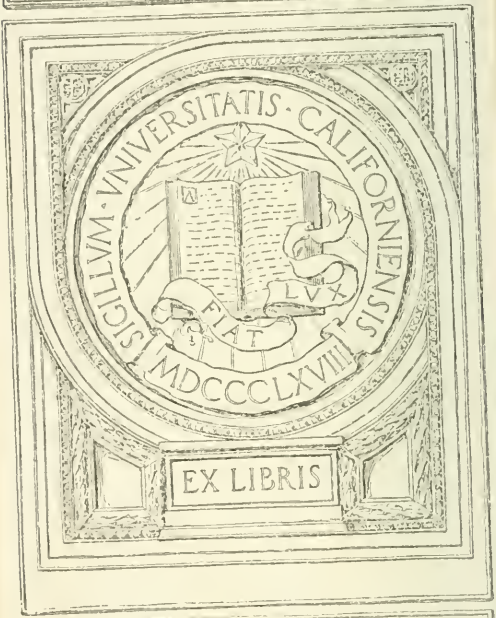

A BOOK OF PREFERENCES IN LITERATURE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FLAMMA VESTALIS

THE FIELD FLOWERS

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE AND OTHER MEDIÆVAL ROMANCES

FRENCH MEDIÆVAL ROMANCES

ARTHURIAN CHRONICLES

OLD WORLD LOVE STORIES

A BOOK OF PREFERENCES IN LITERATURE

BY

EUGENE MASON

LONDON
JOHN G. WILSON
77 QUEEN STREET, CHEAPSIDE
1915

PRINTED AT
THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
LONDON

TO

M. A. M.

ALL SAINTS' DAY 1913

Æterna fac cum Sanctis
Tuis in gloria numerari

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

THE scope of this little volume is suggested sufficiently, I think, by its title—"A Book of Preferences in Literature." The essays included here deal with subjects which, for one reason or another, are dear to the mind of their writer, and represent a personal choice amongst many valued books. Exclusion from these pages does not necessarily mean that such absent authors are less congenial to his taste. It implies simply that M. Anatole France and Mr. Rudyard Kipling amongst novelists, Walter Pater amongst essayists, and Christina Rossetti, Mr. W. B. Yeats, Heredia, and Francis Thompson amongst poets, are peculiarly grateful to his temperament and thought. The writers named, however eminent, are not perhaps of the supremest genius. It matters little. In literature, as in prayer, the devotion at times will be addressed to the saint rather than to the Deity, and yet the homage and petition may gain their reward. In the

following chapters I have offered my duty to Literature through the persons of the acolytes about her shrine. I trust—with fearfulness—that I shall be forgiven. Amongst all the characters of fiction I have coveted greatly the rôle of Interpreter in the House Beautiful. Where I have failed in my aspiration, it is the commentator and not his text that is uninspired.

E. M.

M. ANATOLE FRANCE, AND THE COMPLETE SCEPTIC

THAT Flemish monk who stated he had spent his most uncheckered hours in a nook with a little book, obviously could not have referred to the yellow-covered volumes of M. Anatole France. Even had he lived four or five hundred years later he would have considered those books as more suitable for the Abbey of Thelema than to the library of the Brothers of the Common Life. I am not concerned to deny that they do contain matter rendering them inconvenient for inclusion amongst writings of a devotional character. If, however, they are not meant "to make man at peace with death," as was the "Imitation" of à Kempis, perhaps they may perform the yet useful function of keeping him at peace with life. The series of novels and essays for which M. Anatole France is responsible presents a well-considered criticism of life under a style which is a perpetual joy and

astonishment to the reader. But the author of these books is greater and more interesting than his works. To use the compliment of the poet, "What, madam, we most admire in you is—yourself." He is greater and more interesting than they because at a critical moment of his life he dared to rise above their teaching, and, like St. Paul, to dispose of the strict and formal laws of logic with a "God forbid." The apostle is an odd and unexpected exemplar for Anatole France to take pattern by, and the circumstance is one of those little ironies which should be dear to his sardonic humour. The appearance of the smiling epicurean in the rôle of the moralist; the dogmatism manifested by the preacher of the uncertainty of private judgment; the fervid political sympathies proclaimed on platform and in pamphlet by the excursionist from ivory towers—such contrasts as these are a very rejoicing spectacle, and add salt and savour to the consideration of his character and work.

M. Anatole France was born on April 16, 1844, and has just completed his seventieth year. He was born, appropriately enough, in Paris, the city which has told so many excellent stories

and has mocked so gaily at such excellent creeds. It is not without significance that his place of birth is the arena where so great a number of the intellectual battles of Christendom have been waged and decided, and where the cross is continually rising and falling above the dome of the Pantheon. Renan—whom Anatole France would own as master—was born in Brittany. Christianity, therefore, was in the fibres of his heart, although he could not accept its theology. Its memories echoed in his soul like the bells of the city of Ys, ringing beneath the waters of the sea. The distance between Brittany and Paris is not so great as the difference between Renan and France in the fashion they look back upon the religion they felt constrained to abjure.

Anatole France was the only child of a poor bookseller, whose shop was on the Quai Malaquais, near by the Seine, within sight of the Louvre, the Pont Neuf, the towers of Notre Dame, the *tourelles* of the Conciergerie, and the high-pitched roof of the Sainte Chapelle. His father was Noël Thibault, nicknamed "Père France" by the comrades of his regiment. The son, in turn, took the jest as his pseudonym, and has made it a glory of modern

French literature. Noël Thibault derived from La Vendée, and—as was meet—was both Catholic and Royalist. His wife came from Bruges-la-morte, and was Catholic too. There never was an author more personal than Anatole France, nor one who recurred more willingly to the scenes of his childhood. In the loving intimacy of his treatment of such subjects he reminds us irresistibly of Lamb. The memories of these early days are branded into his recollection. They occur again and again with the regularity of motives throughout his work. He recalls with delight those quays on the Seine where the bookstalls form an essential part of the landscape. He lingers gladly near the river which by day mirrored the sky, and by night (like a woman) decked itself with jewels and gleaming flowers. In how many novels does his father's bookshop recur, with its circle of writers and artists and amateurs discussing everything in heaven and earth, and in other places less reputable as well! Noticeable above all are the content and gladness with which M. France speaks of his parents. With such frequency and in such touching terms does the great writer dwell upon the theme, that the most casual reader seems

privileged with their acquaintance. Le Père Francee, to his son's remembrance, was an old man, older in weariness than in years. The retired soldier was gentle, and a little sad, and loved to talk his son to sleep by telling over the folk-tales of his country. But, like a true Frenchman, the lad's most fragrant recollections cling about the memory of his mother. She appears in his pages active and gay, singing cheerfully as she busied herself upon the duties of her house. She had the soul of an artist, though the opportunity to express herself was denied, and, like her husband, delighted to relate stories to her boy; but the stories he learned from her lips were the beautiful Christian legends opening to a sensitive child the very gate of dreams. Near her side he turned over the Flemish pictures in the great family Bible. At her knee he read in a beautifully illustrated edition of the Lives of the Saints. Doubtless it was owing to his mother's influence that M. France's first childish ambition was to become a saint, just as the normal lad desires the career of a sailor or a mighty hunter. Of his efforts to reproduce in a modern household the life of an early ascetic we have a very entertaining description. Discourage-

ment has been ever the lot of those of whom the world is not worthy. A spirited attempt to revive the peculiar mortification of St. Simeon Stylites on the top of the kitchen pump ended abruptly, owing to the active measures adopted by an unsympathetic maid. The aspirant to sanctity was whipped and put to bed for cutting open the seat of a chair to make himself a hair shirt. When he threw his playthings into the street, his father, not so perfected by counsels of perfection, merely shut the window, exclaiming that the child obviously was an idiot. "I felt both anger and shame to hear such an opinion of my character. But I consoled myself with the thought that since my father was not so advanced in holiness as myself, he would not share with me in the glories of the blessed, and in this reflection I found a rich source of consolation." Piety, in the classical sense, is an essential feature both of M. France and of Charles Lamb. Piety, in the Christian meaning of the word, is scarcely a note of their mature characters, but each alike asserts almost passionately the fundamental goodness of the child. The dream of sanctity died away early in the case of M. France. One scarcely knows

whether to laugh or cry at the thought. The dream was succeeded by other ambitions, and the first to plant the seeds of such imaginings were members of his family. Intellectually Anatole France proceeds neither from father nor mother, but from his grandparents. The former may have endowed him with his instinct for the *conte*, but from the latter he derives the habit and texture of his mind. His grandfather was a veteran of Waterloo, a little jaunty in carriage, and a diligent student of the Oriental scholar Volney, whose famous book, "Les Ruines," expounds the history of humanity in a pompous narrative, exhibiting a touching faith in the progress of the human race. The grandson shares the same historical interests, but with a less naïve confidence in the ultimate perfection of our species. The influence of his grandmother was even more pronounced. This lady was neither Catholic nor Royalist, but frivolous and sceptical according to the traditions of the eighteenth century. She was innocent of religion as a bird; her mind was moulded in the school of Voltaire, and she made no secret of her predilections. She mocked gaily at the seriousness and sobriety of her daughter-in-law, and,

undeceived by the child's precocious piety, remarked, with assurance, that her grandson would grow a very different man to his father. The uncanny insight of her prophecy, and its uncanny measure of fulfilment, almost entitle her to a place amongst the major prophets. Anatole France is the child not of his father but of his grandmother. If the hands of the dead shape our characters and fashion our destinies, then the career of the greatest of living authors —amongst all its conflicting currents—was influenced fundamentally by the sceptical old lady who sat at the feet of Voltaire.

The poor bookseller determined, at any cost, to give his son the advantages denied to himself. To ensure that the lad should not be defrauded in his young years of the sweet food of academic institution, he was sent to the Collège Stanislas, there to make his "humanities." The Collège Stanislas was an ecclesiastical school. This had its advantages, for, as Lemaître points out, the offices of religion help to keep the soul tender and pure; and should faith unfortunately leave you later in life, you are better able to appreciate its influence on others, and are more intelligent and equitable in your judgments. It was a

long walk to class, and the way led through the picturesque Latin Quarter, the quiet provincial streets about St. Sulpice, and so through the Luxembourg Gardens to college. Many and many a picture of Parisian life was fastened in the lad's retentive memory during that daily journey. The schoolboy made no mark in his studies. Then, as always, he was the artist of the beautiful, rather than the exact and painful scholar. In one or two of his books he has described himself before his desk, upon the bench, his eyes filled with the theory of nymphs. He was haunted by faultless faces, arms of ivory, and white tunics, and his ears were ravished by voices sweeter and more tunable than the most enchanting music. The masters of the Collège Stanislas grounded their pupils in Christianity and the classics. In the case of Anatole France Christianity passed, but his love of the classics remained. He is essentially Latin, even now — the fine flower of the Latin genius. The German culture, so close to the intellect of Ernest Renan, has nothing to say to his disciple. The classics he loves because they taught him the art to order and express his thought. They gave him his canons of judgment and taste, and were the very apocalypse

of beauty. He became an excellent—though not impeccable—scholar in four literatures, but, excluding Greek, all these literatures are Latin. "I have," he says somewhere, "a desperate attachment to Latin studies. Without them the grace of the French genius would be gone. We are Latins, and the milk of the she-wolf is the best part of our blood."

The ambition of M. France was to be a writer, and he embarked on his chosen career immediately on leaving college. His efforts were interrupted by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. He joined the regiment with a copy of Virgil in his knapsack, and continued his studies throughout the disastrous campaign. It is told that he and a comrade sat absorbed over their book to the accompaniment of cannon balls falling in the Marne. It will not be forgotten how Brotteaux peruses his pocket Lucretius, however inconvenient the situation, in that romance of the Revolution entitled "Les Dieux ont Soif." The whole of Anatole France's work is a web of memories and personal confidences. The war ended, M. France resumed his profession of literature. He published two volumes of verse, and attached himself to the Parnassians, a school of

which Leconte de Lisle was the acknowledged prince. It is obvious that so personal a writer could not remain permanently devoted to a faith whose cardinal dogma was the repression of any display of emotion. It is difficult to conceive Anatole France in the impassive attitude of a Sioux brave at the stake. Preoccupation with beauty, concern with form, led him to imitate the rigorous perfection of his model. Personal differences with the master quickened his departure from the camp. Verlaine, for a period, adorned the same gallery, with a similar incongruity.

M. France, however, is not essentially a poet. Few poets are. His true gift is the more flexible and pedestrian gift of prose. This he was quick to discover, in the first instance because he is an excellent and discerning critic, and secondly by reason of being under the painful necessity to live. The distinguished editor of *Le Temps* persuaded the diffident scholar to contribute articles to his journal, articles dealing mainly with literary and philosophical subjects, pleasantly illuminated by anecdotes and autobiographical excursions. These articles have been collected in the four volumes of the "Vie Littéraire," and to the

true Anatolian are amongst the most delightful portions of his work, to be read and re-read. "The kissed mouth never loses its freshness." In the light of his future development these little essays are of the deepest interest. They express the views of a philosophical monk, belonging by heart (it is M. France's own phrase) to some Abbey of Thelema, where the rule is easy and the obedience light. Possibly faith may not overflow the measure, but charity certainly abounds. Indulgence and tolerance are the cardinal virtues of the Order. Its professed monks are excellent citizens, because they are profoundly attached to the use and custom of their times. Since the wont of the majority constitutes human morality, a sceptic is your perfect citizen, for why should he agitate against a law he has no hope to improve! The sceptic must leave martyrdom to those who, unable to doubt, have in their very simplicity the only excuse of their obstinacy. There is even some impertinence in piling the faggots about yourself for the sake of an opinion. Martyrs have no sense of irony, and this is their unpardonable sin, for without irony the world is but a wood without birds. Irony is the gaiety of thought and the wit of

wisdom. Such are some of the precepts and counsels bestrewn with a liberal hand through the pages of these four books of essays. Their sweetness would be positively cloying were not the writer human, and his theory of indulgence liable to reach its limit, sometimes an unexpected limit. The novels of Zola, for instance, are treated with an extreme severity. It is declared there is none to envy his disgusting notoriety, and with an unwonted burst of Scriptural fervour the critic adds it were good for that man if he had never been born. Somewhat of the same unforeseen lyricism is displayed by the essayist when a copy of an anti-militarist novel was burnt publicly by a chauvinist colonel before his regiment of cavalry. He was a sage indeed who pleaded that your enemy should be entreated as if one day he may become your dearest friend.

M. France did not confine himself to journalism. It was but one phase of the activity of a man whose humour it is to pretend to idleness. He pressed steadily forward with that wonderful series of short stories and novels constituting one of the glories of modern France. These books were very fragrant and

tender at first, but as time went on and their author dared more and more to be frankly himself, they developed other qualities which proved somewhat disconcerting to his early admirers. In a day when artists are too frequently but faded replicas of great originals, this desperate insistence on individuality should be counted to him for righteousness. The novels are not impeccable, on the contrary they are a mine of faults, but these defects are so engaging that if you failed to appreciate the books for their excellences the chance is you would do so for their failings. Critics tell us that they are but poorly constructed; and when we find one seventh of a whole volume given over to the mere description of a banquet, we must agree, however ruefully. But who would wish the talk in that Alexandrian banqueting-hall, with its brilliance of dialogue and its confusion of philosophies, to be shortened by a single page! Again, it may be urged that the sensuous is but one step removed from the sensual, and in the case of M. France the one step which exists does not always need to be taken. Neither can it be denied that the characters informing these romances lack somewhat of the relief and sub-

tlety given by the mightiest creators to the offspring of their imagination. It matters little. One character, and that the most entrancing, is common to all these narratives, and it is Anatole France himself. Sometimes his is the function of the Greek chorus. More often he appears beneath the most trivial disguise and dissembles under the names of Nicias, of the Abbé Jérôme Coignard, of Bergeret, of Brotteaux des Ilettes. The reader recognizes him by his silken speech. The hands may be the hands of Esau, but the voice in every case is the voice of Jacob. The views enunciated by such characters as these are not austere. The philosophy they expound is an undiluted epicureanism. Their scepticism is the scepticism we are familiar with in the essays of their original and prototype. They share even in his personal feelings and distastes. One or two are bookmen who are perilously near to becoming bookworms. This loves cats, and this other has an imperfect sympathy with Jews.

Then to the smiling Epicurean in his ivory tower came the angel with the test. A certain captain, of Jewish blood, was tried for treason, and found guilty. The great majority of the French nation, including most of Anatole

France's personal friends, approved of the finding and the consequent sentence. A minority, contemptible in numbers, contended that an awful wrong had been done to an innocent man, and moved heaven and earth to annul the judgment. This minority included as its most prominent champion that novelist on whom M. France had published so caustic a criticism. Neither was it possible to consider the captain himself as exactly a sympathetic personage. The issues were very confused, and the storm raged with astounding violence. If ever there was a case in which the complete sceptic and convinced Epicurean was bound by principle and interest alike to remain aloof from the din and dust of the battle it surely was here. Logically he was compelled to do so, for how should he attain that truth he had always proclaimed as past finding out! M. France was nobler than his creed, and adopted a distasteful task in the company of distasteful comrades, with enthusiasm. Man does not live by denial but by affirmation, and he realizes himself more completely through self-sacrifice than by indulgence. Though any opinion you may hold is probably mistaken, yet you must act upon it whatever be

the cost. Better to affirm and be wrong, than deny and be in the right.

Probably M. France, as a personal matter, was not wildly interested in the fortunes and misfortunes of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. He paid a great price to obtain the victim's freedom, a price to be counted over in popular disfavour, in loss of friends and of that leisure so dear to a scholar's heart. But not one of his books shines with so pure a lustre as the conviction which induced him, despite all logic, to range himself upon a side and do battle for an idea, whether that idea were right or wrong.

The complete sceptic, once having failed, progressed rapidly along the road of imperfection. His ivory tower was abandoned for political platforms. The comrades of that first crusade were men of advanced political opinions. Politics being a state of mind rather than a creed, it was natural M. France should regard their views with sympathy. He presently made them his own, and is now a convinced Socialist. It would be an impertinence to criticize the doctrines of so distinguished an advocate, and I have no intention to make myself ridiculous by so doing. Very possibly, indeed, he is quite in the right.

One may be permitted, however, to smile at the incongruity of M. France's appearance in the part of the hot gospeller, walking beneath the red flag and chanting the International as lustily as he may. But to the fervour of the proselyte we who are Londoners are indebted for the privilege of hearing the great author speak on that memorable evening when he occupied the platform of the Fabian Society with other orators only less eloquent than himself; and the audience gathered together on that occasion will not easily forget the moment when M. France in his fraternal ardour embraced Mr. Bernard Shaw upon the cheek.

The illustrious evening of M. France is a very strenuous period. It is associated with battle-cries, and devoted to causes and an ideal. It seems odd to remember that for the greater part of his life the author of the phrase "Society is founded on the patience of the poor" was regarded as a mere dilettante. Indeed, the reproach is levelled yet by critics who feel little enthusiasm for his views. We must admit there is much in these writings to give colour to the suggestion. They are composed and put together so loosely as almost to require

the indulgence that is the privilege of the amateur. They repeat themselves continually. They are concerned with art and thought, less as a passion than as an agreeable pastime to occupy our little day. The interest in ideas manifested in every book of the long series, nevertheless, is genuine and sincere. They may be treated with too much display, as though they were only a handful of brightly coloured beads, but behind the parade M. France sits absorbed as Mr. Wells himself. The learning, moreover, informing these books is very real. It is worn lightly as a flower—too lightly, indeed. It is the scholarship of a poet rather than that of the student, and seems wide rather than deep or exact. This matters nothing if the book be a work of fiction. More is not required. The case is only serious when the book purports to be a considered study of history, involving questions of grave import. An imperfect proof-reading, and an apparent indifference to accuracy of reference, then become unpardonable levity. At least they seemed so to Andrew Lang. M. Anatole France took a less austere view of the moral aspect than could be expected of a Scotsman. Perhaps he was biased. He pleaded for indulgence in advance by telling in

his preface to the "Vie de Jeanne d'Arc" of the fate awaiting the inaccurate writer. "During that very fifteenth century which I have striven to reclothe in flesh in these pages, a certain demon flourished, named Titivillus. It was his pleasure to collect the omitted letters and misplaced words of negligent clerks at their daily task, and to carry them to hell in his wallet every evening. When the day of the death of each careless scribe was come, and St. Michael weighed his soul in the balance, then Titivillus hastened forward and placed the heavy burden of his sins in the scale of his iniquities." Such eloquent special pleading would have touched the heart of any reader except that of a brother humorist, carried beyond his usual courtesy by an uncontrollable indignation.

The omnivorous reading and wide learning of M. France find a congenial vehicle for employment in the novel. In a vivid metaphor he once compared the scholar with an Oriental eater of hashish. Both live in a fume of dreams, and—he declared—printed matter is the opium of the West. As we turn the pages of his books, and think for a little of what we have read, the truth of the figure comes home

to us. They possess the supreme gift of suggestiveness, of evocation, and the dreams of the past steal from their chapters like wreaths of smoke from the opium pipe. History, and the pleasant byways of history, seem to be his favourite study. The obsession of what is gone lies upon him, and no period of the world's history is alien to his curiosity. The century he regards with the deepest intellectual interest is that in which Christ was born in Syria. The dawning of Christianity, and the relations of its Founder with the characters He met upon His road, are approached with the most alert concern. Pilate, who had forgotten the Man he crucified; Mary Magdalene, who loved her Master with a fervour deemed barely respectable by the Roman matron; St. Paul, the destined conduit through which the new religion was to flow—these form material for some of Anatole France's most arresting and characteristic narratives. Christianity absorbs him despite his repulsion. It is Christianity, again, that takes him to Egypt, and we assist at that strange and bewildering kaleidoscope where the hermit and the desert are brought into troubling contact with the learned and beautiful courtesan, and the

libraries and philosophies of Alexandria make "Thaïs" half museum and half pandemonium. Whatever be the defects of its planning, the present writer must consider "Thaïs" to be its author's masterpiece, if only because his essential gift of irony finds there its most complete expression. M. Faguet, however, gives pride of place to the eighteenth-century novel of modish manners and pagan wisdom entitled "La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque" —a queen with webbed fingers to her hand like some aquatic bird. Other critics, equally distinguished, allot the palm to the Benjamin of his age, that fine romance of the Revolution, "Les Dieux ont Soif." Should a referendum be taken, the popular vote doubtless would fall on his modern evocation of Florence, "Le Lys Rouge," with its new Decameron set amongst the formal gardens of the city of the red lilies—a Decameron of criticism rather than of story-telling, and of visits to holy places, where the neurotic heart sets itself to devise perverse things. All these novels are remarkable in their various ways. The master falters only when he emulates the dismal foreseeings of Mr. Wells. His speculations on the future seem largely derivative from the English writer,

and the mediævalist in him is distinctly to be preferred to the prophet.

