discussing translations of Homer, Mr. Mathew Arnold took occasion to affirm that although the main effort of the European intellect in general had for many years been a critical effort, "the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology,

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philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is," yet "almost the last thing for which one would come to English literature is just that very thing which now Europe most desires—criticism."<sup>1</sup> Of this general judgment, as later reiterated, Mr. Herbert Spencer has forcibly controverted a good many items;<sup>2</sup> and even as regards literary criticism Mr. Arnold exaggerated the national defect in the gross, though he might well complain of the restrictedness of English criticism in some directions—directions in which he himself later inconsistently sought to restrict it—and of the lack of scientific disinterestedness or open-mindedness in what criticism there was. Since then there has certainly been progress in these regards, there being now a number of non-partisan reviews of high-standing. There is still lacking, however, that measure of coördination that might be expected to be attained in literary criticism, in view of the extent to which it has been carried in other studies; and Mr. Arnold's own performance may without malice be said to have come short of its avowed aim. The very undertaking to see "the object as in itself it really is" was ominous to begin with; because "the object as in itself it really is" is strictly a chimæra. We can but know the thing as it is to our minds—to given orders of mind; and what happens in science is the gradual agreement among given orders of mind that on investigation

<sup>1</sup> Lectures on Translating Homer, 1861, p. 64. Cf. "Essays in Criticism," "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," *ad init.*

<sup>2</sup> "The Study of Sociology," 1873, pp. 217-236.

things are so and so. What the critic may hope to do is similarly to persuade given orders of mind, by comparison and reasoning, that things are so and so, and to explain to them why it is that to other orders of mind they are otherwise. Doubtless Mr. Arnold did this to a considerable extent, his gift of persuasion indeed outrunning his gift of demonstration; but he was too little given to scrutinizing and comparing his own impressions ever to realize aright the relativity of notions, or, consequently, to make good the coherence of his own. He thus provoked as much dissent as any critic of his time, while doing singularly little to resolve dissent by analytic argument. But he has left to criticism the legacy of an example of admirable temper, an urbanity so nearly perfect as at once to win assents almost without proof and to atone to the verge of possibility for logical perversity and failure.

And, needless to say, failure to stamp science on criticism is not specially to be charged against Mr. Arnold. Foreign critics with much more show of scientific method have provoked scepticism enough, and the greatest has not grappled with the scientific problem. It does not appear that Sainte-Beuve ever answered the question put to him by Flaubert on his adverse review of "Salammbô":—"Etes-vous bien sûr, d'abord,—dans votre jugement général,—de n'avoir pas obéi un peu trop à votre impression nerveuse?" His Parisianly courteous reply to Flaubert's keen counter-criticism might signify either a consciousness that the "impression nerveuse" had been unduly influential in his review, and that the



most convenient amends would be the printing of the rejoinder along with it; or that, the romance being still in his opinion a failure, though he had been caught tripping in his archæological objections, it would be a friendly service to Flaubert to let the defence be made the most of. However that was, he dismissed his friend's challenge with "J'avais tout dit; vous répondez: les lecteurs attentifs jugeront." Now, Sainte-Beuve, "the very genius of observation, discretion, and taste," as Mr. Henry James sums him up, must have felt the pertinence of Flaubert's query; and his omission to take up the critical problem it raised was a regrettable evasion of the most important question the critic can ask himself. If he were partly or fully conscious that he had—as what critic has not sometimes?—allowed a nervous revulsion to prejudice his judgment, he of all men had least need to shrink from the avowal; and if he felt he could clear himself, who could put the case more lucidly?

The best criticism being thus unrelieved of an imputation of final arbitrariness and inconclusiveness, it is not difficult to make out a plausible case for critical pyrrhonism by a free citation of the failures of the worst; and when authors, as they well may, print in contrast the mutually annihilative judgments sometimes passed on their books by different newspapers; or when a comparison is made of newspaper judgments on contemporary pictures, the chances of critical science look small enough. Hence more than one elaborate contention that criticism is but a cumbering of the ground. That proposition we must now examine.



## II. RECENT NIHILISM.

NIHILISM, rather than pyrrhonism, seems the right description of the professed thesis, as distinct from the actual exposition, of the recent volume entitled "Shakspeare as a Dramatic Artist," by Mr. R. G. Moulton, the able advocate of University Extension. Though, as we shall see, Mr. Moulton's practice is in itself a negation of his theory, he formally and energetically repudiates all criticism whatever, in the ordinary sense of the term; claiming to substitute an "inductive" criticism which, in theory, is not in the ordinary sense criticism at all, but description; yet in his own performance is found to be no more inductive and no less deductive than any other. Rather in respect of its undertaking than of its execution, his work calls for detailed examination.

It is one of Mr. Moulton's convenient assumptions that the "judicial critic"—that is, the critic who praises and blames—is by his very attitude partly disabled for appreciation. Perhaps, however, Mr. Moulton would allow that in "criticizing" what

professes to be a scientific treatise, the need for coming to a position either of agreement or of disagreement is so imperious as to make the judicial attitude in that case comparatively venial. In any event, one can but avow that one went to his book hoping to find something satisfying, not at all unprepared to agree, but expecting only to try his reasoning by the tests of universal logic; and that one nevertheless found incomplete observation, spurious analysis, and unsound argument. In such a case one can but propose to oneself a conscientious effort at an understanding of the position objected to, trying to see the problem as the protagonist saw it, and to settle not only whether he is wrong but how he went wrong—admittedly the only decisive settlement of any such issue.

Mr. Moulton, then, as I take it, started from the ordinary perception that critical literature is in large part made up of conflicting judgments; that these judgments are often arbitrary and unexplained; and that people obscure art hopelessly by persisting in forming and uttering such opinions in the old style. In particular he noted how critics had framed hierarchies of merit, and how even some whose judgment he felt to be generally good had fallen into absurdity in this process. From these data Mr. Moulton seems to have passed at a stride to the singular conclusion that it is a blunder to pass judgments on merit at all, though each step of his own reasoning in the matter consisted in such an act of judgment. Where he had a gleam of light, if I may so express myself, was in his

X feeling that formal criticism should rest on analysis; but at that stage, I fear, the light went out. Mr. Moulton incontinently decided that the process of analysis could be entirely separated from that of judgment; and proceeded to call the former "inductive criticism" and "science," and the latter "judicial criticism," otherwise, something anti-scientific. There is a quite startling simplicity in Mr. Moulton's way of reaching these conclusions. To show that "judicial criticism"—the criticism which praises and blames—is always non-inductive and always non-scientific, he selects certain old critical judgments *which he regards, and knows to be generally regarded, as absurdly wrong*. These he exhibits as sample cases of judicial criticism, *saying nothing of the judicial criticism which has condemned them*, but describing the survival of the contrary opinion as a case of "defeat of criticism" by "science," or by "authors."

Let us check Mr. Moulton's account of the single case of Shakspeare, which he takes (p. 11) as "only the most illustrious example of authors triumphing over the criticism that attempted to judge them." The history of Shakspeare-criticism, he asserts (p. 8), "is made up of wave after wave of critical opposition, each retiring further before the steady advance of Shakspeare's fame." One is staggered by such an allegation in the forefront of an exposition which claims to be above all things attentive to factual data. In point of fact the history of Shakspeare-criticism begins with an immense volume of contemporary and posthumous applause, including



the unparalleled panegyrics of Jonson and Milton; and it is not till two generations after the poet's death that any considerable signs of reaction are seen. Even Dryden, whom Mr. Moulton oddly cites only as cavilling against Shakspeare, honoured him in terms as reverently enthusiastic and as emphatic as those of Jonson and Milton; and it is only on the part of the extreme disciples of Boileau and Rapin, as Rymer, that one finds anything like unqualified dispraise. Now, even if Rymer's denunciation had set the fashion for his whole generation; even if there had not flourished throughout the Restoration and "Augustan" period, as we know there did, a stedfast Shakspeare-worship alongside of a different taste, the phenomenon would still be only one of a temporary change of fashion; and Rymer's verdict would be no more typical of "judicial criticism" than the applause of Jonson, Milton, and Dryden.<sup>1</sup>

Given, then, such a transient fashion, what should

<sup>1</sup> Rymer did not have it all his own way even among the French school in England. The translator of Bossu on the Epic not only takes occasion in his preface to cite Dryden on behalf of Milton, whom Rymer had ignored in a notice of English heroic poetry (discussing only Spenser, D'Avenant, and Cowley), but explicitly decries Rymer:—"Among the *English*, there have been but few that merit the Name of Critick, in that Sense I take the Word. Most of them are only *Criticks* in the worst Sense; that is, such as expose the *Faults*, but take no notice of the *Excellencies* of Authors. The *Judicious Rymer*, who seems to have a particular Talent for *Criticising*, yet in my Opinion falls short of being a true *Critick*: And if he will still dispute that title with the World, yet he must be contented with being reckon'd one of the meaner Sort; since 'tis more difficult and honourable to discuss and commend the *Excellencies*, than 'tis to find out and expose the *Failings* of *Shakespear*, *Fletcher*, or any other Author." Mr. Moulton is thus somewhat astray in assuming (p. 8) that Rymer was "accepted in his own day as the champion of 'regular' criticism."



be the attitude of the scientific critic towards it? Here it is that the incoördinate character of Mr. Moulton's doctrine fully betrays itself. He has been good enough to admit (p. 21) that while judicial criticism is "outside science altogether," it is literature in itself. "It would be false to the principles of induction not to recognize that the criticism of taste has long since established its position as a fertile branch of literature"—which surely amounts to saying that it is subject matter for inductive critical science. But just when, on his own principles, he should be merely registering phenomena without praise or blame, Mr. Moulton is passing "judicial criticism" of the most Rhadamanthine order, praising and blaming the critics, past and present, for their virtues and vices, and pronouncing the miscarriages of Addison<sup>1</sup> and Johnson, oddly enough, "odd anachron-

<sup>1</sup> It is a singular blunder on Mr. Moulton's part, by the way, to pillory Addison (p. 16) as "constructing an order of merit for English poets with Cowley and Sprat at the head"—that is, if the reference be, as I fancy it must, to Addison's juvenile "Account of the Greatest English Poets," a set of college verses. The reference to Sprat is as follows:—

"Blest man! [Cowley] who now shall be for ever known  
In Sprat's successful labours and thy own."

It is an awful couplet; but it was written in the poet's green and salad youth [April, 1694]; and in any case the allusion is to Sprat's *prose Life of Cowley*, not to his poetry. Nor does the praise of Cowley represent Addison's mature judgment, according to which Cowley was the greatest exemplar of "mixt wit"—that is, of "wit" only half-way between the false and the true—and inferior both as wit and poet to Dryden (*Spectator*, No. 62). See too the warm championship of Shakspeare in No. 592, at the end. Even in the crude "Account" there are glimmerings of the later admiration of Milton. It may be noted, by the way, that Pope was wont to call Sprat "a worse Cowley." Perhaps this may have something to do with Mr. Moulton's statement.

isms," when one would think that was the one thing they were not. False characterization apart, these judgments are of course only too natural, since to characterize critical judgments at all is to speak of them judicially. Only in terms of critical judgment are they perceptible moral phenomena. Mr. Moulton's logical suicide is committed in good company—that of Bacon, for one, of whom one of his editors has confessed that in "censuring intermediate propositions" he "appears to have been unaware that he was condemning the only forms through which reason or inference can manifest itself, and lecturing mankind on the futility of an instrument which he was employing in every page of his book." But looking to Mr. Moulton's purpose and preparation, his fallacy is, to use his own phrase, an odd anachronism.

If we take his account of the general movement of modern criticism, it is found to make his self-destruction, if possible, still more complete. "Between the Renaissance and the present day," he sums up (p. 18), "criticism, as judged by the methods actually followed by critics, *has slowly changed from the form of laying down laws to authors into the form of receiving laws from authors.* In its first stage the conception of criticism was bounded by the notion of *comparing whatever was produced with the masterpieces and trying it by the ideas of Greek and Roman literature.*" Why what is this last but the very thing Mr. Moulton says it is not—receiving laws from authors? One is at a loss how to dispute with a writer who thus unconsciously confutes himself in the very

statement of his case : you cannot be sure that terms are to him what they are to you. Setting Mr. Moulton and his confusions for a moment aside, we may perhaps best progress by constating a little more lucidly the phenomena he seems to have in view. Criticism always did, and probably always will, to a certain extent, "receive laws from authors," not literally or mechanically, but by deduction and insight, since it is from authors that the critic must have gathered, mediately or immediately, his notions of excellence. Authors, it is obvious, similarly "receive laws" from their predecessors, originality only consisting in bettering one's teaching. And the whole critical problem is, From what authors are laws at a given moment received, what laws in particular, and why these? In Shakspeare's own day, his product was spontaneously accepted on the strength of its immediate attraction, only a minority censoriously testing it by the models of antiquity. What happened later was that a movement of French influence, involving a short-sighted resort to classic standards, helped to cause a partial reaction, in which he was condemned in whole or in part. These censures were in terms of laws "received from authors"—other authors; but because they have since been reversed Mr. Moulton calls them "judicial criticism," and "outside of science." In point of fact they were just reversed by judicial criticism of an opposite drift, representing the lapse of the French and pseudo-classic taste, and the partial return to the Elizabethan; and now the laws were received from the authors in favour.



But it was not because the new critics were more inductive or more scientific than their predecessors, though perhaps they were so : it was that for some cause, remaining to be traced, their leanings were different ; and they accordingly praised and blamed as zealously as the others had done, to different effect.

On Mr. Moulton's ostensible principle, however, the formulation of "laws" at all is an absurdity ; and yet another aspect of his logical self-annihilation is his process of deducing from a single author "laws" which, on his own view, are never to be applied. In his "Survey of Dramatic Criticism as an Inductive Science" he professes to analyse the technique of Shakspeare alone. Something might be said on the pretensions of such an analysis as his to be in any case either dramatic criticism or dramatic science even on the limited scale of his professed inquiry, which only "endeavours to find convenient headings under which to set forth its observations of Shakspeare's plays" (p. 230) ; but it is enough that by his own account he can deduce from Shakspeare the laws for Shakspeare only. If, as his argument asserts if it asserts anything, criticism is to discover from every author the "laws" of his work, and to lay down none for him from previous authors, Mr. Moulton has no more right to derive "laws of drama" from Shakspeare than the French school had to derive them from Aristotle or the classic practice. Shakspeare, he tells us (p. 231), "must afford a specimen of literary tendencies in general, and that particular modification of them we call Elizabethan." But why ?



Already we had been told (p. 3) that Jonson "by the 'cross-fertilization' of two existing literary species" "added to literature a third including features of both;" and "founded a school of treatment of which the law is caricature." Besides, "inductive treatment knows nothing about higher or lower, which lie outside the domain of science." Jonson, then, is as much Drama as Shakspeare. And it will not do to say here that inductive criticism is to keep a ledger in which accounts, so to speak, are to be separately posted with the view of ultimately arriving at generalizations. On Mr. Moulton's principle there can never be any generalization, because every new author brings his "laws" with him, and these are—not indeed better or worse than those already ledgered, since inductive criticism is to "know nothing" of better or worse—but just as truly laws as the conceivably quite different methods of the other writers. Yet here have we presented to us, as data of scientific dramatic criticism, a set of formulas supposed to describe or diagraph the dramatic practice of Shakspeare. Is it that Shakspeare's methods are all the while assumed to be exemplary? I cannot but think that this is the clue to Mr. Moulton's procedure, even though he professes to repudiate any attempt at settling precedence as between Shakspeare and Jonson.

"No one," he declares in his preface, "needs assistance in order to perceive *Shakspeare's greatness*; but an impression is not uncommonly to be found, especially amongst English readers, that Shakspeare's greatness lies mainly in his deep knowledge of human nature, while

as to the technicalities of Dramatic Art, he is at once careless of them, and too great to need them. *I have endeavoured to combat this impression by a series of studies of Shakspeare as a Dramatic Artist. They are chiefly occupied with a few masterstrokes of art. . . .*" How Mr. Moulton can say such things in the name of inductive criticism, and then proceed to declare that inductive criticism "knows nothing of high or low," and has "nothing to do with merit, relative or absolute" (p. 22), I am unable to understand. But that he should throughout his book indulge in judicial criticism is intelligible enough, because all criticism is judicial, and what he calls specifically induction is at all times a part of the judicial process. From one point of view he has the merit, always important in a critic, of prompting readers to find reasons for their judgments, by resorting to analysis of a kind; but even this merit is in part discounted by the obvious fact that he is determined to see only wisdom in the methods he explores. His every step of plot-analysis, for example, amounts to the assertion not only that This is so, but that This is admirable; just as Rymer would say, This is execrable. In the very act of protesting against the criticism which praises and blames and frames hierarchies, Mr. Moulton exultingly announces that "Finally criticism comes round entirely to Shakspeare"—that is, puts him at the top of the hierarchy, as does Mr. Moulton, who pronounces him (p. 40) "the great master of the Romantic Drama." If the statement as to modern criticism be meant literally, it is not true; for even in our own day Mr.

Arnold has with general agreement protested that some of the writing in "Macbeth" is execrable; Mr. Lewes has with tolerably widespread assent declared<sup>1</sup> that "Hamlet" is a gravely faulty play; and Lord Acton has, perhaps not entirely without countenance, pronounced the poet to be flagrantly insular.<sup>2</sup> And for two generations at least Hallam has certainly had with him a multitude of thoughtful readers in his ascription to Shakspeare of some "hasty half-thoughts."<sup>3</sup>

As against all such attempts at discrimination, Mr. Moulton proceeds on the Schlegelian principle of finding good reasons for and subtle judgment behind everything Shakspeare did.<sup>4</sup> To what this principle may lead in darkening of counsel and actual perversion of fact may be seen from several passages in Mr. Moulton's chapters on the "Merchant of Venice." As these:—

I. The dramatist is credited (p. 54) with special scrupulosity and propriety in writing

"You that choose not by the view,  
Chance *as fair* and choose *as true*,"

and not "*more fair*," and "*more true*" [*i.e.* than the other suitors]. The remark shows a complete misconception of the passage, which means "may you always chance as fair and choose as true." Bassanio *did* chance

<sup>1</sup> "Actors and Acting," p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Art. on George Eliot, *Nineteenth Century*, March, 1885, p. 471.

<sup>3</sup> "Introd. to Lit. of Europe," Pt. iii. c. 6, § 40.

<sup>4</sup> It is right, however, to give Mr. Moulton credit for his intelligent suggestion (p. 61, *note*) that the line "How like a fawning publican he looks" was originally an aside of Antonio, not part of the speech of Shylock; and for his interpretation of the term "human kindness" (pp. 149-50).



more fair than the others: "chance as fair" means "chance as wisely" or "as luckily"; and he *did* "choose more true": "choose as true" means "choose so as to get what you want." Mr. Moulton's reading would imply that Shakspeare either forgot that the dead father could not tell which casket was to be opened first, or, in crediting him with second-sight, forgot that Bassanio does not know anything of the previous choosings.

2. Shakspeare is praised (pp. 54-5) in that "as if to warn us against" looking for the key to the suitor's fates "in the trains of reasoning they go through" instead of in their characters, he "*contrives that we never hear the reasonings of the successful suitor.* By a natural touch Portia, who has chosen Bassanio in her heart, is represented as unable to bear the suspense of hearing him deliberate, and calls for music to drown his meditations; it is only *the conclusion to which he has come that we catch* as the music closes." In point of fact the interrupting song is ten lines long and the heard soliloquy thirty-five; and the latter contains at least thirty lines of analogical reasoning as against not more than five which turn on character. "Of Bassanio's soliloquy," says Mr. Moulton (p. 56), "*we hear enough to catch that his pride is the pride of the soldier;*" and he quotes for this merely the three lines on the "meagre lead." Can it be that he did his exegesis from stage recollection?

3. Shakspeare is throughout credited with inventing the casket mottoes. A circumspect critic would gravely



doubt whether they had not been framed or suggested in some previous manipulation of the *Gesta* story, which had three mottoes to begin with.<sup>1</sup> A reasonable criticism would be that at least the first is badly framed. The chooser of the gold casket "gains" nothing.

4. Shakspeare is expressly declared to have "improved the story in the telling" in that (p. 66) he "retains the traditional plea as to the blood, but puts it into the mouth of one known to his audience to be a woman playing the lawyer for the nonce;" and again "follows up the brilliant evasion by a sound legal plea," and so "contrives to secure both alternatives" (*sic!*) of "choosing between (!) a course of procedure which shall be highly dramatic but leave a sense of injustice, and one that shall be sound and legal but comparatively tame." As a matter of fact the blood plea is put in the mouth of the woman playing the lawyer in the *Pecorone*; <sup>2</sup> and it is at least as likely, as not that the "sound legal plea" had been laid down in the previous play of "The Jew," alluded to by Gosson in his "School of Abuse."<sup>3</sup> It is hinted at in the declamation of the Christian in the dispute between Jew and Christian in "The Orator" of Silvayn, in the remark that in Rome it was forbidden to imprison men for debt when the Commonwealth was found to suffer from the practice.<sup>4</sup>

5. Mr. Moulton praises Shakspeare (p. 66) as having "improved his two stories [of caskets and bond] by so

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. W. C. Hazlitt's ed. of "Shakspeare's Library," Pt. i. vol. i. p. 364.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, pp. 343-7.

<sup>3</sup> Arber's reprint, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> "Shakspeare's Library," i. 359.

weaving them together that they should assist one another's effect." But even in the *Pecorone* novel we have the conjunction of the story of the winner of the lady of Belmont and that of the bond to the Jew by his godfather; just as in the ballad of the "The Northern Lord"<sup>1</sup> the *naïf* rhymers combines the motives of the stolen ring and the ill-used wife with that of the pound of flesh; and there is good reason to assume that the stories of the casket-choice and the pound of flesh were already woven together in "The Jew," which, as Gosson notes, represented "the greediness of worldly chusers, and bloody mindes of Usurers." These are just the sort of points that a truly "inductive" criticism would carefully look to in estimating merit and awarding praise; but Mr. Moulton overlooks precisely the material on which fresh induction should be founded.<sup>2</sup>

6. Yet again, he praises the dramatist (p. 72) for bringing the play "into conformity with the laws of mental working" by causing the episode of the rings to afford a relief of reaction from the tension of the Trial Scene, so that "the effect of the reaction is to make the serious passion more keen because more healthy." In point of fact the same relief is found in the *Pecorone* story, where the ring episode occurs in the same way, save that there is only one.<sup>3</sup> Yet Mr.

<sup>1</sup> "Shakspeare's Library," p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> In his treatment of Richard III. he confidently assumes for Shakspeare the whole plan and conduct of the play. Few careful students will follow him.

<sup>3</sup> As cited, p. 350.

Moulton confidently ends his chapter with the claim that "in this particular case the combination of tales so opposite in character must be regarded as one of the leading points in which Shakspeare has improved the tales in the telling."

7. By way of magnifying Shakspeare's sense of symmetry, we are told that "Jessica and her husband are the messengers who bring the sad tidings" of Antonio's peril, and "thus link together the bright and gloomy elements of the play." They are *not* the messengers. The messenger is Salerio, who, Lorenzo tells, "did entreat me, past all saying nay, to come with him along," when they met "by the way." Once more, was Mr. Moulton writing on recollections of the theatre?

8. The poet is credited (as by Gervinus) with having planned in "Macbeth" a perfect arch of rise and fall, with a turning-point at the centre, in the murder of Banquo. No note is taken of the fact that Holinshed had said: "After the contrived slaughter of Banquo, nothing prospered with the foresaid Makbeth."

9. The apologetic purpose works many flat contradictions. As thus:—(a) "Shakspeare is never wiser than the age he is portraying" in the matter of supernaturalism (p. 131). On p. 185 Lady Macbeth's "the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures" is taken as giving a clue to a whole life history of inquiry and speculation, since she "must have started with the superstitions of her age." Here, when Shakspeare *is* very much wiser than the age, we learn that it is only



the character who is so.<sup>1</sup> (b) Of Lady Macbeth it is stated (p. 155) that "in the kingdom of her personal experience her WILL is unquestioned king." On the next page we learn that "Lady Macbeth's career in the play is one long mental civil war." Words are used for rhetorical effect, in disregard of meaning and consistency.

10. But the crassest of the confusions thus created by an idolatrous as opposed to a judicial attitude is the following passage:—"In the case of personages *demande*d by the necessities of the story rather than introduced for their own sake, Shakspeare has a tendency to double the number of such personages for the sake of getting effects of contrast."<sup>2</sup> In support of this egregious proposition Mr. Moulton cites the two unsuccessful suitors in "The Merchant of Venice," the two wicked daughters in "Lear," and the two princes in "Richard the Third." To say nothing—as indeed nothing adequate can well be said—of the remarkable theorem that Shakspeare *tends to double for the sake of effect* the number of personages "demanded by the necessities of the story" (a piece of doctrine which is in some ways typical of Mr. Moulton's general drift), it is enough to point out that in the three cases in question the doubling is not Shakspeare's at all. There are two unsuccessful suitors in "The Merchant" because there are two wrong caskets, and probably because there were two such

<sup>1</sup> Compare p. 47 :—"Antonio must be understood as a perfect character: for we must read the play in the light of its age, and intolerance was a mediæval virtue." What then of Lady Macbeth's scepticism?

<sup>2</sup> P. 240.



suitors in the previous play; there are two wicked daughters in "Lear" because that was the legend; and two princes in "Richard" because that was the historical fact. Mr. Moulton seems to attain sheer hallucination in his idolatry. Thus he declares of Lorenzo that "to the depth of his passion for music and for the beauty of nature we are indebted (!) for some of the noblest passages in Shakspeare;" he decides that the blood-plea must have been "Portia's happy-thought," not Belario's—"certainly it was not this doctor who hit upon this idea of the blood being omitted;" and he discovers that "we must see the calibre of Lorenzo's character through the eyes of Portia, who selects him at first sight as the representative to whom to commit her household in her absence"—this by way either of vindicating Shakspeare's power of characterization or of vindicating a supposed actual Lorenzo.

Such are some of the phases of pseudo-interpretation and spurious knowledge arrived at by Mr. Moulton's quasi-inductive method, and presented by him as a contribution to popular culture.<sup>1</sup> He has laid it down (p. 25) that literary interpretation is of the nature of a

<sup>1</sup> I can but hope that these comments will serve as an answer in part to the contrary dictum of Professor Dowden (*Academy*, Aug. 29, 1885, p. 127) that "Mr. Moulton is an excellent and original critic, bringing admirably to light new depths of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of Shakspeare." This very high eulogy Mr. Dowden supports by no example whatever; and the rest of the criticism is so inconsistent as to make the whole more inconclusive than an average newspaper notice. It is to be regretted that critics of standing should add to the confusion of judgment by such obviously offhand and ill-considered deliverances.

scientific hypothesis, the truth of which is tested by the degree of completeness with which it explains the details of the literary work as they actually stand." We have seen how Mr. Moulton's "hypothesis" explains "The Merchant of Venice." Much might be added as to the perversity of some of his ethical teaching, as when he says of Jessica (whom on p. 85 he describes as, like Lorenzo, a "negative character," shortly after declaring (p. 84) that "all with whom she comes in contact feel her spell") that her giving the turquoise ring for a monkey is "a carelessness of money which mitigates our dislike (!) of the free hand Jessica lays upon her father's ducats and jewels"—this when Shakspeare takes care to tell us that the ring was a love-gift of her mother to her father in their young days. After all, however, perversities of the "criticism of taste" may be committed by any man, whether or not he professes to be scientifically inductive. The distinctive and fatal miscarriage of Mr. Moulton is in his handling of theory; in his confusion of terms and of ideas; in declaring that inductive criticism knows nothing of higher or lower while subsuming special excellence in given subject-matter; in asserting (p. 3) that induction "takes objection to the word 'decay' as suggesting condemnation," while (a) making it an axiom (p. 37) "*That literature is a thing of development,*" (b) stating (*pref.*) that Shakspeare made certain dramatic methods "obsolete," and (c) proposing (p. 39) to "leave a *dead judicial criticism* to bury its *dead authors*;" and in professing to know no laws of

art save those which are to be deduced singly from individual authors, while explicitly assuming (p. 106) certain perennial "demands of art," and implicitly reasoning from first to last on that assumption. It is a harrowing spectacle, in which the pathos of failure is dashed by a sense of the Icarian presumption which would neither hesitate to blame nor stay to calculate difficulties. Enough of the result.

### III. THE PROBLEM STATED.

ONE plank floats from the wreck of Mr. Moulton's enterprise—the reasonable proposition, namely, from which he started, that literary judgments tend in general to be arbitrary and in particular to be conservative. It is not, as he puts it (p. 2), that “judicial criticism has a *mission* to watch against variations from received canons;” the idea of any such mission being as wild a chimæra for the most “judicial” of critics as it is from the point of view of sane induction; but that the human mind is as slow to accept new art as to accept new truth.<sup>1</sup> Those who will take the trouble to learn for themselves what the history and the progress of science really are, instead of adopting the declamations of rhetorical scientists or ill-informed dilettantists, will find that new scientific doctrine has had just about

<sup>1</sup> Goldsmith (to go no further back) had long ago protested that “there never was an unbeaten path trodden by the poet that the critic did not endeavour to reclaim him, by calling his attempt innovation” (“Polite Learning,” ch. ix.); and had incontinently proceeded to illustrate the truth by condemning the use of blank verse for light themes. The fallacy here lies in putting “the critic” for “critics.” Conservatism operates in every field of human action; but not more in literature than in morals, religion, and politics. And a familiar episode in Goldsmith's own career showed that “the critic” can at times welcome an innovation.



as uphill a fight, against the "judicial" temper so-called, as new literature. In science as in art, great names reign; habits of thinking ossify, prejudice blinds<sup>1</sup>; and new theory and practice are suspect. Religion determines men's attitude towards palæontology and psychology; Bibliolatry sets them perverting the geological record; and a new theory in physics may still fight for acceptance for a generation against mere inertia—till the old and middle-aged men are dead, in fact—just as may a new form of verse or a new method in fiction. Doubtless a new scientific theory is now discussed with a greater degree of truly judicial or scientific method than an innovating work of literature proper; but for this there are reasons which leave it clear that the disorder in literary criticism is not a result of any inevitable shortcoming in literary critics, but of conditions of special difficulty in their task, and of special defect in their normal preparation. At worst, they are not further from agreement than politicians, ethicists, and sociologists.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "I see no reason to doubt that if Sir Charles Lyell could have avoided the inevitable corollary of the pithecoïd origin of man—for which, to the end of his life, he entertained a profound antipathy—he would have advocated the efficiency of causes now in operation to bring about the condition of the organic world, as stoutly as he championed that doctrine in inorganic nature" (Prof. Huxley on "The Reception of the 'Origin of Species'" in "Life of Darwin," ii. 193). But note Professor Huxley's whole account of the first outcry against Darwin in the scientific camp as well as outside.

<sup>2</sup> It has to be observed, too, that lay ignorance confers the title of "science" where the expert does not claim it. "In itself," observes Professor Schmidt, "the history of development does not as yet exceed the rank of a merely descriptive branch of erudition" ("The Doctrine of Descent and Darwinism," 1875, p. 10). Professor Huxley, again, some-

In science, however, the slowly developing attitude of receptiveness is the necessary accompaniment of the immense activity which has in a century reconstructed the scientific notions of the human race. So clearly has it been seen that the wisdom of antiquity was mostly darkness in these matters, that a conservative attitude in science is impeached by the very commonplaces of the schools. But not only is there this sanction as against the still operant forces of habit and prejudice, rooted in the physical apparatus of thinking; there is the further advantage in matters of natural science that the facts and the data are measurable, tangible, and constant. Usage, indeed, largely restricts the word "science" to departments of knowledge of which this can be said; so that it tends to cover for us just the permanent properties of matter and the physical phenomena of life—the concrete or objective environment, in short, as distinguished (so far as may be) from the more purely subjective experience. Precisely as we seek to include under the term the less verifiable classes of facts and impressions, the greater becomes the proportion of dissidence to agreement in the literature of each class; so that "moral science" is still a matter of habitually hostile schools, and a "historical science" has been declared by a living historian<sup>1</sup> to be impossible. Now, literary science, supposing there to be such a thing, must needs lie under the drawbacks alike what confusingly allows the designation of "science" to the "Summa" of Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Froude's "Short Studies on Great Subjects," ed. 1878, vol. i. "The Science of History."

of historical and of moral science in the matter of incalculable personal equation, with the further burden of the vaguely vast personal equations of æsthetics. In the physical sciences, the personal equation is trifling as a source of inveterate dissent: in the science of literature it is such an immense part of the dispute that it is hardly an extravagance to say the business comes to be just the science of the personal equation.

All this perhaps savours of commonplace; but that may be so much the better for our inquiry. Suppose we say that the business of literary criticism is the science of the personal equation: on that view we are at least in full sight of our problem, of which the first step would then be the survey of the personal equation. What is it? Briefly, our notional and opinional relation to the total environment, [*our* criticism of life, in short. So that our opinion of books is just what modern criticism has with something like unanimity declared the totality of books to be. As it was put by Hume, "All polite letters are nothing but pictures of human life in various attitudes and situations;"<sup>1</sup> or, as it is later put by Mr. Arnold,<sup>2</sup> all literature is "criticism of life." Our criticism of the book is thus just as natural a thing as the book itself: nay, our criticism is precisely, in the strict sense of the word, our appreciation or appraisal—it is our estimate of the value, interest, or accuracy of the criticism presented to us]; praise

<sup>1</sup> "Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding," sec. i. ("Essays," ed. 1825, ii. 7).

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to "The English Poets," edited by Mr. Ward, and elsewhere.



being thus as much a matter of judicial criticism as blame. Now, to ask that this estimate should be left off would plainly be to prescribe a contradiction in nature, such as eating without tasting or seeing without perceiving, or suffering without pain. Nobody can ask this: what then can be sanely meant when we are asked to judge unjudicially? Evidently that we should avoid taking our simple likes and dislikes, our assents and dissents, for a true measure of things; just as we should remember that while we may find olives execrable, or bananas nauseous, other people find them delectable. And in so far as our "tastes" in literature can be seen clearly to vary according to (1) some native bias, (2) degree of knowledge or expertness, and (3) didactic training, this can be readily agreed to. But the difference between the physical and the literary taste, varying as both do in the same particulars [for palatic taste is a matter of native bias, length of habit, and inculcatory, belike painful, preparation] is just that between a mediate and an immediate perception, of which the latter is not matter for analysis or judgment, while the former is. Thus I can readily influence or be influenced by another judgment on the question of the reasonableness of a plot, or the verisimilitude of a dialogue, or the wording of a verse; while nothing but constitutional change, perhaps producible by sedulous habit, can alter my conscious attitude to olives. The possibility of change in the former case rests on contingent ideas, which are successively alterable. I may be made to see something I had overlooked, to



learn something I did not know, to correct a misconception of terms: all processes which readjust judgment; and the possibilities of persuasion open to criticism in these regards are endless.

More than half the actual work of criticism in the wider sense, indeed, consists of attempts to persuade opinion on matters on which, in the long run, there is practical prospect of agreement. When and how the Hebrew books were written and manipulated; whether Gibbon is right in this or that statement on Roman administration or Christian beginnings; whether Lewes properly represents Kant; how far Comte's law of the three stages and his classification of the sciences are empirically and rationally sound; whether Pliny's letter or Tacitus' passage on the Christians is genuine; what measure of solidity there is in Mr. Gladstone's theory of Greek mythology or in Professor Müller's applications of the solar key to myth; how far phrenology is verified; what force there is in Mr. Butler's criticism of Darwin—these are all matters of "criticism," which we shall hesitate to divide into "higher" or "lower" when we remember the work of Niebuhr and of Sainte-Beuve, of Bentley and of Baur, and the kind of faculty that went to doing it. In such matters as these there is perhaps no more formidable personal equation to be got over than entered into the dispute of Dr. Tyndall and Dr. Bastian as to their tests for spontaneous generation; though in the various cases persuasion may be variously delayed. And even where, as over a question of the relative merits of novelists, there are

sources of dispute not reducible to the tests of evidence and inference which apply in the matters above glanced at, there is still much room for the use of argument and the clearing up of disagreements.

We might at this stage of the argument take philosophic stand on the final position that criticism (like philosophy) is in the long run the assertion of our personality in that struggle for survival which goes on among opinions as among organisms; but seeing that the survival depends on persuasion, and that the impulse to the struggle is the notion of persuadability, the natural course is to postpone the fatalistic clash to the irreducible or ultimate ground of the native bias. In so far as we can influence each other's judgments we do so. And to that end there is needed a simple classification of the phases of literature in regard to which there is sub-logical difference of judgment.

[Assuming the general position that all literature is the expression of human relations to or notions of things, then, we may say that it is discussible under three aspects: (1) its account of things actual or things imagined, this including all correction or impeachment of any kind of misstatement; (2) its presentation of the writer's mind; (3) the charm or merit of its expression in respect of language. Equivalent heads would be: What the writer sees or thinks; what he is; and how he speaks; or, yet again, (1) the objective purport, (2) the subjective purport, and (3) the medium.] Let the reader choose a classification to his "taste": each set will serve. Criticism is thus seen to be in itself criticable

literature, even where it is most closely restricted to judgment on books; and of course it always tends to go further; but for our purposes it mainly differentiates as an immediate rather than a mediate expression of ideas, *à propos* of other or mediate expressions.

