I FOR ONE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BRIEF DIVERSIONS : being Tales, Travesties, and Epigrams

PAPERS FROM LILLIPUT

I FOR ONE

By J. B. PRIESTLEY

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To

PAT AND BARBARA

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Note.—The following papers, all of which were intended, devised and written for publication in book form, have appeared in the new Challenge, *and I wish to thank the proprietors and editor of that excellent weekly for the courteous hospitality they extended, every Friday, to these strange little visitants.*

I FOR ONE

ON BEGINNING

HOW difficult it is to make a beginning. I speak of essay-writing, an essentially virtuous practice, and not of breaking the ten commandments. It is much easier to begin, say, a review or an article than it is to begin an essay, for with the former you attach yourself to something outside yourself, you have an excuse for writing and therefore have more courage. If it is a review that has to be written, well, there, waiting for you, inviting your comment, is the book. Similarly with an article, you have your subject, something that everybody is excited about, let us say the Education of Correlates or the Bearing of Teleology on the Idea of God, and thus you know what is expected of you and (though it may sound difficult to common sense and physiology) you can take up your pen with a light heart. But to have nothing to cling hold of, to have no excuse for writing at all, to be compelled to spin everything out of oneself, to stand naked and shivering in the very first

sentence one puts down, is clearly a very different matter, and this is the melancholy situation in which the essayist always finds himself. It is true that he need not always be melancholy ; if he is full of himself, brimming over with bright talk, in a mood to take the whole world into his confidence, ready to rhapsodize about music-halls to Mr. Bertrand Russell, Dean Inge, and the Lord Chief Justice, or to soliloquize on death and the mutability of things before the Mayor and Corporation of Stockport, if he is in such good fettle the essayist will find his task a very pleasant one indeed, never to be exchanged for such drudge's work as reviews and articles ; and he will step briskly on to the stage and posture in the limelight without a tremor. But such moments are rare, and the essayist at ordinary times, though he would eagerly undertake to defend his craft, cannot quite rid himself of the feeling that there is something both absurd and decidedly impudent in this business of talking about oneself for money ; this feeling haunts the back of his mind like some gibbering spectre, and it generally produces one of three effects. According to his temperament, it will prevent him from doing anything at all that particular day or perhaps any other day, or it will allow him to write a few brilliant opening sentences and

then shut him up, or it will keep him from making a start until the last possible moment.

For my own part, I am one of those who find it difficult to begin; I stand on the brink for hours, hesitating to make the plunge; I will do anything but the work in hand. This habit is certainly a nuisance, but perhaps it is not quite so intolerable as that of some other persons, men of my acquaintance, who fall into the second category mentioned above and always find themselves making dashing openings and then coming to a stop. Without a moment's hesitation, they will take up their pens and write on the top of a clean sheet of paper—"On Massacre," and will then begin at once: "It is only as a means to an end that Massacre can be adversely criticized. As an end in itself, something that is its own reward, there is nothing to be said against it and everything to be said for it. It is only since the gradual overclouding of the purely æsthetic view of life that Massacre has come to need any defence. It is true that we still talk of art, but actually we care nothing for its values, and in particular for those of Sublime Art, which asks for the whole of life upon which to experiment. Thus it is that we have come to misunderstand Massacre, a manifestation of the Sublime, and have lost sight of the true Herod." At this point, they

will stare at what they have written, well pleased with it as an opening, and then discover that the flow has ceased. They will write "Albigenses"—"Sicilian Vespers"—"St. Bartholomew" on the nearest sheet of blotting-paper, but all to no purpose; they will have come to a stop, and horrible hours will pass, and perhaps many more dashing openings will have been made, before any real progress will have come about and their essay taken some sort of shape. Such writers seem to me even more unfortunate than I am, for I do at least go forward once I have made a beginning; as soon as I have summoned up courage to ring the bell I am at least admitted into the house of my choice, and am not, like these others, left kicking my heels in the vestibules of half-a-dozen houses perhaps without ever seeing the interior of any of them.

Nevertheless, though there may be worse things, my own habit of procrastination is undoubtedly a great nuisance. Fear, indolence, and a plain incapacity to concentrate for more than a few seconds, all play their parts. In the end, it is true, they delay my beginning so long that they succeed in destroying themselves, for I become so desperate at last that my fear and indolence are willy-nilly driven out of court and I even achieve some sort of concentration. But in the mean-

time I have wasted hours and hours. I begin, usually in the morning, with the fullest intention of settling down immediately to work ; an essay has to be written ; it has been left too long already, and I have no time to waste. But no sooner have I arrived in my room than I begin to do a great many things that I never do at any other time. I clean a pipe or two, all the while pretending to myself that I am eager to get to work, though it is curious (to say the least of it) that I never scrape and clean my pipes at any other time. After having lovingly filled and lighted one of these beautifully clean pipes, I sit down, but get up again almost immediately to straighten one of the pictures, to restore a few books to their proper shelves, or to clear away any odd papers that may be lying about. Then instead of sitting at my table on a hard little chair, whose unyielding surface and ungracious angles would serve to remind me that life is real and earnest, I bury myself in an enormous basket-chair of the kind that is exceedingly popular (and not without good reason) at the universities. This chair is so long and low that I always find it necessary to have my feet off the ground when I am sitting in it, so in this thoroughly comfortable posture, with slippered feet up somewhere near the fire-place, knees slightly bent, head

well back, I prepare myself to grapple with the work in hand. I reach for my fountain-pen and a stiff writing-pad ; my pipe is going beautifully ; now, if ever, is the time to concentrate. But alas !—I cannot concentrate. I can follow another man's thought, in a book or out of it, as long as it should be necessary, but left to its own devices my mind does nothing but wander aimlessly, for I am of a discursive habit of mind, with strong but eccentric powers of association. Mr. Pelman and his friends would weep over my puling attempts to keep my thought to its proper theme ; and I sometimes think that I would seek their assistance had I not somewhere at the back of my mind a fear that they would contrive to turn me away from scribbling altogether and convert me to Salesmanship, whatever that may be.

Gloriously at ease, then, lying in my big fat chair, I consider the prose masterpiece in miniature that must be born into the world during these next few hours. In bed last night, when I ought to have been asleep, I had the whole thing worked out ; it was there down to the last comma, and it was wonderful ; the bed-posts were festooned with noble thoughts and the counterpane glittered with bright miraculous phrases ; there can be no doubt that I surpassed myself last night. No

wonder that now, when the work has actually to be done, I feel so sleepy. And unfortunately, though the subject itself remains, I can hardly remember a word of what I invented last night, and the few snatches I do remember seem crude and thin. It does not even appear a very promising subject now. What is there to be said about it that has not already been said? Little or nothing. But something must be done, so I write down the title and draw a line underneath it, and contrary to my usual practice I do this very slowly and carefully, merely to waste time and retard the evil moment when I shall have to take thought. But long before I have finished drawing the line, my mind has wandered whole continents away from the subject. Drawing the line so slowly has made me think of an old master I once had at school who was always pointing out that the best way to draw straight lines without the aid of a ruler was to draw them very quickly; and from him my mind has rambled round to other masters I had, and from them to holidays, and to friends and California and paint-brushes and Whistler and Chelsea and my friend X and Devonshire cream and finally to Coleridge. And now that I have arrived at Coleridge, I suddenly remember that I want to look up some passage in the "Table-talk," so with a not ignoble

effort I scramble out of my chair and search for the book and the particular passage. And now it is nearly half-an-hour since I read that passage, but the "Table-talk" is still in my hands and I am still reading. But I put it down because I recollect an old project of mine, a book on the criticism of Coleridge, and now I begin to plan that book all over again and detached phrases for the introductory chapter come into my mind; and now I decide that I must sketch my plan for this book on paper, and I take up my pen and paper again, but only to remember that I have an essay to write. . . . Lunch has come and gone. . . . And now I will settle down and get my work done. But first I must put away the copy of Coleridge's "Table-talk" still lying in my chair. So I put it away, but when I withdraw my hand it has taken out the second volume of Leslie Stephen's "Hours in a Library," and for no accountable reason I find myself still standing by the bookshelf reading his essay on Horace Walpole. This will never do, and rather angrily I put Stephen away and fling myself down in my chair once more. My manhood is at stake; I must take the plunge; so without more ado I seize hold of my pen and paper and write: "How difficult it is to make a beginning. I speak of essay-writing, an essentially virtuous practice, and

not of breaking the ten commandments. . . ." And then, with only a few halts, I go forward to the end. But what the end is, I cannot tell you, for it has all become very complicated.

DIXIE

I HOPE that it is still the fashion, in music-hall and pantomime songs, to express a longing for Dixie and to sing its praises. Until the other day, when I made a notable discovery, I thought we had had too much Dixie and hoped I had heard the last of it. But then, until the other day I did not know what Dixie was. I had not thought much about it, but in a vague sort of way I had concluded that it was somewhere in the Southern States and had come to bracket it in my mind with Kentucky and Alabama and Georgia. There seemed no reason why my countrymen should be always singing about such places, should be always "longing to be there." What if the cotton did grow? What if dear old Mammy and Uncle Joe were waiting at the cabin door? The craze became irritating. We have our own brands of foolishness and have no reason to import alien idiocies. I doubt if the rowdy young men of New Orleans sing noisy lyrics in praise of Lancashire—where the cotton's spun.

My feelings about these songs in general have not changed ; I wish that I had heard the last of them ; only now I make one enormous exception of all those songs about Dixie. They should be encouraged. The League of Arts should teach people to sing them. For Dixie, it appears, is not what I so foolishly concluded it to be, is not some place in the Southern States, but something very different—an imaginary region, a land of Heart's Desire, only to be found on maps of moonshine. This is my grand discovery. Perhaps every one else has known it for years. I do not know, and frankly, I do not care, for it is part of a miscellaneous writer's business to risk making a fool of himself. Indeed, the essayist always arrives just after the fair. Like the poet, he discovers things last, but makes the prettiest noise. If he is melancholy, it is probably because he has just heard the news about his favourite monarch, Queen Anne ; and if he is in high spirits, he may have just caught the rumour about the Dutch having taken Holland. Or he may have discovered that Dixie has not a Legislature or a Mayor and Corporation and, in short, does not belong to this world.

It seems that, at the beginning of the last century, a certain slave-holder called Dixie removed his slaves from Manhattan Island to

the Southern States, where the poor creatures fared much worse. They began to sigh for their old home, which they called Dixie's Land. Gradually, as time went on, the old folks, telling their tales, lost sight of reality, and the credulous, imaginative younger generations added their share of myth, until Dixie's Land became one of the Delectable Kingdoms, a land of milk and honey, the land of Beulah "where the sun shineth night and day." It became Dixie. Thus, to the great list, Hesperian Fields, Fortunate Islands, Tir-na-nog—the Land of the Living, the Island of the Seven Cities, the Isles of the Blest, the Isle of Avalon, and I know not how many more—to this great list another name was added. Another quaint shape suddenly appeared on that map which I have called the map of moonshine, though I believe it to be more significant, perhaps closer to essential reality, than those maps, so cocksure in their bright blues and pinks, that we receive from the hands of the cartographer. After all, moonshine endures and will outlast all your Gas, Light and Coke Companies.

Those poor blacks, conjuring out of their disappointment and their misery the mystical land of Dixie, deserve our thanks, for they have satisfied a great want. We needed Dixie. The longing for these perfect places, somewhere beyond the horizon, lands where there

is neither rain nor snow, neither darkness nor any knowledge of death, is not simply part of a weak and foolish desire to escape from life : it is something better than that. All races have had their Isles of the Blest and Lands of the Living and have lived no less sturdily for such pleasant day-dreams, which are only born of the craving for perfection, the time-old desire to catch up the ragged ends of life. The poet who sang—

> 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 . . .

sang for all of us. And these delectable lands of fantasy are simply the earth and the sky and the water re-made, whether they are called Hesperian Fields or Fortunate Islands or Avalon or even Dixie. They are to the popular (and poetical) mind, which loves the concrete, what his ideals, universals or absolute values are to the philosopher. They are to the imagination what the clean cool sheets of the inn are to the body of a tourist. Just as civilized men have always walked in gardens towards the cool of the evening and somehow drawn sustenance from the double witchery of the time and place, so their imaginations have

travelled in these perfect kingdoms and found similar sustenance. When the seas have washed over all these Isles of the Blest and men have turned away from their dreams of them, there has always been something unquiet and evil in the times ; men have been denied this strange rest and marvellous refreshment and have therefore suffered, for the mind must have images of health and beauty to brood upon if it is to keep sane.

Dixie brings us back into the great tradition ; it proves that we are a poetical people. True, it is a more homely kind of earthly paradise than most of the older ones ; but it is none the worse for that. Most of the others were always too thin and ghostly for my taste ; there were too many hollow lands among them, too much silent adoration of spectral ladies and not enough good fellowship, too much idle plucking of gold and silver apples and not enough feasting and fun. They order this matter better in Dixie. We do not go there as a means of idle escape, or cry for the company of thin ghosts because we shrink from hearty flesh and blood. Dixie is homely indeed, because it is more like home than home itself ; life there is as we would have it, warm and human, but enduring and unchanging, for Dixie is outside these detestable modern universes compact of nothing but change and

relativity. There, every one is more like himself than he ever can be here. There, it is Christmas Eve or Kate's wedding or Tom's twenty-first birthday for ever. I fancy that all the earthly paradises were once like Dixie, more lively than life, but that when ordinary people ceased to believe in them, sentimental literary men came along to sentimentalize them and decorate them with all their bad moods. The Tir-na-nog of the Irish poets was probably once a real Land of the Living, but now it is a poor thing, which would not satisfy Mr. Yeats and Æ. and their followers for five minutes. It has become the rag-bag of vain regrets and questionable moods. Not so with Dixie, which is a real Land of the Living. When we declare that we want to go there, we mean it ; we would go there as we would go home ; indeed, there is about the legend of the place the atmosphere of a great and festive home-coming. This is your true earthly paradise, and the others, true in their day, are now false ones, nothing but literary gestures. There is something suspect about the invitations that the Irish poets receive—

"Come away," the red lips whisper, "all the world is weary now;
'Tis the twilight of the ages and it's time to quit the plough."

These are deceitful red lips that are telling

lies about the world in order to lure men away to some dreary hollow place at the back of the moon. If you have not made the most of the world as you have found it, you cannot enter Dixie, not even in imagination. That is the difference between a bright living legend and a poor faded tale that has been dragged out of the lumber room.

I wish I had known all this long ago. How the seemingly foolish songs we used to hear take on a deeper significance in the light of this discovery. There was, for example, one popular lyric with the refrain "Are you from Dixie?" a lyric that described a meeting between two strangers who discovered, to their mutual satisfaction, that they were both from Dixie; and, in my ignorance, seeing in it nothing but an encounter between two enthusiastic but rather absurd tobacco-planters or cotton-broker's clerks, I soon wearied of this song and began to curse the people who still found it pleasant. How different it appears now. Two immortals, putting on the appearance of our dark mortality, hiding their radiance, travel in the world of little common men, and chance to meet each other. Their flimsy disguises, sufficient for the lack-lustre eyes of mortals, are as nothing; in a flash, each has divined the real nature of the other, and shining, magnificent, they stand together,

crying, "Are you from Dixie?" "Yes, I'm from Dixie," rapturous. For a moment or so, the foolish ill-shaped world about them fades out, and they see before them once more the bright imperishable levees and golden cabin-doors of Dixie. Gravely, they salute one another as the gods salute, and pass on. And it was of such adventures that people sang night and day—and I never knew.

ON HATING STRANGERS

THERE is one story of Charles Lamb, and I think only one, that I have never been able to appreciate. There are several versions of it, but writing from memory, I think the one that is best known runs something like this : Lamb was once hotly assailing the character and reputation of a certain person, when his hearer, rather surprised at this outburst, interrupted it to say that he had no idea that Lamb knew the man in question. " Know him ! " Lamb exclaimed. " Of course I don't know him. I never could hate anyone I knew." Now I have never been able to appreciate this story because it is always given as an illustration of Lamb's delightful eccentricity and love of paradox, and so forth, and as such it fails lamentably : Lamb's reply, though doubtless unexpected, was quite simple and sincere ; it does not point, as his biographers would seem to think, to some trait or habit of mind almost peculiar to himself. Most of us could, in all sincerity, have made

exactly the same reply. We English are like that. We reserve our real hatred for people we do not know.

Other races take more kindly to strangers than we do; they are more polite, more obliging, more hospitable; with us the Lancashire saying, "Here's a stranger. Heave half a brick at him," points to an extreme but nevertheless indicates a general attitude of mind. But, on the other hand, we do not indulge in feuds and vendettas and relentless persecutions. We leave such things to the more polite and hospitable races. Once we know a man, we may quarrel with him, may even give him a drubbing, but hate him?—never. I suppose we all have a certain amount of hatred that we must dispose of somehow, and, speaking generally, it seems to me that our English habit of working it off on people we do not know is altogether admirable. Thus, to take two familiar examples of our coldness and reserve, the English hotel and the English railway carriage; these places are nothing more nor less than repositories of hatred, safety-valves of dislike and antipathy, and, as such, sweeten our private lives and save families and friendships from ruin. We use these places as a sink for our black and bitter humours. The country that has the cheerful hotels has the cheerless homes. The races that are

apt to be friendly with their fellow-travellers are equally apt to be capable of stabbing and poisoning their relatives and acquaintances. We on our side do such bitter business when we are among strangers, when we are on a journey or putting up for a night somewhere ; we poison with a cold supercilious glance ; we stab with an irritable jerk of our newspapers in the reading-room, and after that we are able to depart, to resume our private life, cleansed and serene and radiating good-will.

This habit of generalizing too quickly will, I know, eventually get me into trouble. I am not at all sure that "we" do these things ; what I do really know is that I do them. Among my friends and acquaintances, I generally pass for a mild man, but when I am abroad and among strangers, I scatter death and destruction. I sentence whole crowds to transportation and sign innumerable death-warrants. On a single journey on the Underground, I can outdo Nero or Tamerlane himself. I have only to be travelling on a bus or suburban train when the children come crowding in from school, and I can out-Herod Herod. I spare neither sex nor age : let them all perish. A single pair of squeaky shoes has made me condemn a man for life to the galleys or plantations. An overpowdered nose, a silly stare, a monstrous sidewhisker, a

penetrating voice, all these trifles have made me clap my hands and call for my executioners. And when the occasion really provides some excuse for my cold fury, then it is terrible indeed. If, for example, I happen to be at a concert to which the Society of Public Nuisances has sent its representatives (armed with the usual large tin-trays and cannon-balls to drop on them), then my malevolence passes all bounds ; I go to the East for unspeakable tortures or invent new ones myself for these wretched fellows. The minor representatives of the Society, such as the women whose duty it is to rustle specially prepared paper-bags throughout the performance, I usually sentence to twelve years or so on a desert island. But wherever I go, if it is among strangers, it is always the same : outlawry, banishment, incarceration, torture, and execution, follow in my wake. Thus my entire stock of hatred is at an end by the time I have returned to my family and friends ; I am all good-nature once again, and can put up with almost anything. There could hardly be a more fortunate arrangement for a man's feelings, for where I carry my dislikes, I have little power to do injury (except in imagination), and where I have that power, I have no longer the desire to make use of it.

I am ready, too, to confess that my dislike

of certain strangers is usually entirely absurd. Quite a number of my best friends are people who, when I knew them only by sight or repute, filled me with positive loathing. And even when I met most of them, it was some time before my dislike abated. I have never loved at first sight. My first impressions are generally wrong, and though I am ready to argue from them, to inflate all manner of whimsical prejudices, as a strict matter of fact, I distrust them so much that I should never act upon them unless absolutely compelled by circumstances to do so. As for those people who boast that when they met So-and-so for the first time, "something told" them that he or she was going to be a great friend or enemy of theirs, and then go on to prove that it all fell out accordingly, such persons are merely guilty of a little common self-deception. Most of us, when we first meet people, have what we are pleased to call premonitions, sudden flashes of insight, seemingly instantaneous judgments, but if we are wise we do not pay much attention to them. Though I have no doubt that some one at this present moment is sitting down to prove that such rapid verdicts come from the unconscious mind (which alone, nowadays, can do no wrong), and are therefore right and proper and to be trusted; for my own part I have found them thoroughly untrust-

worthy, being nothing more than the sum of a large number of little effects, the result of clothes, hair, tone of voice, manner, and so on, all things of little ultimate importance. So, too, that sixth sense, that intuition, that amazing insight into character, with which woman is commonly credited, is nothing more than a pleasant little myth. If woman did possess such a remarkable faculty, it would go hard with my sex ; but as it is, she possesses it not, and so too often life goes hard with her.

Perhaps there are no strangers against whom we are so heartily prejudiced as the friends of our friends, the people we never see but hear so much about, the people with whom we shall get on so well when we do meet them. We never for a moment believe that these tedious unknowns are one half so interesting, so clever, so kindly, as we are told they are ; always we have the secret conviction that our enthusiastic friends have been for once deceived. There may be a little jealousy at the root of this feeling of ours, but usually we are simply irritated by the fact of our having to listen to an account of persons unknown to us, a record that is closed to us and therefore tedious, quite unlike the genial hue-and-cry of a talk about friends we have in common. I began with Charles Lamb, and I can very well end

with him, for once he expressed, very forcibly, what we have all felt at some time or other. The story can be found in Moore's Diary :—

"Kenny to-day mentioned Charles Lamb's being once bored by a lady praising to him 'such a charming man!' etc., etc., ending with 'I know him, bless him!' on which Lamb said, 'Well, I don't, but d—n him, at a hazard.'"

And so, I think, say all of us.

THIS INSUBSTANTIAL PAGEANT

AS I was riding home on a bus, the other afternoon, I made a discovery, or what at least seemed to be a discovery at the time. I shall not be at all surprised if it will not stand being dragged out into the daylight ; the occasion was propitious for a little pleasant self-deception ; and it might well be that my so-called discovery was merely a piece of fancy spun out of the blue dusk, the magical changing lights, and the mild intoxication (cheaply purchased at threepence) that comes with rapid motion at a height somewhere between the pavement and the chimney-pots. Ideas have a trick of taking to themselves some of the glamour of the time when they were first conceived. A man who suddenly struck out a new theory about the Reformation while walking through the fields with his first love, would be loath to let it go and would probably defend it for years on quite illogical grounds. Poets are, on the whole, less apt than most of

us to make fools of themselves simply because they know that they are poets and that life is poetical stuff; while the rest of us, similarly moved by colour and sound, secretly moon-struck with the witchery of things, deceive ourselves into thinking that we are creatures of a few simple axioms and proceed to act upon a consistent plan that is always doomed to break down. So that I shall not be surprised if my discovery, my theory, if you will, adds nothing to the sum of knowledge; but if, in approaching it, I can send us all spinning westward on the top of a bus at the close of a fine afternoon in late winter, the mood and the moment may flower again, and so carry with them, unquestioned, unopposed, the fragile little thought they created.

To the man who wishes to savour his journey and does not merely want to be sent, like some piece of merchandise, from one place to another, London can offer nothing better than the top of a bus, particularly if the day is fine and the hour is somewhere about dusk. The unusual height at which one travels changes the whole city: one sits on the deck of a queer kind of ship, and the streets become rivers and the open spaces dim lagoons. Moreover, one is outside in the open, in the dusk, seated in a darkened moving auditorium, ready for the show, and not cut off from the

world by being enclosed in a lighted travelling hutch. Inside a bus, one is shaken and jolted and sees nothing but staring eyes that try to rid themselves of any meaning ; it is like being in some ghastly little drawing-room in hell. A journey on the Underground and tube trains is simply a brief nightmare, or, if you prefer it, a triumphant effort of the will, which masters the protesting senses and hurls the tortured body from one spot to another. In a taxi, one is too close to the ground and moves too quickly, so that lights and sounds merely assail the windows and one travels through a screaming chaos. Such experiences may occasionally be necessary, but they can hardly be enjoyed by anybody except those who deliberately go in search of morbid sensations. On the other hand, I enjoyed my ride on the bus so much, the other afternoon, that I nearly decided to join that company of writers who do nothing but produce coloured little essays about London, who bid us note the rich Brahms-like quality of Bayswater, and show us Commercial Road East in amethyst and gold. It was just twilight when I mounted the bus ; the shapes of the buildings could still be seen hanging against the sky, but they no longer looked solid ; all the lights were blazing away, but they were set not in the thick background of night but in the delicate

greys and blues of dusk. Piccadilly Circus was a mad little universe, in which purple constellations flamed to the glory of somebody's port and a multicoloured host of moons spun and flickered in praise of some one else's soap. The crowds on the pavement were nothing but a blurred piece of decoration, with here and there a face sharply outlined by a passing light. I was carried through the air so quickly along Piccadilly that, on my left, the Park faded into a dim sea, and on the other side the lighted windows of the clubs all joined on to each other and formed a kind of golden frieze of arm-chairs and tiny waiters and lounging clubmen. At Hyde Park Corner a swarm of little lights ran hither and thither, and high above them, breathed upon the sky, were great fantastic shapes. And then we passed into Knightsbridge and Brompton Road and came to the big shops, blazing, opulent, riotous, and sometimes we seemed to be tearing through bright gardens, sometimes splashing upon opalescent seas. They were no more shops, as we know shops, than was Aladdin's Cave ; their shimmering fabrics foamed about our wheels ; their ceilings glittered with jewels ; and Harrods, as it loomed, blazed for a few moments, then faded, was a glimpse of an Arabian Nights' entertainment. Then all the lights flickered out and all the

sounds died away, and we passed into the mournful spaces of South Kensington, a desolate region at that hour, and indeed a strange one at any hour. We crept, the bus and I, past the vast crouching Museums, and to placate them we gloomed and pretended to mourn over Albert, so that they let us pass in safety. And so home.

