

G. K. CHESTERTON



LUNACY+LETTERS

Ten years before Jung published his first big work Chesterton wrote, in his essay "The Meaning of Dreams": ". . . in dreams is revealed the elemental truth that it is the spiritual essence behind a thing that is important, not its material form . . . in the world of subconscious speculation, where all superficial ornaments are shattered and only the essentials remain intact, everything but the ultimate meaning is altered. The spiritual forces, on their nocturnal holiday, have, like lovers on Bank Holiday, changed hats." Throughout this new Chesterton selection you will find this sort of thing again and again; beneath the deceptive surface simplicity and readableness, depths of prophetic intuitive insight. To us, used to anguish-contorted prose, there is something scandalous in wisdom's being so simply presented; passing time merely emphasizes the timeless and shattering sanity of Chesterton's thought. In the *Waiting-for-Godot* era it is even more topical than it was in 1901 to read: "It is . . . sages and grey-haired philosophers who ought to sit up all night reading *Alice in Wonderland* in order to study that darkest problem in metaphysics, the borderland between reason and unreason, and the nature of the most erratic of spiritual forces, humour, which eternally dances between the two."

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Lunacy and letters

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LUNACY AND LETTERS

LUNACY AND LETTERS

*Gilbert
City* by
G. K. CHESTERTON

edited by
DOROTHY COLLINS

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FOREWORD

THESE essays appeared during the years 1901 to 1911 in the *Daily News*, mostly as a contribution to a weekly Saturday column. They have not appeared in book form before, although they belong to the period of similar collections, such as *Tremendous Trifles* and *Alarms and Discursions*, which account for about eighty essays chosen from more than six hundred. It was due to stress of work during Chesterton's lifetime that a selection has been neglected for so long.

His aim in contributing to this column is given in his own words taken from an article in *T.P.'s Weekly*, March 1913:

. . . When . . . the *Daily News* had been recovered for the older Liberal traditions, the new editor, Mr. R. C. Lehmann, gave me a place upon that paper.

In that paper I have written a vast amount of nonsense and also, I happen to think, a great deal of sense. As the more fanciful parts of the work, the tales and the parables do not easily lend themselves to any logical exposition, I will confine myself to stating one principle. I was, and am, a Liberal; though the Liberal party has seceded from Liberalism. But while that danger was only threatening I took a certain view of the nature of that danger, which led me into a large number of extremely agreeable rows.

. . . At this time I had little more than a desire to be just to the Catholic theory of Christianity. I had not yet discovered the fact that a man cannot be just to the Catholic

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idea. The moment he begins to be just to it, he begins to like it. But it was the same in all my controversies. . . . This absolute conviction that a controversy not only clears the air, but solidifies the real sympathies, I have followed persistently on the *Daily News*, until I left it a week or so ago.

The political articles of the day are not included here, but there is plenty of discussion on permanent subjects, and some of what Chesterton called “the more fanciful parts of the work”.

D.C.

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LUNACY AND LETTERS

A CONSIDERABLE amount of testimony exists to indicate the rather astonishing fact that the British Museum Library, in addition to its multifarious services, discharges a great many of the functions of a private madhouse. Men and women in that vast palace of knowledge go quietly to and fro, ransack the wisdom of the ages and are waited on by the servants of the State, who in a less humane age would have been screaming in Bedlam upon a heap of straw. It is said that it is no uncommon thing for a family which is responsible for a harmless lunatic to send him to the British Museum Library that he may play with dynasties and philosophies as a sick child plays with soldiers. Whether or no this be true to the full extent, it is assuredly true that this colossal temple of hobbies has all the air of containing many tragedies, for, indeed, a hobby often means a tragedy.

There go the loves that wither
The old loves on wearier wings,
And all dead things draw thither
And all disastrous things.

In that library may be seen figures so weird and dehumanised that they might be born and die in the Library without seeing the light of the sun. They seem like a fabulous and subterranean people, the gnomes of the mine

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of learning. But it would be hasty and irrational to say that all this amounts to madness. The love of a bookworm for musty old folios may easily be more sane than the love of many poets for the sunshine and the sea. The inexplicable attachment of some old professor for a tattered old hat may be a far less vitally diseased sentiment than some light-minded society lady's craving for a gown from Worth's. It is too often forgotten that conventionalities may be morbid as well as unconventionalities. Of course there is no absolute definition of madness except the definition which we should each of us endorse that madness is the eccentric behaviour of somebody else. It is, indeed, an absurd exaggeration to say that we are all mad, but it is true that we are none of us perfectly sane, just as it is true that we are none of us perfectly healthy. If there were to appear in the world a perfectly sane man he would certainly be locked up. The terrible simplicity with which he would walk over our minor morbidities, our sulky vanities and malicious self-righteousness; the elephantine innocence with which he would ignore our fictions of civilization—these would make him a thing more desolating and inscrutable than a thunderbolt or a beast of prey. It may be that the great prophets who appeared to mankind as mad were in reality raving with an impotent sanity.

In a large number of cases, doubtless, these literary eccentrics, in pursuing their hobbies, are pursuing the sanest of all human impulses, the impulse that bids us put our trust in industry and a defined aim. There is probably many an old collector whose friends and relations say that he is mad on Elzevirs, when as a matter of fact it is the Elzevirs

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that keep him sane. Without them he would drift into soul-destroying idleness and hypochondria; but the drowsy regularity of his notes and calculations teaches something of the same lesson as the swing of the smith's hammer or the plodding of the ploughman's horses, the lesson of the ancient commonsense of things. But when full allowance has been made for that wholesome cheerfulness which often peculiarly attaches to laborious and useless employments, there does remain a problem of the sanity of scholarship. Books, like all other things which are the friends of man, are capable of becoming his enemies, are capable of rising in revolt, and slaying their creator. The spectacle of a man raving in brain-fever through the mysteries of a trumpery pamphlet of rag paper that he can carry in his pocket has the same ironic majesty as the sight of a man struck down by a railway engine. Man is supremely complimented even in death; in a sense he dies by his own hand. This diabolic quality in books does exist; madness lies in wait in quiet libraries, but the nature and essence of that madness can only be approximately defined.

One general description of madness, it seems to us, might be found in the statement that madness is a preference for the symbol over that which it represents. The most obvious example is the religious maniac, in whom the worship of Christianity involves the negation of all those ideas of integrity and mercy for which Christianity stands. But there are many other examples. Money, for example, is a symbol; it symbolises wine and horses and beautiful vesture and high houses, the great cities of the world and the quiet tent by the river. The miser is a madman, because he prefers

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money to all these things; because he prefers the symbol to the reality. But books are also a symbol; they symbolise man's impression of existence, and it may at least be maintained that the man who has come to prefer books to life is a maniac after the same fashion as the miser. A book is assuredly a sacred object. In a book certainly the largest jewels are shut in the smallest casket. But that does not alter the fact that superstition begins when the casket is valued more than the jewels. This is the great sin of idolatry, against which religion has so constantly warned us.

In the morning of the world the idols were rude figures in the shapes of man and beast, but in the civilized centuries they still remain in shapes even lower than those of beast or man, in the shape of books and blue china and quart pots. It is written that the gods of the Christian are leather and porcelain and pewter. The essential of idolatry is the same. Idolatry exists wherever the thing which originally gave us happiness becomes at last more important than happiness itself. Drunkenness, for example, may be fairly described as an engrossing hobby. And drunkenness is, when really comprehended in its inward and psychological reality, a typical example of idolatry. Essential intemperance begins at the point where the one incidental form of pleasure, which comes from a certain article of consumption, becomes more important than all the vast universe of natural pleasures, which it finally destroys. Omar Khayyam, who is for some inexplicable reason often regarded as a jovial and encouraging poet, sums up this final and horrible effect of drink in one stanza of incomparable wit and power:

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And much as wine has played the infidel,
And robb'd me of my robe of honour—Well,
I wonder often what the vintners buy
One half so precious as the stuff they sell.