Now, on each of the three heads of the division there is obvious possibility of variation of opinion in terms of the three aforesaid forces of bias, expertness, and lessoning; that is to say, I pronounce on an author's picture of life or account of facts, on his personality, and on his style, in the light of the three dispositions of hereditary leaning, teaching, and hability; being (a) rather loose or rather precise in my observation, rational or passionate in my tendency of thought, by force of cast of brain and nerves; (b) prepared to look for merit or demerit according as I have been taught or persuaded; (c) appreciative or unappreciative of skill or crudity according as more or less familiarity with many performances has let me know whether a given effect is easy or difficult, commonplace or subtle. I fear all this anatomy and arithmetic will be found repellent; but perhaps I may without raising further protest add the old factor ("enveloping action," we might call it, to borrow a phrase from Mr. Moulton) of individual nervous variation from day to day; in respect of which I may one day find tedious a description of scenery which on another would interest me; or now be moved to incipient hysteria where anon I should simply cognize pathos. Given the other forms of variation as part of the subject matter of critical science, this last might for



comparative purposes be technically termed the personal equation proper; though in a sense it is about as calculable as the rest, and though most practised critics probably make some allowance for it in their work.

Thus far we are in a position to partly explain a given conflict of judgment—say the difference between Rymer's view of Shakspeare and Coleridge's or our own. Seeing that hability in or familiarity with a given style or form affects our appreciation of it, change of style appears as a necessary movement, in which either an author modifies his manner, as Shakspeare progressed in concision and complexity, or Keats towards form; or a new writer's peculiarity of note pleases by novelty; or men consciously avoid a manner which has grown to seem to them laboured or affected. Thus verse style would and will change as inevitably as that of music, costume, or architecture. But after Shakspeare there happened also social, political, and religious changes which eventuated at one period in a certain conscious precision and sophistication of manners, particular ways of thinking on conduct and bearing, a fashionable philosophy of life, and a special conventional pitch and measure of diction; so that many people in the period in question found the Shakspearean pictures of life wild and the Shakspearean style barbarous. It only needed that the reigning conventions should in turn pall, and come to seem cheap and mechanical, in order that new judgments should be framed and old forms and ideas be returned to with gradual avidity; and in so



far as these forms are still preferred to those of the interregnum, the simplest explanation is that the former are the more effectively related to the tendencies of a freely developing literature and society, assuming our literature to be now developing more freely, in respect of social pressure or class taste, than that of the Restoration and "Augustan" period. We class the literary interregnum, in short, as a variation that did not persist; and looking from our point of view at life and destiny, we satisfy ourselves that, while it did a service as an interregnum, we can see in its jejune reasoning and consciously artificial key and style a kind of ineptitude of thought and speech, amounting to a falling off in total vitality which it was well to have got past. Beyond this, criticism need not go; but thus far, on the assumptions made, it must go. If the Pope school strikes charmlessly on our sense to-day, we must needs ask ourselves why; and if, relatively to our pulse and philosophy, it is thus shallow and sapless, there is nothing for it but to so rank it in our literary cosmos, because that cosmos must have ourselves for its centre. But it does not follow that we shall either dismiss it from our ken or fail to see in it an important chapter in literary development. Some taste, some preference of our own we must needs have: we must either wear wigs and powder and swords or not, stiff collars or not; and we have collectively abandoned wigs and powder and swords, though mostly holding piously to stiff collars. Yet we can recognize in the wigs and

frills and swords a certain grace and decorum, not without fascination; just as, while we prefer waltzing, we discover that the minuet was in its way a difficult dance enough, calling for physical poise and command of carriage; and thus add critical applause to our pleased sense of its careful grace. So, while choosing for ourselves a freer play of muscle and nerve, we can look in on the old music-room, with its straitened insonorous instruments, and applaud the visible skill of phrase and measure, a little less patronizingly perhaps than does the poet in listening to "a toccata of Galuppi's," but with the same sense of looking back on a withered world, living on in faint fragrances. Indeed, in our classification of aspects of literature, we should keep room for the strictly historic or technico-historic interest of every past art form to those interested in art. Liking or disliking a given style, we still read to see how they wrote in those days.

Does all this sound arbitrary and uncatholic? Or other than "scientific"? At least there is no oblivion of the relativity of the judgment; and the due recognition of this relativity we tentatively assumed to secure the reduction of our criticism to the scientific form. I cannot in the nature of things be a good eighteenth-century Popean and a good Tennysonian. I may incline to suspect that Pope's total cerebation would compare very well with Tennyson's—the cerebation of leading poets giving a very doubtful clue to the average cerebation of their periods—but in

the matter of art and language, rhythms and music, I cannot choose but prefer the modern, for the same reasons that make me prefer Shakspeare to the Popeans on the points in question. The fashion may change, of course: social evolution may yet take paths parallel to those followed before and after the Restoration; in which case nothing may convince the generation on these paths that to-day's taste is more healthily related to progress than that which we now describe as non-viable. In which view, if haply some of our seniors still challenge us in the names alike of Pope and Byron, there is a common ground in philosophy for all. If my senior thinks Byron a finer poet than Tennyson, or Pope a greater than either, saying nothing of Shakspeare, I formally account to myself for his views on the score of his education and usage; while he may account for my aberration in terms of a variation destined to be abortive. If each is inconvincible; if he cannot learn to see futility in Byron's rhetoric and awkwardness in his verse, and to hear thinness in Pope's cadences, while I remain mostly obdurate to the spells of the heroic couplet and the Byronic stanza, blank verse, and character-type, our "criticism" remains just a matter for others to decide upon. But if time prove to be on my side, as I of course suspect will be the case, the residual fact will be that my "taste" was nearer the main line of evolution than his.

We have spoken of "total cerebration," implying a kind of test different from the strictly artistic—the



criticism, in short, of the writer's presentment of life and of his own personality, the two first orders of our classification of the phases of literature as distinguished from the third—or rather estimating the last in terms of the others. In judging of these, as before noted, all three forces of individual variation come into play, just as in our estimate of literary and artistic form. As thus. If the question is of Ben Jonson, my personal bias as regards taste for "naturalist" truth and "observed" characterization will determine the degree of pleasure or displeasure with which I read "Every Man" and "Volpone," or "Catiline" and "Sejanus." It will make little difference—unless I am more obtuse than the average reader—whether or not I bethink me of Mr. Moulton's view that "Jonson founded a school of treatment of which the law is caricature;" for I have my notions as to what is good caricature. In point of fact, there is no reason for holding that Jonson meant caricature<sup>1</sup> any more in "Epicœne" than in "Bartholomew Fair," though there is a wide difference in the kinds of effect produced by these two plays. The word is vague; and some people might be disposed to call the "Fair" caricature and "Epicœne" idealized comedy. In point of fact the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Moulton, while agreeing as to the caricature, attributes the charge to the "judicial criticism" which censures Jonson. It is very unlikely, however, that the criticism in question denied the possibility of merit in caricature: the notion presumably was and is that Jonson's characters merely misrepresent humanity in the attempt to represent or satirize it. Satire, as Mr. Brooke urges, "must be true up to a certain point;" and this was doubtless what the judicial critic meant to enforce.



former comes home to us as reporting much observation, while the latter suggests certainly some observation and, with much motiveless fantasy, some caricature. A probably acceptable definition of the last term would be, "humorous exaggeration of observed character," since this view alone would square with its important pictorial application; and in this sense it can no more be applied to such a play as "Volpone" than to a Senecan tragedy. These personified vices, virtues, passions, and foibles, baldly labelled as such, are painted from nothing and resemble nothing: they edify at best as one is edified by the ugliest of the freakish "caricatures" of Da Vinci, in which faces drop humanness without becoming recognizably bestial, as in the demons of mediæval art generally. Falstaff, if you will, is a caricature, the raciest ever drawn, known as such by the facts that (1) he moves mirth in a cultured reader, which Jonson, broadly speaking, never does; and (2) he can be readily conceived in any Shakspearean group of English characters, joining congruously in talk and action, though always in the burlesque key. Jonson's types, on the other hand, are unthinkable in their own or any other environment. A true and verifiable account of his comedies would be that he simply framed plots and personages suited to the cruder taste, always abundantly represented, of the English audience, which to this day delights in plots made up of accidents, and persons made up of one phase.

It is one of Mr. Moulton's *quasi*-propositions (p. 3)

that if Jonson's "new species" be an "easier form of art, it does not on that account lose its claim to be analysed." The half admission as to the "easier form" is significant: it concedes the vital point urged by Heine<sup>1</sup> as against those who preferred Schiller's high-toned types to the subtly natural transcriptions of Goethe—that it takes a rarer and more complex mental process to convincingly reproduce nature than to project eloquent phantoms; which is a plain discrimination of higher and lower. But, setting that aside, what shall we make of the "claim to be analysed"? Who ever denied it? What did the hostile "judicial" critics do but analyse in order to reach their conclusions that Jonson did not draw human beings, and that he is in a measure "responsible for the decay of the English drama"? They analysed, doubtless, in a different way from Mr. Moulton, who hopes to enforce the greatness of Shakspeare by analyses which, even if true, only suggest greatness after you have made up your mind that whatever you will find in Shakspeare is great. They presumably analysed plots, motives, diction, and dialogue, and found the mechanism and the trappings consistently unsatisfying. Despite Dryden's singular eulogy of "The Silent Woman"<sup>2</sup> for almost unbroken adherence to the unities, for oneness of action, and for "great and noble" intrigue, they perhaps

<sup>1</sup> "Die romantische Schule," Erstes Buch. ("Werke," Ausg. in 12 Bänden, iii. 152.)

<sup>2</sup> "Essay on Dramatic Poesy. Works, Scott's, ed. xv. 354-361.

decided that the only unity observed in the piece is that of time; that, as in most of Jonson's plays, there are several extraneous actions; that what Dryden calls the aim is only the *denoûment*; that of the several intrigues there is not one within a thousand miles of greatness and nobility; and that, in short, the only deserved part of Dryden's praise is the remark that "the conversation of gentlemen in the persons of Truewit and his friends is described with more gaiety, air, and freedom than in the rest of Jonson's comedies." These, be it observed, are matters easily settled in the estimation of any roomful of educated men or dramatic critics: the unity of an action is not a "question of taste" for the majority of instructed people. And, again, despite Coleridge's<sup>1</sup> inclusion of the "Alchemist" in a list of the three best plots in literature [with the "Ædipus" and "Tom Jones"!] the judicial critics may have ventured to think that the want of vitality and continuity in the virtuous or successful interest is rather ruinous—that a play of which the main strength runs so much to the exposure of rogues that the final success of the honest folk is insignificant and fortuitous—that this is neither strong comedy nor perfect plot. In the other plays the "judicial" analysis may have been similarly damaging.

Over Jonson as over Pope, however, artistic dissatisfaction is not all-absorbing, and does not exclude artistic approbation. Both writers, like all men im-

<sup>1</sup> "Table Talk," July 5, 1834.



portant in their day, are permanently interesting in themselves; and, like all powerful performers, both are interesting in respect of their method and their special gifts. If Jonson as a dramatist in the main misrepresented life, his misrepresentation is energetic and striking; and in his muscular style he at times rings a true note of expression even in the dramas; while in his other verse and in his criticism he is one of the most memorable of writers. As a tragic dramatist he is a singular case of strenuous unsuccess; and yet he is massive in his very futility. Hazlitt's praise of "Sejanus" as an "admirable piece of ancient mosaic" is fatally suggestive; and his further rhetoric no less so. "The principal character," says the facile eulogist, "gives one the idea of a lofty column of solid granite, nodding to its base from its pernicious height (*sic*) and dashed in pieces by a breath of air, a word of its creator—feared, not pitied, scorned, unwept, and forgotten." Is it so with granite pillars, then? And then, who is the principal figure? Sooth to say, all are granite pillars together—of that particular order. It is a tragedy without action; with hardly more than one tolerable situation, that of Drusus striking Sejanus at the end of Act i. The second female figure, Livia, is deplorably handled, appearing only to discuss her fucuses, and reaching no individuality; Sejanus does not even die on the stage; and the one touch of real pathos, the story of the children, is also undramatized, and blotted out by moralizing. We are outraged too, on the side of style, by Jonson's execrable fashion



of putting the severed halves of a word in two lines :<sup>1</sup>

“ Pray Augusta, then,  
That for her own, great Cæsar's, and the pub-  
lic safety, she be pleased to urge these dangers ” (ii. 2).

And yet there lives in the memory the cry of old Silius :

“ O, ye equal gods  
Whose justice not a world of wolf-turn'd men  
Shall cause me to accuse, howe'er provok'd ” (iii. 1) ;

and such a touch as Arruntius' picture of Tiberius

“ Acting his tragedies with a comic face,  
Amidst his rout of Chaldees ” (iii. 5),

brings us in contact with a virile judgment, realizing in its way the drama of antiquity. The same forceful personality comes on us in the “ Ode to Himself ” in the “ Underwoods ” ; and in the Epigram on Inigo Jones :

“ The Lybian lion hunts no butterflies. ”—  
“ Thy forehead is too narrow for my brand. ”

And at times the burly muscles achieve a curious grace, as in the familiar “ Drink to me only with thine eyes ; ” in that other song in “ The Forest, ” “ That Women are but Men's Shadows ; ” in the “ Charm ” and the echo-song in the “ Masque of Blackness ; ” in such a flash as this in “ The Vision of Delight ” :

“ How better than they are, are all things made,  
By Wonder ! ”

<sup>1</sup> Compare the Epistle to Master Colby, in “ Underwoods, ” and the Expostulation with Inigo Jones.

and in such a strain as this in "The Masque of Beauty":

"So Beauty on the waters stood  
 When Love had sever'd earth from flood!  
 So when he parted air from fire  
 He did with concord all inspire!  
 And then a motion he them taught,  
 That elder than himself was thought,  
 Which thought was, yet, the child of earth,  
 For Love is elder than his birth."

Well, one passes judicial criticism on Jonson to the effect that his was on the whole an unfortunate literary variation, in itself and in respect of its consequences ill-related to the mental and neural life of to-day; and we say this with a conscious eye to what seem to us the elements of eternal fitness in Shakspeare. Yet we remain fully alive to the strong interest of Jonson's mind, character, and work, and recommend him not only to the literary student as a great figure in the history of technique, but to the general reader as affording lights on the intellectual and art life of the Shakspearean period which are not to be got in Shakspeare. That sufficiently said, judicial criticism has, broadly speaking, done its work with him. And some such process of discrimination, I would say, is really a matter of course in any sort of criticism which deals with the matter; even Mr. Moulton obviously framing his own cosmos and hierarchy while demurring to those of other people.

In Jonson's case our residual impression, being one of a very considerable total cerebration, may leave him

bulking really largely in our mental vista of historic figures ; and the circumstance suggests plainly enough that a scientific criticism should classify or conceive of relative intellectual importance with an eye to other than merely literary importance. When an erudite and enthusiastic critic, such as Mr. Swinburne, is found habitually dividing writers into classes of gods and demigods, or gods and giants (Jonson, I think, is one of the giants in this cosmology), one feels, besides the turgidity of the diction, a certain professional limitation in the naïve narrowing of the outlook to just those forms of literary art which consist in rendering thought on things human in verse or prose with an artistic as distinct from a scientific purpose. In the celestial hierarchy of this order of criticism, verbal art escapes all test of comparison with other forms of energy : Chaucer is unneighbourd by Roger Bacon, Shakspeare by Verulam (who takes rank by his lighter labours), or Jonson by Gilbert. You do homage to Milton with no category-confusing thought of Cromwell or Newton ; you frame your English galaxy without Boyle or Berkeley, Marlborough or Peterborough ; you give Hugo his godlike honours while contentedly leaving Darwin and Napoleon for other people's firmaments, in which belike Hugo is but a speck in the nebulæ. The belletrist<sup>1</sup> may answer, of course, that his plain business is with *belles lettres* ; that he has no call whatever

<sup>1</sup> A word of excuse is needed for this term, which, in the adjective form of "belletristic," has brought on Mr. Arnold some objurgation. One can but say that it is borrowed from the Germans ; and that there is no alternative between it and a periphrasis.

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to do anything but classify his own body of phenomena ;  
 and that if you go about to discuss literature with a  
 preparation in physical science your tests will probably  
 be a mere scandal to the trained literary sense. Quite  
 so ; but the question is whether his habit of seeing only  
 the chapters on æsthetic literature in the history of  
 mind does not make his very literary criticism imper-  
manent, in view of the necessary synthesis of the  
"criticism of life." [Granted—nay, insisted—that  
 literary art is a specialty like another, to be judged of  
 by specialists, does it not follow that inasmuch as  
 imaginative literature, besides being art, is criticism of  
 life, the critic's criticism should be informed by a  
catholic and not a specialized relation to life? ]

My proposition is twofold. It is that mere belletrist  
 criticism of *belles lettres* tends not only (1) to magnify  
 the human importance (as measured by the language  
 which serves all human purposes) of the performance  
 and the performers in question, but (2) to misrepresent,  
 for normally cultured intelligences, the very literary  
 values of the given performance, inasmuch as the sense  
of even relative literary value shifts with the wider or  
narrower development of brain faculty. Let us take  
 the two points separately.

As to the varying conceptions of the human impor-  
 tance of personages, let us consider these observations  
 of Professor Tyndall concerning Thomas Young :—

"Let Newton stand erect in his age, and Young in his. Draw a straight  
 line from Newton to Young, tangent to the heads of both. This line  
 would slope downwards from Newton to Young, because Newton was



certainly the taller man of the two. But the slope would not be steep, for the difference of stature was not excessive (*sic*). The line would form what engineers call a gentle gradient from Newton to Young. Place underneath this line the biggest man born in the interval between both (*sic*). It may be doubted whether he would reach the line; for (*sic*) if he did he would be taller intellectually than Young, and there was probably none taller."<sup>1</sup>

Put such a deliverance (style apart) beside a literary schema of gods, demigods, and giants, and the two remain wholly unrelated, a perplexity to the student who is framing his philosophy of life, or worse than a perplexity—a lead in the direction of a chaotic view of categories, involving the sub-conscious notion that life is a matter of blind departmentalism, in which education only means variety of idiosyncrasy. On these lines mankind can never learn. Each specialist will but gather up for his clique the results of his life's work, and the general culture that should result from their collective labours remains the dream of the philanthropist, all-round life becoming actually further-off than in the days before science.

But not only does the inveterate specialist fail to relate himself to the general course of things: he positively becomes incompetent qua specialist. His data are no longer to him what they are to other people: he now cannot see the wood for the trees, and every tree has become for him a world, in which he notes, not the laws that relate it to the organic and the inorganic cosmos, but the variations of leaf shape and size; variations which he relishes as objective facts,

<sup>1</sup> "On Light," 3rd ed. pp. 49-50. Cf. the speaker's citation from Helmholtz:—"He [Young] was one of the most profound minds that the world has ever seen."

never seeking for the new law which reduces them to intellectual order. That new law comes suddenly from without, from the germinal idea of somebody who has been looking at the processes of things in their masses and tendencies, perhaps without even reading the specialist's literature of microscoped minutiae. Now, the inevitable critical test of such a specialist's total importance is his relation to the main mental movement; and in so far as his work consists in empirical collections of data it will drop even out of the literature of his specialty.

Analogies of categories, however, are never conclusive; and it is as well to urge plainly the charge against the literary criticism which is absorbed in *belles lettres*. It grows enamoured not merely of art for art's sake, thus narrowing the critic's activity, but of all the waste matter which is a mere record of artistic failure, thus warping his judgment. Tenderly conning every vestige of old conventions, devoutly ready to take in earnest every new deliverance which assumes the old manner, he becomes a specialist in verbiage, a kind of artistic Talmudist, living in a world of word-begotten thoughts, the mere spectra of ideas. One test of the validity of his attitude is its result in his own practice. Now, even such a genius as Lamb, the most exquisite of essayists and the rarest of souls, profoundly original as a stylist and as a critic, whose essay on "Shakspeare's Tragedies" is one of the great documents of critical literature—even he can set us asking, by his imitative efforts, whether it is really worth a man's while to

thumb for years the shelved salvage of the Elizabethan drama—or, if that study be a tolerable hobby for a man of genius, whether he does well to ask the reading world to ride it with him. German graduates, one learns from catalogues, write studies on the use of the preposition “of” in “Paradise Lost;” and it may be, though the point is dark, that the work is for them personally a good gymnastic, on the principle that it is well to know “everything of something;” but at least there is little doubt about the social futility of the publication of the gross result. Dead drama is certainly not so inorganic as the literature of prepositions; yet here too the question arises whether it is a profitable gymnastic compared with the possibilities of the time. One says flatly of these Elizabethan and Caroline obscurities that their total intellectual value—their accomplishment in *Welt-Weisheit* and blank verse—is inferior, as measured by probable cerebration or comparative rarity of gift, to the accomplishment and endowment of scores of workers in other directions whose names the critic barely knows,—chemists, mathematicians, physicists, biologists, historians, inventors. Well, if that be so, the primary problem before the student of criticism is evidently this: Will coming literature, or will it not, hold in its blood the results of these scientific performers’ labours as well as those of the mere performer in words and rhythms, whose addition to the sum of human ideas is inappreciable? If the answer be *Not*, why then our Talmudist is in a fair way to be as immortal as anybody, and may



cheerfully continue to heap his superlatives on successes of phrase and cadence equivalent in cerebral cost to the last patent pencil-sharpener. In the case supposed, literature is on a line of evolution to some extent parallel with that taken by it in old Byzantium, whose literature was the Talmudism of Greek. To the glazing Byzantine eye, the Byzantine commentating was of course lifelike enough; and to those on the hypothetic line of similar literary evolution to-day the things around them will similarly tend to appear satisfactory. But if on the other hand the literature of the future, as the present argument will assume, is to have in its veins a blood digested from all the pabulum of the omnivorous modern intelligence, why then the purely belletrist criticism of our time will one day look curiously Byzantine to such historians as are called upon to give some account of it to a rationally educated generation that will no more dream of reading it as it stands than of repeating the abortive experiments of early alchemy.

Let us summarize the argument thus far. Literature, we said, is judged of under three categories—its picture or criticism of life (criticism by representation, in large part, as in fiction and drama, but also in large part by assertion and criticism proper), its presentment of the writer's personality, and its form or style; and these categories are severally filled up in terms of three sorts of individual variation—that of heredity and acquired bias, that of special expertness, that of education. Next, it has been sought to show that our estimate of



criticism of life, and even our estimates of style, all depend upon the comprehensiveness of our relation to life and knowledge, which may be held to be an outcome of general bias and of education. In these regards, then, conflict in criticism is reducible to terms of the general conflict of ideals and opinions, and is no more factitious a phenomenon than strife in politics. Further, the criticism of all the phases of literature may vary with what we may empirically term fashion; a particular convention of tone and style involving the opinion that another and more vital tone and style are primitive. This we may call error of education, when we hold it to be transient; but where it merges into nationalism in taste it has just to be reckoned with like national genius of speech or temperament. Further, the habit of the specialist, which in literature involves a pronouncing of *quasi-comprehensive* judgments, may lead to loss of the normal sense of proportion, and consequently to criticism that will not appeal to a true normal intelligence on any of the three points of our analysis of literature. This we may call vice of bias, arising partly out of expertness. But here arises the question, *Granted that a theoretically just or permanent estimate of an author's view of life, and of the importance of his personality, depends on the comprehensiveness of the critic's relation to life, what is the true or healthy functional sphere of the specialism that is to decide on the art or style value of an author's work?*

Of the inadequacies likely to be charged thus far against the foregoing exposition, perhaps the most

generally felt will be the little notice yet given to the great principle of Beauty, pointed at in the last of the three phases in which literature is envisaged. That slightness of notice, however, did not come of slight appreciation of the greatness of the issues, though what has been said of the aberrations of expert taste might seem to make light of literary art as distinct from or additional to criticism of life and character revelation. [Let us hasten to restore the balance by advancing the doctrine that such art, seen in beauty or power of speech, is one of the most vital things in literature; so much so that it may keep alive, or vividly related to an evolving society, criticism of life so effete and perverted as to repel even through the beauty of style which allures the reader, or give an undying charm to pictures of life and manners in themselves of doubtful documentary value, and void of the literary note of personality. Style is of course very intimately bound up with matter; and valid beauty of style must always involve immediate congruity (as distinct from rightness or wisdom, which is an extended congruity) of thinking; but as mere immediate congruity of thinking is common enough, the essence of style can easily be seen to be a matter of verbal art.] One of the most commonplace of human reflections in all ages, for instance, is as to the impossibility of taking our possessions "with us" when we die, but a Horace can chance to put the immemorial thought in a phrase which to such an artist as Arnold<sup>1</sup> may be a perpetual possession:—

<sup>1</sup> See *Fortnightly Review*, August, 1887, p. 299.

“Linquenda tellus, et domus, et placens  
 Uxor; neque harum, quas colis arborum,  
 Te, praeter invisas cupressos,  
 Ulla brevem dominum sequetur.”<sup>1</sup>

Of this elusive quality of beauty, then, who is to be the judge?

Nothing is more instantly obvious than the fact that the perception of beauty must vary, as we said other judgments did, with native endowment, general education or prejudice, and special expertness; that is to say the faculty is born and made, and must be held to reach its highest potential, on the side of literature, in the case of personal gift cultivated by a literary life. But granted the gift, convention may give it an unfortunate turn, as in the last century (to our present-day sense) every verse-maker, whatever his cerebral faculty, tended to be kept to one or two forms. Yet again, as above noted, specialism may breed morbidity, as so many painters appear to develop disease of the colour-sense and the fine natural gift may evolve on a line of variation alien to the tendencies of normal life. How decide, then, whether a given body of judgments represents a doomed variation, as the criticism of Rymer, or a durable reaction against an impermanent variation, as (apparently) Wordsworth's protest against Pope?

Here, I suspect, we are near the psychological bed-rock, just as we are when the supernaturalist, availing himself of Hume, asks the man of science what ulti-

<sup>1</sup> Odes, ii. 14.



mate grounds he has for his belief in scientific doctrines. On the instant, there can be little question, each critic must fight for his own hand, giving his reasons for the faith that is in him; and that faith and these reasons will become part of the stream of tendency, either making or not making an effective eddy, telling on the banks. Here our problem becomes part of the general problem of history, and is no more and no less soluble than that. The science of criticism goes no further; but science in criticism remains to every critic who cares to methodically question his own consistency; and the practical question comes to be whether or not, in a given case, he can not only offer an estimate of a performance which shall be broadly congruous with a considerable body of instructed opinion, but give a persuasive explanation of such differences of instructed opinion as leave many cultured people perplexed. It is as Mill said of economists: the working test of competence should be (if we can agree on anything) the ability to explain in terms of sequence of causes a given economic situation.<sup>1</sup> He who gives the coherent and plausible account is presumptively in the right: there is no further economic science till somebody impairs that explanation, checks and restates the phenomena, and produces an explanation more congruous to the general sense; just as the undulatory theory of light superseded the corpuscular. The critic, like the philosopher, can do no more than convince his generation.

Nor is the difficulty of gaining an effective body of

<sup>1</sup> "Essays on some Unsettled Questions of Polit. Econ.," 2nd ed. p. 158.

Consistency

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agreement much greater in criticism than in economics, which last, despite reactions and dissensions, ranks as a province of science. It is safe to say, for instance, that Mr. Lowell's essays on Chaucer, Dryden, and Pope; Mr. Leslie Stephen's on Johnson or Crabbe; Mr. F. W. Myers' on Marcus Aurelius; Mr. Nettleship's on Catullus; Sainte-Beuve's on—almost anybody, but say, his series on Chateaubriand; Poe's on Mrs. Browning; Professor Dowden's on Landor; Mr. Henry James's on Trollope and Balzac, will elicit from the world of English-speaking bookmen something not far short of unanimous general approbation, indicating wide community of tastes, with only unimportant differences on points of detail. Here there is question at once of criticism of life, estimate of personality, and opinion of style. But if we narrow the issue to style, assumed by us to be on the whole the least calculable mode of excellence, it will I think be found that the mass of competent readers—the people who have read the documents and know the general lay of the land—can really be got to a very general agreement on fairly complex issues.

We get rid speedily of the pathetic mass of judgment which cannot know complex beauties because of sheer inexperience—the tastes to which at best Dickens and Macaulay, not to say Dr. Farrar and Mr. Haggard, present the perfection of verbal art; to which, say, Mr. Bret Harte's "Melons" is difficult, Mr. Edmund Gurney's criticism too close to be readable, and George Eliot apt to be unintelligible. Such votes disallowed,

there remains, happily, a body of qualified opinion that may confidently be looked to to maintain with unanimity the right attitudes of nose to the delicate fragrance of Lamb and the ammoniacal rhetoric of the Archdeacon of Westminster. Within the limits of this franchise, there is, I think, substantial agreement that the prose style of Mr. Pater is beautiful but apt to be overposed and overdone; Mr. John Morley's strong and penetrating but too uniformly metallic, like a powerfully-played Broadwood piano; Mr. Lowell's admirably felt and choicely sententious, but a little perilously inclined to *concelli*; Mr. Swinburne's at least as maddening as Professor Dowden once hinted of it; <sup>1</sup> Mr. James's, in criticism, notably skilful and fortunate; Mr. Howells's, in fiction, exquisitely accomplished; Mr. Stephen's gentlemanly in its felicities and in its laxities; the late Mr. Arnold's incomparably limpid and perfectly chaste at its best, falling sometimes to a dallying air of being consciously irresistible; Mr. Lang's often delightful with the charm of Dundreary's stammer; Mr. Stevenson's pretty well perfect in grace and nerve even when straining a trifle under the eye of the world; Mr. Ruskin's—well, the most comprehensive instrument in the orchestra, and so in early days capable of very vicious imitations of the organ, as in later days of noble strains of melody and strange raptures of cry.

Not only would instructed judgments be found thus tending to unanimity, but they would tend to rest themselves, if not explicitly yet implicitly, on the funda-

<sup>1</sup> *Academy*, Jan. 3, 1880, p. 2.

mental test of which Mr. Spencer's law of economy<sup>1</sup> is a partial exposition, but one pointing the way plainly to the complementary truths. It is possible to make diversity of critical taste in style seem very much more hopeless than it really is by collecting inexpert or random opinions. Thus the species of symposium instituted some time ago with the best intentions by the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*<sup>2</sup> yielded dubious counsels because the inquiry was suffered to be changed from a request for perfect passages into one for merely favourite passages—a very different thing. This need not have been. People asked to name “the *one* passage in all poetry” and “the *one* passage in all prose which appears *of its kind the best*,” might well recoil; but they might have been with more wisdom asked to name *a* passage in prose and one in verse which seemed to them artistically perfect, or several passages which seemed perfect in different manners. This would have had instructive results. Indeed it is instructive to bring together even a number of passages that have chanced to catch the fancy and remain in the memory of different people; but in the latter case the gain to criticism is only indirect, since everybody knows that many passages, like tunes, fix themselves in the memory without satisfying the canons of perfection. Thus it comes about that we learn of the satisfaction with which Earl Granville listens to “Therefore with

<sup>1</sup> See the essay on “The Philosophy of Style” in vol. i. of “Essays, Scientific, Political, and Speculative.”

<sup>2</sup> See the numbers for August–November, 1887.



Angels and Archangels" in the Prayer Book, and "The quality of mercy is not strained" in Shakspeare; the interest with which Mr. Llewellyn Davies cons one of the disquisitions in "Paracelsus," some hundred and fifty lines long; and the profit Dr. Richardson has derived from the teachings of the poets in general. Beyond this, however, there is a considerable collation of passages held to be artistically perfect, many of which have, but many of which have not, conquered, and probably will not conquer, the competent vote above indicated. In regard to these one feels that the selectors are, some of them, not very good readers; and that in many cases a little comparative discussion would lead to quite unanimous admissions of the unfitness of the specimens. Thus, while the Earl of Carnarvon has hit the mark in prose with the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah (though the credit here is to an indefinite extent due to the translation), his selection of "Il Penseroso," avowedly only one of many favourite poems, leaves us asking whether there are not richer and lovelier *kinds* of poem than this, admirable as it is in its own kind; nay, whether the one or two touches of the fanciful manner of the period even in this admirable texture do not slightly detract from entire perfection. On these heads technical agreement might surely be attained. Then when Mr. Thomas Hardy cites Byron's three stanzas on "clear placid Leman" as unsurpassed in descriptive poetry, the students of poetry are surely quick to agree that these verses are much too lacking in fluidity of movement to be credited with



excellence. And while his prose passages from Carlyle are much better, Mr. Hardy perhaps would not deliberately maintain that the Carlylean manner is entirely winning or successful in the first. Again, when Mr. Andrew Lang, Mr. Theodore Watts, and Mr. Frederic Harrison pitch on Sir Ector's eulogy of the dead Sir Lancelot, it is plain that they are impressed by its old-world pathos rather than by the literary power of its composition, which is much too naïvely artificial, too artlessly artful, to be called perfect. As for Mrs. Lynn Linton's citations of Shakspeare's twenty-ninth sonnet and Herrick's "To Anthea," these are but chance indications of satisfaction, giving no help towards a critical code; since the pieces named plainly cannot claim to be perfect in beauty of poetic idea, rhythm, or phrase. But perhaps the most aggressively unsatisfactory selection is that made by Mr. George Meredith from "Henry VIII.;" and here again, I take it, there will be no difficulty in getting an overwhelming negative vote from those who are at once students of Shakspeare and students of poetry. If ever the hand of Fletcher can with absolute certainty be traced in the "Henry VIII.," it is in Katherine's speeches: "After my death I wish no other herald," and "In which I have commended to his goodness;" and if ever the inferiority of Fletcher's versification to Shakspeare's was demonstrated, it is in these cloying successions of weak endings. The tune is monotony itself, and the sickly melody much less endurable than the movement of any fair specimen of Jonson. Such a choice from

such a writer is surprising, though perhaps not inexplicable by the principle of complementaries. An every way more competent selection from Shakspeare is that made by Mr. Swinburne from "Antony and Cleopatra" the dialogue between Antony and Eros in Act. iv. Sc. 14, from "Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish" to "Ourselves to end ourselves." Here we have, if not Shakspeare at his noblest and beautifullest—that we have in the speech of Prospero, also cited by Mr. Swinburne, and in the "O Proserpina," suggested by Mr. Augustine Birrell—certainly an admirable sample of his indescribable pregnancy and vividness of thought, feeling, and phrase; as we have again in Hamlet's soliloquy "How all occasions do inform against me," Mr. Swinburne's third example. But must we not protest that the critic is somewhat led astray by the pride of his discovery of power in the little-read "Pericles," when he puts also in the "very front rank" those imperfectly pathetic speeches of the husband: "Thou God of this great vast, rebuke those surges," and "A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear," the first of which some of us can still doubt to be Shakspeare's at all, either in cadence or phrase?

No less desirable than a direction of choice to passages held to be artistically perfect as well as pregnant, would have been a restriction of samples to English literature. Even in dealing with modern foreign languages, of which the shades of meaning are comparatively easily grasped, there is risk of grave miscalculation of stylistic merit; witness the persistent eulogy

of Byron on the Continent. The fallacy of Goethe's verdict on that poet is well known; but down to our own day the same erroneous estimate is often made abroad for the same reason—failure to appreciate the finer shades of style value. It is plainly difficult for even good readers to escape such risks in dealing with a foreign literature. But whereas the numerous contributors to the *Fortnightly* anthology, going as they did outside their own tongue, might have been expected to go to the familiar fields of French literature, and to choose from the treasures of German poetry, of which the genius is so closely akin to that of our own, the latter is barely once glanced at, and even French gets little notice; while there are Greek references by the dozen, and a number to Virgil and Dante. Mr. F. W. H. Myers need hardly have complained (p. 594) of indifference to antiquity on the part of the contributors, though they did ignore Lucretius (all save Lady Dilke and Mr. Herbert Warren) and Catullus, and though Byron had more admirers than Horace. Were there not references enough to Homer, Plato, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, not to speak of Simonides, Theocritus, and Aristophanes; and did not Tacitus have several votes, and Juvenal and Persius find encomiasts? The Greek and Latin selections were sometimes translated, sometimes not: in the first case all style value had of course evaporated; in the second, one was left speculating on the value of modern judgments on ancient style of three epochs. We can be tolerably sure we are safe in counting Goethe's "Ueber allen



Gipfeln" perfect: we may even venture to think, in England, that we can be sure there is no element of inferior rhetoric in "Die Sonne tönt nach alter Weise;" but can Madame Darmesteter and the Dean of Wells and the President of Magdalen be equally sure of the specific perfection of style in long stretches of Sophocles? One ventures to think, not considering the difficulty of persuading some people that Byron's sublimity is second-rate; and considering that Mr. F. W. H. Myers, an excellent critic, is capable of putting Blanco White's charmless and beautiless sonnet "Night and Death" (doubtless on the strength of its idea) beside Tennyson's splendid verses "To Virgil;" and these beside the didactic and half-successful "Voyage."