During this journey, as I remarked how all the sounds lost their ordinary significance and flowed into a kind of vague symphony, how all the sights became a sort of decoration and could be made into anything by the wandering fancy, I suddenly realized why we provincials are able to endure London, why we are not afraid of it, why we can sometimes even browbeat it a little. It ought to be unendurable, it ought to frighten us ; for we come up from, say, Little Todlington, and are immured, with five miles of brick between us and the nearest field, in a vast human ant-heap ; millions of our fellow creatures swarm about us, and millions of strange eyes scan our figures and faces ; the streets are bursting with life, comedies and tragedies ripening under every chimney-pot, and there are miles and miles of them in every direction we turn ; the thing is monstrous, a nightmare. But it weighs so lightly upon us simply because we do not conceive of London as a reality in the same

sense as we conceive of Little Todlington as a reality. In Little Todlington, we know every inch of ground and are aware that something or other happened round every corner ; all its inhabitants are known to us by sight, most of them by name and fame, and a great many we know quite intimately. To us its streets bristle with personalities and problems, solid human souls and questions that cannot be ignored : Little Todlington is real. If London came to our minds clothed in the same startling reality, we should go mad within a fortnight ; but fortunately London to most of us never becomes real at all ; it is merely a dream, a phantasmagoria, a changing pattern of sight and sound, with little bits of reality here and there, like currants in a vague and enormous pudding. We may look very bustling and business-like, but one half our time, as we descend from buses and taxis, go up and down in lifts, push our way through the crowded streets, "we move among shadows a shadow and wander by desolate streams." If we go, let us say, from our own rooms to those of a friend in another part of the city, then we move from one tiny bit of reality to another through an uneasy dream : we close our door and find ourselves in the roaring streets and immediately everything becomes more and more unsubstantial ; we keep company

with our thoughts and the bright images that flicker across the mind, and these are more solid than all the life stirring about us ; we know in a vague sort of way, that we have pushed a few coins under a window and received a slip of pasteboard in return, that we have descended into the bowels of the earth, that we have jammed ourselves into some queer lighted place that has suddenly screeched and rushed away into the darkness, that we have seen a familiar name in bright letters and ascended into the upper air again ; but what a strange shadowy panorama it has all been ! Not until we have walked among those unreal scenes of dim colour, movement and blended sound, those scenes that frame a thousand masks, that we call streets, do we begin to emerge from our thoughts and notice the faint traces of a real world about us. A little further and we come upon a door we know ; it is opened to us and we see a familiar friendly face and hear a familiar friendly voice, and then our dream is at an end and we are back into reality again, where we know we cannot mould and colour everything to suit our mood, where there is something objective, something definite outside ourselves. It is no wonder that so many dreamers have trod these streets, that so much high imaginative literature has been written here, the very place for

visionaries. The realists, if they would survive, must return to Little Todlington, and leave the rest of us to London and our fond imaginings.

THE PROPHETS

THERE were four of them, three men and one woman, and I saw them in the public forum in Hyde Park. In the 'Nineties, which were crowded with professional Cockney humorists who gave us "glimpses of life" and jested desperately in and out of season, it was, I fancy, the fashion to regard these public meetings in Hyde Park as a magnificent free banquet of absurdity ; the whole staff of *Punch* might have been seen any fine Sunday afternoon, pulling out their notebooks in the shadow of the Marble Arch ; and women would titter and grow moist-eyed and men would roll about in their chairs and almost suffocate with laughter at the very mention of Hyde Park. In these days, now that we have exploded nearly everything, our gun-cotton, our ideals, and even our standard jokes, it is probably a sign of extreme youth or sentimental old age to think of these public meetings in the park as a glorious feast of fun. For my part, I have little interest in them, for they are usually conducted now by experienced tub-thumpers,

old hands, and there is nobody more tedious after a first acquaintance than your old hand with his bag of cheap oratorical tricks, his face and voice of brass, his patched sordid dialectic. On the occasion when I saw this little group of four that I shall call the prophets, I walked round the assembled crowds without stopping to listen to any of the speakers. There seemed to be the usual meetings in progress : some orators roaring out their approval of God, others noisily assigning limits to His prestige and power, and others again loudly denying His existence ; the philosophers, the saints and the angels were all being butchered by some one to make an artisan's holiday ; and any idler present had the choice of some five or six entirely different universes. I was just turning away when I caught sight of the three men and the woman, the prophets, standing in a little empty space between two great knots of people. One was speaking and the other three were supporting him, and apparently they had no audience at all. Something about them, perhaps their pathetic isolation, rather attracted me, and I moved forward ; but as I knew that if I planted myself boldly in front of them, all their eloquence would be directly addressed to me, I merely walked forward to the outskirts of the adjoining crowd and drew as near to my four as I

could without appearing to listen to them.

This was sheer cowardice on my part and I suffered for it (as one always does), for I could not hear a word they said. On one side there was a noisy political meeting and a great deal of heckling and shouting and booing, and on the other, where I was standing, everybody was singing a very objectionable hymn under the leadership of a perspiring Salvation Army official. I had to content myself with watching my little group, apparently ignored by everybody else and at once absurd and pathetic in its isolation. All three men had beards. This was no mere coincidence, for there was something about these beards that suggested they were there on principle ; they were all long beards that had obviously been allowed to go their own way, beards that had demanded and obtained self-determination. Two of the men were elderly and their beards were fairly full and satisfying, but the other, an undernourished fellow with bulging eyes, was much younger, and his beard, though longish, was thin, patchy and straggling—a horrid sight. No doubt it was a rule in the tiny sect to which they obviously belonged that all male members should grow their beards. Many tiny religious sects have, I fancy, some such rule. There is nothing odd in this, because if a sect is only small enough all its members become

prophets, and prophecy demands that the chins in its service should not wag uncovered. Indeed, there is a type of beard, long and full, that belongs to the prophet alone. This old and honourable connection between prophecy and beards is easily explained. Growing a long beard is the simplest way of going into the wilderness. The man who shaves is the man who has come to terms with this world. He who has foreseen the impending Doomsday cannot be expected to lather his face briskly every morning or come out of his apocalyptic vision in order to strop a razor; nor can a prophet, no matter how minor, consort with barbers, who care only for sport and sixpences and not at all for the wrath to come. Thus, the tiny sects, made up almost entirely of prophets, are right to insist upon beards, and these three men, in letting themselves be overrun by their strange growths, were only doing their duty.

When I first drew near, one of the two elderly men was taking a turn on the little wooden soap-box and addressing a heedless world, but after some time he was relieved by the others. They were all much less vehement (so far as my eyes could judge of the matter) and more restrained in manner than the general run of park orators; they gave me the impression of men who knew that it was their duty not to denounce, not to argue

furiously, not to challenge and criticize, but to testify, without unnecessary violence, to the truth that was within them, a truth, I imagine, of which they had almost a monopoly. Every now and again, the little chorus of three, supporting the speaker, would nod their heads and make some exclamation to show their approval. The younger man, he of the vile beard and the under-nourished look, was the most interesting. When he mounted the soap-box, there happened to be a moment's quietness on either side, where the hymn-singing and heckling were still in progress, and I did actually catch the first two words of his discourse. In a thin reedy voice, the very tones of one who is nourished chiefly on starry and insubstantial fare, who feeds on tea and bread-and-butter and visions, he cried, "We believe . . ." And then the noise began again, and I did not catch another word, nor do I know to this day what they do believe. In all probability the doctrines of their microscopic sect are based on some strange little heresy that has persisted in odd corners, among bakers and saddlers in obscure towns, for centuries ; and it is more than likely that there is much talk of the end of the world and the coming reign of the saints in the meetings of the sect. For all their quietness and mild glances, however, there was an apocalyptic

gleam in their eyes, particularly in those of the younger man, and their beards had not sprouted on behalf of any shallow, time-serving sort of creed. Perhaps they knew the very date when the world was to be withered away and the stars were to drop from the sky like rotten fruit, and had travelled many a league with their soap-box to give us warning ; perhaps they were there ready to barter an eternity of bliss for half-an-hour of our attention, and, because we did not choose to listen, already saw the angel of death making ready his sword above our heads. But no, if they believed that things were at such a desperate pass, surely they would not have been so calm, surely they would have raised their voices and not allowed every roaring fool in the park to catch the attention of the doomed city.

The woman did not speak, though, like the rest, she occasionally nodded her head in approbation. She was a sturdy middle-aged woman, who looked better fed and more sensible than her men-folk. Undoubtedly she had come with one of the men, and was probably his mother, wife or sister ; she had accepted the creed when she accepted the personal relation, and being a motherly sort, she probably not only mothered the man, but mothered his poor little creed too. Against the background of these bearded fantastics,

with all their starry folly, she looked robust and earthy, as solid as a hill. If her man had taken to drink instead of prophecy, she would have seen him through with that too, and would have gone with him into public-houses to see that he did not take too much and get himself into trouble. As it was, she had come to Hyde Park to stand by the soap-box and nod her head with the rest, but doubtless all in a dream, her mind being busy with hurrying little images, with shifting faces, vague cries from the past, and the remembered grasp of little children ; while outside the sun went down the sky, the crowds sang or cheered or heckled or drifted away, the voice just above her head droned on in the old way she knew so well, and she stood there (" Like a fool," perhaps she thought) with aching feet, still nodding her head though no one listened or stopped to look.

As I watched this ineffectual quartet, in their motives like gods and in their wit like sheep, I pestered myself with vain questions. Where had they come from and where would they go to ? To what strange place would they carry themselves, their beards and their soap-box ? What did they do for a living ? Did they go to workshops and factories and quietly endure the rough chaff of the others, comforted by the knowledge that they were men set apart, men guided miraculously by

an inner light to the truth? Were they the only members of their set or were they merely the few who had volunteered for this particular duty? Where did they meet and what did they do? Of what would they talk when they were on the way home from the park? Were they always conscious of their mission, their great destiny, or did they relapse, on ordinary days, into commonplace artisans or shopkeepers, strangely bearded? Were they moved to come to this place by an ecstasy of conviction that left them no choice but to express themselves in public, whether they made converts or not? And supposing, I said to myself, that these people, whom you think absurd, whose beliefs you actually know nothing about, are in the right after all, that by some miracle they have stumbled upon the key to the universe and were busy on the soap-box tearing the problem of good and evil to shreds, that the date when these three men first met will be celebrated down the ages, that the younger one with the bulging eyes will ultimately turn human history in a new direction . . . what then? And I went on "supposing" and "what then"-ing to myself for some time, but nevertheless while I was doing this I was hurrying away from the three prophets and the woman, for I knew that time was getting on, and I was anxious not to be late for tea.

HAUNTED

IT has come back again, and I suppose that I shall have it with me now for the remainder of the day. Ta tumti tumti tumtiti —there it goes—tumtiti tumtitee. This is to be tune-haunted, one might almost say hag-ridden only that a melody, however much of a nuisance it may become, cannot possibly be described as a hag ; and to be tune-haunted is my constant fate. Poets and novelists are for ever talking of people who are haunted by a face, but for my part I have never been haunted by a face, and, indeed, agree with Sir Thomas Browne and some others among my betters in declaring that I can never summon up a satisfactory image in my mind of any face that is really dear to me. Tunes, little snatches of melody some two bars long, are my oppressors. As I am setting down these words, there is a monotonous concert taking place somewhere at the back of my mind, and it is ta tumti tumti tumtiti all the way. I will describe, as far as I can, what happens. I go to a concert, we will say, and come away with a swarm of

melodies humming and buzzing under my hat. After a little while they leave me in peace, but then, during the next few days, I discover that my mind is continually groping for something, continually adding one note to another in its search for one particular delightful sequence. Unless I happen to be fully occupied, I feel a faint dissatisfaction : something is missing. Then suddenly, as if a room had been flooded with light, a melody, one of the tunes I have just heard, sings clearly in my mind, and I am enraptured with it. No other art could give me such a moment ; it is a sudden undreamed-of caress from the Muse herself, Euterpe or Terpsichore ; and the world and I, golden lads, move on to the sound of ta tumti tumti tumtiti. But alas !—the melody only comes back for a few moments, and unless I should happen to examine it carefully while I still have it in my grasp (and it is as if one should happen to count the feathers of the Phœnix) and obtain some idea of its notation, it vanishes as suddenly as it first appeared, and I am left to wander in a tuneless void. Where it goes to I do not know, but I should not be surprised if it did not sink into my unconscious mind and there, in that dim region, serenade the sick and groaning complexes. What is certain is that for a space I have it not.

Then begins an intolerable game of hide-and-seek, sometimes lasting for days and days. Though outwardly I am as other men, and eat, sleep, work when compelled, talk with my friends, sneer at my enemies, perform great acts of self-sacrifice in my imagination and innumerable mean, petty, rather selfish little acts in actual practice, in short, though I behave as other men do and would appear even to some one who knew me very well in no way different from what I usually am, nevertheless I am a man living in a queer dream, a man for ever occupied with the most foolish quest imaginable. If the tune is in my unconscious mind all the time, then nothing could better illustrate the doctrine that the will has little or no power to bring anything up from the unconscious to the conscious mind than this game of hide-and-seek. Sometimes, after great concentration, I manage to lay hold of ta tumti or it may be tumti tumtiti, but the full glory of ta tumti tumti tumtiti baffles all my efforts. "Ta tum" it calls mockingly from one corner of my mind, and off I go in hot pursuit, beating among the woods and thickets of memory, but all in vain. It has fled, but not far, only far enough to call "Tumti tumtiti" somewhere close behind my back, and then to escape me again. Even an iron will (and mine is not metallic at all) would

not be able to command such an elusive mocking thing ; though I suppose it is also true to say that a person with an iron will would not engage in such foolery with tunes, would neither hunt them nor be haunted by them, and thus would never make the test. Then when I have given up all hope, and perhaps deliberately shut all thought of the matter out of my mind, the tune comes floating back and I am in possession of it once again. And this time, it remains.

There is now no end to the tune, which goes on singing itself over and over at the back of my mind. It forms a kind of background, for the time being, for my whole life, and all things flow to its measure. I pass ta tumti tumtiti days and nights, and move and have my being in a recurring tumti tumtitee. Curiously enough, no matter what the original character of the various tunes might be, they always take on one particular kind of significance before I have done with them and always have precisely the same effect upon me. The odd bars of melody that have haunted me from time to time have been of many different kinds, only alike in that none of them has been a really massive theme, like many of those in Beethoven's Nine or Wagner's " Ring." Unfortunately, I have never kept a record of them, but I am quite certain that they would

make a very odd list, in which all kinds of music, good, bad, and indifferent, would be represented. With one or two exceptions, the music I like best and can always listen to with delight has never haunted me, perhaps because it is its superb development and general structure that appeal to me ; and though I have often enjoyed such music in my mind after I have come to know it very well, it does not haunt me in the fashion of these separate snatches. I am rather glad, too, because once a melody has given me a thorough haunting I have never any further use for it afterwards ; it seems to me absolutely devoid of beauty and significance, a bone with all the marrow sucked out, and I fling it away, and this is clearly not the way to treat great music. I wish I could remember all the tunes, or parts of tunes, that I have lived with for a short hectic season in this fashion ; but I am sure that at best I can only recall a few. There was, I remember, the queer little waltz-tune that figured as a serenade and an intermezzo in Wolf-Ferrari's " Jewels of the Madonna " ; and one of Elgar's " Enigma " variations, the one in three flats ; and the jerky little theme that the orchestra plays when the sacristan (or whatever he is) hobbles across the stage in the first act of " Tosca " ; and the refrain of an old French song that I once heard Mr. Plunket

Greene sing and that had some such words as "D'ou venez vous promener vous promener vous belle" ; and a lilting open-air sort of theme from the first movement of one of Grieg's Violin Sonatas ; and a snatch from a silly music-hall song that went "Oh I do love you, my Orange-Girl" ; and, an exception to the general rule for I have never tired of it, Schubert's "Litany" ; and the first few bars, a trifle lighter than air and exquisitely coloured, of a certain Capriccio by Brahms ; and many another that I could whistle but probably could not name. My ta tumti tumtiti of the moment is, I fancy, from somebody's imitation Old English dance ; it is not Edward German's, of that I am sure, but for the rest, I do not know who wrote it, what it is called, how it begins or follows on (for it is just a few bars in the middle that are haunting me), or even where I have heard it played.

I notice that it is going the same way as the others. As it repeats itself endlessly, it is losing all its brightness and eager lilt and is becoming, by some hocus-pocus, curiously wistful, the expression of vain regret, still a little mocking perhaps but now gathering tenderness and settling into a not unpleasing melancholy. However blithe they may be at first, these tunes all have precisely the same effect in the end ; they ta tumti me into a

sort of inner mood of melancholy so that even when I am laughing and talking I am still doing it to their rather mournful lilt. It is curious that music, once it has filtered into the memory, should always lose any gaiety it might have once had and turn regretful, softly hymning a world of lost endeavour. Nothing can express gaiety, happiness, and even ecstasy as music can, but we must be listening to it and not remembering it (at least snatches of it), or otherwise it will soon flow back into the main stream of melancholy, to which most music (taking the art in its entirety) seems to belong. Perhaps this is because the happy kind of music does not depend on its melodic structure but on the manner in which it is developed, the way in which it rushes to a climax, and also on the irresistible appeal of polyphony, one theme answering another, escaping and returning, and so forth ; whereas all of this is lost and nothing but the melodic outline, endlessly retraced, remains to the little tunes that haunt the mind. This repetition of one little tune gives us music in its primitive form, and music in its primitive form, the naïve folk-music of every race, always seems subdued and mournful. A tune may have a quick dancing lilt with it and so appear jolly enough at a first hearing, but let it once sink into the mind and its very superficial

bustle and cheerfulness only heighten the real strain of regret or disillusion that soon makes its appearance : music has its irony too. My imitation Old English dance, which is still buzzing at the back of my mind, and of which, by the way, I am now heartily sick, for it has long outstayed its welcome, is certainly an ironical little caper, and might have been composed by one of Shakespeare's musical clowns had it been a better tune, for it has something of their spirit. If I cannot discover any other way of ridding myself of this bitter-sweet carolling, which is ta-tumti-ing the world away, I must fall back upon my old remedy, a remedy that has never failed even in the most desperate instances. I must find out the name of the piece, and then, if it is arranged for the piano, buy it and play through these particular bars about half-a-dozen times. When I have done this, I shall be able to walk abroad once more without a care or a ta or tumti in the world, a free man until the next tune leads me into philandering again, and I desire, pursue, capture and sicken once more. O fickle weak humanity ! Ta tumti tumti tumtiti.

ON VULGAR OPTIMISTS

THERE is a certain kind of optimism that is easily the most depressing thing in the world. To meet one who professes it, one who may fairly be called a vulgar optimist (for this kind of optimism is vulgar), is to long for the sweet consolations of Leopardi and Schopenhauer and the blithe despair of the *Shropshire Lad*. Who does not know and shrink from that metallic and inflexible cheerfulness, that brutal determination to make what is very absurdly called "the best" of everything, which mark such optimism and set it apart from all reasonable attitudes towards life? Its unmistakable vulgarity, the sign of it everywhere, is easily discovered in its favourite aphorism on the subject of dark clouds and silver linings. There is nothing more beautiful, in their own season, than dark clouds, and no man with a healthy mind, and a healthy mind is a poetical mind, has failed to be strangely exalted, uplifted in spirit, at some time or other at the sight of these sombre

masses and fantastic shapes, which for a few brief moments can transform the whole world into a battlement of Elsinore ; yet this vulgar optimist, like some importunate bagman, must come bustling in with his talk of silver linings. He cannot be content with having his pockets and coffers lined with silver, he must line the night sky as well, and all with the same cold glittering stuff. He lives in a Brummagem universe, silver lined and silver plated. What does he know of that wise melancholy which is the familiar companion of all good men and true thinkers ? He presses all the world and the sun, moon and stars into the service of maintaining his fixed grin, and he can wring bright conclusions from twilight and the moaning sea, from old unhappy songs and the pitiful remembrance of first love. For him the strings are muted in vain, he will have nothing but the loud trombone. Now that he and his fellows have swarmed into pulpits and newspaper offices, the whole population is steadily sinking into a deep fit of depression. He it is who is responsible for all these cheery messages and bright services and talks we hear so much about at the present time. Is there anything more hateful than a bright talk ?

This vulgar strain of optimism may affect a man's ordinary manners and talk or his opinions, his philosophy of life, or it may affect them

all. In their manner, a great many parsons are optimists of this kind, though they are not so much vulgar as morbid, the victims of a curious sort of nervous disorder. A good deal of the current prejudice against clergymen has nothing at all to do with their religion, their opinions in general, their peculiar functions ; it is simply the result of a distaste for the manner they affect in ordinary society. Many of them have a suspicion that their ministrations are not wanted, and as they are compelled to meet all kinds of people who may possibly be hostile, and are anxious to carry it off bravely and prove that they are good fellows and men of the world, they finally adopt a manner that irritates every sensible person they meet. Their grimly determined cheerfulness and hectic goodfellowship are appalling. They drench the world in rose-water. Never will they permit the faintest shadow to cross their faces ; they will not be serious for a single moment, but will break into loud, though distinctly nervous, guffaws at every turn. They appear to exist in a universe designed by the editor of *Punch*, and by their kettle-drum counsels of good cheer drive even children towards a bleak but less depressing agnosticism. In America, where extremes flourish, the popular preachers and orators seem to have reached such a frenzy of vulgar and intolerable

optimism that perhaps nothing but the re-introduction of gin into the country will save its millions from idiocy. There, a mechanical cheerfulness, the result of nothing but astigmatism and insensitiveness, passes for the very height of wisdom. To read Dr. Samuel Johnson, who meditated and wrote much on the vanity of human wishes, is to be heartened to face the inevitable ills of life ; but to read Dr. Frank Crane, who screams into millions of ears every day that everything is for the best and that nothing can go wrong, is to be depressed beyond belief, to be dazed and deafened by the brass bands of cheap optimism.

The men who are for ever slapping one on the back and saying that everything will come right are bad enough, but more intolerable are those persons who will persist in slapping humanity itself on the back and regarding all life with an unchanging grin of approval. We have not had so many of these vulgarly optimistic philosophers among us of late, but their influence is still felt in the opinion of our time. There are not more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in their philosophy, because, in the first place, their philosophy does not dream. Stupidity, downright insensitiveness, is the secret of such optimism, which fits as much as it can of life into its bright little boxes and blandly ignores the rest. It

is at its worst when it is based upon a creed of mechanical progress, believing that humanity can be saved by its comforts and conveniences. Who does not know the man who, in his heart of hearts, is convinced that the fact of twenty-five pins being sold for one halfpenny is a blow at, say, the doctrine of original sin? Or him who can now ignore the "still sad music of humanity" simply because the voice of Mr. George Robey can be heard at both Dundee and Gloucester in the same evening? Or those who prefer to concentrate upon the future, and believe that once all rooms are built without corners and electric light is found in every village, desire shall not fail and the mourners go about the streets no more? It is such thinkers as these who—to borrow once more the words of their greatest enemy, the Preacher—come in with vanity and depart in darkness, and whose names shall be covered with darkness.

The reason why such shallow optimism always succeeds in depressing us is because blindness, stupidity, and insensitiveness are always depressing. It is plain to us that those who profess it are living in a world of their own, a much smaller world than ours, a world without atmosphere, and therefore without either sunlight or shadows, and so their words mean little or nothing to us. They are denied

both tears and laughter and much of what we call poetry. Shelley, with his belief in human perfectibility and his beautiful anarchy, was an optimist if there ever was one, but he is neither vulgar nor depressing, simply because he sings and does not speak, sings out of a vision ; he gives us not thought but the intoxication that thought always induced in him, and it is for this noble intoxication that we treasure him. He is everybody's adolescence, or at least the nobler part of it, transmuted into song. Thanks to his untimely death, we see him and his work for ever in the golden haze of his youth and panther-like beauty, and we ask for nothing better. What we should have thought of a fat, spectacled, middle-aged Shelley still uttering the same sentiments is another matter. In the meantime, we go to him neither for wisdom nor for consolation, but in moments of great stress turn rather to that plain, long-nosed gentleman who lounged about the shores of Grasmere, even though we do not care a snap of our fingers for his moral cottagers and celandines. Another great poet, Browning, was an optimist, but was saved by his passion and dramatic genius from the vulgar strain, though even he came dangerously near it at times. Tennyson spent sixty years trying to become a vulgar optimist, but fortunately for us he could never destroy (though he

could cheapen) his natural dreamy melancholy, and now when his voice returns to us it is mournfully declaiming such things as—

> The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
> The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
> Moans round with many voices. . . .

There are a number of great men of letters, and they are, on the whole, those with whom we spend the most of our time, whose attitude, not to be lightly labelled either optimistic or pessimistic, seems to be the right one; they are neither intoxicated youths, clothing the world in their bright dreams, not bitter hobbledehoys, cursing the world for their own awkwardness and bad manners, but grown men, ripe, experienced, knowing the worst, but still smiling, a little sadly sometimes, but smiling. There is Shakespeare among the poets, Fielding and Thackeray among the novelists, Lamb among the essayists, and Johnson among—shall I say—the literary figures; and when I remember what they have known, drudgery, poverty, and disease, mad sisters and young wives dead or insane, and all the smaller ills of life besides; when I remember these things and read their work, noting their humour and pathos, their flashes of indignation, their wise wonder, their lasting kindliness, I understand how life, that is

neither rose-water nor bitter aloes, should be approached. There is about all such men a certain sweet melancholy, as far from the studied gloom of the pessimist as it is from the metallic cheerfulness of the optimist, that pervades their work rather than finds direct expression in it ; a sweet melancholy that is an air, an atmosphere, a background to their laughter and junketing, a vague curtain before which the little things of this life appear small and bright, pitiful and lovely, an expression that steals over their faces when the fighting and clowning and feasting are done with and they think they are unnoticed. So it is, I fancy, with all good and wise men, except those who are prophets and mystics. So it is not with the vulgar optimists, who have never meditated upon vanity and have no values. They stand crowing in the darkness, and they will never raise our spirits until they have depressed their own.

AN ILL-NATURED CHAPTER

IF it is true that some Government in Australia is willing to give large pieces of its land to some thirty thousand settlers from this country, then we should see to it that full advantage is taken of the offer. It is high time Australia was portioned out, watered and swept. If it appears that people here have no particular longing for those great open spaces beneath the Southern Cross where the men of the Younger Nations ride and shoot and grow boastful over their whisky ; if, in short, our people do not come forward in sufficiently large numbers to accept these pieces of Australia, then, writing in all responsibility, I say that there must be coercion, the Government must take steps. There is no difficulty here ; the thing has been done before ; it simply means that some people will have to be taken aside by a few of the superior civil servants, men who have distinguished themselves in Greats, and will have to be told that Australia awaits them with so many free acres,

heavily scented with eucalyptus, and that they have no alternative but to leave this country at once. Nothing must be said about banishment or transportation, for these are hard words : Australia must be served, that is all. And I flatter myself that when it comes to the question, a little difficult, I admit, of the choice of persons to be treated in this fashion, I can offer our authorities some advice and assistance that will be worth having. I know the very people who are ripe for such enforced travel. It is true that when I recommend them I shall be thinking of what we here will gain by their absence, and shall not be thinking at all about Australia ; but then she has her great open spaces, her Southern Cross, her stalwart sons, and can, I take it, look after herself.

When the time comes for the list to be made out, I shall mention names if asked to do so, but in this place I shall keep them to myself. I have my own list ready, you may depend upon it. There are—to begin somewhere near the bottom of the list—those people who habitually dislike the books that I am very fond of, hateful people, much worse than those who simply like bad books, for there is something so stupid and insensitive about them. One reads an excellent new book, a book to arouse a man's enthusiasm, and, being

full of the subject, one rushes into company —only to meet these dull, head-shaking persons, and Oh yes, they have read it, and for the life of them couldn't see anything in it. And there they sit in rows, so much dead matter, their dampening speeches dissolving the salt out of one's life. Let them discover if they can see anything in Australia. Then there are the square middle-aged women with big noses and very loud voices who are so good at organizing and managing things; they ought not to be cribbed and cabined in this ridiculously small island. Higher up the list come a certain number of retired flunkeys who either own or manage nasty bright hotels in such places as the Lake District or Devon and Cornwall, and who, when they see a dusty poor pedestrian with a pack on his back, immediately raise the prices and come waddling out of their holes to sneer at him. Let them go and sneer at a few acres of Australian desert. After them come those strange persons who go about giving little lectures and writing little articles on Woman and Marriage, persons who bear the extraordinary name of "publicists." I can dimly understand the functions of an author or a journalist or an advertising agent or even a plain liar, but I cannot see the use of "publicists," and so I have their names ready and, if necessary, will undertake

to warn them myself when the moment arrives. Their short talks on Woman in the New Era will help to pass the time during the long voyage out. To cut short such a dreary recital, however, let me say that at the very top of my list is the name (and present address) of that woman who was my hostess on two distinct occasions and throughout each evening always referred to me and addressed me as Mr. Barker.