The Persian was a poet of immense fancy and fertility, but the full force of his imagination could not summon from this multifarious universe anything to rival the attractions of a particular red substance that had undergone a chemical change. This is idolatry: the preference for the incidental good over the eternal good which it symbolises. It is the employment of one example of the everlasting goodness to confound the validity of a thousand other examples. It is the elementary mathematical and moral heresy that the part is greater than the whole. Now in this sense bibliomania is capable of becoming a kind of drunkenness. There is a class of men who do actually prefer books to everything with which books are concerned, to lovely places, to heroic actions, to experiment, to adventure, to religion. They read of godlike statues, and are not ashamed of their own frowsy and lazy ugliness; they study the records of open and magnanimous deeds, and are not ashamed of their own secretive and self-indulged lives. They have become citizens of an unreal world, and, like the Indian in his Paradise, pursue with shadowy hounds a shadowy deer. And that way lies madness.

In the limbo of the misers and the drunkards, which is the limbo of idolators, many great scholars may be found. Here, as in almost all ethical problems, the difficulty arises far less from the presence of some vicious tendency than from the absence of some essential virtues. The possibilities

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of mental derangement which exist in literature are due not so much to a love of books as to an indifference to life and sentiment and everything that books record. In an ideal state, gentlemen who were immersed in abstruse calculations and discoveries would be forced by Act of Parliament to talk for forty-five minutes to an ostler or a landlady, and to ride across Hampstead Heath on a donkey. They would be examined by the State, but not in Greek or old armour, which are their pleasures, and in which they may be trusted as safely as children at cross-touch. They would be examined in Cockney dialect, or in the colours of various omnibuses. They would be purged of all the tendencies which have sometimes brought lunacy out of learning; they would be taught to become men of the world, which is a step towards becoming men of the Universe.

ON BEING MOVED

I AM sitting and trying to write this article in a room with nothing in it except a dining-room table, a kitchen chair, and a dislocated bookcase. There are no carpets, but plenty of dust. I write with an old chalk pencil on such pieces of wall-paper, etc., as I can find lying about. I try to imagine myself to be a starving genius in a bare garret, a man brilliant, indeed, but (alas!) embittered against his kind. The illusion is periodically disturbed by the entrance of enormous men with green baize aprons who tramp in and out, taking things away. They would take my chair away but for the formidable necessity of carrying me away in it; a task from which the most enormous shrink. But sideboards and pianos melt away at their lightest gesture and bedsteads simply flee before them. Like some landslide, chair by chair . . . what is it that Tennyson says in the pretty lyric about Amphion? I get up and go to the dislocated bookcase to verify the quotation. But there is no dislocated bookcase. They have taken it away. I come back to my writing table and sit down again.

I wonder what the dickens I shall write about (I am not the Dickens who could write about anything); I get up again and go to the window. A white morning mist chokes either end of the road and veils Battersea Park, which I love and leave; making it like the ghost of a greenwood. I am glad it is not what people call fine weather; there is

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something merciful and proper in this cloud and twilight on the borderland between two lives. For the modern fate is fallen on me; I am moving into the country; I am going into exile; into England. I am going . . . if, indeed, I go, for all my mind is clouded with a doubt . . . why am I haunted with scraps of Tennyson, especially now that they have taken away the bookcase, and I cannot spell the island valley of Avilion? Avilion is a very nice place, situated in Buckinghamshire; but, like Arthur after his last battle, I feel it fitting that a vapour should veil the moment of passing; the slipping through from state to state . . . Tennyson again. Hades, the place of shadows of which the pagan poets sang, is not our state after death; it is simply death itself, the instant of transition and dissolution. In the end the dim beneficent powers will take the cosmos to pieces all round me, as my house is being taken to pieces now. I am glad that a cloud sits on Battersea to cover this monstrous transformation.

I go back to my writing table; at least I do not exactly go back to it, because they have taken it away, with silent treachery, while I was meditating on death at the window. I sit down on the chair and try to write on my knee; which is really difficult, especially when one has nothing to write about. I feel strangely grateful to the noble wooden quadruped on which I sit. Who am I that the children of men should have shaped and carved for me four extra wooden legs besides the two that were given me by the gods? For it is the point of all deprivation that it sharpens the idea of value; and, perhaps, this is, after all, the reason of the riddle of death. In a better world, perhaps, we may permanently

On Being Moved

possess, and permanently be astonished at possession. In some strange estate beyond the stars we may manage at once to have and to enjoy. But in this world, through some sickness at the root of psychology, we have to be reminded that a thing is ours by its power of disappearance. With us the prize of life is one great, glorious cry of the dying; it is always "morituri te salutant". At the four corners of our human temple of happiness stand a lame man pointing to one road, and a blind man worshipping the sun, a deaf man listening for the birds, and a dead man thanking God for his creation.

I begin to be moved; I perceive that there are many mysteries concealed in that kitchen chair. That kitchen chair may truly be called (as they say in the colleges) the Chair of Philosophy. I stride up and down the room, rejoicing in the divine meaning of chairs. I wave away, with wild gestures, that merely dingy and spiteful democracy which consists in declaring that every throne is only a chair. The true democracy consists in declaring that every chair is a throne. I return rapturously to the chair; but I do not sit down in it. Wisely; because it is not there. It has been taken away. I sit down on the floor, which the enormous workmen assure me (with elephantine courtesy) they will not want for the present.

What is it, then, that makes it impossible to write anything connected or intelligible to-day? It is not mere interruption: I wrote my first criticisms of books in an office with two typewriters going at once and clerks rushing in and out every five minutes. It is not mere discomfort; I have in my youth written articles in the middle of the night,

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leaning against the stall of a hot-potato man. It is not for me to say that the articles were good, but they were as good as anything else I have ever written. No; I know what it is . . . it is Battersea. I have the strongest and most sensible reasons in the world for going into the country. Going into the country is a joyful thing: but leaving London is a sad one. Here at least you have a harmless alphabetical paradox; one admitted by the souls of all sane men and women. It is glorious to become a man; but pathetic to leave off being a child. It is jolly to become a married man; yet it is depressing to leave off being a bachelor. Permit to us who pass from one state to another something of the pathos that is to be permitted to those that approach to death. We are happy to go into the country, but we are unhappy to leave the town. I am leaving the most living part of London, the most romantic, the most realistic, the borough that has led the people. I am leaving the borough of Battersea. I cannot write of that; and I cannot write of anything else. When I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning; that is, let it forget how to write, in blue chalk on old wall-paper, an article about nothing at all.