The lover of beauty is driven by necessity to take refuge from the banalities of to-day in some dream of the past. Time has winnowed the vulgarities of yesterday from the threshing-floor with his fan. The residue is pure wheat. The poetry of distance softens the harsher features of the landscape with a purple haze. Anatole France, by temperament and by philosophy, was born to experience its siren seductions. He had ever taught that in the flux of things memory alone is lasting, and that our life turns inevitably to what is gone. His novels are but doors of escape opening on cities of brighter colour and on fresher streams. With an insatiable curiosity, M. France laboured to acquire any knowledge that would bring this fairer world more closely to his eyes. He is a tireless student of history and biography—perhaps even more of those memoirs and diaries which show humanity in its dressing-gown. Pictures and prints help to visualize and re-create his scenes, and certain chapters in his books are but transcriptions in prose of the colour-print upon his desk. The illusion of reality is made more vivid by

M. France's pleasant habit of telling over again many half-forgotten legends of the past. These stories come to us with an added richness by passing through the successive strata of so manifold a culture. That irony, which is his most personal quality, transforms the *naïveté* of the original narrative. Such stories as these are usually drawn from mediæval sources. "Our Lady's Tumbler," for example—surely one of the most appealing and suggestive of the legends of the Middle Ages—is preserved to us by the piety of Gaston Paris and of another scholar in a volume of "Romania." "The Surety," again, is derived from a great collection of the Miracles of Our Lady, translated from the Latin into fluent French verse by Gautier de Coinci, a monk of Soissons, in the thirteenth century. "The Boast of Oliver" comes from the cycle of the Charlemagne romances, with pleasing additions by a little master of the seventeenth century. But, indeed, nearly the whole of the exquisite "Puits de Sainte Claire" may be considered as taken, in substance or essence, from French and Italian sources of the Renaissance or the *Moyen-âge*. Even when the precise original of some of these narratives is unknown to the

present writer—in consequence, perhaps, of limited leisure—it is possible to identify a variant. I am unacquainted with the source of that delectable anecdote (enlivening the pages of a book of essays in no need of relief or illustration) telling the reason which induced a Roman lady to pray daily in public to the gods for the life of the vilest of the emperors. Some reader may be more fortunate. But a variant is to hand, taken from a collection of Latin stories extracted from preachers' manuals of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to be used as illustrations in sermons, and quoted by Mr. G. G. Coulton in his wonderful volume, "A Medieval Garner." "A certain abbot gave his monks three dishes to their dinner, wherefore they said: 'This man giveth us but sparingly; let us pray God that he may soon die.' And so it was; for within a brief while, for that or some other cause, he died. Then came another abbot who gave them but two dishes; whereat they were sore wroth and grieved, saying: 'Now must we pray all the more (since one dish hath been taken from us) that the Lord take away this man's life.' At length he died; and the third gave them but one. Then were the monks moved to in-

dignation, and said : ' This fellow is worst of all, for he will slay us with hunger ; let us pray God for his speedy death.' Then said one monk : ' Nay, but I pray God He may give him a long life and keep him among us.' The others, marvelling, asked him why he spake thus ; and he : ' The first (I see) was evil, the second worse, and this man worst of all. Yet I fear that, when he is dead, another may came who will famish us outright.' For as the proverb hath it : ' Selde cometh the latter the better.' " Certainly M. France—like other great writers—takes his goods where he may find them.

The work we have examined in this paper is supple and various. It deals with many matters in divers ways. It is interested in ideas. It observes modern life closely and curiously, but is equally at ease in the cities of refuge of the past. This work, moreover, despite its variety, is no mere collection of separate publications, but is held together by a central unity of its own. The cover and stitching, binding many detached chapters into one organic whole, are provided partly by the interest excited by their author's personality, partly by a beauty of writing amount-

ing almost to a miracle, and above all by a criticism of life, represented in different books by varying facets, but always consistent with a central conception of things. In a sense all M. Anatole France's work might be included under the common title of Books of Pity and of Irony. There is no text from which he preaches more willingly than from these two words, which run almost like a refrain through his pages. It occurs in "Crainquebille, et plusieurs autres Récits Profitables": "He felt much pity for men, scarcely counting them as reasonable beings; their blunders, when not cruel, seemed amusing, and caused him to smile." It recurs in his Florentine novel: "Let us give to men for witnesses and as judges, Irony and Pity." The theme is developed and explained in his volume of opinions, "Le Jardin d'Epicure." "Irony and Pity are two excellent counsellors; the smiling face of one makes life a pleasant thing; the tearful eyes of the other make it sacred also. The Irony I invoke is not cruel, and rails neither at love nor beauty. She is gentle and well-disposed to all; anger fades before her smile, and in her school we learn to laugh at folly, which, without her teaching,

we might have the weakness to hate." The text is expounded through a long and brilliant series of books, and these illustrations may almost be considered the core of their writer's genius. It is probable M. France has no exalted views of man's destiny, and knows very little of whence he derives, or the bourne to which he goes. With a poet of his own country he sees we are "all under sentence of death, with a sort of indefinite reprieve," and watches our strange gyrations on this sleeping volcano with humour and with pity. Consequently he attaches much importance to the lesser virtues —to cheerfulness, to courtesy, and fair dealing between men—and, just as the complete sceptic was forced by circumstances to believe in his own infallibility, so, by one of those little ironies dear to him, the smiling Epicurean becomes a moralist in his own despite.

ON THE SHORT STORY, AND TWO MODERN EXEMPLARS

IN one of those volumes of opinions which are more entrancing than most romances, Monsieur Anatole France narrates an anecdote somewhat in the following fashion. Many, many years ago an Eastern satrap came to the throne, possessed by a most unusual and conscientious desire for the welfare of his subjects. In pursuance of this laudable object he called before him the wise men and scholars of his kingdom, and desired them to furnish him with a History of Mankind. These gentlemen formed themselves into an Academy, appointed a permanent secretary, and embarked zealously upon their task. At the end of twenty-five years they appeared before their Sultan, bearing with them upon a train of camels the precious history, in five hundred forbidding volumes. Daunted by this formidable array of books, the king explained to the deputation the importance of

his duties and the brevity of life, and desired the scholars to reduce their wisdom into a more reasonable compass. Fifteen years later the academicians yet remaining alive returned, bringing their sheaves with them—in fifty stout volumes. The monarch burst into tears, exclaiming that evidently it was written he should never digest the history of mankind. The Academy therefore resumed its labours, and at the close of another five years the sole survivor—a permanent secretary on crutches—brought the result to the palace, upon an ass, in one thick octavo volume. But the king was at the last gasp, and turned his face to the wall as the student entered the room. Then an inspiration seized the permanent secretary. Throwing his leather-bound history to the floor, he hobbled to the bed, and cried, "Sire, the history of men may be resumed in three words. They are born; they suffer; and they die."

No one, I presume, will dispute that the moral of this delectable apologue has the additional merit of being absolutely true. The length of the road and the agreeableness of the prospect may vary for each one of us, but the journey's end inevitably is the same.

One may be carried to his long rest in a pauper's hearse, whilst his neighbour goes in a pompous procession, with weeping relatives; but to the same home they both go, and to the like complexion they come at last. All the more honour, then, to our pathetic and transitory race since it has set itself with a sort of desperate and indomitable cheerfulness to make the best of an "indefinite reprieve." The line of its march may be traced by the ruins of the temples builded to enshrine its dreams. On either side of the path the wilderness has been husbanded to blossom like a rose. The chambers where man could but lodge for a night, he has ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion; and at evening, after the hard day's toilsome march, he has gathered round the camp fire and cheated his weariness with tales and laughter—surely two of the best gifts of the grudging gods. In the warmth of that pleasant blaze, listening to the saga men of his tribe, he forgot the dark sky above him, and enjoyed the illusion of happiness, till the caravan was struck again with the dawn.

The stories told at twilight about these blazing fires were, at the beginning, mere flimsy anecdotes. The narrator did not know

himself for an artist. He related the adventures of a day, the fear lurking in the night, the way in which an unit was added to the number of his women. These anecdotes he told in as straightforward a fashion as was consonant with his desire to impress the listeners around him. The braggart was the first story-teller, and in a sense the liar may be considered as the earliest artist. The boaster was not content with the mean baldness of the literal truth. Probably it added nothing to his glory. He touched it up, and proving the inferiority of fact to fiction, became the first self-conscious artist. "Gab," discovered thus about a wandering camp fire, remained for long the amiable weakness of our race. Readers of mediæval literature will remember how Charlemagne and his Paladins spent the hour after supper in the chamber allotted them by the Emperor of Constantinople. They must recall with what strange "gabs" the Paladins bragged one against the other, and the dire results which befell through their betrayal by the hidden spy. Frequenters assure us that at times they may be heard even yet in the smoking-rooms of to-day.

The artist having learned to select and to

arrange his material, having freed himself from the bondage of fact, speedily realized the advantage of imputing his noble deeds to some fictitious character. Such a hero aroused less jealousy, and was not exposed to the risk of being found out. Prowess in hunting and in tribal war, good fortune in love, and personal relation with the gods accordingly were ascribed to dead heroes, or to some others who never had an actual existence. Presently it would happen that one such hero, for this reason or that, aroused more interest and obtained greater favour in the hearts of the auditors than his fellows. About this favoured personality was formed an accretion of tales. He stood draped in a web of legend. These legends grew gradually to an organic whole, and the romance superseded the anecdote. Ballads crystallized into the epic, and old blind Homer was born.

It must seem strange that man who went forth to his labour from sunrise to evening, whose years were so few and swift, was not content with stories appropriate to his leisure. He might sit at his ease, hearkening to the minstrel, for but one quick hour between twilight and darkness. One short story, a

single ballad, would fill his scanty leisure to the brim, and then to sleep. Yet the history of the imaginative literature of the world is the preference of our race for the serial as against the anecdote. Man chose deliberately to take the memory of some hero to bed, and to resume his adventures about the camp fire just where they were interrupted the evening before. It mattered little to the listener that the chances were great he would never live to hear the conclusion of the tale. That was but one adventure the more. Obedient to the imperious demand, minstrel and saga man did wonderful feats of memory. The skald held the viking from weariness on the swan's path by recital of the sombre and dramatic epics of the North. The scarlet-clad minstrel stood before a gay company of lords and ladies, seated on the steps of the perron, telling over the interminable romances of chivalry; whilst above him the olives whispered, and near by the broad stretches of the Rhone flowed swiftly to the sea. In Eastern bazaars the professional story-teller, stick in hand, related with ceaseless and emphatic gesture some marvellous invention concerning afrit and djinn. Writing eased the strain for a time,

and made an abnormal memory less a necessity of the craft than a helpful talent. But with the discovery of the printing-press Othello's occupation was gone. Glee man, minstrel, and story-teller became rogues and vagabonds by Act of Parliament, instead of honoured guests in the halls of the great and the meeting places of the mean. The short story sunk deeper in the general discredit. It was aware of the disfavour in which it was held, and tried hard to hide its identity. It banded itself together, masking under the guise of a long, connected narrative. The shifts it was driven to are amusing. Consider the "Arabian Nights," and the framework laboriously provided to give the illusion of an organic whole. Can the frail wicker-work be held worthy of so resourceful a little baggage as Scheherazade, the princess of fiction-mongers! Boccaccio found a somewhat more convenient door of escape for his "Decameron." The pressure of the outside world, the horror of the plague, the imminence of death, indeed, does something to knit these stories together. That garden is certainly more sunny, those lips are certainly more instant in love and laughter, because of the horror waiting just without the gate.

If we put the "Morte D'Arthur" aside, Chaucer is the one instance of an approximately successful solution of an insoluble problem. The architectural device adopted by the writer of the "Canterbury Tales" does much to incorporate into a single mansion a series of absolutely unconnected chambers. This convention provides a group of character-studies of such humanity, engaged in an occupation so typical of its age, that the stories put with more or less propriety into the mouths of the pilgrims are sufficiently in unity with themselves to be considered by the indulgent as one narrative. But the tide ran strongly in the direction of the novel all the same. To the interminable romances of chivalry succeeded the interminable sentimentalities of a later century. These lachrymose excursions into the province of the heart and the sensibilities were followed in turn by novels of picaresque adventure. The heels of vagabondage were kibed by a grim and grimy realism. Realism gave way to psychological studies of a singular dullness—all in many volumes of closely printed type. The hour of the short story —which went so lightly and laughed so gaily— was over indeed.

It is but fair to admit that the short story in France has never been treated so shabbily as across the Channel. It fell upon evil days, but not into the indigence and dishonour it suffered in England. The gift of narrative, like the gift of sculpture, is a French tradition. The Middle Ages in France were a riot of short stories. The land was as thick with them as a country hedge with roses. The taste for such narratives endured there side by side with the tyranny of the novel. Any failure of interest was but a comparative failure, and not in the superlative degree as here. It is curious to speculate on the causes of our distaste. Perhaps it is an indication of the lack of a certain alertness of mind. Possibly such mental lethargy may be less pronounced in our neighbours. It certainly seems that the average English reader finds no continuity of interest in a volume of tales. Such a "miscellany of inventions" is a succession of mental jolts and jars. He seems to be changing his carriage at every local station, instead of settling down cosily for the length of his journey, and he grows weary of the discomfort. Since we have no natural instinct for the *conte*, it is the more creditable that we

shared with France in the revival making the last quarter of the nineteenth century so good and stimulating a period for the writer of the short story. The French artist, for his part, was born free; but with a great sum we obtained this freedom. And here it may be desirable to state precisely what is meant in this paper by the term "short story." A great deal of critical energy has been wasted in seeking out a definition. It was sought to provide a formula that would define the boundaries of the short story with the mathematical strictness of a sonnet. It must not be an anecdote; it should not be a little novel. Walls were built about it, and beyond certain limits it was dared to stray. For my part creeds are peculiar to theology, and I am not anxious to impose them elsewhere. Wiser words have not been written on the subject than some by Mr. Wells, whose special authority will be appreciated by all. Not only has he spelt w-i-n-d-e-r, but he has given a personal application to the object-lesson by cleaning it better than was possible for anyone else. "I refuse altogether to recognize any hard-and-fast type for the short story, any more than I admit any limitation upon the liberties of the

small picture. The short story is a fiction that may be read in something under an hour, and so that it is moving and delightful it does not matter whether it is as 'trivial' as a Japanese print of insects seen closely between grass stems, or as spacious as the prospect of the plain of Italy from Monte Mottarone. It does not matter whether it is human or inhuman, or whether it leaves you thinking deeply or radiantly but superficially pleased. Some things are more easily done as short stories than others and more abundantly done, but one of the many pleasures of short story writing is to achieve the impossible."

The excursion in fiction which could be read aloud in something under an hour flourished exceedingly towards the end of the last century, both in England and France. A group of writers of the highest brilliance redeemed the reproach into which the art had fallen, and worked marvels with their material. The entertainment provided by these artists was of a very various order. They were all things to all men. Not possessing a scrupulous conscience, they perpetrated the anecdote and the minor novel with gaiety. They were trivial, or grandiose, or squalid as they pleased.

Sometimes their readers laughed with them; at others they were impertinent enough to laugh at their readers. Their narratives ranged from the familiar prospect without our windows to the landscape separated from us by the terrifying thickness of the world. The characters moving through these tales would be trite as our neighbour, or exotic as tropical fauna. But whether these writers broke the ten commandments of the critics, or paid tithe of mint and anise and cumin to their injunctions, at least they produced works of art. Their tales must have been as pleasant to write as we find them to read. It seems impossible that much of their work will not remain as a permanent contribution to the treasure-house of fiction. Some are gone to their well-earned rest; others, happily, are with us to-day. Since it is more convenient to speak of the general character of such work under particular instances, I may be permitted to dwell for a while on some of its prominent features, as exemplified in the stories of two of its greatest masters, Guy de Maupassant and Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

Guy de Maupassant had two great advantages as a novelist. He derived from that old

France which has told so many stories, and told them so well, and he was the literary apprentice of Gustave Flaubert. Counsels of perfection urged by Flaubert were put into painful practice by his disciple. For ten years Maupassant laboured to acquire a style and to develop his originality—mainly in office hours and on Government paper—under the severe tuition of his mentor. He was taught to see with his eyes, and not, as most people do, with their ears, as their fathers have told them. The result of the training became apparent when his first story was printed, for "Boule de Suif" was admittedly a triumph. From that period Maupassant published three masterpieces a year with regularity. Above all, it was from the older writer Maupassant obtained that fatal theory of impersonal literature which has proved so fond a delusion to so many authors. The creed was one peculiarly grateful to Maupassant. He embarked, with cheerfulness, on lawsuits to prevent his portrait adorning his books, and removed all literary merit from his private correspondence lest it should be published. He loved to think he gave nothing of himself to the public. He pathetically believed that his works were a mirror

reflecting all the world, with the sole exception of their author. It is amazing that so observant a man could prove so apt in self-deception. Of course the exact opposite is true. Bits of himself, his flesh and clothing, stick to every one of Maupassant's novels. His stories are set amidst his familiar Normandy landscape; their heroes are the peasants he knew, and their very subjects are drawn largely from actual happenings which once gave scandal to the neighbourhood. The crude and bitter philosophy of his characters is quickly recognized as that of their creator. A contempt for humanity overbrims the measure. An artist's work is always a kind of signature, sometimes with a flourish beneath. These stories shudder with Maupassant's fear of death, and are built on the very hallucinations which caused him to spend the last eighteen months of his life a lunatic in an asylum. For in spite of the exuberant gaieties of his youth, and the brilliant successes of his manhood, the shadow of Maupassant's terrible end must always cling about his memory like a pall. He will ever remain a tragic warning against burning the candle at—not two, but half a dozen ends at once. You may become a celebrated writer,

or an incessant traveller, or a popular athlete, or a well-groomed man about town; but if you attempt to combine all these conflicting personalities in one single being, the result will prove disastrous. Maupassant made the effort, and died under restraint, not having completed his forty-third year.

After all, that old France proved a better friend to Maupassant than did the mentor who, both by precept and example, urged him with blows along the path of perfection. It is impossible to exaggerate the value of the assistance he derived from the little masters of his country. Their many and excellent short stories, written through the course of centuries, are a manifestation of the national character. They express the tradition of the race. The dead hands of these writers form and mould their successors, and to depart from their path is to inflict a grievous wrong, not only on them, but also on yourself. The story writers of old France were of all sorts and conditions of men. Gentle and simple, rich and poor, monk and troubadour alike were counted in their guild. But certain gifts they had in common, by right of birth. They had the gifts of clearness, of measure, and of

sobriety. They were also gay. At times they might be devout, or serious, or impassioned in their contemplation of beauty, but as a rule their feet were rooted in the earth—the gross and gracious earth of France. Maupassant, of course, did not possess all these qualities. If so he would have been a portent rather than an artist. It would be affectation to deny that in poetry and grace he was excelled by Daudet. But with certain of their virtues he was richly endowed. No modern novelist, for instance, conducted his narrative with such economy, or obtained his effects with more clarity and simplicity. He also laughed easily and loudly, and was not much perturbed though the fastidious hesitated to join in his ferocious merriment. "La Maison Tellier" and "Les Sœurs Rondoli" are little masterpieces of humour, but it is unfortunate the reader should ask himself whether he does well to be amused, even whilst the laughter is in his mouth. It must be admitted there is some difficulty in recommending Maupassant for general perusal, without reservation. He had but one subject, and that an improper one. In this he resembles certain earlier writers of his country. They, however, are considered in the bulk with other

novelists who bring cleaner qualities into their narratives, and thus the whole mass is leavened. Perhaps it is safer to deal with Maupassant in a similar fashion.

In addition to those qualities which may be regarded as his by heritage, Maupassant brought to the short story certain characteristics of his own. He could laugh in actual life and in print, and did so heartily. He was equally thorough and uncompromising in his pessimism, and consequently his books are full of the most violent effects of light and shade. I do not call Maupassant a pessimist, particularly because he considered life not worth living. Such a philosophy is explicit in certain Scriptural books the orthodox believe to be given by inspiration of God. Neither do I reproach him because he looked upon man as swayed mainly by his desires and appetites, and saw few of our species with an aureole. A man who denies facts is not an optimist but a lunatic. The bleak pessimism blowing through Maupassant's pages like an east wind is due to his conception of man as a mere animal, without soul or spirit. To him, as to another, man is only the saddest of all the beasts of the field. He studied the human animal altogether in

his appetites, never in his aspirations, which apparently he found some difficulty in recognizing. The result of this reduction of man to half a dozen mean passions, and of woman to one, was an excessive simplification which enabled Maupassant to achieve immediate effects of a startling character, but which in the long run may do harm to his reputation. As works of art his narratives are flawless. Possibly they will prove less rich and stimulating than some others, technically not so perfect, but written by men of wider culture and deeper thought, and informed by a nobler philosophy.

Turn from the narratives of Guy de Maupassant to those of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, and you recognize at once the advantages of a tradition. The French master is a classic largely because the way in which he walks was made ready to his feet. Scores of short story writers—some with famous names, but others whose obscurity is lighted only by their work—engineered and made easy that road. Mr. Kipling had no such moral support. English letters are surprisingly bare of the short story. Most of our greater novelists show no inclination to essay the adventure, and their navy consists mainly of Dreadnoughts.

It is unreasonable, under such circumstances, to expect Mr. Kipling to prove the perfect artist. He is the pioneer, with a rough, uncharted country to explore. Should he grope a little, or fumble occasionally, it is just because he has to find his way alone in the dark. If he irritates at times by a mannerism that seems crude and omniscient, we must remember there is nothing to prune and restrain his excess of individuality. We should not dwell lovingly on the faults of his work, but rather appreciate the essential and virile genius that carried him far upon so difficult and perilous a journey.