She is, I believe, in many respects a pleasant person ; I understand that she is a good wife and a doting mother, and, for all I know to the contrary, she may be a helpful neighbour and a great social worker. But nevertheless I dislike her intensely, and though I shall be sorry to injure her husband and family in any way, I shall see that she is packed off. The first time, when she said, " I am so delighted you have been able to come, Mr. Barker," I was a little put out, but remembering that even the best hostesses must sometimes get flurried and that she would in all probability soon be telling a mythical Mr. Priestley that she was so delighted *he* had been able to come, I said nothing. But when she persisted in calling me Mr. Barker, in spite of the fact that her husband and children addressed me by my proper name, I began to get annoyed. It was humiliating. I have no particular

objection to the name Barker, which has probably more distinguished representatives at the present time than my name has, for we have done nothing since we discovered oxygen and revolution in the eighteenth century, whereas the Barkers, with Sir Herbert mending arms and legs, and Sir John, of Kensington High Street, selling everything, are forging ahead. But so accustomed are we now to our little labels that, robbed of mine and dowered with another to which I had no right, I was nowhere, literally nowhere. Every time my hostess spoke to me, her "Mr. Barker" annihilated my real self; I became a wistful ghost, hovering somewhere behind the conversation, waiting until Barker had had his say. There I was, in flesh and blood, some hundred and sixty odd pounds of me, and yet as soon as the smiling lady opened her mouth and asked a question, there I was not. Nor can it be said that there was a real person there at all, for the Barker who took my place was not a real Barker but only a shadowy counterfeit, nodding and smiling Barkerishly for a little space. This mistake of hers began by pricking my vanity and ended by frightening me, and altogether it gave me an uncomfortable and, indeed, rather uncanny evening.

Like a fool, however, I promised to go there again, and when the time came I went,

probably out of sheer curiosity, wondering what it would be like being a real person to my hostess. I never dreamt for a moment that she would repeat the mistake. But she did. The servant's announcement, her husband's and children's mode of address, my own constant references to my proper name ("And so Smith said : 'Priestley, my advice to you is . . .'" and so forth ; I was always doing it), had been all to no purpose. No sooner had I set foot on the drawing-room carpet than Priestley dwindled and almost perished, and that hateful grinning image, Mr. Barker, came into existence once more. This time she was kinder than ever, and took me, or rather Mr. Barker, on one side, and inquired about my, or rather his, health, spirits, work, and family. Such inquiries among acquaintances are hollow enough at any time, a mere exchange of social counters, but now they were the veriest mockery. What was Barker's health to me ?—or his family or his prospects ? Or, assuming that I was in some sort of way Barker for the moment, what answer could be made to such inquiries ? How could Barker, a poor thin wraith only flickering into existence at odd moments during an evening, have anything that could be called health or ill-health ? Who could possibly examine and report upon the microscopic ills and shadowy changes in

the life, pulsating so very faintly, of such an attenuated creature? As for his work and prospects and so on, what mockery was this? Did I not know very well, no one better, that Barker's tiny existence was an entirely independent one, without any tangle of relations to other creatures, perhaps the loneliest in the universe; that Barker had no family either before or after him, no affairs beyond the most evanescent trifles, things not to be comprehended by solid earthy persons, certainly no visible occupation, and as for his prospects, they were clearly not to be discussed. Actually, she alone could say what Barker's prospects were, for in so far as he can be said to have had a destiny, she was obviously its arbiter; she alone called Barker into existence, and therefore it was for her to say what was likely to happen to him. At this juncture, however, before I had time to do anything more than mumble some nonsensical reply to her queries, my hostess was suddenly called elsewhere and excused herself. "But I shall be back in a moment," she said, "I do so want to hear about your holidays, Mr. Barker." This was the last straw. So she wanted Barker to talk about his holidays, Barker, poor little ghost, who in his few brief snatches of existence had been hard put to it all the time, and really had no clear idea of what constituted a holiday.

A sudden cold fury took possession of me ; I could not stand it any longer ; it was too late in the day to undeceive her, for I ought to have told her long before very plainly and forcibly who I was, and if I did it now, I would only make a fool of myself, and she would probably swear to all and sundry that I was in the habit of passing myself off under an assumed name ; so there was nothing for it but to go, and go I did, without even waiting to let Barker have his last good-night from his hostess. The list was not thought of then, but my fury did not subside for some days, and even then only settled into a cold malice. But when I did come to make out my list, her name, as I have said, was the first to go down on it, and I only hope that when she arrives in Australia she will immediately call the Southern Cross the Great Bear, and thus draw down upon herself the still colder malice of the constellations.

THE ELUSIVE LETTER

WHO was the woman who once declared that she was only prevented from committing suicide by the fear of missing the next post? If ever I knew her name, I have forgotten it now, but I am sure she was a wise and witty creature, who needed no psychoanalyst to discover to her what was in her mind, who could enjoy her own little weaknesses too much ever to be in any real danger of committing suicide. I have never been in such danger myself, but I am positive that if I were, the thought of the next post would soon entice me back to safety. I do not know how it is, but I seem to spend half my time anxiously awaiting a letter that never comes. What the letter will contain, when it does come, I do not know. It is all very mysterious, but I have been driven to accept this theory of the one supreme, even mystic letter, this shining elusive Graal of correspondence, this glimmering Will-o'-the-Wisp of Letterdom, whose unearthly light illumines for a second or so

the path of every postman ; I have, I say, been driven to accept this theory because my attitude towards the post is otherwise entirely unaccountable. As it is, it seems very foolish. This is what it amounts to. When I receive no letters at all, or at least only a few circulars and the like, I am always either disappointed or irritated, depressed or positively angry. Yet even if the post is far from being barren, even if I pick up a good fat handful of letters, after I have gone through them I am still conscious of a vague feeling of disappointment. Somehow I have been tricked. As I survey the heap of notepaper and torn envelopes, I am conscious of a depressing anti-climax ; the sickening flavour of Dead Sea fruit clings to my palate. Thus, you see, one way or the other I remain dissatisfied, and so I need some theory to account for such a strange state of affairs.

I am not going to excuse myself because I get angry when the post yields me nothing. But it is only fair to say that the nature of my trade (which is, shortly, the desperate enterprise of coining such slight fancies as these into hard cash) makes me more than usually interested in the post, which is, of course, the principal channel of communication between my employers and me. Still, I fancy I should be much the same if I were

engaged in any other business. The only post of the day that gives me no conscious anxiety is the early morning one, for I am usually sound asleep when it comes ; but even then, perhaps my sub-conscious mind is worrying about it and is busy staging fifth-rate symbolical dramas on the subject. The other regular posts of the day are nothing less than a nuisance, for I cannot help worrying about them. When I know that it is only about ten minutes from the usual time for a post, my mind refuses to concentrate on any other matter ; I pretend to read or write, or try to get up a brisk passage of talk, but it is all a hollow pretence : I listen for every footfall. I am as foolish as a young lover awaiting his adored, without—alas !—his divine excuse. It is a pitiable farce trying to do anything else when every nerve in my body is crying out for the familiar rat-tat at the door and the comforting clop-clop of the falling letters. When I make a pretence of indifference, as I usually do, it is simply to deceive the malicious younger gods, for I have noticed that if I openly reveal my state of mind and hang about the door, nothing happens. But how I hang on, hoping against hope, when the time passes without bringing the postman to my door ! How I invent excuses for his delay ! And with what a sinking of the heart I realize that the time has long since gone

past, and that I must stand up to face the sickening truth and try to exist until the next post. And how I hate the postman when I catch sight of him, swaggering and whistling, marching past my window ! And how I hate everybody when there comes the welcome rat-tat and I rush to the door to find a post that is no post, to pick up something and nothing, a wretched sham of a letter ! Every ten days or so, I realize the hollow mockery of all existence because there comes through my letter-box, with a prodigious clatter, a stockbroker's circular addressed to a former occupant of these rooms. I know very well that it will come ; I try to steel myself against its visitation ; but it is no use, for every time it arrives it comes as a fresh blow, a new, crushing disappointment.

All this is very foolish, but I am comforted by the thought that I have fellow-sufferers. I once made a confession like that above to a man with a first-rate detached, philosophic mind, and, to my amazement, he replied that he felt pretty much as I did. Since then, I have come to doubt even those celebrities who receive shoals of letters by every post and employ several secretaries to deal with them. I doubt if they are quite so annoyed about it all as they pretend to be. If their post dwindled down to nothing in the course of a

week or so, I am not sure that they would be so overjoyed as they imagine. They are like the American film stars who come over here and say they want to enjoy complete privacy, but really mean the amount of privacy left them by the host of perspiring publicity agents at their command. We moderns despair of cutting any sort of figure in the next world, and so we concentrate upon this one, and our correspondence is one clue to the kind of figure we cut. If any angry philosopher is enraged by the restlessness of the modern world and wishes to discover the criminal who is responsible for it, he should turn his attention to the famous Rowland Hill, who was, I fancy, a cynic not uninspired by malice.

It is, however, very curious that after all this eagerness on my part I should be somehow disappointed even when I do get a good post. A short time ago, my posts had dwindled almost to nothing and I was becoming uneasy and suspicious, indeed, not untouched by misanthropy ; so I decided to go away for a week or so, ostensibly for a rest and a holiday, but in reality (for I had given orders that no letters should be forwarded) that I might have the pleasure of handling a large number of letters all at once when I returned. While I was away, I spent most of my time either thinking about food (as one always does on a holiday)

or dreaming of the letters awaiting me at home. True, I found a large number when I returned, yet I was far from feeling satisfied, indeed, I was more disappointed than ever. I have tried to analyse this feeling, but to no purpose, so I have taken refuge in the theory of the One Supreme Letter, of which all others are but the shadow. This it is that we expect, knowing nothing of what it will contain, or of what form it will take, but only feeling that this Letter alone will completely satisfy this strange craving of ours. After we have received this Letter, if it does not lure us on to the grave empty-handed, the spell of the post will be broken, and we shall worry no more. The postman will take his place with the butcher and the milkman, and he can call or he can pass, it will not matter to us, for there we shall sit, serene as gods ; and if we hear him knock, we shall look up from our books and say, " Oh, it's only the post," and turn to our books again, and not trouble to pick up the letters until we happen to be passing the door.

But the observant reader will have noticed that there is a certain lack of ease in what I have written so far. The truth is, all the time I have been writing I have been drawing nearer and nearer to the time of the next post, and though I have worked off some of my feelings

by sitting down to describe them, I have naturally been more interested in the coming post than the absent reader. I had just written the word "door" above, when I heard the clatter of my letter-box and hurried out. I saw that there was only one letter. But what, I thought as I rushed forward to pick it up, if it should be the One Supreme Letter! What a triumphant conclusion to my essay! The letter was in an unknown hand, and looked promising. The envelope was of that distinguished-looking kind, long and narrow, with a deep flap, and made of good paper. The handwriting of the superscription was neither too delicate nor too bold, but fine, free and aristocratic. Perhaps the moment had come: nothing was impossible. I called my wife and, wide-eyed, wondering and flushed, we opened it together. It was a note from the Gas Company, pointing out that my cheque was tenpence short and asking me to forward the balance in stamps. Oh! the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world.

AN OLD CONJURER

CONJURERS, it will be readily acknowledged, are a race of men apart : they do not mix easily with the public, their patrons and their willing, even grateful dupes. How should they ?—oracles, sibyls, necromancers, medicine men, sorcerers, wizards, I imagine, were secretive, elusive, not given to hobnobbing with the public in their day. Our own conjurers, it is true, are content to be mere entertainers and make no claim to supernatural powers (indeed, they are formidable critics of all who do), yet they keep to the tradition and hold themselves aloof from the rest of us, forming themselves into Circles of Magic and the like, and meeting regularly to discuss the interests of their uncanny profession. Hidden away, like a secret society, perhaps they show one another their new tricks ; probably their meeting-place is in a constant flux of top-hats, coloured ribbons, eggs, white rabbits, and aces of clubs ; and perhaps after they have made all the table appointments disappear and reappear (a ritual of theirs), they dine well and

at length, and sit there until a late hour boasting of how Southend was bewildered for three nights and a matinée, and Wolverhampton amazed for two consecutive weeks. I should like to think that their societies afford them some such relaxation, for they are, I gather, a hard-working set of men who would probably be a thought too austere—for all their professional bonhomie, which is, after all, nothing but a concession to popular taste—without the kindly leaven of such free-and-easy intercourse. I should like to think too that when they are thus met in secret conclave they are waited upon by those very fellows who always pop up, on demand, from the audience to hold the conjurer's hat or hand, and who always appear so suspiciously awkward and so unnaturally, inhumanly commonplace. I can see these fellows, now shorn of all disguise, without their scrubby moustaches and blue serge suits, waiting upon their masters ; brisk and neat-handed now, bringing in the cheese and biscuits and bottles of Bass ; being themselves perhaps conjurers in embryo, having mastered the eggs and the ribbon but being still clumsy with the rabbit. Soon they too will go on the road as fully-fledged magicians, radiant in evening clothes and waxed moustaches, to subsist elvishly, like poets, on the sense of wonder in man.

The only conjurer I ever knew died some months ago. At one time he could be seen, sitting over a snack and a glass of bitter, towards the end of every morning at a certain old-fashioned eating-house I visited occasionally ; and it was there I met him. Lerrymac, for that was his name, was getting on in years, and had already retired from the stage even when I knew him. A widower, he lived, I believe, with a married daughter, and did nothing but invent an occasional trick and now and then accept an engagement, usually at large children's parties. It is possible too that he may have given some lessons in sleight-of-hand, for he was, I understand, something of a master in this branch of his art. I knew him well by sight long before we had exchanged a word. He would sit in one corner, an elderly and rather solitary figure, neither avoiding notice nor seeking it, but placid and at ease, plainly tasting contentment with his sandwich and sipping leisure with his bitter. He was clearly not unsociable ; he was always ready to engage in talk with anyone as leisurely as himself ; but he was not one of those elderly men who are sharp-eyed and restless, on the look-out for a listener to deluge with a Niagara of reminiscence. At first, stupidly enough, I could not place him. He had that indefinable air which stamps all persons who are accustomed

to moving before a thousand curious eyes, yet he did not look like an actor. There was, too, still about him some trace of that odd smirking "genteelity" which I realized I had known before, but I had not the wit to see that it was the very mark and sign of our bland loquacious magicians. However, I was not entirely to be blamed because the obvious conclusion escaped me. Somehow one never expects to meet a conjurer. When the curtain descends upon a conjurer, we do not expect him to go on existing; he is not like an actor or actress whom a sycophantic press contrives to make more impressive off the stage than on; we imagine that he will probably hey presto himself and melt into thin air until he is wanted again. I remember having once to ask a boy what his father's occupation was, and how I was most queerly startled, had the most odd Wonderlandish feelings, when he replied, "A Conjurer."

I lost no time in making Lerrymac's acquaintance when I learned that he was, or had been, a conjurer. It was pleasant to notice his habit, which persisted in spite of his years, of making deft clean movements with his hands. I have always discovered a genuine pleasure in watching a good conjurer shake out a cloth or fold a piece of paper. Lerrymac, I remember, had a curious little trick that never ceased to

fascinate me : he would clench each fist and keep a penny rolling backwards and forwards along the space between his knuckles and the first joint of his fingers. He would talk of this and that, and all the time the pennies would be turning over and over, backwards and forwards, along the back of his hands in the most uncanny fashion. He never did it ostentatiously, with the obvious desire to impress, but did it idly, as if it were a mere habit, just as another man might have twiddled his thumbs ; all of which was, when one comes to think of it, rather cunning showmanship on his part. Little is left to me of his talk, for I can only see him now as a figure faintly coloured in the memory : a few chance meetings only leave one the savour of a man. But I remember that he was very contemptuous of those illusionists who are paid large salaries on the music-hall stage, who have no craft in their fingers and thumbs but simply invent, or more often buy, elaborate mechanical devices. Lerrymac scorned such inartistic hocus-pocus and declared more than once to me that the true art of the conjurer lay in sleight-of-hand. He was fond too of insisting upon the necessity of a thorough magician's being able to do a trick in several different ways, and he would relate, not without a great many chuckles and the pardonable glee of the ageing, how he had

puzzled a certain well-known performer on one occasion by showing him a familiar trick worked by quite an unfamiliar method. He was filled with such innocent and genial vanities.

His favourite story, one that he told me several times (for he had reached the age when a man has outlived the fear of repeating himself), described a journey he had once made in the same railway compartment as some card-sharpers. These rascals, knowing nothing of our friend and seeing in him a likely dupe, asked him to join them in a game, and though he did not gamble himself he agreed, "just to teach them a thing or two." Never were three men more surprised ; game after game ended in the most unexpected manner ; until finally, Lerrymac, after dealing out the cards, told each man what he had in his hand, and fished—or appeared to fish—four aces out of one gentleman's pocket. He then gave them their money back and told them who he was, much to their discomfiture. It was a great triumph for honesty. Told in detail, with a succession of carefully graded climaxes, it was a fine story, with something of that sense of keen expectation satisfied, that idea of shattering Nemesis, which marks the end of the Odyssey and other pieces of great narrative. I only wish I could hear it again.

There was about this old performer, in whose finger-tips and palms there dwelt so much cunning, a certain air of sweetness and innocence not easy to interpret. But, in the first place, he was an artist, and, in the second, he was an artist of a very peculiar kind. By an amount of labour and a degree of concentration superior to anything that most of us could accomplish, he had turned what might have been a predatory instinct into a "source of innocent merriment." A born cheater, he never swindled a soul (even the watches he borrowed were returned); and instead of robbing children of their patrimony he left them wide-eyed and happy. Out of his silk-hat, he produced twelve yards of coloured ribbon instead of twelve dubious limited companies; and instead of making a few hundred thousands of other people's money disappear, he only made a few imitation half-crowns of his own vanish up his sleeve. Other men born with the cheater's instinct have travelled further than he did; some are in "Who's Who," some in South America, and others in gaol; but he was a wiser and better man and turned conjurer. And if, as I trust, the general scheme of this universe is less solemn and priggish than many people now seem to imagine, probably he is conjuring still, somewhere. I should like to think that at this

very moment the shade of old Lerrymac, ringed round with the peeping shades of forgotten children, is producing a spectral rabbit from a ghostly hat.

IN PRAISE OF THE NORMAL WOMAN

A LARGE number of men, for the most part elderly men, are secretly terrified by the new type of woman, the emancipated woman, who has put down her fancy-work, left home, received a man's education, taken a man's position in the world, and partly adopted masculine habits. The protests, the sneers and growls of such men are fed by this secret terror. The very sight of one of these young women, so determined, business-like, efficient, makes them shake in their shoes ; for they know that the game is up, that no longer will they be able to swagger and boast of their professional capacity before an admiring female chorus ; the women have penetrated behind the scenes in the theatre of man's business and have noted the frailty of the players. Now, like these fellows, I too have protested, have even ventured a little sneer at times, but I flatter myself that it has been for a very different reason. To speak frankly and without boastfulness, this new type of woman does not

terrify me in the least. On the contrary, she puts me at my ease : she is so like myself. She (at her worst) can sprawl in public places with a cigarette or even a pipe, a glass at her elbow, a newspaper in her hands ; but then so can I ; I have been doing it for years and have always found it a remarkably easy accomplishment ; the only difference is, she does not do it so well as I do. Moreover, she has lost something very valuable, to wit, feminine reserve, dignity, grace, without which she will never be able to check my raging conceit, my swelling vanity, never be able to put me in my place as her gentler sisters can with only a faint smile or a slight gesture. That is why I protest against her, for if her kind multiply, we shall live in an entirely man-made world, and we men will strut and swagger unchecked, to the peril of our souls.

It is the other and older type of woman, with her fancy-work and fancy puddings, her slight knowledge of Italian and painting in water-colours, that terrifies me. It is the frail silvery old ladies, with fine manners and much knowledge of the world, who can put me in my place. And like all men, I ought to be put in my place every now and again, or I should become insufferable. That is why the intellectual young men who figure as heroes in our novels of Chelsea life are so insufferable ;

they spend all their time among advanced women (who have gone into the world in pursuit of a career—as the phrase goes) and so are suffered to go their ways unchecked ; whereas any ordinary woman would quickly send such fellows very briskly about their business, for all their talk would not hide from her quick feminine glance their hundred-and-one little meannesses. For in addition to some qualities already mentioned, the ordinary woman usually possesses something that her more "advanced" sister plainly lacks, and that is commonsense ; and a measure of feminine commonsense is fatal to pretentious and designing males. It usually seeks expression in a curious sort of cool yet sparkling irony, essentially feminine, which will prick the inflated balloons of masculine conceit in a trice. Nothing could be better for the purpose. Every man, if he will but speak the truth, will admit that his grand egotistical self has suffered more discomfort from this very feminine verbal weapon than from all the more boisterous devices of his fellow-men put together. As for the free-and-easy banter of the mannish women, their pontifical airs, their pedantry, their shrill sarcasms, they are simply ineffectual, a mere play of shadows, compared with this older method of feminine attack and defence, the method of polite smiling irony.

Jane Austen, of course, used it to our admiration, and, if we are men, occasionally to our discomfort. There is a fine squib in Mr. Chesterton's brilliant firework display, "The Victorian Age in Literature," which can be aptly exploded here. "Jane Austen," he says, "was born before those bonds which (we are told) protected woman from truth were burst by the Brontës or elaborately untied by George Eliot. Yet the fact remains that Jane Austen knew much more about men than either of them. Jane Austen may have been protected from truth: but it was precious little of truth that was protected from her. When Darcy, in finally confessing his faults, says, 'I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice *though not in theory*,' he gets nearer to a complete confession of the intelligent male than ever was hinted by the Byronic lapses of the Brontës' heroes or the elaborate exculpations of George Eliot's." Any man wishing to preserve his own unbounded conceit of himself would rather face ten women like George Eliot or George Sand than one like Jane Austen, a delicate and fastidious little spinster who spent her life in a secluded village. But for company and for the good of my soul give me Jane Austen and all such cool feminine intelligences that know too much to flatter my sex by imitating it.

The woman who lives a normal life is able to check the swelling conceit and egotism of her menfolk simply because her outlook is so different. It is more personal and yet more impersonal. Her interests are at once narrower and wider than those of men. She is primarily concerned with very little things, the minutiæ of talk and behaviour for example, on the one hand, and with very big ones, the colossal elementary facts of life, such as birth, mating, and death on the other. The first are personal and particular ; whereas the second, those enormous facts about life which woman is never allowed to lose sight of, are, of course, universal, meaning just as much in the Fiji Islands as they do here. And both ranges of interest make her what only fools deny her to be, namely, essentially practical ; her eye is steadily fixed on the concrete thing, and she mistrusts that chasing of the wild goose which is one of the chief pastimes and delights of man. She is concerned with persons, solid unmistakable individuals, and judges ideas according to their capacity for making persons happy. Her peculiar and intense devotion and loyalty are meant for persons, for the family and not for the world, and when, by some accident, there is a temporary dislocation, a change in the objects of this devotion of hers, the result is rather pathetic and, I think, not entirely

harmless. Thus, at the present time, there is more than one woman who goes out to business and gives to the trade, say, of money-lending that intense devotion and loyalty of hers which Nature meant her to give to human beings, a man and helpless little children—a very unfortunate displacement.

Now somewhere between these two extremes, the minutiæ and the colossal universal facts, come man's interests, all the philosophies, arts, sciences, political systems, dreams, fantasies, abstractions, and what Stevenson called "logical Aunt Sallies." These are the things that men take seriously, and these are the things that woman (I do not mean Miss So-and-So or Mrs. What's-her-Name, but Woman) does not take seriously, not, that is, in the last resort. From this comes, what Stevenson again called, woman's "motherly, superior tenderness to man's vanity and self-importance." But the fact that it is "superior" tends in any healthy man to check that vanity and self-importance. He takes his interests for once into an atmosphere in which they are regarded as the ingenious play of a great child; his values are for once not merely questioned but quietly set aside and a new scale erected in their place; his monstrous egoism receives a shrewd blow and if he is not a megalomaniac, he finds himself swallowing an unfamiliar dose of humility.

If a man is hurt he can run to his womenfolk for comfort and sympathy and he will not ask in vain, but he is only doing what his child who burnt itself playing about the hearth did a few minutes before, and what comfort he receives he has to accept on the same terms. If he is not a Sir Willoughby Patterne, the experience will do him good. Many a time when I have been brimming over with self-importance because some little affair of mine, which I imagined was as significant to all the world as it was to me, had prospered, I have encountered some quiet-spoken, almost timid lady, whose faint but perceptible contempt for the whole world of ideas I was living in suddenly brought me down to the ground again and gave me a right sense of proportion once more. Most men (with the exception of the Patternes) who are wholeheartedly devoted to this art or that science, who are ambitious in their profession or their politics, must have remarked this queenly indifference, this unspoken but obvious contempt for their great concerns, and benefited by it. This tolerant and tender smile keeps us in order when all the shouts and groans and menacing gestures of our fellow-men are of no avail. It puts us in our place, among the largest and noisiest of children. Once all women have left their citadel and descended, with shrill cries, into

the battlefield, as some are doing now, then man's conceit will flourish unchecked for ever. He will become the Superman ; a sight for the gods, rolling in inextinguishable laughter.

ON HABERDASHERS[1]

I HAVE no doubt that once free of the shop and of the necessity of trading together, with our pipes in our mouths and our minds at ease, haberdashers and I would get on very well together. I have probably met a good many out of hours and not been aware of the fact that they were haberdashers. As *men*, I have no objection to them. But, as haberdashers, they form one of my "imperfect sympathies." It is when I visit their shops and speak to them across the counter that the gulf between us is revealed. That there should be such a gulf, that haberdashers and I cannot agree, may seem to some captious persons a matter of little or no moment. Get on with your business and then get out—I hear them remark—and don't worry : one cannot be on friendly terms with everybody. But what a

[1] But throughout, you will notice, I am not writing of haberdashers proper, but of persons variously designated as Hosiers, Gent.'s Outfitters, and so forth. Nevertheless, I prefer to stick to "haberdashers."

pity, though. I hate that view of life which condemns the greater number of our fellow humans to be merely economic puppets, duly labelled "ironmonger," "butcher," "postman," "burglar," and so on, and then takes no further note of them. Hath not a plumber eyes? Hath not a politician hands? Is not a financier warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you tickle a psycho-analyst, does he not laugh? If you poison reviewers, do they not die? We are all made, whether well or ill, of the same (becoming-year-by-year-more-dubious) stuff and in the same monstrous and exceedingly rickety boat. Therefore let us be something more than customers, shop-walkers, clients, and so forth; let us be friends; let us understand one another. O. Henry has a story somewhere of a Westerner who went up to New York and, hungering for conversation, finally compelled the manager of a café, at the mouth of a revolver, to enlarge upon his curt comment on the weather and talk at some length about the baby and the new piano and other heartening topics. That Westerner has my sympathy, and, indeed, my admiration.