THE POETRY OF CITIES

SOME OF the more adventurous of modern poets have attempted to attach poetry to the details of our civilisation, and they have been laughed at, like all true adventurers. The project, when superficially considered, undoubtedly has elements of humour. The colour of the pimpernel is exhibited on a larger scale on the Hammersmith omnibus, and yet, despite the more liberal display, it does not evoke equally poetic sentiments. The symbolic colours of omnibuses are not interpreted with heraldic seriousness; the green Bayswater omnibus does not recall green meadows to the City clerk, nor does the vehicle which finds its ultimate destination in Kilburn remind religious persons of the traditional hue of heaven. A chimney-pot a mile off on a hazy day looks just as blue and just as shapeless as a mountain peak, but the observer of the picturesque cannot forget that, after all, it is a chimney-pot. An absolute distinction exists in the minds of most people between the country and the town; the country is conceived to be absolutely and essentially picturesque, the town to be absolutely and essentially prosaic; if the country is prosaic, it is by accident; if the town is poetical, it is by accident.

Now, there are at least two things to be said about this. Firstly, it may be remarked that both in town and country it is almost by accident that we gain a glimpse of what is really beautiful. A lamp-post precisely in the middle of a bare street is ugly; but a tree precisely in the middle of a bare field is quite equally ugly. Three red-brick houses

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in a row are ugly, but three pigs in a row are at least equally ugly. The crimson of the feather against the violet of the hat of an 'Arriet on Hampstead Heath is discordant and offensive; but let us remember that wherever the crimson of a sunset cloud meets the violet of a distant hill it is by honest artistic canons equally discordant and offensive. The purest heavens, the most silver clouds, the most verdant meadows may combine in a riot of incongruity such as was never seen on the bonnet of a flower-girl. Wherever we see an outrageous carpet or an insolent wall-paper we have no real reason for supposing that its discords may not exist in some quiet and nameless meadow under some remote and silent sky. If Nature had nothing better to offer us than trivial harmony or mere beauty, it would have comparatively little claim upon us. We could find more of that mere visual aestheticism in Mr. Liberty's shop than we could find in God's creation. Nature has too much to do in her great project of satisfying our insatiable appetite for breakfast and supper to pay special attention to the lust of our eyes. Men are, upon the whole, far more sensitive to mere beauty than Nature is. The most hideous chapel of the Primitive Methodists in the most remote country village was at least to some extent intended to be beautiful; but we have no particular reason to suppose that a lily was intended to be beautiful; it was intended for the far nobler purpose of producing other lilies. Thus we need hardly blush for the vulgarity and ugliness of the cities of men. However disdainful of art men may be, they cannot rival the simple and magnificent disdain of Nature.

The second point to be considered, before we decide that

The Poetry of Cities

cities are hopelessly unpoetical, is this. The beauty of the country was not a thing which, when we study the history of human ideas, would appear to be obvious, like the happiness of health, or the hotness of fire. Men lived for hundreds of generations among sublime and tremendous scenes which are lost for ever; mountains which were like waves escalading heaven, frightful forests in which the flowers were as large and as fierce as dragons, awful birds which had the lightness of moths and the magnitude of elephants; and there is not the smallest reason to suppose that these men had any more sense of the beauty of their surroundings than if they had been inhabiting a row of villas in Brixton. As far as they were concerned, things were as prosaic as they are to-day in a modern city.

And as we advance in history we find the same thing substantially true. The old literatures of the world, which are still unsurpassed in the matters of the mind and the heart; which, when they speak of the spiritual nature of man, speak with a wisdom and an authority which are still unsurpassed, speak of the earth and its common sights with the indolence and carelessness of children. There are English ballads of the greenwood, but to the authors of those ballads the rudest bow or the coarsest cudgel that was wielded by a living man is more important than acres of splendid grasses or armies of eternal oaks. These old writers did not care for Nature. "An immense mountain," said Boswell, in a moment of enthusiasm, to Johnson. "An immense protuberance," said the chief critic of the age. To the men of that time mountains were protuberances; they were outrages upon the essential reason of things.

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We have, therefore, to consider this point. It took man many generations to realise the poetry of the macrocosm in which he lives; it was many ages before he realised that great mountains were splendid, and small mosses at least equally splendid. May it not, it may reasonably be argued, take man some number of generations to realise the poetry of the microcosm in which he lives; may it not take him a little time to realise that great factory chimneys are splendid, and small London toy-shops equally splendid? Would it not be possible to maintain that some future poet will find it as easy to speak of the exquisite purple of the distant chimney pots as of the distant hill tops, of the telegraph wires radiating across the terminus as of the spider's web radiating across the entrance to the glen, of the gem-like glitter of the evening lamps as of the gem-like glitter of the stars? It may seem ridiculous even to prophesy such alterations in sentiment. But it would have seemed at least equally ridiculous to a man of the Stone Age to say that the fire or water could be considered, properly speaking, poetical; it would have seemed equally absurd to a Highland cateran of the fourteenth century that any poet should descend from massacres and genealogies to celebrate anything so essentially prosaic as Ben Nevis.

Cities are (like the Universe) for good or evil a very important, and therefore a very poetic, thing. If they suffer in any respect from a literary point of view, it is from the vastness of their claims, the multiplicity of their dues. There are more stories to be told about them than would go to make a new "Arabian Nights". There are more poems involved in their chronicles than any minor poet would dare

The Poetry of Cities

to publish in one volume. In a rustic romance the story is effectively relieved and contrasted; it is a matter of the heat of human passion being shown up against the placidity of hayricks; a matter of the elaborations of human cunning being enhanced by a comparison with the antique simplicity of pigs. But in a city like London, tales trip over each other's heels, the threads of thrilling romance cross and tangle; the world is too full of interest to be properly interesting.

So many men pass us in the street who may have a rich and unique history that, for the sake of mere convenience, we fall back on the assumption that none of them has. We compel ourselves to pass by dramas as if they were Sunday School stories; we are steeled to fling romances into the waste-paper basket, cover and all, as if, instead of containing histories coloured and gilded with human passion, they contained nothing but coal circulars or applications for assistance to the restoration of a church in Cumberland. The beggar we wave off in the street may have a vastly more interesting history than we have. Yet we have to wave off a hundred such men, laden with useless romance; and when we have thus denied ourselves more marvellous human stories than the Sultan of the Indies paid to hear, we rush down into the vicinity of turnips and toadstools in order to have a month of poetry.

Turnips cannot tell us their story; if they could, it would doubtless be deeply fascinating. We can never know the melting and many-coloured emotions that give variety to the toadstool's existence. But the reason we fly from the city is not in reality that it is not poetical; it is that its poetry is too fierce, too fascinating and too practical in its demands.

THE LIBRARY OF THE NURSERY

A GLANCE at recent publishing announcements shows that a great many children's books of the more modern and artistic type are being issued and re-issued. Edward Lear, one of the most thoroughly original men of the nineteenth century, as original in his own way as Darwin or Carlyle, and all the imitators of Edward Lear, whose name is legion, are apparently planning a new invasion of the nursery. A vast and very honourable revolution is expressed in the fact that there are a fair number of modern places of residence in which the nursery is the best room in the house. It represents a very genuine and self-sacrificing ideal of the aesthetic education of children. To the majority of our ancestors the sacrifice of a large and artistic room to infancy would have appeared outrageous. It would have seemed like making the dog-kennel bigger than the house, or giving the cow the unrestricted use of the drawing-room. While minds more strenuous than our own are discussing whether the world is growing better or worse, it cannot be amiss to point out that this age has really invented this great artistic sacrifice to children, this costly loan to posterity, who is the most bankrupt of all debtors. The moral credit of this act is not affected even if we choose to think that it is a mistake to place really ingenious poetry and really decorative art before infants. It may possibly be true that subtle aesthetics are unsuited to the simple

The Library of the Nursery

mind. It may be that when we present Walter Crane's illustrations in a nursery book we are acting like a person who should put a very abstruse selection from Wagner into a baby's musical box. It may be that a child can no more realise the best art than he can realise the best algebra. We do not think ourselves that he is at all inferior in this particular. But even if he is, the toil undertaken for the literary education of children remains equally stirring and reassuring to all who are discussing the moral development of humanity. It is the latest movement of the religious instinct, which is the instinct of trust.