Yet, if Mr. Alfred Austin went too far in declaring (p. 717) that some contributors "cited passages for our admiration which no human being could possibly admire, provided he really knew why he admires the poems and passages mankind have for generations agreed in thinking admirable," much might be done by a really circumspect selection to settle at least what can be admirable to all instructed readers. Many of those passages actually submitted, as already noted, are either perfect or (perfection being after all only a theoretic possibility) so nearly so as to be sure of classicality; and whereas there are different kinds of admirableness, it would perhaps not be hard to decide, in terms of neural experience, why we rank the fourteenth of Isaiah higher than Carlyle's passage on the Oak; and "Lycidas" higher than "Il Penseroso" or



Lovelace's lyrics. We could accept Mr. Arnold's sentence from Bossuet as a snatch of very good prose from Mr. Hardy, Teufelsdröckh's night thoughts—but why not also the "So has it been from the beginning so will it be to the end" in the same book, and the "Why should the living venture thither" at the beginning of the Cromwell? The extract given by Mrs. Linton from Ruskin is so marvellously rich, so consummately skilful, as to make it sound presumptuous even to ask whether there is not an air of manufacture over the whole, a sense of long labour and manipulation, that constitutes a drawback even here, as is certainly the case in the passages cited from the same master of prose-poetry by Mr. William Sharp. On Mr. Meredith's citation from "Villette," again, there would probably be general agreement in a literary committee that perfection is there missed by reason of stress and spasm of expression; and to Mrs. Butler it might be pointed out, as regards her long citation from "Paradise Lost," that we may have power and greatness without perfection; which consists in some such combination of merits as she found in her selections from the "Mill on the Floss," though these are perhaps not unsurpassed in George Eliot's work. From Mr. Birrell we may well accept the last paragraph from Sir Thomas Browne's "Fragment of Mummies;" but why not also the two immediately preceding? The magic of the second has been made widely known by Emerson, who perhaps sent Mr. Birrell, like some of the rest of us, to the whole frag-

ment, absent as it oddly is from the Bohn edition, though the paragraphs referred to are really Browne's high-water mark in harmony. "Kubla Khan," Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," the last stanza of the "Ode to Melancholy," the "Belle Dame Sans Merci," Wordsworth's "Highland Reaper," Shelley's "Cloud" and "Stanzas Written in Dejection"—these we can all agree to, with few reservations, among lyric verse; Othello's last speech and Claudio's on death, with the other things above cited from Shakspeare, and Arnold's lines on the Oxus at the close of "Sohrab and Rostum," we can equally accept in blank verse—noting that the passage cited by Mr. Gosse from "Paradise Regained" for technical masterliness is unsatisfactory precisely because it lacks sustained flow and beauty, which are as much a matter of choice craftsmanship as is variety of rhythm—and there will be general agreement, too, on the varying excellences of many of the prose extracts, as Johnson's letter to Chesterfield, Macaulay on the Catholic Church, Sydney Smith on the defence of prisoners (passage cited by Mr. Traill, p. 601), the Master of Marlborough's extract from Burke's Speech on Conciliation with America; Sir Rowland Blennerhasset's page from Bossuet (with detraction on the score of pulpit diffuseness); some of the passages cited from Landor, and from Thackeray; and some of those culled from Newman (with a caveat against the extravagances of faith, which impair by their violence the effects of phrase and cadence). All these passages throw permanent light on the laws of literary art; and

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of none of them is it possible to say that it is astonishing to find cultured men admiring it, as might be said of Napier's account of a Peninsular battle cited by the Master of Eton, with its *saugrenu* spread-eagleism. A few more safe citations could readily be made in verse and prose; in verse from Heine and Burns, as "Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam," and "Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doune" in its original form (which is much nearer perfection than "My luvie is like a red, red rose," cited in part by Mr. Ernest Rhys); from Arnold (strangely ignored by every contributor in the *Fortnightly*) and from the "Scottish Probationer" Davidson: in prose from Lamb, *e.g.*, the two closing paragraphs from the "Child Angel;" from Emerson; from (if we are to go abroad) Renan, as the dedication of the "Vie de Jésus;" from Heine; and from Fouqué, as the passage in which Undine tells of the sprite world to her mortal spouse; from several of our living prose writers, as Mr. Myers, Mr. Pater (cited not at his very best by Mr. Sharp), Professor Dowden, and Mr. Stevenson; and from the too early dead Edmund Gurney. In short, a few hands in council might compile a copious anthology, which should leave all cordial, and over which no man should raise an eyebrow.

#### IV. PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE.

THE fact that there exists this wide agreement as to the beauty and successfulness of certain samples of writing, is in itself a proof that there are bases for a criticism which shall be scientific, or reducible to connected steps of reasoning from verifiable data, as against that which is but the random expression of an aberrant opinion, born of ignorance, haste, or perversity. And what is really wanted in literary criticism is that there should be this statement of data and process of proof, the demand for that much being exactly what arose generations or even centuries ago in the case of the physical sciences. The modern scientific movement, often unduly associated with Bacon but really traceable to other and earlier thinkers as well as to him, may be summed up as a process of asking Why do you think so? of every notionist in turn. Give us, the inquirers began to ask, data and laws in place of notions and references; your own testimony extracted from nature, and not simply what Aristotle and Galen say. Right or wrong, give us your reasons, and let us compare notes. In essentially the same way rationalism has appealed from



alleged revelation to reason in history and morals, after Protestantism had appealed from Papal authority to its alleged documents. In the criticism of *belles lettres* the process is again the same. At the end of last century the leading idea as to criticism in England (as indeed in France) was one of authority—a matter of what Dr. Johnson or the wits thought, though by that time there had been abundant unsettlement of authority in religion. But already the forces of change were at work. Addison had invited his readers to follow his criticism critically; Goldsmith's practice was no less stimulating; Hume was acutely analytic; and Johnson's dogmatism was but the expression of his peculiar personality. As social, philosophical, and scientific change continued, it was simply inevitable that the temper of challenge and question should spread more and more in the discussion of things literary; and it must needs generate the habit of analysis and the attitude of propaganda. Thus, while the robust hand-to-mouth politicians are seen in the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, and *Blackwood*, producing a slightly-reasoned statement of their bias and prejudice, the ever-analytic Coleridge is seen habitually giving himself his reasons, felicitously or at least suggestively where his mind played freely, perversely and benightedly where his theological and other sub-rational prepossessions were uppermost; while the strenuous Carlyle, *more suo*, seeks to relate his literary judgments to his incomplex philosophy of things, badly deflected as it is at one point by the solar attraction of Goethe. Everywhere a fresh

study is seen going on : Wordsworth, Lamb, Coleridge, and Hazlitt, all think and speak for themselves, though Hazlitt is unoriginal beside the other three : Hallam, Macaulay, and Thackeray in turn never hesitate to reconsider a case, though they have the *ex cathedra* tone for their own part ; and in America Poe and Emerson, in their very different ways, criticize the criticism of the old country and speak with a new security of personal conviction, Poe as a born critic, Emerson as a born eclectic. It is in Arnold among ourselves, but much more satisfyingly, I think, in Mr. Lowell among our kin beyond seas, that we begin to find the effectual expression of the habit of analysis and reasoning in matters of comparative literature. Hitherto criticism had affirmed or denied : these begin to persuade, the former guided a good deal, it may be, by that French criticism which in Sainte-Beuve had reached an admirable development of catholicity and discrimination ; the latter, though the wider and harder reader of the two, expressing rather a native relish of appreciation and faculty of choice. The critique on Swinburne's Tragedies marks, broadly speaking, a new literary period.

The next development, so far as one can see, must needs be an extension of the practice of judicial reasoning to the comparison of competing judgments, a step attempted by Mr. Swinburne almost alone among prominent critics, and thus likely to secure to him in the future that deserved credit for judicial faculty which is so apt to be impaired by the spectacle of the vices

of his poetic style, fatally emphasized as they are by the atrocious superfoetations of his prose. Least influenced among our recent poets, apparently, by the science in the air, he is in more ways than one, with all his atavism, the most genuinely a child of the scientific age, carrying his rationalism furthest, and outrunning in much of his practice the influence of his chosen standards. What he has done <sup>superbly</sup> forcibly but fitfully, unmethodically, passionately, scientific criticism must do circumspectly and with patience. In no other branch of human inquiry does discussion go on from day to day and generation to generation without a matter-of-course reference to and reconsideration of the work of the different inquirers. In *belles lettres* alone does the new treatise proceed as far as possible independently of all others, each critic apparently thinking it beneath him to make more than a passing reference to the differing judgment of anybody else. [What the reading world may well ask of the judges is that they should compare their opinions and at least try to account for their differences if they cannot resolve them. And perhaps the fittest conclusion to the present excursus will be an attempt to formulate briefly the principles on which a critic should go to work.

If, then, our analyses of the judicial process and its subject matter hold good, and the iteration be not become odious, we say that the critic appears as viewing literature under three broad aspects, himself representing possibilities of personal variation of opinion which also may conveniently be reduced to three sorts. He



has to estimate, in a given book, the validity of its representation of facts, or its direct or indirect "criticism of life;" its importance or comparative interest as a presentment of mind, irrespective of accuracy; and its relative success or value as a piece of literary art. And his personal judgment or taste, which is for him the standard of appraisement (this even if he be but a journalist trying to be "safe"—for he must still judge for himself what is truly safe) is a function of his natural parts, his education or prejudices, and his special familiarity with the matters in hand. So that, if he would be conscientious and fairly secure of a hearing from the good readers, he must watch over himself on all heads.

(i). If it be his immediate business, say, to criticize fiction on its merits, he is bound to ask himself — as Flaubert asked Sainte-Beuve — whether his impression in a given case is likely to stand the tests of change of nervous condition and of widening experience of life; and further, whether or not it represents what he can detect to be a mere tendency to "like" this or that theme or method, rather than a true comparative estimate. If, say, he is conscious of finding Mr. Howells more enjoyable reading than Dostoievsky, while yet feeling that the latter grapples with the harder tasks, he will not allow himself to criticize in terms of his superficial sense of pleasantness, but will take pains to estimate total values. And when, in the work of a master, he is conscious of less than usual satisfaction, he will do his



best to make clear to himself precisely why he is less satisfied. There are plenty of instructive illustrations of the difficulty.

Mr. Henry James<sup>1</sup> and Mr. George Saintsbury,<sup>2</sup> for instance, have each criticized the works of Flaubert; and, while agreeing as to the remarkable powers and achievement of the novelist, have arrived at almost absolutely contrary opinions on one or two of his books. "Madame Bovary" they both pronounce a masterpiece; but whereas Mr. James likens the reading of "L'Éducation Sentimentale" to "masticating ashes and sawdust," Mr. Saintsbury, with that judgment before him, not only praises the book in detail, but declares<sup>3</sup> that it "certainly gives him pleasure." Between such judgments, is there any way of deciding that is better than casting an arbitrary vote on one side or the other? I think there is. Mr. James is obviously staking everything on his "*impression nerveuse*," for he allows that "here the form and method are the same as in 'Madame Bovary'; the studied skill, the science, the accumulation of material, are even more striking;" while persisting in his verdict—"but the book is in a single word a *dead* one." On the face of the matter there is something wrong here. If with the same form and method, the same skill, science, and abundance of material, one book is dead and the other living, criticism would seem to be a vain task indeed. Such

<sup>1</sup> In his volume of collected essays, "French Poets and Novelists."

<sup>2</sup> In the *Fortnightly Review*, April, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> Art. cited, p. 587.

a paradox should be solved, and Mr. James provides no solution. “‘Madame Bovary’ was spontaneous and sincere; *but* to read its successor is, to the finer sense, like masticating ashes and sawdust.” The antithesis is spurious, because we have just been told that form, method, and art are the same in the two cases. “‘L’Éducation Sentimentale’ is elaborately and massively dreary.” Well, but Mr. James had just said a few pages before, of “Madame Bovary,” that “anything drearier, more sordid, more vulgar and desolate than the greater part of the subject-matter of this romance it would be impossible to conceive;” and he speaks of the pain with which one closes the book. Justifying his verdict on the later work he proceeds:— “That a novel should have a certain charm seems to us the most rudimentary of principles, and there is no more charm in this laborious movement to a treacherous ideal than there is interest in a heap of gravel.” But Mr. James had only a moment before had his finger on the fact that charm is a matter of wide individual variation, and had noted that many readers feel towards “Madame Bovary” just as he feels towards “L’Éducation Sentimentale.” “To many people,” he truly says, “‘Madame Bovary’ will always be a hard book to read and an impossible one to enjoy. They will complain of the abuse of description, of the *want of spontaneity*,” [this just before the ascription of spontaneity by the critic] “of the hideousness of the subject, of the dryness and coldness and cynicism of the tone. *Others will continue to think it a great performance.*”

Quite so ; and why not allow as much of "L'Éducation Sentimentale" ?

Mr. Saintsbury on his side gives his reasons for esteeming that work. "There is not a character in the scores which figure in the book that is not in itself a masterpiece. . . . But the greatest attraction of the book is the profusion of observation and knowledge of the intricacies of action and conduct which it displays, and which I do not hesitate to say is not excelled in the work of any contemporary writer." No one, I think, will dispute in detail that statement as to the masterly drawing of the different characters: there is nothing *vivider* and truer in fiction, though the book as a whole is a study of impotence, incompetence, weakness, and failure. Equally true is the estimate of the human science: as to that Mr. James is in virtual agreement. And yet one cannot escape the sensation on which Mr. James based his verdict: if "Madame Bovary" is hard reading, the other is *very* hard indeed. Is that then the final test? Surely not. It has already become clear that the appreciation of these books is a matter of evolution of palate, and that the later is to the earlier what a late sonata of Beethoven is to an early one—closer-packed, more scientific, more difficult, less attractive; and one decides that Mr. Saintsbury's appreciation comes of his being (as there are other reasons for considering him) the harder reader of the two. One does not say he is as a rule the better critic: Mr. James strikes one as in several respects the saner in taste and philosophy, and one feels his account of



Homais as an "unwholesome compound" to be sounder and truer than that of Mr. Saintsbury, who finds the charlatan likeable, and thinks Flaubert did not mean him to be otherwise. But Mr. Saintsbury may yet be the harder student; and his defence of "L'Éducation Sentimentale" is so explicable. And so with the dispute over "La Tentation de St. Antoine," which is to Mr. James's sense "what 'L'Éducation Sentimentale' is to 'Madame Bovary'—what the shadow (!) is to the substance;" while to Mr. Saintsbury it is "my own favourite reading among its author's books. It is the best example of dream literature that I know." It is the first problem over again.

Now, the whole question here is, whether a novel which such a good reader as Mr. James finds unbearably scientific can well be reckoned as on the line of evolution—whether the enjoyment of Mr. Saintsbury is not a case of lopsided development. The analogy of Beethoven's sonatas—or of music in general—will probably serve to check haste in decision. We are most of us diffident about pronouncing against a piece of music which we feel to be for the time beyond us; and this not merely because of our cowardice about admitting our musical illiteracy—though that operates to an extent not quite agreeable to think of—but because we remember how we have developed in the past. With that in view, we shall be slow to say that even Mr. James's impression is decisive. We may feel as he does, and yet come to



change our attitude—as may he. Mr. Saintsbury tells how he read “Salammbô” for the first time with effort and perplexity, though fascinated; but that on a later reading there was no effort, but only enjoyment. So it is with much music; and is a novel never to need a second reading?

It must be granted that “L’Éducation Sentimentale,” permanently and powerfully as it impresses us in detail, arouses in the reader many strong objections: that it seems, in reading, ill-combined, straggling, lacking in that effect of wholeness which we so instinctively crave for in all art. Nay, let us remember that Flaubert himself laid his finger on the very considerable artistic defect of “Salammbô”—the fact, namely, that “the pedestal is too large for the statue.” May not the later book then be found permanently faulty in construction, and permanently repellent on that ground? We have to remember yet further the peculiar personal development of Flaubert, the early hint of epilepsy and the permanent weakness of health, the gradual increase in his toil relatively to the quantitative result, and the fact that his manuscript finally came to be an unintelligible medley of deletions. May this not have been just a development on untenable lines? <sup>1</sup> Well, but what of Beethoven?

All things considered, one is driven to vote with Mr. Saintsbury, who is after all a sanely constituted mind

<sup>1</sup> See the important and painfully interesting account of Flaubert’s physical history, and the apparent arrest of his development, in the “Souvenirs Littéraires” of M. Maxime du Camp, Paris, 1882.

enough. The reasonable presumption is that as we get older [Mr. James was fairly young when he wrote his essay] we shall better relish the dry wine of Flaubert; and that cultured posterity will have less difficulty than we in relishing it. And with this presumption before us we are bound to pronounce Mr. Saintsbury's the better criticism of the two. Mr. James, even if he was convinced of the social validity of his impression, ought to have viewed such a problem all round, and ought to have given us an explanation of the case instead of leaving us with a dogmatic paradox. Mr. Saintsbury, contradicting Mr. James, did not fully explain the case either; but he posited the unquestionable merits of the book, and his critical defence of it left the full explanation clearly in view.

(ii.) Here variation of opinion can be reduced to the causes of (1) hasty acceptance of "nervous impression," and (2) degree of expertness or development. In many cases, of course, conflict comes of what we may call the natural bias reinforced by habit, as when Mr. Swinburne, in a critique inconsistent in itself at various points, has finally the air of making out Charlotte Brontë a greater mind and a greater novelist than George Eliot, on the strength partly of the first writer's capacity for tempestuous emotion and partly of an asserted capacity for "creating" true characters. Let us take his most precise all-round judgment:—

"In knowledge, in culture, perhaps in capacity for knowledge and culture, Charlotte Brontë was no more comparable to George Eliot than George Eliot is comparable to Charlotte Brontë in purity of passion,

in depth and ardour of feeling, in spiritual force and fervour of forthright inspiration. It would be rather a rough and sweeping than a loose and inaccurate division which should define the one as a type of genius distinguished from intellect, the other of intellect as opposed to genius. But it would, as I venture to think, be little or nothing more or less (!) than accurate to recognize in George Eliot a type of intelligence vivified and coloured by a vein of genius; in Charlotte Brontë a type of genius directed and moulded by the touch of intelligence." <sup>1</sup>

Here we have genius treated (1) as a thing not only over and above but different from intelligence, and (2) as consisting in specifically emotional or passionate processes of ideation, such as, say, many of Mr. Swinburne's own. Now, genius is plainly enough just an energetic perfection of intelligence in a given direction: in any more limited sense the word becomes an unintelligent and needless epithet for a habit of nervous perturbation, or for mere special capacity in one of the fine arts. Newton, to the eye of human science, is just as much a genius as Shelley; Lessing in a way as truly as Heine or as Ruskin. Even if genius be held to consist in that movement of thought past conscious induction or choice to apparent intuition, which people often seem to have in view in using the term, it would still be demonstrably represented in the hypotheses of Newton, Kepler, and Laplace, and in the criticism (as distinct from the other performance) of Lessing and of Lamb. To call, as some would do, Marlowe a genius and Sainte-Beuve a man of intelligence, thus giving the first a kind of halo to mark him off from the mere mortality of the second—this is only to express a very limited view of life and the frame

<sup>1</sup> "A Note on Charlotte Brontë," 1877, pp. 19-20.



of things. Thus seen, humanity has more geniuses than great thinkers; and the rarer development takes the lower rank. As against such caprice, shall we not say that Hume is as important a genius as Wordsworth, the scientist Young as Coleridge; and that if Carlyle had a genius for vivid presentment, Mill had as surely a genius for justice?

Mr. Swinburne, one says, is naïvely applying the bias of what some are pleased to term the "creative" artist to the discrimination of two personalities and two bodies of work; and he errs, to the sense of some of us, alike in his estimates of the work in itself and of the personalities behind it. Note, to begin with, the clash between his and Mr. Leslie Stephen's opinion of Charlotte Brontë's Rochester as a study of masculine character, and of the effectiveness of the character of Paul Emanuel. To Mr. Swinburne,<sup>1</sup> Rochester is a "wonderful and incomparable figure," and "one of the only two male figures of wholly truthful workmanship and virtually heroic mould ever carved and coloured (!) by a woman's hand,"<sup>2</sup> the other being Paul Emanuel. To Mr. Stephen, on the other hand, as to many of us, Rochester is not a truly masculine character at all, and is very far from creating a heroic impression.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Swinburne, declaring<sup>4</sup> that "Edward

<sup>1</sup> P. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 27-8.

<sup>3</sup> Let me, however, formally dissent from the astonishing remark of Mr. Stephen that if Rochester "had proposed to [Jane] to ignore the existence of the mad Mrs. Rochester, he would have acted *like a rake*," though not like a sneak. Surely Mr. Stephen had been conning the two commandments of Mrs. Grundy before thus publishing a judgment which casts suspicion on his fitness to discuss ethics with rational men.

<sup>4</sup> P. 7.



Rochester and Paul Emanuel are creations," as against simple "constructions" like Adam Bede and Tito Melema, confidently intimates that "the inevitable test or touchstone of this indefinable difference is the immediate and enduring impression set at once and engraved for ever on the simplest or the subtlest (!) mind of the most careless or the most careful student." Similarly, over Jane Eyre's answer to her lover, "To the finest fibre of my nature, sir," Mr. Swinburne decides<sup>1</sup> that we all "feel to the finest fibre of our own that these are no mere words." Now, the chances are that if a poll could be taken of the instructed and experienced readers, both of these verdicts would be annulled; that Rochester would be pronounced a sentimental portrait, probably based on actual and misconceiving observation of a weak but blustering man; that Jane Eyre would be voted a sentimental figure alike in the above-quoted answer and in many other phases; and that Mr. Swinburne's rapturous eulogy would be classed as a reminiscence of the age when we are all sentimentalists; that is, in the words of Mr. James, when we "prefer a contemplation of the surface to a knowledge of the internal spring."<sup>2</sup>

If those who turn away from Rochester were to pursue the method of Mr. Swinburne, they would indulge in a quantity of raging execration of the character, as he does in the case of Stephen Guest,

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Article on Sainte-Beuve, *North American Review*, January, 1880, p. 60.

or of rowdy derision of the misadventures of its delineator, as he does with regard to George Eliot.<sup>1</sup> His uncalculating wrath at the idea of a superior woman being fascinated by an inferior man—a kind of naïf nervous recoil which is bound to deflect critical judgment—is the pretext for a torrent of clotted damnation of novel and novelist alike; though it comes with the preface that “we must regretfully and respectfully consider of what quality and what kind may be the faults which deform the best and ripest work”<sup>2</sup> of Charlotte Brontë’s rival. On the other hand, while some of Charlotte’s own failures are admitted frankly enough, all deductions are kept out of the total estimate; and we have one of Mr. Swinburne’s iterative disquisitions on the capacity of mere intelligence to blunder to an infinite extent while erring genius can never go very far wrong. These theses are at least doomed to the category of the aberrations of genius. George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë have alike failed in many things, as even great artists in all ages have tended to fail—as Shakspeare sometimes failed, as Goethe failed, as Balzac failed, as Da Vinci failed,—simply because the artistic like every other form of intelligence cannot be at all times and on all themes equally instructed and equally competent.

<sup>1</sup> The allusion to “the pitiful and unseemly spectacle of an Amazon thrown sprawling over the crupper of her spavined and spur-galled Pegasus” (“Note,” p. 25) will probably be held to justify the above stricture. It might perhaps even be conceived to warrant—it certainly suggests—a reflection on the paddle-wheel paces of the foaming quadruped which has borne Mr. Swinburne over so many windy leagues of verse.

<sup>2</sup> P. 28.

Both women projected characters that were largely sentimentalized and only partially observed—for in all cases there must be some basis of observation in fictive work. Mr. Swinburne, after declaring that Rochester and Paul are “creations,” finds (p. 87) that for the latter the novelist “must have had some kind of model, however transfigured and dilated by the splendid influence of her own genius.” Quite so. Paul is a living character for us just because we feel him to have been taken from the life. And when Mr. Stephen, in this connection, goes on to argue that “such a test admittedly implies an erroneous theory of art;” and that “in fact, the intense individuality of Paul Emanuel is, in a different sense, the most serious objection to him,” we are driven to an analysis of Mr. Stephen’s theory of art.

The result, briefly put, is the discovery that he has reasoned fallaciously from accepted dicta as to the inferiority of that painting or sculpture which laboriously reproduces minute detail and yet misses living truth. There is no real analogy; for M. Paul is not a faulty production in that sense; and indeed that kind of fault is not one to which English fictional art has ever yet been found to be prone. Its specific failing is that of “doing it from nothing,” as the artists say—putting forward types in which lax imagination slurs and confuses the lineaments of living character till nothing is left but a purposive dream, purposive yet fluctuant and inconsequent as dreams are. To compare Paul with Uncle Toby and Don



Quixote to the disadvantage of the first, as Mr. Stephen does in confutation of Mr. Swinburne, is to compare performances of essentially different kind, as well as of different epoch, of which one set, besides, is judged more or less conventionally while the other is discussed on a spontaneous impression. A theory thus arrived at, to the effect that so-called type-drawing in fiction is a higher order of work than painting from the life, has none of the characteristics of a scientific proposition; and may in this connection be dismissed with a square challenge to any one to show why Molière is to be pronounced a higher order of artist than Ibsen, or Sterne than Tourguénief.

The true test of coeval fictive art, surely, is just its congruity with ripe experience; and the tests for Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot must needs be the same. It is nakedly irrational to rank the admitted character-successes of the latter lower than the verbal success of a fine poetic figure in the diary of Louis Moore, admittedly a "woman in breeches." Artists must be totalled, if at all, in respect of their general reach and competence: and the reach of George Eliot is, almost in the terms of Mr. Swinburne's own contrast, greater than that of Charlotte Brontë. Her successes simply lie on different lines: her failures (to the general sense) are proportionally not more numerous, and are certainly not more consummate. The difference is that whereas both women too often "did it from nothing," working partly from vague reminiscence but mostly from fancy, Miss Brontë in



default of true study sentimentalized, while George Eliot sermonized; and if we must discriminate in artistic mistakes, surely the moralizing of a comprehensive and trained intellect is more instructive than the romancing of an impulsive mind, highly gifted indeed, but not comprehensive, and very imperfectly trained. I do not know whether I shall not be unwarrantably following in the wake of Mr. Swinburne if I speak of Charlotte Brontë as having a vivid imagination and great fictive faculty grafted on the philosophy of a spirited governess; but I trust I shall have the general verdict one day with me as to the insufficiency of her grasp of human life.

Here I have pronounced an opinion at once on an author and on her performance, cursorily estimating her criticism of life and at the same time her intellectual importance. And some will doubtless say, somewhat as Mr. Moulton has said, or as Mr. Howells has more recently said with some point and emphasis, that it is not the critic's business to do these things, or at least the last. Mr. Howells, I take it, would taboo any total or general criticism of a book.

"It is hard for him," he says of the professional critic, "to understand that it is really his business to classify and analyse the fruits of the human mind as the naturalist classifies the objects of his study, rather than to praise or blame them; that there is a measure of the same absurdity in his trampling on a poem, a novel, or an essay that does not please him, as in the botanist's grinding a plant underfoot because he does not find it pretty. He does not conceive that it is his business rather to *identify the species and then explain how and where the specimen is imperfect and irregular.*" "Let him conceive of an author as not in any wise on trial before him, but as a reflection of this or that aspect of life, and he will not be tempted to browbeat or bully him." "The critic . . . must perceive, if he will

question himself more carefully, that his office is mainly to ascertain facts and traits of literature, not to invent or denounce them: to discover principles, not to establish them; to report, not to create" ("Editor's Study" section in *Harper's Magazine*, June, 1887, pp. 156-7).

Some maladroit criticisms doubtless provoked these propositions; but, taken as they must needs be on their dialectic merits, they constitute a theory of criticism that cannot stand analysis. It is surely very plain that Mr. Howells here (save in the somewhat inconsistent passage italicized, and in so far as he simply demands courtesy of tone) is denying to the critic one of the most important of individual rights; a right, too, which it is his own special function to exercise. Mr. Howells' novels are, in their degree, criticism of life by the representation of it; that is to say, he gives us what purport to be views of persons and society, saying in effect, This is how things go. Now, it is no special prerogative of the artist so-called to tell his fellows how things go: it is equally the right of the moralist, the historian, the politician, the philosopher, the critic—the preacher, if you will; and to say that any one of these is not free to contradict the artist is no more reasonable than to say that the members of any one class may not contradict each other, or members of the other classes; which would be a sufficiently idle dictum. All philosophy is necessarily criticism of philosophy; all politics criticism of politics; and if the critics find Mr. Howells giving what they consider misleading views of life, why should they not put forward their opinion just as they would

on the arguments of Strauss or the historic doctrines of Mommsen? One is at a loss to see on what grounds an artist can justify to himself a protest against such criticism *per se*. In his novels he does but present *his* view of things, as Schopenhauer in his philosophy does *his*: different natures express themselves in different ways; and is everybody to have his say but the "critic" so-called?

Such a veto quashes itself: Mr. Howells is criticizing the critics, effectively enough sometimes, in the act of protesting against the critic's criticism. And it will be idle for him to say that the critic began; because the proposition in dispute is that the novelist began by criticizing that contemporary life in which the critic is a unit, and that the critic is simply spokesman for his fellows—or himself. The capable novelist may well protest against the incompetence and unfairness of hostile judgments of his work: such error is sure to abound; but surely he is not a solitary sufferer. Let a scholar start a new theory of the Acts of the Apostles, or a moralist a new standard of conduct, and he becomes the *bête noir* of whole sanhedrims of respectable people, who are as satisfied of his perniciousness as he can be of theirs. What is to happen? Simply a struggle of opinion, in which persistence tells; final persistence for the most part, however, being happily in the ratio of validity of logical and factual basis.

If indeed Mr. Howells should simply appeal to the conscientiousness of the critics, he would be very clearly within his right. It stands by reason that of the



hundreds of critiques written on every expert novelist, the majority must be inexpert; such being probably the rule in such simple matters as the making of coats and shoes, as it certainly is in bookbinding. But let Mr. Howells remember that we who vex him are exercising our craft also on other novelists, who in their way are generally as incompetent as we; and he will surely hesitate to say that we have less title to characterize books than his unfit fellow-craftsmen have to represent people. His part is just to make his appeal (or deliver his shot) and take his chance; for there must and will be written criticism so long as readers like and dislike. The most conscientious critic can but keep before him the risks of error and injustice.

What of most weight there is in Mr. Howells' substantially ill-judged deliverance lies in the plea for temperance of tone and avoidance of animus—for the scientific as contrasted with the prejudiced temper. He has doubtless good reason to protest on this head, alike against American and English critics. But his criticism here strikes himself as well as us. He is not only guilty of keeping up, with certain *Saturday Reviewers* here, the absurd Anglo-American wrangle, in which trivial national animosity becomes a critical standard, each side imputing literary incapacity to the other nation's writers or critics in the lump; he has further disfigured his fiction by the same kind of prejudice, which is of all artistic vices the least to be excused in a novelist. Mr. Howells, alike as moralizing novelist (*vide* "A Modern Instance") and as sufferer



from fits of Anglophobia, may well bethink himself of his own cure—he, the physician. The critic's case is in comparison less pressing, since here Mr. Howells exaggerates the disease. Discourtesy, brutality, vulgarity—these are always nefarious; but, as we have seen, Mr. Howells misconceives his just grievance to the extent of denying to the critic the right of even a temperate and impersonal condemnation of a novelist's treatment of life; comparing the critical function to that of the student of natural and non-moral phenomena; whereas that kind of treatment of books, if possible, would not be criticism at all, but mere description. The critic aims and must aim at influencing both art and conduct; and just because he is an explicit teacher, and as such not an artist, it is for *him* to condemn where it is for the artist simply to *represent*. It is Mr. Howells who should "handle his frog as if he loved him:" the critic's method is inevitably different.

→ Something of the naturalist's moral aloofness the true critic indeed must have, else he will run endless risk of misappreciation; and he must as certainly be capable of reviewing literature as a field of natural phenomena, reducible to classification and law, else his judgments will habitually lack correlation, proportion, comparative justice. Needless to say, he must regard literature as a process of evolution. And here I am driven regretfully to say that few critics have ever sinned more flagrantly against that basic principle than Mr. Howells has done in certain critical remarks on Edgar Poe. Not content with passing one of the usual perverse

Poe

American<sup>1</sup> judgments on Poe's work all round, the denier of the right of criticism proceeds to say:—"He [Poe] was *of his time*, and his tales and poems remain a part of literary history; but *if they were written to-day* most of them could not be taken seriously." Supposing this were true, which it assuredly is not, could there be a more grossly uncritical, a more unscientific, a more unjust species of test than that suggested? I take it that Poe's best work—verse or prose—will bear the test of time a century hence rather better than Mr. Howells' best; but on Mr. Howells' test, no work ever written could finally bear the test of time at all. If the "Prometheus Bound," or "Daphnis and Chloe," or the "Novum Organum," or "Hamlet," or "Le Misanthrope," or the "Vicar of Wakefield," or "The Scarlet Letter," or Descartes' "Sur la Méthode" were written to-day, could they be "taken seriously"? If it be answered that Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" could be so taken, I answer that to critics who have studied their business perhaps a little more carefully than Mr. Howells has done, Poe's "Dreamland," "For Annie," "To Helen," "The Haunted Palace," "The City in the Sea," are as masterly as anything in Keats or Tennyson; and that alike his verse and his tales seem to such critics destined to be taken seriously as long as imaginative art is cultivated. Clearly some of us run grave risks of judicial blindness.

<sup>1</sup> I trust I am here not falling into the folly of blind nationalist imputation. It is, to my knowledge, the fact that hostile estimates of Poe are proportionally very much more abundant in America than here. See an essay on Poe in *Our Courier*, September-December, 1885, *passim*.

(iii.) Thus far, in trying to map out these risks, we have looked at cases or possibilities of error in the appraisal of (a) the matter of literature, and, by consequence, of (b) authors. But plainly there are risks in the latter regard independently of the fallacious testing of an author's work. The belletristic or other bias, for one thing, may lead to irrational judgments as between different orders of intellectual achievement, as when Coleridge<sup>1</sup> naïvely decided that it would take many Newtons to make a Milton; or when Carlyle<sup>2</sup> similarly argued that not merely was Shakspeare's faculty necessarily equal to the production of a "Novum Organum," but that all Bacon's work represents an inferior order of capacity to the dramatist's—a species of flout not unavenged by later and worse extravagances. Against such crudities of judgment the critic is now-a-days better guarded by current culture. He is perhaps, however, no better guarded than ever against that prejudice of religious or philosophical opinion which the two critics just mentioned have so often exemplified—which makes Coleridge so vulgarly hostile to all writers who had doubted his creed or contravened his politics<sup>3</sup> and Carlyle so capriciously

<sup>1</sup> "Table Talk," July 4, 1833. Cf. the remark (*Id.* Oct. 8, 1830) that "it would take two or three Galileos and Newtons to make one Kepler."

<sup>2</sup> "Heroes and Hero Worship," Lect. iii.

<sup>3</sup> He is thus violently unjust to Gibbon ("Table Talk," August 15, 1833), to Horne Tooke (*Id.* May 7, 1830), to Landor (Jan. 1, 1834), to Hobbes and to Hume ("Biographia Literaria," c. 5. Cf. Mackintosh, "Eth. Philos.," Note T.), to Frenchmen, to Dissenters, and to Radicals generally. In regard to Horne Tooke, Coleridge echoed the earlier dictum of Hazlitt (in "The Spirit of the Age," 1825) that Tooke's "Letter to Mr. Dunning"



iniquitous in respect of men's varying combinations of masterfulness, weakness, licentiousness, deism, atheism, democratism, and philanthropy. It may or it may not be a quasi-philosophic bias which makes Mr. Lowell proceed from fair strictures on Pope's empiricism to unfair depreciation of some of his thinking, as where he carps at the poet's account of the varying conceptions of heaven without really invalidating his propositions. "Does our hope of heaven," he asks, *à propos* of the lines about the poor Indian, "depend upon our knowledge of astronomy?" The point is that the Indian, lacking astronomy, frames for himself "a *humbler* heaven," while Mr. Lowell's heaven is likely to be adjusted to his measure of knowledge of the cosmic system. It is doubtless true, as Mr. Lowell suggests by way of a "charitable" vindication of the poet's orthodox sincerity, that "Pope's precision of thought was no match for the fluency of his verse;" but then that happens to be true of most quasi-orthodox system-makers; and unless *my* philosophy in turn makes me unjust, it sometimes holds good of the fluent prose of Mr. Lowell. Such stuff as this:—

"Every mortal man of us holds stock in the only public debt that is absolutely sure of payment, and that is the debt of the Maker of this Universe to the Universe he has made. I have no notion of selling out (!) my stock in a panic."<sup>1</sup>

contained everything of value that appeared in the later "Diversions of Purley;" but also went so far as to assert that "all that is true in Horne Tooke's book is taken from Lennep." Now, Lennep's book, as Dr. Richardson has pointed out, was not published till 1790, twelve years after the Letter to Dunning and four after the first part of the Diversions.

<sup>1</sup> "My Study Windows," p. 57.



And this :—

“The true poet is much rather (*sic*) experimented upon by life and nature, by joy and sorrow, by beauty and defect, till it be found out whether he have any hidden music in him that can sing them into accord with the eternal harmony which we call God”—<sup>1</sup>

seems to me as vacuous a species of rhetoric as anything in Pope, and, written to-day, to be a stronger proof of laxity of thought than even the verbalist and confused pantheism of last century. But, though Mr. Lowell verbalizes as to Deity being an eternal harmony, he takes offence<sup>2</sup> at Pope's substituting “the general (!) term nature” for “God”; and one is driven to suspect in the critic one of those theological aversions which are found to transcend logical tests because they have no logical derivation. The practical lesson of the matter is that the distracted logic of Pope is no more fairly to be turned against him *qua* versifier than the distracted logic which pervades religious verse in general—Mr. Lowell's like other people's—is to be to the literary discredit of that.

(iv.) The name of Pope, and the question of comparative theology, bring us to what is, perhaps, one of the most practical of literary problems—that, namely, as to the *rationale* of moral blame. Pope's own character has been the subject of much unscientific discussion on the part of critics of all orders of capacity; and at this moment there may be said to be two camps of opinion on the subject, equally strong in names, and perhaps equally strong in logic. The two sides may be described

<sup>1</sup> “My Study Windows,” p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> P. 303.

as the accusing and the apologetic; and what has gone on is a process of impeachment on one side and of excuse on the other, Sainte-Beuve repudiating the heartlessness of M. Taine, Mr. Swinburne deprecating the somewhat hesitating severity of Mr. Stephen. In the two latter cases the infirmity of Mr. Stephen's logic is so great that only the extreme inconsistency of Mr. Swinburne's practice hinders the latter from carrying with him the general sympathy. Pope, according to the former critic, lays down a noble morality; and Mr. Stephen agrees with Mr. Ruskin that "a noble morality must proceed from a noble nature," that "good fruit, even in moralizing, can only be borne by a good tree,"<sup>1</sup>—a pre-historic fallacy of idea and term certainly sufficient to wreck any critical process. Accordingly, when Mr. Stephen is forced to admit that Pope's nature is at many points ignoble, he can but helplessly fall back on his fallacy and revolve in its circle. Sainte-Beuve could not generalize quite so primitively as Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Stephen; but he too misses science in his sympathetic defence of the frail-framed poet, so curiously different in method from his treatment of the much-moralizing but ill-conditioned Villemain.<sup>2</sup> And Mr. Swinburne is of course much more inconsistent still. "He was," says Mr. Stephen of Pope—"if we must speak bluntly—a liar and a hypocrite." "But I venture to think," pleads Mr. Swinburne parenthetically, "we must not speak so

<sup>1</sup> "Hours in a Library," 1st Series, pp. 129, 133.