But my complaint against haberdashers is not that they refuse to talk, but that they and I, apparently existing in different worlds, have no common ground; and because it is I who

have to go to them, they have me at a disadvantage and treat me accordingly. How they see life, I do not know : perhaps they see it as a procession of hats, a foaming tide of collars, a flickering pageant of ties ; but certainly not as I see it. And when I enter one of their shops, all my small vanities, all those little coloured prides that give one character and sustain, against dreadful odds, one's self-respect, all ebb away before their eyes. In my own world I may cut some figure, if only a small one, but what am I in theirs ? What is it to them that the man who writes in the *Puffer's Gazette* once said I was almost a wit, that I can play Parodies' Toccata with an average of less than fifty false notes, that I am this and that and can do the other ? The moment I cross their threshold, the values that I would live by cease to exist. I stand before their eyes an ill-assorted bundle of last year's goods, probably bargains, stuff that should never have been bought in the first place, and, even then, has been scandalously neglected since. The only hope for me (I can see it written in their eyes) is to put myself absolutely in their hands and to spare no expense. Short of that, I shall remain as I am, a thing of naught. And, of course, it always is short of that, for being a poor man I am bent on economy.

Then, at the outset, these fellows always play me a very paltry little trick. It happens every time I go. I visit one of these places for some socks, let us say, and in the window there are some socks at two-and-sixpence that will do excellently. I enter the shop and the dapper man who looks like the proprietor of a troupe of performing seals comes forward, and I mumble something about half-crown socks. Then, with a slight gesture of contempt, he turns away and beckons an assistant. Whatever I ask for, it is always the same ; he turns away with a slight but quite perceptible gesture of contempt. (I wish sometimes I was immensely rich and could walk into one of these places and, in reply to the shop-walker, say very quietly, " Er—I've—er—come to buy the shop." What would he do then ?) An assistant then comes forward and cries loudly and cheerfully, " Socks ! Yessir ! This way, sir ! " And then, noticing me more particularly, a certain air of lassitude creeps over him, a hint of weariness and disillusion finds its way into his voice, as he says, more meditatively, " Oh—yes—socks." All this time there has been no word of the price, no mention of half-crown, and I wonder if the assistant understands. He pulls out several boxes, from which he takes a great many pairs of socks, opulent socks, elegant socks, grave and

chaste socks, but all socks with an air ; and as he spreads them out he becomes lyrical and moving in their praise.

" What—er—are the prices of—er——— ? " I venture to ask. His face falls. I have ruined one of his great moments, and I realize it and am a little sick at heart. He looks faintly surprised. " Oh, let me see," he murmurs, " twelve-and-six, ten shillings, and seven-and-six." I set my teeth, for this is the time to assert my manhood. " Oh, those are not what I want," I cry, with an affectation of boisterousness and good-fellowship, " but some at half-a-crown." I say this in such a way as to suggest that I am not trying to economize but have a whimsical desire for the half-crown article, that if I were really *buying socks* I should insist upon having the more expensive ones, but at the moment I am trifling with socks, merely seeing what can be got for a half-crown, indulging an elegant whim.

" Oh !—half-crown," the assistant repeats, icily, all his fires fading out as he wearily returns the real socks to their boxes. (The snob !—for two blazing seconds, I wave the red flag, storm the Bastille, and sit at Lenin's right hand.) And then we begin to trade, soullessly and with mutual contempt.

That is the trick these haberdashers always play me, whatever I may happen to want. I

am convinced that it is a trick, probably carefully taught and rehearsed in one of those courses on Salesmanship. The whole business is craftily stage-managed right from the moment one enters the shop. Its object is to undermine one's self-respect at the start, so that the only possible way to restore it is to buy the most expensive things in the place. It is a trick that works well with a good many men (it is useless against women, who return contempt for contempt and with interest), and it has caught me out on occasion but not for some time now. This, however, is only the beginning of my discomfort, which rapidly increases when I have to try on things. The large bright mirrors in these places always make me look a fool. I hate to stand in front of them, for I look an absurd shape, curiously top-heavy, badly-dressed, and, for some mysterious reason, disgustingly ill-shaven.

The mirrors in the hat-shops are the worst. By some devilry they always make me look sillier and sillier with every succeeding hat I try on, until at length, in desperation, I take the first one and carry it away without another single glance at the mirrors, which are, I am sure, the fruit of much midnight trafficking with the powers of darkness. That this is no mere idle fancy of mine is proved by the fact that while my attendant hatter, by some amazing

effort of will, keeps solemn and grave, the other assistants, passing and re-passing and catching glimpses of my reflection, or rather, distortion, always have knowing and evil grins spread across their faces. But even then, notwithstanding their evil mirrors, I take more kindly to the hatters than to the other haberdashers, perhaps because of the mad one, who is one of my favourite characters in literature. Indeed, I believe that eventually we shall learn to understand each other, the hatters and I. Only the other day, seeking a new hat, I was waited upon by a little man with a large head, rather like an Under-Secretary, who, when I protested against the price of a certain hat, intoned solemnly : " This, sir, is a hat that will wear. It will withstand the elements." I said in reply : " Sir, by that delicious remark, you have probably saved the whole race of hatters and haberdashers, all of whom I proposed, at some time in the near future, to exterminate." But being very shy, I said it under my breath and, clapping on my new hat, walked out, duly fortified against the elements.

THE NEW HYPOCRISY

IF he were living in the young society of our time, a clever hypocrite of the old school, a Tartuffe or a Joseph Surface, would find his occupation gone. No longer would he be able to pay his court to some rigid system of morality while he sinned delightfully in secret. The old type of hypocrite, whose efforts to deceive were nothing less than a tribute to the prevailing ethical standards, whose very existence was a proof of the general sound morality of his age, would either have to go out of business, forgo his amusing habits of deception and sin openly, or have to give his hypocrisy a twist and follow the example of the young men and women who surrounded him ; and if he chose the second alternative, he would become one of our new hypocrites, in short, one of those who pretend to be worse than they actually are. Tartuffe would have to go about damning all and every kind of religion, and would have to swear that he cared for nothing but money and women.

Joseph Surface would openly declare that he loved nothing but the crafty play of his wits, and would confess in all companies that he was as insensible as a stone. Pecksniff would glory in the fact that his art left him free from all moral responsibilities, and, in particular, free from the duty of feeling charitable towards the other members of his family.

We are so anxious now that everybody should know the worst that we are beginning to invent it. Pretended goodness being considered the lowest form of vice, pretended badness has become the fashion. It appears that there must always be a certain amount of cant and humbug in the world, and now that one kind has been driven out, another has come in to take its place. Because their grandmothers sometimes blushed and looked confused when there was no necessity to do so, our girls of to-day steel themselves against showing any signs of confusion and creep away to their bedrooms to blush in secret. The young men who loudly extol an ethical system that would make a tiger look thoughtful, are now compelled to deceive their acquaintances just as the old type of hypocrite deceived his ; and often when they are generally supposed to be breaking the ten Commandments, they are in reality paying secret visits of consolation to invalid aunts in East Dulwich. Some of

the more shameless deceivers, after loudly proclaiming their own particular new form of ruthless ego-worship, will sneak off to practise the domestic virtues, and a few of them, having been taxed with showing signs of kindness and consideration and a sense of honour in their private life, have been obliged to confess their double-dealing. Persons who are capable of forming the warmest and most disinterested friendships noisily protest that they use everyone as a convenience, and our advanced lovers jeeringly announce to one another that they are merely satisfying a transient mood, and keep the tale of their honest affection to themselves. I suspect that the people in the new novels are really much better than their authors would have us believe. The young novelist implores us, almost tearfully, to notice how selfish and vicious his heroine is, what a sensual, mean, cowardly snob, the hero. But even these fleeting shadows, these little creatures born of bad ink and cheap paper, are following the fashion in their humble way, are posing like their creator and his friends ; they, too, poor little sprouts of an overworked fancy, want us to see that they are ready to face facts, to have done with self-deception, to know the worst of themselves ; they, too, having stepped out of the shadow of Dr. Smiles and the Great Exhibition, having said good-bye to the tear

of sensibility and the melting whisker, have now arrayed themselves in scarlet, and proclaim their imaginary sins in the market-places.

It may be said that there is no real change in hypocrisy, but only a change in the standard of morality, that what I call blasphemy, cruelty, selfishness, lying and avarice are now simply virtues, to which the hypocrite pretends as a matter of course. Again, perhaps there is no standard of morality, in which case there can be no real hypocrisy, nothing but pleasant deception, deception for its own sake. Thus a man who never beats his wife or starves his children may give it out that he is always doing so, and if it has all become a matter of taste, then the false impression he creates is merely the result of an amusing whim. He cannot, of course, even be censured for lying. The really great hypocrites have always been actuated by a love of their art and would have tried to deceive even though there was nothing to gain by it. The common pretender has some definite end in view, a few pounds, a situation, a little applause, and so on, but the masters have always been moved simply by their delight in hoodwinking their stupid fellow creatures. It is vulgar to impute to them the common motives of rascality. Iago, the most consummate hypocrite in our literature, played the bluff, honest soldier for sheer love of the

game, glorying all the while in his intellectual supremacy. But such masters are rare, and may be left out of our reckoning : it is the commoner type, the mere artisan of hypocrisy, with his eye fixed upon the rewards of his craft, that must engage our attention. Of the two kinds, the old and the new, the one who pretends to be better than he is and the one who pretends to be worse, which is the more admirable? Our first impulse is to shout in chorus, " The New ! " but the question is not so easily answered. It is a question that has little or no interest for the general public, that has no practical significance whatever, and, like all such questions, it should be handled tenderly, for it is beautifully useless and appallingly fragile, like a rose or a baby.

The old kind of hypocrite, it is agreed, was in himself a living testimony to the sound morality of his time. He would not have affected virtue if virtue had not been generally admired. Nevertheless, in spite of that fact, his influence upon those who came in contact with him was really bad, for he made virtue seem less admirable. Being rotten at the core, he carried with him an evil atmosphere, which gave to those who did not know his real rascality, a rancid flavour to the very virtues he pretended. The sound moral maxims he often preached, being tainted by this vague

atmosphere of evil, lost their honest appeal to the moral sense and began to appear somewhat unsavoury and sinister. Even though we never doubted for a moment the sincerity of the speakers, if we heard counsels of honesty and comradely frankness issue from the mouth of an Iago, fine sentiments from the honeyed lips of a Joseph Surface, devotional maxims in the soft thick voice of a Tartuffe, we should find that honesty and comradely frankness, fine sentiment and religious devotion tended to lose something of their appeal. We should begin to discover, to our astonishment, that there was something slimy, unhealthy, faintly poisonous about them : virtue and morality would suffer in consequence. In this way, the influence of the old hypocrite was definitely bad ; there can be no doubt that he was a sorry fellow. Unfortunately, the influence of our new hypocrites is no better. Being at heart more virtuous, better-natured, than they pretend to be, they carry with them no such sour and evil atmosphere as the old ones do, but nevertheless, they end by turning us away from morality in much the same way. Their very youth and tender bloom, their hidden innocence, dower the immorality they affect with a fatal charm, so that what once seemed to us inexcusably ugly in conduct soon has a fascination of its own. The cruelty and

meanness extolled by golden youth soon begin to look strangely different from what we once knew as cruelty and meanness. The selfishness and treachery advocated by our young girls, so bright, audacious and beautiful, soon begin to make unselfishness and loyalty seem drab, sour and unlovely. How should we know that it is really the soundness at the core, and not the false bloom and colouring of the outside, that has such an effect upon us? We cannot know (unless we meditate upon it), and so these fresh young hypocrites, so busily engaged in making faces at the wax-fruited and antimacassared views of their great-aunts, crumble our morality to little pieces and would make rascals of us. Thus, they are no better than the other, more traditional hypocrites. They may end by being worse, for the effect of their own hypocrisy upon themselves will inevitably be much worse. The old hypocrites, though they did not practise virtue, had to contemplate it in order to pretend with any success, so that many of them, like Lord George Hell in Mr. Max Beerbohm's delicious morsel of fiction, may have finally become, in truth, the virtuous characters they had so long pretended to be. Our new people, on the other hand, have to fix their minds on vice in order to keep up the masquerade, and so if they too end in becoming, in reality, what

they have long pretended to be, they will become thoroughly vicious. When that happens, there will be nothing left for them to do but to try and work round the full circle ; they will then have to pretend that they are a great deal better than they really are, and thus, if they live long enough, they may at last achieve solid virtue. I suspect that very soon "Old Hypocrisies for New" will be all the cry.

ON FREE SPEECH

THE new régime in Russia seems to me very much like the old one that it replaced so violently, for what it chiefly suffers from is a lack of intelligence. It will not tolerate criticism ; it has turned its back on any and every kind of liberty, and, like its predecessor, it has the persecuting mania. As before, one person out of every ten is a member of the secret police or a spy. This type of government is always both a terror and a farce. To the wild enthusiasts, the fanatics of the opposition, persons who have always a tragic rather than a comic view of life, such a government is a terror, the monstrous creature of a nightmare, something to be exterminated at all costs. The strict repression of all feeling carries with it a very strong psychological reaction ; prevented from having his say, the most foolish young enthusiast who could be laughed out of his views in a week or so if he were granted the privilege of free discussion, begins to harden, like metal poured into a

mould ; he becomes a potential martyr, and no danger is too great for him so long as he can strike a blow at the monstrous thing that is oppressing him. On the other hand, persons who delight in cool reason and abhor fanaticism, who tend towards the comic view of life, have a contempt for the absurd panics and the clumsy preposterous methods of such governments. Their weapon against the army of police and its masters is their bland baffling irony. Intellectually, they play the toreador to the government's bull. By temperament, they are usually inclined to support law and order, and, unlike the born rebels and enthusiasts, they prefer a tolerable state in the hand to two utopias in the bush ; but a stupid policy of repression and persecution on the part of their rulers soon puts an end to their loyalty. And as they are generally men with uncommon qualities of mind, who often take to writing, they are very dangerous opponents, for no government, for all its host of bayonets, can extinguish the sly laughter they invoke.

Every persecuting power that endeavours to crush liberty of thought, that will not allow free speech, raises up these two enemies and is eventually destroyed by them. It is the good-natured government that tolerates its cranks and temperamental rebels and takes care to keep the wits to its own side which

survives. Walpole was never so great a statesman as when he refused to persecute, thereby maintaining his own easy superiority, winning moderate sensible men everywhere, and maddening his more determined opponents. An increasing intolerance among governments is one, and not the least, of the evils brought about by the war. We too have fallen, we have hardened our hearts (and softened our heads) with the rest. When we held out our hands to everybody and were unsuspecting and tolerant, no doubt we were sometimes the easy prey of rascality, and it may have been foolishness on our part ; but it was the kind of foolishness that brought us a host of friends. England became the home of great exiles. The new and very different kind of foolishness into which we are falling will not bring us any friends. There may have been a certain amount of pride in our old attitude, but it was not an ignoble pride ; it was rather like that we remark in big dogs when they take their walks abroad. We are now descending from the level of the St. Bernard to join the crowd of mean, suspicious, snarling curs as one of themselves. It is not pleasant to read, as I did the other day, a description by an intelligent and witty foreigner, a woman, of a stupid and high-handed action on the part of our military authorities abroad,

who treated a harmless authoress as if she were a desperate criminal, ready at any moment to wade in blood instead of ink. It is not pleasant to see our fellow-countrymen being turned into the police of melodrama and comic opera, who see spies in every bush and bombs in every handbag. So far, we are not so bad in our internal as in our external affairs, but even here, at home, where the shoot-them-down-like-dogs fellows are mostly compelled to keep their blood-and-iron humours to the club smoke-room, even here it looks as if our old tolerance were fast disappearing. Yet with us, free speech, regarded purely as a safe political policy, has been very successful. If a man can express himself in violent words, he is usually in no great hurry to accomplish violent deeds. The Sunday afternoon performance in Hyde Park, where every one, from the Creator to the chairman of the Puddleton Watch Committee, is steadily denounced by somebody, has saved us from a great deal. We might have heard machine-gun bullets rattling down our streets before now, had it not been for these popular forums. They are our safety-valves, and if we do not believe in the machine-gun method in politics, let us honour them as such.

If I were a despot, even though I knew my territory was crammed with fanatical

revolutionaries, I would not repress freedom of speech. Indeed, I would encourage it. I do not mean that I would do it simply out of deference to the principle of free speech ; but as a safe policy, in order to keep myself in power. I would have little forums specially constructed in public places, where any man could go and say what he wanted. Special policemen would be detailed to show the audience to their places, to assist the speakers in any way, and even to lead the applause. The lank-haired young men who denounced me as a tyrant would do so on my specially constructed platforms, before the courteous smiling officers of my forces. When they had become thirsty denouncing the government, they would find at their elbows a glass of distilled water placed there for their convenience by that very government. But I would go further than that. I would have a certain number of officials from my Department of Education, bland, polite, faintly superior persons (specially imported from Oxford, if necessary), told off for the duty of attending such meetings and helping the speakers by giving them a criticism of their manner and style. Any revolutionary orator able to pass a fairly elementary examination would be coached free of charge by my Education Department ; so that a man at the very climax of his speech,

when he was prophesying disaster to the bloated tyrant and all his myrmidons, might often find himself looking into the face of his old tutor from the State Department, nodding approval from the front row. No man would be punished for his political opinions, or rather, for openly expressing those opinions, but an orator who persistently mixed his metaphors or never tried to furbish up his rhetorical finery from one year's end to the other, might be told to report at one of the Educational Offices, where he might be gently chided. Old offenders could be punished by being compelled to attend burlesques (the work of State parodists and mimics) of their typical performances. Though I myself, the Benevolent Despot, would not go so far as King Paramount the First, of Utopia, who used to write revolutionary letters to the newspapers, I would certainly pay occasional visits to my little forums, beam upon the orators and graciously acknowledge the salute of their audiences. And instead of keeping up an enormous army of secret police I would spend the money pensioning off the wits in the country. Instead of subsidizing a solemn newspaper, which everybody would know to be simply a government organ, a thing to be laughed at, I would subsidize the chief comic paper in the country, for people would not

care whether it was a government organ or not, so long as they could laugh *with* it. The political significance of a good comic paper is hardly realized even yet, except by the journalists themselves and one or two of the leading politicians. *Punch*, whatever its editors may declare, has always had a side (though not always the same one : it began its career with Radical prejudices), and it has always been worth innumerable votes to that side. Were I a despot, as I say, I would take care that my country's *Punch* was on my side ; and although free speech would be everywhere encouraged and no man arrested for expressing violent opinions, what with the comic journalists and artists, the government forums with their polite uniformed attendants, the visiting officials from the Education Department and tutors of oratory, I am certain that no revolution would ever dislodge me from my throne. The ordeal by laughter would be too much for my visionaries, who would cry for solemn martyrdom—but never get it.

THOSE TERRIBLE NOVELISTS

IF I am reading for pleasure, I rarely take up a modern novel. The fact is, modern novels, our serious, intellectual, satirical novels, terrify me. I do not let it be known. Indeed, I have never confessed it before, but it is the solemn truth—they terrify me. No one would ever guess it, of course, because I can bluster it out, I can hide my fear, as well as the next man. Sometimes, editors who chance to forget everybody's address but mine, send me parcels of books to review, and at times there are novels in these parcels, and then I sit down and look through the novels and write little notices about them. And no one who read my reviews would ever imagine what was my real state of mind when I wrote them. I pretend to be rather bored and condescending, and give a novelist a pat here and a kick there ; I say that by writing *Deathtraps* Mr. Aloysius Slaughter has proved himself to be either a writer to be reckoned with or not to

be reckoned with, that Miss Firestone (who has written *Sour Cream*) has promise and will be heard of again ; all with a fine air of condescension that deceives everybody, except other reviewers. Yet if the truth were known, these very novels I have been appraising so carelessly have filled me with apprehension, sometimes sent me into an absolute panic, at the time I read them. I am still speaking of the same kind of fiction, the serious and rather satirical kind, studies of modern society and so forth, and not of stories of adventure, detective tales, genial blood-and-thunder books, which do not terrify me in the least but give me great pleasure.

Our novelists frighten me because they are both omniscient and uncharitable, which no one else ever was. I do not mind those who attack the industrial system or slum landlords (though I never read them) because I do not happen to be either a factory-owner or a slum landlord myself, and so their onslaughts pass over my head. It is the others, those who hold up the mirror to ordinary society, who always leave me so dazed and apprehensive that I have given up reading them, at least for my pleasure. They fasten on to the smallest details of conduct in ordinary social life, and make everything appear to be so terribly significant that they leave me positively afraid

of going out and mixing with my fellow creatures. They seem to have access to social codes entirely unknown to me. Everyone is weighed in balances infinitely delicate, and mysteriously found wanting. They have standards of conduct, appearance, talk, manners, so utterly beyond my comprehension, criterions so refined, so subtle, so far above anything to which I for one (and perhaps you for another), could attain, that not for the world would I encounter one of these prying, gloating scribblers. If I am to have literary company, let me be with the poets, the critics, the essayists, the wistful reviewers. I call upon all the kindlier gods to protect me from your arrogant intellectual novelists. In their presence, I would not dare to open my mouth or to make the slightest movement, for fear of trespassing against some mysterious code of theirs and having my life sneered away in their next book. They serve up everybody with that bitter sauce of theirs ; their wives (or husbands), their parents, children, friends, neighbours, landladies, shopkeepers and all ; and by this time, now that they start their careers early in life, they serve up their schools and colleges : nobody is safe from their unaccountable indignation, their strange, enduring malevolence.

It would not be so bad if one knew how to

please them, if one were certain that it were possible at some far-distant date, after going through agonies of self-discipline, to win their approval. But alas !—for my part what it is exactly that is wrong I do not know ; all I do know, as I shrinkingly turn their pages, is that there is *something* wrong, that most of us are every moment putting ourselves beyond the pale. We do not know why. We simply *are* that kind of people, as the novelists themselves would say. Thus you have only to open one of their alleged stories anywhere to encounter a passage that runs like this : " The next day, Richard made the acquaintance of Boston. Boston was the kind of man who would drink Chianti "—or " who would not drink Chianti " as the case may be. And as soon as you have read this (at least if you are like me) your spirits droop, for you too are the kind of man who drinks (or does not drink) Chianti, and you are lost indeed. Nor are such passages, such murderous stabs in the dark, only encountered at long intervals, for our very bright and satirical novelists can average at least one to a page. They pull us up in this cruel fashion at every turn, and as we read, we sicken. Only a short time ago, I read (for money) two novels, one immediately after the other. In both stories, the situation was the same. The hero—each time, a snob,

but then they are always snobs, prigs or cads now—married a poor little wretch of a suburban Miss who was brought on the scene to be jeered at. But in the first novel, the poor little wife was utterly damned because, when she went out to tea, she held her cup with her little finger outstretched ; whereas in the second, she was equally damned because she went out to tea and held her cup without her little finger being outstretched. I forget which writer I said was one to be reckoned with, but I know that, my reviewing at an end, I was glad to get out of this stifling atmosphere of the Secret Society for the Correction of Suburban Misses, to escape into the clean open air of a genuine tale.

Moreover, these novelists of ours carry their motiveless sneering and confounding into graver matters. They will jeer at you if you are married, and sneer at you if you are unmarried ; they will curse you for a clumsy swindler if you are in business, politics, or a profession, and set you down as a neurotic weakling if you are an artist ; they will dismiss you with a bitter paragraph if you attempt suicide, and yet raise their eyebrows through twenty-five chapters if you persist in living : there is no pleasing them. Our older novelists, whom I read with increasing pleasure, dealt with normal people simply as normal people,

and presented their humorous, odd and eccentric personages as such, and enjoyed them, and consequently make us enjoy them to this day. They did not refer their characters to mysterious standards, put them to monstrous and secret tests, and spend their time trying at once to dazzle and bully the reader into admiration. They made no pretence of omniscience, and they were certainly not uncharitable. But our contemporaries enjoy nobody in their books ; I do not believe that they enjoy writing the books themselves ; all that they enjoy is their one little trick, by means of which they hope to compel our admiration. All their vast parade of knowledge, knowledge of men, manners, countries, trades, books, music, food and wine, is but part and parcel of this trick. An essayist, now, will make open confession of his ignorance and frailties, but when did you discover a novelist ready to admit he or she was ignorant of anything ? Why, they often desert their narrative altogether and go miles out of their way simply in order to drag in the name of a fashionably obscure French painter or German composer, an Italian vista or an Hungarian entrêe. So, too, their strange criticism, their eternal, irrational, uncharitable habit of jeering and carping is simply part of the same trick. They cannot hope to entertain us with their poor, halting

tales, so they have given up trying, and prefer to frighten us so thoroughly that we shall not even dare to stop reading them. But, speaking for myself, though they can terrify me when I do read them, the trick goes no further with me now. I simply refuse to be bullied into reading them (even when I take money for it), and they can do what they please about it : they can put me into their forthcoming books and say that I simply *am* that kind of man, and show me out to tea with my little finger outstretched or not outstretched or curling into the cup, just as they please : I do not care.

CRANKS

A CRANK is defined by my dictionary as "an eccentric person." I feel that there is something wrong here. Surely we ought to be able to make a distinction between the crank and the eccentric. That the two are not the same is obvious when we remember how we commonly use the terms. Once we call a man "a crank," it is certain that we are prepared to dislike him, whereas, unless we are raging pretorians of convention, we feel a sort of tenderness for the eccentric. The latter is a person of whims and crotchets, one who makes experiments in living, whose life overflows the strict pattern of the crowd, whose corners remain unrubbed; one who simply asks to be left alone. England has always been a country of eccentrics; they jostle one another throughout our older literature, where their presence is an unfailing source of comic relief. Even the eighteenth century, for all its trim and razored formality, was a period when the eccentric flourished mightily.

To borrow Mrs. Meynell's happy phrase—the century stuck straws in its periwig. Walpole's letters provide us with a feast of whims and crotchets ; they hum with the rumours of this and that eccentric. And the writer himself, with his lean and querulous foppery, his enthusiasm for the toy Gothic, his pastry-cook's castle of Strawberry Hill, seems to us now a notable eccentric. But then a great many of our authors have been eccentrics, and our literature itself, with no academy to clip its wings, is odd, whimsical, assertive, individualistic. Our older fiction is crammed with queer characters because our older novelists found themselves surrounded with such queer personages. There is no oddity in all Lamb's essays so odd as the writer himself. All this is as it should be. There are people who would have human nature like a Dutch garden and hate to see it going its own way, now gnarled and stunted, now ripe and luxuriant, but we, I trust, are not of their company. We who demand variety and do not pretend to have a pattern of our own so perfect that it should be imposed on the rest of humanity, we not only do not dislike the eccentric, we applaud him, and regret, with salt bitterness, that he is fast disappearing. His place is being taken, if it has not already been taken, by the crank. It is a bad exchange.