Before the throne of the modern child the best treasures of art and literature are unrolled: the worship of the Child (an essential part of Christian religious art) is carried in these days even further than it was carried by the most careful colour and gold-leaf of the medieval craftsman. No sacrifices are spared and no reward is demanded. The offerings made to the old Pagan gods, who were the personifications of power, fall far short of the prodigality and richness of the offerings made to this god, who is the personification of impotence. None of the old literary patrons who could drive a poet into beggary or put his fingers into the treasury of the king is so well treated as this new patron, who can neither smite nor reward, whose vengeance consists in throwing a brick and his gratitude in offering, in a somewhat hesitating manner, a portion of a partly consumed chocolate.

In honour of the child the nineteenth century has made one real discovery, the discovery of what are called Nonsense Books. They are so entirely the creation of our time

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that we ought to value them like electricity or compulsory education. They constitute an entirely new discovery in literature, the discovery that incongruity itself may constitute a harmony, that as there is a beauty in the wings of a bird because they evoke aspiration, so also there may be a beauty in the wings of a rhinoceros because they evoke laughter. Lewis Carroll is great in this lyric insanity. Mr. Edward Lear is, to our mind, even greater. But it is only fair to say that this invention may be criticised in its educational aspect. We must avoid, above all things, confusing those aspects of childhood which are pleasing to children with those which are pleasing to us.

The great literature of Nonsense has enormous value, but it may at least be reasonably maintained that this value exists chiefly for grown-up people. Nonsense is a thing of Meredithian subtlety. It is not children who ought to read the words of Lewis Carroll; they are far better employed making mud-pies; it is rather sages and grey-haired philosophers who ought to sit up all night reading *Alice in Wonderland* in order to study that darkest problem of metaphysics, the borderland between reason and unreason, and the nature of the most erratic of spiritual forces, humour, which eternally dances between the two. That we do find a pleasure in certain long and elaborate stories, in certain complicated and curious forms of diction, which have no intelligible meaning whatever, is not a subject for children to play with; it is a subject for psychologists to go mad over. It is we mature persons, with our taste for something lawless, who invented nonsense. We indulged ourselves in Jabberwocky and the Yongy Bongy Bo just as

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we indulged ourselves in spiritualism and the Celtic fairy tales, because we had an everlasting impatience with our own humdrum earth. But the child is in an immeasurably finer position. To him the earth is not humdrum; for him there is no need of books. That element of the wild and the poetic which is stirred in us by the Dong with the Luminous Nose is stirred in him by any ordinary uncle. It is not necessary to the child to awaken the sense of the strange and humorous by giving a man a luminous nose. To the child (type of the true philosopher, who is not yet born) it is sufficiently strange and humorous to have a nose at all.

If any one of us casts back his mind to his childhood, he will remember that the sense of the supernatural clung as often as not round some entirely trivial and material object, round a particular landing on the stairs, round a particular tree in the park, round a way of cutting cardboard or the hair of a Japanese doll. The child has no need of nonsense: to him the whole universe is nonsensical, in the noblest sense of that noble word. A tree is something top-heavy and fantastic, a donkey is as exciting as a dragon. All objects are seen through a great magnifying glass; the daisy in the meadow is as large as a tree of the Hesperides, and the pebbles littered about a puddle will serve for the Islands of the Blest. A child has innumerable points of inferiority to ourselves; he has no sense of experience, of self-possession; above all he has no knowledge of deep emotion, no knowledge of those great pains which make life worth living. But he has one real point of superiority. We are going forth continually to discover new aesthetic worlds,

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and last of all our conquests we have discovered this world of nonsense. But he has appreciated this world at a glance, and first glances are best.

This amounts only to a one-sided view, but it is a view which may demand to be stated, if only in justice to the old-fashioned writers for children, who are often denounced in our day. Their moralising is sometimes nauseous, but after all it is grown-up people whom it nauseates. Off children the morality ran like water off a duck's back. What children enjoyed about the old moral tales was that they were realistic tales, and that the authors were, like children, realists, people who were really interested in the phenomena of this world. All readers of the tales of Miss Edgeworth (to take an excellent example) will remember an admirable story about a little girl who wished to possess the vases of coloured liquid which are exhibited in the front of a chemist's shop. The moral of the story, which we only dimly remember, was something about the wrongness of the desire and the vanity of human wishes. But the child who read the story did, as a matter of fact, imbibe a precisely opposite moral to that of the story: he learnt to dream of the vases, to exult in the glory of the primal colours. The didactic pessimism of old-fashioned ethics did not touch the matter; the essential of the matter was that Miss Edgeworth had grasped a glowing fragment of poetry which was missed by Keats and Browning, the fascination of those monstrous and coloured moons which proclaim for yards down the street the mystery of the home of healing.

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

IN THE earlier part of the Victorian era, when rationalism was at its height and retained at least the traces of rationality, the phenomena of dreams were very much used in connection with the phenomena of religion. It was proudly boasted in those days by the hilarious sceptic that for the most part all the mighty Churches and arresting creeds of mankind could be traced to an origin so mean and obvious as that of dreams. Nowadays we may be inclined to ask whether they could be traced to an origin more mysterious or more sublime. For the truth is that there will always be religions so long as certain primeval facts of life remain inexplicable and therefore religious. Such things as birth and death and dreams are at once so impenetrable and so provocative that to ask men to put them on one side, and have no hopes or theories about them, is like asking them not to look at a comet or not to look out the answer of a riddle. Around these elemental acrostics human hypothesis has circled and will always continue to circle. Even in an empire of atheists the dead man is always sacred. The grave, like a tilled field, brings forth crop after crop of creeds and mythologies. If we adopt the too common modern theory that the history of man commenced with the publication of the *Descent of Man* we may be able to treat this whole tendency as superstition. But if we take a large and lucid view of the main history

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of mankind we shall be driven to the conclusion that nothing is upon the whole so natural as supernaturalism.

This sacredness is, as I have said, everywhere predicated to the dead man. It is a strange and amusing fact that even the materialists who believe that death does nothing except turn a fellow-creature into refuse, only begin to reverence a fellow-creature at the moment that he has been turned into refuse. Now, by a very accurate parallel, a parallel enshrined in the old Greek saying about Death and his brother, men have come generally to this conclusion, that some portion at least of the sacredness of the dead man belongs to the sleeping man. Nor is this without a very real meaning. The greatest act of faith that a man can perform is the act that we perform every night. We abandon our identity, we turn our soul and body into chaos and old night. We uncreate ourselves as if at the end of the world: for all practical purposes we become dead men, in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. After that it is in vain for us to call ourselves pessimists when we have this trust in the laws of nature, when we let them keep an armed and omnipotent watch over our cradle. It is in vain for us to say that we think the ultimate power evil when every twelve hours or so we give our soul and body back to God without security. This is the essential sanctity of sleep, and the sound and sufficient reason why all tribes and ages have found in it and its phenomena a source of religious speculation. In this sudden and astonishing trance which we call sleep we are carried away without our choice or will and shown prodigious landscapes, sensational incidents, and the fragments of half-decipherable stories. Men have

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in all ages based a great many creeds and speculations upon this fact. With considerable confidence it may be said that they would have been great fools if they had not.