<sup>2</sup> See the passage quoted in Mr. James's essay on Sainte-Beuve.

bluntly of such a man. . . . A liar, yes; a hypocrite, no." <sup>1</sup> But there is no showing that Pope was not a hypocrite in the only sense in which the word is practically significant; and we come to "the instincts of a deformed invalid," after something like an admission that constitutional bias is the cause of the misdoings alike of Burns and Byron. Here we are in sight of science; but we have only to turn to Mr. Swinburne's own treatment of Byron to see how little allowance he will make for the "instincts of a deformed invalid" when he is not in the melting mood.

X Yet it is surely not difficult to get at the scientific point of view. When Mrs. Oliphant judicially sums up that "Cowper had the excuse of mental disease; *whereas* no apology can be made for Burns, except that which pity makes for the *victim of a defective will* in all circumstances," <sup>2</sup> she so obviously misses that point of view that she leads us to it. A defective will is clearly as much a matter of cerebral constitution as "mental disease" so called. In Mrs. Oliphant's own view, both men are "victims," with "excuses." Now, the problem here is simply a phase of the general penal problem: All men act from motives created by heredity and environment: <sup>3</sup> shall we then punish them when

<sup>1</sup> "Miscellanies," p. 37. ("A Century of English Poetry.")

<sup>2</sup> "Literary History of England," i. 166.

<sup>3</sup> It is, or ought to be, instructive to note the philosophic confusion of Mr. Lowell on this question. "Now, although to admit this notion of inherited good or ill to its fullest extent would be to abolish personal character, and with it all responsibility, to abdicate freewill, and to make every effort at self-direction futile, there is no inconsiderable alloy (*sic!*) of truth in it nevertheless" ("My Study Windows," p. 183). One



they do wrong? The answer of penal science is that society must protect itself, and that accordingly the wrong-doers should be drafted dispassionately into asylums and prisons, according as their diathesis needs mainly medical or mainly disciplinary treatment. Of course penal practice is dismally astray from the sane theory, but that is none the less plain to those capable of dealing scientifically with morals and conduct. And the corollaries are surely just as clear. Asylum and jail are assumed to secure all such necessary protection of society as involves the detention of the dangerous organism: for wrong-doing not held to justify detention, and not calling for or admitting of medical or other supervision, we employ the correctives of blame and ostracism, these being means of modifying the free organism. Blame on this view is not a "stratagem," as some theologians have argued, but a procedure as inevitable as the physical avoidance of hot iron. We are or fear to be hurt, and we shrink; doing it, if we are rational, in the spirit of the adult as opposed to that in which the child beats the chair. But if our deliberate censure is futile, if the peccant organism cannot be modified, there is nothing for it but to resort either to ostra-

answers that to refuse to accept any notion to *its* fullest extent while admitting there is an "alloy of truth" in it, is either to confuse words in a scandalous fashion or to "abdicate" free reason. The principle of heredity *is* true to *its* fullest extent; and "personal character" and the "principle of responsibility" remain matters of scientific predication all the same. But Mr. Lowell, with his vague allusion to "freewill" and his half-admission of a heredity that interferes with "freewill," is only exhibiting afresh the eternal dilemma of theistic ethics.



cism or a protesting endurance, according as we are situated.

X The same principle covers the problem of literary criticism. If a writer show an evil bias in his work, that bias is to be publicly denounced: if his life be specially faulty, those faults must needs become public property after his death, if not sooner. The question then simply is, Ought we invariably to record our denunciation? and the answer surely is that we need only do so in so far as there is a danger of any being corrupted by the bad example. In the case of Cowper, only pity is for the most part possible: he is alike mentally and physically in the sick-room. Pity will always be leagued with censure in a good heart, when the sinner censured is one of the sufferers from his own error; but where he is the main or nearly the only sufferer, and the fact is patent to all, censure soon becomes superfluous, and pity alone should come into play. Now, the excuse for speaking with severity of Pope to-day is that his own so often unjust and unsound judgments still have an undue prestige, which may be lessened by exposure of his vices. In the case of Burns and Byron, such an excuse will be held to subsist by those who think that, say, Burns did injustice to religious zealotry, or that Byron did injustice to personages of his day; and that their verdict still carries undue weight. In the opinion of some of us, however, it is no more necessary now to rail at the unhappy Byron than to rail at the diversely unhappy Shelley; and the need even for temperate censure in

Pope's case is becoming ever less. It is more to the purpose to impeach Carlyle—yea, and Mr. Ruskin, who have wrought about as much injustice as any of their predecessors, and who at present are more influential. We cannot cure a temperament like Mr. Ruskin's, but when need is we can resist it. What is better, we may perhaps learn from it, taught to prize consistency by an execrable imbroglio of eloquent inconsistency, taught to value logic by the decay that is seen to overtake a body of often admirably inspired dicta by reason of their pervading arbitrariness, and profligacy in dogma.

And if we can learn lessons of critical conduct from Mr. Ruskin, no less may we learn from the very different Arnold that urbanity is not logical rectitude, that temperance of style is not judicial method. On some of the points on which he has been so forcibly challenged by Mr. Swinburne, Arnold spoke in sheer unpremeditated aberration of mood, saying things he could not possibly stand to across the table with the books open; just as, when he latterly alleged the invariable perfection of Milton's style, he certainly spoke in oblivion of blemishes that have been notorious since Addison—the "No fear lest dinner cool" and such-like banalities in the "Paradise Lost," and the insufferable touches of Cowleyism in the "Comus." But Arnold's perversity does not begin or end with paradoxes of literary classification: it is a chronic tergiversation, traceable to a vital division of bias between the logical dislike of the anomalous in all

things and the temperamental and hereditary leaning to the anomalous in so many things—the strain of Goliath in David (to apply Mr. Swinburne's *mot*)—the vein of militarism in the humanist, of unreason in the rationalist, of aristocratism in the Liberal. Of all that, the lesson is not to be put in a paragraph.

(v.) Caprice is so obvious a snare to the judge of letters, that only on one head is it worth while to discuss it further. That is, the manifold risk of treason to known truth, on the one hand through imperfect sympathy with persons who speak it, or through conscious inferiority of zeal; and on the other hand through sheer unworthy conformity to fashion. If the critic as such is to have an ideal—and all right conduct is a matter of following ideals—it should surely be one of courage and veracity, of effort to raise the ideals of others, to educate taste, to further high work and to discourage low. The fallacy which deduces from diversity of ideal a principle of pococurantism, mutely accepting the theatre as necessarily vulgar, the pulpit as necessarily irrational, because most people are vulgar and irrational—this is but sloth parading as philosophy. If a man feels it his mission to be all things to all men, echoing every shibboleth and winking at every abuse, let him act after his nature, but let him not pretend that he is comporting himself scientifically: the shibboleths and the abuses are the disproof. Unreason will always fight for its own hand; and if reason does not do as much, it is simply abdicating in favour of the other. The one cure for low ideals is



the obtrusion of higher—as one sees and holds them. Now, for generations it has been counted a respectable course in this country to compromise with low ideals in Church and State, deprecating high standards of worthiness in this and of honesty in that; so that we have our minor poets relieving the reluctant laureate of his function of official flattery, and our critics in a conspiracy of silence as to the popular mythology; Arnold sentimentally resisting Colenso; Carlyle cloaking unbelief through a lifetime with rhetoric, and frightening young disciples into worse insincerity. In this state of things we have suppression of translations of M. Zola, on the score that these tend to reach the common people, while the original lies free to the rest of us, and our own most obscene and corrupt “classics” are sold both dear and cheap; the same journals glossing over the leering prurience of Fielding and lifting the hands at the passionless science of Zola. Needless to say, the temper that yields such moral phenomena makes steadily for that literary conservatism which is irritated by every innovation, and whose history is a record of stultified censure and retorted contempt. From all which, may science deliver us.

If it does not, there is small security, in literature any more than in sociology, for that continuous future progress which some people suppose to be involved in the principle of evolution. The steady extension of the vogue of the theatre in the direction of the lower rather than of the higher forms of drama is one warning; and the invariably greater popularity of the lower as com-



pared with the higher forms of successful fiction points the same lesson. It is of course clear that mere literary criticism cannot remove these drawbacks; but inasmuch as the critic is a nerve in the social organism, remissness on his part must needs react on the whole; and the cure cannot be made without his being in his degree instrumental. Yet when the exceptional vogue of some sensational fiction elicits a number of just if somewhat miscalculating protests, a critic of standing is found ready to sophisticate the issue by taking it as one of rival categories rather than of grades of efficiency. Mr. Andrew Lang, in an article on "Romance and Realism," discourses readably on his elective affinities, and, *à propos* of some recent discussions, declares that "if the battle between the crocodile of Realism and the catawampus of Romance is to be fought out to the bitter end—why, in that Ragnarök, I am on the side of the catawampus."<sup>1</sup> The main effect of this final deliverance is to register Mr. Lang as a champion of Mr. Rider Haggard, who belongs to the *genus* catawampus. Now the pitting of realism against romance (a dubiously profitable course in any case) is a totally different thing from the question whether Mr. Rider Haggard's books are tolerable literature. Mr. Lang does indeed make something like an incidental admission that they rank low in their own department; but that is not the effect of his general exposition, which indeed is rather a string of three leading articles than a critical argument. The

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, Nov., 1887, p. 693.

reader is left to understand that the objection to Mr. Haggard comes from the sectarian critics who can appreciate none save realistic fiction, and that Mr. Lang, who in turn has little taste for realism, finds Mr. Haggard in his way good literature enough. There need be no question here of the partiality of a friendship that is avowed; for no one supposes that Mr. Lang would extol Mr. Haggard's books if he got no pleasure from them. The dispute is as to his profligate defence of an order of literature that he knows to be poor stuff, on the score that it interests his idler hours. Many of us, probably, could say the same: one can recommend the books in question as serving to make time pass that for any reason, whether of lassitude, sloth, or circumstance, cannot be better occupied. But no reader with Mr. Lang's culture can possibly fail to recognize the bankruptcy of Mr. Haggard in all the higher qualities even of the romance-writer; his essential vulgarity of plan, aim, and method; his profound inferiority to, say, Mr. Stevenson, not only in style, culture, grasp of character, taste, morals, philosophy, and breeding, but in the very matters on which he specially stands—verisimilitude of detail and vividness of imagination on the granted plane of his plot. When Mr. Stevenson describes a scene we can see it and feel that he sees it: he does not, like Mr. Haggard, speak of a given slope as "steep" and as "gradual" in the same chapter. But to speak of such books as "Prince Otto" and *Un*"She" as in any sense comparable

because both are technically "romances," is trifling; and to praise the latter book as a good romance because one can enjoy it as one enjoys poker, is to debase the literary currency. A critic who does such things challenges a court-critical; and the foregoing verdict may be reinforced by the following:—

"Mr. Lang is not merely an overgrown schoolboy. He is a man of fine literary faculty and delicate literary sense. He knows as well as the *Fortnightly* Reviewer (and probably much better) that Mr. Haggard is not a writer, an *écrivain*, but merely a popular paper-stainer. He knows that his style is alternately flat and tawdry, always slipshod, and often incorrect. He knows that his humour is the cheapest sort of mess-room jocosity, filtered for family consumption. He knows in his heart of hearts (though this, perhaps, he does not confess, even to himself) that the imagination which begot 'She' is mechanically grandiose and is marred by an all-pervading commonness. He knows that the philosophic padding which Mr. Haggard so much affects is the veriest twaddle. He knows, in short, that Mr. Haggard is a story-teller for schoolboys, a half-educated writer for the half-educated. But having, in a schoolboy mood, done homage to Mr. Haggard's genius, Mr. Lang is not the man to falter in his allegiance."<sup>1</sup>

Having regard merely to Mr. Lang's pleasant trifling, all this might seem needlessly serious. But Mr. Lang in his turn can on occasion be most decorously serious, as when it is a matter of rebuking the ill-recommended morality of M. Renan's latest imaginative performance.<sup>2</sup> In such a case the critic can rise to the height of rebuking the frivolous Gaul for taking away people's religious beliefs; a tendency of which the critic's own mythological investigations are of course innocent. Thus established as a moral authority with the British public, Mr. Lang may never even be suspected, by

<sup>1</sup> Art. "Philistine Fiction," by Mr. W. Archer, *Pall Mall Gaz.*, Oct. 25, 1888. <sup>2</sup> Art. "M. Renan's Later Works," *Fortn. Rev.*, Jan., 1887, p. 59.



respectable readers, of playing fast-and-loose with critical ethics in the case of Mr. Haggard. Now, the rise of an orthodox public that frowned on Renan and batted on Haggard would not promise well for the future of civilization; and it is desirable, once in a way, to impugn those of Mr. Lang's labours which tend to produce the sort of public in question. In a case of loose newspaper criticism, one may choose between theories of professional laxity and of incompetence. But in Mr. Lang's case there cannot be the measure of incompetence that the hypothesis would demand; and with a writer of his ascertained delicacy of conscience we are forced to assume a lapse into unconscientiousness.

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Does all this, it may be asked, constitute a "method"? The hope is that, however feebly, it points, not to a method, but to method. Methods have indeed done much for knowledge: the method of M. Taine has helped to set up intelligent currents through the whole area of criticism, though it has been felt to be over-facile in some of its applications, and to make a case at times "dark by excess of light." The risk of a method is that it makes methodists; and the English critic who made merry<sup>1</sup> over Sainte-Beuve's claim to work with such an instrument, contributed a sufficient vindication of the master against

<sup>1</sup> Art. "Sainte-Beuve's Critical Method," by "A. A.," *Cornhill Magazine*, July, 1878.

any such suspicion. "He [Sainte-Beuve] has, or thinks he has, a critical method, though I confess I never found it out till he told me of it himself." The alleged method was indeed only a "tip": the great critic did in fact, as Mr. James claims for him, continue to develop to the last, his taste "growing more and more flexible with time," and "opening new windows and doors," despite certain residual prejudices. His influence lay, and will continue to lie, in the perpetual appeal he makes to right reason in all his readers.

That this appeal goes for little in practice, we shall doubtless continue to hear. Sainte-Beuve himself, indeed, may seem citable to obscurantist purpose in that connection, when he delivers himself thus unpremeditatedly:—

"La critique, à lui seul, ne fait rien et ne peut rien. La bonne critique elle-même n'a son action que de concert avec le public et presque en collaboration avec lui. J'oserai dire que le critique n'est que le *secrétaire* du public, mais un secrétaire qui n'attend pas qu'on lui dicte, et qui devine, qui démêle et rédige chaque matin la pensée de tout le monde. Et même, lorsque le critique a exprimé cette pensée que chacun a ou que chacun désire, une grande part des allusions, des conclusions et conséquences, une parte toute vive reste encore dans l'esprit des lecteurs."<sup>1</sup>

But what is this but a delicate way of saying that the critic energizes under the same intellectual laws as the statesman, the moralist, the poet? Sainte-Beuve the humanist had in him certain energies which, given play, acted on his generation; just as Victor Hugo, the patriot, standing on his own feet and taking his

<sup>1</sup> "Lundi" on "M. de Feletz et de la Critique Littéraire sous l'Empire," 25 fév. 1850 (ed. Garnier, p. 373). Microsoft®

own way, lived to see the fruit of the action in which he persisted when other men would not persist, and so earned a historic credit which Sainte-Beuve, abdicating half his birthright, has missed. Criticism only succeeds in concert with the public: yes; but the concert may come late or come soon; and one of the measures of the critic's stature is the length of reach he was able to make for it. Unhappily, only courage can perceive that courage is the best policy, as in the parallel case of honesty.

In Sainte-Beuve's reflection we have an obvious truth: to see that confused into a fallacy, let us turn once more to the nihilist criticism of Mr. Howells:

"Every literary movement has been violently opposed at the start, and yet never stayed in the least, or arrested, by criticism; every author has been condemned for his virtues, but in no wise changed by it." "Perhaps criticism has a cumulative and final effect; perhaps it does some good that we do not know of. It apparently does not affect the author directly, but it may reach him through the reader. It may in some cases enlarge or diminish his audience for a while. . . . We doubt if it can do more than that."

The failure as well as the thesis of such argument suggests that Mr. Howells should abandon the practice which he declares to be so futile; for if "the critic" cannot directly affect "the author," it stands to reason that the author-critic cannot directly affect the critic-author. It is sufficiently absurd that the matter should seem to become a sort of tribal conflict between authors and reviewers; but it is necessary at any cost to point out that critic-authors and author-critics have



repeatedly affected each other and the public to a great extent in human history; that it is not the case, as Mr. Howells so strangely assumes, that *all* literary "movements" have triumphed over opposition; that Pope *did* help to kill Blackmore by criticism; that Boileau *did* go far to suppress *préciosité*; that even Johnson discredited the "metaphysical" school; that Lessing went a long way to change the course of German literature; that Voltaire immensely influenced that of France; that Coleridge and Wordsworth wrote criticism as well as poetry, and were influential in both ways; that Macaulay did much to put Montgomery out of fashion; that every critic of any standing, in short, has that standing precisely in respect of his influence alike on authors and on public; and that the apparent futility of the bulk of criticism is just a phase of the apparent futility of the bulk of human effort. But such a good democrat as Mr. Howells should not need to be reminded that the miscalculation of the value of individual conviction is the master error of unprogressive ages. Futility is strictly proved only when efforts are seen to merely cancel each other. And to avoid such cancelment the one way, clearly, is to strengthen one of the efforts.

As regards, finally, the old formula that criticism is a lower form of intellectual effort than those called "creative," one need but point to the nullity of the proposition. This comes out notably enough in Mr. Arnold's valuable essay "On the Function of Criticism at the Present Time." "Everybody," says the critic,

“would be willing to admit, as a general proposition, that the critical faculty is lower than the inventive.” And again: “The critical power is of lower rank than the creative. True. . .”<sup>1</sup> But on the next leaf we have this:—“Creative literary genius does not principally show itself in discovering new ideas; that is rather the business of the philosopher.”<sup>2</sup> What then does creative literary genius create or invent or discover? And when Mr. Arnold was putting forth his ideas in that essay was he a philosopher or a critic? These distinctions are meaningless. We have seen that the only generic difference between the “critic” and the “original” writer is that the former, as such and as a rule, writes *àpropos* of books, while the latter, as a rule, writes *àpropos* of things, events, and ideas. If the conventional notion be progressively worked out, it is found that the historian is no more “creative” than the critic; since both do but comment on data. But who then is creative? It would seem, only the fictionist — the poet or dramatist or novelist who invents stories; since poems on facts are more “creative” than histories only in the sense that they involve more labour of expression; and if labour of expression is “creative,” then even the prose historian, and every prose writer, including the “critic,” is “creative” up to a certain point. Nay more, the careful prose stylist may be more “creative” than the careless poet.

<sup>1</sup> Essays in Criticism,” 3d. ed. pp. 3, 4.

Again, Charles Lamb's essay on "Old China" or "New Year's Eve" would commonly be ranked as creative. Is the essay on "Shakspeare's Tragedies" then the work of a "lower" order of faculty? What does "lower" in this connection mean? I can find no tenable definition save "less rare"; and I cannot see that the faculty shown in the one case is less rare than that shown in the other. Nobody, surely, pretends, that a poor poem or a bad novel involves a higher order of faculty than that which produces a good criticism—that Mr. Montgomery was a higher intellectual type than Sainte-Beuve. What must be meant is that good poetry or fiction, say, is something higher than good criticism, the best poetry than the best criticism. But to what distinct idea does this lead us? Suppose we say that the best poetry or fiction in existence affords a keener satisfaction than the best criticism in existence; and plausibly argue that that kind of excellence which yields the keener kind of satisfaction means the higher order of faculty; will it not follow that the musician is still higher than the poet, Beethoven than Shakspeare, Schubert than Heine?<sup>1</sup> — not to raise the point whether Rubinstein or Joachim is as high as Millet or Turner. Even if it were not sometimes confidently argued that anybody would prefer being Michael Angelo or Newton or Bacon to being Beethoven or Mozart, the test would become instantly suspect, for we should have to go further, and place Schubert and Heine in their degrees high above Aristotle and

<sup>1</sup> Compare Mr. Arnold's poem, "Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön."



Laplace; and we should not stop till we had set Taglioni above James Watt.

It is an idle undertaking, this of graduating the various kinds of excellence—greatness in the arts, in the sciences, in philosophy, in history and criticism, in discovery, in action—and the question should never have been raised in connection with criticism in particular. It is always raised fallaciously.<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth was only condemning bad criticism when he generalized on the subject; for his “fetch” as to the preferability of bad poetry to bad criticism reduces the argument to triviality; and Mr. Arnold has rightly answered<sup>2</sup> that the poet was rather better employed over his critical prefaces than over his Ecclesiastical Sonnets. It was a very gratuitous fallacy to couple that contention with an admission that criticism is something lower than poetry; as if Wordsworth’s prose criticisms were not more “creative” than nine-tenths of his verse.

But indeed it is demoralizing to argue at all about the application of an epithet by which it is sought to scare honest criticism from its work. “Creative,” as

<sup>1</sup> Thus Mr. Hall Caine, after admitting that there is a “criticism that is in itself creative” (“Cobwebs of Criticism,” p. xix), decides that “criticism *must*, in the nature of things, lag behind creation—it usually establishes its tenets on the accepted doctrinés of the period anterior to it. Creative effort is linked in no such palpable way with the past. It may break entirely with the canons of art that preceded it” (p. xxi). As if any such “entire” break ever occurred in art or anything else! It would really be more nearly attainable in “criticism” than in art, because it is easier to plan and suggest than to perform.

<sup>2</sup> Essay cited.

X | a term of characterization in literature, has just the value of "original"; and the wise man knows with Mr. Ruskin that the one way to be original is to be sincere. If, acting on that principle, the critic attains to what is new, it is well; if he but attains to what is true, it is still well. And on both heads his chances need be no worse than those of other people.

Howells had not yet  
written *Rise of Silas Lapham* 1885  
nor *A Hazard of New Fortunes* 1890

MR. HOWELLS' NOVELS.

(1884.)

So much has been made in the mother-country of the challenge to America to produce a distinctively American poet, that it is rather puzzling to find almost no record of a similar demand for a fictionist. The explanation which first offers itself is that for a generation back the unique genius of Hawthorne has forestalled any such requirement; but the method of Hawthorne, rare and exquisite as it is, and concerned as it is in large part with American subjects, does not at all obviously realize what British critics might be conceived to expect from an American; and if it did, there would still be the question why so much stress was laid on the demand for a poet if it were admitted that America had produced a great and national novelist. Did not the existence of the novelist prove all that the desiderated poet was to attest? Or could it be that the challenge about the poet was so essentially puerile that it might have been met by the appearance of one whose grade in the company of singers should be no higher than that of Fenimore Cooper among writers of fiction,



provided he had an equal endowment of nationalism? The problem fosters uneasy speculation as to whether the critical British patriot has of recent years felt forced to silence by the product of Joaquin Miller rather than by that of Walt Whitman. However that may be, it is certain that no English journalist will in these days seek to humble Americans by discussing the novelists of the States. Whatever *genre* be conceived by Whitmanites or the *Times* as the ideally American, it must be allowed that two such writers as Mr. Henry James and Mr. W. D. Howells have an art, a method, and a material of their own. Mr. James, while not following British models—unless he be held to have imitated “Daniel Deronda” in his “Portrait of a Lady”—has perhaps a somewhat undue tendency to take his characters to Europe; and there is a certain suggestiveness in this style of announcing one of his recent magazine stories:—“It belongs to the ‘International’ series, the scene shifting from London to New York, and back to London. Lady Barberina is the daughter of an English nobleman, who engages the affections of a young American physician, who is the heir to millions.” Mr. James has indeed a way of devoting himself to the society of aliens who neither toil nor spin. But there is no such reproach against Mr. Howells. That writer, though he has made use of his acquaintance with Venice in several stories, is not only above the weakness of adorning his books with the English aristocracy, but is at pains to indicate his distinctively American attitude by his treatment of the

English personages in his narratives. If Mr. Howells wants to introduce a particularly vulgar figure, or to set off the refinement and intelligence of his leading characters, he does so by bringing forward one or more members of the English nation, or, at a pinch, a Canadian, who shall be adequately ill-bred or good-naturedly stupid; and when that plan is not altogether convenient, he is likely to succeed in his purpose by conveying the idea that a particular sample of American manners is a copy from the English. Englishmen will hardly think of charging such an artist with deficiency in nationalness.

Mr. Howells, however, is too likeable an author to be classified on the strength even of such a striking peculiarity as that. It is probable that a feeling of personal attraction to the writer is about as common a result of reading his books here as it appears to be in the States. If the sincerest compliment we can pay an author is that of reading his books in quick succession, there can be little doubt that Mr. Howells has had as friendly a reception from the British public within the past two or three years as he could well wish; the attractions of Mr. Douglas's pocket edition combining with those of the novelist's style, humour, and piquant narrative to lead even temperate novel-readers into prolonged dissipation. An English reader, in whatever school his taste may have been formed, unless it shall have been the sensational, is likely to find something refreshing and stimulating in Mr. Howells' stories; and even the amateur of deep-laid

plots may learn from them to relish better things. Here there are no mysterious crimes; no studies in circumstantial evidence; no staggering surprises; few rescues, and these quite ordinary. The novelist has gone beyond George Eliot in his abandonment of plot and intrigue, and challenges us to try how a dexterously handled love-story will do on its own basis. And for a while it undoubtedly does very well indeed. These stories of light and lightly treated incident, with their accidental meetings of young people which are the beginnings of loves that run, in most cases, with a ripple that to an old-fashioned romancer would represent the merest smoothness, but is to the ordinary reader a sufficiently palpitating series of anxieties; loves which come to nothing and loves which end in marriage; loves under peculiar and loves under ordinary circumstances, always with some environment of cleverly observed and deftly drawn characters, and generally an interesting pictorial background—in all respects they are readable and appetizing. It is only after the charm of the humour and the artist's self-possession has become quite familiar, after interest in the love-stories and satisfaction in the minor character-drawing have passed into retrospection and suffusive musing, that a sense of anything being lacking supervenes. And the reader, even if his turn of mind be critical, will probably hesitate at first to decide that his vague impression of inadequacy can legitimately be formulated into an objection to the work he is thinking of. In two of Mr. Howells' stories the theme and the treatment are alike



so simple—there is so little hint of the author's personality, so little suggestion that he conceives himself to have presented to us a finished artistic production—that it is impossible to arraign him on their basis. The narratives in question are "Their Wedding Journey" and "A Chance Acquaintance," two of Mr. Howells' earlier novels. In the first we have simply the experiences, observations, impressions, and conversations of a young couple in their honeymoon—which they devote to travelling from Boston to Canada and back—the whole not properly amounting to a story, as even the pre-matrimonial history of the pair is only hinted at; and here there is really nothing to be discontented about on a final critical consideration. The author has given us a daintily written sketch, in which the personal element agreeably relieves interesting description and historical talk; and we cannot say that he is in the least respect dissatisfying. We feel, not that the slightness of the sketch is a shortcoming, but that he can do more, and when a few clues in "Their Wedding Journey" are taken up and worked on in "A Chance Acquaintance," the feeling is strengthened; a conviction of the author's ability being left without any suspicion of inadequacy. Thus far Mr. Howells' performances are, as wholes as well as in detail, fresh and original, suggesting an independent method and even a high standpoint; just because they so fully realize all they seem to aim at. "A Chance Acquaintance," which remains one of his most felicitous productions, is a study of an abortive love affair between an aristo-

cratic Bostonian and a bright, unconventional New England girl, who become acquainted on a holiday journey. It will at once recall "Pride and Prejudice" to the lovers of Jane Austen, an artist whose method has perhaps more points of affinity with that of Mr. Howells than has that of any other English writer; though he has of necessity passed under the influence of George Eliot. Of course George Eliot's achievement, and all else that has gone between Jane Austen's day and ours, produce a pervading difference between the stories of Darcy's *tendresse* for Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Miles Arbuton's for Kitty Ellison. Above all, the quality of American humour marks off Mr. Howells' story as a perfectly independent study and work of art, though it should be noted that Jane Austen to some extent anticipates American humour as well as American method in fiction. In "A Chance Acquaintance" the separating tendency of the wooer's social prejudices and the girl's strength of character has the effect of breaking off their unlikely looking and precipitately formed engagement; and in this and in a dozen other respects the story, with all its slightness, is a further evolved production than any of Jane Austen's. We have here the mark of the modern critical development—the implication that [a good fictionist is not simply to concoct for us a story with an agreeable ending, but is to impress us with a sense of his faithfulness to an actual life that is full of broken threads and pathetic failures.] Jane Austen, writing in girlhood and applying her exquisite powers with hardly any critical data before her, was content

to smilingly finish off her stories in a way that would leave her tender-hearted readers contented. Since her day have appeared the Bröntes, Thackeray, George Eliot, Balzac, and Tourguénief; and these have cast on the aspirant who follows them a burden of serious consideration of life which did not trouble the wonderful little woman who wrote her early stories so spontaneously in the quiet old parsonage of Steventon. "Pride and Prejudice" might or might not end "happily"; but "A Chance Acquaintance" is only a good story in virtue of the final breach between the ill-assorted lovers. Had Mr. Arbuton married Kitty, the story, one feels, would have been immeasurably less worth the telling; with its actual conclusion it represents a work of intelligent, sympathetic, subtle observation, and deliberate, finished art. The interludes of historical and descriptive detail make up with the curious little love episode an artistic whole—a story which is not exactly a novel, but is none the less a perfectly justifiable and satisfying literary product. Summing up, one pronounces it a sound and promising sample of realistic fiction, presenting as it does a quite agreeable set of phenomena, because the shifting scene is naturally one of amenity, but indicating no incapacity for handling grimmer details. We have the truthfulness of Tourguénief, with an inspiriting humour and cheerfulness which Tourguénief lacks; and to a sanguine reader all things seem possible with such a writer and such a method. It is perhaps not too much to say, however, that "A Chance Acquaintance," taken as a whole,



represents, if not Mr. Howells' high-water mark, at least an unfulfilled promise of achievement on his part.

This is apt to look like saying that the novelist has failed in that he has not continued to give us simply stories which end unfortunately—that a pessimistic treatment of human relations in fiction is alone sound; a principle which the most confirmed pessimist would hardly venture to lay down in matters of art. Of course, no such principle is here advanced; but in point of fact the arrest of development asserted of Mr. Howells may to a large extent be indicated in terms of his later leaning to rose-colour. For purposes of exposition, it may be said that a love-story which ends unfortunately is potentially the testimony of a deeper thought, and consequently of a stronger artistic grasp, than are testified by a love-story which ends fortunately; that is to say, the presumption is against the latter being all through the more deeply thought and superior performance, though there is, of course, no certainty that the sad story will be such. [The presumption is that the mere pleasant love-story is the device of a facile workman who produces what he knows the majority of readers enjoy, and is little concerned about giving any thoughtfully acquired conclusions of his own as to what life is like.] Or, alternatively, we may say that it is presumably the work of one who does not think deeply, and has his natural habitat among the sunny shallows. This may seem a hard saying; but let any one fully compare for himself the work of a writer of pleasant love-stories

—say Mr. Black—with that of a novelist of a more sombre turn—as George Eliot or Tourguénief, or even Thackeray—and say whether the former is not by a long way the less important kind of artist, precisely in respect of his fashion of making things nice. His function is the inferior one of titillating people's nerves agreeably by lightly bringing together under varying conditions persons of the two sexes, and exciting in the reader pleasurable sensations in sympathy with those of the heroes and heroines. His books are what Carlyle would call lollipops; and the feeling of his thoughtful readers is apt in time to become that of the sage over the “Idylls of the King,” one of some “impatience at being treated so very like infants, though the lollipops were so superlative.” It will perhaps be objected that Mr. Black has attempted work above the lollipop order. To answer that is impossible within the limits of the present paper; but it may in passing be suggested that it was perhaps a consciousness of having produced too many lollipops that inspired the attempts to produce something different. Now, the gist of the critical finding against Mr. Howells is, firstly, that after promising to give us sound realistic work, embodying both observation and meditation on life, he has descended to the function of producing lollipops; and, secondly, that when he has sought since to present the desirable realistic and conscientious work he has exhibited a lack of the necessary width and depth of thought—in short, deficient philosophic capacity.

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Such a judgment is not to be passed on such an accomplished writer without a careful estimate of his excellences. Apart entirely from any question of his moral personality, [Mr. Howells establishes on the very first acquaintance a peculiar claim to his reader's goodwill in respect of his perfect mastery of the language he writes in. To read any one of his stories is to experience that acute pleasure expressed in Dickens's cry over one of the "Idylls of the King"—"What a blessed thing it is to read a man who really can write!" Felicity of style, constituting as it does the main element of immortality in any literary product, is one of the best gifts a fictionist can have; and it is so strongly suggestive of all-round capacity that probably every critical reader on a first contact with the work of Mr. Howells places him higher as a writer and thinker than fuller acquaintance will justify, while the chances are that many will never consent to forego their first estimate. There is no describing that sense of tingling yet soothing satisfaction in falling into the hands of a good stylist.] The one sensation it can judiciously be compared to is that of a skater on ice that is at once strong and pure, when prolonged experiment has removed all apprehension of cracks, roughnesses, and snowdrifts; and when the only approximation felt to a shock is the recurrent thrill of the ice's smooth elastic strength. George Eliot taught us how full and how precious this enjoyment might be, and she added to the artistic gratification an impression of adequate mentality such as we do not seem likely to have from



no close analysis

any one else for a while; but though Mr. Howells must have been influenced by that great model in his pursuit of his art, he is perfectly original in his success.

[A general facility in tolerable and even good writing is now by no means uncommon among fictionists, but perfectly assured and accomplished work is still so rare! The strained adjective, the *banal* or reiterated term, the overladen description, the spasmodic effort at impressiveness, the meaningless metaphysicism, the bankrupt reflection—who has not stumbled over them all again and again in his conscientious examination of the more or less promising romancers of the day?]

Mr. Howells' stylistic success is that of the artist who delights in his work. In his short paper on Mr. Henry James,<sup>1</sup> he has commented with a craftsman's satisfaction on that writer's fortunate use of language; and it is easy to see that he is a vigilant critic of his own work, which is the stylist's final credential. Reviewing the prose of the leading English novelists of the past hundred years, to whom the debt of English literature is so great, one can see how, one after another, they have perfected expression; the self-possessed irony of Fielding happily developing into the copiously but choicely phrased humour of Scott—seen best in his prefaces; the wit and refinement of Jane Austen introducing a subtler precision, to which Charlotte Brontë added colour and boldness; Dickens making his mark with his luxuriant whimsicality, and Thackeray evolving a lighter and choicer sarcasm; till George Eliot brought

into the language a new and complex harmony, in which all elements of strength seemed combined. But it is apparent at a glance that Mr. Howells comes after all these in order of evolution. Scott's carelessness is at times nothing short of exasperating; Jane Austen's marvellous precocity could not consist with true finish of style; Charlotte Brontë could be as commonplace at one time as she was triumphantly successful at another; and there are more small slips in George Eliot—the most accomplished of all these—than one cares to mention. Mr. Howells, granted that he works on a lower plane, is more nearly a faultless stylist than even the last. This scrupulous care is perceived by a negative process: his adroitness and accuracy of touch compel notice every little while, just often enough to keep up a special current of pleasurable sensation. If any set of samples can convey an idea of the charm of these skilled touches, it is likely that a few will go as far as a mass.

A sufficient number may be taken from one novel, "A Modern Instance." In chapter v. of that story there is a slight but noticeable sample of the author's deftness in a sentence on lawyer Gaylord: "A man is master in his own house, generally, through the exercise of a certain degree of brutality, but Squire Gaylord maintained his predominance by an enlightened absenteeism." A different kind of power is shown in this sentence on Mrs. Gaylord in chapter viii.: "It was not apathy that she showed when their children died one after another, but an obscure and formless

exultation that Mr. Gaylord should suffer enough for both." Here the impression produced is partly due to the striking character of the idea; but Mr. Howells constantly attains the true triumph of style, that of making an ordinary phenomenon freshly appreciable. Take his account of Kinney the cook, "starting as a gaunt and awkward boy from the Maine woods, and keeping until he came back to them the same gross and ridiculous optimism," all the while carrying or finding adversity, "but with a heart fed on the metaphysics of Horace Greeley, and buoyed up by a few wildly interpreted maxims of Emerson." For the eclectic reader there is no need to italicize the piquant features in these quotations, and for others the service would perhaps be unblest. But everybody must catch the adroit touch in the following account of a mortified scamp's soliloquy: "It was not that he cared for Kinney; that fool's sulking was only the climax of a long series of injuries of which he was the victim at the hands of a hypercritical omnipotence." A new collocation of terms, as in Charlotte Brontë's "colossal hum," descriptive of the note of St. Paul's clock, is the sign of the gift of writing, and one has it in Mr. Howells in all kinds of manifestations. He is apt, indeed, to presume on it. Thus he describes the possessor of a stylographic pen, "striking the fist that held it upon his other fist, in the fashion of the amateurs of that reluctant instrument." The situation under description has both a serious and a romantic interest, and only the effect of that adjective "reluc-



tant," can at all excuse the detailed allusion to the pen, which one perceives to be introduced chiefly to fire off the *mot*. But at times, on the other hand, he conveys a telling humorous touch with the happiest concision, as in the reference to the old sea-farers of Corbitant, who "had now all retired from the sea, and having survived its manifold perils, were patiently waiting to be drowned in sail-boats on the bay." Sometimes Mr. Howells' wit is as weighty as it is poignant, as in this reference to Mrs. Atherton, *née* Kingsbury, who in her younger days had thought she had "great interests," but has become an ordinary happy woman: "In her moments of question as to the shape which her life had taken since, she tried to think whether the happiness which seemed so little dependent on these things was probably immortal, and was certainly cultivated." The spirit of the artist in words, too, comes out in such a description as that of an "accipitral profile," in which we have a better vocable than the canonical "accipitrine," and a more telling term than *aquiline*; and, again, somewhat questionably, in a reference to negro melodists as flinging up their "black voices." But questionable effects are rare in Mr. Howells' work; so rare that the following could hardly be paired from his books: "the old man had to endure talk of Bartley, to which all her former praises were as refreshing shudders of defamation." That is, perhaps, the worst phrase Mr. Howells has produced, and it is only bad enough to prove that he is mortal.