The eccentric was usually an old gentleman who went his own way and only asked to be left alone ; the crank is commonly a youngish person who demands that everybody should go one way, that is, the crank's way, and will not leave anybody alone. The eccentric merely discovered a mode of life that suited him ; the crank has found a way for everybody ; he possesses a panacea and is aggressive, militant, proselytizing. The mark of the crank is his unshakable belief that his own particular crotchet will save the world. If we laugh at him, it is not merely because he is a faddist and, like Don Adriano de Armado in the play, " too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd, as it were, too peregrinate," but because he displays a ludicrous want of any sense of proportion and so tickles the comic spirit, which is very delicate in its appreciation of values, its sense of balance and proportion. There is nothing peculiarly laughable about persons who want to save the world ; prophets and reformers on the grand scale may inspire either hatred or admiration and love, but they do not awaken our laughter and contempt because their means are at least more or less commensurate with the end they would achieve. The crank, however, who believes that humanity has but to take some curious little step to arrive at perfection, who would bring back the Golden

Age with one wave of his diminutive wand, is simply a little reformer with the air and manner of a great reformer, a prophet.

This is the age of the crank ; and little reformers multiply. Seeing that there are now so many well-meaning and energetic persons in the world, persons with a brave public spirit, intent upon reform, many people wonder why so little is done. They forget that there are so many cranks among us, all pulling in different directions, all ready to make us perfect, but each proffering his own foolish little remedy. Our streets are paved with Philosopher's Stones and the Elixir Vitæ may be had for the asking. The male crank was bad enough, but now that the awful citadel of feminine commonsense has fallen, we have the female crank, a devastating figure. I am sorry to say that the medical profession (which is called upon to talk more often than it should be) is responsible for some of the worst cranks. The people who believe that we can solve all our problems by making a change in diet or clothing are perhaps the most insufferable. Some merely believe in living simply, that is, wearing special clothes, sleeping in a special kind of room, eating a special kind of food cooked in a special way; and they like to show the rest of us, who can probably live almost anywhere and eat and drink almost anything,

what an artificial, complicated sort of life we lead. Others believe that something of man's primal innocence can be restored by the continuous sipping of unlimited quantities of hot water. Others again hope to get back to Eden by way of vegetarian potted-meat (yes, Vegetarian Potted-Meat—I have had some). There are some who would go further and have nothing but sun-cooked foods. One enthusiastic group is convinced that man will never enter the Land of Beulah unless he is wearing porous underclothing. There are societies that "cultivate rhythm and poise by leisurely mastication," which is, it must be admitted, a small price to pay for the possession of rhythm and poise. [As for this word "rhythm," I have noticed that a frequent use of it in unlikely and dubious contexts is a sure sign of the pretentious but half-baked thinker: the wilder sort of crank loves it.] A few cranks here and there are certain that the higher thought can only be cultivated by deep breathing, and I, for one, should not be surprised if they were right. Some of them tilt at greater marks. There are those who think that nothing but a dense cloud of tobacco smoke hides from our sight the gates of Paradise; and the other day one of them cried: "Don't preach political liberty if you are a slave to tobacco"; to which we, victims of this kindly self-imposed

slavery, can only make answer, in a drowsy murmur, "Don't preach at all if you are the slave of false analogies." Then there are those who have discovered that a raging sea of beer and whisky stands between man and his true destiny, and invite us to cross it in the good ship Lime-Juice. And when we come to education and the relation of the sexes . . . But we do not come to education and the relation of the sexes, at least, not willingly. We will admit that the cranks are there, myriads of them, and have done with it.

Let us confess that these things, porous underclothing, sun-cooked foods, and the rest, are all (except vegetarian potted-meat) very well in their way ; a case can be made out for them ; we might be better off if we did take to eating or wearing them. But obviously they should not be made the central point of a complete social philosophy, the hinge on which turns the whole social system, and this is just what the crank does make them. That is why he amuses us for a time, and then finally leaves us bored or irritated : his universe is not ours. Why he should flourish in our time is a question not lightly answered. Nothing is more certain than that the cranks, unlike the poor, are not always with us ; many ages seem to have been entirely free from them, particularly those ages which show us a clear-

cut social system, a philosophy known to and accepted by almost every one, a universal religion. At such times, everything is in its place ; there is neatness, order, a sense of proportion, an appreciation of values, and there is no room for the crank, with his ill-balanced views. But as soon as we come to an age of transition, to a time when the one great light is broken up into a hundred flickering many-hued lights, when the social system, philosophy, religion have been split into fragments, the crank makes his appearance. We have seen more and more of him these last hundred and fifty years ; he is the scientific crank. Probably we should have to go back at least sixteen hundred years to find his match, and then we should find that the magical, the superstitious crank, his ancestor, was flourishing in that other age of transition. It is in these times of spiritual twilight, when trees walk and distant hills tremble and fade, that the crank can be discovered, waving his long, thin arms, crying " Ducdame " and mistaking every firefly for the rising sun. And when the age is at end, when the sun has risen and the world is flooded with clear light and all the spectres have vanished, when the fine edges have been restored and hill and tree and stream come back to the sight, when men and women go walking in the fields, and turn their faces

to the level light, careless of the long trembling shadows they cast behind them, when the world is seemingly re-made and given to man with the dew upon it, then you will find everything again in its place. But you will not find the crank. He has fluttered away with the moths.

SONG

IN a world torn by dissension, it is well if we can continually exhibit some proof of the theory that we are all brothers and sisters "under the skin." Rather tentatively, I offer one such proof now; tentatively, because it is generally overlooked and its validity may be questioned; and it is this—that all of us hold in common a notion that we can sing. You are about to tell me once again that *you* cannot sing, that *you* hardly know one tune from another, that *you* have your faults, but that a pretence to song cannot be included among them. I know, I know: I have heard you make your disclaimer, without shame and even with some little flutter of pride, in many a drawing-room. But either you are a freak (which might account for the shamelessness of your confession) or you are lying (which also might account for your shamelessness). Having watched you closely, I have come to the conclusion that generally you are lying. In your heart of hearts you believe that you can

sing, as all proper men and women do. That you make no public profession of your faith, that you steadfastly refuse to perform, that your tiny, delicate light of song is always hidden under the largest and thickest of bushels, matters nothing. Just as you believe, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that you have a distinguished appearance, so you believe you can sing. Your confession, in answer to the query of some hostess, that you cannot sing is nothing less than a sly protest against the quality of the music you have just heard, against the singing of the other guests; it is a veiled adverse criticism of your hostess's standard of song; and what you are really saying, at the back of your mind, is something like this: "I am a modest sensitive man, madam, and it is not for me to inform you that actually I can sing, and sing with extraordinary charm, when I choose. But at this moment, I do not choose. For one thing, it is quite clear to me that you are a woman with no taste, for over and above the duty of a hostess you were obviously pleased with the —to me—ghastly exhibition of A. and B. and C., my fellow guests, upon whose impudence (in trying to sing at all) you have set the seal of your approval by your entirely absurd and unnecessary solicitation. In this galley, I do not sing. Enough!"

Apart from a few freaks, we are all like that. Deep in our hearts, we hold the conviction that we can sing. Do not misunderstand me ; I am not saying that we believe we are ready at any moment to stand on the platform of the Steinway Hall with a two hours' programme in front of us, Mr. Liddle or Mr. Kiddle at the piano, and give such a recital that Messrs. Colles and Newman, the musical critics, would put down their evening papers and leap out of their seats with enthusiasm. No, we know that we stand in need of training, that we do not read music very well, that our pitch and timbre and breathing are not perfect. We know that Art could do much for us, but, at the same time, we are convinced that Nature, in her own kindly fashion, has carried us a great way upon the road. It is not that we want to be singers but that we are singers by nature and have simply not chosen either to make a business or even a hobby of song.

> 'I do but sing because I must,
> And pipe but as the linnets sing'

we cry with Tennyson ; only most of our piping is done not in public but in strict privacy, indeed, to be brief and perhaps brutal, in the bathroom. We hold the same opinion of our singing that we do of our faces ; we

know that a superficial critic might easily report to its disadvantage, that the defects of our singing, as of our faces, are obvious, proclaiming themselves to the ear of any casual sprawling listener ; but we believe too that there is about our song *a something* as people say, a subtle charm, emanating from our unique personalities and not to be analysed, that more than compensates for all manner of defects. I am quite certain that most people are entirely mistaken, and I would attack this belief as a monstrous error altogether did I not hold it myself and happen to know that in my case, at least, it is perfectly true. In my singing (though not, I fancy, in yours), despite all its faults, I am certain there is *a something* . . .

I have long thought that people possessed this irrational conviction about their powers of song, and a queer experience I had a few nights ago only confirmed me in my opinion. I was present at an entertainment given in a small hall in a remote suburb. The first half of the programme was furnished by a number of school children, and, as usual, the audience was chiefly composed of their parents, good, simple, kindly, long-suffering people, ready to clap their hands together vigorously at the cessation of any noise from the platform. Up to the interval the entertainment was like all the rest of its kind : there were the young

performers, round-eyed and solemn, the anxious teacher gesticulating in the wings, the ubiquitous smiling clergyman, the old piano protesting against the false notes wrung out of its ancient frame by the nervous accompanist, the stage curtain that would insist upon closing when it should have been open and opening when it should have been closed, and the various lights that followed the perverse tactics of the curtain. So far we are on familiar ground. But the rest of the programme was to be given by some friends of mine (hence my presence) and consisted of miscellaneous songs. Of the ladies I will say nothing. The men, however, were all literary men whom I knew fairly well, but not well enough to know that they appeared occasionally in public as vocalists, that is, not until they invited me to this concert. Until that evening I had never thought of them as singers. Nor have I thought of them as singers since that evening. I know now that for all their powers of intellect, their introspective habit, they are simply under the sway of the common conviction, which, in their case, happens to be entirely false.

The first to appear was C., an all-round man of letters of great power and charm. Being used to public platforms, he showed no trace of nervousness, but came forward briskly, a tiny sheet of paper in his hand, and stood at

ease while the pianist played the opening bars of the song. Then, the moment the introductory passage was at an end, his mouth opened a little and continued to open and shut, one hand came forward and kept on moving backward and forward and sideways, and he began to wag his head as people do when they are singing with enthusiasm. His presence and gestures were magnificent ; never did I *see* a song better sung ; but alas !—I never caught the faintest murmur of sound from his moving lips ; it was a Barmecide Feast of song. Judging from the accompaniments, I gather that he gave us two songs, one by Schubert, the other by Schumann, but not one note or word of them did I hear, and for all I know to the contrary he himself may have been singing "Down Among the Dead Men" or anything else. But each time the piano stopped, he made a half-bow, half-nod, and we all applauded loudly like the courtiers standing round the Emperor's imaginary robe in the fairy-tale. Thus ended C.'s curious performance. The next to appear was my friend L., a young poet with a strongly-marked personality. He also had a tiny piece of paper in his hand. Unlike C., however, he was clearly nervous, and stood too near the piano, being almost behind the accompanist at times. He is tall and slender at any time,

but on that tiny stage, he looked about nine feet high, a monstrous sight. Altogether he looked very uncomfortable, and it was not long before he had made me feel as uncomfortable as he looked and probably felt. He began one of those interminable folk-songs, a thing that had a refrain about " mowing the barley " and was obviously not meant to be sung or heard by sober citizens but by rustics filled to the neck with cider and ale. He sang on and on in a choky little voice, with his long body in such a strained attitude and his face turned at such an absurd angle (looking like an illustration to a handbook on Swedish Drill) that we became more and more irritated. Unhappily, we relieved our irritation by vigorous hand-clapping at the conclusion of his song, and he, misinterpreting the meaning of the noise, came back and sang another folk-song. By this time, he had goaded us into a kind of cold fury, and we sat with clenched teeth and let him finally depart in silence. But there was worse to come. C. had left us wondering ; L. had left us irritated ; but now we were to be finally routed. For the next performer was the last person I ever expected to discover on a public platform singing a song. He is a youngish critic, with an aggressive North-country manner and accent, who shall pass here as B. Now the other two,

with all their faults, could be avoided when they became too tiring. Thus, one had only to close one's eyes to eliminate C. altogether; closed eyes and some concentration upon an interesting thought were fairly successful against L. ; but as well try to avoid Destiny as B. ! He came forward with a scowl on his broad face and stood within a foot or so of the edge of the stage, peering down at the wondering audience. In his hand he had a gigantic sheet of paper ; his hair was very untidy and his clothes, as usual, looked as if he had slept in them. He began. The words of his song were very pathetic and dealt with the bereavement of a young lover ; the tune they were set to was extremely sentimental. Anyone less suited, in face, figure, voice and manner, than B. for such a sentimental ballad can hardly be imagined. But he had been told that the audience would like broad sentiment, and he meant to give them it. He filled the place with a volume of the most unpleasant sound ; he roared and grunted and wheezed and bellowed ; his sentiment was the sentiment of a wounded bull ; and there was no escape from his monstrous voice, which assailed the ears and smote the nerves without pity. His performance was inhuman, a blasphemy. If the huge prehistoric monsters had love-songs, that is how they must have sung them. After the

first few notes, a stir ran through the audience ; a few bolder spirits were infuriated and looked menacing, but the large majority, which included me, was simply dazed and apprehensive. As soon as the pale accompanist had played the last frightened note, I escaped to the outer air to set my nerves in order again. But the next time these literary friends of mine sneer at my judgment and taste and (especially B.) roar at my little enthusiasms, I shall reflect upon the strange fact that they, yes, even they, are befooled by this widespread though secret conviction and imagine that they can sing. And they have proved themselves to be so appallingly wrong, that were it not for my own powers, undoubted though not acknowledged by anyone but myself, I should imagine that this secret conviction was altogether deceitful, and the most lively of all our mental Wills-o'-the-Wisp.

A DEFENCE OF DULL COMPANY

AT this season, the beginning of the year, we often find ourselves in the company of people we do not see at any other time. The festive tide floats us into the presence of innumerable relatives and old family friends. Our consciences recover some of their tender bloom in the early days of January, and we hasten to repair the neglect of the last twelve months by issuing invitations to those persons "we really ought to see" and by scrupulously declining to invent excuses for not accepting their invitations. The result is, we find ourselves in strange waters for a little while. Our friends, our real friends retire to the background, their places being taken by people who (if we are under fifty) remember us when we "were only so high" and do not scruple to make the indecent most of the circumstance, by old schoolfellows with whom we have had nothing in common for thirty years, except a liking for tobacco and

a hatred of taxes, and by a host of other odd solemn fish. The values of our own little world suddenly mean nothing ; we are regarded from all manner of quaint unlikely angles ; we are treated with respect simply because our cousin is Borough Surveyor of Little Podlington, or we are laughed at because we made ourselves ill with pudding at the age of twelve, or we are pitied because we have not commandeered a fortune like our wife's sister's husband, the company promoter. We suffer a voluntary exile.

The people we meet at such a time are generally dull. This is probably the reason why our engagements with them become affairs of the newly-wakened conscience, things not to be thought of in June or September, when such persons, nothing but poor wraiths of the memory, mean less to us than the trembling shadow of a leaf. Our friends, of course, are not dull ; if they were, they would not be our friends. Indeed, I flatter myself that most of my friends would not be considered dull in any company, unless it was in a company of flappers, and even then I think some of them would give a good account of themselves. One or two of them are people of such rare charm that their very appearance acts as signal to hospitality to fling its gates wide open ; if they were dropped from an

aeroplane into some remote and alien city, I believe they would have received half-a-dozen invitations to dinner before they had walked the length of the main street. Such are my friends ; witty, genial, argumentative, roaring, subtle, wise and humorous souls : I rejoice in them. But, I repeat, the people I see at this time of the year, and only at this time, are not my friends, and they are dull. Everybody knows them. They are not the skeleton in everybody's cupboard, for the skeleton is usually some relative who is a cheerful wastrel and turns up at inconvenient moments to borrow five shillings ; the skeleton is exciting. These people are rather the cupboard itself, the plain, deal, innocent-looking affair that conceals the skeleton. They are solidly dull folks, good rate-payers all, the backbone of the country and the suet-pudding of society.

There is much to be said in favour of their company, or at least for a measure of it once in a while. When we are with our friends, we are not in the world, that is, not in the real world but only in a cosy little painted world of our own ; we and our old friends agree to be warmed by the same sun of illusion and cooled by the same sweet rain of opinion ; much talk and many experiences in common have enabled us to map out our hills and valleys, roads and rivers together, so that we

always know where we are and can travel in comfort. Once out of the society of our friends and among our distant relatives and the rest, and all is changed. Our horizons are immeasurably enlarged by our Uncle George, who used to be in the coal business, who is so old and stupid, who knows nothing about our delicate fads and foibles, and cares less. When we face him, we begin to face a new world. It may be a very dull and stupid one, but contact with it will do us good. Forced to accept innumerable strange points of view, we are braced ; many a drowsy spell is broken ; we must willy-nilly cast into the balance much of what we have come to accept without question. We come to a short talk with our cousin the stockbroker, who thinks of literature much as we think of eau-de-Cologne, as Childe Roland came to the Dark Tower in Browning's fine poem. It is only right that such heroic encounters should be infrequent, but if we shrink from them when they do offer themselves, so much the worse for us. More than one fiery young revolutionary is ready to face the tribunals of the bloated oppressors, but is not willing to face his maiden aunt from Cheltenham.

The time we spend in this dull company is not only a period of trial but also one of rest and refreshment. There is nothing bad in

this. Even the Crusader or the Knight-errant, once he had set out, was at least free of his creditors. So while one part of us is being tried in the battle, another part is being rested and even coddled. This welcome rest in dull society will take a slightly different form with each individual, and what follows may only apply to myself. If it does, I am sorry, but it cannot be helped : in the last resort, a man can do no more than translate his own experience into words. For my own part, then, I discover a certain transient satisfaction and mental comfort in dull company because it affords me a relief from ideas. My own friends are for the most part men and women of ideas. Modern psychology has made a distinction between "stable" and "unstable" types of mind, one tending early towards settled convictions and largely working by instinct, the other being more subject to change and knowing more of reason. My friends are of the "unstable" type. In their company, I become aware of subtleties, of the more intimate relations of things ; I realize that all is relative, shifting, confused, secretive, that we grope from darkness to darkness and are only the more bewildered by our brief intervals of light ; I am never allowed to forget that I am a semi-crazed, two-legged thing, half-ape, half-god, mumbling and staring

for a little hour on a globe that is spinning on its way through the darkness. This is very well ; I make no complaint ; but one can have too much of it. So the dull people I meet at this season come very opportunely, for through them I can win a little peace.

Here, in its plain lack of ideas, is the saving grace of this dull company. On these grounds I am prepared to defend it. There is a certain air of cosiness about it, an absence of doubt and uncertainty, that is the very medicine I need at the New Year when I venture into such society. The dark outer spaces are shut out and forgotten. The abstract, so cold and brittle, perishes, and we move among concrete things, solid to the sight and touch. The cosmos dwindles, becomes more warm, human and familiar, and even begins to suggest drawn curtains and a bright fire, tea and muffins. That perilous talk which suddenly starts all manner of awkward self-searching questions in the mind, is heard no more. All we hear is solid comforting stuff ! " Now getting so much a year. . . . The eldest, Mabel, is very pretty. . . . Sold his house for so much. . . . Managed to find an excellent hotel. . . ." Nothing much in itself perhaps, but infinitely soothing, keeping at bay the howling wolf-packs of ideas. And, after all, it is not so much the talk itself as the atmosphere, the

spirit, Master Shallow, the spirit ! There are no uncertainties, no changes ; every one is himself or herself, the same this year as last, as splendidly dull as ever. We are free of time ; we spend an evening or two in eternity, secure from trouble, in a world all fixed and constant ; the very stories, heard so many times before and so very tedious, drone on for centuries, and little we care. Once again we hear how Aunt Mildred missed the 9.52; and the fire gleams upon pleasant faces, and all is snug within, while outside there is the wind and rain and death and destruction and all the ideas in the world. There we sit, cosy, untroubled, gloriously fallow, sipping our cups of lethe-water and eating our hot buttered lotus. Later, we shall awaken like children from sleep, and go out, alert, eager and refreshed.

AN IDLE SPECULATION

NOT long ago I attended a football match, in the company of one friend and thirty-nine thousand nine hundred or so strangers. Remarking the general enthusiasm, the eager way in which the thirty-nine thousand not only followed and commented upon the game they were watching but also discussed the prospects of the innumerable other matches that were being played elsewhere, remarking all this, my friend and I very naturally fell to talking of this national passion for football, and in particular for the association game as it is played by the professionals from Scotland. And then one of us, I forget which, wondered what would happen if by some whimsical chance the people of this country suddenly grew tired of football and developed a passion for some other human activity, such as literature. We thought of the vast sums that are expended every week, the almost universal interest that the game arouses, the space that is given to it in the Press, the interminable discussions that take place in trains and trams

and tap-rooms, and barbers' shops all over the country, the photographs, the interviews, the special trips, the advertisements, the organizations, and so on and so forth ; we thought of all these things that are only sustained by the widespread passionate interest in the game, and then began to tell each other what would happen if this interest were suddenly diverted to literature, if books and authors took the place of goals and players, if poets suddenly became more important than centre-forwards and critics better known than full-backs. It is an odd but not altogether unfruitful theme.

The free libraries would be suddenly besieged. Every evening and all Saturday afternoon, long queues would be discovered waiting patiently at the doors, until notices were hung out, saying, "Nothing but Bad Fiction left," when the crowds would turn sadly away. Suburban trains would be filled with rows of men reading poetry and belles-lettres. Every good bookshop would be entirely cleaned out of its stock during the first week. The literary periodicals, now leading a precarious existence, would suddenly find themselves printing edition after edition, and would be compelled to announce that they were unable to cope with the demand. Newspapers would give at least four full pages to poetry, literary articles and reviews, and their

back pages would be decorated every day with photographs of authors. *The Athletic News* would become *The Literary News*. Perhaps *The Pink 'Un* would become the *Mauve One* and devote itself entirely to the Free Verse movement. Boys' papers would have long serial stories with such titles as "The Boy Essayist" or "The Masked Critic, a Tale of Literary Life." Special editions would be rushed out every other night or so to give some exclusive piece of information about a book, a poem or an article: one would hear the newsboys crying: "Speshul! Smith's poems accepted" or "Jones' novel finished! Speshul." The whole nation would neglect its business, and breathlessly await the decision of the committee who annually award the Hawthornden Prize, and every newspaper would have a special leader on the subject. Idlers would loiter outside publishers' offices all day long to see who was going in and coming out and to try and catch any bit of news as to forthcoming books. A man who had just had a good sonnet printed in one of the weeklies would be recognized and cheered as he walked down the Strand. Mr. Puff, the bad critic, would be driven out of the country, and perhaps an attempt would be made by schoolgirls to assassinate Miss Saccharine, the erstwhile popular novelist.

There would be no end to the enthusiasm. Mr. Thomas Hardy would appear a demi-god. Special excursions would be run from London to Bath so that enthusiasts might catch a glimpse of Mr. George Saintsbury. Mr. Walter de la Mare would be offered £600 a week merely to recite "Arabia" on the stage of the Coliseum. Every fine Saturday afternoon Messrs. Gosse and Squire would have to deliver lectures through megaphones at the Crystal Palace and Stamford Bridge grounds. Thirty thousand people would assemble at the ground of West Bromwich Albion to hear Mr. John Drinkwater explain, through a very large megaphone, how he came to be a great dramatist. Mr. Arnold Bennett, terrified at such publicity, would retire to Chicago. Mr. H. G. Wells would publish his sociological treatises in penny parts. Mr. Bernard Shaw would write a long drama that was nothing but the history of Woolwich Arsenal Football Club, and would write to the papers pointing out that Steve Bloomer was a greater man than Shelley. A bill would be introduced into Parliament restraining publishers from offering more than a thousand pounds for a first book of verse. Conversation in the streets and public-houses would be on literary topics: everywhere one went, one would catch such phrases as "Bad anti-climax. . . . No construction. . . . 'E

shouldn't have used no Italian form. . . . Wot d'you know abaht blenk verse. . . . When I ses faulty style, I means faulty style. . . . Call that a tragedy, where's the catharsis!" Barbers, bending over their victims, would be discovered declaring their belief that Matthew Arnold has been overpraised as a critic or that the English novel has had its day. Policemen on night duty would comfort themselves with lines of Wordsworth, and busmen would hurl Shakespearean quotations at each other in passing. There would be a Keats' Day at Harrods, and Selfridges would occasionally devote a whole window to the glory of Sir Thomas Browne. Literature, in short, would come into its own.

It would not be long, however, before football too would come into its own, not with the foolish, idle, clamouring masses, now devoted to poetry and belles-lettres, and what not, but with that superior cultured minority of people who can think for themselves, persons of taste. Pale and clever youths would meet together to discuss the former glories of the great game, and to sneer at the crowd, the vulgar mob that cared for nothing but odes and essays, and would not know the difference between an inside-right and a centre-half. High prices would be paid by collectors for picture post cards of favourite football teams,

now only a memory. Programmes of important cup-tie matches, sheets giving the names of the players and some scraps of information concerning them, would be put up for auction at regular intervals, and many of them would command such monstrous prices that only American collectors would be able to acquire them. The Tottenham Hotspur Society would meet every other Thursday at Lady Weathercock's, where little papers would be read on the more important events in the history of that astonishing organization. There, too, serious young persons, who have no desire to appear superior to the general run of their fellow creatures but having found happiness in their culture, having discovered beauty, simply wish to help the ignorant masses to find happiness too, would ask one another what could be done. "I passed a library the other day," one of them would declare, "and there must have been nearly a thousand people waiting to go in, women too and quite young children. Surely, we can do something to make those people realize how they were wasting their time." "It is not so much the waste of time," another would reply, "as the waste of money that disturbs me. Do you know how much was spent on books last year?" (And then he, or she, will name the appalling figure.) "How many really first-class pro-

fessional teams could be run on only a tenth of that sum ! But no, not a player, not a goal, not a ball—the great game is dead. That's the tragedy of it all." A third would intervene : " Yes, I was only thinking the other day that even that little knock-kneed shrimp, Lonlox, the poet, must make at least five times as much as ever any really first-class player ever did, such a great man as—say—Smith, the famous outside-right." At that point, some new member, who has done no research so far, would ask how much Smith was paid for his art. " How much ! " would come the reply, " Why Smith never made more than six pounds. Six pounds ! In a country like this. But then Smith loved his art, and was ready to make sacrifices for it. It is not so much this writing business itself that I object to, literature is all right in its way, for occasional light amusement. But it's the beastly professionalism that has been introduced into it that sickens me." And then, putting their copies of *The Football Review* (a monthly periodical, heavily subsidized, with a very small but select circulation) into their pockets, perhaps they would all hurry off to attend a lecture on " The Short-Passing Game : The Last Phase," by Dr. G. J. Gregory-Jones ; and as they passed through the streets, murmurous with the noise of son-

nets read aloud, they would glance at each other and smile, half in disdain, half in pity, but well content to feed the flame of culture in the gathering darkness.