The note of Mr. Kipling's prose is romantic rather than classical, and this may be necessitated by the nature of his subjects. It is difficult to be frigid and correct when dealing with the East. Maupassant, the classic, never went far afield. I recall but one story ("Chali") in which he adventures on ground Mr. Kipling has made peculiarly his own. He might have excused himself by quoting the author of the "Imitation": "Wherever thou mayest go canst thou behold more than the elements, earth and sky and water, for of these are all things made!" Maupassant's restraint has not been

shared by his fellows. They seem, indeed, to have parcelled out the world amongst them. Sir Gilbert Parker has laid a hand on our Lady of the Snows, and finds to his cost that she permits no divided worship. Mr. Conrad, by divine right, is the Rajah of the Malay Archipelago. Pierre Loti, by his very business in deep waters, is equally at home with the *mousmée*, all sash and reverences, the Tahitian maiden wreathed with flowers, and the hideous negress with her shaven head. The province of Mr. Kipling is India. It is so to-day, and has been since he "made his astonishing advent with a series of little blue-grey books, whose covers opened like window shutters to reveal the dusty sun-glare and blazing colours of the East." Mr. Kipling's stories seem only to move and have their being on the soil of India—India and the homeland he loves better still. The virtue passes out of him when he steps outside his chosen province and her peoples. America especially is fatal to his talent, and his allegorical talking horses and cumbersome machinery of the railway yard inspire the reader with consternation. His best and most enduring pages are not clammy with the fogs of the Newfoundland banks, or elaborate

with descriptions of the evisceration of the cod caught in those waters. The tinkle of the Bengali dancing girl's sitar is infinitely more pleasant to the ear than the whistling of those engines in which he has taken, on occasion, so overwhelming an interest. India restores Mr. Kipling to himself. It is a matter to marvel over how much of that country is epitomized in his books. Indeed these books are rather a cinematograph before which we sit, than novels we read, and a cinematograph much more wonderful than the rather limited machine with which we are all familiar, since it reproduces not only the shape and movement, but the very colours and odour and speech of life. India is brought before us, not perhaps with greater fullness of knowledge, but more vividly than by any other writer—the sights and the sounds and the smells of her, her welter of creeds and castes, her temples and cities, the Way of Buddha and the Grand Trunk Road. These pages are crowded with as picturesque and motley a throng as any novelist can show—Eurasians and the governing classes, the three musketeers, the yellow and wrinkled Buddhist lama, and the burly Afghan horse dealer, his beard dyed

scarlet with lime. Such scenes and characters as these are to be found both in Mr. Kipling's novels and in his "miscellanies of inventions." It would seem that their writer is unlikely now to produce that masterpiece of sustained narrative we all hoped to receive from him, and must be content to reign supreme in the more restricted area of the short story. After all it is a sufficient distinction for an overweening ambition. When you have written such moving and vivid narratives as "Without Benefit of Clergy," "The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney," and "The Man Who Would be King"—to name but three amongst many, almost at haphazard—it should be easy to hear little critics hint that "Kim," although a very delightful performance, lacks a central unity, and is less a novel than a series of brilliant and disconnected episodes.

Mr. Kipling's love of England is greater even than his passion for India. With Maupassant he has the genius of patriotism, and like the gifted Frenchman sought to express his devotion in the terms of his art. Maupassant, a realist of his time and day, was driven to write poignant tales of the great disaster of modern France. Mr. Kipling is more fortunate. A romantic writer, of wider imagination, he

derived his inspiration from the glorious past. "Puck of Pook's Hill" and "Rewards and Fairies" are not so much a sequence of stories, set against a homely background of Pevensey meadows, as a panorama of England, and of the breeds which went to the making of the English. To those who are in any degree possessed by the passion of the past such a theme must be of the highest interest. We look back at the seething pot into which every component of our race was flung, and watch the shaping of a nation. Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane, Norman—each contributed some quality or defect of muscle and brain and character, making the modern Englishman, for good or evil, what he is. Our forefathers live again in our sins and our virtues, as we in theirs; for, as an illiterate lady of my acquaintance once remarked, "I am as I am, and I can't be no ammer." The very observances of our modern Christianity would not be what they are were it not for the gods who paled before a brighter hope. We call our days even now after the names of deities fallen upon evil times. England is indeed a palimpsest of various writings and surpassing interest. It is to be regretted that Mr. Kipling expresses his appreciation

of this fact so frequently by means of children. Mr. Kipling is boy-rid, and some of his readers are weary of perpetual boy. The boy is a veritable obsession with his creator, and a very fly in the precious ointment. But, boy-rid or not, Mr. Kipling's books, at least, are an enthusiastic recognition of the unity of the race, and in this patriotic love of country he treads common ground with a novelist with whom he would seem to have little in common, save a genius for the composition of the short story.

Has the short story, of which we have witnessed the glorious resurrection, come to stay? It flourished once before, but fell upon evil days; may it not be so again! So far as France is concerned, there seems every hope the *conte* will endure with her literature. A country which has produced so fertile and lusty a crop is unlikely to become waste and barren at this period of her history. We should as soon expect the vine and wheat to fail from her yards and barns. Her masters of imaginative literature are famous not only as writers of the orthodox romance, but of the "minor novel" as well. In England the position is different, and the question cannot be answered to our

wish with the same assurance. The tradition of the short story has never taken a grip of our literature. It has seemed alien to the genius of the race. The great English novelists, almost with one consent, ignore the Cinderella of their art. Their short stories were brought forth with a shamefaced air, as if apologizing for the production of such frail and plaintive bantlings. Of recent years there has been a revival of interest in Cinderella. The most famous authors of our time have written the short story, and worn no air of condescension. Stevenson, for example, composed specimens considered by competent judges to be the finest in the language. Mr. Hardy, Mr. Kipling, Mr. Wells—and I pass by others—publish in our very day narratives of no great length which exhibit to perfection the form and pressure of their mind and genius. These men have no tradition to follow. Never was there such a lack of canon and article to guide their steps. They, and such as they, are painfully building the road the little masters of to-morrow must tread. Perchance these pioneers may find none coming after to put spade in the pit they commenced to dig. Even so their work will not be wasted. It must

remain as a protest and as a call. But to the wish and hope of every lover of the *conte* other builders will follow, learning and selecting from the example of those who went before, so that the road may be carried on, and become a witness to our national character, and an expression of the traditions of the race.

THE POET AS ARTIST
JOSÉ-MARIA DE HEREDIA

THERE are certain persons who consider the name of an artist to be an index to his character and personality. They deny, for instance, that anyone of the name of Jones can be a painter of pictures. They affirm that Miss Marie Corelli must necessarily be a mistress of romantic fiction. Is it not sufficient glory to possess either the sounding name or the indubitable talent, and why should one amongst the children of men be so favoured as to be the proud possessor of both! It would be equally reasonable to require of a poet not only that he should write his verses, but also that he should look his rôle—which is manifestly absurd. Occasionally, however, the absurd actually happens. The most distinguished of living French critics tells that when a lad at class the name of a minor luminary of the literary Pleiades—Ponthus de Thyard—haunted his memory. He reasoned

that an author endowed by Providence with so musical a patronymic must in consequence write verses of a beauty beyond the reach of his fellows. M. Jules Lemaître remarks that when at last he lighted on the actual poems of Ponthus de Thyard his deception was great and his fall very grievous. Disillusioned, he still cherished an affection for his old love, only it was rather for the noble name than for the tinkling verses. But what Ponthus de Thyard was for the eminent critic in the days of his youth, all that, and more, José-Maria de Heredia became to the years of his manhood. A name so noble that it streamed like a flag and was blazoned as a banner, but with the added lustre that the author's sonnets were as coloured as his name, and were the culmination in literature of a heroic and adventurous ancestry. "Heredia," he cries, in the words of the enthusiastic Gautier, "I love thee because thou bearest a name exotic and sonorous, and because thy verses are wrought with all the pomps of heraldry." The impossible, you see, had really happened.

By the irony of circumstance several of the most distinguished poets of modern France have not been French by birth. Leconte de

Lisle, for example—the master at whose feet Heredia sat, and at whose suggestion his fugitive verses were collected—was a Creole. Heredia may be reproached with having robbed Spain of a poet, for he was born at Cuba in 1842 of a Spanish father, and traced his ancestry direct from one of those conquerors of the New World whose epic deeds he commemorated in such picturesque and sonorous lines. His ancestors, indeed, were of those who sailed with Cortez and assisted the second Columbus in the founding of Carthagena in the Indies. Students of modern French poetry will not need to be reminded of the glowing sonnets which he consecrated to their triumphs. The poet's mother came of a Norman family, but Heredia was really less French than Rossetti (with whose work his own has so much in common) was English; for at least Rossetti, if of alien blood, was born in England, whilst Heredia was a Frenchman but by adoption and grace. All the poet's childhood was passed amidst the enchanted landscape of his beautiful island; and in early manhood, whilst studying law and theology at Havanna, it was beneath orange trees and near by a fountain that he perused his favourite authors. His

boyhood, however, was spent at Senlis in France; and following upon the University of Havanna, his education was completed in Paris, where he afterwards remained. In Paris, naturally enough, he drifted towards literature, and formed one of that group of young men, nicknamed Parnassians, whose ideal of poetry was so severely impersonal that they crushed down any expression of emotion with the triumphant query, "Is the Venus of Milo flesh or marble?" Of this set M. Anatole France, in the delightful causerie on Paul Verlaine reprinted in the third series of "La Vie Littéraire," gives a vivid picture. I may extract from that article the portion referring to Heredia: "Alone, or almost alone, of our group M. José-Maria de Heredia, although cheated of a large portion of the treasures of his ancestors, the Conquistadores, dressed as the young gentleman, and smoked excellent cigars. His ties were brilliant as his sonnets, but it was of the sonnets only that we were envious, for we held in sincere contempt the gifts of fortune." But whilst the Parnassians, one by one, appealed to the neglect of the public, and to the flail of the critic, with modest volumes of verse, Heredia alone, wrapt in the

pride of those dead Conquistadores, scorned to appear in the booth, and was content to remain unpublished—and famous. For close on thirty years his sonnets passed from hand to hand in manuscript, were doled forth by units in anthologies, or occasionally, by a gracious concession, appeared in force in the lordly columns of the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* In fact the very process which piqued the curiosity of the amateur in the work of Dante Rossetti was exactly paralleled over an even more extended period of time. In 1893, at the mature age of fifty, M. de Heredia was pleased to gather his neglected foundlings together. He incorporated with the sonnets already printed many others then in manuscript, and under considerable pressure at last published "Les Trophées," his single book of verse. The success of "Les Trophées" was immediate and miraculous, and some thirteen editions of a volume consisting mainly of sonnets appeared, I believe, in less than nine months. Certainly my own copy, which bears the date 1893, is marked as being of the tenth edition. I say consisting mainly of sonnets because it should be mentioned that three mediæval Spanish romances and a poem in heroic couplets are

included in "Les Trophées," but these exercises in an unfamiliar medium do not permit us to believe that their author could cast a statue as bravely as he carved cherry-stones. For, as is made clear in a letter printed by Mr. Edmund Gosse, in the mathematical strictness of the sonnet Heredia saw the finest of fixed poetic forms, one demanding by its very brevity and difficulty a conscience in the execution and a concentration of thought stimulating in the highest degree to the artist; and it was on the sonnet's scanty plot that his muse found her most congenial haunt. The sonnet repaid his devotion. Rather more than one hundred carried him to the Academy.

I believe the public considers the sonnet a very hard boiled egg at best. Despite the fact of Heredia's popular success its appeal is mainly to the artist. There is scarcely a poet of mark who has not put his fortune to the touch; but the nymph is capricious. Some of the very greatest have wooed her without success, "as an eunuch embraceth a virgin, and sigheth." It is really surprising why their sonnets should be so bad, and doubtless these eminent writers were more bewildered than anybody else. On the other hand, men

of far less essential poetic quality have written excellent sonnets. The strictness of the form proved neither shackles nor hindrance to them. It served rather the purpose of a woman's corsets, and they wore it lightly for similar reasons. When we recall the triumphs and the variety of the sonnet in competent hands, we should cease to marvel at the love artists bear to the form. It has sounded bravely as a trumpet, and breathed sweetly as the flute. With that key Shakespeare unlocked his heart, and the divinest poets have entrusted to it, as to a magic argosy, their most intimate and golden freight. It has been radiant or sombre, alternately, with the hues of life and death. Nevertheless the sonnet is a thoroughly dangerous form. Once master its technique, and there is no conceit so trivial, no fancy so thin or far-fetched, but may be made a sort of parable, "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning"—earthly story to be stated in the octave, heavenly meaning duly expounded in the sestet. Though form be all-important, and any faltering of the hand goes before the artist to judgment, the "fundamental brain-work" of Rossetti's famous criticism remains the true essential.

Heredia was of his day and school. He purposed, therefore, to compose sonnets quite other than those I have described. Flaubert had written novels which aimed at an impersonal reproduction of an altogether objective world. Gautier polished his "Émaux et Camées" whilst the German guns thundered without the walls of Paris. The poems of the master of the Parnassians, Leconte de Lisle, were impassive as the Sphinx, and all his disciples aspired to write verses that should be equally without bowels. The Venus of Milo, undoubtedly, was not flesh and blood, but marble. Heredia's idea was to write a series of sonnets which should deal with various phases of nature and civilization in an absolutely external and decorative fashion. There was to be no heavenly meaning to his earthly stories, but a single theme should overflow from octave to sestet, the picture filling alike the canvas and the predella. His ideal sonnet was to be as like to a mediæval miniature, and as unlike black signs on white paper, as literary pigment could make it. In addition, the personality of the artist was to be banished remorselessly from his work. Draped in his cloak of Spanish pride, Heredia proposed that nothing of the

sonneteer should be seen, save only in choice of subject and in workmanship. The subject should be as arresting, the craftsmanship as miraculous, as skill and care could compass, but nothing of the character and the proper emotion of the artist should show in his work. It was a vain dream. A work of art is as much the offspring of its parent as a child. The child betrays his father in some trick of gesture, some quality of mind, or disposition, or character. Flaubert strove with might and main to keep himself out of his novels. He died of the effort, and his portrait is there for all men to see. Gautier, who fiddled whilst Paris was burning, died broken-hearted at the ruin of his worshipped city. What thou be-est, that thou see-est, as the Eastern proverb has it. No man can jump off his shadow, and the portrait of José-Maria de Heredia is painted to the life in the imperishable colours of his delectable book.

The hundred or so sonnets contributed by Heredia to "Les Trophées," which form the really permanent portion of his work, bear comparison to any sequence of sonnets written in modern times. They excel Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" in brilliance of colour, if

they are inferior in poignancy of emotion. Though they be empty of the mysticism which informs Rossetti's "House of Life" so throughly, the air in which they move is fresher and less stifling. In a sense I suppose that only the expert can appreciate completely the amazing cleverness of Heredia's performance. Not content with the difficulties inherent to the form, he delighted to elaborate unnecessary difficulties. His very rhymes are chosen because their sound is suggestive of the matter with which at the moment he deals. "The artist asks you to come and see, not perfect works of art," said Manet, "but sincere works of art." Heredia's work is both perfect and sincere. Certainly he has the Nemesis of his qualities. A hundred sonnets, each standing in glaring sunshine, every one sharp in outline as if cut out of metal, scarcely one with any repose or mystery of shadow, necessarily fatigue the eye if read on end. There is no obligation to do so. The very choice of subject, the very division into sections, is an invitation to read leisurely, closing the page often, so that the flavour may be retained on the palate. But the fit reader, though he may read slowly, undoubtedly will read to the close.

The theme of "Les Trophées," put shortly, is a selection of such features of mythology, history, incident, or natural beauty as may be of particular personal interest to the writer. What he included, therefore, is very significant. But the man, equally with the artist, is known by what he rejects. The subjects ignored by Heredia are as informing as his preferences. They are surprisingly great. Barbarism in general he passes proudly by. He has little to say of any civilization before that of Greece. Not one of the great religions of the world, by whose consolations and hopes mankind has ennobled its destiny, touches his imagination—except, perhaps, in two sonnets which treat of the early life of Christ, and that in a purely decorative fashion. These are large omissions, but fortunately his sympathies in other respects are rich and deep. Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Tropics, Nature and Brittany, these furnish ample material to the most fastidious seeker after beauty. Heredia begrudged no labour to make each sonnet worthy of its matter. Every poem presupposes a long preparation, an elaborate study of the period, the country, and the theme with which it is concerned.

Scholarship and imagination alike have gone hand in hand to their shaping. I propose to consider each of these sections separately, although as shortly as possible. It is my aim, moreover, to illustrate each group for English readers by translating at least one sonnet included in such section. In this way it is hoped some slight indication of the value of Heredia's performance may be furnished, especially if "generously expanded to the full measure of the writer's intention." At least I shall have had the pleasure of looking closely at beautiful objects. The bee passes amongst the flowers, and a little of their gold dust—so she be fortunate—clings, haply, to her wings.

The first portion of Heredia's sonnet sequence concerns itself with Greece and Rome. He pays due homage to the lovely gods and goddesses of that mythology, but it is curious to notice that his real interest lies rather with the strenuous and very human heroes of that absorbing epoch. Hercules and the Centaurs, Jason with the Golden Fleece, Perseus and the rescue of Andromeda, these clearly stir his pulse and exalt his imagination. He dreams over those epic yesterdays, just as in a later

poem his forefathers, the Conquistadores, brood over epic to-morrows. He tells of Hannibal, and of the great adventure which nearly changed the destiny of a world; of Antony and Cleopatra, and the mad love for which an empire was counted a bauble. His very treatment of pagan death is strenuous. To think of such a subject is, for the average man, to recall the sculptured stones of the lad with the strigil, and the woman with her jewels. We remember those "tombs of Greece, carved over with images of beauty and regret, yet without despair or anguish. They teach that calm acceptance of the inevitable which is more than resignation, which is serenity." Serenity and resignation are absent from Heredia's conception of pagan death. The ghost wanders with anguish and indignant tears in the Under-world, lamenting that his slaying is unavenged. The widower turns sleeplessly upon his gold and ivory bed, plucking at the purple coverlet, as he bewails her who is gone, and calls upon the hearer to pity her fate. With these sonnets there are others at a less passionate pitch of tension—poems on a flute, on a book borrower, on a grasshopper, a runner, a charioteer. I have selected

one of these quieter examples for translation, merely premising that the original is excelled by few of its fellows in brilliance of colour and art.

THE TEPIDARIUM

Their languid members macerate with myrrh,
Luxurious—about this heated room
Where brazen brasiers glow within the gloom—
The women lie, and dream, and make no stir.
From piled red couches, sweet with lavender,
A body rises, that warm lamps illume,
Marble or amber, like a rose in bloom;
Through thin lawn veilings burns the grace of her.

Feeling on naked flesh the ardent heat,
An Asian woman stands upon her feet
And yawns, to speed the long slow hours that pass;
Whilst white and wondering maids from other zones
Grow raptured, o'er the rich barbaric tones
Of jet-black hair upon a bust of brass.

The only "heroes" included in the section devoted to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are the Conquistadores realizing their dream of "epic to-morrows." It was not that "super-

men " were unknown to the period. On the contrary, they positively luxuriated. Heredia concerns himself with but one, and his sonnet on Michael Angelo is, oddly enough, placed out of its natural sequence. Neither is any reference made to architecture, the characteristic and stupendous art of the Middle Ages to which all other arts were ancillary as handmaids. Those Gothic cathedrals which are the glories of France are not even glanced at. Clearly Heredia was more interested in the delightful but minor craft of the goldsmith, the bookbinder, the maker of that incomparable stained glass which furnishes the Sainte Chapelle and Chartres Cathedral with such wonderful eyes. On these, and on that charming craft of the toilette, enabling a woman to be herself a work of art, he wrote triumphantly; and I select, from mere personal whim, three of these sonnets to serve as illustrations.

THE ROSE-WINDOW

Beneath this painted window, count and dame
In plume and casque and silken hood have prayed,
Whilst o'er their lowly heads the rich cascade
Of riotous colour broke in pearl and flame.

Then passing hence, assoiled and free from blame,
Falcon on wrist, perchance, or steel-arrayed,
They pricked to chace, or sought the far Crusade,
Struck down a heron, or advanced a name.

Now, side by side, are dame and baron found,
With feet soft-pillowed on a couchant hound,
Above a little dust, in carven stone.
Dumb, motionless and deaf, their effigies
Watch, without sight in blank, untroubled eyes,
The stained Rose-Window—fadeless, freshly blown

THE OLD GOLDSMITH

I handled brush and graver with more ease,
More deftness, than all masters of the guild,
In jewelled work my cunning brain was skilled,
I shaped the vase, and wrought its storied fricze.
Now, silver and enamel fail to please,
For there I traced—so my snared soul hath willed—
No sacred Rood, no Deacon Lawrence grilled,
But vine-girt gods, or Danae's gold-clasped knees.

To Hell's own service my red forge inlaid
With fair devices some rich ruffler's blade,
Till deep in pride my part of Life is lost.
Thus, seeing I grow fearful, and am old,
Ere death may come and falling dark enfold,
I chase a golden monstrance for the Host.

THE CABINET-MAKER OF NAZARETH

From strenuous dawn the Carpenter hath bent
Above his bench, toiling that set of sun
May find the polished aumbry fitly done,
With cunning hand and tool subservient.
Blue shadows touch the threshold, day is spent;
The goodman marks the palm tree, where anon
St. Anne, Our Lady, and the Prince, her Son,
Will rest awhile with folded hands, content.

Heat broods on branch and flow'r, no petals fall.
St. Joseph, long outwearied, drops the awl
And with his apron wipes his brow amain.
But the Divine Apprentice in the room
Works on, suffused with splendour 'gainst the gloom,
Whilst golden shavings curl from 'neath His plane.

The third section is devoted to the Near East and the Tropics. It includes some beautiful

work on the Egypt of the Sphinx—colossal and terrifying—as well as work on that later Egypt which might well be, and is, fittingly dedicated to M. Gérome. The Japanese sonnets are especially interesting. They deal with phases of life long since passed away, and form an admirable foil to Loti's sentimental excursions in that country. Heredia describes the hero of old Japan, the Daimio, on the battlefield, clad in armour of brass and lacquer-work, sheltering his eyes from the glaring sun with a fan of iron and white satin. How piercing is the contrast with the officer and accoutrements of to-day! Again, how much of ancient Japan, or at least of the Japanese bibelot, is in the following toy:

LE SAMOURAI

The loud strings thrill beneath her languid hand,
Whilst through interstices of latticed wall
She knows her destined lover's proud footfall
Upon th' unsheltered waste of quivering sand.
With eyes fan-shaded, girt with two-fold brand,
In sombre mail he comes, and bears withal
Hizen's device and crest armorial
Above the fringes of his crimson band.