There is a great deal in dreams which is very beautiful, very happy, and even very triumphant. But, alike in happiness and in unhappiness, there is a peculiar element of thwarting and insecurity. We find marvellous things in dreamland—things often more precious and splendid than anything that is made under the sun. But the one thing that we never find is the thing we are looking for. A strange strand of eternal pathos runs through dreams which comes from the very loom of life itself. Dreams are, if I may so express it, like life only more so. Dreams, like life, are full of nobility and joy, but of a nobility and joy utterly arbitrary and incalculable. We have gratitude, but never certainty.

Of course, an absolutely accurate view of dreams is impossible. For dreams are functions of the human soul, and the human soul is the only thing that we cannot properly study, because it is at once both the study and the student. We can analyse a beetle by looking through a microscope, but we cannot analyse a beetle by looking through a beetle. But, though in the last resort the discovery of the truth about dreams is as impossible as the whole science of psychology, it is possible to arrive at certain general underlying laws of dreamland.

One of the most widespread and fundamental elements in the dream-world, it seems to me, is the element of the divorce between the appearance proper to one thing and the emotions proper to another. In real life we are frightened

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of vipers and decorate ourselves with flowers. In dreams we are quite capable of being afraid of flowers and decorating ourselves with vipers. In dreams we think violets nauseous, sewers fragrant, toads beautiful, stars ugly, a street with three lamp-posts exquisite, a pole with a white rag horrible. It is a commonplace how we attribute emotional qualities to the things that happen in dreams, how we believe a string of idiotic words to be superlative poetry, how we permit a perfectly trumpery set of events to overwhelm us with indescribable passions. The real point is, as it appears to me, that all this amounts simply to the conclusion that in dreams is revealed the elemental truth that it is the spiritual essence behind a thing that is important, not its material form. Spiritual forces, abroad in the world, simply disguise themselves under material forms. A good force disguises itself as a rose in bloom, a bad force disguises itself as an attack of chicken-pox. But in the world of subconscious speculation, where all superficial ornaments are shattered and only the essentials remain intact, everything but the ultimate meaning is altered. The spiritual forces, in their nocturnal holiday, have, like lovers on a Bank Holiday, changed hats.

All the outrageous topsy-turvydom of dreams is sufficiently represented by saying that angel and devil have changed hats, or, to speak more accurately, have changed heads. In a dream we love pestilence and hate the sunrise. In a dream we shatter temples and worship mud. The whole explanation is to be found in the conception that there is something mystical and undefined behind all the things which we love and hate, which makes us love and hate

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them. The metaphysicians of the Middle Ages, who talked a great deal more sense than they are nowadays given credit for, had a theory that every object had two parts: its accidents and its substance. Thus a pig was not only fat and four-legged and grunting and belonging to a particular zoological order, and pink and sagacious and absurd—beyond all this he was a pig. Dreams give a great deal of support to this conception; in a dream a thing might have the substance of a pig, while retaining all the external qualities of a boiled cod. The medieval doctors, of course, applied this principle most strongly to the idea of Transubstantiation, maintaining that a thing might be in its accidents bread, while being in its substance divine. Whether it be reasonable or not for a waking man to worship a wafer of bread, it is quite certain that a dreaming man would worship a wafer of bread, or a pair of boots, or a sack of potatoes, or a pint of castor oil. It all depends upon what disguise the highest spiritual power took in appearing to him, the incognito in which the King chose to travel.

A WILD RECONSTRUCTION

AMERICA and the American spirit in literature present what would be very generally regarded as something like a contradiction in terms—the widespread union between shrewdness and fantasticality, between a shameless materialism and a more shameless spiritualism, between the mysticism of Emerson and the realism of Mr. Barnum. The whole tends in its higher phases to the beauty and brutality of Whitman, and in its lower phases to that union between mean practice and mad theory which was the dominant trait of “Mr. Sludge, the Medium”. In truth, however, there is no contradiction between mysticism and shrewdness, but rather a fundamental affinity. It is sometimes said of wild and transcendental poets that they are in danger of lunacy, but their friends need in general have little fear of this. It is the prosaic people who are the commonest victims of insanity. It is the rationalists who go mad. This is no paradox, but a statement that becomes self-evident the moment we consider it. To confess that we are living in infinity, to splash about and be carried about on the surge of infinity, is a perfectly healthy pastime, as healthy as swimming in the sea.

Destruction awaits not the man who swims in the sea, but the man who tries to plumb it. The danger is not for the swimmer who lets the tide carry him hither and thither and to whom the sea is infinite; the danger awaits the

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swimmer who tries to swim across the sea and make it finite. And in the same way the psychological danger lies in wait for the man who tries to measure all things, for it is that way that madness lies. The brain cracks when the man tries to cram the whole universe inside it and bar the doors, not when man's mind is like some vast and hospitable tree, nested in by birds out of strange countries and swayed by winds out of the ends of heaven.

Consequently we may say truly that it is not the poets who go mad; it is the mathematicians, the logicians, the numberers of the stars, and the counters of the grass. There is one very famous line of poetry, which is often quoted, about the wild spirit of poets, and is always quoted wrongly. There exists a general idea that there is a line of Dryden which runs, "Great genius is to madness near allied", and this is generally understood as an allusion to the frenzy of the artist. Dryden, being a poet himself, knew a great deal better than that, and his line really runs, "Of those great wits to madness near allied", which is a very different thing, and draws attention to a very profound truth—the insane tendency not of the imagination, but of the intellect.

There is a tradition in American literature, which is much under the influence of Whitman, of what may be called, for lack of a better phrase, the essential reasonableness of ranting. This temper of Whitman, Stevenson in one of his happiest phrases called "transcendental commonsense". But commonsense, it may be said with some certainty, is always transcendental. It depends upon a certain large grasp of the actual state of the facts, strong enough to resist all the thousand wiles and sophistries of argument and

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verbal misrepresentation. A legion of doctors could not make a poet believe that life was evil, nor make an ordinary man believe that negroes are white. If the universe be taken piecemeal in the manner of the syllogist, it may be found that every detail and iota of man's origin and progress is accounted for and related to other facts. Looked at thus microscopically, man may be made to appear as commonplace and mechanical as a larva or an amoeba; but looked at simply and suddenly, looked at in its whole bulk and proportion, the position of man in nature is a monstrous and miraculous thing. It is like seeing a hundred toadstools an inch high and another toadstool forty feet high. It is like one pig in a litter growing larger than a cow. But this actual direct vision of the state of affairs as a whole is possible only to the eye of great simplicity and sincerity. Detailed criticism sees man as a link in a chain of commonplace incidents. Commonsense sees him as a fairy tale.

In a book from America which I have read recently the author points out, truly, as it seems to me, that science has not explained and is in its nature incapable of explaining what actually is the original impulse or motive, the original élan or prompting in spirit or matter, which has given it the strength and consistency necessary to pursue life through so strange an evolution, culminating in so sensational a product. He says that as a matter of fact the birds and brutes and insects have persisted continuously because they have faith; in other and inferior words, because they never for a moment doubt the essential goodness of the ideal of existence. Man may, if he chooses, give the final crown of intellectual civilization to the pessimistic

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amoeba. The conception of the faith of the brutes is surely a fine one; they build no temples and sing no litanies. So far as we know, the elephant never worships in monstrous temples, larger than the mountains, and graven with prodigious images of elephantine gods. The apes never write and hoard their indecipherable scriptures, written upon huge and tropical leaves. The birds do not sing to the image of a bird, nor the oxen kneel before a golden calf. Yet all these creatures truly have a religion, the dark, blind and triumphant religion of the goodness of God, of the supreme value of his terrible trumpet calling them together to life.