Finally, I make no doubt, some indolent young man, having an essay to write, would pretend that he had been with a friend to some crowded library or bookshop, that the two of them had remarked the popular enthusiasm, and had fallen to wondering what would happen if this enthusiasm were suddenly diverted from literature to football. Then he would proceed to waste his own and his readers' time by setting down a number of odd and trifling fancies.

THE CULT OF THE REVOLVER

IT can hardly be denied, except by those contumelious persons who are always ready to deny anything and everything, that much of our recent progress is simply due to the revolver and the part it is playing in our everyday life. That we are not like our fathers, for ever floundering in a morass of catchwords and foolish phrases, that we are able to make up our minds, cut short all quibbling, and act swiftly and decisively, must be set down to the credit of those patient and ingenious inventors, the unconscious instruments of a higher civilization, Messrs. Colt and Webley and Smith & Wesson and the others, who perfected this marvellous (though now so familiar) utensil. The old pistol, whether single or double-barrelled, was inconceivably clumsy and woefully inaccurate, and the result was that nothing was done. A few persons, usually uneducated members of the lower classes, here and there took to the pistol

as a means of asserting (in the gracious words of the beautiful old German mythology) their Will to Live and their Will to Power ; but little came of it. The movement did not spread because the instrument was not yet ready. But even when we reach the present century, when the revolver had been brought almost to perfection, we find that it took people a long time to realize the potentialities of this easily handled and comparatively inexpensive utensil. It is, of course, the old story : a new era had dawned, but men and women, blind as ever, had their backs turned to the glorious sunrise, and still groped in the fading and flickering lights of the past. Only a few wiser spirits, such as Mr. Kipling the poet, cast aside prejudice and saw the possibility of a new world in which the dreary weaklings, with their interminable logic-chopping talk, would be for ever silenced by the strong virile men who always knew what they wanted and always had their fingers on the trigger. Fortunately, the events of 1914 and onwards swept away all idle prejudices ; men learnt to face the facts and cared no more for outworn shibboleths ; civilization, which had been almost at a standstill, took a great leap forward. The cinema, too, which came to replace the simpering toy-like arts of the past, unfolded before admiring millions its vivid dramas of

" the great open spaces where men are men " ; and at the sight of these manly picturesque figures of the screen, impressionable youth, even though it was nurtured in the counting-house, put behind it the faded ideals of the past and was uplifted by this new spirit of swift and decisive action, a sharp word and a sharper blow. The revolver came into its own.

To point out that other things too came into their own at the same time does not by any means lessen the importance of the revolver. Thus, in some quarters the bomb is regarded as a formidable rival of the revolver. Undoubtedly, the bomb has its uses ; it has a part to play in the new world we have made ; it has taken its place in our civilization ; but it does not seriously compete with the revolver, except in the imagination of its more enthusiastic admirers, because its character is quite different and therefore the scope and method of its use are quite different. The revolver is a universal instrument, useful to all classes and well used, capable of settling all manner of questions, religious, political, social or mere private differences ; and one or other of its kinds will suit any temperament. The bomb, however, is much more limited. For example, it is generally considered bad taste to introduce it into private quarrels, a sphere of activity particularly suited to the revolver. As a

means of settling political differences, perhaps the bomb has its uses, but most authorities are agreed that it is too doctrinaire. It is more a philosophical than a political instrument, and that is why only the political extremists have favoured its use. It is too imposing, perhaps a trifle too flamboyant, for the adjustment of slight differences of opinion ; large questions and issues, in which ideal systems are sharply contrasted with less perfect ones, are the natural sphere of the bomb. Comparatively small rough-and-ready bombs were used with some success by some pioneers of the modern movement to make certain stupid persons in authority realize the sacred nature of human life and liberty. More recently, small hand-grenades have been flung about in considerable numbers in Ireland, Italy, and other places, but in all these instances, there has been a high-spirited populace more bent on amusement than on serious propaganda. We must look elsewhere to see the bomb used as it should be used. It is only the large bomb dropped from an aeroplane that has won for itself a permanent place in our new world, a position that cannot be challenged at all by the revolver. The latter is, for example, much too petty an instrument for the wide issues of Imperialism. To impress upon thoughtless women and children the gravity of international

affairs and the justice of the cause which employs the airmen, there is nothing superior to the aeroplane bomb, that is, nothing superior so far, though a number of brilliant men, dedicated to the welfare of the race, are engaged upon the discovery of means even more effective. So, too, as a means of bringing—almost literally—the light of civilization before the startled eyes of ignorant backward races, indifferent to the higher demands of empire, the aeroplane bomb has not yet been surpassed. But it is obvious that we cannot all devote ourselves to such high tasks ; we have our own parochial and personal interests, and it is here that the revolver reigns supreme.

The Colt .45 used at short range will blow away the back of a man's head, and thus it is essentially the instrument for a person with political interests. A young man who is ambitious and has a fairly large, steady hand and a good eye, will be well advised to make himself thoroughly familiar with the Colt .45 and to regard his use of it as the foundation of his public life. In his lighter moments, when he is with his family or his friends, he will probably prefer to use an instrument of a smaller calibre and more amusing mechanism, but unless he wishes to be considered a mere fribble, he will do the bulk of his work with the big Colt. Here in England, we must con-

fess, it has played a very small part in political life ; we are at heart a conservative people, steeped in prejudice and suspicious of change ; we still hear men arguing about political questions and still trying to convince one another in the old stupid way, until we might imagine there was no such thing as a revolver in the world. It is true there are individuals here and there who are more progressive, and it is they who have done something for other countries if little for their own. In Ireland, for example, where the use of a good Colt in public life is now thoroughly appreciated, our English enthusiasts have not been without influence.

In commercial life, now that it has been "speeded up," a revolver is invaluable, particularly for the task of facilitating the rapid transference of wealth from one person to another. In America the large Colt is still popular in this class of work, but it is generally considered too clumsy and rather too showy by the average up-to-date young Englishman with economic interests. A utensil of smaller calibre is preferred among our smarter men because, being so much lighter and shorter, it does not bulge the pocket and spoil the fit of a coat. In private and personal affairs, men suit their own tastes and indulge their whims, for these are matters of pleasure rather

than business ; so that all kinds of revolvers are used. In an affair of a very intimate nature, an amorous and tender affair, there is nothing like a small automatic, which has neatness and dispatch and a certain delicacy of its own. It is true that little can be done with the butt of a small automatic, and this makes it almost useless for those who like broad and rather grandiose effects ; but to the ordinary adulterer or jealous lover this fault is more than compensated for by the unique advantage that this instrument possesses in its succession of shots. Women, for all their apparent delicacy, are notoriously difficult to kill, and husbands are a tough race, so that a full clip of cartridges to hand is often very useful indeed. Fortunately, in these more personal affairs, we have made some headway in this country ; we cannot be accused of neglecting the revolver entirely ; our old smugness is vanishing, and some of our young men and women, spirited children of the age, have seen the futility of the old methods and have not hesitated to pull the trigger. The younger generation is awake to the fact that society, with all its half-witted codes, means nothing, and that the splendid destiny of the individual means everything. It will not be long before it realizes that the individual can do little without the revolver.

In conclusion, seeing the world as it is before us, we must ask ourselves if there is not much more to be done. Here in this country there are still absurd statutes on the books about revolvers, though they are nothing, of course, but absurd anachronisms. The cinema is doing well, but is it doing all that it could do? It shows ordinary marksmanship and the effective use of the butt often enough, but what about breaking an opponent's front teeth with the muzzle, what about the use of the gun against little children? What about prices?—why should the poor man be denied his revolver? Why not more public interest in the standard of marksmanship? What are the schools doing? Or the women—particularly the political women—what are they doing, now that there are all these light automatic guns about? These are questions that will have to be answered once we realize that we are living in a new age, in a world where the revolver, or the effective use of the revolver, is "most current for that it comes home to men's business and bosoms"—above all, their bosoms.

TOY-BALLOONS

IT is well for those grumblers who are for ever pointing out how much worse off we are since the War, for ever telling us how cheap and wonderfully made everything was before the War, that they never think about toy-balloons. The toy-balloon is one of the few things that has not suffered a change for the worse ; it appears to have been steadily improved, brought nearer to perfection, with every passing winter. At one time, toy-balloons were always shiny and rubbery, hideously coloured and of a monotonous shape. Now, they are more opaque, and have some suggestion of the peach and apricot in their dull, smooth surface ; they are diversely and very beautifully coloured, some even being parti-coloured and others again having the metallic lustre of gold and silver exquisitely softened. Evidently there are artists, sensitive, creative minds, in this mysterious and rather elvish trade. Some one, it is clear, has sought relief from our present horrors in the work of

shaping and colouring such delicate, exquisite merchandise. I refer, of course, to the more aristocratic little balloons. No doubt the baser sort, on the old hideous pattern, is still with us. No doubt the cheap juvenile tailors still give them away to little boys as some sort of compensation for their being huddled, not without grave warnings and threats, into new clothes. It is not easy to understand exactly why all cheap tailors should have preferred toy-balloons to any other kind of inexpensive gift. Was it because it allowed them to write their names and addresses across it and so kept alive the feeling of gratitude? Perhaps. But then the toy-balloon always had a short life, shorter than a picture book or a little toy would have had. Yet its very transience may have been thought appealing and likely to make any small boy wear out his clothes more quickly than usual in order to replace it? But I leave the question to more thoroughgoing reasoners or to those in the know, of whom there are always plenty.

This great and surprising change has even effected the toy-balloons one sees hawked along the kerb. They too are moving graciously towards perfection. And surely, with the exception of flowers, they are easily the prettiest things offered for sale in the streets. Even at a distance, they make a charming splash of

colour. Seen close to, as they float, though seeming rather to hang, above the vendor's head or round his basket, they are entrancing indeed. They look like fruit, celestial, ethereal, the fruit of some strange star. The pleasure they must have given to the crowds moving along the sooty streets is incalculable. The sight of these opulent yet delicate clusters has probably heartened more people, done more solid good, than all the fine sentences our social philosophers have written this year. Pushed and jostled about the London pavements as I have been in the dark seasons, they have probably meant as much to me as the sudden sight of the daffodils meant to Wordsworth (or his sister) ; and it were shameful ingratitude not to acknowledge the debt. When one of our younger poets is tired of scraping together imagery to describe the more obscure processes of his mind, he might do worse than visit the Strand to see the toy-balloons and to write in praise of them. If he is not suddenly invaded by a host of pretty little metaphors and similes, if his thoughts do not pick up their trailing skirts and fall to dancing, then he is no poet.

Yet it is obvious that from most points of view the toy-balloon is indefensible. It is the very type and symbol of idle frivolity. No man or woman was ever the wiser or, it must seem, the better for having one. (Do not

imagine that toy-balloons are manufactured solely for children.) I doubt if a place could be found for it in any scheme of things, solemn, wide-embracing, nobly planned, of the kind that philosophers and others submit to us from time to time. Herbert Spencer, for example, contrived to mention most things, but I doubt if he ever wrote a word about toy-balloons. In all the economic researches and speculations of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, the toy-balloon industry has never been considered. Its passing would not wring a tear even from Dean Inge. Its notable improvement in late years has not even excited Mr. H. G. Wells. At no time, I believe, has Mr. Bernard Shaw written to the newspapers or allowed himself to be interviewed on the subject of toy-balloons. They are chiefly to be found where there is a foolish glare, much noise, and little truth, beauty and goodness ; they have probably diverted some from the search for truth, allured others from the path of goodness ; and in themselves they mark a lapse from a more austere and nobler standard of beauty. Much valuable energy is consumed in their manufacture and much money wasted in their purchase. Quite a number of our fellow-citizens stand daylong in the gutter hawking these foolish trifles. No, it will not do.

For all the charm of these things to a lounging

essayist, I doubt if the trade of selling them is good for the people in it. I have not had much talk with hawkers of toy-balloons, but a short time ago I happened to overhear one of them talking with a couple of his friends and his conversation certainly lacked charm. He was in an expansive mood, for he had finished for the day, though there were still a few remaining brightly-coloured balloons floating about his person, looking, it seemed to me, not unlike Titania's sprites waiting upon Bully Bottom. Being in the mood for confidences and vain bragging, he launched into an interminable story of a dismal adventure he had had, in the way of business, with a lady near South Kensington Tube Station. He had sold this lady several balloons and greatly overcharged her. She went away with her purchase and then returned, a few minutes afterwards, to demand either new balloons or her money as the ones he had sold her were faulty. He jeered at her, and so she called a policeman, with whom our friend took a different tone, and, indeed, managed to whine himself out of the scrape. This is the substance of a tale that went on and on, a tale that was bad from every point of view, for it was neither entertaining nor moral. I do not suppose that all balloon men are such dreary rascals, indeed, I am sure this fellow was an

unpleasant exception ; but obviously the influence of the balloons, such as it is, does not count for much with their vendors, whose æsthetic sense is not unnaturally blunted by the more urgent preoccupations of trade.

Undoubtedly, the toy-balloon is indefensible from most points of view. But as we have already agreed, I hope, that it has a place in *our* scheme of things, that we can even feel grateful towards it, then surely it is simply the points of view that are wrong. Let them look to it. I often wonder what would happen to such pretty trifles in the solemn economic utopias that some people are always fashioning for us ; and I cannot help thinking that the possibility of such things being allowed to survive is very remote. Seeing that we should be compensated in other directions, perhaps it would not matter : we could do without them. I confess that I would sorely miss the quaintest of all markets, that of the street hawkers with all their strange array of amusing and entirely useless little things, toy-balloons, dancing clowns, clockwork lizards, mechanical clucking hens, and what not. And it is certain that such idle and promiscuous commerce would not be suffered to exist, for the grim necessity that alone drives men into it is very ugly indeed. I like to see the street hawkers, but, on the other hand, I should not like to

be one, to have to stand in the gutter all day hoarsely proclaiming the virtues of an absurd little toy (though there are many other occupations, of much more consequence, that I should like less, for, unlike some men, the toy hawker does at least find himself surrounded by amused faces—think of the children !). But it ought to be possible to find some place for the pavement merchant and his absurd wares even in the most idealized city of the future. I like to think that the socialized streets will not be shorn of their elvish commerce, that there will still be hawkers, now quaintly clad, Barrie-ish persons, comfortably seated on the crystal clear pavements, calling the attention of passers-by to little toys of amazing ingenuity and toy-balloons that are more like starry fruit than ever. We might even agree to make the toy-balloon some sort of test for our prophets and grand, sweeping reformers. When they have told us what should be done, when they finished refashioning the world and have put everything in its place, we might venture to ask them what would happen to the toy-balloon. If the wistful demand was met with a look of contempt and a shrug of the shoulders, we could then turn away well satisfied, knowing that, whatever they were, they were not the prophets for us. Let them reform themselves, we would mutter as we passed out of their hearing.

CHARLES AND EMMA

IF asked to produce a list of their favourite children in literature, most people would probably not include Charles and Emma; indeed, they would not know Charles and Emma, so how could they? I do know Charles and Emma, and though I am not sure that I would include them in a list of favourite characters, I do feel that they should have a mention somewhere. They are to be found in a fat little book that was written, I imagine, about a hundred years ago: *Scientific Dialogues: Intended for the Instruction and Entertainment of Young People; in which the First Principles of Natural and Experimental Philosophy are fully explained.* The author is the Rev. J. Joyce. How strange if he should prove to be an ancestor of our J. Joyce, who writes books not intended for the Instruction and Entertainment of Young People! Ancestor or no ancestor, he was the creator of Charles and Emma.

If you should want to know what these two

children looked like, I shall have to disappoint you. The book is in strict dialogue form and contains no description. There is, it is true, a frontispiece that shows us the family group, but even this is not very helpful. Father, that fountain of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, is there, standing in the middle of the group, with his right arm resting on a large globe and his left arm extended towards the open window. The artist clearly understood Father, who is made to look the very picture of Natural and Experimental Philosophy tempered with parental affection ; bald, benignant and wise. The children who are standing round him look as all children look in the pictures of that time, that is, like adults on a small scale. The boy on the left with the long dark curls and the eager, faintly Jewish face is obviously Charles. The little girl, who is seated in the foreground, picking a rose to pieces, is clearly too young to be instructed and entertained by First Principles, though she looks, by the way, not unlike a miniature dowager. Her two older sisters, aged about eleven and fourteen respectively, are standing with their backs towards us, and the older one on the right who is looking out of the open window, and whose back is taut with intellectual effort, I take to be Emma. How cunning of the artist not to let us see her face, so that she

remains through the ages a somewhat enigmatical figure, a young, mysterious Hypatia. I would rather have seen her face than Charles', for compared with hers, his mind is an open book.

Both children are alike in their passion for instruction, a passion that would make one of our university professors seem a mere frivolous lounger. There is nothing to choose between their respective desire for knowledge, as the very first conversation will testify. Charles begins :

" Father, you told sister Emma and me that, after we had finished reading the *Evenings at Home*, you would explain to us some of the principles of natural philosophy : will you begin this morning ? "

This timely question gives Father a magnificent opening. I can see him walking, a little pompously, perhaps, across the room to take up his position near the globe, and then striking the correct attitude, one hand caressing the globe and the other moving freely to indicate the First Principles. Will he gratify his son's thoughtful request ? He replies :

" Yes, I am quite at leisure ; and I shall, indeed, at all times take a delight in communicating to you the elements of useful knowledge ; and the more so in proportion to the desire which you have of collecting and storing those

facts that may enable you to understand the operations of nature, as well as the works of ingenious artists. These, I trust, will lead you insensibly to admire the wisdom and goodness by means of which the whole system of the universe is constructed and supported."

So all is well. And now, the artful author does not give us another question from Charles, but quietly, very quietly, introduces Emma. Emma it is who, with an innocent, too innocent, air, asks :

" But can philosophy be comprehended by children so young as we are ? I thought that it had been the business of men, and of old men, too."

There is an unmistakable flavour of feminine irony in this demurely framed question ; but Father, whose perception is not so delicate as it might be, takes it all in good faith and replies :

" Philosophy is a word which in its original sense signifies only a love or desire of wisdom ; and you will not allow that you and your brother are too young to wish for knowledge."

Father knows very well, of course, just as we of posterity know, that Emma will not allow anything of the kind. He has, probably unwittingly, pierced the slight mask of irony ; and the real Emma shines forth in her reply :

"So far from it; that the more knowledge I get the better I seem to like it, and the number of new ideas which, with a little of your assistance, I have obtained from the *Evenings at Home*, and the great pleasure which I have received from the perusal of that work, will, I am sure, excite me to read it again and again."

We should think so, indeed. I wonder if that work, the perusal of which, I too am sure, would excite us all to read it again and again, has come down to us?[1]

After Emma has thus made her declaration of faith, we plunge into business. The divisibility of matter, the attraction of cohesion, the attraction of gravitation, the centre of gravity, and the laws of motion, these and other delightful themes are discussed by Father to the accompaniment of pointed questions by the two children, and the spacious and golden hours of childhood bloom and fade as the two rapt listeners pass from Mechanics to Astronomy, from Astronomy to Hydrostatics, from Hydrostatics to Pneumatics. And then when we come to the end of Pneumatics and pass to Optics, the scene is suddenly changed, or, at least, the dramatis personæ are changed. Whereas before we had Father, Charles, Emma, we now have Tutor, Charles, James.

[1] It has, but not—alas!—into my possession.

Thus only Charles remains of the old trio. What has happened? Is Father dead? Who is James? The explanation may be that Charles has simply grown older (as well he might) and arrived at the age when he could join the Tutor and James. If this is so, then it is a scandalous shame that Emma should be banished from these discussions. She was always the superior of Charles and I am certain that she is more than a match for that intruder, James. I see her, forlorn, disconsolate, driven from the First Principles into the outer darkness, cut off from all new knowledge, idly fingering her tattered copy of *Evenings at Home*, that work which she cannot peruse any longer, now that she knows it by heart. The only excuse that could be put forward for this summary banishment would be a certain lack of fitness in the new subjects. Perhaps there is something indelicate, something not quite suitable for the ears of a young girl, something to rob innocence of its tender bloom, in Optics that is not to be found in Hydrostatics or Pneumatics. Perhaps there is something not quite ladylike in taking part in a discussion about such things as refractory rays. It is not for me, who am ignorant of these subjects, to decide. I know that there is always a grave risk, but I do feel that unless Optics is a positively shameless topic, the risk

should have been taken and Emma's fine intellectual curiosity allowed free play.

The merest glance through the last part shows that the book suffers considerably from this deplorable change. There is a definite lack of human interest, no plot to speak of, and very sketchy characterization. Charles is well enough in his way, but he is not strong enough to carry the book through with two such associates. The Tutor is Father over again, but more business-like and wanting something of Father's eloquence. James, introduced when the author's creative powers were waning, is a definite mistake : he can only blurt out such remarks as " We do not know what you mean by the word refraction," or " Would it not appear curved ? " or, even at his best, " I once saw a bullock's eye dissected, and was told that it imitated a human eye in its several parts." And this is the creature we are asked to accept as a substitute for Emma ! True, Emma herself as a figure gains somewhat from her sudden disappearance, for there is added to one's remembrance of her a touch of mystery, a hint of pathos. As the book proceeds we have come to take her for granted, when, suddenly, without warning, we are robbed of her presence, and this unexpected stroke makes her shine more brightly in the memory. Lightly indeed we hear her say :

"Yes, the *barometer* informs us how dense the atmosphere is; the *thermometer* its heat; the *hydrometer* what degree of moisture it contains; and by the *rain-gauge* how much rain falls in a given time."

And we do not stop to notice that there is in this speech a certain nervous emphasis foreign to the speaker, a sense of hurry and impending fate, a desire to make all clear before the end, some throbbing note that makes it significant. No, without thinking, we turn the page—to find Tutor, Charles, James. Emma has gone; the darkness has closed over her, and as her last words . . . "rain falls in a given time . . ." still linger in our memory, we realize that we shall never meet her again.

ALL ABOUT OURSELVES

"NOW tell me," said the lady, "all about yourself." The effect was instantaneous, shattering. Up to that moment, I had been feeling expansive; I was self-confident, alert, ready to give a good account of myself in the skirmish of talk. If I had been asked my opinion of anything between here and Sirius, I would have given it at length, and I was quite prepared to talk of places I had never seen and books I had never read; I was ready to lie, and to lie boldly and well. Had she not made that fatal demand, I would have roared like the sweet little lion she imagined me to be, roared as gently as any sucking-dove or nightingale; for, unlike that haphazard impresario, Peter Quince, I had, you may say, "the lion's part written." But to tell her all about myself. My expansive mood suddenly shrivelled to nothing; every richly-dyed shred of personality was stripped from me and there remained only my naked, shivering mortality. Nothing but a jumble of

memorable old phrases haunted my mind : I was, like Socrates in the first syllogism, a man and therefore a mortal, such stuff as dreams are made on, born of a woman and full of trouble, one whose days are as grass. . . . What was there to be said ? I stared at my sprightly companion, who was still smiling, half-playfully, half-expectantly, and I must have looked like a child peering from the ruins at the squadrons of an invading army. Then I mumbled something so unsatisfactory that, despairing of any intimate avowals, she passed on to some other topic, while I, donning my cloak and wig, my cap and bells, left the naked six feet of ground to which her demand had confined me, and made haste to follow her. Yorick was himself again.

The request, so framed, was undoubtedly preposterous. Indeed, it was so obviously calculated to silence any normal human being that one may reasonably suspect the motive that lay behind it. To confess one's terror at meeting such a demand is not necessarily to hint at an engaging modesty. It was so all-embracing, so ultimate, that only a megalomaniac or a great genius could have coped with it. A request to know what I had been doing for the past year or intended to do in the next twelve months, to know whether I approved of William Shakespeare or liked

early rising, would have set my tongue wagging for an insufferable length of time. I am ready to talk about myself, that is, about my opinions, my likes and dislikes, my whims, my experiences, my hopes and fears, at any and every season. I have my own share of that windy, foolish, but, I hope, not too unpleasant vanity which is common to most people who do little tricks with words and pigments and fiddle-strings ; I can fly my little coloured balloons of conceit with the next scribbler or chorus-girl or cabinet minister. But even if we only need the merest shadow of an excuse to talk about ourselves, there must be something interposed between the universe and our bare selves ; there must be bounds assigned to our flow of egotism ; we must be given some idea of ourselves to work upon, to build up or knock down. To tell *all* about ourselves in one vast breath is really to press the whole round world in the lemon-squeezer of our minds, to explain the sum total of things in terms of ourselves, to raise the ego to a monstrous height. The very thought of it flips the mind with " a three-man beetle " and stuns a man into humility.

Perhaps with most men there comes a time when they are able to give a reasonable sort of account of themselves ; but I, for one, am free to confess that I have not yet travelled so far. I am still busy trying, unsuccessfully as

yet, to piece together the various impressions and opinions of myself I gather from other people to make up the fragments of my portrait. I am still noting, with amazement, the broken reflections and queer glimpses of myself that I catch sight of in other people's minds. This I conceive to be the third stage of one's progress in self-knowledge : how long it lasts and whether there is a fourth stage at all are questions that I cannot answer. But I can vouch for the two previous stages. When we are very young, not only has the earth and every common sight (to plunder Wordsworth) the glory and the freshness of a dream, but we ourselves have something of the same glory and freshness ; we gulp experience and do not question ourselves, and this golden age lasts until we realize, with something of a shock, that there are other selves who see us from the outside just as we see them. It is when we become conscious of other selves that we become self-conscious. Then we pass on to the second, most disquieting stage, which, for most people who are impressionable and imaginative, covers the whole period of their later teens and early twenties, and may even last considerably longer.

At this time we do nothing but question ourselves ; rosy little Hamlets, we are for ever busy with self-communion. Never are we so

anxious to discover what we are and never do we make so little of the matter as we do then. We examine ourselves in the light of everything we read, and become weathercocks swinging before the changing wind of ideas. An hour of Swinburne turns us into magnificent pagans and sensuous lovers, but before the day is out, a few pages of Carlyle have promptly transformed us into sturdy philosophers or roaring men of action. We can be Stoics before breakfast, Epicureans after lunch, and uncertain but hopeful Platonists before nightfall. Then gradually we lose heart, for though every philosophy attracts us and seems to have been almost designed to catch our eye, though we can always read so much of ourselves into every character we admire, yet there is always something essential wanting in us. We might be anything: we are nothing; nothing but a bundle of impulses, a rag-bag of discarded ideals and wavering loyalties. We are convinced that other people will never understand us, will never be subtle enough to appreciate that curious quality which, for all our wretched lack of anything like character, our instability of purpose, our wandering will, somehow makes us splendid and unique. Meanwhile, we can make nothing of ourselves, for we seem radically different from hour to hour, according to the company we are in. If we are with

some great lout of a fellow, then we see ourselves dapper, fragile, precious, and, in a flash, decide the path we will take for the rest of our lives. But no sooner do we fall in with some little dandy than we hear our own voices, cutting through his mincing accents, and recognize in them the notes of strong determined men who will make their way in the world. So we go on, until we feel that we can show nothing to the world but this dance of shifting selves.