This mighty swordsman, dight with plate and blade,
In bronze and silk and lacquer-work arrayed,
Shows like some huge crustacean, black and red.
He sees, he smiles beneath his bearded mask,
And sunlit, gleaming with his quickened tread,
Twin gold antennæ tremble at his casque.

The final section of this wonderful sequence—that devoted to Nature and to Dream—contains some of Heredia's most vivid and characteristic work. Here is collected a group of miscellaneous sonnets, dealing largely with landscape and with such aspects of Nature as are of peculiar import to the writer. It was no wonder that Anatole France, in turning over his memories of Heredia's youth, remarked that "he always dressed as the young gentleman." He is the "gentleman" here. Other poets had given Nature gods. Heredia tricks her in a coat of arms, gay with paint, and blazoned with all the devices of heraldry. But he touches a more human note in the beautiful sonnets concerned with Brittany. The pathos of the lives of those simple and hardy fisher-folk lifts him above himself. Nearly for the first time he betrays the divine

gift of sympathy with unpoetical griefs—when speaking, for instance, of the women praying on the cliff for those who will never come back from sea. Here, in this section, may be found a little of that shadow, that sense of mystery, needed to temper the hard outlines, the almost cruel colour of his work. Here he discovered a soul. Had he written more often in the tone of "The Breton Bed" it is possible his reputation as a poet would stand wider and higher than it actually does. For people live by bread and will not be fobbed off with a stone, even though the stone be a precious gem polished and set with all the resources of the most consummate art.

THE BRETON BED

Curtained with sober serge, or stiff brocade,
Sad as a grave, or gay as Love's warm nest,
Here man is born, sleeps well, lies breast to breast,
Babe, husband, ancient, grandam, wife, and maid.
Above this bed, where Love and Death are stayed,
In turn the Palm, the Crucifix is drest;
Whence flowed the source, there sinks the stream to rest,
From Life's first dawn to that last taper's shade.

Whether the couch be shuttered, rustic, mean,
Prankt richly forth with scarlet, gold, and green,
Fashioned of rough-hewn oak or cypress wood;
Happy the man who sleeps with quiet head,
With equal breath, with conscience clear and good,
Where all his sib were born, where each lay dead.

Perhaps I should add that certain of the foregoing translations are taken from books of verses which I have neither the right to praise nor the desire to blame; whilst others are printed here for the first time. Certainly, too, I owe an apology for the roughness of my hand to the memory of one who, if not the greatest poet, was probably the most accomplished artist of his time

THE POET AS MYSTIC
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

THE Irish literary movement of our time is the most interesting artistic event since the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. It exhibits the same combination of diverse personalities and gifts dominated by one common aim and directed towards one single end. The group composing the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and its literary associates, petered out partly because its work was done, and partly because it was wounded in the house of its friends. Beauty and truth had kissed each other, but the embrace severed with quarrels over money matters, and in threats of writs and legal proceedings. It is to be hoped that the coat may never be trailed in Ireland. In a sense the various phases of the Irish literary movement are an outcome of the demand for Home Rule, and the toast of Ireland—a nation. They aim to provide that purely political

conception with a soul. A nation is not a mere fortuitous assemblage of people on a certain portion of the world's surface, but a unity with a common language, a common past, and a common tradition. The aim of the Irish literary movement is to promote the study of the old Gaelic tongue, to perpetuate the memory of the ancient myths and mythology, and to ensue a future fellowship by means of a community of interests. The men and women allied together for such purposes as these may have very different political and religious sympathies. Possibly they are to be found even in opposite camps. Certainly their individualities are very distinct, and at a casual glance one might think not particularly sympathetic. Amongst the more prominent of those connected with this Celtic Renaissance may be mentioned Dr. Douglas Hyde, author of "The Literary History of Ireland," and translator of the exquisite "Love Songs of Connacht." Dr. Hyde is the scholar of the movement, a great authority on the old Gaelic tongue. Not all of his colleagues have a working knowledge of that language, and it is a gratification to the Saxon that for his delight they are constrained to write in English.

Lady Gregory is a student in a near field—with one foot, however, at the stage-door—and her volumes of translations from the various cycles of Irish romance are as beautiful as her excursions into modern farce are entertaining. Mr. Yeats believes that in Lady Gregory's renderings Ireland has found her "Mabinogion" and "Morte D'Arthur." He thinks "Cuchulain" the best book that has come out of Ireland in his time—perhaps the best book that has ever come out of Ireland; and certainly "Cuchulain" deserves much, if not perhaps quite all, of his generous praise. Associated with Lady Gregory in her labours for the Irish National Theatre Society was Synge, whose premature death is a loss not merely to the parochial drama, but to the whole English-speaking race. Written in a curiously rhythmic and musical prose, Synge's bitter comedies and undiluted tragedies are the most memorable stage work from an Irishman (with the single exception of Bernard Shaw) since the brilliant artificial comedies of Oscar Wilde. But above all, to the onlooker, the Irish literary movement is summed up in one picturesque figure, the most arresting personality of the whole group, Mr. W. B. Yeats.

Not only is he its most distinguished poet, he even enters into the spirit of his rôle. His enthusiasm provides the driving power and the motive force from which the movement derives its strength. His work is the flag round which the central battle has been waged. Mr. Yeats was described by Mr. George Moore, in "Evelyn Innes," under the name of Ulick Dean. In that novel he was pictured as a hater of materialism, and as a believer in all mythologies—more particularly the Irish. This is how he appeared to the novelist: "He had one of those long Irish faces, all in a straight line, with flat, slightly hollow cheeks, and a long chin. It was clean shaven, and a heavy lock of black hair was always falling over his eyes. It was his eyes that gave the sombre ecstatic character to his face. They were large, dark, deeply set, singularly shaped, and they seemed to smoulder like fires in caves, leaping and sinking out of the darkness. He was a tall, thin young man, and he wore a black jacket and a large necktie, tied with the ends hanging loose over his coat." Many further references to Mr. Yeats' personal characteristics are to be found by the curious, scattered through the pages of the same writer's indis-

erect trinity of memories entitled "Hail and Farewell."

William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin in 1866, the son of a well-known Irish artist, Mr. J. B. Yeats. He is therefore well under fifty years of age, and we may hope has many years yet to fill with the activities which have made his career so distinguished. Mr. Yeats was educated in his native city, and for a time intended to follow his father's profession. In 1887, however, his family removed to London, where he devoted himself to literary work, and contributed to the magazines. Two volumes of poems published by him attracted considerable attention, and made clear to that contemptible portion of the public which cares for poetry, that a fresh singing voice, with a novel accent, was abroad in the land. The curious strain of mysticism running through Mr. Yeats' character now became more apparent, for it had been evidenced already in his verse. He devoted himself to an elaborate study of Blake—the poet-artist whom we consider sane or mad according to the measure of our sympathy with his philosophy. He spent some considerable time in Paris, frequenting the company of Sar

Peladan, that famous novelist and spiritualist —mage or charlatan, as you will—for the study of the magical tradition, and in the hopes of raising ghosts. The results of these experiments and speculations he set forth in books of essays which are not always certain of the sympathy of those who are amongst the most enthusiastic admirers of his genius. Mr. Yeats returned to Ireland and threw himself whole-heartedly into the daylight affairs of a tangible world. He assisted in the foundation of the National Literary Society and of the Irish Literary Society of London. "We are preparing likely enough," he said, "for a new Irish literary movement that will show itself in the first lull in politics." Awaiting that lull he stood upon Nationalist platforms and proved the courage of his political opinions. In company with Lady Gregory he collected folk-tales from the mouth of peasants, and conned the legends she was to incorporate later in books he loves so well. Then an interest developed which was destined to prove a veritable Aaron's rod amongst the wands of the enchanters. The Irish National Theatre Society was founded, and quickly swallowed all the other pursuits he had engaged in so long.

Even poetry—his real bride—had to give way to the imperious new mistress. The volumes grew smaller, and the gap between them increasingly wide. Doubtless a larger public is interested in the drama than in poetry; but the minority are not comforted, and fear that Mr. Yeats is bestowing silver where his gifts might be gold. But he refuses to be turned from his course.

The reasons for Mr. Yeats' interest in the theatre are perfectly clear. A dislike of the commercial drama, and a conviction that the modern play is choked under idle trappings and accessories, are not peculiar to Ireland, and indeed are generally shared. His desire to see the Irish stage reflect the legends and daily life of its country is one, also, that every patriot will receive with respect. The true trouble is that Mr. Yeats' talent is not essentially dramatic. I would suggest that his discovery of Synge in a Paris attic near the Luxembourg Gardens remains his most valuable contribution to the service of the drama. Mr. Yeats has placed many of his own plays upon the boards, and "The Countess Cathleen" shares the distinction, in common with "The Playboy of the Western World," of very nearly

provoking a riot. I doubt whether any competent critic would maintain that Mr. Yeats' plays are completely successful as dramatic experiments—interesting certainly, but scarcely successful. The one possible exception—and it is a significant exception— is "Cathleen ni Hoolihan." The Poor Old Woman's lamentation over the loss of her four beautiful green fields, her great central speech, and the boy's description of her as a young girl with the walk of a queen, undoubtedly go to the heart; but how much of the effect is due to a political conception is difficult to determine. It is certain that could lovely poetry and musical periods constitute a play, these efforts would be the greatest dramas of our time. Neither has Mr. Yeats been served amiss by the performers who essayed his characters and spoke his words. Actors of the highest distinction have played these parts, and London has been privileged to enjoy the consummate performance of Miss Sara Allgood as The Poor Old Woman, and of Mrs. Patrick Campbell as Deirdre, in the drama of that name. The fact seems to be that the fairy tales and Celtic dreams beloved of the poet are too remote and far from a popular audience. It is indeed a dream-heavy

land in which we wander for a dream-heavy hour. The lines are too lyrical for drama, and do not really carry across the footlights. They sound sweeter and sing more tunably in the study. Above all, when the drama, which depends upon an immediate appeal, is made the vehicle of such a dim and paralysing mysticism as informs, for instance, "The Shadowy Waters," it is no wonder that the average sensual man turns impatiently to a simpler and a coarser fare.

The genius of Mr. Yeats moves more easily through the narrative poems he has founded on legends derived from Gaelic sources. Thanks to the devoted labours of a band of modern scholars, Celtic mythology and folk-tale are opened up to English readers; and whilst all is interesting, much is even curiously beautiful. The early legends of the Irish Celt are full of a haunting charm, and of a melancholy quite their own. He has embodied in Cuchulain his conception of man as hero, akin in spirit to the Greek idea of Hercules. He has produced in "Deirdre" one of the half-dozen great love stories of the world. He has created in her person a heroine who very nearly realizes the six graces of womanhood representing

the Celtic ideal—the gifts of beauty, of singing, of sweet speech and of needlework, the gift of counsel, and the gift of chastity. At times, indeed, a strange ironical merriment breaks across his dreaminess; such, for instance, as the inextinguishable laughter of the heroes at Finn's return, with Grania—that errant wife—leaning lovingly upon his neck. It is odd that William Morris cared less for the Irish mythology than for any other with which he was acquainted. Possibly the stories were too lyrical, romantic, and dreamy for his mature taste, which as he grew older turned more and more to the sombre and dramatic temper of the Norse. These very qualities endear them to Yeats, who, far more than the poet who applied the phrase to himself, is a dreamer of dreams. "We Irish should keep these personages much in our hearts, for they lived in the places where we ride and go marketing, and sometimes they have met one another on the hills that cast their shadows upon our doors at evening. If we will but tell these stories to our children the land will begin again to be a Holy Land, as it was before men gave their hearts to Greece and Rome and Judea. When I was a child I had only to climb the hill behind the

house to see long, blue, ragged hills flowing along the southern horizon. What beauty was lost to me, what depth of emotion is still perhaps lacking in me, because nobody told me, not even the merchant captains who knew everything, that Cruachan of the Enchantments lay behind those long, blue, ragged hills ! "

Amongst the most charming of these narratives are the " Death of Cuhoollin " and " Baile and Aillinn." These poems are told in rhymed couplets, and in a fluent and coloured verse very personal to their writer. The first relates the story of the combat between Cuhoollin and his unrecognized son Finmole, in which the lad is slain. In death the boy reveals his secret, and Cuhoollin, driven mad by remorse, is drowned fighting the incoming tide. It is a story that has blown like thistledown about the four winds. It is the Persian legend of Sohrab and Rustum, and is to be met with in the mediæval romances of Marie de France under the title of the " Lay of Milon." The story of " Baile and Aillinn " is very delicate, and is narrated with an elusive and sidelong grace which adds to the charm. The argument is simple. Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love,

wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken, and they died. These narratives, together always with the memorable "Wanderings of Usheen," represent Mr. Yeats' gift of story-telling at its best. The "Wanderings of Usheen" was published in 1889, but in the revised version it remains yet its author's most characteristic piece of story-telling. The poem in its present form is undoubtedly a finer work than the original sketch, and this is saying much. Mr. Yeats is not always so happy in emendation, and painful experience has taught us to mistrust his zeal in gilding gold and painting the lily. The "Wanderings of Usheen" is founded upon the Irish dialogues of St. Patrick and Usheen, and is related by the Fenian hero to the Christian bishop in the first person. It tells how he

Found on the dove-grey edge of the sea
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
On a horse with a bridle of findrinny ;
And like a sunset were her lips,
A stormy sunset on doomed ships ;
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,

But down to her feet white vesture flowed,
And with the glimmering crimson glowed
Of many a figured embroidery;
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell
That wavered like the summer streams,
As her soft bosom rose and fell.

This lady was Neave, a princess of faery. She cast the spell of her beauty and her love upon the hero, and carried him across the sea, to the Kingdom of Aengus, the Land of Unfading Youth. Here the Fenian spent a hundred years in softness and delight. At the end of that century—which passed swiftly as a watch—Usheen came upon the broken staff of a warrior's spear. The weapon brought back memories of his comrades and their wars, and he grew dissatisfied with his ease. To keep him at her side Neave carried her mortal hero to the Island of Victories, where for another hundred years he fought and slew, again and again, an unsubduable demon. In the pauses of the ceaseless combat Usheen ate and drank, and so maintained an endless feast, an endless war. On this merry life broke in the disturbing thought of Finn, his white-haired king. Finding memory to be vital as the deathless demon,

Neave next lured her lover to the Island of Forgetfulness. For another century he lived content, till when the three hundred years of his exile were accomplished he was possessed by desire to see his home. "Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened in the gates of his heart." Usheen returned to Ireland, a creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle never dry on his beard. The Ireland he left had passed away. His comrades were long since dead. The very ideals of the land had changed, and Patrick the bishop, with his crozier, assured him that the Fenian heroes were tossing on the flaming pavement of Hell. Usheen, broken with pain and with years, was too old to change with the times. He threw away the rosary of small stones the saint had given him, and elected to join the Fenians, whether in the flames or at feast.

This bald summary does not do justice—indeed is flagrantly unfair—to a most charming story. The "Wanderings of Usheen" is certainly one of the finest narratives of our time. The handling of the contrasted metres, the various music, and the rich colouring are worthy of the highest praise. The closing scene between the cleric and the hero, too, is essentially dramatic,

far more so indeed than Mr. Yeats' more formal efforts. The story is worthy of a place amongst the dreams composing the "Earthly Paradise," to one of which—the legend of Ogier the Dane —it bears some resemblance. But "Usheen" has qualities of beauty that are absent even from the perfect tales of William Morris.

It would seem unlikely that Mr. Yeats could do better work than these narratives, were not his lyrics in evidence. Undoubtedly these lyrical writings are the fine flower of his gift. Dr. Johnson, in his breezy fashion, once described claret as the drink for boys, port for men, and brandy for heroes. It is easy to determine which are the claret, the port, and the brandy respectively of Mr. Yeats' cellar. I do not suggest that the "brandy" is of a very ardent or fiery quality. The lyrics are as Celtic as the dramas and the romances, and to the full as dreamy. The love poetry, for example, is beautiful, but vague and dim. Had we not Mr. Moore's emphatic assurance it would appear impossible to believe that the poet wrote such poems under the ecstasy of love, or that they were addressed to a woman of warm flesh and running blood. Like Raphael's Madonnas they seem rather to derive from

a certain idea in the mind. There is more passion in the verses that record his following after " the red-rose-bordered hem " of Ireland's robe, than in any rhyme he has dedicated to a mortal maid. All that Mr. Yeats knows of melody and music and colour he has put into his lyrics. None but those who refuse to see beauty except in precise and definite shape, can be indifferent to their vague loveliness of outline, or to the mystery that informs these songs. If at times the feet seem to halt, we must not be deceived. It is the very artfulness of simplicity, and the hesitation, the " stammer," is contrived deliberately to increase the total effect. Mr. Yeats—like Mr. Robert Bridges—is a scholar, and indulges in learned experiments. These are, or should be, the joy of the amateur or the aspirant, on the one condition that he admires, but refrains from imitation. In another fashion, too, this scholarly poet is a snare for the unwary. He is a symbolist, which is to say, in his own words, that he endeavours to catch some high impalpable mood in a net of obscure images. The obscurity at which Yeats hints is very pronounced, not to say Cimmerian. A gloss to many poems is absolutely necessary. The

"Wind among the Reeds" is a volume of some 108 pages. Of these but 62 are poetry, and the rest of the handful of a book is occupied by a bewildering paraphernalia of notes; an intolerable deal of sack with but a ha'p'orth of bread. There are passages in these poems so crudely and aggressively symbolist as to set the teeth on edge. No parochial patriotism can succeed in making poetry of "the boar without bristles" or "the valley of the black pig"; and as for the notes they simply darken counsel with their fantastic talk of "the magical tradition." Will any reader with an instinct for commentary care to decipher the following hieroglyphics? They come from "The Happy Townland," a poem included in "The Seven Woods."

Michael will unhook his trumpet
From a bough overhead,
And blow a little noise
When the supper has been spread.
Gabriel will come from the water
With a fish tail, and talk
Of wonders that have happened
On wet roads where men walk,
And lift up an old horn

Of hammered silver, and drink
Till he has fallen asleep
Upon the starry brink.

It is all very strange and perplexing; but perhaps—as Lamb observed of Coleridge's metaphysic—it is only his fun. I do not desire to conclude these remarks on Mr. Yeats' lyrics in a tone of remonstrance, however gentle. It is more pleasant and easy to praise. For sheer love of the lovely words quotation may be permitted of one of the happiest lyrics from "The Wind among the Reeds." It is of the poet's best, which means that it is excelled by no singer of our time, save, possibly, by Mr. Yeats himself.

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,

With the earth and the sky and the water remade
like a casket of gold,
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a
rose in the deeps of my heart.

Mr. Yeats has essayed various forms of poetry—the dramatic, the narrative, the lyrical. Running through play and story and lyric alike is the golden cord of mysticism. Mysticism furnishes the cement binding the various phases of his talent together; it is almost the hall-mark proving the poem to be genuinely of his workmanship. This mysticism which is implicit in the poems becomes explicit and definite in certain books of prose, but with these we are not immediately concerned in this paper. Mysticism is less a creed than an attitude of mind, a state of the soul. It is not peculiar to any religion, nor for the matter of that is it incompatible, apparently, with the very minimum of orthodox belief. The Eastern ascetic, smeared with ashes and clad in his saffron robe, seeks to attain Nirvana by the path of mysticism. The modern Christian mystic looks upon Nature, and recognizes that all the natural phenomena about him is really due to the office and ministry of

angels. "Every beautiful prospect, every ray of light and heat is, as it were, the skirts of their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God." The mediæval mystic gazed into her own soul, and found all Heaven reflected there as in a pool of clear water. She saw Majesty upon His throne, with the Holy Mother standing with uncovered breasts on God's left hand, and Christ on the right, showing His still open wounds; and she adds that so long as sin endures on earth so long will those wounds remain open and bleeding, though painless; but that after the Day of Judgment they will heal, and it will be as though there were rose leaves instead of wounds. Mr. Yeats has no such orthodox creed to be a lantern to his steps. He is the less fortunate, for the believer, at the worst, has company in his wanderings, which is better than being solitary in error. The Christian mystic has a centre from whence to proceed, and on which to rally; right or wrong we know where he stands; he is a figure with a background; a soldier armed on a system, and from a tested armoury. In a word, he is logical and complete. Mr. Yeats' faith according to "Evelyn Innes" is very comprehensive. There he is introduced as

a hater of materialism, and as a believer in all mythologies. I remember reading a story of a man who was anxious to know the precise white truth of things. This dreamer had a vision, in which he saw a great rose window, gorgeous in colour, composed of many circles, all filled with little figures representing the philosophers, the teachers, the poets, and the scientists of the world. A scroll issued from every mouth, and on each scroll was inscribed "And *this* is Truth." Presently the rose window began to turn like a wheel before his eyes. It whirled faster and faster, till as the inquirer gazed, the glorious colours became merged in one pure disk of white. Truth is the sum of all our human contradictions. I have sometimes wondered if the name of this dreamer was William Butler Yeats.

Mr. Yeats' mysticism is of a personal character, and I approach the subject with some diffidence. He believes, apparently, in a collective body of feeling, outside ourselves, which may represent the total experience of the race. Quietism will bring us into closer relation with this nucleus of feeling and emotion, and the poet speaks willingly of visions coming from that source, and of dreams which he

afterwards wrote down in verse. Vision and dream, indeed, are short cuts and open doors to the dim kingdom he loves. A deep-seated tendency to quietism frequently enough has the effect of discouraging action and also speech. It may even admit no necessary connexion between the inner life and the accepted moralities of the day. Mr. Yeats is no exception. The activities of the body and all human energies seem slight things in comparison to the vitality of the soul. He speaks therefore with a certain contempt of "dusty deeds"; and in "The Blessed" proclaims that "the blessedest soul in the world went nodding a drunken head." The old sea rover of "The Shadowy Waters," and Dectora the captive woman who loved him, put both love and life aside with a measure of scorn. "As to living, our servants will do that for us." Nature herself has to be re-created in the heart before the stars can shine, the winds blow, and the spices flow forth for this fastidious visionary, as may be seen by reference to "The Two Trees," one of the most mystical of his poems. I do not think myself "The Two Trees" to be amongst the most haunting and perfect of Mr. Yeats' lyrics. Better judges

than the present writer appreciate it more highly than he is able to do. There is no doubt, however, that the substance and message of the poem are vitalized by the sincerest conviction. It is of peculiar authority to those who would learn something of the mystic's creed. To its author, as to all visionaries, the world is only a little dry dust, barren of nourishment to the soul. The illusions about us, which the unwary mistake for realities, are but fatal images seen in a magic mirror. The tree of life bears but blackened leaves, and its roots are hidden deep in snow. Through its broken branches fly the ravens of thought, watching the disasters that befall the spirit of man. The only way of escape is to avert the eyes from all this ugly ruin. The kingdom of God is within you. Make no effort to right wrong, or to set the crooked straight. Look into your own heart, and build the world anew according to your conception and your dream.