What we primarily want just now is not intelligence and many-sidedness, and the turning of things over and over, but some one man, somewhere, who will lay down some one thing and say that he is certain it is true. It is our only chance of emerging into a constructive age, instead of pottering on until the crack of doom in a merely destructive one. If we could take one single common conviction, even if it were only that it is really worth while to keep a Persian cat, we could rebuild civilization and religion.

The element of authority in human life cannot be too highly valued. Obedience is and has been often the most passionate form of personal choice; and the man who sunk his name and character in a brotherhood often did it with the same reckless and magnificent individual courage with which a man might leap his horse into a chasm. Nevertheless, a conception of the divinity of human life, as the last astounding biological product, is quite sufficient to base a faith on if we really believe in it as a fact, and not as

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a phrase. One condition, however, must be sharply and strongly noted. If we believe in the sanctity of human life, it must be really a sanctity; we must make sacrifices for it, as the old creeds made for their sanctities. There must be no murdering of men wholesale because they stand in the path of progress. There must be no committing suicide because the landlady is unsympathetic and the books of Schopenhauer impressive. If human life is mystical and of infinite value, murder must be really a crime. Suicide must be a greater crime than murder, since it is the murder of the only man whose happiness we can appreciate. The faithful of the ancient creeds gave up for the sake of their sanctities the ultimate and imperious cravings of human nature, the desire of love and liberty and home. We profess to believe in the divinity of life, and we cannot give up for it a few grimy political advantages, and a few sullen psychological moods. They gave up their joys, and we cannot even surrender our lamentations. They denied themselves even the virtues of common men, and we cling openly, in art and literature, to the vices which are not even common. In this mood we are not likely to open a new era.

THE MEANING OF THE THEATRE

THE MORE mobs I have seen the more firmly I tend to conclude that their prejudices have always at the back of them some errant and nameless virtue. When ten thousand men all assert a certain view without any reason, we may conclude, generally speaking, that they have a very good reason indeed. They may be wrong, of course, but they have an idea. The mistakes of the populace, which has in all ages stoned the prophets and resisted progress, were not in any case due to the fact that they were entirely wrong. They were due to the fact that they were upon some point right, and could not clearly and intellectually realise how right they were.

Now, the resistance of the conventional mind to Ibsenism and what is called the new drama is fundamentally right, because it is a vague and prejudiced resistance against a movement which threatens or denies the very existence of the drama itself; which is, in short, an attack on the ultimate meaning of the theatre. For what is the theatre? First and last, and above all things, it is a festival. In the dim ages, almost before the dawn of Greece, it was a religious festival; it was founded in order that men might dance and give praise to a deity. Today, after a thousand changes, it is still a festival; it is continued in order that crowds out of Hammersmith and Camberwell may gather and sing the praise of life. The theatre is nothing if it is not joyful;

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the theatre is nothing if it is not sensational; the theatre is nothing if it is not theatrical. A play may be happy, it may be sad, it may be wild, it may be quiet, it may be tragic, it may be comic, but it must be festive. It must be something which works men up to a point, something which is passionate and abrupt and exceptional, something which makes them feel, however gross the phrase may seem, that they have in reality got a shilling's worth of emotion. It must be a festival. It must, in modern phraseology, be a "treat". To the primitive Greek the loud, wild praise of Dionysus was a treat. To the modern child the pantomime of "Cinderella" is a treat. The true meaning of the theatre is thoroughly expressed in both. If it is a treat, a festival, it matters nothing whether it is comic or tragic, realistic or idealistic, Ibsenite or Rostandesque, happy or pitiful; it is a play. If it is "like Life", if it represents the dull and throbbing routine of our actual life and exhibits only the emotions with which we commonly regard it, the internal merit matters nothing; it is not a play. That is the damning, but neglected error of so much modern realistic drama; the play fails to be a festival; and therefore fails to be a play.

This difference between the internal merits and what may be called the external merits of a work of art may easily be illustrated from all the other arts. Let us suppose, for the sake of example, that an incomparable artist in stained glass were asked to design seven church windows symbolically representing the periods of day and night in connection with seven great moods of man. He would conceive the first window in white, chequered faintly with a pale gold and rose, expressing the young austerity of the dawn,

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its pure passions and its innocent colours. He would fill the second pane with gold, darkening or rather enriching itself, into brown towards the edges, expressing the masculinity of things, the triumph and even the insolence of the sun. The third would be of a dense blue, that blue of midday which in the very tropical intensity of summer has a resemblance to the midnight darkness. The fourth would be full of a certain pale purple of afternoon, a purple tinged with silver which suggests more completely than any earthly thing the conception of resignation and order, an endless ending of things. The fifth would be the window of the sunset, stricken on fire with crimson and gold, flamboyant and full of the war of the heavens at that moment when the sun seems to turn to bay. The sixth would be of green and silver, and typify the sad and universal pardon which lingers in the sky after the fall of the sun. The seventh would, by the lawful operation of a good design, be utterly black and brooding, a drift of dark clouds, declaring powerfully the final divinity of darkness. It would seem a fine and artistic ending. Nevertheless, one condemning and decisive thing would have to be said. The last window with its dome of utter darkness, would not be a good window; it would not be a window at all. For behind all designs for specific windows stands eternally the essential idea of a window; and the essential idea of a window is a thing which admits light. A dark window cannot be a good window, though it may be an excellent picture. We should have to sacrifice the internally artistic character of the seventh design to the fact that when externally considered, when taken in connection with the peculiar

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objects of the work concerned, it was inartistic. A hundred examples of the same thing might be taken. An architect might design four or five pillars in a church so that they should allegorically express four or five typical virtues. The pillar which represented Fortitude might be a solid and splendid piece of work, based on broad roots like an oak-tree and capitolled with the horns of a bull. The pillar which typified Purity might be a pure marble column, carved here and there with a lily; the pillar depicting Charity might be many-sided and many-faced, graven with the wings and faces of cherubim. All these, however different, might be thoroughly artistic. But if the architect made a pillar of Humility, and made it slightly bent, or even very slender, it would be a bad pillar. For behind all designs for specific pillars stands eternally the essential idea of a pillar, that it is a thing which is capable of supporting weight. A wavering pillar cannot be a good pillar, though it may be an excellent drawing-book curve. There is an almost infinite variety of meanings which can be expressed by windows and pillars and all other forms of artistic workmanship—but they have their indwelling limitations. They cannot express darkness in a window or a surrender in a column of stone.

These entirely elementary principles of art are quite equally applicable to the great institutions which men have set up in human society—the Church, the Court of Justice, the Pageant, the Council, the Theatre. Each of these has at the back of it an emotion, an idea. Each of them may play a thousand tricks, but they must not violate this idea. What is it, for example, which gives us a vague feeling of

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discontent in listening to the individual who is commonly called the popular preacher? He is logical, eloquent, scientific, convincing, no one cares what. The essential and damning point is that he is not—in the true and forcible meaning of the phrase—he is not in church. A church represents a certain feeling which is an integral and perfectly natural part of an ordinary man—the feeling of sanctity. We do not care in the least in comparison which rites or what dogmas the Church professes; we do care very much that it should be a Church. The instant it is turned into a moral lecture room; that instant we desert it and walk into the nearest Roman Catholic or Salvation Army chapel. A church is nothing if it is not a sanctity. A theatre is nothing if it is not a festival.