Such a degree of artistic conscientiousness com-

mands respect. Such a writer has to be reckoned with as a thinker to the extent at least of his calculation of expression; and Mr. Howells has besides given us a very distinct declaration of artistic principles in regard to choice and treatment of theme. In chapter xvi. of "A Modern Instance" (i. 257) is this remark on Bartley Hubbard's compilation, for newspaper purposes, of an account of the prices and aspects of Boston lodgings: "He had the true newspaper instinct, and went to work with an intention which was as different as possible from the literary intention. He wrote for the effect which he was to make, and not from any artistic pleasure in the treatment." Then he has a remark elsewhere to the effect that Anthony Trollope's novels are tiresome; but the most notable details he gives us as to his critical attitude are to be found in his graceful little paper on Mr. Henry James. In that short but evidently deliberate study he had the courage to write as follows:—

"The art of fiction has, in fact, become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray. We could not suffer the confidential attitude of the latter now, nor the mannerism of the former, any more than we could endure the prolixity of Richardson or the coarseness of Fielding. These great men are of the past—they and their methods and interests; even Trollope and Reade are not of the present. The new school derives from Hawthorne and George Eliot rather than any others; but it studies human nature much more in its wonted aspects, and finds its ethical and dramatic examples in the operation of lighter but not really less vital motives. The moving accident is certainly not its trade; and it prefers to avoid all manner of dire catastrophes. It is largely influenced by French fiction in form; but it is the realism of Daudet rather than the realism of Zola that prevails with it; and it has a soul of its own which is above the business of recording the rather brutish pursuit of a woman by a man, which seems to be the chief end of the French novelist. . . . It is, after all, what a

*gossipy* *of Thackeray*

writer has to say rather than what he has to tell that we care for nowadays. In one manner or other the stories were all told long ago; and now we want merely to know what the novelist thinks about persons and situations."

There is some obscurity here, and a danger of misunderstanding Mr. Howells in the attempt to choose between the meanings naturally to be drawn from his opinion, on the one hand, that we could not now suffer the confidential attitude of Thackeray; and his proposition, on the other, that what we care for is what a writer has to say rather than what he has to tell. What is meant by "what he has to say," and "what the novelist thinks about persons and situations"? Is it that Mr. Howells finds Thackeray's perpetual introduction of his individuality a superseded method, but that he still desires an explicit, though less free and easy, announcement of the author's views on characters and conduct? He had said in a previous paragraph that there was on the part of Mr. James's readers, in regard to Daisy Miller, a "mistake as to his attitude," a "confusion of his point of view with his private opinion;" and that "they would have liked him better if he had been a worse artist—if he had been a little more confidential." We are either witnessing a confusion of thought or a very subtle piece of metaphysicizing—one fears, the former.

"No other novelist [says Mr. Howells a little further on], except George Eliot, has dealt so largely in analysis of motive, has so fully explained and commented on the springs of action in the persons of the drama, both before and after the facts. These novelists are more alike than any others in their processes, but with George Eliot an ethical purpose is dominant, and with Mr. James an artistic purpose."



This is clearer, but it does not clear up the other passages. Is it meant that an author becomes "confidential," and accordingly primitive, when he harbours an ethical purpose; and that the true artist takes up some "point of view" which does not give the clue to his ethics or "private opinion"? Is George Eliot, after all, classed with Thackeray as "confidential"? She was indeed confidential enough. Mr. Howells must excuse us if we cannot follow the logic of his criticism. Though we give it up as a whole, however, the different propositions remain interesting for us, and may fitly be discussed in the course of further consideration of his books.

It is important to think out that distinction between artistic and ethical purpose in a novelist's analysis of, and comments on, the motives of his characters. We may range alongside of it the distinction between the newspaper intention and the literary intention; though one's inclination is to dismiss the latter at once as superficial. According to this definition, the newspaper intention is in its degree a form of ethical purpose; the latter terms presumably meaning a desire to move the reader to an act of moral judgment and influence his conduct. It would follow that Mr. James writes, not with any wish to make a moral impression on his readers, but rather for the sake of the satisfaction he finds in his study and his art. Now, it is tolerably certain that artists of every description, whatever pleasure they may have in the practice of their art, require appreciation to make their contentment any-

thing like complete; and it may reasonably be assumed that neither Mr. Howells nor Mr. James can be quite satisfied without that advantage. Mr. James, in his paper on Alphonse Daudet,<sup>1</sup> as it happens, gives us his idea of the nature of a novelist's intention, demurring to the definition of Mr. Charles Dudley Warner, that the object of the novel is to entertain.

x "I should put the case differently [says Mr. James]; I should say that the main object of the novel is to represent life. I cannot understand any other motive for combining imaginary incidents, and I do not perceive any other measure of the value of such combinations. The effect of a novel—the effect of any work of art—is to entertain; but that is a very different thing. The success of a work of art, to my mind, may be measured by the degree to which it produces a certain illusion; that illusion makes it appear for the time that we have lived another life—that we have had a miraculous enlargement of experience."

Here we are on much sounder ground. On this view, the literary artist works with his special instinct, certainly, but is conscientiously producing an effect—that is, he is challenging his reader to recognize in his production a certain meritorious fidelity, however artistically modified, to the actual; his satisfaction in his work culminating in his knowledge that his claim is conceded. The difference between a Bartley Hubbard and a literary man, then, is simply that the former is a lower species of artifex, artisan rather than artist, and is mainly concerned to know that his article meets a "felt want"; while the latter's instinct or faculty impels him to produce his article, and makes him count on its being appreciated because of the instinct's

existence. Both wish to produce an effect, only the literary man has a motive over and above this, which the Hubbard has not, save in the limited form of a bias in favour of that sort of industry.

What, then, as to artistic *versus* ethical purpose? It will be granted that every novelist who aims at more than narrative of adventure, works in ethical ideas, and that his effects depend on a general harmony between his views of life and conduct and those of his readers. A certain moral code is understood between them and him, and this code is really part of his material. This being so, it is scarcely possible that he should be without ethical purpose. He deals with the relations of men and women—relations which are the application of ethics, and it is essential to his success that he shall induce his readers to make a moral estimate of at least some of his characters and their actions. But it is equally essential that he shall all the while make an artistic effect, that he shall make the reader feel the story to represent life, and to be satisfactory as such representation. The fault of the “novel with a purpose”—which ought rather to be called the novel with a “moral,” in the sense of the “moral” of a fable—is that it fails truly to represent life, by reason of its giving factitious prominence to a subsidiary ethical idea, and implicitly attributing the character of a central truth to, say, the proposition that private lunatic asylums need to be looked after, or that dram-drinking may lead to ruin. The statistical and other observation which leads to this class of inferences, is



not legitimately to be termed observation of "life," and the stories of which they are the motives cannot amount to anything deserving of being termed representation of life; and even if they only receive emphasis in a story with other and essentially wider interests, they similarly create a sense of false perspective. We sum up that the good novelist must create an impression, at once of the soundness and the delicacy of his moral judgment, and of the combined width, clearness, and minuteness of his view of life. Now, Mr. Howells presumably would not say that George Eliot seriously comes short in the latter endowment: his characterization of her work, as dominated by an ethical purpose, is not likely to have been meant to imply that she tends to fail artistically by cause of presenting sets of subsidiary details to enforce subsidiary social propositions. It will probably not be disputed that George Eliot is a wide-seeing artist who delights in observation, drawing conclusions from what she sees rather than selecting narrowly related phenomena to illustrate restricted conclusions. What then is the significance or the justification of the distinction drawn between her and Mr. James? It would seem to be this, that the reader of George Eliot, by a process which he still recognizes as artistic representation of life, is led to meditate on the bases of human relations; while the reader of Mr. James, though also witnessing representation of life, finds himself left with a sense of having studied a skilful composition—and nothing in particular beyond. If this be a true account of the

matter, are we not established in the position that, roughly speaking, George Eliot does for us what Mr. James does, and something more?

It is not here asserted that what Mr. Howells says of Mr. James and George Eliot is thoroughly accurate; what has been done is simply to assume a practical and superficial rightness in the distinction, and to find the precise relations of the phenomena Mr. Howells seeks to express. Our business at present is to criticize, not the novels of Mr. James, but those of Mr. Howells, and, with that view, to get at Mr. Howells' idea of an enlightened novelist's attitude and procedure. We are so far led to assume, despite what he has said about the stories being all told, and its being the novelist's business to say what he thinks of the people and the situations, that he believes in the policy of telling a story in considerable detail without giving the reader any decided notions as to what he, the novelist, thinks. The remark cited must just be held to mean that the novel-reader now wants to know, not simply that Jack and Jill fell in love and quarrelled, or were separated, or came together again, but what were the little peculiarities and accidental minor details in the affair, the manners in which the various characteristics of the persons particularized the familiar situation for them; the mere fact of people meeting one or another fate being regarded as a matter of no great moment. At least, if Mr. Howells does not mean that, his meaning is in a mist for us. And if that interpretation be correct, the observation under notice

was hardly worth making, because in the first place the variations in character of personages, and the tracing of the consequences, constitute newness of story still, as they have done for many a long day; and in the next place it has for generations, not to say centuries, been understood that the narrator of the most striking story did well to give his readers an idea of the temperament and character of, if possible, all the figures he introduced.

Mr. Howells' theory and practice, then, can hardly illuminate each other. It has been already submitted that, after exhibiting a capacity and disposition to represent life subtly and justly, he proceeded to produce work apparently inspired chiefly by the desire to tickle ordinary palates—an alternative inference being that his powers of observation and reflection were more limited than at first seemed the case. Now, either view must be qualified by the admissions that some of Mr. Howells' later work shows an inclination to return to the paths of high-minded art, and a deeper intelligence than is inferable from the works objected to; and that he has done some work more deeply thought and more finely handled in parts than "A Chance Acquaintance." The novel entitled "A Foregone Conclusion" had a suggestion of a kind of strength not apparent in "A Chance Acquaintance." It indicated an instinct for searching the deeper places of the soul; an insight that did not swerve from the study of primary passion. Yet the story, which is in conception a romance, but is treated in the manner of the novel, is at best only a



half-success. It is interesting to note that while Mr. Howells has written three semi-dramatic sketches, "Out of the Question," "A Counterfeit Presentment," and "The Parlour Car," none of which has been played, "A Foregone Conclusion" has lately been dramatized, and played in London. In point of fact, its *motif* is much more feasible for the stage than that of any of the sketches named, none of these being actable—that is, in the present stage of development of the actor's art—while this has a basis of effective incident. One cannot, of course, conceive a satisfactory dramatization of this any more than of any other tolerably written story; but the theme suggests a play, our drama being further from realism than the novel; and one can conceive that if it had only appeared in a dramatic form, some of the weak points in the story would not have been apparent. However that may be, the story is, on a thoughtful retrospect, fundamentally unsatisfactory. The variation and vagueness of the implied moral standards, for one thing, suggests weakness. At one time we have Mrs. Vervain undisturbedly counting on Don Ippolito's making a new life for himself in America; and Florida eagerly contemplating the same prospect; the natural inference being that they expect him to become a free American citizen. But Ferris, the consul and representative of the land of freedom, is unable to conceive such a future for the priest, apart even from the difficulty about the act of emigration. He is not merely secretly jealous; he regards the idea of a priest's abandonment of his

priesthood just as a Catholic might; and when at length Ippolito declares his love for Florida she is horrified. One asks what it all means; whether we are to regard the horror as sheer feminine inconsequence; and whether an American consul would have treated Ippolito's case as Ferris did? The fact seems to be that the author saw a good *motif* in the case of an unbelieving and gifted Venetian priest who should love an American lady, and desire to work out his salvation by beginning a new life in America; but that he has been unable to control it. He wanted to rely on the priestly character as the bar to Ippolito's love; yet he has not made Florida believe that the priestly character is a bar to secular American citizenship; and even after she has expressed her horror she tacitly unsays it by her pitying embrace. Ferris, again, is never made quite palpable. Here, as in another story, Mr. Howells has sought to give us an impression of strength in a man by making him rather brutal, a device that can only be effective with very easily impressible people. In point of fact, Ferris's *brusqueries* and brutalities, his rages and misconceptions, are rather boring than otherwise; he does not fully get hold of our intelligence, much less our sympathies. On the whole, the critical reader's feeling is that the book is weakened by the element of plot and misunderstanding, the manipulation of incident savouring too much of the old sensational method of keeping up the interest. Here was a theme that would sustain attention as well as need be, without the attribution of an intermittent superstition to any of

the Protestant personages; and, above all, without any need of the conventional expedients of the painter's misinterpretation of things, and the two years' interval which goes to produce the titillation of the regulation happy ending, when Ferris and Florida meet again.

With all its shortcomings, it must in fairness be allowed, the story shows remarkable talent in its easy handling of realistic incident and its general newness and freshness. The talent is so great, to use Mr. James's remark on the art of Mr. Keene, that we wonder why it is not greater; and when we proceed to other works the wonder is deepened. The author of "A Foregone Conclusion" gives us "Out of the Question" and "A Counterfeit Presentment," two semi-dramatic sketches which, though they have a species of delicacy that raises them above contemporary drama, can only be classed as specimens of dainty confectionery, indicating no higher artistic purpose than a desire to secure the patronage of the amateur of the maudlin. There is no true observation of life here—only an ingenious production of amatory sensations for their own sake; the leading characters having just the bare requisite flavour of reality given them by the author's partial use of his observation. The delicate humour and the delicate sense of style prevent the artistic unconscientiousness of the work from obtruding itself in detail; it is all of a piece; but when each is reviewed as a whole the sense of its essential inferiority is the more decisive. A kind of struggle against the corrupting influence of the love-story market is visible



in "A Fearful Responsibility"—visible in a rather curious way. That novel deals with the perplexities of a semi-invalid American professor who, during the civil war, is working in Venice on the subject of Venetian history, and who finds himself burdened with the responsibility of superintending the love affairs of a beautiful girl, the sister of one of his wife's bosom friends. He takes the line of being desperately careful and conventional, snapping off in a spasmodic way the young Austrian officer who attempts, without an introduction, to press his suit on the professor's young guest. The story is satisfying in scarcely a single detail. After all that has been said of the independence, the self-respecting unconventionality, and the self-reliance of the American girl, there is something disillusioning in the attitude of the three Americans concerned in the affair—the heroine, the professor, and his wife. One questions whether any English girl with an ordinary amount of character, much less an American one, would have behaved with such forcible feebleness as is exhibited here by the two women and by the professor, who weakly treats the women as candid and straightforward persons, and acts accordingly. His and their conventionalism is overdone for any English-speaking community. Of course it may be argued that the story is a study of weak-minded and vacillating conventionalism; but for it to succeed as such there would be necessary a more important heroine. We must be interested in a girl for her own sake if we are to take a philosophic interest in her mistakes. "A Fearful

Responsibility" is to the extent of three-fourths just a thin, undeveloped love-story. It is a curious testimony to the calibre and the interests of the majority of American and English-speaking readers that they can be counted on to regard as the chief interest in such a story, not the character of the professor, his mission, and its upshot, but the problem of the ultimate engagement or otherwise of the heroine and the officer whom she meets in the train and at the masked ball. Now, there is evidence that Mr. Howells, after preparing for a "happy ending," was impressed by the thinness of the whole business, and sought to give the story a greater specific gravity by falling back on a "sad ending." As has been said, he may have originally projected a study of mistaken conventionalism, which would call for an unhappy conclusion; but he surely intended something different when he began the twelfth chapter. It is there told how the professor is notified that, the war being over, his old university is re-opened; that it is henceforth to be also a "military institute"; and that he will require a "competent military assistant" for some time. The last detail is never again mentioned, and the inference is irresistible that it was a preparation for a "happy ending," in which the young Austrian officer should go to America as Lily's husband, perfect his English, and become Professor Elmore's military assistant at Patmos. If that was not intended, the detail is either an inartistic trick or an inartistic excrescence: that it was left standing by an oversight is the more satisfactory explanation. But the deflection

to a grave ending does not save the novel. Here lies the trouble in nearly all Mr. Howells' books, that their ethical significance is too small in proportion to their elaboration—short as most of them are. It was not worth our while to have all this detail and suspense as preparation for the final reflection that it was perhaps a pity the officer was not encouraged. And even that degree of significance cannot rightly be extracted from the story: Mr. Howells will not even insist on his grave conclusion. Lily after going home becomes somewhat more staid; goes to parties as of old, but neither flirts nor marries; after several years falls into weak health; seems to brood on the old Venetian episode, and so makes Elmore uncomfortable for his share in it; recovers, and starts at the age of thirty a Kindergarten school in the West "with another young lady;" and "in due course" marries, "from all they (the Elmore) could understand, very happily;" her husband being a clergyman. The latter circumstance is perhaps meant to do duty as a touch of gloom, but it is not emphasized. We have an account of Elmore's self-reproaches, and then the author's statement that they were practically unfounded; and the upshot of "A Fearful Responsibility" is that there was nothing fearful in the matter, there being simply no reason for believing that a heaven-made match had been frustrated. We feel we have been fooled. And here asserts itself the canon Mr. Howells would fain repudiate, that the front rank is only for those novelists whose art is rounded and controlled by an adequate theory of life—a theory which



makes itself felt behind all their work. It may be confidently claimed that a recognition of some such comprehensive view of life, some such working philosophy, is part of our appreciation of every novel we pronounce great. What, precisely, let it be asked, is the difference between our critical frames of mind after reading a story by Tourguénief and after reading one by Mr. Howells? This, that Tourguénief leaves us, as a rule, contemplating life in the light of his story, while Mr. Howells sets us considering his story in the light of life. The one work is a competently made and impressive transcript of what we feel to be the actual; the other, a clever and charming but unsatisfying combination of some aspects and sections of the actual with the pleasant. The one writer has made up his mind about life; the other has not.

Perhaps this last proposition requires separate substantiation. That can best be obtained from an examination of "A Modern Instance," pronounced by many people Mr. Howells' most important novel, and undeniably a work showing much talent and observation. It sets forth the courtship and married life of a young couple, of whom the husband is a non-moral rather than a bad creature—a scamp rather than a scoundrel; while the woman has very little mind or intelligent interest in life generally, but is intensely devoted and given to insane jealousy. In many respects the study is clear and finished. The portraiture of the young people before their marriage; the treatment of Marcia's love and wild jealousy; above all, the account of her

utter self-abandonment and her passionate appeal to her father when, after casting off her lover in a frenzy, she finds she cannot live without him—all that portion of the story is strong and true. The Bartley Hubbard of the beginning does not thoroughly consist with the man of the later story; but up to the first quarrel with Marcia there is no serious difficulty in thinking him. One of the flaws of Mr. Howells' method, however, becomes apparent just here, in the detailed account of Bartley's attempts to sell his horse and sleigh. That episode refuses to compose with the general story; so far from being part of the presentation of Bartley's career as determined by his character, it makes the first difficulty in our conception of him. If the young man is to be conceived as shrewd and resolute in such a matter, yet without forethought or presence of mind in his other relations, we must have as much explained to us. We feel as if the horse-selling story was told mainly for its own sake, and in the presence of the study of a personality such a matter is out of place. Even the pictures of newspaper life have the air of independent studies. The artist, we are led to suspect, has no distinct selective principle to guide him; no clear view of his theme as a whole; and turns aside wherever a tempting opportunity for *genre* work offers itself. Another aspect of this want of purpose is the lack of clear impression, almost up to the impingement of the catastrophe, as to how the fortunes of the couple are tending. Bartley is represented as both resourceful and hard-working; he is shrewd, unscrupulous, and, in

the main, clever. Why should not such a man succeed as a journalist? He is just the kind of man who does. The account of his life as an unattached reporter, living a Bohemian life with his beautiful and quick-witted if narrow-headed wife, might quite easily be the prelude to a happy ending. There are thousands of such men in the world—smart, non-moral, without deep feeling, but getting along quite prosperously by dint of their smartness. If one such is to be wrecked there must be good reason for it; and the reasons for the wreckage of Bartley Hubbard are not good. He takes rather too much mild beer, but not enough. He is only once drunk, and the incident serves another purpose than that of bringing him down in the world. He is made to grow fat, in order, it would almost seem, to increase our dislike for him; but the effect is chiefly to make us wonder how Marcia's old passion will survive this development of corpulence in the beloved object, apart from other considerations. The mild beer and the fat, one reasons, have no causal connection with the fall of his fortunes; and yet, perhaps, we are to understand that they made him stupid. His first real piece of ill-luck in Boston is the result of a piece of knavery which he short-sightedly does not lie away, as he easily might; and which in any case ought not to ruin a knave. He ought to become a well-to-do, greasy citizen. At first he was suspiciously clever; now he is not nearly clever rogue enough. Marcia, again, is made to turn against him by virtue of a delicacy of moral sentiment which we did not expect to find in



her; and the result is that her act of judgment does not seem sufficiently real, especially as it does not precipitate the catastrophe. Finally, after Bartley has begun to go to the bad through what seems to be simply a loss of his old cleverness—whether through beer-drinking or inevitable fat—the catastrophe of his leaving his wife is brought about virtually by her crazy jealousy and her own declaration that she leaves him for ever; and we are left listening to the virtuous people execrating him, scamp as he is, for an act which Marcia's provocation might almost have made excusable in a better man. Every way we turn we are in a haze. If Marcia's burst of frantic jealousy had been well-founded, as at first we expect it will prove to be, we should feel standing-ground, but that is not the case. Never was the verdict of "faults on both sides" more helplessly grasped at. We vaguely feel, somehow, that Bartley would have prospered, with his unscrupulous views about journalism, if he had not got fat, and that then he would not have left his wife; which is hardly an adequate ethical induction from such a story. The novel, perhaps, would after all be less unsatisfactory than it is if the final rupture of the wedded lives of Marcia and Bartley were allowed to give what definiteness it can to the story; for the crowning episode of the divorce is undoubtedly effective, though the details of the railway journey, like the horse-selling passages, are felt to be irrelevant. But the sense of confusion about the Hubbards is aggravated by the perplexity surrounding the other characters—Halleck, Atherton, and Clara

Kingsbury. We start with tolerably clear opinions about these people, and end by finding that they—or at least the men—have changed on our hands like people in a dream. Halleck and Atherton catch our ear at first as the moral and clear-headed men standing in judgment over Hubbard; and the author distinctly causes us to feel that Atherton is an extremely superior personage who speaks his (the author's) opinions on the metaphysics of ethics, divorce, and other matters. But at the close we reflect that Atherton, the superior man, has married a fribble—unreal even at that—for no better apparent reason than that she is rich and clings to him, he being her lawyer; and we wonder whether, after all, the author meant us to regard him as a rather fine specimen of humbug. Clara Kingsbury we at first regard as a serviceable grotesque; but we find her happily married to the superior man. Then Halleck is a kind of elusive conundrum. At first he is a kind of model of intrinsic worth, who contrasts finely with Hubbard; but as his infatuation for Marcia develops, he becomes more and more unintelligible, our interest in her being largely dissipated just when his passion begins to be fully apparent. The significance of his career would seem to be that your good, unselfish man may have his life wrecked through a blind attachment to a small-minded woman whom he once saw as a village beauty, and finds years afterwards the infatuated and jealous wife of a scamp; and that such a passion as his may fairly account, as things go, for his abandoning Unitarianism and embracing the career of a Christian

clergyman, though at the very last he is left half hoping to marry the widow. The book is summed up in the words of Atherton, with which it closes: "Ah, I don't know! I don't know!" And yet Atherton is a man with a cut-and-dry—extremely cut and extremely dry—moral code; which he is always exploding on us. Why, after all he has said, does he not know? The author, we feel, does not know either; and yet he has always made us understand that he is speaking through Atherton. [We feel that his ethics is a compound of emphasized, sermonized conventionalism and vague tolerance. It is not that we are impartially left to reflect on an obscure and delicate moral problem; we have been listening to the most emphatic deliverances on every step of the case; and at the finish the author's confidence suddenly fails him, and he begs us not to take him at his word. The fact is, Mr. Howells cannot help feeling that the fictionist's art is nothing without some kind of philosophic purpose, and he falls back on an assumption of philosophic doubt. He would fain be regarded in this case as the artist who reproduces what he sees, and disclaims responsibility as to the verdict; but he cannot escape the consciousness that by the very process of selecting certain details for us he implies that these particular details lead to certain conclusions; and he backs out with a protest that it is difficult to say what the conclusions are. We, in turn, decide that Mr. Howells has flashes of illuminating cynicism, flashes of pessimism, and periods of convinced conventionalism; that with a wide problem before him



he gets confused ; and that he is happiest when he is doing love-stories for the general market, though he is at times moved to aim at higher things. There are signs that he would like to make Halleck marry Mrs. Hubbard, but that he feels such a consummation would disastrously cheapen the book. ]

Compare these impressions with those we get from reading one of the novelists we accept as great ; and the shortcoming of Mr. Howells will be manifest. We do not leave a novel of Hawthorne, of Balzac, of Tourguénief, of George Eliot, of Thackeray even, in a state of mere confusion and discontent. We feel that they are equal to their work ; that they have their personages in hand ; that they have a philosophy which sums matters up. Hawthorne deals with a world which he treats as a series of problems ; but his treatment of each is a process of analysis which ends in clearness and contemplation. We may agree with Mr. James that Balzac's explicit, didactic philosophizing is often preposterous ; but his practical philosophy, of which the title is "La Comédie Humaine," is on the whole adequate. Tourguénief's pessimism is perfectly definite and all-embracing : the note is always clear. Thackeray's man-of-the-world cynicism is equally comprehensive of his world, as, unlike Trollope, he rarely projects a personality that is not perfectly within his range ; and what need is there to dwell on the substantial completeness of George Eliot's mastery of all her wide range of presentation of life ? We may feel that she makes out a more regular and palpable moral

sequence in things than really exists, and that she at first was a little too copiously and formally didactic; but if we set aside the question of the rightness of her judgment and the soundness of her art in the case represented by the personality of Daniel Deronda, her clearness of view over all the ground before her is undisputed. George Eliot has given a philosophy to thousands who but for her would have none. Her "ethical purpose" is the expression of her working philosophy of Meliorism—the aspect in which her sympathy differentiates her from a great pessimist like Tourguénief. Mr. Howells would perhaps say that Tourguénief, like Mr. James, differs from George Eliot in being dominated by an artistic purpose; but the true view is that Tourguénief's art expresses a philosophy of sadness, while George Eliot's sadness is modified by the impulse to teach. The essential matter is that both have a rounded conception of life, and deliberately body it forth. Now, it may well be that an artist shall arise who shall see more variety in life than Tourguénief does; who shall equal Balzac's observation and surpass him in depth and sanity; who shall transform pessimism into world humour; and who shall draw from life a wider ethic than George Eliot's; but he will still be an artist with a philosophy, not a mere humorous catholic observer, who is satisfied to be entertained by his observations and to present them in an entertaining form. He will differ from such an observer as the painter of great pictures differs from the producer of "sketches from Nature." The power to project and arrange a

picture is the painter's decisive qualification ; only when he can do that is he effectively an artist.

The want of a philosophy in a novelist, unfortunately, means not merely a defect in his books as wholes ; it means that his characters, when he is not copying real personages, are apt to lack intelligibility. The great novelists all possess in some degree Shakspeare's power of creating people who are not sketched from any one model, but who are made of the material of human nature and have a distinct individuality ; indeed, it is obvious that every novelist is making, or attempting to make, such people during half his time. Only, as development goes on from poetic drama to prose novel, there is an increasing difficulty in preserving consistency between the fictive figure and the implied every-day surroundings in which he moves ; and whereas Shakspeare conquers us by amplitude of sympathetic imagination, the lesser artist, attempting the same feat, is apt to make us feel rather his limitations than his powers. Now, it is the special weakness of the novelist without a philosophy that even his best characters have his own defect ; and as every novelist of necessity invites acceptance of some of his characters as effective, it results that with him we find ourselves challenged to respect a number of people who have an air of superiority, but whose superiority we have to take for granted, not being able to perceive wherein it consists. What is meant may perhaps be made clearer by taking up for a moment the heroes of Byron, and one of their modern descendants, Gautier's Fortunio. Long ago inquisitive people began



to ask what there was, after all, in the Laras and Corsairs to command our admiration; whether they were deeper or clearer thinkers than ordinary men; and the result of the inquiry was a rather sweeping verdict as to the sawdusty character of their interior. So with Fortunio, who is held up to us as something quite above the ordinary run of his fellow-creatures: we find in him, on examination, nothing in the nature of a soul by which he relates to ours. We know that the really impressive man, in the actual world, is so because of a certain attitude towards the world, a certain kind of sagacity, certain powers and peculiarities of mind, and a certain measure of knowledge; and we feel that if there were any real personage of whom Fortunio is a theatrical presentment we should find him, if we met him at dinner, to be a Byronic fool, an aristocratic brute, or a tedious Philistine. Gautier, of course, is not a novelist at all,<sup>1</sup> and we may read him for his scene-painting without feeling it is any the worse for the entire unreality of his heroes; as we might accept Byron's heroes, if only the poetry were better, with some of the satisfaction of our predecessors, whose taste in poetry was more primitive; but nothing can make amends for want of thoroughness in the creations of a writer who aims at being a novelist proper. Now, not a few of Mr. Howells' men are, in their way—that is, in a different way—as dubious entities as Fortunio, and

<sup>1</sup> Let me note, however, that Mr. James, while pronouncing "Fortunio" a "grotesquely meretricious performance," gives high praise to some of Gautier's more important works.

for the same ultimate reason, that we feel the author assumes their scope to be relatively large when it is relatively small, and means them to be taken as effective minds when in point of fact he has not made us aware of their minds at all. Take Staniford in "The Lady of the Aroostook," Libby in "Dr. Breen's Practice," Halleck in "A Modern Instance," Ray in "A Woman's Reason," and even Ford in "The Undiscovered Country." Ray and Libby, we feel, we are challenged to accept as effective and admirable personalities, both being credited with a fine combination of strength, refinement, sagacity, modesty, and resource; but the moment we try to conceive ourselves as meeting them we feel there is something wrong; that the kind of man who exists in the environment of Ray and Libby has very distinct limitations, which are an important part of his description; and that the author has not only not indicated these limitations, but has not enough breadth of view to perceive and define them. The novelist must in some respect be above his creatures; and Mr. Howells is really above the kind of man he handles in respect of psychological subtlety; but it is his fate to give his own superior kind of psychology to the limited personalities; and the result is the discontent above indicated. Libby and Ray will not relate to actual humanity; they are the ideals of an author who is not high enough in his point of view to know how his ideals will compare with those of thoughtful people. In a similar way, we feel that too much has been implicitly claimed for Halleck and

Staniford when we proceed to sit in judgment on their conduct, which is that of men to whom we credit a different calibre from that which Mr. Howells at first led us to assume in them. Ford, again, is a variation on Ferris ; a man whom we feel we are expected to regard as of forcible character because of his hardness of outline, which is indeed so pronounced that an impression of force is almost inevitable ; but whom, on a retrospect, we do not at all feel to be strong by virtue of any inward quality. We do not find that we have been enabled to perceive the true inwardness of these persons ; we do not feel sure that they have any inwardness at all ; and, to put the matter rather brutally, we decide that, with all their fineness of touch and style, Mr. Howells' novels are finally adapted for a lower order of readers than those who are capable of fully appreciating a writer of the first order.

It is generally claimed for Mr. Howells that he knows and can draw women very well ; and as much may be allowed—with the qualification, however, that such praise implies a rather unflattering judgment as to the average woman. Those of us who confess we find Mr. Howells' women charming, go far to say that we like a woman to be a trifle silly ; that we do not want to find in her an intellectual or even a quite rational companion. He has drawn four married women—Mrs. Elmore, Mrs. Ellison, Mrs. Vervain, and Mrs. March—of whom two, he gives us to understand, are likeable fools ; but the difference between them and the others, of whom the same is not hinted, is only one of degree. A certain in-



fusion of charming foolishness, or childishness, enters into most of his heroines ; indeed, it is now and then a little dismaying. In "Out of the Question," where we are professedly introduced to an American girl who is both charming and sensible, in the person of Leslie Bellingham, we find her in a tolerably serious situation—comedy though it all be—talking as a satirist might make a "girl of the period" talk. Is this an approved sample of the American girl? we ask; and does Mr. Howells feel about her as he makes us feel? He is presumably in a satirical mood, for in other books he gives us considerably different heroines to be charmed with. On the whole, it is to be suspected that critical women will not be very well satisfied with Mr. Howells' gallery of women portraits, few of which are respectfully done. Florida Vervain is the most memorable; she has something of the "dynamic" personality of George Eliot's women. Dr. Breen has a certain factitious importance through her doctorship, her abandonment of which will probably be resented by enthusiastic women readers as no more a telling comment on the claims of women than is Heler Harkness's failure to succeed in avocations for which she has not been trained—a kind of failure which would certainly be about equally complete in the case of a young man similarly situated, as the author, indeed, indirectly admits. In "The Parlour Car: A Farce," again, the farce consists in the conduct of the young lady, who is a charming goose, while the man is drawn respectfully enough, and endowed with sense and delicacy; though

Mr. Howells does make him tell a story of his own goodness and prowess, which, as it happens, is again made to do duty in "The Lady of the Aroostook"—a proceeding that makes us displeased with both the novelist and the young man. The main point, however, is that the superior kind of man is made to cherish the love of a charming goose while perceiving her quality. The summing-up of Mr. Howells' views about women is that their supreme business in life is to fall happily in love; and, though this is to a large extent true, there is the drawback, resulting from his intellectual incompleteness, that his young women are pretty girls falling in love with suitable young men, never adorable women whose moral natures love deepens and irradiates. We must go to other novelists if we want to think women worshipful. Even Florida Vervain is, to some extent, a flash in the pan. Many male readers will be inclined to protest that Mr. Howells' charming girls are from the life, and that the worshipful heroines are not; but surely there is a realistic mean between Romola and Leslie Bellingham, or even between Dorothea Brooke and Grace Breen?

It is clear that a novelist whose opinion about women is that above mentioned, will of necessity tend to produce love-stories of a restricted importance. In all fiction, indeed, the relations of the sexes figure largely, as needs must be, seeing that they rest on the fundamental fact of life; but it is in their treatment that the difference between the greater and the lesser novelist comes out; the first presenting to us certain

personages who interest us as individualities, and proceeding to show how love affects them ; while the other proceeds to interest us in personages by letting us know they are in love, and exciting our curiosity as to how the affair will end. The first sees love as a great factor in life ; the second treats it as a delightful and conspicuous episode, thus making, after all, less account of love than the other, who seems to make it subsidiary. Thus in "The Lady of the Aroostook" we have a young man and a girl, who are psychologically shapeless to us, brought together on a ship ; and we see an attraction arising between them by degrees. This is the gist of the story. We are expected, on the strength of the universal sympathy with a love affair, to find sufficient interest in contemplating the growth of the love of these two characterless young people, in consideration of their curious position on board ship ; and such is the stamina of average humanity that most of us get led along, and along, weakly curious, to the sweet end. It would almost seem as if Mr. Howells had sardonically resolved to experiment on the popular appetite for the amatory with the most uninteresting heroine he could construct, taking care only to make her beautiful and to put her in a piquant situation without any rival. There must indeed be some planned relation between the profoundly commonplace character of the lovely Lydia and the circumstance that Staniford falls in love with her purely because she is alone among the men and he is idle ; but the story is only an extreme instance of Mr. Howells' later method. In "A Woman's Reason,"



finally, he has reached quite the lowest artistic and intellectual plane that an artist of his culture and delicacy can deliberately stand on. He told us that the moving accident was not the trade of the new school of fiction ; but immediately afterwards he proceeded to write a story of which a large section was sheer Charles Reade. The narrative of Fenton's mishaps and coral-island experiences reads like a calculated imitation of that great sensationalist ; which amounts to saying that it is merely superior melodrama ; and even the story of Helen's struggles to make a living, though not told in the Reade style, is only a superior kind of manipulation of the "moving accident" ; the troubles of the two lovers, who are separated through Helen's feminine finesse and Fenton's undue straightforwardness, being just so much variously exciting incident designed to make the final meeting the more thrilling. There is a closing suggestion that her experiences have had an effect on her character, but the pretence is rather thin. Fenton, again, is almost an entire failure—how nearly so can only be conceived after reading the story. So hard pressed is the author in the effort to make his hero live that he resorts to the following desperate predication concerning his state of mind on the coral-island :—

“In the maze which had deepened upon Fenton, the whole situation had an unreality, as of something read long ago and half forgotten, and now slowly recalled, point by point ; and there were moments of the illusion in which it was not he who was imprisoned there on that unknown island, but the hero of adventures whom he had admired and envied in boyhood, or known in some romance of later life. . . . All

these things seemed the well-known properties and stock experiences of the castaway of fiction; *he himself the figment of some romancer's brain, with which the author was toying for the purposes of his plot, to be duly rescued and restored to the world when it should serve the exigency of the tale.*

It is difficult to fully express the nefariousness of the art of this passage, especially in the italicized clauses: there is a suggestion of artistic humiliation about it which tends to overlay our derision with pity for the author's straits. Enough to say that a novelist must be hard pressed indeed for something to say when he psychologizes in this fashion.