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.

The changing colours of its fruit
Have dowered the stars with merry light;
The surety of its hidden root
Has planted quiet in the night;
The shaking of its leafy head
Has given the waves their melody,
And made my lips and music wed,
Murmuring a wizard song for thee.
There, through bewildered branches go
Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,
Tossing and tossing to and fro
The flaming circle of our life.
When looking on their shaken hair,
And dreaming how they dance and dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care:
Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.

Speculations such as some of those set out in the preceding pages may be interesting and harmless enough to the thinker who holds his nature firmly on the curb, but to the ignorant they are death. They end in sheer nihilism, and in paralysis of the whole body, political and social. It is fortunate that speakers of the vulgar tongue are not likely to be attracted by such doctrines. Mr. Yeats himself, we are grateful to notice, does not

illustrate his every precept. His life has been one of ceaseless and beneficent activity, and his speech overflows through quite a number of books. But perhaps these are reproaches which it is not fair to level at this one particular phase of mysticism. Very possibly some such dangers are common to all mysticisms, and form the seamy side of Buddhist and Christian mystic speculations as well as of the esoteric imaginings of Mr. Yeats.

It is not likely that poems teaching such a philosophy will ever be popular. Neither is it probable that Mr. Yeats will rank amongst the divinest poets of our speech. His gift is not rich, nor deep, nor various enough for such supreme honour as this. It is sufficient distinction that of all the writers of our day he is the most essentially poetic, and best illustrates modern verse at its farthest remove from prose.

TWO CHRISTIAN POETS CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI AND PAUL VERLAINE

I.

THE year 1894 should have been addressed to this country in a black-edged envelope, and it is a fortunate thing that it came to an end on December 31. Had it lasted much longer English letters would have become blank as a sheet of fresh note-paper. That unlucky year must bear the heavy responsibility of taking from amongst us a historian like Froude, an essayist like Pater, a novelist such as Robert Louis Stevenson, and a poetess of the value of Christina Rossetti. It is idle to pretend that literature did not reel under their loss. In one of the most wonderful of Victor Hugo's romances a very pretty girl elects to lose certain of her teeth, and with them loses all her attractiveness. The difference between January, 1894, and January, 1895,

was much the difference in Fantine's face before and after her visit to the dentist. We must take what consolation we may from the thought that the supreme work of which most of these writers were capable had been accomplished. Christina Rossetti certainly would have pressed this application to herself. She was sixty-four years of age, and although she died with her singing robes upon her, it was her unalterable conviction that song is the prerogative of youth and passes with the spring.

Christina Georgina Rossetti was born in December, 1830, the youngest child of an Italian refugee and of a mother who was half Italian and half English by blood. Four children were born of this marriage, and all four are honourably esteemed in connexion with literature. The eldest, Maria Francesca, was the author of "A Shadow of Dante"; she afterwards entered an Anglican sisterhood. Dante Gabriel became the famous artist and poet, a man of mystery, and one of the most overwhelming personalities of his day. William Michael, an excellent student and critic, devoted his life to very valuable and informing studies of the more prominent members of his family and their friends. Christina, herself, was very

near to being the most charming lyric writer of our time. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and who can say from what source this remarkable diversity of gifts and graces derived! Christina Rossetti, like all her family, matured early. The atmosphere of her home was something of an intellectual and artistic forcing-house. At seventeen she had written and privately printed a little volume of poems. Just out of her teens she was contributing to the *Germ* a haunting series of lyrics, which exhibit her style absolutely matured in its fresh individuality; and of these early lyrics one—or possibly two—represents her genius at its sweetest and best. However, her successive volumes of poems, although to the popular taste, did not succeed to the full measure of their deserts. This was no blame to Dante Rossetti, whose eminent engineering talents were always at his sister's service. Friends, influential and highly placed, seemed to begrudge her gifts, and almost to discourage their exercise, in case they might distract attention from the work of her more celebrated brother. Books pouring forth from members of the same family suggest to a haphazard public the methods of a factory,

rather than those of the study. Troubles of all sorts closed in upon her. She suffered from private griefs and from bodily infirmities. A disfiguring complaint of the eyes injured her personal appearance. Miss Rossetti withdrew more and more into herself. She spent her days in loving service to an aged mother. Absorbed in religious exercises and in the composition of devotional books, she scarcely left her house, except to attend the services of the Church to which she so whole-heartedly belonged. Her poems were written on her dressing-table, or on the corner of her washstand. At length an incurable internal disease developed, and after a long illness, patiently borne, this great poetess and Anglican saint attained her rest on December 29, 1894.

Poetess and saint—these are the two keynotes of Christina Rossetti's character. Saints are not a particularly numerous body in this rough work-a-day world of ours, and England—once upon a time called the Isle of Saints—is not more favoured than the rest of Christendom. With whatever illusions we start our life's journey, most of us soon give up any thought of distinguishing ourselves upon the

paths of virtue. We are thankful if at the end of the dusty road we have still some rags of honour clinging about us, like tattered flags. Christina Rossetti shone like a good deed in this naughty world, and was one of those devout women who are the adornments of their Church. If, however, saints are few and far between, poetesses have nearly reached the vanishing point. For the purposes of English literature they may be counted easily upon the fingers of one hand, and not exhaust the tale. No gift is more common to their sex than the knack of facile rhyme ; no grace seems more tantalizingly beyond its reach than the incommunicable birthright of poetry. I do not say that Miss Rossetti was always equal to her best self, nor that her garland consisted only of roses. But when every deduction is made, and after hearing all the devil's advocate may urge, she remains easily one of the two most distinguished poetesses of the Victorian era. Since, then, to be either saint or poet is enough for glory, it is Christina Rossetti's peculiar, and nearly unique, distinction to combine the double honour in a single person. There is little doubt which of these two graces she would most have coveted—

had it ever occurred to her humility that she might be of the saints. Poetry was only an incident—a daily practice—of her years, but the religious life was her very breath. Devotional works were her constant companions; the Bible (that Book of the Consolation of Humanity), the "Imitation," St. Augustine's "Confessions," and Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" were, in particular, her intimate mainstay. When to an overstrained conscience it seemed possible that any of her poems might lead a weaker brother to offend, that fantastic conception caused the deletion of the doubtful portion from her books. Theatres she ceased to attend because of their supposed effect on the characters of the performers, and chess she refused to play because she was too keen upon winning. During the course of her life two men asked for the honour to be called her husband. Both were suitable proposals, and each in turn would have been accepted save for religious scruples. The friend of her youth was a Roman Catholic, and therefore believed too much; the friend of her womanhood had no sufficiently definite creed, and so believed too little. She contented herself with loving the latter to her dying day. It is sad to gather

that this life of unrelaxing effort and worship brought Miss Rossetti neither happiness in this world nor confidence in her election for the next. Whilst the average indifferent man faces the future with a cheerful serenity, this Anglican saint almost feared to pass to that country where in truth she had always dwelt.

Dante Rossetti once remarked that all poetry should be "amusing," and this in the obvious meaning of the word his sister's work emphatically is not. Many of her poems are, in fact, extremely dull, and you have to cross weary stretches of sand to reach the oasis with its fountain and its palms. Clearly she did not know her good work from her bad, and it is unlikely that posterity will read her as a whole. Then, too, the reading public has an incurable taste for cheerfulness, and cheerfulness does not break in very frequently here. Without shutting our eyes to its brighter portions—such, for instance, as the triumphant "Birthday"—her poetry is the revelation of one who saw habitually "gold tarnished, and the grey above the green." Probably the tendency to melancholy was constitutional, but many streams must have swelled

the main current before she could have written—

I hope, indeed, but hope itself is fear
Viewed on the sunny side.

Again, should a poet write stories in verse, that portion is sure of the first attention of his readers. The eternal child in all of us cries out for a tale. Christina Rossetti incidentally composed narratives in rhyme; essentially she was a lyric poet. The tales have both imagination and movement, but they do not deal quite frankly with us. Read as pure fantasy they are delightful, but behind their mufflers we seem to spy a beard. There is a general impression, for example, that the simple-seeming story of "Goblin Market" is really a parable of redemption through a sister's love, and that "The Prince's Progress" is not a love tale, as it pretends, but is rather an allegory of one who was tempted, and who served strange masters, and at last was utterly overthrown. The impression doubtless is inaccurate, for in a letter addressed to the present writer Christina Rossetti said herself, "I must own that 'Goblin Market' and the 'Prince's Progress' were written without

any allegorical meaning, although I see that such may be read into both; nor are you the first who has so interpreted 'Goblin Market.'" But the mischief is done. As Keats remarked long ago, poetry should not come to us obtrusively with its hand in its breeches' pocket, and the public has no passion for allegories.

Christina Rossetti's fame must be based ultimately upon her lyrics and sonnets; her true gift was the grace of song. Lyrical writing is the revelation of a mood, or emotion, in one pure jet of music. To be frankly oneself, to reveal personality without false shame or modesty, is difficult enough in a man. For a woman it is more than difficult, it is next door to impossible. To show in naked words the naked heart, demands a courage that verges on the heroic. That is why, when a woman writes lyrics, she sings, frequently enough, through the mask of a man. Christina Rossetti made no such compromise. She dared to be herself. She elected, in the main, to make the lyric the expression of her spiritual life. Since she was by conviction an adherent of the Church of England, it follows that these lyrics cannot be mistaken for the work of a member of any other religious body.

Anglicanism always has been a literary religion, founded on the dignity and reserve of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. It is therefore upon the more austere side of Christianity that the poetess habitually dwells. Her preference is for the fast rather than the festival. Occasionally "A Christmas Carol" may rise to her lips, but by choice she broods upon "Advent," or "Good Friday," or "The Three Enemies." The shadow of the grave, the apostolic fear lest the singer herself should be a castaway, rests broadly upon these poems, and were a motto desired by way of summary to her verse it might almost be found in the words of the "Religio Medici": "For the world I count it not an Inn but an Hospital, and a place not to live but to die in." How often must the sentences inscribed on Akbar's monument have risen in her mind: "Said Jesus (on Whom be peace) this world is a bridge. Pass over it, but do not build thereon. He who asks for an hour asks for eternity." No praise of mine can do justice to Miss Rossetti's lyrics, to their fervent melody, to their lovely phrasing, and to the passion of the emotion they express. They rank with their peers, immediately after the supreme masterpieces

of the century that is gone. These songs are the revelation of a beautiful personality, both in its spiritual and—in a less degree—its earthly relationships. I do not say that each is a perfect work of art. At times the central fire has not burnt all the slag away. Swinburne, coming after her, took one or two of her original melodies, just to show of what they were capable in the hands of an unrivalled virtuoso. Something of the same kind, one day, will be done to the remarkable poems with which Mr. Thomas Hardy occupies his illustrious evening. Possibly it is the fact that "Amor Mundi" was my first introduction to all this gift of song which makes me regard it with peculiar pleasure. At least its quotation may be permitted me, in proof of the inadequacy of any praise.

"*O where are you going with your love-locks flowing,*
On the west wind blowing along this valley track?"
"*The downhill path is easy, come with me an it please ye,*
We shall escape the uphill by never turning back."

So they two went together in glowing August weather,
The honey-breathing heather lay to their left and right;
And dear she was to dote on, her swift feet seemed to float on
The air like soft twin pigeons, too sportive to alight.

* * * *

"*Oh, what is that glides quickly where velvet flowers grow thickly,*
Their scent comes rich and sickly?" "*A scaled and hooded worm.*"
"*Oh, what's that in the hollow, so pale I quake to follow?*"
"*Oh, that's a thin dead body which waits the eternal term.*"

"*Turn again, O my sweetest—turn again, false and fleetest:*
This beaten way thou beatest, I fear is hell's own track."
"*Nay, too steep for hill mounting; nay, too late for cost counting;*
This downhill path is easy, but there's no turning back."

II.

At the very time Christina Rossetti was writing the most beautiful devotional poetry of her country, a voice could be heard across the Channel equally urgent and true. The religious poems of Paul Verlaine are as poignant as the lyrics of the English poetess, and capable judges assert that in their fashion they are excelled by none in the French language. Beyond their common faith and their gift of devotional song, the two writers had absolutely no meeting-ground. Indeed, had some ironic dramatist desired to depict a merry and tragic contrast of similar gifts, exhibited through utterly dissimilar characters, he could scarcely have gone beyond placing Christina Rossetti and Paul Verlaine—those two Christian poets—upon the stage at one and the same moment. One was truly the life hidden with Christ in God. Of the other life the less said the better, were it not that the "legend" is too picturesque to be easily forgotten. Verlaine's prototype is not Christina Rossetti, but rather Francis Villon. The more lurid misdeeds of that mediæval singer are largely discounted by the latest criticism. The shock-

ing confessions of the "Testaments" are regarded somewhat as a playful exercise of the imaginative faculty, and I, for one, am anxious to agree, although with doubt and mental reservation. Villon was a Bohemian, a jail-bird, an associate of loose women, all that was bad; only it happened that this thoroughly undesirable person chanced to be the greatest poet of his day. Possibly, after an interval of four hundred years, Fate, in playing her game of hazard, dealt out much the same combination of cards upon the table.

Paul Verlaine was born in Metz in 1844, the son of a French army officer—who died at the time the poet came of age—and of an over-fond Flemish mother. On leaving school with a degree, he obtained a clerkship in connexion with the municipality of Paris, and devoted all the time he could abstract from his duties to the composition of verses. He was not the only Frenchman to cultivate literature whilst in public employment. Coppée, Maupassant, and Huysmans were all in Government or municipal offices, and many a story and many a novel were written on official paper and in office hours. For some obscure reason singing birds, both in England and France,

are frequently caged in the various departments of the Civil Service. At intervals Verlaine published slender volumes of verses, of a singular music, which attracted some attention. One of these, "La Bonne Chanson," was the outcome of his marriage. This did not prove permanently successful, for he did not shine in the rôle of a married man. Then Verlaine disappeared from Paris and his customary haunts for years. During a portion of that period he was in prison in Belgium for attempted homicide. He also essayed the moral instruction of youth in an English school. When Verlaine returned to Paris he was Bohemian through and through. His associates were too frequently men of little character and women of less. He lived in a squalid lodging in a low district. How he lived at all was a mystery, but I suppose it was partly by the sale of his poems and partly on charity. When sick he sought the hospital, where—his story and his gifts being known—he was allowed to remain until minded to discharge himself as cured. At times, decently clothed and in clean linen, he was taken by his best friends to London or Brussels, there to lecture before distinguished audiences; but

always he went back to the old dreary life. Nothing could be done to raise him from his surroundings; and in the same manner as he had chosen to live, so he died at the age of fifty-two years. This, or something like this, is the lamentable "legend" of one of the truest poets of our time.

There was little enough in common between Christina Rossetti and Paul Verlaine, between the saintly recluse and the rolling stone of dubious paths; nothing, indeed, but their faith and the divine gift of song. Their inspiration was never more manifest than when exercised upon lyrics dealing with the spiritual life. It mattered little then that the one wrote upon her dressing-table, and the other upon the marble slab of some crowded café. It mattered less that to the undiscerning eye one was a prim, silent lady, dressed in an antiquated black gown, and the other a drunken Socrates without philosophy and without self-control. In each case the unpromising exterior hid the same excellent gift. The divine treasure surely was there, manifestly shining through the earthen vessel. After all it is of small concern whether the chalice from which we drink the wine is of gold or clay.

If the gem be priceless, why give a thought to the casket! The religious poems of Christina Rossetti and Paul Verlaine are gold thrice refined. They derive all their sweetness from their celestial vintage. In them will be found the most beautiful religious poetry of the nineteenth century, the most piercing and poignant expression of the spiritual life in modern verse. On that life they gladly dwelt, for it is the essential and elemental note of their work. "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love."

Verlaine's poetry was not concerned exclusively with devotional subjects. Indeed, that devotional poetry is largely to be found in two later volumes, entitled respectively "Sagesse" and "Amour." His earlier verses dealt with quite other material. They contain realistic descriptions of English and Belgian life and landscape. They are occupied with gallant and Watteau-like scenes of an enigmatic perversity; there are love poems addressed to mistress and wife, and occasional verses of an intimate character—such, for

instance, as that justly celebrated poem (included in "Sagesse") recording the remorse of the prisoner as he considers his spoiled and wasted youth. These writings doubtless have many faults. They were not the work of a scholar, even in his mother tongue. At times they are difficult to construe, so difficult that one is tempted to wish the task impossible. But at least they are the songs of a reed through which all winds blew to music, to use the phrase Tennyson applied to Swinburne. Verlaine's poems are of a strange and haunting melody, which till then had been unheard in French verse. At times there is a catch in the accent, very arresting to the ear. He seems to sing false almost deliberately, with something of the "stammer" the English reader finds in Yeats. It was no wonder that youthful symbolists grouped themselves about his flag. They had found a leader whose words suggested more than they actually expressed, and whose music induced emotions beyond the notes of which it was composed.

When we come to the volume entitled "Sagesse," nothing of the old Verlaine remains, except the music. The subjects are altogether changed. "Sagesse" is a book

of religious verses, laying bare with the utmost directness and simplicity the spiritual life of its writer. It is essentially the work of a Christian poet, who is also a Catholic. The reasons which have induced men to become converts to that venerable faith are various and cogent. Newman approached it by way of a series of propositions as logical as Euclid. Huysmans, again, by way of a series of disgusts. I doubt whether in the strict sense of the word there was need for Verlaine to be converted at all. He had never lost his faith. It was simply mislaid. When the deplorable circumstances of his life drove him in upon himself, he sought refuge in the old consolations which for the time he had neglected. Verlaine was neither scholar nor philosopher; he was only a poet. He turned with proud disdain from the anxious questionings of his time. He desired to have been born in the great days of Louis the Fourteenth, when France was happy in the shadow of Madame de Maintenon's linen coif, when doctors served the Mass and were content to assist in the offices of the Church. But, no, the fastidious dreamer recalls with horror that the seventeenth century was Gallican and Jansenist. It was tainted

with heresy, with Pascal, and with the dissenters of Port Royal. One only period sufficed his needs—the Middle Ages, monstrous and delicate (to use his own inimitable phrase), when a king walked barefoot through the Paris streets, bearing the crown of thorns, and the marvel of Chartres Cathedral rose, not to music, but to prayer. Mysticism—the wonderful Christian mysticism—is implicit in every poem. All earth is a parable and a miracle as well. The harvest is plenteous, not only to provide bread for man, but also the wafer for the Host. The vintage is red to make merry men's heart; yes, but rather to brim the chalice with His Wine. Surely it is not for nothing that Chartres stands amidst the granary of France, and Rheims rises like a benediction above her vines. Equally implicit is Verlaine's conception of "two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings," himself and his Creator, in the world. To that Creator the stricken soul approaches in unrhymed verses of astonishing simplicity and straightforwardness. Thoughts of such striking beauty escape him, that they seem, it has been suggested, as if strays from the "Imitation." Penitential psalms, devout prayers, acts of

contrition, canticles to the Virgin, follow one upon the other. Where all is beautiful, perhaps may be singled out as especially beautiful and affecting a series of sonnets composed in the form of a dialogue between the soul and God. It is a daring dramatic experiment, completely successful. That, indeed, is its only justification. The sequence commences with an appeal by Christ for the love of His "lamentable friend," and with a recapitulation of how He had loved the sinner to the death. It continues with the plea of the penitent that because of his frailty he dare not love in return. Then with the insistence of the "Hound of Heaven," Christ develops the theme in sonnet after sonnet—the necessity of love, the path by which it may be attained, through confession, by means of Holy Communion, to peace of heart and final redemption. And the whole concludes with its acceptance by the penitent in hysteria, and ecstasy and fear. It is impossible to doubt that the writer's emotion is genuine. The metal rings absolutely true. In Verlaine's religious poetry there is none of the pose of neo-Catholicism, so common in our day. There is nothing derived simply from an æsthetic appreciation of incense and

ritual and art needlework. The craftsmanship is that of a great poet, but the message is that of the convinced and persuaded Christian.

III.

Two Christian poets. So far as Christina Rossetti is concerned no one would dream of denying her the ascription. Her life and her life's work are absolutely of a piece. From the tree you would prophesy with certainty the fruit which, as a fact, hangs so thickly on the branches. The case of Paul Verlaine is different, and possibly may not be accepted without hesitation. It is not very easy to determine the species of a tree which, in its season, put forth such various fruits. At times the burthen was wholesome; at others Dead Sea apples. Occasionally by a curious and deliberate perversity the good fruit and the bad grew side by side upon the self-same bough. By their fruit ye shall know them. In this essay I have kept my attention fixed upon the Christian aspect of Verlaine's work. To doubt its sincerity would be to strike at the root of criticism, and to destroy the very

canons of judgment. What Verlaine suffered from was the evil of the divided mind. As Anatole France remarked in the study of his lamentable friend, entitled "Gestas": "He has faith, simple, firm, childlike faith. It is works alone he is lacking in." But to discuss the relations between faith and works is to enter the thorniest path of religious controversy. By intellectual conviction Verlaine was a Christian, and the most permanent portion of his poetry witnesses to his belief. I consider him, therefore, a Christian poet. If his practice did not always square with his creed, which amongst us can cast the first stone!

In an Eastern apologue it is related that a crowd was once gathered about a dead dog lying in the gutter. One drew attention to the rope about his neck, concluding that he was a thief; another derided his torn and mangy hide; a third pointed out that he was only a worthless mongrel. But a certain Teacher—in Whom, as it chanced, Paul Verlaine believed—passing that way, stopped for a moment, and ere He proceeded, remarked softly, "Pearls are not equal to the whiteness of his teeth."