But we grow up, and then either we cast off introspection in engaging to do the world's work or we still try to puzzle it all out. Perhaps we begin to remark the figures we cut in the minds of our friends and acquaintances, and try to live up to the best of them ; though how we discover which are the best of them is a question I am not prepared to answer. This may lead us into vanity, a swelling eager sort of vanity, restless in pursuit of praise, a characteristic that is not so bad as it sounds. As some wiser men have already pointed out, vanity is at least warm, human, social, frankly dependent upon sympathy. There is an infinitely worse alternative, easy to fall into if we strongly approve of ourselves and yet shrink from soliciting other people's suffrages, and this is the solitary and desolating vice of pride. Many a man is praised for his reserve and

so-called shyness when he is simply too proud to risk making a fool of himself. The vain man will cut capers in order to obtain notice and applause, the proud man asks for notice and applause without being willing to cut the capers, while the very proud man has such a miraculous self that he does not even want the applause. Some philosophies make this last state of complete self-satisfaction their goal, but one and all omit to mention the obvious advantages enjoyed by the oyster on such a plan of life. But unless we are victims of such icy folly, we discover, perhaps to our astonishment, that our greatest moments come when we find that we are not unique, when we come upon another self that is very like our own. The discovery of a continent is mere idle folly compared with this discovery of a sympathetic other-self, a friend or a lover. Where now is the sickly pleasure in not being understood, in being unique, miraculous, entirely self-satisfying, in shutting the painted doors and windows of the mind? Before this solid smashing happiness of thus being understood, all our walls go down and the sunlight comes streaming in. And then, and not until then, begins that endless tale which seems to be merely about this and that, but is really all about ourselves.

A NOTE ON HUMPTY DUMPTY

ALICE in Wonderland and *Through the Looking-Glass* are, I understand, to be published for the first time in German. When I first learnt this important fact, it surprised me for a moment, for I had thought that both these classics had by this time passed into all civilized tongues ; but after some little reflection, I soon realized that if they had been popular in Germany, we should have known about it. It is not difficult to imagine what will happen when the Alice books are well known there, for we know what happened to Shakespeare. A cloud of commentators will gather, and a thousand solemn Teutons will sit down to write huge volumes of comment and criticism ; they will contrast and compare the characters (there will even be a short chapter on Bill the Lizard), and will offer numerous conflicting interpretations of the jokes. After that, Freud and Jung and their followers will inevitably arrive upon the scene,

and they will give us appalling volumes on the "Sexualtheorie" of *Alice in Wonderland*, on the "Assoziationsfähigkeit und Assoziationsstudien" of Jabberwocky, on the inner meaning of the conflict between Tweedledum and Tweedledee from the "psychoanalytische und psychopathologische" point of view. We shall understand, for the first time, the peculiarly revolting symbolism of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, and my old friend, the Mad Hatter himself, will be shown to be a mere bundle of neuroses. And as for Alice—but no, Alice shall be spared; I, for one, am not going to be the first to disillusion the wistful shade of Lewis Carroll; may he remain in ignorance a little longer as to what there really was in Alice's mind, the Wonderland (save the mark!) in Alice.

How will Humpty Dumpty fare among the German critics and commentators? I shall be interested to learn, for there has always seemed to me about Humpty Dumpty the air of a solemn literary man, and I was driven to thinking about him only a few days ago, when I had been reading the work of a rather pontifical and humourless young critic whose name I would not divulge for the world. There is quite a little school of youngish critics in this country and America whose work, at once pretentious and barren, has always seemed to

me to have a certain "note" in it that was vaguely familiar; but it was not until the other day that I realized where it was I had caught that manner, heard those accents, before. It was in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Humpty Dumpty has not had justice done to him; he is a prophetic figure, and Lewis Carroll, in drawing him, was satirizing a race of critics that did not then exist. Now that they do exist and put their insufferable writings before us at every turn, it is high time we learned to appreciate Carroll's character-sketch for what it is—a master-stroke of satire in anticipation. I do not say for one moment that such an explanation will exhaust the significance of Humpty Dumpty, for I should not be surprised if there are not other, deeper and more esoteric, interpretations of this character waiting to be discovered by members of the Theosophical Society and others; but it is Humpty Dumpty as a literary character that interests me, and so I shall confine myself to this one aspect. Let us approach the text while it is still unencumbered with German professors.

Alice, you will remember, discovers Humpty Dumpty (who has just been an egg in a shop) sitting on the top of a high and extremely narrow wall, and she takes him for a stuffed figure. This is, you will observe, our intro-

duction to him : notice the *high* wall, so narrow that Alice " wondered how he could keep his *balance* " (the italics are mine) and the *stuffed figure*. Remember these things, and think of that darling of the tiny coteries, Mr. Blank, that owlish young critic : I say no more. It is characteristic of all such critics that they very quickly show a contempt for their audience ; they are all for the select few, who can appreciate Flaubert and Stendhal and Tchekov and no one else. Humpty Dumpty strikes this note very early : " Some people," he remarks, at the very beginning of the talk, " have no more sense than a baby ! " Immediately afterwards, he asks Alice what her name *means* and is annoyed because she does not know, a significant procedure, that needs no comment from me. Then Alice, who represents the normal person, asks a question of the utmost importance—

" Don't you think you'd be safer down on the ground ? " Alice went on, not with any idea of making another riddle, but simply in her good-natured anxiety for the queer creature. " That wall is so *very* narrow ! "

Indeed, the whole passage is significant. Notice that Humpty Dumpty thinks that every simple question is a riddle, something for him

to solve triumphantly, and he cannot understand that Alice, standing firmly on the ground, may be wiser than he and may be really giving advice and not seeking the answers to trifling conundrums. He, of course, prefers to be in the air, and the very *narrowness* of his wall appeals to him. Again, on the very same page, we discover him breaking into a sudden passion because Alice interrupts with "To send all his horses and all his men." What he thought a grand secret is in reality a mere commonplace, known to Alice and everybody else, and only his blind conceit has prevented him from discovering this fact before : there is no necessity to labour the point or to indicate the analogy. Very typical too is the pedantry he displays, shortly afterwards, in the discussion about Alice's age—

"I thought you meant 'How old *are* you?'" Alice exclaimed.

"If I'd meant that, I'd have said it," said Humpty Dumpty.

And the next moment, he shows his hand again by remarking : "Now, if you'd asked *my* advice, I'd have said, 'Leave off at seven'—but it's too late now." Here is that characteristic reluctance to come to terms with reality, that love of fixed standards, rigidity, arrested

development, that hatred of change and evolution, which always mark this type of mind.

It would not be difficult to follow the conversation step by step and find something typical of the fourth-rate critic in every remark that Humpty Dumpty makes ; but we must pass on to the latter part of the chapter, in which the conversation turns upon literary themes. Here the clues to Carroll's real intention in writing the chapter are plain for every one to see. After the talk about unbirthday presents, Humpty Dumpty, it will be remembered, exclaims : " There's glory for you ! " Alice, of course, does not understand what he means by " glory," and says so, upon which he smiles contemptuously and cries : " Of course you don't—till I tell you." At every step now the satire becomes more and more direct, until we reach the very climax in Humpty Dumpty's cry of " Impenetrability ! That's what I say ! " Who does not know those superior beings who, when they write what they allege to be literary criticism, talk of " planes " and " dimensions," of " static " and " dynamic," of " objective correlative," and Jargon only knows what else ! And here is Humpty Dumpty, swaying on his high and narrow wall and crying, in a kind of ecstasy, " Impenetrability "—Humpty Dumpty—the very type and symbol of all such jargoneers.

Alice, as usual, speaks for the sane mass of mankind when she remarks so thoughtfully, "That's a great deal to make one word mean." Of course it is a great deal, but then Humpty Dumpty and his kind pester us with their uncouth and inappropriate terms so that they may be spared the labour of thought and yet may convey the impression of great profundity. There is a certain periodical written for the benefit of superior persons in America, a periodical in which every article bristles with terrifying names and pretentious technical terms that really mean little or nothing, and if I had my way there would be scored across every page of that periodical, in the largest and blackest of letters, the blessed word "Impenetrability." But hardly less significant is Humpty Dumpty's reply to Alice's request that he should explain to her the meaning of the poem "Jabberwocky." For once he is eager, alert, on his mettle: "Let's hear it," he cries, "I can explain all the poems that ever were invented—and a good many that haven't been invented just yet." Of course he can, and so can all his tribe; they are for ever explaining poems, for ever mauling and manhandling their betters, the poets. But what, it may be asked, is meant by that reference to a good many poems "that haven't been invented yet"? For my part, I hold that it refers to the sketchy verses

written by his friends, members of his little coterie, for such verses can hardly be said to have been invented, and it is only when they are explained by the friendly critic that they really come into existence as inventions at all. Finally, it is inevitable that we should discover that Humpty Dumpty, too, writes verse. This fact alone proves conclusively that Lewis Carroll, having had a sudden and disturbing vision of what was to come, meant this Humpty Dumpty episode to be a satire. True, the verses themselves are better, at least technically, than those we are treated to by the young critics who are aimed at, but it is extremely likely that our author, even in parody, felt that he ought not to fall below a certain standard. But the poem, if it can be called a poem, that Humpty Dumpty recites has certain characteristics that are by this time only too familiar to readers of verse : it has that abrupt manner, that sense of incompleteness, that suggestion of vague symbolism, which we know only too well. Such verses as—

> The little fishes' answer was
> We cannot do it, Sir, because—

and

> And when I found the door was shut,
> I tried to turn the handle, but—

leave us in doubt as to who are the posthumous

victims of this satirical genius. And we have only to think of what we have suffered from such persons, and in particular (not to mince matters) Mr. Blank and Mr. Dash, to agree that once again Alice is made to speak for all of us when she exclaims, as she walks away from the absurd figure perched on the high and narrow wall, "Of all the unsatisfactory people I *ever* met . . ." There is clearly no more to be said; the episode is at an end; Humpty Dumpty and all his later followers are annihilated.

ON IMPRESSING ACQUAINTANCES

IT was said of the elder Pitt that when he was a young man he made a practice of always arriving late and leaving early whenever he was a guest. Thus, people never had a chance of becoming wearied of his society ; he had the air of one who confers a favour in appearing at all ; and as an ambitious young man with his way to make, it was, of course, his business to create an impression. If young Mr. Pitt had not always left half-an-hour before any other guest, we might never have had the astounding victories of the Seven Years' War, might never have acquired Canada and India : a man with sufficient will-power to enable him always to arrive late and leave early is the very man to shape the destinies of an Empire, to win England's victories by sea and land. Here is a man with ambition, with a purpose, a vision, to which he can mould his life. Some may think this little histrionic device unworthy of a great man, but

I disagree ; it would be unworthy of a very great man, who, indeed, would probably never think of it, but nevertheless it required a great man to put it into practice at all. Most of us could think of it, and have thought of it, but we have not sufficient strength of mind to carry it out. Certainly, I, for one, have not. If I am asked anywhere, I nearly always arrive too early, and always, always I stay too long. That, indeed, is my trouble : I stay too long. Just when I feel that we are on the threshold of good talk, when I have lost my last trace of self-consciousness and diffidence, when I feel that we are all good friends together, warm, comfortable, intimate, with the night howling outside to warn us against stirring a finger, when I am sure that the evening is about to blossom and bear fruit and that the moment has come for astonishing confidences, delicate humour and unsuspected wisdom, then either I notice a certain fixed and strained look in the eyes of my entertainer or I intercept a glance, so slight, so quick, yet meaning so much, between my host and hostess. I realize, with a sinking heart, that I have fallen into the old error : I have stayed too long. "Why on earth," they say to one another as I go clattering down the steps outside, "didn't the man go before!" They never hear my name again without wanting

to yawn ; they are as much impressed by me as they would be by an exploded paper-bag.

I have always wanted to create an impression with new acquaintances, but somehow I have never succeeded. For a few minutes I can almost hold my own, but after that I see myself gradually sinking in their estimation ; a rot sets in and nothing I can do will stop it. I bring out all the usual tricks, one after another, but it is all to no purpose. If I have met one or two of the great, I talk about them as if, of course, they were my intimate friends. If, for example, I had met Mr. John Galsworthy or Mr. H. G. Wells (and I know neither of them), though I had only exchanged half-a-dozen words or merely passed the salt, I would by hook or crook make some casual reference to Jack Galsworthy or Bert Wells. But though I push this device as far as it will go, it never seems to have any effect. It is not that people do not believe me when I hint at my familiarity with the great ; no shadow of doubt ever seems to cross their faces ; but they refuse to be impressed. If anyone else were to talk about his or her friend Tom Hardy, these very people would be stricken with wonder and awe ; but if I summoned up every platoon of impudence in my army and talked about Tom Hardy until my voice gave out, they would not be impressed ; they would

smile gently at my prattle. It is only right that some men and women should not impress their new acquaintances, because they are lazy and will not work to that end, but nobody can say that I am lazy about it, for I do whatever can be done and work like a nigger—but all to no purpose. Thus, if it looks as if it would pay to affect a superior ignorance, I affect it. If I feel that it will carry weight with the company, like the judges I am not above asking who this Charles Chaplin is. It is true that I, unlike the judges, may be told that I know jolly well who he is and may be asked not to pose, but that is worth risking. Indeed, if I were asked not to pose, my end might be gained, for the company, on dispersing, might say to one another or to their friends : "Yes, an interesting man, but a frightful poseur." And that would be something at least, something accomplished, something done, footprints, if only those of a poseur, on the sands of time.

If I feel that knowledge rather than superior ignorance will most impress my companions, then I do not scruple to affect knowledge. One sometimes does this out of mere indolence, of course ; it is surprising how many lies one will tell merely to save trouble. Thus, if I am faced with one of those persons who love entering upon lengthy explanations and

descriptions, which I always find insufferably tedious, and I am asked if I remember that little shop at the corner, if I know that road which turns off to the right past the wood, if I can recollect the fuss there was when some one or other brought out a first book, I always say, "Yes, yes. Of course," very quickly, although I have not the faintest idea of what is meant: it saves so much trouble and one is spared the inevitable long explanation. But this is lying for the sake of ease; it has nothing to do with creating an impression. If it is merely a question of leaving one's mark, it is no bad thing to pretend omniscience, but if one is out to create a good impression, it is better not to know too much. People are apt to be prejudiced against a too liberal supply of information; the man who understands when to know nothing is more likely to win the suffrages of his companions than your Mackintoshes and your Macaulays.

The real problem, in trying to create a good impression, is connected with the proper distribution of praise and blame. Some beginners, mere daubers, always start by praising everything and everybody, little realizing that they are doing nothing but depreciating their currency the whole time. After one has heard A., B., C. and D. praised to excess, there is no pleasure at all in hearing praise of oneself

from the same source ; one suspects the lavish praiser either of having an entirely uncritical, undiscriminating mind or of being a crude flatterer. Crude and obvious flattery is always distasteful to us because it is an insult to our intelligence : if we are to be buttered, we demand that we should be buttered neatly. It is, of course, almost impossible to create a good impression without recourse to flattery, but that is no reason why we should put our artistry on one side and go about pitifully daubing. I have devised a system that would be absolutely perfect were it not for one fatal flaw ; and as some other people may find it possible to avoid that flaw, I think my system may be of some benefit to the young and ambitious. Briefly, then, the idea is not to praise at all until the right moment arrives. One must be like Iago, nothing if not critical ; one must speak roughly and gruffly, trouncing this fellow (who is not present) and sneering at that fellow (who is also absent), and proceed to carp and jeer and grumble and apparently speak one's mind without any fear of the consequences, until every one present is thinking : " This fellow will take some pleasing ; he is a blunt, outspoken critic, a rough diamond ; he speaks his mind ; he hates to say a good word for anything ; praise from him will be worth having." The stage is now set, ready for the

entrance of Monsieur Flattery. One has only to commend, shortly and grudgingly, the various members of the company, their characters, their persons, their works, and the maximum effect has been obtained with the minimum of effort. They are secretly amazed at such condescension, are flattered beyond belief, and go away with one's few grudging words ringing in their ears, convinced that they have just parted from one of the most interesting personalities, one of the most honest and shrewdest critical minds, with which they have ever come into contact. There is no method that can compare with this.

But where, it may be asked, is the flaw? Alas !—there would be no flaw if one could stay as long as one wished. But time and again when I have been spending the evening with new acquaintances, my system has come to grief. I have jeered and grumbled, given short answers, been brusque and seemingly blunt, and in short have prepared the way beautifully for that moment when, critical and outspoken as I am, I am compelled to admire the wisdom and the charm of the present company. I have prepared the way but I have never reached my destination, for just as I have been nearing it, I have realized that once again I have been staying too long. There has been no help for it ; I have had to go

without being able to say a good word for anybody ; with the result that I have departed, amid the crash of a falling system, leaving behind me nothing but a fixed idea that I am a surly brute and a bore. Other people, who do not stay too long, may be able to use this method successfully, but my ineradicable weakness certainly stands in my way, unless I happen to be the host and can manage to keep the company together until the final act has been played out. By some means or other, I must try to rid myself of this bad habit of staying too long ; and keeping in mind the Great Commoner, I think it will be no bad thing if I make a start now and cut short this essay before you have time to——

IN THE COUNTRY

THEY tell me that this part of the country is famous for its cherries, and certainly I have never seen more blossom, for it foams about us for leagues and the lightest breeze shakes down a host of petals, so that all the roads are snowed under with their fragrant drift. How astonishing it is that by paying a few paltry shillings (less than one receives for writing half-a-dozen or so nonsensical phrases about some book that never should have been written, let alone published) one can be snatched up from the heart of London and set down here among the dazzling orchards, the leafy hills and the clean white roads. At the beginning of the day I am still beleaguered by miles of bricks and mortar ; I am still sneaking past the fourth-hand furniture shops, the unsavoury Cash Stores and gaudy taverns that mark the part of the city in which I have been immured for months ; I am still grimy and sweaty and irritable ; knowing full well that both I and my surroundings affront the Spring sunshine ;

and yet after paying my few shillings, long before the sun has gone down, everything is changed, and here I am, deep among the hills and in cool sweet air, and I have but to look up to see the white blossom-laden branch of a cherry-tree cutting across the blue sky, so that I might be some one in a Japanese fairy-tale. And indeed, townsman that I am, and North-countryman to boot, knowing best the country given over to wandering sheep, the cry of the curlew and endless black stone walls, I cannot help feeling that I am in a fairy-tale of some kind, for the sudden splendour of this South Country is to me a miracle. "Loveliest of trees," I begin, over and over again, discovering some outlet for my wonder in that loveliest of little poems.

In all this, you may easily discover the suspicious enthusiasm of the townsman. But not, I hope, that of the tripper (unblessed word), though even if you do, you will be wrong, for I hope to stay here until all the blossom has drifted away, the roses come and gone, the great yellow moons of late summer floated up and down the sky, until, indeed, the stage has been set in deep gold for the last act but one, and October has entered to the sound of muffled horns. Here, then, is no tripper, but certainly a townsman, gaping at the countryside as the rustic gapes at the city

streets. When Giles and I take a holiday and change places, we treat each other's home and native heath in exactly the same way, namely, as if it were a show, something got up for our entertainment and not the awful scene of human endeavour that it actually is. Mazed as I am at the sight of all this blossom, which is probably nothing more than so much potential fruit to him, I cannot help feeling that I have the better of the bargain ; though if I were hard pressed I should probably admit that Giles, taking care that his days are passed near the soil and merely going into the town for pleasure, is in the sounder position. And I will here and now confess that, for my own part, I always feel rather clever and rather miserable in town, and distinctly stupid and distinctly happy in the country. I do not say that I am clever when I am in town, but only that I feel that I am ; I am convinced that as men go I am fairly knowledgeable, that I can cope with most situations, that my advice is worth having and my conversation always worth an hour or so of any fellow citizen's time. That I am often miserable is due to a variety of causes, not the least of which is the unnatural situation that I find myself in after spending several months on end in town. When one is no Timon (and I hate the part) and yet finds oneself gladly preferring the

sight of one green tree to the sight of a thousand fellow-creatures, then it is high time to move : trees innumerable, forming a vague background, and against them a few (but very welcome) human beings is the situation that leads to a healthy attitude of mind. Those little enthusiastic essays on a starling seen in Hyde Park are the sign of a morbid mind, and if Mr. Robert Lynd, for example, left off writing about race meetings and cricket matches and other human concourses, he would soon become a thoroughly morbid writer.

I do not feel stupid in the country merely because I cannot think there. It is true that I cannot think in the country, if the air is fairly bracing and all the windows are left open, simply because fresh air seems to be the enemy of thought. There is a certain exhilarating quality in good clean air that engenders a large appetite and sound sleep, brightens the eye and clears the cheek, but that undoubtedly puts an end to thinking. Thought is probably a kind of disease brought on by long confinement in an unhealthy atmosphere ; it is probably the protest of the system against such unnatural conditions. In countries where there is an abundance of fresh air and where everybody lives out in the open, no one ever thinks. It is true that our countryside has produced a few thinkers, but they have usually

lived in small insanitary cottages, and where they have not, they have at least taken care to sit behind closed doors and sealed windows. The wise ecclesiastics who founded Oxford and Cambridge knew what they were about when they chose perhaps the two most unhealthy sites in the country ; they knew that fresh air puts an end to hard thinking, though, of course, they never guessed that in the course of a few centuries an elaborate games system would be introduced in order to exercise the lungs and put the brain to sleep. In great cities, one can think almost anywhere, but in the country or at the seaside, unless special measures are adopted to exclude the outside air, thought is impossible. But this is not the reason why I feel stupid in the country, for thought or the absence of thought has little to do with feeling stupid. The fact is that here in the country I am an ignorant man among a number of very well educated men. There are only three kinds of education worth having, that of the countryman, that of the craftsman, and that of the philosopher ; and all the men I meet here have, of course, received the first kind ; they have graduated in the great university of the countryside, and have taken honours in such subjects as the care of animals, weather-lore, state of crops, methods of tilling, ploughing, sowing, reaping, thresh-

ing, and I know not what else. To their encyclopædic knowledge I can oppose nothing but the blank sheet of ignorance ; in their company I am nothing but a strange important-looking child ; and the old labouring men (brown and gnarled, as if they had been made out of wood and earth) I sometimes meet in the village inn make a few general remarks to me and then have to stop, because they are obviously taking me out of my depth. There are, it is true, a number of persons living in the country who know little more of these things than I do, but then they are always either enthusiastic sportsmen or naturalists, and here again I am completely ignorant and can neither kill nor classify. Thus I am, for the moment, a baby among grown men, and small wonder that I should feel stupid.

But I am a happy baby. " My Body, the Ass," is pampered with the freshest of eggs, thick cream and fruit, and deep sleep, and, thus fortified, I can go about and gape, " stand and stare " (as Mr. Davies, the poet, would have us all do), to my heart's content. I carry my pipe abroad and spend a solid half-hour or so watching the fowls in the orchard (and what a pretty picture they make !) or the six little black pigs down the road. I do not say that I shall always be content to be nothing but a wondering spectator, for I know very well,

even now, that I should be happier still if I dared to do something, came, as it were, into action. What I lack is the necessary courage. Thus, for example, I shall certainly be going to the Costume Carnival and Fete that is to be held here, in the Vicarage grounds, to be exact, in a few days' time, for there is to be a Fancy Dress procession, and races, and a scout display, and hoop-la, quoits and skittles, and refreshments, and dancing, and a Silver Band. (How delightful it would be if it actually played as well as it looks on paper—a Silver Band.) I shall certainly go and shall probably enjoy myself, but nevertheless I should enjoy myself a thousand times more if I could only summon up enough courage to join in everything. As it is, I shall probably wander about, and look rather aloof and faintly patronizing, and all the time I shall be desperately shy, too shy to do anything but risk a few coppers at hoop-la ; even quoits or skittles will probably have to be passed over because they involve too much public notice. Whereas if I only had enough courage I would dress up and join the Fancy Dress procession. Yes, I would go as a Romantic, either an Elizabethan or a Byronic young gentleman of the Eighteen-Twenties, and once there I would be the life and soul of the Fete. I would run in every race and knock down skittles galore, have my

fortune told and wallow in refreshments, and dance the sun down the sky to the measures of the Silver Band. Then, at last, when the darkness had fallen, and the vicar was tired of it all, and the Silver Band had vanished into the night, then I would come swaggering home, making large gestures and breathing blank verse, a figure to dream of, magnificent in a world of stars and glimmering blossom.

A COINCIDENCE

ALTHOUGH we talk so much about coincidence, we do not really believe in it. In our heart of hearts, we think better of the universe ; we are secretly convinced that it is not such a slipshod haphazard affair, that everything in it has a meaning. If, let us say, a man rises on New Year's morning, takes up his newspaper, and, opening it casually, finds himself staring at a name identical with his own in the column of Deaths, it is a thousand to one that he will be shocked and strangely apprehensive. Afterwards, he will relate the incident to his friends, call it a curious coincidence, and laugh, loudly though not heartily, over it, and his friends will call it a curious coincidence too, and they will all laugh loudly together and slap one another on the back and feel convinced that they are fine strong fellows with no nonsense about them. This, at least, is what the men will do ; the women, who are realists and less given to deluding themselves, will be more openly

dubious. None of them will feel entirely comfortable at heart ; they will all find it difficult to dismiss the notion that somehow or other such an incident is significant, that behind it lies the finger not of chance but of fate.

As we go through the year we light upon quite a number of these " coincidences " that we choose to interpret one way or the other ; and whether they promise good or ill fortune, it is certain that they always promise something. Even the smallest, things so trifling that we do not consider them worth mentioning to our friends, are not without their effect. The old wondering, peering, superstitious creature that crouches at the back of all our minds sees them as light straws borne along the wind of fortune. Even the most trifling of all will yet induce a mood, a mood that may lead to a quarrel or a reconciliation, to the revocation of a will or the beginning of a masterpiece. It is very foolish and even dangerous to imagine that we are reasonable beings ; such notions, in view of what we think we know of the history of our species, are themselves highly unreasonable. So it will do us little harm openly to confess for once the quite irrational influence that certain curious incidents, sometimes spoken of as coincidences, have upon our minds. If it is a

weakness, it is probably a universal one, and so need not trouble anyone.

Having thus, rather cunningly I think, put everybody into the same boat, I am ready to admit what I should not admit without some such preamble. I am ready to admit that I have been oddly troubled for the past week by the memory of a very absurd little coincidence. Unhappily it was not a pleasant one ; it has left a nasty flavour in the mouth ; and though nothing may come of it (for I cannot really see that it has any recognizable significance) I do not feel so sure of myself as I did. Something, I feel, is rotten, somewhere, and I can only hope that it is still in the State of Denmark. What I call a coincidence insists upon assuming, somewhere in the darker regions of my mind, the form of an accusation, until I feel vaguely responsible for all manner of evils, like a man who imagines that he has done murder in his sleep.