This is the great truth towards which the defeated and derided remnant of the anti-Ibsenites seems to me to be stumbling and struggling. A play may be as bitter as death, or as sweet as sugar-candy, it matters nothing—but a play must be a treat. It must be something which a mob of Greek savages, a thousand years ago, might, in some ruder form, have uttered passionately in praise of the passionate god of wine. The moment we begin to talk about a theatre or a theatrical entertainment as “dissecting life”, as a “moral analysis”, as an “application of the scalpel”; the moment, in short, that we talk of it as if it were a lecture, that moment we lose our hold on the thin thread of its essential nature. In that moment, we are talking about black windows symbolical of night; in that moment we are talking of bent pillars symbolical of humility; in that moment we are talking of popular preachers who preach as if they were not in

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church. A book of poems we keep on our shelves; its rhymes come to us again and again in the house and garden with an enchanting monotony. A book of prose we keep on our shelves; its problems we hold in the balance; we read it and re-read it, differ from it, and perhaps ultimately agree with it. But a play is nothing if it is not sensational; it is nothing if we do not go to it with the utter asceticism of children, ready to wait an hour outside the pit. It is nothing if it does not leave behind in our heads a trail of glory through the darkness of the return home, and become, like existence itself, a thing we dare not even fancy ourselves as having missed.

A PLEA FOR PARTIAL HISTORIANS

ALL REPUTATIONS, except those of the utterly imbecile, dwindle and rise again; capable men are praised twice, first for the wrong reasons and then again, after a cycle of obloquy, for the right. Thus, Dr. Johnson was admired in his own time as an awful judge, and is admired now as a humorous, extravagant, and delightful partisan; thus Byron was admired by the young in his own time as a type of age and weariness, and is admired now by the aged (such, that is, as the present writer) as a type of romantic youth. Among these great reputations, which are bound to return, may be ranked Macaulay, the historian, whose resurrection I unhesitatingly predict and await with a profound joy. But when Macaulay rises again, we shall have the same liberty in praising him that we have in the case of Johnson and Byron. We do not think it necessary to pretend that Johnson was right on the American War or that Byron's remarkable lines on "A Tear" are good poetry; nor shall we be so absurd as to pretend that Macaulay took a fair view of the seventeenth century.

The real glory of Macaulay, paradoxical as it may appear, was that he took an unfair view, or what is called an unfair view. That is to say, his real glory was that he was a partisan in the seventeenth century, and therefore lived in it. It may be better to understand all sides in the Civil War than to understand one of them; but it is immeasurably better to understand one of them than to

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understand none of them; which is a precise description of the condition of the rationalistic constitutional historian of the type of the impeccable Hallam. Can we imagine Mr. Hallam shouting, "Fall on!" with the bravoes of Charles in the Commons lobby? Can we imagine him shouting, "Privilege!" with the Puritans inside the House? Can we imagine him shouting anything? Even when his *History of the Middle Ages* was published, I question if he shouted. Macaulay would have shouted with one of the mobs; nay, he did shout with that mob. He gave his shout openly, like a shout out of a mob, and did not care that his shout was belated by two hundred years, and that all his own mob was the dust of the forgotten dead. He did live in the period; he lived fiercely, bigotedly, brutally, abominably, if his opponents will, but he lived there. He was like an ordinary indignant Whig, and that is a better light on the seventeenth century than an ordinary undignified prig.

Macaulay's version of Charles I may be and probably is unfair; but Macaulay's history, if it does not tell his life, at least explains his death. We see in Macaulay's history a proud, mean, intriguing Italian prince, poisonously pious and morbidly romantic, seeking by every petty trick of the diplomacy of the seventeenth century to deceive and destroy a plain and honest public protest. We see, in other words, something that may be possibly most limited and partial; but we see what the Puritans saw. And what do we see when we read the solemn, rational, impartial histories which pride themselves upon swerving neither to the right nor to the left? We see a phantasmal king oppressing for no

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reason a phantasmal people who revolt for no reason. We see men fighting for parchments and phrases that have no life in them; we see men, as in a world of shadows, slaying and torturing for things that seem as pedantic as the spelling of a Greek word. Here there is no hint of the bitter exultation, the honest exaggeration, which makes it possible for good men to do evil work.

An impossible mob assembles round an impossible execution. A human two-legged man takes up a huge, hideous, sharp tool, like a very large kitchen chopper, and with this tears asunder the arteries of another human two-legged man with his head against a piece of wood; and we form no notion of how such a thing could happen. Macaulay could make us understand. I know that many excellent people believe very firmly in what they call seeking after truth. Truth seems to me to be a condition of the soul; possible in a German professor and also in a Sussex peasant. A man seeking after truth, I fear, appears to me like a man setting out with a knapsack and an Alpine-stock to discover his own centre of gravity. But whether or no objective and absolute truth can be discovered by the scientific use of the intellect, I am quite sure that it is useless to talk about truth in education, in the teaching of such things as history. It is possible to teach truth only in such things as arithmetic and the physical sciences; and to some limited extent in such things as tying a bow or skating or swallowing a sword. But if we wish to teach anything to our children beyond these things, uncontested truth is impossible. If we are content with teaching such things as that the giraffe is a mammal or that three feet make one yard, then of course

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these things can be taught exactly; and in that case we are independent of all doubt and all controversy, of all philosophy, theology, ethics, or aesthetics.

Let the child exist entirely upon these undisputed facts. When the time hangs heavy on his hands, when he yearns for the pulse and dance of some light lyric, let him repeat to himself that three feet make one yard. When the sky of his spirit darkens, when troubles come upon him and tear his soul, let him comfort and reassure himself by remembering that, in spite of all passing storms, the giraffe remains a mammal. If this satisfies him, let him be satisfied. But if we have the least notion of teaching him such things as history and philosophy, religion or ethics, art or literature, let us abandon altogether the notion that we can tell him the truth, in the complete and real sense. We cannot teach history fairly; the thing is intrinsically impossible. It is impossible for this simple reason, that, every human being being unfathomable, no one can really decide how right or how wrong he was. There was more honesty in Titus Oates and more wickedness in Bayard than we can exhaust until the end of time.

Let anyone who thinks he can give children a pure, impartial picture of the seventeenth century, try a parallel experiment. Let him give one single child a lesson in the character of his Uncle Joseph; let him establish an Uncle Joseph class of one; then let him see how he can convey all the rich humours and indescribable shades which we all recognise in that particular uncle. Then let him ask himself how he is to convey the final truth about a war two hundred years ago which raged between two armies of the

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Uncle Josephs; a war in which one Uncle Joseph imprisoned five Uncle Josephs, in which ninety Uncle Josephs mobbed one Uncle Joseph, in which millions of men mingled, every one of them an inexhaustible problem. You cannot be just in history. Have enthusiasm, have pity, have quietude and observation, but do not imagine that you will have what you call truth. Applaud, admire, reverence, denounce, execrate. But judge not, that ye be not judged.