A CATHOLIC POET FRANCIS THOMPSON AND HIS LEGEND

THERE are many advantages for an artist in being the proprietor of a "legend." It is the equivalent—and more than the equivalent—of the romantic appearance, to those who know by the ear and not through the eye. It piques the curiosity of the crowd, and gives a factitious interest to things which otherwise would not attract its attention. The idler in the market may care nothing for the song, but he gapes readily enough upon the singer, especially should gossip be concerned with the privacies of the singer's life. Frequently enough he recognizes the performer to be a singer by reason of this noble or grotesque attitude, rather than by the thrilling voice. The "legend" may be lurid or tragic or squalid, but it has come to be demanded, and the poet frequently responds. The rôle of the blameless ratepayer is not for

him, however greatly he may yearn. The poet has much of the feminine in his character, and we all recognize how woman can flood the street with living copies of Burne-Jones or Beardsley, or whoever else may be the fashionable artist of the day. This predilection for interesting details is responsible for odd enthusiasms. Villon, for instance, is doubtless a great poet, very probably the typical French poet of the Middle Age. His poems are largely written in slang—thieves' slang of the fifteenth century, extremely difficult to read. But he was a student of the Paris University, who also stole ducks from the city moat. He robbed, he joined the company of an interesting guild of vagabonds, for whom archers looked about carefully with lanterns, he committed manslaughter, he rotted in prison, he sweated in fear of death. As a consequence his standing as a poet is well esteemed of many who, without the picturesque legend, would have been attracted but little by mediæval French verse. Again, take the singer who in modern times reproduced Villon's life with an overmuch fidelity. Doubtless Verlaine was a divine poet, but the divinity showed less in his daily life than in his songs. He is therefore a better

known figure in the market-place than certain excellent contemporaries who presented a more reputable and less disordered front. However, it is not necessary that the legend should be lurid to ensure attention. It is sufficient so it be romantic or mysterious or even squalid. Byron flaunted through Europe the pageant of his bleeding heart. The chatter about Harriet keeps Shelley's memory green. The love letters of John Keats and Robert Browning preserve their verses sweet. The romantic story of the burial by Rossetti of his manuscript poems in his wife's coffin, between her cheek and hair, was responsible for much of the public curiosity in that withdrawn and strange personality. It did not occur to us how deeply the exhumation of the body, and the subsequent publication of the poems, tarnished the beauty of the legend. We were young, and our eyes were touched with romantic illusion. And who can say what proportion of the popular success of the book of poems which most nearly approached, and perhaps actually rivalled, the success of Rossetti's, was owed to the story of the tragic and squalid life of its author? No concealment was made of the matter. The material was used for bold

advertisement, and for once poetry sold like a sporting novel, and was reviewed in the daily press at the length usually reserved for the latest musical comedy. Let there be no mistake. Francis Thompson's book was beautiful, and deserved all the success and the praise it received, and both were given in no grudging measure, even if not to the author's opinion of its value. But much of its popularity was due to quite other causes than the intrinsic merits of the contents. Poetry—beautiful poetry—Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyám," for example—has fallen dead at publication, and this simply because it elected to go without the meretricious allurement of the romantic legend. The British public—God bless it—has no love for poetry, and cheerfully passes it by, save for some purely adventitious attraction.

The true story of the life of Francis Thompson, with certain obvious reticences, has recently been given to the world by Mr. Everard Meynell. It is very fitting that the poet's biography should be written by a member of that family which alone made Thompson's life liveable, and whose generous and untiring charities ensured the production of all this

wealth of song. The one objection to Mr. Everard Meynell's book is that modesty would not permit him to thank his father and mother in the name of English letters for the treasure they have added to its store. The title-page of Francis Thompson's poems should really bear not his name only, but those of Wilfrid and Alice Meynell as well.

Francis Thompson was born at Preston in 1859, the son of a homœopathic doctor, who was a convert to Rome. This medical man had the unprofessional habit of baptizing those infants he assisted into the world. Later his son was to be reproached for his inability to keep theology out of the compass of his art. A devout child, he was intended for the priesthood, and sent to St. Cuthbert's College, Ushaw. At that time the college was not considered a particularly literary institution. Its motto was action rather than words. Now the school may boast Hearn and Thompson amongst its scholars, though their destinies were separated by wide seas, and still wider and deeper seas of thought. Thompson made little mark at class. He was observed for his comic verses, and for a practice of reading and copying poetry in the library when other boys were

at games. His superiors reported reluctantly, at the end of his course, that he had no vocation for the Church, and this decision they based on the grounds of indolence and nervousness. The child is indeed father of the man. These characteristics remained with Thompson to the end of his days. In the trembling hand of his last months he wrote out in big capitals on pages torn from exercise books, such texts as were calculated to frighten him into his clothes. "Thou wilt not lie abed when the last trump blows." "Thy sleep with the worms will be long enough," and so on. These he pinned to his wall, but they were ineffectual. The dying poet remained the very lad accused of unconquerable indolence at Ushaw thirty years before. His education at Ushaw, however, left a deep impress on both thought and poetry. Wise are those philosophers who would sacrifice all, so they might shape the child when his mind is malleable and enduring. Eton would have given Thompson his Latin, but his Liturgy was more important. His singing gown was a vestment, and he learnt its fashioning at college. One of the most liturgical and definitely Catholic of his poems, the "Assumpta Maria," was remembered from his schooldays

at St. Cuthbert's. "No Ushaw man need be told how eagerly all, both young and old, hailed the coming of May 1. For that day, in the Seminary was erected a colossal altar at the end of the ambulacrum nearest the belfry, fitted and adorned by loving zeal. Before this, after solemn procession from St. Aloysius' with lighted tapers, all assembled, professors and students, and sang a Marian hymn. In the college no less solemnity was observed. At a quarter past nine the whole house, from President downwards, assembled in the ante-chapel, before our favourite statue. A hymn, selected and practised with great care, was sung in alternate verses by the choir in harmony, and the whole house in unison. Singing Our Lady's Magnificat, we filed into St. Cuthbert's, and then, as in the Seminary, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed. For thirty-one days, excepting Sundays and holy days, this inspiring ceremonial took place—its memory can never be effaced."

Returning home from Ushaw about the age of eighteen years, for six more Thompson attended as a medical student at Owens College, Manchester. For a doctor he had fewer qualifications than for a priest. Indolent,

slovenly in dress—"he would even leave his father's reputable doorstep with untied laces dragging their length on the pavement past the windows of curious and critical neighbours" —indifferent to his profession, he neglected classes, and devoted the time so made his own to the reading of poetry in public libraries. At this time, too, during his early courses at Owens College, his mother, without any known cause or purpose, gave him a copy of De Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium Eater." A more deplorable present was never made by mother to son, and had its issue been foreseen she would have cut off her right hand rather than proffered the gift. Henceforth Thompson was in the snare of the fowler, and was destined to reproduce on earth the very tragedy of the great master of elaborated prose. So startling is the likeness, each to each, that it is less resemblance than plagiarism. Mr. Meynell's treatment of the results of the laudanum habit upon Thompson is frank, but scarcely frank enough. He deals simply and straightforwardly with the physical consequences of the indulgence: "On the one hand it staved off the assaults of tuberculosis; it gave him the wavering strength that made

life just possible for him, whether on the streets or through all those other distresses and discomforts that it was his character deeply to resent but not to remove by any normal courses ; if it could threaten physical degradation he was able by conquest to tower in moral and mental glory. It made doctoring or any sober course of life even more impractical than it was already rendered by native incapacities, and to his failure in such careers we owe his poetry. On the other hand, it dealt with him remorselessly as it dealt with Coleridge and all its consumers. It put him in such constant strife with his own conscience, that he had even to hide himself from himself. It killed in him the capacity for acknowledging those duties to his family and friends, which, had his heart not been in shackles, he would have owned with no ordinary ardour." But of the stringent efforts made by Thompson to break with the vice we learn little. Whether his recurrent visits to religious houses in later years, presumably for some such purpose, were really struggles of reclamation we are left in doubt. Above all the interaction of the drug habit upon his genius, the question as to whether it hindered or inspired, whether it

was in any way responsible for the poet's fear lest the divine gift of song had left him and that he was forsaken indeed—these are subjects, fraught with interest, of which Mr. Meynell must surely have much inner knowledge, and yet either deliberately passes by or else deals with as shortly as possible. Repeated failures made it clear to Thompson that any thought of a medical career must be abandoned. His knowledge of literature suggested to him joining the army like Coleridge, but the odd recruit failed in the business, just as he had failed in some other unpromising professions. In November 1885, at the age of twenty-six, he set off to London, with no hope in his heart, but with Blake and Æschylus in his pockets; not, like Whittington, to seek a fortune, but merely for the right to exist. Then for two years and six months was enacted beneath the astonished stars a tragedy of the London streets. A gentleman, a scholar, a devout and shrinking soul, a poet of genius, was in turn a bookseller's collector, a boot-black, a hawker of matches. His calling was literally a calling of cabs. He endured days and nights of human dereliction. He slept in arches and in common lodging-houses; he

haunted the Embankment, and in watches of the night marked the traffic of Jacob's ladder pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross. In such places Thompson learned the bitter knowledge he was later to put to such striking use when reviewing General Booth's "Darkest England." He knew at first hand, and not by hearsay, of a "life which is not a life; to which food is as the fuel of hunger; sleep, our common sleep, precious, costly and fallible, as water in a wilderness; in which men rob and women vend themselves—for fourpence." It was characteristic of the reticence of the man that Thompson made no effort to escape from his inferno. He kept away from the relatives he had in London, and did not trouble to collect the trifling allowance sent to a post-office by his father. He accepted kindness but from two persons during those tragic years. The one was an evangelical bootmaker, named McMaster, who embarked on a venturous friendship in Wardour Street with the inquiry—the resented inquiry—"Is your soul saved?" The other friend was a girl of the town, who, when the oldest profession in the world permitted, "gave out of her scant and pitiable opulence, consisting of a

room, warmth and food and a cab thereto." In that Chelsea shelter she was at once sister and mother to the waif beneath her roof. She protected him until he found help more potent than hers, and then disappeared, saying that she had always known him to be a genius, but that their friendship would be misunderstood. Try as he might, Thompson never succeeded in meeting that lady again.

Thompson's salvation was achieved, as it were, in his own despite; never was human derelict less anxious to be piloted into harbour. "His feet were in the gutter, but his thoughts were with the stars." He had pushed through the letter-box of *Merry England*—a Roman Catholic magazine, edited by Mr. Wilfrid Meynell—an essay on "Paganism Old and New," and also a group of poems, including "Dream-Tryst." The manuscript was exceedingly uninviting to eye and hand. Its crumpled and dirty condition, indeed, caused it to be pigeonholed for some six months. Then Thompson's good angel jogged the editor's elbow. The contributions were appreciated at their value, and the editor did his best to get into touch with his elusive correspondent. For some time he was unsuccessful, and the story of

the circumstances leading to their actual meeting—if not quite so romantic as that given by a certain well-informed writer at the time of the poet's death—is sufficiently striking. Possibly the account given in the official life is a trifle expurgated. "My father, being in his workroom, was told that Mr. Thompson wished to see him. Then the door opened, and a strange hand was thrust in. The door closed, but Thompson had not entered. Again it opened, again it shut. At the third attempt a waif of a man came in. No such figure had been looked for; more ragged and unkempt than the average beggar, with no shirt beneath his coat and bare feet in broken shoes, he found my father at a loss for words." Of Mr. Meynell's delicate consideration and infinite patience in dealing with this forlorn and sensitive wretch, "one can only, like Cordelia, speak by silence." Thompson had no stomach for charity, and no capacity for self-help. He would have sunk stoically a yard from the shore, without a struggle and without a cry. After prolonged entreaties he consented to enter a private hospital, where for the time being the laudanum habit was broken off. Then he was put with the monks of Storrington Priory, whilst the pangs of

abstinence seemed to feed and quicken the springs of poetry within. Song gushed from the rock at the stroke of the rod, and much of his finest work is of this period. Prose alternated with poetry. The "Hound of Heaven" and the elaborate "Essay on Shelley" are both of the same date. These yet remain his masterpieces in verse and prose. In his own wonderful phrases they are indeed attar of poetry, and a very fuming brazier of imagery.

In 1893 the long-expected book of "Poems" appeared, a handsome volume in brown boards, with a frontispiece by Mr. Laurence Housman. The way was well prepared to attract public attention. The romantic story of this stricken life was exploited in the press for some time time previous to publication, and the curiosity of the market-place was studiously aroused. The volume was reviewed widely, and was received with a chorus of praise. It ran through many editions. Thompson, however, was not satisfied. More oddly, his friends do not seem to be contented either. Mr. Everard Meynell thinks it well, even at a distance of twenty odd years, to recall that Lang and Mr. Gosse had but a modified enthusiasm for much of this poetry. These gentlemen

were certainly entitled to express their opinion, even though it may not jump with Mr. Meynell's or mine. Such criticism, after all, was but a drop of gall in an ocean of eau sucrée. Is it permitted me to hint thatThompson appreciated his own poetry to its utmost worth ! Personally I rate that value very high indeed, as may appear before the conclusion of this paper. But the poet expressed his assurance of his genius perhaps a trifle in excess of modesty and a little too willingly. He emphasized it in poetry, in letters and in conversation. " I absolutely think that my poetry is greater than any work by a new poet which has appeared since Rossetti, unless indeed the greater work to which the critic referred was Mrs. Meynell's." Or again,

Before mine own elect, stood I,
And said to Death, " Not these shall die."
I issued mandate royally.
I bade Decay, " Avoid and fly ;
For I am fatal unto thee."

I sprinkled a few drops of verse,
And said to Ruin, " Quit thy hearse " :
To my loved, " Pale not, come with me ;
I will escort thee down the years,
With me thou walk'st immortally."

In Mr. Wilfred Whitten's obituary notice of Francis Thompson he tells: "Thompson knew that above the grey London tumult, in which he fared so ill, he had hung a golden bell whose tones would one day possess men's ears. He believed that his name would be symphonized on their lips with Milton and Dryden and Keats. This he told me himself in words too quiet, obscure, and long ago for record." It may be so; and yet somehow or other, true or not, how infinitely one prefers the modesty of Keats' reticent phrase: "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death."

Francis Thompson published two further volumes of verse—"Sister Songs" and "New Poems." The former was composed previously to much of the contents of the famous book of 1893; the latter was of a subsequent date. Neither of these volumes repeated the phenomenal success achieved at a first venture. Of "Sister Songs" only 349 copies were sold in twelve months, and the first edition was procurable but the other day. The sale of "New Poems" was infinitely worse. Five copies only were disposed of during the first half of 1902, and the author gained exactly six shillings in royalties during a period of six months.

Thompson's friends seem inclined to impute this failure to the inability of Protestant lungs to breathe the Catholic air of his poetry. No incense-heavy atmosphere hindered the sturdy Protestant from delighting in the earliest chapel dedicated by the poet. The fifty thousand copies sold of a cheap edition of the "Hound of Heaven" were not all bought by his co-religionists. The true cause is not obscure. The poetry was not so fresh nor so beautiful as of old; whilst neither in matter nor in manner had Thompson made any concession to the weaker brother in the delivery of his message of mysticism and his strange gospel of stark renunciation.

Thompson was persuaded that his genius had left him. He turned to journalism for daily bread, and familiarized long-suffering editors with those habits of procrastination and delay which had procured him his reputation at Ushaw. Their only consolation was the knowledge that in the end they would receive work none but he was competent to give. His method of reviewing was unusual. The notice would be written in pencil beneath a street lamp, or near the flare of a second-hand bookshop. The reviewer would then hasten in before

the shop closed to sell the book. This was done to procure money for the secret drug to which he had long returned. Like Coleridge, who, voluble on all else, kept absolute silence on the subject of his vice, Thompson never mentioned his practice to his dearest friend. The habit was the ruin of friendship, and of family ties. It rendered its victim more helpless in the everyday affairs of life than even nature intended him to be. It necessitated that dreary round of second-rate lodging-houses constituting his only home. It set the solitary, not in families, but in an added solitude of conscience and choice. Thompson went his own way uncomplainingly. He practised as well as preached his doctrine of renunciation. He was always in light marching order to obey the summons whenever it should come. Never was man who carried fewer of the impedimenta of life about him. Alone he lived, and in the hospital—characteristically enough—alone he died on November 13, 1907. When his effects were gone through after his death they were found to consist of a box which contained sundry unopened letters and some worn-out pipes, together with a copy of his first book of "Poems," wherein was preserved the poppy

picked and given to him by Miss Monica Meynell at Friston so many years before.

A "legend" such as the above may prove a short cut to glory, but it has to be paid for at a very great price.

There are few allusions in Thompson's poetry to the painful circumstances of his life. These circumstances darken the whole of his poetry, as they saddened his outlook on man. They are seldom specifically mentioned, but they colour all he wrote.

For ever the songs I sing are sad with the songs I never sing.
Sad are sung songs, but how more sad the songs we dare not sing.

Occasionally, however, his rigid reticence breaks down. "Sister Songs," for example, dedicated to two innocent girls, happy as spring flowers, suddenly tells, with piercing poignancy, the story of that other flower, fallen from spring's coronal and blown withering through the city streets. It records how this brave, sad, and loving girl gave of her scanty pittance to him, a stranger, that he might eat; then fled, a trackless fugitive. The

emotion of the wonderful passage is heightened to an almost unbearable degree by the dramatic contrast of the delicately nurtured child, to whom the verses are spoken, with the girl whose innocency only God can give again, when He restores the years that the locusts have eaten. But once more did Thompson write of his experiences during those three tragic years at this same passionate pitch. Amongst the poems found with his papers after death, was that called "In no Strange Land," and carrying the motto, by way of sub-title, "The Kingdom of God is within you." The editor of the book of "Selected Poems"—bearing appositely enough upon its cover the crown of thorns intertwined with the poet's laurel—rightly says that had Francis Thompson lived, he might yet have worked upon it to remove here a defective rhyme, there an unexpected elision. But no altered mind would he have brought to the purport of it; for in these triumphing stanzas we hold in retrospect, as did he, those days and nights of human dereliction he spent beside London's river, and in the shadow—but all radiance to him—of Charing Cross.

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,
Cry—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Genesareth, but Thames.

The Catholic imprint is stamped far more deeply upon Thompson's work than the hall-mark of "Darkest England." Ushaw was a more enduring influence on his character than the Thames Embankment. Coventry Patmore described Thompson as the most naturally Catholic of all men he had known. So far as

we may tell he never knew what it was to doubt. Even in his sorest straits it seems unlikely that he found difficulties in the path of faith. Unless, indeed, his theological position is that described in the "Mistress of Vision," "Know, for thou else couldst not believe." Catholic ritual supplies the whole of his imagery to a poet who is all imagery. In a sense his most famous and possibly his finest poem is not the most characteristic, for the "Hound of Heaven" is devoid of any symbolism definitely Catholic. It might have been written by a member of any Christian denomination. For the rest, Thompson's poems are saturated with the imagery of his creed, even his love poetry. The prevalent idea that Thompson could not write love poetry seems to me radically false. On the contrary, his praises of the woman he loved are more fragrant than the roses of any other poet of his time.

God sets His poems in thy face.

Hers is the face whence all should copied be,
Did God make replicas of such as she.

God laid His fingers on the ivories
Of her pure members as on smoothèd keys
And there out-breathed her spirit's harmonies.

No woman worthy to receive such exquisite praises as these but would remember them proudly to her dying day. But Thompson could not always keep the service of woman apart from the offices of the sanctuary. "A Carrier Song" is full of conceits and fancies gathered from religion, and the very beads of the rosary are strung like pearls for a lady's adornment.

It is the same with his treatment of Nature. He expresses her under similar symbols, and in terms derived from the selfsame doctrine and ritual. Thompson was no pantheist or Nature worshipper. He complained that she has no heart, and is only a cruel and obdurate abundance of clay. One fancies he would have been in sympathy with the words of a younger writer: "Nature is not our mother. Nature is our sister. We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same Father, but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate." When Thompson speaks of Nature, however, he derives his similes from his customary ecclesiastical sources. The sun is likened to the Host, with sky for monstrance; to Christ, with the sombre line of the horizon for Rood; to the altar Wafer, and signed

with the Cross. The twilight is violet-cassocked. Day a dedicated priest in all his robes pontifical exprest. Night—

See how there
The cowlèd night
Kneels on the Eastern sanctuary-stair.
What is this feel of incense everywhere?
Clings it round folds of the blanch-amiced clouds,
Upwafted by the solemn thurifer,
The mighty Spirit unknown,
That swingeth the slow earth before the embannered Throne?

Thompson's use of ecclesiastical material reaches its extreme limit in poems such as "Assumpta Maria." The images of this poem are taken from the Office of the Assumption and from the "Song of Songs." Thompson made no secret of the matter, either in public or in private. He prefixed the motto from Cowley, "Thou needst not sing new songs, but say the old," frankly to his lyric. He commends the writer quite simply to the protection of his Patroness as "poor Thief of Song." To the ecclesiologist it is all very delightful, even to the Greek phrases gathered from a Good

Friday Office, and laid like amber with his rhymes, but to the average reader such remorseless ecclesiasticism is doubtless a little disconcerting.

Those critics who dislike Thompson's "sacerdotal" poetry, equally dislike the "turgid" Latinisms of his speech. There is no doubt he was in the habit of using very long words, very strange words, and words very difficult to be understanded of the people. Just as Rossetti dug "stunning" words out of old volumes of romance, so Thompson revived obsolete words from *his* favourite authors with equal pride. He was kindly affectioned towards such findings as roseal, labyrinthine, and fuliginous, and he rejoiced greatly when he rediscovered them creeping back into use after his initiative. He has been suspected of inventing certain odd phrases; certainly he was guilty of some strange experiments in speech. But so far as his Latinism was concerned, much must be forgiven to a poet who was saturated with the Vulgate and the Missal, and whose chosen companions were De Quincey and Sir Thomas Browne. However, it is not fair to speak as if Thompson were always Latin and obscure.

Even so, one day, he would afford scope for another Browning Society to elucidate his mysteries. As a fact he is often quite clear and direct. His most beautiful effects are sometimes reached by methods of the utmost simplicity. But a strange personality must be expected to declare itself in unaccustomed fashions. A life such as Thompson's will find expression through a unique revelation. Literary admirations such as his will result in magnificent plagiarisms. Beliefs and renunciations, like those he was instant in, tend to find forms stark and uncompromising as themselves. The new wine—it is an old saying —oft-times bursts the old bottles.