As has been said, Mr. Howells seems to oscillate between the desire to cater for the popular appetite and a leaning to higher things. "The Undiscovered Country" may be assumed to represent one of these strivings after a worthy subject, and as such it may be regarded with a favour not exactly proportioned to its final value. That, however, is comparatively high. Not only does the book give copious proof of the author's quickness of eye and discursiveness of observation, but—method apart—it is evidently the result of a good deal of thought. It is the strongest of all his stories that end cheerfully, though the eternal device of making the lover suspect a rival is employed to intensify the *dénoûment*. In none of his books, perhaps, is there less of irrelevant or dispensable detail; the closeness of the tissue giving an impression of exceptional creative certainty. In dealing with such a subject as the spiritualistic aberrations of a visionary mesmerist, however, Mr. Howells could hardly attain

to a philosophic success which he has failed to reach in his treatment of more normal phenomena. To succeed in such a case would require something more even than the special pains Mr. Howells has evidently devoted to it. A rounded artistic exposition of it could only come from one who had made up his mind on the various aspects of the matter, and this Mr. Howells does not seem to have done. At all events his narrative, close as it is in texture, will not stand examination from the point of view of logical scepticism any more than from that of believers in spiritualism; his science, on analysis, leaving a residuum of rubbish, and the fashion of holding the balances between credulity and disbelief being far from arresting attention. As regards the Shakers, too, deft and easy as is the presentment of them and their environment, we do not arrive at confidence in the trustworthiness of the picture. There remains a suspicion that Mr. Howells does not fully see through and round the Shaker idiosyncrasy; that he does not clearly recognize the peculiar limitations and bias of the members of the sect; that his account of them is at bottom romantic. It is the old drawback; he is not sufficiently above the subject-matter to present it in its true relations to general social phenomena. The author who can remain at all hazy on the subject of spiritualism is hardly the person to analyse rigorously the intellectual and moral nature of the Shakers. And, to make an end of the fault-finding, there is something disappointing in the usual optimistic dismissal of the married lovers in the case



of such a marriage as that of Ford and Egeria. As before remarked, Ford is not quite solid, but he has telling aspects, and marriage seems an insufficient final classification in his case. As Phillips is made to say in the closing pages: "Imagine a Pythoness with a prayer-book, who goes to the Episcopal church, and hopes to get her husband to go too!" What are we to make of it? The problem is such a grave and important one. ~~George Eliot, one regretfully reflects, deliberately avoided it; but she did not raise it and then drop it as Mr. Howells has done here. It is sufficiently inconsistent, however, to regret the evasion of an important problem by an author of whom one complains that he is not equal to the treatment of problems calling for philosophic power; and we must just note this missing of a great consideration as one of the evidences of Mr. Howells' limitations.~~ We may put beside it the attitude maintained towards the civil war in "A Foregone Conclusion," where Ferris's experience of the struggle is treated as just so much time spent before he wins the woman he loves—a way of dealing with that colossal fact in the recent history of mankind which seems common among Americans, whose indifference sometimes makes us forget how ghastly the memory really is. ~~Their novelists seem to regard it as an occurrence which separated lovers, not as something which could colour men's whole thoughts on life.~~

But enough has been said to justify, or at least to illustrate, the charge of intellectual insufficiency against

Mr. Howells; and when that is done the critic has no further ground for adverse criticism. What has been said, indeed, is perhaps apt to mislead by laying so much more stress on the artist's shortcomings than on his skill. If "The Undiscovered Country" is on the whole but a love-story with a new species of complication, it yet has value even as a psychological study. The personality of Dr. Boynton is an original and meritorious projection; and the whole episode of Egeria's unhappiness under her father's experimenting and her intense feeling for the charm of physical nature after her fever, is soundly and even finely conceived. She may be a little colourless, she may be indebted somewhat to her beauty for our interest; but she is perfectly real. And Mr. Howells has such a strong natural faculty of observation that he has put some brilliantly real people into almost every story he has written. To say nothing of the almost invariable vitality of his ladies, Dr. Mulbridge and his mother in "Dr. Breen's Practice" are vividly genuine; so is Squire Gaylord in "A Modern Instance;" so—to take a vicious type—is poor little Hicks in "The Lady of the Aroostook;" so, in his peculiar way, is Arbuton in "A Chance Acquaintance." Our author's technique, too, is so fine that even his least adequately thought work—if we except the adventures of Lieutenant Fenton—never exhausts the patience of a reader fully mindful of the contrast between skilled writing and the bulk of the writing he reads. Thus, for instance, while the journalist Evans,

in "A Woman's Reason," never seems to come within our acquaintance, it is impossible not to relish his "form"; and despite the confectionery quality of "A Counterfeit Presentment," it is impossible not to perceive the delicacy and ingenuity with which our palates are titillated. The touch is as light and winning as that of Marivaux, and the effects are complex beyond any Marivaux attempted. The pathos about the death of Mr. Harkness, in "A Woman's Reason," again, has an effortless poignancy such as one rarely finds. And Mr. Howells is never obtuse; never vulgar; never fatuous: on the contrary, he is, within his intellectual and ethical limits, perhaps the most alertly, the most instinctively, artistic of American novelists.

It may be asked whether, with a writer of such eminent accomplishment, who interests and amuses us in spite of ourselves, we do well to be so rigorously critical as to condemn him for what he lacks, especially at a time when so much work that is altogether worse is popular and unblamed. When there is considered the appalling crudity of such a book as "The Gilded Age," concocted as it was by two such clever men as Mark Twain and Mr. Charles Dudley Warner, and tolerantly received as it was by the flock of servile newspaper reviewers, it may seem as if it were an ill-timed undertaking to insist on the deficiencies of Mr. Howells. But criticism can no more afford to be adjusted on such views than the high-aiming artist can afford to fashion his product with an eye to the weakness of the many producers rather than to the strength



of the few. Work that claims to be worthy of the present day must be tried by the highest present-day standards. We can go back to and enjoy the plays of Marivaux without scruple; but when a novelist of our own day works on the lines of Marivaux we cannot choose but demur. On any judicial estimate Mr. Howells must be credited with having brought something to the store of the resources of fiction; and it may well be that he will influence the art for good. He has indicated an ideal even while swerving from it. "Ah! poor real life, which I love," he exclaims in "Their Wedding Journey," "can I make others share the delight I find in thy foolish and insipid face!" He is entitled, after all, to an encouraging answer. Remembering, too, how an artist is tempted, nay almost coerced, by his world; remembering to what a large extent *l'homme moyen sensuel* and his wife make up the American as the British reading public, we may admit that Mr. Howells would have had great difficulty in resisting the seductions of the love-story market: remembering the contrast between Russian pessimism and American optimism, we must concede that he is very differently situated from Tourguénief; that he is in the stream of a tyrannous tendency to light-hearted superficiality. At times he faces round: he has done a capital magazine sketch<sup>1</sup> of a forenoon's proceedings at a Boston police-court, which blends a deep note of reverie with the light, happy strokes of description; and we have seen that he has fits of gravity and in-

<sup>1</sup> *Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1882.

tensity in more than one story. Reviewing them all, one arrives at a notion that this gifted, sympathetic, unphilosophic novelist, with his acutenesses and his blindneses, his felicities and his inefficiencies, may be a link between a past school and a future school; an intermediate type in the evolution of fictional art. But, remembering the fate of intermediate types, we cannot promise him a full-bodied immortality.





## THE FABLE OF THE BEES.<sup>1</sup>

(1886.)

A CURIOUS act of literary favouritism, to call it by no

<sup>1</sup> In the same year with the first appearance of this essay there was published at Halle the doctoral thesis of Herr Paul Goldbach, "Bernard de Mandeville's Bienenfabel," to which I would call the attention of those interested in the subject—if they can procure it. This essay of a young German student is in many ways the most thorough research that has yet been made in connection with Mandeville's performance. Dr. Goldbach devoted himself mainly to the elucidation of the original verse "Fable," not to the book which grew from it; but the former he handles with extreme care and completeness. He re-edits the "Fable" in the true German fashion, giving all the variants of the different editions, down to the very commas; supplies an exact bibliography of this and Mandeville's other works, with those ascribed to him; adds a note of the editions possessed by the different German libraries; and in the body of his thesis makes a very careful study of the social condition of England in Mandeville's day and the precise bearings of the "Fable" upon it. The whole suggests uncomfortable reflections as to the comparative efficiency of German and English universities. Every year, young German students turn out a mass of dissertations on points in our literature, with which, as regards mere care and scholarship, there is nothing to compare here, either inside or outside of the Universities, which do nothing of the kind either for our own or for any other literature. The German degree-takers are expected to produce documents of permanently instructive value, and they do it, going about the work with as much thoroughness as do the scientific men of all countries in *their* monographs. Thus there is in Germany a whole pamphlet literature of scholarly

harder name, is recorded of Adam Smith,<sup>1</sup> in connection with the less famous of his contributions to practical philosophy, the "Theory of the Moral Sentiments." While he was in Paris in 1766 [or 1765—his biographer is inexact in his dates], acting as bear-leader to the young Duke of Buccleuch, he received from the then Duke of La Rochefoucauld a copy of a new edition of the "Maximes Morales" of the Duke's celebrated grandfather, with the courteous intimation that though Mr. Smith had spoken unfavourably of that work in his "Theory," the sender so much admired the latter book as to have begun a translation of it, which he had only failed to finish because the task had been carried out by some one else. The letter contained an apology for the cynicism of the author of the "Maximes," on the score that his lot was cast in unhealthy moral regions; and, whether in consideration of this suggestion or, as seems more probable, out of mere complaisance towards his distinguished correspondent, Smith in 1789 gave the Duke to understand that in future editions of the "Theory" he would cease to rank La Rochefoucauld with the author of "The Fable of the Bees." And he kept his word; for whereas in the first edition Mandeville and La Rochefoucauld were gibbeted together in the chapter "Of Licentious Systems," the Frenchman's name has now absolutely disappeared

studies of English authors, of which one only becomes aware by conning German second-hand-booksellers' catalogues. These theses may not be works of literary genius, but they are often of great informatory value.

<sup>1</sup> See the "Life" prefixed to Messrs. Nelson's edition of the "Wealth of Nations" 1831 (and later), pp. vii, viii.

from the treatise, and Mandeville has the bad eminence all to himself. To an impartial reader of to-day the justice of such a proceeding is extremely doubtful ; and it may not be unprofitable to go into the merits of the case.

Bernard Mandeville, as he called himself, or De Mandeville, as it has been the fashion to call him in biographical notices, was born, according to some authorities, at Rotterdam, but really at Dort, in 1670 ; and he appears to have spent his boyhood in the former city, where his father was a physician. As the name shows, he was of French ancestry ; and his work is certainly more of a French than of a Dutch cast. When he was only fifteen he published at Rotterdam an essay, "De Medicina Oratio Scholastica," pronounced by Professor Minto in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* "a remarkably eloquent schoolboy exercise;" and he studied medicine for six years at Leyden, taking his degree in 1691, his thesis being a "Disputatio . . . de chylousa vitiata." He had previously, in 1689, published a "Disputatio Philosophica de Brutorum Operationibus." Immediately afterwards he came to England "to learn the language," and succeeded, as Professor Minto observes, "to some purpose, writing it with such mastery as to throw doubts upon his foreign extraction." London pleased him, and he settled there as a physician. It was not till 1705 that he issued his first English publication, a short satirical poem in pamphlet form, entitled, "The Grumbling Hive," the real "Fable of the Bees," round which has clustered perhaps a larger body



of polemics than has grown out of any production of similar bulk in modern times.<sup>1</sup> The fable, as Mandeville remarks later, is not remarkable as a piece of verse, though, like all he wrote in English, it has an ease and directness of expression implying a singularly complete conquest of the language on his part.<sup>2</sup> "I do not dignify these few loose lines," he writes in 1714, "with the name of a poem, that I would have the reader expect any poetry in them, but barely because they are in rhyme, and I am in reality puzzled what name to give them; for they are neither heroic nor pastoral, satyr, burlesque, nor heroi-comic; to be a tale they want probability, and the whole is rather too long for a fable. All I can say of them, is that they are a story told in dogrel." The story is, in brief, that in a certain hive of bees, corresponding in all respects to England, the fraud, corruption, luxury, and vice, of the various sections of society created such an outcry on the part of everybody that at length Jove swore "He'd rid the bawling hive of fraud; and did;" whereupon the hive began to decline in wealth, in commerce, in population, in power, and in industry and the arts, the decay going

<sup>1</sup> Yet the original pamphlet would seem to have utterly disappeared. The British Museum only possesses a pirated reprint in four pages quarto, which Mandeville tells us was "cried about the streets" at a halfpenny. Dr. Goldbach, I notice, tried to procure the first issue, but of course in vain.

<sup>2</sup> Coleridge justly ascribes to it "great Hudibrastic vigour" ("Table Talk," July 1, 1833). Dr. Goldbach's bibliography, by the way, includes two poems, "Typhon" and "The Planter's Charity," dated 1704, of which I can find no trace in the British Museum, and which he himself has not seen.

on till only a few bees of Spartan cast were left, and these finally "flew into a hollow tree, Blest with content and honesty." And the moral is :

"Then leave complaints : fools only strive  
 To make a great, an honest hive.  
 T' enjoy the world's conveniences,  
 Be fam'd in war, yet live in ease,  
 Without great vices, is a vain  
 Utopia, seated in the brain. . . .  
 So vice is beneficial found,  
 When 'tis by justice lopp'd and bound ;  
 Nay, where the people would be great,  
 As necessary to the State  
 As hunger is to make 'em eat.  
 Bare virtue can't make nations live  
 In splendour."

The fable, in short, is a bold paradox, half serious, half humorous ; not constructed to stand logical analysis or serve as the basis of a system of morals. As Professor Minto has seen and shown with his usual penetration, it had originally a political application. "Owing to a curious misprint in an edition published after Mandeville's death," he points out,

"a wrong date is commonly assigned to the *Grumbling Hive*, and the contemporary point of it consequently missed.<sup>1</sup> It appeared during the heat

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Mr. Leslie Stephen ("English Thought in the 18th Century," vol. ii. p. 33) says : "The poem itself was first published in 1714. It did not excite much attention until republished with comments in 1723." In point of fact, the edition of 1714 was the reissue with comments. Professor Fraser (ed. of Berkeley, ii. 10) makes the same blunder. McCulloch ("Lit. of Pol. Ec.,") does the same. The confusion of dates is further confounded in my copy (ed. Edinburgh, 1772), in which, by an editorial blunder, Mandeville is made to say he published the *Hive* about 1699. Mr. A. W. Ward, again (Globe ed. of Pope, p. 391, *note*), gives the date 1708.

of the bitterly contested elections of 1705,<sup>1</sup> when the question before the country was whether Marlborough's war with France should be continued. . . . The cry of the high Tory advocates of peace was that the war was carried on purely in the interests of the general and the men in office; charges of bribery, peculation, hypocrisy, every form of fraud and dishonesty, were freely cast about among the electors. It was amid this excitement that Mandeville sought and found an audience for his grimly humorous paradox that 'private vices are public benefits'—that individual self-seeking, ambition, greed, vanity, luxury, are indispensable to the prosperity and greatness of a nation. . . . The *Grumbling Hive* was in fact a political *jeu d'esprit*, full of the impartial mockery that might be expected from a humorous foreigner, and with as much ethical theory underlying it as might be expected from a highly educated man in an age of active ethical speculation. The underlying theory was made explicit in the *Remarks*, and the *Inquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, published in 1714. But his purpose in dwelling on the text that private vices are public benefits was still rather the invention of humorous paradoxes than the elaboration of serious theory."

This is perhaps the most perspicacious account that has ever been given of the matter; Mandeville's assailants having as a rule taken him up in a spirit either of intense seriousness<sup>2</sup> or of intense spite, and his few defenders having been till lately too much occupied in exposing the unfairness or the blindness of the attack to pry into the heart of his mystery. Coleridge was one of the few to surmise his original temper: "a *bonne bouche* of solemn raillery," he calls it<sup>3</sup> incidentally in one of his scurrilous allusions to utilitarianism. I

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Goldbach, calculating from the preface of the ed. of 1714, gives the date 1706. But that preface says "above eight years ago." The reprint is dated 1705.

<sup>2</sup> So Malthus: "Let me not be supposed to give the slightest sanction to the system of morals inculcated in the "Fable of the Bees," a system which I consider as absolutely false, and directly contrary to the just definition of virtue. The great art of Dr. Mandeville consisted in misnomers" ("Essay on the Principle of Population," 7th ed., p. 492, note).

<sup>3</sup> "Table Talk," as cited.



think, however, Professor Minto goes a little too far in holding that in 1714 Mandeville was as much bent on humorous paradox as in 1705. A humourist he certainly was, but not, I think, "at least as much of a humourist as a philosopher," as Mr. Minto puts it. Even his prose "Remarks" on his fable are not predominantly humorous, and his other works are still less so. It would probably be nearer the truth to say that as he grew in years he became more and more concerned to expiscate the scientific truth that weighted his original squib: an experience to which there are abundant analogies. The "Remarks" and the "Inquiry" were followed in 1723 by an "Essay on Charity and Charity Schools," "A Search into the Nature of Society," and a sufficiently serious "Vindication of the Book;" and these again in 1728 by a volume of "Dialogues," in which, though the old humour is not lost, the work of vindication is systematically gone about. The writer is no mere jester. Mr. Leslie Stephen, whose account of him veers a good deal, does him a distinct injustice in declaring that in his preface Mandeville "avows" the diverting of his readers to be "his sole purpose." Mr. Stephen has misread the text. Mandeville says, "If you ask me why I have done this, *cui bono?* and, what good these notions will produce? Truly, besides the reader's diversion, I believe none at all: but if I was asked, what naturally ought to be expected from them? I would answer, that, in the first place, the people who continually find fault with others, by reading them, would be taught to look

at home"—thereby learning to mend their own ways; and, further, that lovers of ease and comfort would "learn more patiently to submit to those inconveniences, which no government on earth can remedy, when they should see the impossibility of enjoying any great share of the first, without partaking likewise of the latter." The humourist comes out in the sarcasm that after so many books have been written for the benefit of mankind with so little good result, he is "not so vain as to hope for better success from so inconsiderable a trifle;" but the notes in vindication of the poem, with all their sub-acid humour, are keenly reasoned. He must indeed have been very humorously constituted to take quite humorously the storm of obloquy to which his enlarged book gave rise. The poem had, as he tells us, been taken by many, "either wilfully or ignorantly mistaking the design," to be "wrote for the encouragement of vice;" and his prose explanation only increased the outcry. On the one hand, ridiculing as he did the optimistic rhapsodies of Shaftesbury, he had against him nearly all the Deists; and on the other, his questionable profession of Christianity was quite insufficient to conciliate the Christians, whom he startled and irritated by his merciless reduction of all good actions whatsoever to the promptings of self-love, or, as he later preferred to put it, self-liking. Consequently the Christians, according to their habit, called him an Atheist, besides charging him with deliberately encouraging vice; and the Deists both of his own and the next generation concurred on the latter if not on both

heads; "pernicious" being the favourite adjective for the book. Smith, as we have seen, held it up to unique reprobation; stating first that its tendency was "wholly pernicious," and further-on ponderously pronouncing that "though perhaps it never gave occasion to more vice than what would have been without it," it "at least taught that vice, which arose from other causes, to appear with more effrontery, and to avow the corruption of its motives with a profligate audaciousness which had never been heard of before."

That sentence recalls, if it was not inspired by, the ingenuous work of Berkeley entitled "Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher," a set of dialogues, in one of which the system of Mandeville is subjected to a quasi-refutation by the simple expedient of grossly misrepresenting it through the mouth of a foolish youth who is described as adhering to it, but who is really an impossible libertine with a set of opinions never formulated or held by any human being. Mr. Stephen charitably observes<sup>1</sup> that "Berkeley's 'Minute Philosopher' is the least admirable performance of that admirable writer." John Mill<sup>2</sup> says as much, and then goes a little further:

"It is most likely that Berkeley painted Freethinkers from no actual acquaintance with them, and in the case of 'sceptics and Atheists' without any authentic knowledge of their arguments. . . . Like most other defenders of religion in his day, though we regret to have to say it of a man of his genius and virtues, Berkeley made no scruple of imputing Atheism on mere surmise—to Hobbes, for example, who never speaks otherwise than as a believer in God, and even in Christianity; and to

<sup>1</sup> ii., 43.

<sup>2</sup> Diss. and Disc., iv., 179.



the 'God-intoxicated' Spinoza. We may judge that he replied to what he supposed to be in the minds of infidels, rather than to what they anywhere said; and, in consequence, his replies generally miss the mark."

I venture to go a step further still, and say that the "Alciphron" is an unpleasantly unscrupulous performance. The philosopher who rose from Tar-water up to Tar-water's God, and who, according to Pope—a precious authority, certainly—had "every virtue under heaven," is in reality a very striking illustration of the demoralizing effect of devout religious belief, and of the clerical function, on men in their intellectual relations with their fellows. It is pleaded for him that he saw growing corruption in society and fancied that unbelief was the cause: the answer is that he promoted the corruption by the immorality of his own controversial methods; than which, besides, no species of immorality could be more commonplace. The philosopher had recourse to the most habitual expedient of his profession both then and now, the vilification of thinkers whose books he had never read.<sup>1</sup> Mandeville, in his "Letter to Dion" by way of self-vindication, takes quite the superior position, explaining and arguing without temper yet without flippancy, and making none of the severe rejoinders that he legitimately might.

<sup>1</sup> "You are not the first, sir, by five hundred," says Mandeville ("Letter to Dion," 1732, p. 5), "who has been very severe upon the Fable of the Bees without having ever read it. I have been at Church myself, when the Book in Question has been preached against with great Warmth by a worthy Divine, who own'd that he had never seen it; and there are living Witnesses now, Persons of unquestion'd Reputation, who heard it as well as I."

This superiority of tone comes out equally when he is contrasted with almost any one of his opponents. When he does not far surpass them in acuteness he is sure to have the advantage of them in serenity. Thus Law, the utterer of the "Serious Call," who criticized Mandeville with considerable dialectic skill, fails of impressiveness in the long run by reason of the acrid and carping tone of his attack. Even Hutcheson, the "never-to-be-forgotten," as Smith affectionately termed him, passes from satire into spleen in his "Observations" <sup>1</sup> on the "Fable," venting his bitterness in sneers at such matters as "that easy phrase 'meliorating our conditions,'" and "that most grammatical epithet 'superlative';" which phrase and epithet are now current without challenge. As for poor John Dennis, who wrote a work, entitled "Vice and Luxury Public Mischiefs" (1724), against Mandeville by way of fortifying the Established Church, he simply gets into the state of frenzy with which his name is so irretrievably associated; pronouncing the book <sup>2</sup> "a very wretched Rhapsody, weak, and false, and absurd in its Reasoning; awkward, and crabbed, and low in its Wit; in its

<sup>1</sup> Of which Mackintosh held that Hutcheson "appears nowhere to greater advantage" ("On the Progress of Ethical Philosophy," 4th ed., by Whewell, p. 161, *note*). I cannot think this is so. But there is point and force in Hutcheson's preliminary analysis ("Thoughts on Laughter, and Observations on the Fable of the Bees," ed. 1758, p. 58) of the variations of Mandeville's thesis, which takes, as he points out, five different forms:—that private vices are themselves public benefits; that they naturally tend, as the direct and necessary means, to produce public happiness; that they may be made to tend to public happiness; that they naturally and necessarily flow from public happiness; and that they will probably flow from public prosperity through the present corruption of men.

<sup>2</sup> Pref., p. 17.

Humour contemptibly low, and in its Language often barbarous." But the contemporary attacks are too numerous to catalogue; and so strong was the chorus of denunciation that on the issue of a fresh edition in 1723 the grand jury of Middlesex "presented" it as one of a number of pernicious publications by "zealots for infidelity" "in their diabolical attempts against religion." "We are justly sensible," said the pious jury, "of the goodness of the Almighty, that has preserved us from the plague, which has visited our neighbouring nation . . . ; but how provoking must it be to the Almighty, that his mercies and deliverances extended to this nation, and our thanksgiving that was publicly commanded for it, should be attended with such flagrant impieties!"<sup>1</sup> What then was in effect the teaching which so revolted the mind of the respectable British public in the days of George the First?

The alternative title of Mandeville's expanded book—"Private Vices Public Benefits"—is apt to be even more misleading to a reader to-day than it conceivably might be then; and even from Mandeville's own point of view it does not cover his whole sociological theory. His paradox is two-edged. On the one hand he argues against the censors of social corruptions, and this not merely humorously, that nearly all the evils they denounce—luxury, envy, avarice, selfishness, prostitution, and so forth—tend to benefit society in some way; on the other he argued against the school of Shaftesbury that the alleged benevolent and virtuous

<sup>1</sup> See Mandeville's "Vindication" at end of vol. i.



impulses in man, prompting him to live in society and to do well by his fellows, are as surely manifestations of self-liking, or the spirit of self-assertion or self-preservation, as any other impulses whatever, and are thus to be classed with the "vices"—selfishness being always so catalogued. On the face of his theory, Mandeville was thus an extreme optimist and a good deal of a pessimist: the pessimism and the optimism being alike logically involved in the first proposition; while the second had for the ordinary reader all the effect of a depressing view of human nature. The thesis that "vices" work good, of course, is really no more a vindication of vice than is the thesis of Milton, that it is absurd to blame Deity for introducing evil into the world, seeing that without "evil" there can be no "good"; an argument unhesitatingly used by Christians and theists when they find themselves hard pressed in the defence of their faith. Strictly, Milton's proposition is the more "licentious" of the two, seeing that it asserts evil to be a necessary condition of good, while Mandeville only says it is actually found to involve good. Nay, the Christian scheme of redemption, promising as it does remission of sins on the mere condition of belief in Christ, is theoretically a stronger encouragement to immorality than the doctrine either of Milton or of Mandeville. But the orthodox disputant is always prepared to endorse the orthodox and the Miltonic principles without regard to their consequences, while ignoring, in regard to the other, everything *but* the hypothetical consequences. So, too,

Pope may with impunity argue that "whatever is, is right," though the proposition involves even more than Mandeville's; the ethics of the pious having at all times been a medley of inconsistencies, and their hatred or favour depending largely on the fashion in which their prejudices are countered or conciliated.<sup>1</sup> We see the same iniquitous play of blind hostility and blinder sympathy to-day.

Studied in detail, Mandeville's first contention is rather a truism than a paradox. That—to take his boldest assertion—the existence of prostitutes secures the "chastity" of a number of young women who would otherwise become "unchaste," is a statement which no thinking man can dispute. To-day we go further, and point out that the comfortable life of the married women of the middle classes is in large measure provided for by the sacrifice of women of the lower; the middle-class man being saved from the burden of a family in his early manhood, not by his "prudence" but by his resort to the prostitute. So with the rest of Mandeville's propositions, many of them being now commonplaces. That strife of sects promotes religious zeal and clerical good conduct; that destruction of goods and property benefits certain producers; that avarice saves wealth; that prodigality

<sup>1</sup> But Gibbon, in his conformist vein, joins in the conventional outcry. Of Law, who was his aunt's spiritual preceptor, he writes, demurely: "On the appearance of the Fable of the Bees, he drew his pen against the licentious doctrine that private vices are public benefits; and morality as well as religion must join (*sic*) in his applause" ("Memoirs," Misc. Works, ed. 1837, p. 10).

distributes it; that the expenditure of the rich is the means by which many of the poor are "employed"; that ambition and love of pleasure stimulate to exertion; that the desire for good things causes good things to be produced—all these statements, taken simply as assertions of fact, are indisputable. The real "answer," in so far as the book called for an answer, seems never to have been given in Mandeville's own time, and indeed is only given in its entirety by the most advanced social philosophy of to-day.

In so far as temperate rejoinders were made to the "Fable" last century, they were inconclusive, if not absolutely beside the mark. Mr. Minto points out as much in regard to the criticism of Johnson. "I read Mandeville," said that pundit in his old age,<sup>1</sup> "forty or, I believe, fifty years ago. He did not puzzle me; he opened my views into real life very much. No; it is clear that the happiness of society depends on virtue." "The fallacy of that book is, that Mandeville defines neither vices nor benefits. He reckons among vices everything that gives pleasure." As Mr. Minto points out, and as James Mill pointed out long ago in his "Fragment on Mackintosh," this objection (as do those of Malthus and McCulloch) misses the point, for Mandeville worked on the definition of virtue and vice which was orthodox in his day. It was even then pretended that he was founding on an extravagant ascetic formula, but it was not so. Johnson's objection, however, happens to be a mere

<sup>1</sup> Boswell, ch. 38.



repetition of Smith's; that optimistic Deist, as Mr. Stephen rightly describes him, having found no better argument with which to stiffen the pages of thin rhetoric in which he denies, deprecates, and dismisses Mandeville's doctrine. If his criticism does anything, it begs the question against Mandeville's theory of motive, and it does not even do that with any air of conviction. "I do not think," says Whately, whose treatment of Mandeville is uncommonly fair, "he [Smith] fully understood Mandeville; and if, as I believe is the fact, he had read the second volume, he can hardly be thought to have dealt fairly by the author, in omitting all mention of it."<sup>1</sup>

Whately's view of the book is worth notice in itself. Of Mandeville he says:—

"He was indeed a man of an acute and original, though not very systematic or comprehensive, turn of mind; but his originality was shown chiefly in bringing into juxtaposition notions which, separately, had long been current (and indeed are not yet quite obsolete) but whose *inconsistency* had escaped detection."<sup>2</sup> "It is sufficient to remark, that he is arguing all along on an *hypothesis*, and on one not framed gratuitously by himself, but furnished him by others; and on that hypothesis, he is certainly triumphant." "His argument does not go to show *categorically* that vice ought to be encouraged, but *hypothetically* that, if the notions which were afloat were admitted, respecting the character of virtue and vice, and respecting the causes and consequences of wealth, then national virtue and national wealth must be irreconcilable . . . , and consequently, that of two incompatible objects, we must be content to take one or the other. Which of the two is to be preferred, he nowhere decides in his first volume; in his second, he solemnly declares his opinion, that wealth ought to be renounced, as incompatible with virtue."<sup>3</sup>

This does credit to Whately's good feeling, but

<sup>1</sup> "Introductory Lectures on Political Economy," 4th ed. p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 28.

is just a little too accommodating a view to take of Mandeville's development.<sup>1</sup> If, however, we temper its generosity with Mr. Minto's view of the humorous purpose of the original Fable, and then concede that what Mandeville began as an amusing paradox latterly took a serious hold of his mind and feelings, we shall perhaps come as near as may be to a true and fair view of the case. It then becomes easy to come to a critical conclusion.

For us to-day, the fallacy of Mandeville's thesis, in so far as that is expressed by his sub-title, lies not in the definition of vice, for which he was not specially responsible,<sup>2</sup> but in his implied definition of "public benefits." What he really does is to show that the "vices" of some people work good to some other people: what he fails to define, and what he ought to define, is "public benefit." Everything there depends on what you understand by "public," and our answer to Mandeville may be stated very simply thus: That no benefit is a public benefit which involves the degradation of any. So long, of course, as we do not feel as a personal grievance the hardship of others, we shall tend to find Mandeville's demonstration either satisfactory or perplexing according as we are unprejudiced or

<sup>1</sup> The same may be said of the gently charitable criticism of Mr. A. W. Ward (*loc. cit.*):—"Though Mandeville only meant to show that under the system of Providence good is wrought out of evil, he would have done well to leave no doubt as to both the meaning and the limitations of his doctrine."

<sup>2</sup> Though he unquestioningly adopts it. "I see no self-denial, without which there can be no virtue" (Remark (O) on Fable). Compare "Search into the Nature of Society" par. 9, and Dialogue iii. (ed. 1772, p. 90).

biased in favour of a transcendental ethic; but as soon as we attain the sense of the solidarity of society, and reason out the nature of the social interdependences, Mandeville's case becomes an exposure of social evil and a proof of the need for a reconstruction. We do not deny that such "vices" involve such "benefits"; we say we want to have our benefits of a different kind.

Seeing that Mandeville was never answered in this sense in his own time,<sup>1</sup> it would be unfair to attack him on the strength of his general account of things so far as we have discussed it; but it cannot be denied that there is a certain aggressive callousness in his treatment of the problem of poverty. He not only worked out clearly enough, in his "Essay on Charity and Charity Schools" (which is an addition to the "Fable"), that view of poverty which is now associated with the name of Mr. Spencer; going perhaps as far as that thinker, and certainly as far as Mr. Mallock; but he proposed to dragoon the poor in various ways; one of his proposals, it should be noted, being to compel them to attend church regularly on Sundays.<sup>2</sup> Not satisfied with insisting that the poor should not be coddled, he expresses a desire that they should always be numerous, as otherwise the dirty work will not be properly attended to.<sup>3</sup> In view of which teach-

<sup>1</sup> Though he put the point very plainly in his "Dialogues" (iii., near beginning—ed. 1772, p. 88).

<sup>2</sup> Ed. 1772, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> It is a little difficult to decide how far Mandeville may be ironical in this as in some other of his propositions. The "Remarks" abound in



ing the average reader will perhaps sympathize less than he otherwise might with our author in that the proposal to drive the poor to church did not save him from the charge of attacking religion; and for the same reasons one is apt to render a somewhat tepid tribute to the piercing shrewdness of the essayist's commentary on affairs. Still, he must be credited with anticipating Smith in respect of several of his economic doctrines and demonstrations, such as the account of the advantages of the division of labour,<sup>1</sup> the glimpse of the true nature of international commerce, and the condemnation<sup>2</sup> of interferences with trades; credit which he needs the more because his constantly avowed aim is to keep the poor ignorant and contented in the interests of their betters. It is something in his favour to be able to say that in his pamphlet on the executions at Tyburn (1725) he protested strongly and cogently against the atrocious misrule in the jails, thus anticipating Howard, if not acting in Howard's spirit.

humour; and in these (Q and Y) his doctrine as to the poor might be surmised to be satirical. He not only elaborates it, however, in his "Essay on Charity," but recurs to it in the later "Dialogues" (vi., near end) in which he indicates his positions. ~~Frank cynicism~~ rather than irony thus seems to be the explanation.

<sup>1</sup> This is admitted by McCulloch ("Lit. of Pol. Ec.," p. 352); and Roscher ("Zur Gesch. der englisch. Volkswirtschaftslehre," p. 123, cited by Goldbach, p. 59, *note*) praises Mandeville on the same score. For his vigorous and on the whole rational resistance to the "mercantile" theory, see "Remarks" (L) and (Y). A French translator (cited by Goldbach, p. 5, *note*) contends that the Physiocrats had based their system on the principles of Mandeville. But the fabulist had not shaken himself free of fallacy, even as regards the mercantile theory. See "Remarks" (L) and (Q).

<sup>2</sup> "Essay on Charity" (ed. 1772, p. 226).

But the really important contribution made by Mandeville to social science—the scientific truth which he ultimately set most store by and which he elaborated most fully—is his doctrine that self-regard is the basis of all moral or benevolent or “virtuous” action, as of any other. In 1728, as we saw, he added to his book a set of dialogues, the greater part of which consists of a vindication of the author’s earlier propositions on this head. In the course of the work he gives us to understand that his original fable had been to some extent a “rhapsody,” and that his later remarks on it had been in part ironical; but on the instinctively self-regarding nature of all conduct he is serious and explicit. Mr. Stephen has noted the acuteness of his views on the growth of language and society; and it is perhaps not too much to say that he was the first writer to lay a scientific basis for sociology. A biographer of Helvetius has alleged<sup>1</sup> that that writer was “the first to found morality on the immovable basis of personal interest;” but the statement only proves ignorance of Mandeville’s work, which was translated into French in 1750, eight years before the appearance of the “*De l’Esprit*.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “*Poésies de M. Helvetius*,” Londres, 1781, p. xxx.