Last week, I was staying in the North of England, and set out one day to visit an old friend of mine who lives in one of those little industrial places, half towns, half villages, that are to be found in the neighbourhood of the great manufacturing cities. This particular village is perched on the summit of a hill and lies on the edge of a wide moor. It is a grim, forbidding country, bleak and desolate before

the coming of the tall factories, and still more inhuman and terrifying to the eyes of a stranger now that its surface is pock-marked with the unlovely signs of industry, looking as if the great hills had broken into small-pox. The factories thrust up their long slender chimneys and show their thousand and one windows, like blind eyes, to the cold light ; the few green fields are harshly framed in black walls ; great cinder heaps abound there ; monotonous rows of little houses run sharply this way and that, up or down from the dirty roads ; in front are the brown wastes of moorland, with their scattered clumps of hard jagged black rock silhouetted against the sky. The moors frown on the mills, and the mills frown on the men. Such country cannot be ignored ; it grips hold of the mind ; it is unique. Human nature being by no means a tender plant, it flowers there as elsewhere ; indeed, this part of England is a great breeding-ground for massive virtues and odd humours.

Only at night does it become tolerable to a stranger. On a fine clear night, all its harshness disappears, and it achieves an unfamiliar beauty of its own. When the sun has finally gone down, a few strange lights, pale amethyst, green, deep orange, linger above the moorland. The hills fade into the sky ; the distant tram-cars, climbing the hills, look like shining golden

beetles ; the street-lamps across the valley seem to bring new and pretty constellations into the sky. Unhappily, it was not night when I boarded a tram-car that would take me to my friend's ugly village on the hill, and though a tram ride there is rather exciting, for the track is almost that of a mountain railway, and the trams are like top-heavy creaky galleons, I felt depressed as I stared out of the window. The tram made one last groaning effort and succeeded in scaling the rise that leads to the village. We passed mournful and ill-shaped football-grounds, groups of little allotment gardens, sufficiently unlovely to smirch the innocence even of a vegetable, and, what was worst, any number of those hideous little hen-runs in which the submerged tenth of the race of fowls peck out a miserable existence. We passed a public-house or two, and then were soon into the village. I remarked the dreary little shops, the short streets that ran sharply down from one side of the road, and the houses, built of stone and now nearly black. The tram stopped and I descended into the street, in no humour for an encounter with the representative of any lower civilization, such as a bland Chinaman or a tall smiling South Sea Islander.

Facing me, as I descended from the tram, was a little street that immediately attracted

my attention. It had only four or five houses on each side, almost windowless dwellings with the colour and lines of coal trucks. They had no gardens, nor even yards, railings or a few steps ; the hapless folks who lived in them walked straight from the street into the house or from the house into the street. Only a small part of the roadway was paved, the rest being a dreadful mixture of grass, cinders and mire. It ended in a patch of waste ground, from which the grass had long been worn. There was the road at the top, with the trams groaning by, and the patch of waste ground at the bottom, and two little rows of dark cottage houses looking at each other. There seemed to be no children there, or cats and dogs, or even open doors : nothing but an unbroken silence. It seemed to me, as I stood there, to be the most unpleasant street I had ever seen, the very last street in the world I would ever choose to live in. It was not one of your picturesque, lurid slum streets, ever ripe for either a spree or a murder ; it was perfectly respectable, and always would be ; no Sunday newspaper would ever make good copy out of its doings ; it kept itself to itself. But what a place, inconceivably dreary, suffocating ! Everything that had gone to make that street was clearly wrong ; there could be no argument about it, no question

of this system or that system ; something stood plainly indicted. There behind those walls, living and loving, dwelt Man, the dream of the swarming protozoa, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties !

But what of the coincidence that has disturbed me in secret for this past week ? Why, at that moment, when I had just begun to mutter " There, but for the grace of God . . . ," it suddenly occurred to me to look for the name of this street, fully expecting to discover in it some last ironical stroke, some mention of Lavender, Acacia or even Paradise. I looked up, and there, above my head and plain for all the world to see, was the name in bold white letters—Priestley Street.

CHARLES RUPERT PURVISON

THERE have been times in the past when I have thought that I have had enough, and even more than enough, of Purvison's company, but during these last few days I would have given anything to have met him again. To be candid, I have lately fallen into some kind of distemper, into a state of mind and body that does not suggest bad nerves or indigestion or acute melancholia or indeed anything to which one could give a name ; it is an ailment, not unknown at Elsinore, that robs life of its savour, that leaves one in want not of energy but of interest (which may, though, be a form of energy) ; it gives to all existence that exploded look which the very early problems in Euclid used to have ; it dulls my sense of wonder. At such times as these, nature confronts me with a silly staring face and I will have none of her awkward blandishments ; the sunset is merely vulgar and the sea very watery ; books and pictures

are a bore, and even music, the loveliest and the best, loses a little of its enchantment ; and as for ordinary human companionship, it is not to be tolerated. But Purvison, for whom I long, has nothing to do with ordinary human companionship ; he is the very antidote to this subtle poison ; if this ignoble spirit can be exorcised at all, then only the voice, the figure, the astonishing talk of Purvison would accomplish the task. He alone could restore, or at least refresh, my sense of wonder, could bring to my " starved lips in the gloam " a draught of romance. If he has not changed, and I cannot believe that he has, somewhere at this very moment he is wasting his sweetness, casting his pearls, when only an hour or so of his delectable company might medicine me back to the kindly unreason of health.

I am convinced that the very sight of Purvison's lank light hair, now thinning at the temples but very long and thick in various odd places, his long wandering nose and his strangely gleaming eyes, would start the cure. Even though I have only summoned his image before my mind's eye, I feel a little better. I have caught, though only spectrally, that gleam in his pale eyes, the light of seas that wash around the uttermost isles, and at once life begins to look less like a thrice-seen film. I have heard again, though only in memory,

his high-pitched wondering tones, and with them I have heard, too, from far away, the horns of Elfland faintly blowing. That gleam, those accents, are merely symbolical of the man himself and the atmosphere in which he moves and lives and with which he infects, as if with a delicate sweet fever, those who know him. To become, if only for the space of a paragraph, the biographer of his external life, to chain him in facts and figures, would only prevent my letting you see the real man, the delicious actuality behind all such facts and figures ; and so I will say nothing of his birth and age, his education, breeding and accomplishments, his income and his friends and relations. It is sufficient to say of Charles Rupert Purvison that while he is himself, in essence and by nature, one of the most romantic creatures now breathing, he is not one of those men who are said to have had " romantic " lives, not one of those fellows who have been apprentices on the old sailing ships, who have run quick-lunch bars in Oregon, cigar stores in New Orleans, and dancing halls in Nevada, who talk so casually of Rio this and that, of exotic drinks and amours, of crimps and hoboes and beach-combers. Such men, whose strange and eventful careers appeal to the romance in their hearers or (frequently now) their readers, are not necessarily romantic themselves. If it

were possible, and it is not possible for me, to regard Purvison's life coldly, taking it, as it were, out of the golden hazy atmosphere in which he bathes it, there can be little doubt that it would appear a very commonplace, and even drab chronicle ; some time spent in one of the less important, the more prosaic, Civil Services, some time spent abroad working at a language, some time spent teaching in preparatory and other schools, periods of exile in the dullest parts of some of our dullest counties, a small income, a host of tiny economies, cheap lodgings and careful holidays. But the true romance springs up from within, and no friend of Purvison's could see him in the light of such a chronicle, for whatever Purvison does takes to itself something of the romance and wonder that is trilling in his heart.

I used to meet Purvison only at odd intervals, and then not for long, except on one occasion when we went for a few days' tramping together. It was really, I believe, quite an uneventful little walking tour, and yet such was, and still is, Purvison's influence, I cannot help feeling that it was all a tremendous and glamorous affair, quite transcending all other excursions of that kind. Though nothing really exciting happened to us, all the time I felt that something would be happening soon ; we were always on the edge of something amazing,

unimaginable ; lit by the gleam in Purvison's eye, the smallest and dullest events, the inevitable accompaniment to any walking tour, took on a strange significance ; we walked in mystery, girt about with wonders. At an ordinary chance meeting, leading to nothing but an exchange of tobacco and an hour's gossip, Purvison was magnificent, but free of the streets, and his own master for a few days, he had me absolutely in thrall. He could wear ordinary clothes as if they were strange robes and insignia or a cavalry uniform of Ruritania, and he could invest the common raincoat with the air of a cloak, a cloak that concealed a dagger dedicated to freedom and perhaps, indeed, the newly severed head of a tyrant ; he could, I say, work wonders even with our ordinary costume, but when he really had an opportunity of showing his mettle, when he appeared in his tramping outfit, cycling cloak, rucksack, knee-breeches, gigantic stick, soft hat pulled well down, gleaming eyes and all . . . then, indeed, the effect was overwhelming. But perhaps the impression he always succeeded in creating at ordinary times was really more remarkable. To come across him sitting in a public place, merely drinking a cup of coffee and smoking a cigarette, was to realize the romantic possibilities of this life. He was the only man I have ever met who could stir a

cup of coffee with the air of a conspirator. To meet him, even casually, and to join in talk with him was to feel that one had suddenly become a member of a secret society, a society at once idealistic and sinister, known to the police but unheard of by the general public. And his talk instead of producing a disappointing anti-climax (as it does so often) only heightened the impression. His manner was a mixture of the confidential and the secretive ; in his conversation, a few precise details, perhaps carefully chosen, stood out in sharp relief against a tantalizing background of hints, vague allusions, whispers, sentences that trailed off into silence, mysterious reservations, secrets not to be uttered. When he went so far as to relate some experience, it was not so much what he said as what he left unsaid, the terrifying background, that opened all the doors of romance. By merely remarking—but no, not remarking, for he never remarked—by letting out the secret that he had just been on a journey, he could fill my mind with galloping thoughts of dangers encountered and overcome, with hurrying images of lost jewels, masked men, dead bodies under the seats of railway carriages, anarchists falsely bewhiskered as ticket inspectors, and so forth. A reference to his time abroad, which was, I fancy, spent on a fairly hard and innocent course of study,

immediately used to put before my dazed eyes the secret services of all Europe. But once he was fairly launched and in a reminiscent vein, the dead facts, the cold realities, were annihilated. Time too, as we know it, was swept out of existence, for his memories, as hazy and casual as dreams, seemed to cover decade after decade, more years than he could number, and still have hitherto unknown calendars at their disposal. And the quality of his memories was something rare ; he could make anything seem rich and strange. The time he spent in some department connected with revenue or excise at some small and (to less moonstruck persons) extremely dull seaside town he transmuted into crowded years of glorious life. There was nothing tremendously exciting upon which one could lay a finger, nothing strictly tangible ; it was all atmosphere, the spell of a conquering imagination. I remember meeting him on one occasion when we had not seen each other for some time, and discovering that he was engaged in teaching at some remote and preposterous little school. With anyone else, this would have spelt long hours in hot and drowsy class-rooms, bad pay and worse food, and for recreation, a stroll among the turnip fields. But faced with Purvison's compelling gaze and lyrical accents, I saw this situation of his

as something unique, dedicated, the very life for a triumphant spirit. It was no ordinary school, situated in no ordinary county ; on the surface, to the casual outsider, the whole business might seem trifling, commonplace, but there were things in the background, things not generally known or understood, possibilities that must remain a secret, that demanded his presence there for a time, adventure after adventure, wheels within wheels, incredible . . . hush . . . let us say no more, for we too are for the Queen and against the Great Cardinal . . . to you, M'sieur D'Artagnan. If you should choose to suffer a voluntary exile from your country and your period, if you should choose to call yourself for a season Charles Rupert Purvison and pretend to teach in school or to collect revenues, it is clearly your affair ; you have, I do not doubt, your reasons (how you would have loved to say that) and sometime perhaps you will solemnly swear me to secrecy and tell me what those reasons are. Meanwhile, I salute your image, Purvison, and would have you know that the very thought of you has heartened me a little, for you and I, like Ancient Pistol and his friends, " have seen the seven stars." Farewell.

A BEETONIAN REVERIE

THERE are only three books in the room. *The Foundling* by Mrs. Porcherson, *The Magazine of Domestic Economy* for 1848, and *Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book*. I am for Mrs. Beeton. *The Foundling* is one of that poisonous brood of little evangelical stories for children which appeared, I fancy, during the 'seventies; it has a frontispiece, a gloomy drawing, depicting an enormous bearded policeman staring down at a little ragged boy; if I remember rightly all these stories had frontispieces of bearded policemen and little ragged boys under dismal gas-jets. Such drawings are strangely depressing, and the stories themselves are even worse. *The Magazine of Domestic Economy* appears to have been a signally unattractive publication (at least in 1848), and so I put it aside at once for Mrs. Beeton. Not that I can read Mrs. Beeton, for her solemn counsels fall a little heavily upon my ear, but I can look at her bright pictures and dream over her. She is not very well represented, though, in

this volume, published in 1909, for it appears to be only an abstract or abridgment of the great original, intended, I learn, to meet "the requirements of smaller households than those in which such a very comprehensive volume as *Mrs. Beeton's Household Management* is a necessity." No doubt, no doubt; these parsimonious smaller households must be catered for; but I must say that I do not admire such cutting and carving of Mrs. Beeton, though she herself was such a cutter and carver, nor do I admire the persons, however small their households might be, for whose benefit such a transformation has been brought about. They lack poetry, a feeling for atmosphere, to be thus willing to accept in place of the great original work, that cosy and luscious epic, a mere dry abridgment, Mrs. Beeton, as it were, as a cook's mate and not as a great lady. I am disappointed indeed to discover that this is not the massive *Book of Household Management*, for it was that volume which we had at home in the old days (though we were a small enough household), and it was that volume over which I used to pore for hours when I was a small boy. By turning these pages I had hoped to recover some fleeting emotions of my childhood, but I am afraid that the difference between the two versions, between the Mrs. Beeton I once

knew and this shadow of her old self, is too marked. At best, I can only titillate my memory and perhaps evoke the ghosts of my former emotions.

There was something, I remember, about the appearance of our old copy of Mrs. Beeton as it stood on the bookshelves (for we kept it among our books, Shakespeare, Scott and the rest, and did not exile it into the kitchen) that always attracted my attention, as I stood on tiptoe before our tall bookcase. It was easily the fattest book on its shelf, as indeed it ought to have been, and still handsome in the crimson and gilt of its binding, it had a look of fatness and richness, an air of opulence, that inevitably won my regard. Reaching up, a little dangerously, I would clutch at the top of the book and swing it rather than take it down, to pass a solitary hour or so, lying outstretched and face-downward on the rug like the young savage I was, turning its pages and dreaming over its brightly coloured plates. Occasionally, no doubt, I read a few lines of letterpress, but the pictures were my joy. Unless my memory deceives me, this present volume I have in my hand has nothing like the number of coloured pictures that our old book had, and the few that it has do not seem so bright, so ideal, but seem to have come to terms with sad reality, showing us the pudding as it is

and not as it ought to be. The best picture this later book can offer me is that of the cheeses, the twenty great cheeses, and very fine it is too, nobly coloured, with great golden hulks of Double Gloucester and Cheshire flanked by the exotic Parmesan and the sinister Schabzieger. But our old volume had a score of plates infinitely richer in colouring and grander in composition ; it spread for the mind a feast that was opulent beyond Roman dreams and yet not too gross for the most delicate appetite, a feast that left one not a well-filled animal but a dazed and wondering poet ; it laid the world in ruins and rebuilt it in entrées, garnishes and creams. In the days when I brooded over such things, I was, be it understood, a well-nourished child, allowed to risk a third or even a fourth helping of suet pudding ; but nevertheless, in the company of Mrs. Beeton and her enthusiastic artists and lithographers, I discovered a new world. Page after page revealed the most enchanting confections, coloured like a May morning and luscious even in their printer's ink ; there would be Pyramid Cream, I fancy, and certainly there was Gateau à la Ceylon, in white and crimson, and Rose Meringue, a most delicate and harmonious invention, and Imperial Tipsy Cake, dark, flushed, and imperial indeed, the very sweet for bull-necked Cæsars, and

after them a riot of gateaux, trifles and pastries ; and then perhaps best of all, for its flawless image floats triumphantly into the port of memory, a raised pigeon pie, massive and golden, raised in very truth above time and mutability, a pie that never was on land or sea. And when I had done with these bright comestibles, having feasted upon them as Ariel might have done, was there not a fine coloured picture of a dinner-table, a gorgeous perspective of napery and cutlery and carefully ordered flowers, that for all its tameness had something in it to awaken a child's wonder ?

I am much too lazy to inquire into these things, but I trust that there really was once a Mrs. Beeton, a super-housewife who sat down some sixty or so years ago to tell us everything, and that we have not been fobbed off with a crafty publisher's invention, a name merely covering a synod of cooks. I like to think that there was a Mrs. Beeton, and that therefore there was too a Mr. Beeton. If there was, he would probably play the G. H. Lewes to her George Eliot, that is, he would look after her affairs, arrange her salon, and shield her from adverse criticism. That he would live in a splendid whirl of sweetbreads in aspic and iced pudding and never know a dish that contained less than ten eggs and a pint of cream, as some people have imagined,

seems to me very doubtful, for you cannot compile a gigantic volume on housekeeping and keep house at the same time. I should not be at all surprised to learn that all the time his wife was writing her book, Beeton himself was living a spare life on bottled porter and half-cooked chops. Perhaps he starved that we might feast : life is like that. I can see him, a little wistful man, with something of the visionary's look stamped upon his partially emaciated features, rising, with a half-suppressed sigh, from his cold mutton and lumpy potatoes to visit his wife in her study and to inquire, a little timidly, how she is progressing. I can see the light in his eyes when she answers, her natural dignity tempered by the exuberance of the author who has done some work, and tells him that she is already half-way through the chapter on Poultry and has indeed just finished her notes on Mayonnaise of Chicken. And as he goes tiptoeing away, perhaps to finish up the cold rice pudding, little Beeton seems to me at once a touching and noble figure, to be honoured by posterity.

It is, however, the lady herself, the authoress, who commands our attention. Her book, at least in its old form, is something more than a collection of recipes and notes on marketing, kitchen utensils and table decoration ; it is a

social document, a glimpse of a vanished world ; it has an atmosphere, a flavour, of its own. Not merely on account of what they put in, but also on account of what they leave out, all such big books composed strictly in one key, have their own particular atmosphere, something upon which it is difficult to lay a finger, something not to be found in this chapter or that, but which pervades the whole, which calls up to the wandering and sensitive mind associations enough to form the material of a whole world. And our pleasure arises from the recognition of this peculiar atmosphere, this suggested world that lies behind the book itself ; although such an atmosphere or world may not be particularly pleasing to us in itself. To give such pleasure, however, the book must be quite useless to us, so that our æsthetic sense is set free, just as Mrs. Beeton's book is useless to me. Thus, her famous prodigality, her habit of "taking" scores of eggs, pints of cream, and the roes of strange fish, and so forth, in order to make even a fairly simple dish, is irritating to women, who really go to her for advice ; but to me, who ask for no advice, such prodigality is simply delightful, and I would not have the grand old lady deprived of a single egg. We may look back upon this great work of hers, with its chapters on the dignity and worth of

housekeeping, its multifarious marketing, its solemn pages on the management of servants, its diagrams of table decoration and napkin-folding, and discover that a whole age, idealized, it is true, but still recognizable, has been suggested to our mind. The enchantress has only to wave her salad bowl or touch our eyes with one of her folded table-napkins, and lo! —time has rolled back, and once more we are all cosy and superbly fed, all intent upon small social matters, and beyond the torment of ideas; Victoria, that comfortable-looking one of the middle period, is on the throne; Darwin has been heard of but is not believed, and we are still specially created, brought into the world to occupy our stations, to demolish Salmi of Duckling and Almond Pudding, and do good to the poor; none of the 'isms have yet arrived and would not be tolerated if they had; and father is in the counting-house counting out his money; and sister is in the drawing-room reading *The Idylls of the King*; and the Rector is coming to lunch, so mother and cook are in the kitchen, Mrs. Beeton in hand, "taking" twenty-four eggs and a quart of cream.

A GROSSLY EGOTISTICAL MATTER

I HAVE just tossed into the fire a little notebook, one that I have had by my side or carried about with me for the last two or three years. It was entirely filled with hastily scrawled titles and ideas for essays, filled to the very last page ; a notebook to be proud of. Whenever I used to have what I thought was a good idea, I would take out this little book and make a short note that usually took the form of a title for the projected essay. I did this in the same spirit in which some persons, I understand, put money into the bank, and doubtless those who are old enough to have followed, at some time or other, that quaint old custom will probably understand something of what I used to feel, the glow of self-satisfaction, the air of virtue. In short—to be downright crude, inharmonious and vulgar—I used to put a bit of essay away for a droughty day. All the ideas for my best essays were set down in that book. It was

crammed with seductive matter. Never once did I take it up and glance through it without feeling a certain sense of power, without having a mental vision of essays writing themselves, of memorable phrases and unforgettable allusions falling from the air. Possession of it would have made the author of Lord Birkenhead's *Essays* into an essayist.

But I shall be sadly misunderstood and probably taxed with insufferable conceit unless I make haste to explain that the essays in that little notebook remained dream-essays ; the ideas there were never worked out ; the visions that floated about its pages have never been snared into words ; it knew nothing of the abortive things to which I have set my name in the public prints. Heaven forbid that the quality of my notebook should be estimated from that of the hasty and foolish productions, desperate last-minute affairs, that meet the eye in this and other places. It remained a Bank of Ideas upon which I never drew a draft. Whenever I had an essay to do, I would get out my notebook and turn over page after page crowded with alluring titles ; the air would seem to be filled with bright winged words ; artful openings and lovely falling closes would seem to lie all about me, and yet every time, in the end, I would push the book to one side and begin to write

upon some poor drivelling theme that had no place in it. "These ideas are good enough to keep," I would mutter, "I will use one of them next time." But I never did ; I always found some trumpery cooked-up thing to write about in their stead. I frankly confess that I do not know why I always acted in this strange fashion. Perhaps I did not want to spoil my collection (there is a collecting maniac in every one of us) ; or perhaps I shrank from butchering one of those delicate fluttering ideas to make a reader's holiday ; or perhaps I discovered that more recent ideas, which had not found their way into my notebook, were easier to work out ; or perhaps it was sheer miserliness, the instinct that makes some people compel themselves to go short of necessities before they will withdraw a few pounds from the bank. I cannot tell : there are a million ancestors of mine ever ready to complicate my motives, and, unlike my grandparents and great-grandparents, I cannot ignore such ancient influences, I cannot hold a feast of reason and banish from it my uncouth ancestors and their queer tangled instincts.

And now, behold the last act of the comedy ! I have just burned my notebook. It is as if a miser were to steal out one night and fling his money-bags into the canal. A rash, almost insane act, this burning of mine, but not, I

think, without a touch of magnificence, a trace of the grand manner. And surely something of this kind, lordly, sweeping, final, should be demanded occasionally from a man who has a sedentary occupation, few responsibilities, and three or four good meals a day. Let me join a whole company of notorious persons by declaring that I regret nothing, that what I have done I have done. Yet though I regret nothing in the act itself and would willingly burn the notebook over again, I lament the delicate essays in embryo that perished with it, the essays I intended to write. Have they perished utterly, or are they budding forth their artful syllables in eternity? Where are you now, you potential masterpieces! Where—but with the snows of yesteryear—(O bitter stroke!—for did you not always despise a cheap and hackneyed quotation!). As you were nothing but bright promises, so many columns of day-dream, I can hardly claim you for my own, and thus will not offend against modesty if I sing your praises.

There was the essay on "Raspberries and Cream" that would have hooked the reader through his palate and transported him to the stars, an essay in white and crimson, drenched with sunlight and soaked in dew. There was the little paper on "Our Grievance against

Shakespeare," so original, whimsical, bantering, yet not without an undercurrent of critical sense and discrimination. And then the other on "The Dullness of Reviews"—a pretty little nest of scorpions with which to penetrate some tough old hides. And what shall I say of the essay that would have been written on "The Glamour of the Footlights," a subject that appeared, if I remember rightly, no less than three times in my notebook, a subject fit for a king of prosemen, the very jumping-off place for immortality? Or again, what of that on "Too Good to be True," an essay full of surprises, philosophy in cap and bells? Or that one on "Three Dream Journals"—satire, I grant you, but satire touched marvellously with wonder, satire strangely illuminated with tenderness and elusive charm. Why, in the name of an amazed and delighted posterity, did I not write that essay on "Three Dream Journals"? But, for that matter, why did I not write the one on the old bookseller at H——? There was a figure mutely imploring to be sent down the ages; delicately outlined, deliciously touched with colour, in cunningly assorted words, there would have been no resisting the old bookseller at H——; I could have set him nodding and smiling for ever. When I think of him, and then think of what I have done, poor paltry little subjects

that have had to be blown up to a respectable size by the breath of nonsense, I feel as the Man with the Muck-rake ought to have felt or as Bunyan felt for him. But I have not done. There was the scathing paper "On Snobbish Innkeepers," the bitter fruit of much suffering while on walking tours, that would have proved to be the very voice of doom, and would have ultimately driven scores of rascals either into reform or out of business. And better still, perhaps best of all, there was the essay on "A League against Big Noses" which would have been the quintessence, the supreme blend of wit, nonsense, wisdom and poetry, the nectar of prose. But though my notebook has gone, I will not relinquish "A League against Big Noses" even yet. Some day, after much anxious preparation, perhaps I shall be able to gather all my forces together and write this essay : it is at least something to live for, a star to guide my little craft across its oceans of ink.

I do not like to think that these essays I intended to write have perished absolutely. Surely, in a universe so rich and complicated, there is a limbo where things once dreamed and planned but not accomplished are delightful solid realities ; a place that houses so many of those great works that Coleridge thought he had written ; a region in which

the name of President Wilson carries enormous weight, where there is much speculation as to what happened in the early part of *Edwin Drood*, where delighted audiences listen to the last two movements of Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony." I am sure there must be such a limbo somewhere round the corner, and we may be certain that the appreciative shades who live there are never in want of works of art. There go our ideas for novels, plays, pictures, operas, our projected histories, our half-planned systems of philosophy, when we have finally abandoned them. There they flower as they flowered in our minds for a few triumphant moments before we began to wrestle with our stubborn medium, of words or paint, and realized that all was lost. This being so, and having just tossed my notebook into the fire, I may fairly conclude that I have really just published a book in this limbo, a delightful book of essays, one—I trust—of their "Books of the Week," if they should chance to estimate their books in that strange fashion. Perhaps the shade of Coleridge, which occasionally visits this region of great dreams and faulty accomplishment, is sitting down to review my book (I wonder what they have called it?), little knowing that the review will ultimately turn out to be a discourse on the nature of the reading public, followed by

an account of the distinction (of the utmost philosophic importance) between the reason and the understanding. Such a pleasant thought is obviously worth the sacrifice of half-a-dozen notebooks.