It would seem unlikely that Thompson is destined to permanent popularity. He never professed to offer sugar plums as substitutes for poetry. His creed is anathema to a large section of the public not concerned with spiritual matters, and to a larger portion that is. His mysticism was not the pallid moonshine masking under that name, but rather " morality carried to the n^{th} power." His treatment of love and of nature is not that to which his countrymen are accustomed, or particularly congenial to their character. Such fame as he has won

was derivative in the first instance from the rumours of his lamentable legend. Gossip attracted the attention of the market-place to songs which otherwise would have fallen on deaf ears. But supposing it were possible to purge his audience of such unworthy hearers, the residue remaining would be peculiarly fitted to appreciate pure poetry at its worth. These auditors inevitably would be thrilled by poetry of the highest accomplishment and of the most direct inspiration, poetry which in its rarest moments rises to heights the most exalted of its day.

WALTER PATER, AND SOME PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

IT was stated recently in some weekly review that no one reads Walter Pater to-day, and that his fame is not so much under eclipse as extinct. Certainly the present generation give less thought and consideration to these writings than did their fathers before them. Each generation adores its own idols, and sometimes, indeed, goes a-whoring after its own inventions. The years immediately following the death of a famous author are frequently enough the period of his deepest neglect. The young are occupied with their own difficulties and their own ideals. They are busily concerned in refashioning the world after another pattern of beauty and righteousness than sufficed their elders' needs. The newly dead are buried, but as yet no memorial has been raised above the freshly digged grave. Pater died in July, 1894, and his reputation is now in the withered ear. The reproach rests

primarily upon the shoulders of the public, but the publishers of his books are not free from blame. A cheaper edition is needed imperatively of these writings. Only one is published in a popular edition, and that apparently for reasons not unconnected with copyright. My own copy of "Marius the Epicurean" is in Macmillan's well-known Eversley series; and Pater, when giving it to me some years before his death, remarked that it was intended for the American market. The same book can be procured in England, two decades later, only in two volumes and at a considerably higher price.

Though I admit that Pater's reputation is under eclipse, not for one moment do I suspect it to be extinct. Prophecy is dangerous, and I prophesy seldom and with difficulty. The lean years will pass, I am persuaded, and Pater's reputation return, full and good, seven ears in one stalk. We may put aside the seriousness and distinction of his thought, though these alone should suffice to keep his writings sweet. But the mere beauty of his books, considered simply as literature—a prose felicitous and suggestive as the finest poetry—will render them heirlooms,

even in a treasure-house so rich and fortunate as our own. We may place his goldsmith's work side by side with the masterpieces of our greatest artists with no sense of incongruity. Can that writing be considered dead, without resurrection, which endures comparison to the living prose of the immortal masters? Recall, by way of illustration, one or two passages bearing the hall-mark of fame. Age cannot wither nor custom stale such extracts, even when torn from their context, like a joint from the socket. The first quotation shall be from "Hamlet."

"It goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god, the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither."

The next may be taken from a familiar epistle contained in "Charles Lamb and the Lloyds."

"One passage in your letter a little displeased me. The rest was nothing but kindness, which Robert's letters are ever brimful of. You say that 'this world to you seems drain'd of all its sweets!' At first I had hoped you only meant to insinuate the high price of sugar, but I am afraid you meant more. O Robert, I don't know what you call sweet. Honey and the honeycomb, roses and violets, are yet in the earth. The sun and moon yet reign in Heaven, and the lesser lights keep up their pretty twinklings. Meats and drinks, sweet sights and sweet smells, a country walk, spring and autumn, follies and repentance, quarrels and reconcilements, have all a sweetness by turns. Good humour and good nature, friends at home that love you, and friends abroad that miss you, you possess all these things, and more innumerable, and these are all sweet things. You may extract honey from everything; do not go a-gathering after gall. I assure you I find this world a very pretty place."

A third extract shall follow from the most

piercing and poignant of all sermons, "The Parting of Friends."

"O my mother, whence is this unto thee, that thou hast good things poured upon thee and canst not keep them, and bearest children, yet darest not own them? Why hast thou not the skill to use their services, nor the heart to rejoice in their love? How is it that whatever is generous in purpose, and tender or deep in devotion, thy flower and thy promise falls from thy bosom and finds no home within thine arms? Who hath put this note upon thee, to have 'a miscarrying womb and dry breasts,' to be strange to thine own flesh, and thine eye cruel to thy little ones? Thou makest them 'stand all the day idle,' as the very condition of thy bearing with them; or thou biddest them be gone where they will be more welcome; or thou sellest them for nought to the stranger that passes by. And what wilt thou do in the end thereof!"

Now side by side with these justly famous passages may be set an extract from Walter Pater, which we of an older generation thought vital and beautiful, until we were assured it was dead beyond hope of resurrection. It is, of course, the translation through an exotic tem-

perament into imaginative prose of Leonardo da Vinci's wonderful portrait of Monna Lisa, the temporary disappearance of which from the Louvre left, not merely Paris, but the whole world for the time less rich.

"The presence that thus rose so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all 'the ends of the world are come,' and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of these white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the reverie of the Middle Age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like

the vampire she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave, and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her, and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants, and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern thought has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea."

I submit that the foregoing passage from Pater's "Renaissance" stands side by side with quotations from such crested and prevailing names as Shakespeare, Lamb, and Newman, without disaster. If that be so, his writings are independent of the whim of the public, or the fashion of an hour. Their author can lie quiet in his grave, in the sure and certain hope

of a glorious resurrection. He may rest content in the knowledge that sooner or later he must come to his kingdom. Possibly his subjects may be few, but of their loyalty and devotion there can be no question.

It is not without significance that the most painstaking and laborious of English writers believed himself to be of Dutch extraction. An admiral of his name came over from the Low Countries with William of Orange, and settled permanently in this country. Certainly Walter Pater's personal appearance did not contradict such an origin, but the matter was never more than a pleasant speculation. It also pleased Pater to consider that the painter Jean Baptiste Pater, the pupil of Watteau, derived from the same source. However this might be, the immediate ancestors of Walter Pater were found living at Olney, and there the family enjoyed the delightful relations of friendship with William Cowper. Walter Horatio Pater was born at Shadwell in August, 1839. For some unapparent reason it was the traditional custom of some generations of Paters to educate the sons as Roman Catholics, whilst the daughters were invariably baptized as Anglicans. Pater and his brother

were the first male Nonconformists of their stock. A devout and serious boy, his early religious aspirations received a great impetus from some personal intercourse with Keble, the saintly author of the "Christian Year." The child was fond of playing at church functions, and the lad, sensitive to Keble's influence, looked forward to taking Orders in the Church of England. Never, at any time, with all his love of colour and ceremonial in ecclesiastical matters, did he experience any peculiar inclination towards the ancient faith. From first to last Pater's lines were cast in pleasant places, and from school at Canterbury, "that old ecclesiastical city with the rich heraldries of blackened and mouldering cloister, the ruined overgrown spaces where the old monastery stood, the stones of which furnished material for the rambling prebends' houses," he passed to Oxford, the mediæval town of grey and green, with its crumbling pomp of ancient buildings set against a background of grassy lawns. Oxford, that sweet city with the dreaming spires, was destined to be Pater's lifelong home. For thirty-five years, first as a scholar of Queen's, and afterwards as Fellow of Brasenose, he studied and taught

in her schools. There the books were written on which his fame depends ; there his influence moulded the character of those young men who came within his circle, and were worthy to witness to his ideals. That early desire to take Orders in the Church passed from his mind, or rather, shall I say, was postponed. For a time the Unitarian Ministry seemed too definite a committal. He did more than suspend judgment with Montaigne ; he seemed even to range himself upon a side. A casual holiday in Italy had led to a prolonged study of the arts and philosophy of antiquity and of the Renaissance, and he early recognized that in an interpretation of these his life's work was to be found. These speculations and ideas were to lead him by long and perilous paths—had he but foreseen the weariness of the way—towards a resting-place which he never perhaps quite attained. Absorbed in such preoccupations and curiosities his simple and laborious life came to an unexpected end. In the summer of 1894 Pater had an attack of rheumatic fever, and was confined to his bed. He made an apparent recovery, and left his room. He resumed work on the study of Pascal, which occupied his attention at the time, but con-

tracted pleurisy from writing near to an open window. Again he recovered, but on coming downstairs the heart suddenly failed, and he died in his sister's arms. He was but fifty-five, and death struck him down in the midst of his literary activities. "Sayest thou, I have not played five acts? True, but in human life three acts only make sometimes an entire play. That is the Composer's business, not thine."

In 1873 Walter Pater collected a number of essays contributed by him to the *Fortnightly* and *Westminster* Reviews on subjects chiefly concerned with the arts of the Renaissance. The book was published at a time when a wonderful energy of beauty was manifested in the sister arts of painting and poetry. The romantic and literary pictures of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were accompanied and paralleled by the romantic and coloured poetry of Dante Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne, and the printed page was richer than the glowing canvas. Even now some aftermath of this beauty remains. All is not yet faded into the light of common day. A belated stray, tricked in the tabard and piping in the accents of a demoded fashion,

occasionally recalls a loveliness that is a trifle out of date. Pater's first book was representative of his period. It was really the complement in prose of the brilliant palette affected by the artists and singers about him. These enthusiasts were his personal friends, and it would be strange indeed had he not felt sympathy with their school.

A careful student of Pater—whose long indisposition is a loss to English letters—has described "Studies in the History of the Renaissance" as the most beautiful book of prose in our literature. It is a high claim, but one which many will think to carry no excess of praise. Here was to be found, as has been noted, a modulated prose which made the splendour of Ruskin seem gaudy, the neatness of Matthew Arnold a mincing neatness, and the brass sound strident in the orchestra of Carlyle. Possibly the "Renaissance" may be said not so much to suggest comparison to the prose of other authors as to approximate to the more delicate and considered art of poetry. The mere words are placed with such judgment that they catch fire one from another, and glow like contrasted gems set by some skilful jeweller. Of course the extreme deliberation necessitated

by this sort of work makes for a certain heaviness, a danger Pater did not always avoid. His travail was not so apparent here, however, as in some later books. He contrived to load every rift of his subject with ore, and yet to escape over-elaboration. In one of the most finished of these essays—that on the " School of Giorgione "—Pater speaks of all art as constantly aspiring towards the condition of music, that being the art in which the message is practically indistinguishable from the form. Music is not the art one associates in the first instance with these writings. Their quality is rather a constant and cunning appeal to the eye. Like children, they are to be seen in preference to being heard. In his essay on Aucassin and Nicolette Pater speaks of the adventures of that exquisite mediæval *cante-fable* as chosen for the happy occasion they afford of keeping the eye of the fancy, perhaps the outward eye, fixed on pleasant objects—a garden, a ruined tower, the little hut of flowers which Nicolette constructs in the forest whither she has escaped from her enemies, as a token to Aucassin that she has passed that way. The subjects of these early essays are arresting in themselves. Characters more outstanding

and mightily hewn it is impossible to find than some dealt with here. Characters sweeter and more beautiful it is difficult to imagine than others included amongst these studies. Such subjects are obviously selected by the essayist because of the striking personality which differentiates them from their fellows. They are the Sauls, a head and shoulders taller than the average of the sons of men. But noticeable as is Pater's attraction towards the picturesque personality, equally apparent is his choice of the picturesque incident to illustrate his theme. The legend is invariably selected to keep the eye of the reader fixed on pleasant or coloured objects. Take, for instance, the famous essay on Leonardo da Vinci from which quotation has already been made. The whole of the brilliant "legend" of Vasari is transcribed with such vividness that it glows with the inspiration of a gospel. Leonardo constructed models in relief of women smiling; he bought the caged birds and set them free; his physical strength was such that he bent a horseshoe like a coil of lead; he followed chance passers-by, whose beauty of eyes or hair attracted him, about the streets of Florence until the sun went down. Some pages, even,

are little more than a catalogue of exquisite bric-à-brac. "Beautiful objects lay about there—reliquaries, pyxes, silver images for the Pope's chapel at Rome, strange fancy-work of the Middle Age, keeping odd company with fragments of antiquity, then but lately discovered." It reads almost like Balzac's "Le Peau de Chagrin." And this is not all, for but a few lines below the list is continued with "pictures, drinking vessels, ambries, instruments of music, all fair to look upon, filling the common ways of life with the reflection of some far-off brightness." The subject might possibly be illustrated more satisfactorily from either the "Sandro Botticelli" or "The School of Giorgione," included in the same volume. If these essays contain no single passage quite equal to the loveliest page of the "Leonardo da Vinci," they cannot be reproached with suggesting an auctioneer's catalogue. The "legend" of the lives of the two Renaissance artists is as dexterously selected as that of their greater rival. The inspiration of the studies is even more continuously sustained, for the writer's imagination flies on a level wing. Consider for a moment the beauty of Pater's description of either the Venus or the

Madonna of the Magnificat by the Florentine painter. No doubt it is purely a subjective impression, a work of art seen through a temperament; but how rare is such a temperament, and how unique such felicity of speech! Botticelli's Madonna—Pater tells us—" though she holds in her hand the ' Desire of all nations,' is one of those who are neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies, and her choice is on her face. Once indeed He guides her hand to transcribe in a book the words of her exaltation, the Ave, and the Magnificat, and the Gaude Maria, and the young angels, glad to rouse her for a moment from her dejection, are eager to hold the inkhorn, and to support the book; but the pen almost drops from her hand, and the high cold words have no meaning for her, and her true children are those others among whom, in her rude home, the intolerable honour came to her, with that look of wistful inquiry on their irregular faces which you see in startled animals—gipsy children, such as those who, in Apennine villages, still hold out their long brown arms to beg of you, but on Sundays become *enfants du chœur*, with their thick black hair nicely combed, and fair white linen on their sunburnt throats."

Truly, indeed, may the "Renaissance" be described as "the golden book of beauty." What relief to turn from the feverish rhetoric of Ruskin, preoccupied with moral rather than æsthetic values, to this simpler doctrine, this almost literary quietism. I greatly fear that its art criticism may be to the taste of neither Mr. Berenson nor Mr. Roger Fry. It is not concerned either with details of measurements, or with the science of the number of cubes contained in the human countenance. Very possibly it is a criticism which may appear old-fashioned to the young, but wisdom is not necessarily the appanage of youth. Such work is really creative rather than critical. The theme becomes plastic in the hands of the artist, and is fashioned and moulded anew in accordance with the imperious claim of his temperament. Instead of the object being set before us in its naked reality, we see it through the haze of a many-sided culture. May this not add a glamour to the view!

"The Renaissance"—Pater's first book—represents his farthest removal from the doctrines of revealed religion. Leonardo's ghostly head of Christ had become for him "the image of what the history it symbolizes has more and

more become for the world, paler and paler as it recedes into the distance"; and Winckelmann, who shammed Catholicism that he might live amongst the marbles of Rome, "at the bar of the highest criticism perhaps may be absolved." The most significant utterance in the whole volume—the "Conclusion"—said, and says still, that "not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end," and doubtless Pater came to feel that some danger lurked for the unwary in such a doctrine as this. Danger there undoubtedly was. Certain young men pressed on Pater's teaching a logical application, such as Ward applied to Newman's, at an earlier day in the same university. The application was equally distasteful. These young men let no flower of the spring pass by; they left tokens of their voluptuousness in every place, making the quiet groves of philosophy look like Hampstead Heath after a Bank Holiday. The unfortunate philosopher was deeply mortified. He withdrew the epilogue from a second edition of his book, only reprinting it after he had dealt with the same subject more fully in "Marius the Epicurean." Even then, with an almost clerical sense of responsibility, he

made certain changes which brought it closer to his original meaning. For instance, in a passage dealing with how we might make the most of the interval that is ours before death, he had remarked that "the wisest" spend it in "art and song." In the revised version the word "wisest" is qualified by the addition of the phrase, "at least among the children of this world." But the real measure of his dismay was the expansion of these few pages into the packed volume of "Marius the Epicurean."

"Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas," appeared some twelve years after the "Renaissance" was published. In inception and execution it occupied six of the best years of Pater's life. This was a long time to spend upon the production of a single book; but Pater was a scholar, laborious and precise, as well as a most painstaking artist in prose. He dug deep his foundations that the building he reared might endure. The wonder is not that such a book as "Marius" took six years in the making, but rather that it ever got finished at all. Rossetti once described himself as the racked and tortured medium through which his poetry passed. I doubt, however,

if the pangs of Pater's labour were not longer and more severe. There has been nothing approaching the meticulous care of his method since Flaubert killed himself in the effort to produce a perfect prose. His innumerable notes, his incessant emendations and recopyings, were enough to weary the bravest heart; and this anxious and overstrained literary conscience undoubtedly is responsible for the tortuous sentences and heavy solemnities which at times disfigure his style. "Marius the Epicurean," it should be noticed, is not described by its author as a romance. I fear that if anyone were to try to read it for the sake of the story he would—to quote Dr. Johnson—hang himself. Pater was no novelist. He wrote narratives which some excellent critics have the singular good fortune to enjoy. He, himself, preferred "Imaginary Portraits" to any other of his books. Tastes luckily differ, or we should all love the same woman. The sensations and the ideas of Marius are the subjects of the book, not his actions. Pater was an essayist, and "Marius" is really a volume of essays on many fascinating matters of peculiar interest to its writer. In a sense it may be considered an autobiography, for it records

the progress of a soul—whose Odyssey, after all, is the only thing that matters—from station to station, till it stood face to face with the one supreme question. It was a record of Pater's spiritual experiences, and characteristically enough he managed to evade giving a definite answer at the close. It ends on a note of interrogation.

Mr. A. C. Benson has described the motive of "Marius" as the tracing of the history of a highly intellectual nature, with a deep religious bias, through various phases of philosophy to the threshold of Christianity. The scene of the story is laid in Italy at the time when Marcus Aurelius was Emperor of Rome. The period was excellently chosen, for it enabled Pater to bring together many interesting and diverse personalities, and to present, quite naturally, various contrasted systems of philosophical and religious belief. The volume is divided into four parts. The first book is concerned with the pious upbringing of Marius by his widowed mother in her delightful old Roman villa, near by the sea. "A white bird," she once told her son, looking at him gravely, "a bird which he must carry in his bosom across a crowded public place—his own soul was

like that." It narrates his boyhood and his schooldays; above all his friendship with a youth, greatly gifted, whose destiny was to die young, whilst yet immature. It ends on the desolate note of pagan death. The second part traces the development of Marius into an Epicurean of the nobler Cyrenaic school, and incidentally explains those passages of the conclusion to the "Renaissance" which had been so grievously misunderstood by certain young men. He journeys to Rome in the company of Cornelius, a soldier of the Imperial guard. This officer is a Christian, but for a long time Marius fails to learn of his faith, or to grasp the secret of his serenity. The post of secretary to the Emperor brings Marius into intimate relations with Marcus Aurelius himself, and enables the Stoic philosophy to be presented in its highest and most enduring form. The short but extremely important third portion of the volume indicates the causes of the dissatisfaction of Marius with both the Epicurean and the Stoic philosophies, and is followed by the chapter on the Will as Vision, in which, during the course of a lonely ride, it is borne in upon him that behind—but only just behind—the veil of a mechanical

and material order there may be a guide, closer than any friend whom he had known. The fourth section follows, with the unveiling of the faith of Cornelius, and the gradual initiation of Marius into the doctrines and the ceremonies of Christianity. He is never formally received by baptism into the Faith, but during a minor persecution of the Church is arrested, together with Cornelius, and sent for trial to Rome. Marius bribes the guards to connive at the escape of his friend, but is himself stricken down by fever, and dies, fortified by the last Sacraments of that Church of which he may be considered a martyr, although to which he never absolutely belonged.

"Marius" is a book of contrasts, the contrast of pagan death and Christian life, of Epicurean and Stoic philosophies, of an old despair with a great new hope. Its Epicureanism is a very different thing from the instinct of Dante's Ciacco, that accomplished glutton in the mud of the Inferno, for "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die! is a proposal the real import of which differs immensely according to the natural taste and the acquired judgment of the guests who sit at the table." Not pleasure but fullness of life was Pater's

interpretation of his new Cyrenaicism. In this connexion it is very necessary to read the 8th and 9th chapters of "Marius," where the author's position may be found very clearly stated and very carefully safeguarded. Certain sentences from one of these chapters have been described as containing the central words of the book. "Supposing our days are indeed but a shadow, even so we may well adorn and beautify, in scrupulous self-respect, our souls, and whatever our souls touch upon—these wonderful bodies, these material dwelling-places through which the shadows pass together for a while, the very raiment we wear, our very pastimes and the intercourse of society." In the case of Marius the holiness of beauty led him very near to the beauty of holiness; and should it be urged that such a ceaseless introspection as his must inevitably hinder any concentration of energy upon the concerns of a rough work-a-day world, surely it may be pleaded that the contemplative life has its claims as well as the active, and that *to be* is a virtue, as well as *to do*.

It is idle, I suppose, to speculate where Pater's thought would have led him finally, had not death intervened at what was obviously

not a terminus, but a junction. The books of his later years give indications whither he was tending; but such indications are so wanting in precision, that different men find the sign-posts to point in different directions. These later books—more especially "Appreciations" and "Greek Studies"—are of great interest and value, but they forward only slightly the main purpose of this paper. "The Renaissance" and "Marius the Epicurean" remain Pater's two most important contributions to literature and thought. For sheer felicity of verbal beauty he never quite recaptured the charm of his earliest book—the dew of its birth was of the womb of the morning—and "Marius" is yet the most unflinching exposition of his central ideas. As I have observed before, those ideas end—characteristically enough—on a note of interrogation. But his reverent and recollected behaviour at Holy Communion; his frequent attendance at such churches as St. Alban's, Holborn; remarks like that recorded by Dr. Creighton as to the dignity of the Reserved Sacrament, which "gave churches the sentiment of a house where lay a dead friend"; the significant dedication of "Appreciations"

his papers in the *Guardian* — all these induced his friends to believe that had he lived for a few years longer he would have taken Orders, and a small college living in the country. His assistance at the services of such advanced churches as St. Alban's need surprise none. Ritual is the poetry of the eye. The ornateness of ceremonial would possess its full attraction for one who valued the eye above all the other senses, and to whom, if Christianity ever came, it would certainly appeal in a precise and lovely form. To know, however, whether Father Stanton's preaching—so dramatic, so homely and humorsome, yet at times so overwhelming—counted for anything in his attendance, would at least be of interest. This probably we shall never learn. Its elements would seem calculated to repel and to attract a nature like Pater's in almost equal measure. But the public testimony of his intimate friend, Dr. Bussell, as to Pater's attitude towards religion, deliberately uttered on the sad occasion of his funeral sermon, at least cannot be ignored. Perhaps it expresses the true truth concerning Pater's secret and deepest convictions, or as near thereto as we shall ever arrive. "His whole life seemed to me to

be the gradual consecration of an exquisite sense of beauty to the highest ends ; an almost literally exact advance through the stages of admiration in the 'Symposium,' till at last he reached the sure haven, the One Source of all that is fair and good."