<sup>2</sup> The all-observant Buckle notes that “Helvetius, who visited London, was never weary of praising the people: many of the views in his great work on the Mind are drawn from Mandeville” (“*Introd. to Hist. of Civil. in Eng.*,” 3 vols. ed. ii. 218). The visit, however, was only made in 1764. Voltaire too, as Buckle also notes, was impressed by Mandeville. He confessedly imitated the Fable in his “*Le Marseillois et le Lion*” (see the “*Avertissement*,” ed. Garnier, vol. x.), and he has a not very profound passage on it in the “*Dictionnaire Philosophique*,” art. *Abeilles*: “Il est très-vrai que la société bien gouvernée tire parti de tous les vices; mais il n’est pas vrai que ces vices soient nécessaire au bonheur du monde. On

It might be urged, indeed, that Mandeville owes something to Hobbes, who of course pointed to the root principle of self-interest plainly enough; but Mandeville's exposition is so penetrating and so independent that even his assailants do not seem to have denied his essential originality. Mandeville may fairly be said, however, to have followed in the wake of La Rochefoucauld, whom, as we saw, Adam Smith had originally put in the same category in his review of ethical systems; and the only possible technical justification of the exclusion of La Rochefoucauld from the blame passed on his successor is that the "Maximes" are rather a set of epigrams, written for their own sake, than an ethical treatise. On no other ground can the Frenchman fairly be passed by while the Dutch-Englishman is censured. Mandeville, indeed, seems to work quite independently, though he cannot but have heard of La Rochefoucauld's work; and while, on the one hand, the maximist makes the subtler analyses of *amour-propre*, the fabulist in his prose addenda makes a connected demonstration of the principle. Nothing in Mandeville goes deeper, perhaps, than La Rochefoucauld's remark that we only confess our faults and weaknesses in a spirit of self-love—that we secretly pique ourselves in that case on our candour; but La Rochefoucauld, on the other hand, did not attempt to apply his doctrine systematically to the

fait de très-bon remèdes avec des poisons, mais ce ne sont pas les poisons qui nous font vivre. En reduisant ainsi la Fable des Abeilles à sa juste valeur, elle pourrait devenir un ouvrage de morale utile."



entire history of society—indeed he never troubles himself about the history of society at all, though he has studied human nature profoundly enough. One might go on for pages balancing the two against each other; setting Mandeville's proposition that morals originated in the craft of rulers—a preposterous doctrine, as Mr. Stephen justly observes, but probably not a serious one<sup>1</sup>—against some of the strained conceits over which every student of La Rochefoucauld has grumbled; but the end of our comparison, I think, would be the decision that Mandeville has done the greater service to human thought, while La Rochefoucauld has made the more brilliant contribution to literature. Mandeville, with all his comparative coarseness of statement, has constant hold of the scientific truth, though he is often unscientifically perverse in his rendering of it; La Rochefoucauld really restricts us too much to the contemplation of the men of the courts and camps of his time and country. Take, for instance, his celebrated reflection that “in the misfortunes of our best friends we find something not displeasing to us:” careful self-study will (I hope) convince all of us that the fact is not so; the misfortunes of our best friends being found to be un-

<sup>1</sup> Though Mr. Lecky (“Hist. Eur. Morals,” 6th ed. ii. 6) solemnly gives prominence to it as representative of Mandeville's position. It would perhaps be possible to turn the acute thrust of Hume: “Is it not very inconsistent for an author to assert in one page, that moral distinctions are inventions of politicians for public interest; and in the next page maintain that vice is advantageous to the public?” (Essay “Of Refinement in the Arts”); but the explanation of non-seriousness seems the right one.

mixedly painful. The fact is that La Rochefoucauld, as his grandson said to Smith, saw men in the conditions most deadly to real friendship; and he wrote of what he saw. Mandeville, again, with all his surgeon's coolness, never denied that sympathy and pity were sources of keen pain; he only tried to show that because they were instinctive, no credit could be taken for them as virtues. Here, of course, he was working on the contemporary theological definition of virtue, which made self-denial a *conditio sine qua non*; and, whatever he proved in regard to the operation of vices, his paradox destroyed the transcendental doctrine of virtue. The comparatively temperate author of "Deism Revealed"<sup>1</sup> noting that Shaftesbury "labours to prove mankind, of whom he knew but little, benevolent, public-spirited, and by nature good," decides that neither he nor Mandeville is right. "In most controversies, truth is on one side or other, or, at least, in the middle; but in this between *Shaftesbury* and *Mandeville* it is really nowhere; men are not what either represents them." But in denying that there is even a "middle," the critic has left himself no standing-ground; and, besides, he has evidently misunderstood Mandeville's position. Mandeville, indeed, is a little confusing, but his service is none the less effective because of the inconsistency involved in his language. When he proves that the courteous and outwardly unselfish man gratifies his developed self-love, he narrows the field of "virtue" in the old sense con-

<sup>1</sup> Ed. 1751, vol. ii. p. 217.

siderably; but when he shows that pity is now as fundamental a passion as fear; that "thousands give money to beggars from the same motive as they pay their corn-cutter—to walk easy;" that the murderer may in a given case feel pity as strongly as the good man; and that the prostitute may use her child well, while the poor girl-mother may strangle her babe for shame, and yet again prove a tender nurse to those she bears in wedlock—when he thus reduces the "benevolent" impulses to instincts, he has led us over the threshold of the truth that the "virtuous" tendencies are simply those which happen to make for the general well-being, while the "vicious" are those of the opposite order. To-day we are not going to throw away the words virtue and vice because their contents are found to be different from what was once supposed: we simply recast the formulæ. Mandeville, in short, is one of the real founders of utilitarianism; and the foundation, with all its defects, is perhaps sounder than a good deal of the later building.<sup>1</sup> But not merely does he prepare the way for a rational system of morals: he foreshadows the whole evolution doctrine by his rigorous inquisition into the material bases of social phenomena; led, no doubt, by the insight he had acquired in his medical experience. "One of the

<sup>1</sup> Even James Mill, while chivalrously defending Mandeville against the discreditable aspersions of Mackintosh, goes on to say that he does not think mankind are as Mandeville described them; a concession made, I think, rather on sentimental than on logical grounds. Certainly Mandeville is astray in some inessentials; but he ought to be judged by his essentials.



greatest reasons," he writes, in the Introduction to his "Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue," "why so few people understand themselves, is that most writers are always teaching men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are. As for my part, without any compliment to the courteous reader or myself, I believe man (besides skin, flesh, bones, &c., that are obvious to the eye) to be a compound of various passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no." And he insists again: <sup>1</sup> "To understand human nature requires study and application, as well as penetration and sagacity." In medicine, as in morals, he was a sceptic and a naturalist; and his book, "Of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases," <sup>2</sup> while vending a good deal of fantasy concerning the bodily "spirits," after the fashion of the time, insists from the first on a closer and more patient study of nature. It is this vital hold on permanent fact that makes Mandeville fresh and stimulating for us to-day—that makes him worth reading now in connection with the most advanced science in history, sociology, and biology.<sup>3</sup> And yet, somehow, he has practically passed out of sight for the general reader.<sup>4</sup> I suppose it is partly because

<sup>1</sup> Dialogue ii. (ed. 1772, p. 75) cf. Dial. iv. (p. 134).

<sup>2</sup> So in later editions. The first and part of the second have "Passions" for "Diseases."

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Dialogue iii.

<sup>4</sup> An edition, issued in 1844, of Law's "Remarks," with a characteristically rambling and purposeless preface by Maurice, gives, I think, the last reprint of the "Fable" in England.

of our intense prudery and still prevailing superstition ; partly because of that turn for optimistic platitude which is so much more characteristic of English thought than any "practicality" or "hatred of shams." Our timidity about "the nude" extends to truth in general. In France, despite the "restrictions banales" which M. Thénard believes<sup>1</sup> will long continue to be made there on the teaching of La Rochefoucauld, that writer is a familiar classic ; and even in this country it is certain that many will acquiesce in Mr. Saintsbury's outspoken vindication of him who would shrink from Mandeville. Mrs. Grundy has always made exceptions in favour of foreigners. "It may be," said Mr. Horne once,<sup>2</sup> "that false modesty, and social as well as religious hypocrisy, are the concomitant and the counterpart of the present equivocal state of our civilization ; but if I were not an Englishman, it is more than probable I should say that these qualities were more glaringly conspicuous in England than in any other country."

It would be unwarrantable to dismiss as mere conventional prejudice the hostility to Mandeville shown by Mr. Lecky in the section on utilitarianism which begins his "History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne," a section which is perhaps the least durable portion of an ill-coördinated book. But when Mr. Lecky adds to his always inconclusive because always misconceiving criticism of utilitarian

<sup>1</sup> Préf. to ed. of La Rochefoucauld, 1881, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ingram's "Life of Poe," i. 253.

ethics the use of at once question-begging and vituperative terms, which can only browbeat the uninstructed while doing nothing for the student unless repelling him,—then we are justified in imputing to the scholar the temper of unscholarly bigotry. To begin (p. 6) by calling Mandeville's theory (taken not as a whole but in a section admittedly (p. 7) inconsistent with the main and notorious thesis), "perhaps the lowest and most repulsive form" of the principle that virtue rests on self-interest; to reiterate (p. 7) the term "repulsive" and call the scheme in question "selfish"; and yet again (p. 25) to speak of Hobbes' system as attaining intellectual grandeur though "starting from a conception of human nature as low and base as that of Mandeville"—this is not to reason and confute, but to eke out weak argument with abuse. Such was the tactic of Mackintosh, who dismissed the whole subject with a "not to mention Mandeville, the buffoon and sophister of the alehouse: or Helvetius, an ingenious but flimsy writer, the low and loose moralist of the vain, the selfish, and the sensual,"<sup>1</sup>—thus coarsely contemning the acute and original fabulist and the benevolent and beloved Helvetius, while giving complaisant notice to Shaftesbury, Hartley, Tucker and Paley. As against such a deliverance it is not uninteresting to cite the judgment of one whom Mackintosh had occasion once to characterize<sup>2</sup> as failing "in little but the respect due to the abilities and character of

<sup>1</sup> "On the Progress of Ethical Philosophy," 4th ed. (by Whewell), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 303.



his opponents." Says Macaulay, in his early essay on Milton:—<sup>1</sup>

"If Shakspeare had written a book on the motives of human actions, it is by no means certain that it would have been a good one. It is extremely improbable that it would have contained half so much able reasoning in the subject as is to be found in the 'Fable of the Bees.' But could Mandeville have created an Iago? Well as he knew how to resolve characters into their elements, would he have been able to combine those elements in such a manner as to make up a man, a real, living, individual man?"

Coming from the rather bumptious young assailant of James Mill, such a criticism has its value, and it probably represents Macaulay's permanent opinion. It is certainly well borne out by the "Virgin Unmask'd." Elsewhere in the regions of propriety too, there has been heard at times a reasonably open-minded verdict on the Fable: it was Miss Mitford, I think, who once pronounced it the wittiest and wickedest of modern books. It is the professed philosophers who have been loudest to cry "shocking."

Even Mr. Stephen, I think, gives undue countenance to the Grundyite view of Mandeville by calling him a "prurient" writer, and accepting old gossip to the effect that Mandeville was given to ribald talk in the coffee-houses.<sup>2</sup> "Mandeville," he says, "was giving up to the coffee-houses a penetration meant for loftier purposes;" and he accuses him of "brutality," and of wearing a "detestable grin" when he shows us the

<sup>1</sup> Essays, Student's ed., pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Goldbach (S. 32-3, *note*) notes that Schlosser ("Gesch. d. 18 Jahrh.," i. 408) says Mandeville's life corresponded to his book, but answers with Tabaraud ("Hist. Crit. du Philos. Anglais," 1806, ii. 248) that there is no evidence for such defamatory statements.

“hideous elements that are fermenting beneath” the Shaftesburian “coating of varnish.” All this is a little over-strained. If Mandeville was a prurient writer, Pope must be pronounced very prurient indeed; and in fact half the writing of his time must be similarly censured. He is perhaps not so absolutely innocent as James Mill made out: his “*Virgin Unmask’d*” is not an entirely well-meaning performance; but even the most dubious part of that is far more of a realistic study than a prurient production; and the bulk of the book runs to politics and rather stilted narrative. The valid objection to him is on the score of his deficiency in sympathy, which is bad enough, but can hardly be called “brutality”; and in any other sense he is much less brutal than Swift. As for the “detestable grin” Mr. Stephen discovers, I have not been struck by it; and I cannot see the point of the charge that the coffee-houses got the best of Mandeville’s gift of penetration. How many more books would Mr. Stephen have had from a practising physician? I am inclined to suspect, indeed, that Mandeville’s repeated professions of religious orthodoxy must have been insincere, looking to his evasion of the difficulties raised against the received theology by his own scheme. The “*Enquiry into the Origin of Honour and the Usefulness of Christianity in War,*” and the “*Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness,*” have hardly the ring of belief; and it must be confessed that there is an unpleasant air of make-believe about his reprehension of Shaftes-

bury's freethinking,<sup>1</sup> and his characterization of the "atheism" of Bruno and Vanini;<sup>2</sup> the tone of bigotry here being sufficiently discordant with that of his writing in general. But that is a point which cannot now be cleared up; and it is certain that the author of "Deism Revealed" had no pretext in Mandeville's works for describing him as an assailant of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> His value for us as a thinker is not affected by the question of his private attitude towards creeds; it lies in the "tart cathartic virtue" of his criticism of men and manners; in the downright force and fearlessness of his speech. "Of all the writers on the side of infidelity," admits the author of "Deism Revealed," even while thus misrepresenting him, "this had the greatest stock of wit and experience: his stile, indeed, is a little lumpish, but it is clear and strong." Smith thinks the style, though humorous, was one of "coarse and rustic eloquence;" but in point of fact it is more pungent, nervous, and effective than Smith's own; and the humour is an added superiority. Pope's pointless half-line<sup>4</sup> in the "Dunciad" was probably penned with the poet's usual independence of personal inquiry. It may be taken, finally, as a set-off to Mandeville's bad points that he was a keen advocate of realism in art,<sup>5</sup> and that he is quite unique in his generation in his insis-

<sup>1</sup> Dialogue vi., end.

<sup>2</sup> Remark (R) on Fable.

<sup>3</sup> Lechler, in his careful "Geschichte des Englischen Deismus," does not mention Mandeville at all.

<sup>4</sup> B. ii. 414.

<sup>5</sup> Dialogue i.



tence on the intellectual capacities of women.<sup>1</sup> That may win him some feminine consideration to-day, and he certainly needs some such special recommendation to secure much of it.

<sup>1</sup> Dialogue iv. (ed. 1772, pp. 142-3). I do not recollect any earlier proposition of a similar kind in our literature. In Dialogue i., the woman is given the best of the argument on art. It must be confessed, however, that Mandeville's criticism does not in general spare women any more than men.



## THE ART OF TENNYSON.

(1887.)

LAYING down the new "Locksley Hall" and taking up the solider volume that contains the old; turning over the familiar leaves, noting many a well-known strain and scanning anew some only half-remembered, one is moved to ask some grave questions concerning the poet who has woven all that divers-coloured web of song. It is not wonderful, considering all he must have heard of the lofty function of the poet and of his own lofty performance, that he should in these latter years assume so frequently as he has done the guise of the prophet: it is not wonderful, but it becomes a little trying. For one thing, the ermine of the peer *will* trail its ceremonious length below the seer's exiguous mantle; and an ancient echo about kind hearts and coronets seems to lend itself malignly to fantastic variations. But there are graver grounds of question. These last outcries over human hopes and human strivings, these raging indictments against to-day's life as compared with yesterday's, how do they ring beside some dozen of the different notes we recall from the older music?



By the last account, with its rhymed recapitulation of the bad-blooded objurgations of gout-stricken Toryism, we moderns, having "risen from out the beast," are lapsing "back into the beast again," what with Atheism, Zolaism, Radicalism, extension of the franchise, and disestablishment. That being so, we must needs take what pensive satisfaction we can in those earlier musings of the time when, the laureate being young instead of old, and poor instead of rich in publishers' royalties, the universe so accommodately taught such a different lesson. And even as we con the earlier song, there rise up before us a few merely prosaic contrasts between the lyric organism and its environment. They are almost as piquant in their way as the poet's own more inspired visions of to-day. A quarter of a century or more ago, there is painful reason to believe, there was "incest in the warrens of the poor," prostitution, impurity, murderous misery, and all the rest of it; and about those times our poet was inditing, among other things, welcomes to Alexandra, hallelujahs to the Queen, and hosannas to the Duke of Wellington in excelsis. One year the admiring world would have a snatch on the higher Pantheism; in another, such a product of the higher Jingoism as "The Third of February, 1852," in which the singer is so patriotically successful in proving that the laureate of England can at a pinch beat any *poseur* of anarchic France at his own weapons of newspaper fustian and hustings braggadocio. If his lordship's career as a publicist could only be reviewed by an equally gifted

*vates sacer*, in a temper something like that which has inspired his latest efforts, it might furnish a very tolerable companion-piece. The lofty and other sentiments of the young lover of the first "Locksley Hall," with the commentary which represents the personal element in the poem to have included the vulgarly malignant vituperation by a rejected lover of a better man than himself; the chronic hysterical war-whoop of the muse which achieved the definition of "this French God, the child of Hell, wild War;" the operose heroics over that undertaker's apotheosis, the funeral of the Duke; the general inculcation of high-mindedness, and the interludes of assiduous incense-burning before that imposing piece of upholstery, the British throne:—a prose-writing Swift, in the absence of another Tennyson, might make a very pretty picture of human imbecility out of it all. And if good is to be done in this world by unpacking our mouths with words and falling a-cursing over the teachings we cannot agree with, it ought to be somebody's business to do for the Laureate what he does with such a will for his contemporaries in general.

Alas! the situation is poignant enough without any splenetic or dithyrambic comment. We need no pessimist to point for us the moral of these murky utterances of the grey-haired singer, the sting of these acrid taunts at the high hopes of his own youth. His mere self-expression, as such, will go as far as any item in his catalogue of ills to create among the fit audience the impression he has so eagerly sought to convey; and if anything can obviate a sense of bitterness in the reci-

ponents it will be their perception of the bitterness of the poet's own self-consciousness. No critic can exult over such a demonstration of the fallacy of the inveterate habit of viewing poets as teachers with a clearer and further view of things than other men. It is no satisfaction to have such a proof that the miraculous singer can be as weak and unmagnanimous as any of those he affects to scorn, as far as they from the white light of truth, as false as they to his own ideals. Nor, when we have weighed his teaching in the balances and found it so wofully wanting, can we afford to hold him in the mere contempt in which he so lavishly enfolds his generation; for these very flaws of his are in a manner a penalty attaching to the work he has done for us. It has been half-jestingly half-sadly said that actors and some others are to be regarded as suffering in their own personalities for the sake of those they entertain; and so it is with the poet in his degree. He too must "go here and there, and make himself a motley to the view, gore his own thoughts, sell cheap what is most dear, make old offences of affections new." Most flattered of all the artist tribe, he must dree his weird like the rest. We say he is no authoritative teacher, but yet it is in his destiny that the impulse to teach is his highest inspiration, recognizable as such both by himself and his listeners. His song must be beautiful if it is to conquer men; yet if he seeks only beauty his search will never lead him to beauty of the highest kind; which he is doomed to attain only in striving after that moral truth which he is not fated to reach. He is part of the



“riddle of the painful earth,” not its unraveller. We shall gain nothing by turning on him a lowering brow; and we shall accordingly do well to deal with the vices of Tennyson’s teaching as we might deal with the vices of other poet’s lives, as something to be considered apart from his art, if at all, the art being, when all is done, his net performance and our clear gain.

For Tennyson is a great artist, let him now rack his voice and his theme as he will. It must surely have been the constraint of the etiquette of criticism in regard to contemporaries that made Mr. Lowell the other year say of Gray that “he was the greatest artist in words that Cambridge has produced.” Gray is indeed the most consummate artist, properly speaking, in English poetry down to Tennyson’s time, but even Mr. Lowell may safely be defied to draw up such a case for the finished craftsman of last century as can be made out for the one of to-day. Making all due allowance for the amount of artistic cerebration that went to the doing of such work as the “Elegy”—an allowance apt to be unfairly withheld by critics who dwell on the various sources of the material which the poet has built into his structure—Gray’s performance can bear no comparison with Tennyson’s, whether in point of range, power, charm, finish, or masterly ease. His best work is not more pregnant than Tennyson’s best; there is much less of it; and it is always less perfectly melodious. The later singer came into a heritage of song such as the earlier had not known: he found a tradition of freshness and freedom, where the other came under a burden of scruple and formality.

In sheer devotion to art, however, Tennyson stands out even more notably from his contemporaries than did Gray; his bias being made only the more obvious by his early shortcomings. Mr. Swinburne has indicated these with, as usual, all imaginable emphasis.

“There are whole poems of Lord Tennyson’s first period which are no more properly to be called metrical than the more shapeless and monstrous parts of Walt Whitman; which are lineally derived as to their form—if form that can be called where form is none—from the vilest example set by Cowley, when English verse was first infected and convulsed by the detestable duncery of sham Pindarics. At times, of course, his song was then as sweet as ever it has sounded since; but he could never make sure of singing right for more than a few minutes or stanzas. The strenuous drill through which since then he has felt it necessary to put himself has done all that hard labour can do to rectify this congenital complaint; by dint of stocks and backboard he has taught himself a more graceful and upright carriage.”<sup>1</sup>

I do not remember that Mr. Swinburne has ever thought it necessary to speak of “Queen Mab” with a judicial fervour proportionate to the above; but, allowing for the dialect, the central judgment as to Tennyson’s early need and practice of drill is sufficiently well founded; Mr. Swinburne’s verdict having important though verbally inadequate support in the opinions long ago independently expressed on Tennyson’s metre by Coleridge and Poe,<sup>2</sup> of whom the first was not unfriendly

<sup>1</sup> “Miscellanies,” p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> There are several curious points of agreement between Coleridge and Poe in criticism. Both, for instance, had a boundless admiration for Fouqué’s “Undine,” and they expressed themselves in almost identical terms. See the “Table Talk,” under date May 31st, 1830, and compare Poe’s works (Ingram’s ed.) iii. 388, 461; iv. 132, 369.

to Tennyson, while the second admired him intensely. Coleridge said :—

“The misfortune is that he [Tennyson] has begun to write verses without very well understanding what metre is. Even if you write in a well-known and approved metre, the odds are, if you are not a metrist yourself, that you will not write harmonious verses ; but to deal in new metres without considering what metre means and requires, is preposterous. What I would, with many wishes for success, prescribe to Tennyson—indeed without it he can never be a poet in act—is to write for the next two or three years in none but one or two well-known and strictly defined metres, such as the heroic couplet, the octave stanza, or the octo-syllabic measure of the Allegro and Penseroso. He would, probably, thus get imbued with a sensation, if not a sense, of metre without knowing it, just as Eton boys get to write such good Latin verses (!) by conning Ovid and Tibullus. As it is, I can scarcely scan his verses.”<sup>1</sup>

Poe in his essay on “The Poetic Principle” says of Tennyson : “In perfect sincerity, I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived ;” but in another passage, after expressing and elaborating a similar opinion, he writes :

“Tennyson’s shorter pieces abound in minute rhythmical lapses sufficient to assure me that—in common with all poets living or dead (!)—he has neglected to make precise investigation of the principles of metre ; but, on the other hand, so perfect is his rhythmical instinct in general, that, like the present Viscount Canterbury, he seems to see with his ear.”<sup>2</sup>

The closing qualification is to Poe’s critical credit. After all, far too much is made by all three censors of the faults of Tennyson’s juvenile work ; metrical laxity belonging in more or less degree to the early compositions of the great majority of poets. Tennyson’s “first period,” be it remembered, was a very youthful

<sup>1</sup> “Table Talk,” under date April 24th, 1833.

<sup>2</sup> “Marginalia,” cxcvi.



period indeed, and it is to this that Coleridge's criticism must apply. He cannot have been speaking of the poems published in 1833, the best of which show, to say the least, as strong a sense of metre as his own; and when he animadverts as he does on the first volume, issued in 1830, he must have been thinking of what Mr. Swinburne calls the sham Pindarics, which bulk very largely in it. And even of these it is only fair to say that they show rather an early proclivity to wandering measures than an incapacity for strict metre. There are, no doubt, metrical lapses in "A Dirge," but "The Sleeping Beauty" is flawless, sufficiently showing that Coleridge's *de haut en bas* suggestions were not needed. At all events, they were not taken; the young poet discarding his Pindarics, but choosing other metres than Coleridge had prescribed. What is really proved, however, by his early sowing of his wild oats and his speedy reformation, is the immense part that may be performed by careful art in the production of the very finest poetry. There is no more remarkable lesson to be learned from a comparison of Tennyson's work with Mr. Swinburne's than this, that the element of inspiration or cerebral excitement, which as it were gives flight to the poet's song, may be possessed in unfailing abundance without securing real poetic success, while a muse that is lacking on that side, to the point even of occasional serious discomfiture, may yet by stress of patient art produce a mass of work that is entirely lovely. Such at least is the fashion in which I am fain to figure to myself the explanation of the fact that Mr.

Swinburne, while apparently incapable of such lapses into crass prose as are undeniably committed at times by Tennyson, yet so generally turns out what is to me but tortured verbiage, while Tennyson, despite his "congenital infirmity"—very real in this regard—so often yields me golden song. There is, indeed, this to be said for the elder poet, that almost from the first he has grappled with artistic difficulties which the younger has from first to last avoided. There is much significance in Mr. Swinburne's attack on Mr. Arnold for taking as poetic themes ideas which are "flat" and uninspiring. While praising Mr. Arnold's "Empedocles"—in part at least—Mr. Swinburne<sup>1</sup> remarks that "elsewhere, in minor poems, Mr. Arnold . . . has now and then given signs of sweeping up dead leaves fallen from the dying tree of belief;" in objecting to which practice Mr. Swinburne ostensibly follows a French critic who appears to insist that poetry can only arise out of emotions of a positive or violent order. Further on (p. 161) he appears to reiterate the same doctrine thus: "This alone I find profitless and painful in his [Mr. Arnold's] work; this occasional habit (*sic*) of harking back and loitering in mind among the sepulchres. Nothing is to be made by an artist out of scepticism, half-hearted or double-hearted doubts or creeds; nothing out of mere dejection and misty mental weather. Tempest or calm you may put to use, but hardly a flat fog." I confess I can make nothing out of an antithesis of this kind, in which a fog is treated

<sup>1</sup> "Essays and Studies," p. 133.

as something negative and a calm as something positive; and my difficulty is only deepened when Mr. Swinburne goes on (p. 162) to say that "Deep-reaching doubt and 'large discourse' are poetical, so is faith, so are sorrow and joy; but so are not the small troubles of spirits that nibble and quibble about beliefs living or dead; so are not those sickly moods which are warmed and weakened (*sic*) by feeding on the sullen drugs of dejection," &c. All that can distinctly be gathered from such a deliverance is that Mr. Swinburne does not like verse that is vaguely melancholy, preferring either joy or black despair: of reasoned justification for the judgment there is none. We have no canon to enable us to distinguish even between "deep-reaching doubt" and "sickly moods," to say nothing of the more recondite distinction between such doubt and "scepticism" pure and simple, or "half-hearted or double-hearted doubts or creeds:" we are simply driven to the conclusion that Mr. Swinburne, disliking the sentiment of certain verses, relieved his mind in some appropriate rhetoric which pretended to be technical criticism, but possessed no such character. Such an utterance is the more surprising as coming from a writer who, however questionable may be some of his technical judgments—notably in the case of the poetry of Mr. Rossetti—is in general so catholic in his recognition of the scope of poetic art and of the artistic values of verse. Such a criticism is fitly followed by the extravagantly unsound dictum that "When the thought goes wrong, the verse follows after it,"—as if poetry were a matter of pro-



positions. It will never do thus to make our sympathy with or antipathy to a poet's philosophical attitude a ground for deciding that his poetry is not poetical. It is certainly not clear which of Mr. Arnold's poems Mr. Swinburne has in view, as he seems to praise in one place verses which would be thought to come under his ban in another; but, taking his hostile dicta as they stand, they are once for all refuted by Mr. Arnold's production of fine verse on the very motives interdicted. The truth is, of course, that different poetic idiosyncrasies yield different kinds of verse; that Mr. Arnold is, after all, more of a thinker than Mr. Swinburne; and that he can find a lasting dynamic quality in ideas to which Mr. Swinburne instinctively gives a wide berth. These he transmutes into poetry just because he has been profoundly impressed by them. And so, in a different way, Tennyson is capable of poetically transfiguring themes which Mr. Swinburne never thinks of handling, such as those of "The Miller's Daughter," "The May Queen," "Enoch Arden," "The Gardener's Daughter," "The Talking Oak," "Sea Dreams:" at least, if the younger singer were to take up such motives, he would infallibly denaturalize them in order to get his due poetic elevation. When Mr. Swinburne goes about to praise anybody in prose, he raises, as a journalist said the other day, a tumulus of laudatory adjectives and substantives; and he does the same sort of thing in all his verse. Simple pregnancy is as far from him as the gift of surrounding an every-day subject with beauty by an "imperceptible

heightening" of the every-day tone. Turning over his volumes, you find a constant hankering after themes that are either antique, or mediæval, or abnormal; and when they are modern without being abnormal, there is still a constant reliance on the device of archaic diction—one of the easiest methods of being unprosaic, but perhaps also one of the surest signs of a want of the highest poetic originality. Now in Tennyson you will find in general a reaching towards modern naturalness of speech, a preference for simple constructions, similar to that shown and argued for by Wordsworth; though a sense of Wordsworth's frightfully precarious fortune in applying his principle evidently caused the pupil to swerve from the rule of the master. As compared with Swinburne, he is for the most part a realist both in choice of poetic subject and in poetic style, his language having, with certain exceptions, a bias to naturalism even when he treats what would be called elevated themes; while Mr. Swinburne, as has been said, brings to bear on all his subjects alike a style of inordinate and artificial magniloquence; securing elevation indeed without fail, but leaving a critical reader fatigued and nauseated with his waste of sound and fury, and at bottom psychologically untouched. He may move many readers by the sheer contagion of his sibylline excitement; but the piercing power of chosen and welded words, the high art of making a line so eternally living that it can in an instant, at the twentieth coming, clutch our very hearts and stir the deepest wells of unshed tears—this is beyond him, or

at least is hardly attained by him once in a thousand pages. If, then, Tennyson falls at times into mere bathos and Swinburne never does, it is to be remembered that the former runs the extra risk by, so to speak, sailing much more closely in the wind's eye than the other; and that the latter secures his immunity by such an exclusive cultivation of the orotund as makes the bulk of his work a mere weariness of the flesh, or at best a marvel of futile fecundity, to the initiated lover of verse; raising, to take a late instance, such a pother of vocables by way of suggesting the fragile personalities of children, as to fatally recall Goldsmith's anticipation of how Johnson would make the little fishes talk like the whales. Tennyson's very mishaps, in short, are found to involve a proof that he has by far the wider artistic range. All this being so, however, it will still hold that his excellences are emphatically the outcome of patient workmanship; that he is, as has been said, above all things an artist.

One of the prominent proofs of the constant care the Laureate has taken to perfect himself in his art is the extent to which he has suppressed the weaker work of his young days, and from time to time retouched for the better very many of his more successful performances. It is probably not generally known that out of the 154 pages of his first volume of "Poems, Chiefly Lyrical," he afterwards withdrew from his works as much as 61 pages, or two-fifths of the book. There can be no doubt that the suppressed pieces on the whole deserved their fate, being with hardly an excep-



tion unimpressive in conception and unsuccessful in execution; though the variety of rhythmical experiment is, it should be said, sufficiently remarkable as coming from a youth of barely twenty.<sup>1</sup> But, as Mr. Swinburne admits, some of the successful poems in the first volume are as finely turned as anything he has done since. The "melody" which now, as then, stands first in the collection of his poems, is practically perfect to

<sup>1</sup> One or two interesting samples, as "Elegiacs" and "Rosalind" have been reproduced in Messrs. Macmillan's one-volume edition, and we are promised a complete reissue of all the early pieces. Some are unsophisticated enough, as "The 'How' and the 'Why,'" of which the closing stanza runs:

"Why the life goes when the blood is spilt?  
 What the life is? where the soul may lie?  
 Why a church is with a steeple built  
 And a house with a chimney pot?  
 Who will riddle me the how and the what?  
 Who will riddle me the what and the why?"

Other pieces published in 1830 and dropped later are "Supposed Confessions of a Secondrate Sensitive Mind not in unity with itself" [republished some years ago under pressure]; "The Burial of Love;" Lines beginning "Sainted Juliet! dearest name!" Song, "I' the glooming night;" Song, "The lintwhite and the throstlecock;" Song, "Every day hath its night;" "Hero to Leander;" a poem in blank verse, "The Mystic;" "The Grasshopper;" "Love, Pride, and Forgetfulness;" "Chorus in an unpublished Drama, written very early;" "Lost Hope;" "The Tears of Heaven;" "Love and Sorrow;" "To a Lady Sleeping;" Four Sonnets; "Love;" "English Warsong," beginning "Who fears to die? Who fears to die? Is there any here who fears to die?"; a "National Song," beginning "There is no land like England;" "Dualisms;" and lastly "*οἱ βέροντες*," which has a juvenily facetious prose tag at the end.

From the volume published in 1833, again, there have been discarded a paraphrase of Sappho, "O Love, Love, Love!" "The Hesperides;" a song, "Who can say?" "Kate;" "O Darling Room;" the lines to Christopher North, and two Sonnets.

the extent of two-thirds—the only emendation found necessary in the first two stanzas being the change of “bee low hummeth” to “wild bee hummeth”—though the awkward succession of dentals in the last stanza makes a feeble finish. And in the middle stanza there may be found, I think, an interesting proof of the care which the young poet was already capable of exercising in his work, though he was not yet grown circumspect enough all round. It runs, as most readers will remember :

“At eve the beetle boometh  
 Athwart the thicket lone ;  
 At noon the wild bee hummeth  
 About the mossed headstone ;  
 At midnight the moon cometh  
 And looketh down alone.”

Here the proper order of time is departed from—eve coming before noon—probably in order that the rhymes shall fall to the best advantage. I have no information on the subject, but I have an intuition that the poet at first put the third and fourth lines first and second, and then wrote, “At eve the beetle *drummeth* ;” but that, rightly deciding that “drummeth” would spoil the whole stanza, and having no nearer sound than “boometh” left him, he decided to put eve before noon in order to have the proper rhyme value of “hummeth” and “cometh,” which would be in large part lost if “boometh” came between. Similarly, in the later poem, “The Lotos Eaters,” one strongly suspects that it was only after some trouble that the

close  
read

author was content to make the first and third lines both end in "land": he probably tried at first some such locution as "pointed with his hand," deciding, perhaps for once a little lazily, to use "land" twice because he could not bring in "hand" satisfactorily. But the finest samples of the poet's 'prentice-work are, I think, the admirable poem, miscalled a 'song, beginning "A spirit haunts the year's last hours;" the three stanzas of "The Sleeping Beauty," which were later embodied in "The Day Dream," but appeared as a separate poem in the volume of 1830; and "Mariana;" and in these there is little alteration. The first remains unchanged, needing no improvement; and in the second there are just a few differences in the later version, as "She lying on her couch alone" for "The while she slumbereth alone," "Across" for "Over" in the third line; and "broider'd" for "braided." Its music was thus substantially perfect, well deserving the fervent praise bestowed on it by Poe. Here, and in "Mariana," was seen that gift of close observation, the power of the "seeing eye," so warmly commended by Mr. Swinburne; and in the short piece on "The Kraken," too, we have the earnest of a fresh kind of achievement in our literature, that weaving of the ideas or the fancies of science into harmonious poetry without loss of the scientific outline, in respect of which Tennyson stands apart from those poets, like Shelley, who have paraphrased such ideas into allegories, as well as from those who, like Mr. Swinburne, steadfastly leave science alone.



Not, however, till the publication of the volume of 1833 could the most clear-sighted reader have seen that the new singer's endowment was really great. Within the three years he had produced a body of work which left his first collection far behind; which indeed included a greater number of short pieces destined to become classic than are to be found in any other volume of English verse, of similar size, ever published. Now it was that English readers were first charmed by the rich chords and the novel modulations of "The Lady of Shalott," the tender music of "The Miller's Daughter;" the new and masterly blank-verse of "Ænone;" the incomparable blending of form and colour in "The Palace of Art" and "A Dream of Fair Women," and the absolutely unmatched beauty of "The Lotos Eaters." Here was art such as the generation of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, had not yet seen. Art for art's sake indeed might seem to be the object of the poet's pursuit when he appended to "The Palace of Art" footnotes explaining what his plan had been, giving specimens of excluded sections of the poem, in which he had given other views of the palace than those in the text, and intimating how hard it was to design statues in verse.<sup>1</sup> In "A Dream of Fair Women" again, where, speaking of Chaucer, he tells how "for a while *the knowledge of his art held me above the subject,*" there is a material

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written, an interesting account of the development of the poem in question has appeared in the *Princeton Review* (1887 or 1888) under the title "The Vicissitudes of a Palace."

inconsistency which the poet has never remedied, much as he has retouched his earlier work, and which, there can be no doubt, he introduced and allowed to stand just because the inconsistent segment was by itself such a perfect piece of workmanship. It is the song of the daughter of Jephthah. Thus he introduces it, after the glowing picture of Cleopatra :

“Slowly my sense undazzled. Then I heard  
A noise of someone coming thro’ the lawn,  
And singing clearer than the crested bird  
That claps his wings at dawn.”

I hardly dare to ask myself, on this stanza, whether “the crested bird,” so admirably named whoever he be, is he that was erst hight Chanticleer; and, assuming him to be that familiar fowl, I am as loth to decide honestly whether the figure is or is not bathetic. But one thing is obtrusively plain, that the verbal music of the virgin’s song, thus heralded, should be lyrically incomplex, implying by its simplicity and spontaneity of flow a vocal solo, whose charm lies in its soprano silveriness and beauty of outline. But what have we here—

“The torrent brooks of hallow’d Israel  
From craggy hollows pouring, late and soon,  
Sound all night long, in falling thro’ the dell  
Far-heard beneath the moon.

The balmy moon of blessed Israel  
Floods all the deep-blue gloom with beams divine :  
All night the splinter’d crags that wall the dell  
With spires of silver shine.”

—? Harmony of the very richest kind : hardly a noun

without its choicely-fitted adjective: the entire strain packed with tone and colour, stroke upon stroke and chord upon chord, till the whole throbs with music like the charmed thunder of a noble organ. Jephthah's daughter could hardly sing an orchestral andante! The poet knows perfectly the structure and the effect of his interlude, for he goes on:

“As one that museth where broad sunshine laves  
The lawn by some cathedral, thro' the door  
Hearing the holy organ rolling waves  
Of sound on roof and floor . . .  
so stood I”—

a rather different account from the preliminary parallel of the crested bird of dawn. The incongruity is complete; and yet I fancy we can most of us pardon it for the music's sake, though indeed it might have been averted by the simple sacrifice of the bird, and by, say, making the singer accompany herself on a stringed instrument. An artist who can give us such work is not to be quarrelled with for a trifle; and there are a hundred perfect touches in the same poem to atone for a solitary perversity. We cannot now well conceive what were the feelings of the competent readers of fifty years ago when they turned over the pages of that second volume; but it seems as if there must have been something ecstatic in the sensations of the more tasteful over such a succession of beauties as make up each of the great poems in the book.