AN INTRODUCTION TO WACE'S "ROMAN DE BRUT"*

THE little book introduced by this preface is a translation of that portion of Wace's "Roman de Brut" concerned with the story of King Arthur. I am not aware that any considerable portion of the old churchman's book has been turned into English before. This is surprising, because it is not only a curious document of the Middle Ages, but is of peculiar interest to all those—and their name is legion—who admire "the noble acts and worthy achievements" of the Christian King. As the advertisement to the "Historie of King Arthur" declares, "all the honour we can do him is to honour ourselves in remembrance of him." The principal merit of this volume, then, is that it

* This Introduction was written by way of preface to my translation of the "Chronicles of King Arthur," by Wace, in the Everyman's Library, but circumstances did not permit of its appearance there.

contains one of the very earliest histories of the British hero, and its appeal, in the main, is to lovers of the Arthurian legend.

Master Wace was born in 1100, the year in which the Red King was found dead by peasants in a glade of the New Forest, with an arrow in his breast. He died some time after 1174, but the date of his death is unrecorded. The names of his parents are unknown, though his mother was a daughter of Toustein, chamberlain to Robert, Duke of Normandy. Wace's name itself is not exactly unknown, but it affords an excellent fighting ground for scholars. Some contend that his first name was Robert, and—contrary to the custom of his period—his godparents bestowed on him two Christian names at baptism. Others argue that he was baptized Eustace, of which Wace is the diminutive. When experts differ it seems safer to observe with the character in Molière, "Some people say yes, others say no; as for myself I say neither the one nor the other." In his works the poet refers to himself as "Master Wace"; so Master Wace let him be. The facts of Wace's life we know somewhat more fully than those of the average writer of the Middle Ages. He was sufficiently desirous

of fame to put them down in black and white in his books. He was born, he tells us, in the Isle of Jersey, lying in the sea towards the west, and belonging to the fief of Normandy. When a child he was carried to Caen, and put to letters. Afterwards he went to France, studying in the schools for long. On his return from France he lodged a great while in Caen, and composed many narrative poems in the Romance tongue. These poems are largely lost, but those which remain deal with the lives of the saints, and show that as a priest Wace had not mistaken his vocation. About this time—in rather more than middle life—he compiled his historical poem, the "Story of Brutus," from which the present book is derived. This was completed in 1155, and dedicated to "the noble lady, Eleanor, who was the high King Henry's queen." Eleanor came of a family in which the patronage of literature was a tradition. Henry the Second himself was a lover of letters, a virtue to be counted to him as righteousness, for he had need of every rag. Wace seems to have been fortunate enough to attract the attention of the great. He was "reader" under Henry, and the King also appointed him to a prebend at

Bayeux. "I did not succeed in life to my wish," wrote the poet plaintively, "by reason that I was never fortunate enough to find patrons. From this I except King Henry the Second, who made me a prebendary, and bestowed on me many another gift. God return them to his bosom. He was nephew of the first Henry, and father of the third. I have seen and known all these princes." In honour of his sole benefactor, and possibly at Henry's suggestion, Wace composed his most celebrated work, the history of the Dukes of Normandy, known as the "Roman de Rou." Then Fortune turned her wheel. Other singers came to Court and gained the ear of the King. Patrons are no more constant than lovers. They also turn to the fresher face and the younger smile. Wace was growing old, and Henry commanded Benedict of St. Maur to write the chronicles of his ancestors. Since his voice had lost the gift to please, Wace ceased to sing. "As the King has charged another with the task he committed to me, there is nothing to do but to stay my hand and keep silence. In days gone by the King honoured me greatly. He gave me much, and promised me more. If he had granted me all that he

promised, I should be the luckier man. Here endeth the book of Master Wace."

The "Roman de Brut" is the early history of England related in rhyming octosyllables. As poetry it has no very great distinction. Even laureates are not always crowned with laurel; and Wace, obviously, is the historian first, and the poet afterwards. His chronicles commence with the appearance in Britain of Brutus, whose forefathers fled from Troy. They narrate the hero's triumph over those giants, who were the original possessors of the land, and in a leisurely fashion tell the legendary history of the country until its ultimate conquest by the Saxons. It is an excellent and entertaining specimen of the mediæval manner of writing history. Facts and traditions are mixed up together in most admired confusion. Real people rub shoulders and jostle with those who never had an existence, but who, somehow, are equally true. It reminds one of the forecast Lamb gave of the "Essays of Elia." "You shall soon have a tissue of truth and fiction, impossible to be extricated, the interleavings shall be so delicate, the partitions perfectly invisible." I know Wace's method is not the modern way of

considering history. It is all very sad and bad and mad. To-day is the hour of the expert and the fact. History has ceased to be an art, and is by way of becoming a science. Ours is a utilitarian age, and we have no use for fairy tales. Well, as Montaigne observes, we give ourselves many headaches to arrive at a change of errors. If legends are not always true, science is not infallible, and is sometimes dull. For my part I consider the mediæval fashion an excellent way of writing history. Legends and traditions are often more real than facts. They testify to the soul, the essence of a fact. If I am in error, many favourite books of history support my view, so that I go astray in good company. Wace, at least, has the inestimable advantage of unfailing interest. His history is indeed a romance. It is full of entertainment, and of stories which are excellent reading, if peradventure not quite true. The legends Wace gathered together from such various sources, throw a curious and unexpected light on the life and opinions of the Middle Ages. For instance, all students of that period are familiar with the belief of the French that every Englishman concealed a tail in his hosen. It was

among the most common insults of the period ; and many a little French boy or girl has cried, "Englishmen, hide your tails," and ran, when the Islanders were abroad. Wace furnishes the explanation. He tells us when Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory to re-establish a faith almost forgotten in the land, he was received courteously by all. However, there was one exception. When the saint on his visitation came to Dorchester, the folk of that city were either so attached to their gods, or (as Wace suggests) so tainted with original sin, that they fastened fishes' tails to the back of the preacher's cassock. Augustine was so occupied about his sermon, that he failed to notice what had happened, until the congregation broke into huge laughter. Being human, the saint was deeply mortified. He prayed to God to avenge the dishonour done to His servant, and very speedily a tail hung to each of his tormentors. Not only this, but their descendants were afflicted in a similar fashion, the sins of the fathers being visited on the children ; so that, as every Frenchman knew, there was an excellent chance of an Englishman hiding a tail in his hose.

Wace's remarkable compromise between

history and fiction was based upon the labours of another ecclesiastic. In 1148 a Welsh Benedictine concluded—in its present form—a "History of the Kings of Britain," on which for many years he had been engaged. This writer, a Bishop of St. Asaph, more generally known as Geoffrey of Monmouth, wrote for scholars in the Latin tongue. The sources of his inspiration are very much in dispute, and cannot be entered upon in this Introduction. His success, however, was immediate and unequivocal, for there is scarcely any mediæval book of which so many manuscript copies remain. Wace perceived the possibilities of the book, and proceeded promptly to turn it into French verse. He finished his poem in 1155, and, so far as I am aware, expressed no obligation to his fellow churchman. It is to be feared that if he did the same sort of thing to-day on a similar scale, stern critics would describe him as a literary thief, and a plagiarist, together with other hard names. Such annexations were not considered very reprehensible in Wace's time. A writer took his own where he found it. The "Roman de Brut," moreover, is very far indeed from being a mere slavish reproduction of the "History of the

Kings of Britain." Wace added to, rearranged, and omitted freely from Geoffrey's work. Other sources of information were obviously at his disposal. Geoffrey's "History" had breathed life into the dry bones of monastic chronicles, but Wace induced them to move yet more freely. It is true enough that Geoffrey and Wace frequently relate the same incident; but Wace looks at the fact with the eye of a poet or a painter, whereas Geoffrey is often contented with its bare recital. As an illustration of my meaning compare the respective versions of Arthur's passage across the Channel. The Welsh Benedictine simply gives us the scrap of necessary information. Wace sees the sailing of the fleet with his eye, and re-creates it in his imagination. He considers not only the sailors about their business, but also the mystery and danger of the deep; and brings before his readers, in perhaps his sincerest verses, the romance of the first forgotten shipman who put to sea. If any should yet regard Wace as but a servile copyist of his model, I would suggest a further comparison of the relation of the festivities following upon Arthur's coronation. The whole description of this crowning at Caerleon-on-Usk

is looked upon—and with justice—as one of Geoffrey's purple passages. In Wace's pages, however, the scene becomes a priceless and detailed record of a feudal court in the twelfth century. In a series of brilliantly coloured pictures, there passes before the eye a sort of cinematograph of the festival. We assist at the banquet, served by its troop of fair and youthful *damoiseaux*, clad in ermine. We wonder over the dresses of the guests. We watch the amusements of gentle and simple alike. Our ears are deafened by the *jongleur*, the musician, and the teller of tales. Laughter and quarrels fill the air. And that the personal note may not be wanting, the priest and the professional moralist peep out in the denunciation of dicing introduced by Wace into his description, like a sermon preached in a picture theatre. "Those who sat to the dinner in furs, rose from the tables naked." It is another illustration of a previous remark that in taking Orders, Wace had not mistaken his vocation; and the scene is set so aptly on the stage, that one does not know whether to admire the more the zeal of the preacher, or the skill of the artist.

The hero of Wace's "Roman de Brut" is

King Arthur of Britain. Certainly he is the hero of that portion of the history now offered to the public. There is scarcely any other character in our rough island story so intimately known to us all. We speak of Arthur as we speak of Alfred or Elizabeth or Nelson. Poets have sung of his life, and painters have painted his passing. A whole circle of modern writers and artists and musicians have devoted themselves to his cult, and to the exploits of his knights. Arthur has become to us an allegory, and against the head of the British chieftain is placed a nimbus of coloured dreams. He is less an interest than an obsession to the makers and students of romance. The generations of to-day take fire from the artists of their time, and go back—as these went back in their turn—to the great and beautiful book which is the source of their passion and inspiration. It would be impossible to over-praise the high name of Thomas Malory, "the servant of Jesus, both day and night," and the compiler of the immortal "Morte D'Arthur." He wrote "when English prose was dewy with its dawn, of tales of chivalry already coloured by the setting sun." The Introduction to his book tells us that gold

has its dross, and the wine its lees; but his is gold thrice refined, and wine of a perfect vintage. In the whole range of our literature there are possibly only two books, or three, which stand higher than his. Probably it is the finest book dealing with mediæval matters in the language, and is to be preferred before Chaucer—Chaucer even. And yet when we ask ourselves what we really know of the hero of so many romances, we can only add up the sum of our ignorance: "To-day, as of old, Arthur remains but a shadowy apparition, clothed in the mists of legend and stalking athwart the path of history to distract and mystify the sober chronicler. A Melchisedec of profane history, he has neither beginning of days nor end of life."

To satisfy our curiosity we turn to the older books, which are the foundations of the Arthurian legend, and of these one of the earliest and most valuable is Wace's "Story of Brutus." Wace, in the main, follows the lines of Geoffrey, but adds very materially to our knowledge of the growth of the legend. The Prebendary of Bayeux is the first to tell us of the famous Round Table; and he gives the reason of its unusual shape. Forgetful of

the modesty of the perfect knight, some of Arthur's Court were disposed to exalt themselves above their companions; and the table was made round that none might boast his seat was higher than that of his fellows. Again, Wace enlarges the bishop's description of Arthur's end. The King is not only mortally wounded, and carried to Avalon to be healed of his hurt, but he is yet there, and the Bretons await him to this day.

But the differences between the Latin and French versions of Arthur's life are small indeed in comparison with the differences between the early blossom they unfold and the full-blown flower of Malory's book. In the early chronicles the story ends before it has well begun. The tragedy of the battle on the Camel against Mordred follows immediately after the long and grim struggle with the Romans, and all is over. Lucius, the Roman Emperor, is slain by Malory ere a third of his romance is completed. The remainder of his story is largely occupied by the loves and adventures of Tristan and Lancelot, the greatest of Arthur's knights, and by the high quest of the Holy Grail. Of these knights errant, and of the spiritual adventure of the Grail, there is in

Wace not one single word. Undoubtedly their absence is a serious drawback, for it is precisely with these persons and matters, and with those things of which they are the symbol, that the modern imagination is concerned. Since Tristan is not, and Lancelot is not, it follows Isoude is absent also from this book, and that Guenevere, Arthur's queen, has but the shadow of her fatal beauty. "The romance and danger zone of sex" are reduced in these pages to a minimum. Yet these romances were on the tongues of the singers at the very time Wace composed his poem. Twenty years later the stories of Lancelot and Guenevere, and of Tristan and Isoude, were presented in a literary form by Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France. However, although the two most famous knights of Arthur's Round Table are not to be met with in these pages, other knights, scarcely less celebrated, remain. Though much is taken, much abides. Gawain, Kay, Bedevere, and Bors play their parts in the battles like men. They gain, even, by detachment from their more arresting comrades, for they serve no longer as foils and shadows to the more marvellous deeds and shining qualities of their fellows. Gawain is no longer

light, nor Kay grudging; and the friendship of steward and cupbearer, in life and death, should be added to the long gallery of friendships between man and man. Above all, Wace retains for us the early days of Merlin, the typical seer and enchanter—together with Virgil—of the Middle Ages. In Malory, Merlin is the ancient sage from his introduction to his death. His story is begun at the end. Wace relates the adventure of his birth and youth, so that we understand why the wizard was permitted to know so much that was hidden from ordinary mortals.

Cleared from the later accretions of legend, released from association with knights more appealing than himself, Arthur stands out in the "Roman de Brut" emphatically as its hero, and every inch a man. His is the master mind to organize the kingdom, and to conduct campaigns. Gawain, Kay, and Bedevere are excellent lieutenants and men of their hands, but Arthur is the captain and the chief. It is Arthur who breaks the power of Rome. It is Arthur who drives the Saxon heathenry from the land; and it is very understandable why a book intended for the delectation of Norman nobles and gentlefolk should make

such a feature of his deeds. Arthur's adventures serve as the theme of these chronicles. There are no other knights errant to detract from his fame. He is the rescuer and avenger of distressed damsels, and he the slayer of giants. The stirring episode of the avenging of Helen upon the body of Riton will be in the memory of any reader of Wace. Giants, indeed, occupy a considerable amount of his attention. Does any reader marvel over the wickedness and malice of that evil race? Let him consider their origin, and refrain. In the rich land of Syria there was once a noble king, and mighty, and a man of great renown, called Diocletian. This king spoused a gentle damsel, wonderfully fair, named Labana. She loved him, as was but right; so that he gat upon her thirty-three daughters. These maidens, when they were of nubile age, were become so fair that it was a marvel. Diocletian therefore made a royal feast, and bade that all the kings who held of him should come to his banquet, together with their admirals, princes, dukes, and noble chivalry. He also married his thirty-three daughters, right richly, unto thirty-three kings, that were lords of great honour, at that solemnity. It afterwards

befell that these ladies waxed so stout and stern, that they held their lords of little price, but had of them scorn and despite, and would not do their will, but rather their own, in divers manners. The kings chastised them with fair speech and behests, warning them in fair fashion, upon all love and friendship, to amend their condition, but it was all for nought. The thirty-three kings, therefore, upon a time and oftentimes beat their wives; but of such condition were they that for fair speech and warning they did the worse, and for beating very much worse. Now on a day when all these lords and ladies were on a visit to Diocletian the king, he spake to his daughters of their wickedness and cruelty, and reproved them piteously. The ladies met together in a chamber, and Albin, the eldest of them all, said to her sisters, "My fair sisters, our husbands have complained to our father upon us, wherefore my counsel is, that this night, when they are abed, all we with one consent cut their throats, that we may be in peace of them." The ladies consented and granted unto her counsel, and when night was come, and their lords were asleep, they cut their husbands' throats, and slew them all. When

Diocletian heard of this thing he was hugely wroth. He put his daughters on a ship, and delivered them victuals for half a year. He set this ship adrift, and so long it sailed on the sea that at the last it came to an isle that was all wilderness. The sisters went from out the ship, and found neither man nor woman nor child, but only wild beasts of divers kinds. When their store was spent they fed them with herbs and fruits in their season, and lived as best they might. After this they ate flesh of certain animals, so that they became fat, and for loneliness bewailed the husbands whom they had slain. When the Devil, who wends throughout all countries, perceived this thing, he came into the land of Albion, and had to do with these women, so that they conceived, and brought forth monsters, who were named by various names. In this manner horrible giants were born.

Somewhat in this fashion an old chronicler relates the coming of giants; and with the knowledge of their unfortunate parentage in our minds, how can any be surprised at the malice and wickedness of that dreadful race, whether called Gogmagog, Dinabuc, or Riton. Women should really be more careful in the

choice of the father of their children; then had this favoured land of Albion been plagued the less by their brood.

To all who love deeds of daring, ancient history, or legends of Arthur and of his Table, the portion here translated of Wace's "Roman de Brut" should have its interest.

SOME PRESS NOTICES

OF WORKS BY

EUGENE MASON

In sonnet building there is an art which Mr. Mason has fairly mastered, because of his possession of ideas, without which no art is possible in any form of literature. But Mr. Mason has not only triumphed over the secrets of the sonnet; he has achieved a success in the equally difficult line of the ballad. "A Ballad of the Silver Hind" is, in its way, a masterpiece.

Glasgow Herald.

It is the author's first published work, though his poems, privately circulated, were not altogether unknown, and attracted the favourable attention of such a critic as the late Mr. Walter Pater, who found in their workmanship and jewel-like finish the precise qualities he, of all men, most highly valued.

Cheltenham Looker-on.

To us the chief attraction of "Flamma Vestalis" is, "A Ballad of the Silver Hind." How far better is this admirable poem, with its simple epithets and its dignified conduct, than three out of four of those foaming pieces which have lately masqueraded as ballads.—*Literary World.*

Quietly, unobtrusively beautiful.

ERNEST RADFORD in the *Artist.*

Many of the verses collected in "Flamma Vestalis" are inspired by pictures. In nearly all of them there is a constant and skilful appeal to the eye.—*National Observer.*

THE FIELD FLORIDUS and other Poems.

The work of a man of culture, who is also adept in the large craft of rhyme and rhythm, its instant quality is flawlessness. It is carven as a casket; the words are ponderable, have individual value. "A Sacæa in Babylon" should go into any future anthology for adults.

Outlook.

Admirable stuff, the stuff that comes from true genius. Verses quick with thought and passion, palpitating with the music of life.

Birmingham Daily Gazette.

I welcome a new volume of poems, "The Field Floridus" by Mr. Eugene Mason, recalling as I do the romance and perfume of his former volume, "Flamma Vestalis." The great accomplishment of this verse cannot be missed. But there is much more than accomplishment. There is the true romantic atmosphere, the true breath of the Provençal roses. Mr. Mason, too, shows a power of dramatic picture-making more vivid than we are accustomed to find in such dreamy and perfumed verse.

Richard le Gallienne in the *Star.*

Rich with scent and colour.

JOHN DAVIDSON in the *Speaker*.

There is a certain solemn stateliness, as of organ-music, about the poems in this volume, which cannot but impress and charm anyone who opens it. It moves throughout on a high level of distinction.—*Scotsman*.

Of Mr. Eugene Mason, whose second appearance this is, let it be said at once that there is the poet in him. The very power of him is an eye for external, pictorial beauty, with a palette of words capable of glowing representation. The best example of his most characteristic style is "A Satyr." There is something of Keats in the colouring; in the way, also, that the theme is felt and imagined, with fullness of illusive phantasy. That lives to its finger-tips, and might hang as a minor pendant to the magnificent Bacchic hymn of Keats in "Endymion." It is an excellent specimen of a book which has decided poetic mark, and justifies us in expecting from Mr. Mason even better things to come.

FRANCIS THOMPSON in the *Academy*.

It is, we believe, little more than three years ago that Mr. Mason made his first appearance in public as a poet by means of "Flamma Vestalis," in which there were pieces so excellent and pieces so promising that we made up our minds to watch eagerly for the day when this

singer should again call the attention of those who enjoy good verse to his melodious performance. Now that "The Field Floridus" is at our disposal we are particularly glad to observe that Mr. Mason has used his time of silence in improving himself as a worker given over heart and soul to poetry.—*The Literary World.*

Lacks neither sweetness of melody nor grace of distinction.—*New Age.*

If "Flamma Vestalis" has the charm of melody and passion which marks its successor "The Field Floridus" then I shall be glad to read it, for Mr. Eugene Mason's new volume of verse reveals great promise. It is with the ballad metre that Mr. Mason is most eminently successful. Simplicity, directness, vigour, swing, all these things the poem has. Mr. Mason, at least, can write a first-rate ballad.—*The Echo.*

Poets who run to print are very many: poets who run to poetry are very few, and Mr. Eugene Mason is certainly among the few. In the ballad he is at his best. The ballad with its terse and graphic expression of action and primitive emotion, is fatally tempting, and many there be that do it badly, but in such skilful hands as Mr. Mason's it becomes a thing of delight, a stimulant.—*Aberdeen Free Press.*

A new poet of the school of Keats has arisen in the person of Mr. Eugene Mason, whose "Field Floridus," although his second volume, may be said to be his real introduction to the little company of readers who study new poetry. We say of the school of Keats, but that is only half the truth. Mr. Mason is also himself: a curious, questioning, modern development, hovering between the cold beauty of Christianity and the warm beauty of Paganism.

London Letter.

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE and other Mediæval Romances.

More precious than this is Mr. Eugene Mason's new translation of "Aucassin and Nicolette," that romance which of all romances seems to reach the very finest point in the expression of bodily beauty—the beauty, it might be truer to say, of visible things. Mr. Mason's volume also contains many other exquisite stories of the middle ages, "Our Lady's Tumbler" and "Amis and Amile" among them.

Robert Lynd in the *Daily News.*

Mr. Eugene Mason writes a charming Introduction.—*T. P.'s Weekly.*

FRENCH MEDIÆVAL ROMANCES.

In all the magnificent shilling Everyman's Library there is hardly a more delightful book than "French Mediæval Romances from the Lays of Marie de France." The translator, Eugene Mason, has done his work daintily, fitly, almost perfectly, and, what is more, has preluded an ideally suitable and pleasant Introduction.—*Schoolmaster.*

In Preparation, by the same Author

VITRAIL: A Book of Sonnets

PRINTED AT
THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
LONDON