A critic enamoured of the past has somewhere complained that our literature is poor in “gnomic phrases”



as compared with those of Greece and Rome; citing among others, if I remember rightly, a phrase of Apuleius—"inevitabiles oculos magnae Veneris," "great Venus's inevitable eyes"—as a sample of what we cannot do; but one might cite a dozen equally fine coinages from Tennyson's second volume alone. Take "the maiden splendours of the morning star"—not pure gold perhaps, but still a fine phrase; or "the star-like sorrows of immortal eyes;" or "the spacious times of great Elizabeth"—a doubtful proposition certainly, but again a mighty line; or "brow-bound with burning gold;" or "the tearful glimmer of the languid dawn;" or even "those dragon eyes of anger'd Eleanor"—all out of "A Dream of Fair Women." So far from there being any suspicion of a lack of "sense for metre" here, the metre and the sense, in the best lines, are perhaps more thoroughly interpenetrative than in any previous verse in the language. Let one passage be conned as proof:

"There was no motion in the dumb dead air,  
Not any song of bird or sound of rill;  
Gross darkness of the inner sepulchre  
Is not so deadly still

As that wide forest. Growths of jasmine <sup>1</sup> turn'd  
Their humid arms festooning tree to tree,  
*And at the root thro' lush green grasses burn'd  
The red anemone.*"

I do not think it is possible to get anything more perfectly canorous, and at the same time more simply

<sup>1</sup> "Clasping jasmine" in the first edition.

forceful, in English poetry than these lines, especially the two last. And almost as adroit a sequence of words occurs in a descriptive stanza of a more difficult kind, though here the adroitness lapses into noticeable artifice :

“Squadrons and squares of men in brazen plates,  
Scaffolds, still sheets of water, divers woes,  
Ranges of glimmering vaults with iron grates,  
And hush'd seraglios.”

The close is perfect, but “divers woes” is a too palpable patch. How masterly, however, is this :

“Moreover it is written that my race  
Hew'd Ammon, hip and thigh, from Aroer  
On Arnon unto Minneth.’ Here her face  
Glow'd, as I look'd at her.

*She lock'd her lips :* she left me where I stood ;  
'Glory to God,' she sang, and past afar,  
Thriding the sombre boskage of the wood,  
Toward the morning star.”

With an artist who can electrify language so, I suppose we must infer a certain touch of indolence when we find him leaving in such a poem, after all these years, two such lines as these :

“The times when I remember to have been  
Joyful and free from blame.”

But against that one unredeemably weak stroke in the “Dream,” there are to be gratefully reckoned some emendations so extensive and decisive as to make the remaining blemish seem a small thing to complain of.

It is the Rev. Mr. Fleay who, in dedicating his

“Shakspeare Manual” to Tennyson, declares that the Laureate, “had he not elected to be the greatest poet of his time, might easily have become its greatest critic.” This and other praises of Tennyson’s judgment in connection with Shaksperology<sup>1</sup> doubtless proceed upon personal knowledge; but while outsiders are not in a position to endorse such a conclusion as Mr. Fleay’s—while, indeed, they will incline to gravely suspect it of extravagance—they can find data enough in the poet’s revision of his own work to satisfy them that his critical power is indeed high. No poet, I believe, has rewritten so much as he; and probably none has ever retouched with anything like such perfect judgment. Wordsworth, for instance, can in no case be safely assumed to have improved his work when he altered it. His well-known but generally misquoted<sup>2</sup> line in the “Elegiac Stanzas” on a picture of Peele Castle—“the light that never was on sea or land,”—stood so in the first appearance of the poem in 1807; but in the edition of 1820 we have:

“a gleam  
Of lustre known to neither sea nor land;

and in that of 1827 the slight modification of “the gleam, the lustre;” and as it was only in 1832 that

<sup>1</sup> It was he, it appears, who first suggested to Mr. Spedding that Fletcher’s hand was apparent in the “Henry VIII.,” and Mr. Spedding pronounced him “a man of first-rate judgment on such a point.” See Furnivall’s Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Twice, for instance, by Mr. Lowell, who gives it “land or sea” in his essay on Pope (“My Study Windows,” 6th ed. p. 283, *n.*), and in his essay on Wordsworth (“Camelot” vol. of Essays, p. 208).



Wordsworth had the wisdom to restore the matchless original, some non-copyright editions, as the Chandos, have the tasteless intermediate reading. In "The Solitary Reaper," again, one line has been changed twice and another thrice, and in each case it may well be doubted whether the first form was not best. It will be found impossible to convict Tennyson of any such unprosperous second thoughts. His more important revisions are always happy, and there is no more striking achievement of the kind in our literature than the extensive emendation he has made on the first cast of "The Lotos Eaters"—now, to my judgment, the masterpiece of all English poetic art, strictly considered as such. A few alterations, always judicious, have been made in single lines and phrases; the line "Full-faced above the valley stood the moon" being a substitution for "Above the valley burned the golden moon," where the cadence made a monotony with the context which the spondee "full-faced" dissolves; and "Three silent pinnacles of aged snow" having taken the place of the too ambitious "Three thunder-cloven thrones of oldest snow." Then we have "watch" for "hear," before "the *emerald-colour'd* water falling;" and "barren peak" for "flowery peak;" and even a finikin excision of the plural in "eyelids still," and of the possessive in "river's seaward flow," in accordance with a view on which the poet has acted in several other cases, that a final and an initial sibilant should not come together. But the great improvement in the revised poem—in addition to the gain of the present sixth section, an

exquisite piece which did not appear in the volume of 1833—is the insertion of the noble passage from “ We have had enough of action and of motion we ” to the end, in the place of forty lines of irregular and entirely boyish versification, possessing neither dignity nor adequate melody. It is nothing short of startling to compare such facile jingle as this—

“ And the dark pine weeps,  
And the lithe vine creeps,  
And the heavy melon sleeps  
On the level of the shore ”—

with the glorious harmony of those immortal later lines in which, shifting his key and his measure, the poet so strangely and so finely rises from the perfect loveliness of the lotos-eaters’ self-regarding song to a strain of intense and thrilling brilliance, pitched at as high a level of moral inspiration as the great poets of the world have ever reached. Magistral as Milton at his greatest, but subtle beyond his scope, and informed with even a richer art than his, the strain that limns the life of the Olympian Gods is one of the supreme possessions of the English tongue; and it exists for us as the amends made by the poet for an ill-planned piece of youthful composition which his mature judgment could not tolerate.

Certainly the change makes good anything that Mr. Swinburne or any of his predecessors has said on the all-importance of form and measure. The enduring beauty of “ The Lotos Eaters ” rests as a whole on its rigorous regard to metrical law; the deleted passage

being one of those early experimental performances in loose-flowing verse, of which the 1833 volume furnishes another ineffectual sample in "The Hesperides," which, a reader feels, might have been a fine poem if only the singer had resolutely bitted and reined his wandering fancy as he did in the great poems he published at the same time. For in the face of these it is clear that Mr. Swinburne's theory of a constitutional weakness of spine which only the back-board could cure, is one of the most gratuitous of that authority's rhetorical flights. We are dealing with a case in which a poet set out with an equipment of splendid artistic gifts in company with one or two vicious propensities, which last, when he saw whither they led him, he speedily and entirely discarded. And this was but one exhibition of a capacity of artistic self-criticism which asserts itself in other ways than in the abandonment of a mistaken theory of versification. There were other errors of taste in these first poems. Thus in "A Dream of Fair Women," in Iphigenia's account of her death, we have in the first version, which was still allowed to stand in the edition of 1842, this unpleasant and awkward passage :

"One drew a sharp knife thro' my tender throat  
Slowly,—and nothing more ;"

now supplanted by the every way happier lines :

"The bright death quiver'd at the victim's throat ;  
Touch'd ; and I knew no more."

Then, in Cleopatra's reverie on Mark Antony, in place



*visions his look*



of the two stanzas beginning, "The man, my lover," there originally stood three, in which were these lines:

"The glories of great Julius lapse and wane  
And shrink from suns to stars"—

(that cheap conceit being of course begot by the need of a rhyme to "Mars")—

"That man of all the men I ever knew  
Most took my fancy ;"

"What sweet words, only made  
Less sweet by the kiss that broke 'em, liking best  
To be so richly stayed"—

the last about as insufferable a piece of Elizabethanism as any modern has turned out. At the beginning of the poem, too, there originally stood four stanzas, embodying an ill-chosen figure in which "the Poet" was vain-gloriously enough presented as "self-poised" like a man in a balloon, "hearing apart the echoes of his fame;" the deletion of which youthfully self-sufficient prologue allows the poem to begin much more naturally and efficiently, as it now stands. Again, there is quite a multitude of alterations in "The Lady of Shalott" since the first version, the reason for the changes being not so much inferiority of technique in that as an apparent re-conception of the theme in the poet's mind. There are, however, some curious re-arrangements of the rhymes, of which I give a few samples:

*First Version.*

The little isle is all inrailed,  
With a rose-fence, and overtrailed

*Present Version.*

By the margin, willow-veil'd,  
Slide the heavy barges trail'd

very  
anti-idealise

With roses ; by the marge unhaild,  
The shallop flitteth silken-sailed.

By slow horses ; and unhail'd  
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd.

\* \* \* \* \*  
She lives with little joy or fear ;  
Over the water, running near,  
The sheep-bell tinkles in her ear ;  
Before her hangs a mirror clear,  
Reflecting towards Camelot.  
And, as the mazy web she whirls,

\* \* \* \* \*  
And moving thro' a mirror clear  
That hangs before her all the year,  
Shadows of the world appear.  
There she sees the highway near,  
Winding down to Camelot.  
There the river eddy whirls

\* \* \* \* \*  
Till her eyes were darkened wholly,  
And her smooth face sharpened  
slowly."

\* \* \* \* \*  
Till her blood was frozen slowly,  
And her eyes were darken'd  
wholly."

But the most decisive transformation is that made in the last stanza :

*First Version.*

They crossed themselves, their stars  
they blest,  
Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire, and  
guest.  
There lay a parchment on her breast,  
That puzzled more than all the rest,  
The well-fed wits at Camelot.  
'The web was woven curiously,  
The charm is broken utterly,  
Draw near and fear not—this is I,  
The Lady of Shalott.'

*Present Version.*

Who is this ? and what is here ?  
And in the lighted palace near  
Died the sound of royal cheer ;  
And they crossed themselves for  
fear,  
All the knights at Camelot :  
But Lancelot mused a little space ;  
He said, 'She has a lovely face ;  
God in his mercy lend her grace,  
The Lady of Shalott.'

The deepening and heightening of the later finish is too obvious to need comment. I can conceive, however, that some readers, following such a process of technical, or, as it might be put, mechanical elaboration, will exclaim that this is surely not the method of the true poet, the "inspired singer" of literary tradition. Assuredly the actuality does not correspond with the myth ; but it is just so much the worse for the myth. The notion of a poet as a semi-divine personage who gets his rhymes

and rhythms from heaven, as it were, and whose function is to convey a superior form of truth to a world whose part it is to listen to him with reverence and allude to him as "the Poet" with a capital P—this view of the matter is no doubt very agreeable to "the Poet," and has naturally received much support from his own deliverances on the subject; but a more rational analysis simply sets such transcendentalism aside, and reckons up the inspired one as an artistic organism of a particular kind, whose very constitution partly incapacitates him for steadiness, solidity, or real depth of thought, but whose work it is to put such ideas as he comes by into the perfectest form he can attain. He may often think soundly and nobly, if not originally; but such wisdom and elevation will avail him little as poet if he cannot charm them into the shape of beautiful speech. And the beauty of his speech is a matter of manipulation of words, just as the painter's art is a matter of handling pigments. When he strikes such a chord of rhymes as this:

"All in the blue unclouded weather,  
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle leather,  
The helmet and the helmet-feather  
Burn'd like one burning flame together,  
As he rode down to Camelot,"

any one can see that he must have reckoned up the chimes at his disposal; that it must have cost him some calculation to introduce "leather" without being absurd; and that the whole musical effect is thus no outburst of one who "sings because he must"—that is a professional affectation which, cherishing it as he does in



common with prophets and Christian warriors and other self-esteeming personages, we must be content to forgive him—but the carefully adjusted performance of a man of culture with a delicate taste in words and cadences. And he is just as much fulfilling the poetic function when he charms us with an old-world concord like that picture of Sir Lancelot, as when he weaves a larger harmony to tell of the heartless Gods of ancient song:

“For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurled  
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curled  
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world.”

There are only four or five rhymes to “world,” and the poet’s moral lesson here must needs adopt the vocables “curled” and “hurled,” or else “furled” and “whirled,” or “purred.” Is it supposed that his inspiration gave him the right words without his having to stop to think? And if his specialty is admitted thus to lie in the exquisite expression of ideas rather than in the study of human problems, how shall he rank as any more of a “teacher” than any other thoughtful man of fair thinking power who seeks to teach his fellows in speech or printed prose? The poet’s propositions, as such, if they strike the reader favourably, do so because they are of a kind already made more or less common property by non-artistic means; and to credit him with pre-eminence as a thinker for thus working in intellectual material is no more reasonable than to credit with pre-eminent mental power a painter who puts into a picture a view of life that appeals to many ordinary

people who have not the power to paint. In three lines in "The Two Voices" we have a rhymed and cadenced expression of the pathos of the grave, simple but forceful:—

"High up the vapours fold and swim :  
About him broods the twilight dim :  
The place he knew forgetteth him."

There is nothing here—no idea, that is—that has not been thought and said one way or another a thousand times: it is the utterance of a universal sentiment. But the poet chances to put it into a shape of mournful beauty, and his tercet henceforth haunts us like a profound phrase of Beethoven; and, whatever we may say about the matter, we can see perfectly well that the effect is psychologically traceable to the sheer throb of the rhythm and the climax of the consonances; that the effect, in short, is subtly æsthetic, and physiologically akin to that produced by music. And when, at the close of the early poem beginning "My life is full of weary days," we con the stanza—

"Then let wise Nature work her will,  
And on my clay her darnel<sup>1</sup> grow;  
Come only, when the days are still,  
*And at my headstone whisper low,*  
*And tell me if the woodbines blow"*

—we become sensible of that indescribable transmutation of mood, the working of which in us is the triumph of tragic art; but here too we shall find that it is the culminating movement of the verse in the closing lines

<sup>1</sup> Originally "darnels," which was perhaps better.

that is the added something without which the triumph had not been.

But this very finish, as it happens, is the success it is because the poet has had the judgment to discard two other stanzas which in the first version followed that quoted ; stanzas good in themselves, but constituting an anti-climax to its noiseless intensity and effortless poignancy of strain. That particular revision is one of many proofs of a gift he has in perhaps a unique degree among poetic artists—the eye for an ending. I can think of no one but Keats who had previously shown a sense of the technical importance of a "perfect close ;" and even he has not always proved himself alive to it ; the last stanza of the "Ode to a Nightingale," for instance, being a partial falling away from the level of the rest of the poem. We have, however, examples of perfect success in the "Ode to Melancholy ;" in the closing line of the sonnet on Chapman's Homer :

"Silent, upon a peak of Darien ;"

and in the even finer sonnet that ends

"And faithful Petrarch, gloriously crowned."

The effect here is one of cessation while still on the wing, so to speak, as compared with the so general poetic practice of conscientiously dismounting from Pegasus in order to take leave of the reader. That Tennyson had the fullest appreciation of this secret in technique would, I think, be decisively proved, if in no other way, by the fact of his retaining in his collected



poems the piece entitled "The Captain." That is a performance at best melodramatic in conception, and quite third-rate in execution—a rhymed story which, save for a few phrases, might have been by an average workman like Whittier. But one line, the last, is admirably perfect; and it can hardly be doubted that the poet has allowed the piece to stand mainly for the sake of that.

" There the sunlit ocean tosses  
 O'er them mouldering,  
 And the lonely seabird crosses  
*With one waft of the wing.*"

If we must needs read a rhymed moral tale—including such a line as "Years have *wander'd* by"—to light on such a masterly touch as that, we can afford the sacrifice. The presence of the weak elements must, of course, be put to the poet's debit, with a due protest against what one feels, in his case, to be a falling short of attainable perfection. Something must indeed be set down to "judicial blindness" in many cases of unredeemed sins in verse; as when Wordsworth, after all his anxious alterations on "The Solitary Reaper," left unnoticed to the last the weak tautology, "I listened motionless and still." So we must assume that Tennyson has somehow missed seeing the metrical and other flaws in a number of the lines of "Aylmer's Field," and the pedestrian character of a number of the phrases in "In Memoriam," as, "kill'd in falling from his horse," "the noble letters of the dead," and such a *banal* attempt at serious humour as this:

“These mortal lullabies of pain  
 May bind a book, may line a box,  
 May serve to curl a maiden's locks.”

He duly repented of the line “She lit white steams of dazzling gas” in the first version of “The Palace of Art,” recognizing how domestic use had pre-empted past hope of elevation the illuminant in question; and perhaps there is not for every reader, what there is for some of us, a prosaic ring in the legal phrase “portions and parcels,” which has been allowed to stand in “The Lotos Eaters”; or a clink as of machinery in the in-apposite “dew'd with showery drops,” or in the lines about the dews on waters between walls of granite “in a gleaming pass”—the only hints of flaw that I can discover in the poem after dreaming myself to sleep with it a thousand times. But there can be few right-thinking people who have not shuddered over that unspeakable intimation at the end of “Enoch Arden”:

“And when they buried him the little port  
 Had seldom seen a costlier funeral.”

Here—such is human imperfection—we have perhaps Tennyson's very worst line employed as an ending. Such an offence against the commonest sanctities of song and taste, not to say syntax, can hardly be dismissed as an artistic oversight: it must be held to point to a certain strain of commonness, of Beaconsfieldian tawdriness of sentiment, so to say, in the Laureate, which makes itself specially felt in his attitude towards the royal family, and, as Mr. Swinburne has not unjustly argued—though here the vice is less

crude in its manifestations—in the morality of the “*Idylls of the King*.” It is a vein of clay which runs here and there through the fine gold of his art. We cannot overlook such a blemish in reckoning up his personality: it is as real as his better elements. But in a critical study of his art we can do no more than resignedly or bitterly recognize it; turning with a sense of relief, in this matter of poem-endings, to the happier closes of so many of his works, getting rid of the flavour of undertaker’s sentiment in a study of the perfect judgment he has shown in rounding off so many of his other things; and winding up, say, with such an artistic *bonne bouche* as the stanza, at the end of “*The Talking Oak*,” on that “*famous brother-oak*,

“Wherein the younger Charles abode  
Till all the paths were dim,  
And far below the Roundhead rode,  
And humm’d a surly hymn.”

Only less felicitous than such endings is the poet’s art of lyric beginnings, shown in so many a musical reduplication, as in “*Tears, idle tears*,” “*Turn, fortune, turn thy wheel*,” “*Low, low, breathe and blow*,” “*Low, my lute, breathe low, my lute*,” “*Sun, rain, and sun*,” “*Late, late, so late*”—an artifice arising out of the very psychological instinct of song. Sheer bad taste, in matters of feeling, must needs spoil a poet’s verse whatever be his skill; but against the few purely artistic vulgarities in Tennyson’s poetry we can at least set more master-strokes of unprecedented felicity than any other man’s work will yield us.



Our study has dealt thus mainly with the earlier portions of Tennyson's work, for the sufficient reason that it is in connection with that we can most closely trace the decisive workings of his artistic faculty. His later volumes were, practically, fully smelted before issue, and we can but trace in them the line of his development. A few alterations there are in these; indeed, the Ode on the Duke of Wellington has been very much retouched since its first appearance; but one does not find many changes in the rest of the poet's work; the substitution of "great world" for the original "peoples" in the well-known line in "Locksley Hall"—

"Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change"—

being one of the few that have much importance.

"Maud," which represents the high-water mark of the poet's lyrical achievement, has undergone almost no verbal alteration, though a number of passages have been added to the first version, as—stanzas 14, 15, and 16 in Part I., section i.; numbers 4 and 6 in section x.; the whole of section xix.; section iii. in Part II.; and the closing number. These additions, it will be seen, are calculated to give greater continuity and completeness to the poem as a narrative whole—a form of improvement which the poet had not neglected in revising his earlier work. Thus "The Miller's Daughter" has been not only very much retouched, but the stanza which now stands fourth is an addition, as are likewise those three which describe the share of the lover's

mother in the episode, and the two which stand third last and second last; and the second of the two songs is a complete substitution, while the first has been altered. The total effect is to add weight and solidity to the whole; the process indeed showing that the poet altered his tale at his pleasure, but being none the less a gain. And so in "The Palace of Art" there has been an extensive re-arrangement of the stanzas, as well as a re-casting of some, the logical scheme of the first version having evidently failed to satisfy the author on re-reading. While, however, his progress has thus not been merely one of skill in the choice and concatenation of words, but has, as was natural, involved a certain ordering and reconsidering of his general thought, the nature of the latter development will be found to negate once more the theory that a poet's special endowment or inspiration, as such, is moral or intellectual, in the sense of a prompting and a capacity to teach men truth of any kind. This at least, I should be prepared to maintain in the face of such poems as "The Two Voices," "The Palace of Art," taken either as a final whole or in respect of the modifications made on the first form, and "In Memoriam." Any careful reader who will take the trouble to analyse these productions for their didactic significance will find that they only group loosely a number of quasi-philosophical reflections of a sufficiently familiar order, and that the poet has really no connected system of thought of his own. Professor Masson indeed stoutly maintains, in his book on "Recent British Philosophy," that it is a gross

oversight to exclude from such a survey as he professes to make, the names and teachings of such writers as Tennyson, the Brownings, and Clough. But we do not find that the Professor indicates what contributions the poets have actually made to philosophy, and such an omission is rather fatal to the claim. The truth is, Tennyson, like Browning, has passed with many people as a philosophical teacher because he raises philosophic questions in his verse; and it may be said for the Laureate that, with less metaphysical subtlety than his friend and rival, he contrives much the oftener to "drop into poetry" in the course of his disquisitions. It is, I think, the Duke of Argyll who has pronounced "In Memoriam" a great storehouse of poetic thought and feeling for these generations, and in this form the claims made for that work by its admirers need not be disputed. What it does is to give us, in verse almost constantly good and often admirable in its sad dignity and grave harmony, a train of reflections such as occur to a cultured poet, in common with other men of culture whose thought is mostly coloured by feeling, in connexion with a sorely-felt bereavement. And the feeling is in general so vital and so freshly phrased that the total effect is decisively poetic; so that, fatally as fashions of "poetic thought" tend to pass away—witness the proved mortality of "The Excursion" and "The Prelude"—we cannot well conceive that Tennyson's many-toned lament for his friend will ever take its place in the limbo of disestablished classics. None the less confidently may we maintain, however, that



the means by which it will hold its place will be the artistic charm of phrase and cadence in its parts in detail, and not their philosophic import whether singly or together. And the truth of this, if it need further enforcement, will be apparent to most readers from a consideration of the merits of "Maud" in its two aspects of an ethical contention and a sustained lyric rapture. That any one in these days will defend the final political or social doctrine deducible from that poem, I shall not believe until I am definitely challenged. Even the author has shown some misgivings about his thesis; for the added closing stanza has a certain deprecating ring in comparison with what went before; and one of the few alterations in the diction of the work is in the preceding stanza, where the "peace, that I deem'd no peace" has been substituted for the more uncompromising "long, long canker of peace," of the first edition. The prescription to society conveyed in the final section—a prescription fitly summed up in the formula "go to the Crimea and thou shalt be saved"—is a piece of sanguinary sentiment too crude and too puerile to be worth getting indignant over at this time of day, though it might well exasperate rational people at the time of publication. If this is to be taken as a sample of the element of inspirational value in the teaching of poets, the discussion need not go far. But just as obvious as the crudity of the teaching, to an impartial critic, is the exquisite perfection of the style of the song. To me, at least, such lines as these—

“And the cobweb woven across the cannon’s throat  
 Shall shake its threaded tears in the wind no more”—

are as entirely admirable in point of poetic art as they are repulsive in their moral intention. To share in such an exultation we must be pestilent citizens; to miss the felicity of the expression we must be dull readers. Clearly we cannot reckon the poet a teacher.

“Maud,” I venture to repeat, is Tennyson’s high-water mark as a lyrist or singer of passion; as “The Lotos Eaters” may be reckoned his masterpiece in sheer form and the loveliness of repose. And in studying the former work we are able to see the trend of Tennyson’s artistic movement as it relates to and affects the development of our poetry in general. He is in his own way a realist or naturalist; that is, he has tended on the whole, in the works under review, towards naturalness of speech and away from old convention; which is the sum of the whole matter as regards the realistic spirit in any art. We shall not go far wrong in saying that the note of originality, and therefore of permanence, is mainly traceable, in the case of modern poets whom we esteem, to a faculty of saying things, however finely, more straightforwardly, more plainly, more unaffectedly, more in the fashion in which, rhyme and cadence apart, they might be said singly in prose, than did their predecessors. I need only refer to the critical gospel of Wordsworth for the first explicit statement of the theory. As to the practice, one instance can suffice; and we may take that of Poe’s poem “For Annie,” where it will be found that, in

respect of mere accidence or arrangement of terms and clauses, the writing goes on about as inartificially, and with about as few inversions, as would a prose statement of the same ideas; the reiterations being the chief element of difference. Now, this reaching towards freedom of verbal movement concurrently with the fullest circumspection, is strikingly apparent in "Maud"; where there is perhaps more of the air of spontaneity than in any contemporary verse, not excepting that of Mr. Browning, whose rhymes are too often far-fetched to permit of any such illusion. In this poem Tennyson has finally attained, without sacrifice of metrical coherence, that ease of cadence which he seems to have been aiming at in his early "sham Pindarics," where the effort was too much for his hold of metre. To give the full proof would involve sampling every metre in the poem, with its extraordinary wealth of various melody, where each transition seems to be a new triumph of easeful beauty, which is yet as constantly virile as the early experiments were lax and emasculated. Just to show what entire freedom of form may be obtained in strict obedience to fundamental law, let us take one passage, which is indeed "irregular" to the eye and the finger, but which is all the same metrically perfect to the last pulse of its flow :

"O, art thou sighing for Lebanon  
 In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East,  
 Sighing for Lebanon,  
 Dark cedar, tho' thy limbs have here increased  
 Upon a pastoral slope as fair,  
 And looking to the South, and fed



With honey'd rain and delicate air,  
 And haunted by the starry head  
 Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate,  
 And made my life a perfumed altar-flame ;  
 And over whom thy darkness must have spread  
 With such delight as theirs of old, thy great  
 Forefathers of the thornless garden, there  
 Shadowing the snow-limb'd Eve from whom she came."

The very simple reasons why this versification is entirely delightful, while such things as "The Hesperides" leave us wearied and uncharmed, are that, in the first place, the pace or beat is never ruptured, but throbs lullingly through the continuously varied rhyme-lengths, exactly like the tempo of music that, wedded to no meted lengths of speech, proceeds by its own rhythmic law—or, to take another instance, like the movement of a *danseuse* who carries beauty of motion far beyond the narrow limits of ordinary dancing without once giving us the idea of jolt or hiatus; while, again, the poet has of course attained a much more perfect judgment in words and a much clearer sense of what he wants to say, and gives us a rounded period in which not a word is strained or misused, in place of the old thin-spun tissues of wilful fantasy.

But if we thus praise the supple freedom of the verse of "Maud," I fear we are committed to a somewhat different attitude towards the "Idylls of the King" and the tragedies which the author has been producing of late years. The having previously ventured a detailed commentary<sup>1</sup> on "Becket" is a sufficient reason

why I should not here offer more than a summary judgment on these dramatic experiments, to the effect that while the great and various mass of the poet's rhymed verse represents a constant advance in poetic technique, his work in drama has been radically unhappy, in that he has held to a worn-out form, to which he has quite failed to give any new life. He has, in fact, stuck to the old fallacy that the drama is a branch of poetry, and has in consequence sought to fuse together two literary arts which were indeed once in constant combination, but which have in this country for three hundred years been more and more differentiating; and which Tennyson has himself done a vast deal to differentiate further by the very advance he has made in one of them. The function of the dramatist in these days, it cannot be too often repeated, is not to say things finely—the poet's task—but in all seriousness to "hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature." Now, the mere harking back to the far-gone past for dramatic subjects instead of showing the "body of the time his form and pressure," is in itself a sign of an unvital variety of the dramatic instinct—a habit of mind in which, instead of seizing and presenting genuine characters in whom the actor's art may become incarnate, the artist sees everything in a medium of inherited convention, and accordingly prefers instinctively to take his personages from periods over which convention has always reigned, that he may be disturbed by no air of disobedience in his puppets. It stands to reason that if verse-form has modified

since Shakspeare's day, drama-form ought to have modified too; but whereas Shakspeare wrote little non-dramatic verse, and therefore did not overshadow the "heaven of poetic invention," his magnificent dramatic product has daunted the whole literature of England, and in large part that of Germany, down to these days. Whom Shakspeare daunts may be well daunted, to parody—is it Goethe's?—line on the God-deluded; but the fact remains that the thrall is thrall, and no free "maker." And in any case, the habit of producing poetry proper clearly tells against soundness of dramatic method, and *vice versâ*. It cannot, indeed, be doubted that if Tennyson had devoted himself to the dramatic form from the first he might have been original and masterly in that as he has been in lyrism. All along he has given striking proofs of a power to seize and portray character in phases and wholes, as in his youthful masterpiece "The Two Sisters," "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," the "English Idylls" generally, the "Enoch Arden" group, and a number of shorter pieces. That the writer of all these poems could both group characters and project situations is abundantly clear; and the author of "The Grandmother" and the two versions of "The Northern Farmer" might even claim, so far as these pieces went, to be abreast of the best English fiction of his time, so fresh and masterly is their realistic "nudity," as Zola would call it. But while these latter performances have barely as much poetic flavour as will keep them in the poetic category, verse as they are, the dramas constitute an absolute



<sup>down</sup>  
<sup>practice down</sup>  
<sup>become</sup>  
<sup>convention</sup>

relapse into convention. They are methodistic and formal, as they needs must, in respect of their historical motives, where the character-poems are subtly and freely original; and the scrupulous attempt to make them realistic in the Shakspearean fashion only serves to emphasize the more their artistic insincerity. "The Promise of May," where the poet has at last attempted a modern subject, is the final evidence of his failure as a dramatist; a failure absolutely inevitable, as we can now see, in the nature of the case, and, perhaps we should add, something of a fine failure in its way. The attempt has all along amounted to an exhibition of superior—indeed, very superior—dilettantism; and when, as is natural, the effort at a modern play is found to show most decisively the fallacy of the method employed, with its primitive transitions from verse to prose and its crude grouping of impossible abstractions beside thinnish actualities, we can only hope that the old poet will be content to leave drama alone for the rest of his days.

But if this criticism be admitted to hold good against the dramas, it is to be feared a similar judgment will ultimately be come to in regard to the "Idylls." "Superlative lollipops," Carlyle called them, in prompt resentment of their sentimental didacticism; going thus nearer the truth than did Dickens, whose first sensation on conning them was that of the blessedness of reading a man who could write. The whole question between those of us who sum up against the "Idylls" and those who adhere to Dickens's position, is as to whether the poet's

art here, highly developed as it undoubtedly is, wealthy as it is in resource, and consummate as is its conduct, has moved on the lines of healthy evolution, or has diverged on a line of impermanent variation; whether, in short, these poems, pleasant as they have been to the sophisticated palate of the generation now passing away, will be pronounced successes a generation or more hence. In such a matter it is perhaps prudent not to prophesy; but on the other hand it is well to have the courage of our opinions; and I venture for my part<sup>1</sup> to lay it down that, lacking as they do those artistic virtues of naturalness and sincerity which vitalize other portions of Tennyson's work, they must in time be classed among his mistakes. And the cause and manner of the failure are I think apparent. He had succeeded in those character studies where his artistic volition played freely, either entirely creating or working on the actual; but to take the naïf old Arthurian stories and pinch and lace them into so many superfine moral commentaries for the present

<sup>1</sup> But indeed I venture little. The more powerful impeachment of Mr. Swinburne ("Miscellanies," pp. 247-253), which was not in my recollection when I wrote mine, goes much further, and, barring some characteristic exaggeration, is unanswerable. And since I wrote there has appeared in a newspaper article on "Fifty Years of Victorian Literature," bearing the mark of a certain fine Roman hand, this corroborative judgment:—"Lord Tennyson, before he moralized Malory, had given the world an inestimable amount of pleasure, merely by virtue of that beauty which made Poe regard him as the greatest of all poets. His blank-verse sermons, on the other hand, are of no avail, and only disturb his narrative" (*Daily News*, June 22, 1887). Yet Clough on their publication wrote: "I certainly think these Idylls are the best thing Tennyson has done" (*Prose Remains*, ed. 1888, p. 250). The old order changeth.

day, adding the hothouse sentiment of the nineteenth century to the quaintly childish idealism of the original, and grafting on the old romance a mawkish cultus which seemed to take its rise or have its end in a nauseous adulation of a living personage—this was to place art in a fatally false position, where no acquired resource could finally avail it. The poet is writing to fill a given scaffolding, and as a result we have a constant and laboured archaism of style instead of the telling simplicity and robust modernness of his best rhymed verse; a delicate and charming Euphuism in its way, but still a Euphuism, and therefore a doomed development. This might seem to be a case justifying Mr. Swinburne's dictum that when the thought goes wrong the verse follows it; but it is not the wrongness but the fashion of going wrong that is at the bottom of the matter. There is all the difference in the world between affectation and sincere wrong-headedness; and the thesis here maintained is that while the wrong-headed artist may give us fine poetry, he who gives way to an affectation cannot, for the reason that that is a vice striking directly at his art; that, in brief, the "Idylls" as a whole amount to a masquerade, which cannot succeed in creating the right illusion. Only a lengthened analysis, however, could give the full justification of such a judgment; and it must be left for the present in its summary form.

It remains but to say a word on Tennyson's latest performances on what may be termed his normal lines; the verdict here again being necessarily summary. To



put it bluntly, these productions seem to prove that while he largely retains his old faculty of tragic and humorous characterization, his power of creating "rhythmical beauty" is for the most part gone; the old-time Tennyson giving us his swan-song, a worthy one indeed, in the nobly beautiful lines "To Virgil." Than these, indeed, he has done nothing more happily inspired and achieved. While, however, "Rizpah" and "The Spinster's Sweet 'Arts" may be taken to prove the retention of his other powers—though some pieces, as "The Flight," tell for an opposite view; the sequel to "Locksley Hall" and the "Epilogue" in the "Tiresias" volume furnish positive proof, so far as positive proof will go, of the decline in his general sense of beauty. To some perhaps this will not amount to saying that there has been any substantial falling off in the Laureate's work. Mr. Swinburne has set the fashion of treating "Rizpah" as his greatest achievement, on the strength, not so much of its poetic workmanship, as of the tragic impressiveness of its motive and the dramatic intensity of some of its expressions. These are indeed powerful and memorable enough; but those to whom poetry, as such, is a matter of beauty of speech, can hardly let Mr. Swinburne coerce them into giving the palm in Tennyson's work to a piece which, as a little reflection will show, might have been made about equally powerful in prose. Realism of character representation, as distinguished from naturalism in the structure of non-dramatic phrases, obviously tends towards prose as being the natural

utterance of real persons, true poetic values lying rather in the direction of a beauty of speech which is utterly beyond actual use, though its triumph lies in seeming natural at its topmost flight, as the finished athlete's most strenuous feat seems done with joyous ease. If this be granted, "Rizpah" must rank as a powerful study in an intermediate literary form rather than as belonging to the higher poetry; and this is of course entirely consistent with the view that the artist's cunning for that other work is now as good as gone. The "Epilogue" was presumably meant to be beautiful—was, however, commonplace; and, splenetic as is the later "Locksley Hall," the poet cannot but have meant to give it some of the dower of beauty that he bestowed on the earlier poem. Spleen, however, remains uppermost, and only a few lines here and there break mellowly on the strident invective of what is as much a self-impeachment as an arraignment of the world. As in the couplet picturing a perfected earth:

"Robed in universal harvest, up to either pole she smiles,  
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless isles."

But, to say nothing of the epithet-stringing, the new poem contains some outrages in the way of padding such as the Laureate never before committed, as when, in order to get a rhyme, he speaks of the dead wife as

"Feminine to her inmost heart and feminine to her *tender feet*."

Mr. Browning, certainly, has padded as brazenly as

this for many a long day ; but then Mr. Browning does it to the philosophic end of making out that whatever is, is right, and is thus apt to be more easily forgiven than one who employs such devices in an outpouring of scorn against mankind. Padded denunciation is too powerfully suggestive of infirmity. In fine, we must go back to the poetry of the poet's earlier days if we would have what is best in his art ; and indeed this is but what has always been in the service of the Muses. What is song but one of the ways of birth to the urging force of all things, a flower of the vernal blood or the summer-nourished brain, finding their fulfilment like every other cosmic energy? And though spring and summer rain and blast yield thrilling interludes of radiant storm, and autumn many a wondrous harmony and grave magnificence of ripened meaning, how shall the sun-forsaken winter tell of aught but the ebb of the eternal tide, the passing of the protean spirit that is only to return in other lives? In all of us, says the great critic, there is or was a poet whom the man survives. Even so is it with *the* poet. Or, if the waning pulse is ever to chime into the old music, it is to the spell of a passion that recreates the past, not to the bitter musings of frost-nipped eld. It is reviving youth in the poetic heart that sings here :

“ Landscape-lover, lord of language  
 more than he that sang the Works and Days ;  
 All the chosen coin of fancy  
 flashing out from many a golden phrase ;

*Youth*



“ Thou that singest wheat and woodland,  
tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd ;  
All the charm of all the Muses  
often flowering in a lonely word ;”

“ Chanter of the Pollio, glorying  
in the blissful years again to be,  
Summers of the snakeless meadow,  
unlaborious earth and oarless sea !”

“ I salute thee, Mantovano,  
I that loved thee since my day began,  
Wielder of the stateliest measure  
ever moulded by the lips of man !”

In some such temper, borrowing his own melodious  
acclaim, let us to the last salute that singer of our  
youth who is the Virgil of our time.

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