A NEGLECTED ORIGINALITY

A VERY interesting branch of mental science might be found in the things which we think we know and do not know. At first sight it seems a somewhat wild proposition to say that we can think we know anything, since knowledge implies certainty and sincerity. It is hard to believe that a sane man can think he knows Arabic when he does not; it is hard to believe that he can be profoundly convinced that he has counted the steps up to St. Paul's Cathedral when as a matter of fact he has no idea whether there are ninety or fifteen. But that is the real and genuine state of affairs. People think, for instance, that they have read the English Church Prayer Book: they are sure they have read it; they love it and pore over it as the essential heritage of Englishmen. You quote a passage out of the actual text of the Articles or the Rubrics, and they nearly jump out of their boots and think you are quoting either St. Alphonso de Liguori or Mr. Bernard Shaw. It is so in everything: they think they have read *Hamlet*, and they go and see it at the theatre, and do not rise to their feet and howl because things have been left out as they would if they had read it. They think that they have read the Education Bill, and you see by their brave, happy, hopeful faces that they have not. The conclusion is the same in all cases—that our knowledge is perpetually tricking and misleading us, that we do not know what we know, but only

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what we feel. If a man knows a thing it is very possibly right, but if he knows that he knows it, it is most probably wrong.

One of the most striking instances of this general fact is that of the history of literature. We all think we know who were, for instance, the best poets of the nineteenth century. We know nothing of the sort. We know what poets it was the fashion in our youth to account the best. We read a rather small fraction of the works of these, and nothing at all of the rest. But no one who is acquainted with the changes of artistic fashion will attach much importance to the fact that certain men were at one time neglected. If the Renaissance artists had had their way, they would have smashed Amiens Cathedral as a barbaric absurdity; if Dr. Johnson had had his way he would have thrown into the gutter the last copy of "Chevy Chase". And in the same way very few people are aware that with the rise of the Art for Art's sake school of poetry and criticism—the school which devoted itself to the deification of technique—a great body of very fine poetry disappeared from the public view, poetry which was concerned with the great problems and great struggles of the earlier part of the nineteenth century. It disappeared with all its moral energy and aesthetic individuality, just precisely as Gothic architecture, with all its moral energy and aesthetic individuality, disappeared at the Renaissance, that great classic domes might rise like monstrous bubbles over that wide and watery age.

But if anyone supposes that the work done in that strenuous Victorian period was not good work, let him

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ask himself seriously, does he know? For all he knows, Aubrey de Vere and Lord de Tabley may contain treasures as rich as those of a sunken galleon. And in fact, when we come to look into the matter, we find that it is so. There is a race of poets of the strenuous middle of the nineteenth century who contain nearly all the paradoxes and nearly all the doctrines which are now being preached as wild and new. Of these men, a brilliant but not wholly successful example was the late Robert Buchanan. A more typical and intrinsically more successful example was the Hon. Roden Noel. He is a very fine poet of the type that tends to be neglected because he is so serious, so ambitious, so long. His poetry is neglected because it is important. By this time we ought to know, from any general survey of human nature, that things are always neglected because they are important. That is why people do not want to discuss religion in education, or to argue about vivisection or the state of Ireland. Roden Noel was a man who was far more successful in the matter of poetry than the manner. Like William Blake and Robert Browning, he is not so much a poet as a quarry for poets. He is not himself a perfect literary artist; but he could set up seven hundred perfect literary artists in business for the rest of their lives.

The fact that he arose during the period when the old philosophical poetry was waning and the new aesthetic poetry upon the increase is very suggestively indicated in the opening and the preface of his fine poem "Livingstone in Africa". The attitude taken up is so accurately descriptive of the change that it is worth while to quote it. "That events of our own time may be treated poetically has been

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proved by our greatest poetess, Mrs. Browning, although, partly from the fact that England as a nation has withdrawn herself more and more from active participation in events of cosmopolitan interest, our writers of verse have not recently incited attention to contemporary themes, while studious readers have seemed disposed to discourage such attempts. But two or three genuine poets have lately made successful efforts to break through a somewhat vulgar, prosaic, and discreditable apathy, though it is one, no doubt, on which one fashionable petite culture plumes itself."

Here we have expressed, in a very lucid and dignified manner, the definite dying protest of the Early Victorian school of poetry against *fin de siècle* preciousness. In this voice, there is no ring of doubt or hesitation; to this man the band of modern magnificent Gallios, who sit as God, holding no form of creed but contemplating all, were only "a fashionable petite culture". To this man the march of the educated classes away from ethics and politics towards the goal of pure beauty is only "a vulgar, prosaic, and discreditable apathy". He speaks, in short, out of the turmoil of an age that believed in itself.

When one of the decadent philosophers wishes to express an exquisite contempt for something, whether it is morality or carpets, he calls it "early Victorian". That is to say, he attributes it to the last period in our history which did anything or wanted to do anything which had any theory of the present or any scheme for the future, which had any hope or even any desire. He refers to an age which was not only so unphilosophical as to believe that great changes could be made, but so unphilosophical as to make

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them; an age which was not only mad enough to believe in progress, but preposterous enough to progress. He refers to an age which really believed that armies were meant for something else than the conquest of savages, and that the function of art meant something else than keeping pace with French book-covers, and the function of patriotism something more than keeping pace with French clockwork.

The early Victorian period, probably the finest that England has seen for a long time, is supposed to have been prosaic merely because it was ugly. The hats and trousers of Robert Browning and Lord Shaftesbury were indeed as hideous as their souls were beautiful; but they were not the only hideous generation, nor the most hideous. There were costumes in the Middle Ages, for instance—terrifying costumes with horned and towering head-dresses, enormous and curling shoes—which were quite as ugly, strictly speaking, and the time will come when Lord Shaftesbury's top hat will appear as far-off and mellow and fairylike a phantasy as the peaked hat of some Princess in the ages of faith. For the early Victorian age was, in its way, an age of faith, and of ugly clothes, like some of those medieval epochs. They believed themselves to be in a time of stir and promise; with them ambitions were poetic as well as memories. They brought poetry into politics: Mr. Alfred Austin, and even Mr. Rudyard Kipling, can only bring politics into poetry.

The Great Exhibition of 1851, with its hideous building, its hideous furniture, its hideous paintings, was an infinitely more poetical thing than the "Arts and Crafts".

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For the "Arts and Crafts" is mainly the haunt of those who think life prosaic and Art a refuge like opium, while upon the monstrous structure of 1851 there did indeed rest for a moment that moving cloud and glory which over the peak of Sinai and the ruins of the Bastille promised to men the renewal of the youth of the world.

A DEFENCE OF BORES

THE UNIVERSAL, or approximately universal, opinion in these days is that the unpardonable sin is to be a bore. This is a profound error. If this awful phraseology is to be used at all, it may safely be said that the unpardonable sin is being bored. Ennui is, indeed, the great sin, the sin by which the whole universe tends continually to be undervalued and to vanish from the imagination. But it is a quality of the person who feels, not of the person who produces it. There is just the same difference between knowing that we are bored and knowing that another man is a bore that there is between knowing that we are murdered and knowing that another man is a murderer. If we are suddenly shot through the body in the middle of Fleet Street we have logical grounds for stating that, taking the common use of words as our basis of reasoning, we are, essentially speaking, murdered. But whether the man who shot us can, as a whole, be described as a murderer is a very much more subtle question, and takes us at once into the entanglements of legal controversy which stretch back to Magna Charta and the code of Justinian. He may not be, personally, a murderous person at all. He may have shot us in supposed self-defence, mistaking for a savage gesture of attack the graceful movement with which we summoned a hansom cab. He may have shot us in a fit of abstraction, misled by our physical resemblance to a round target at

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Aldershot. The condition of ourselves, when shot, is a clear matter; the condition of the man who shot us is a particularly doubtful matter, and may be anything between devilry and childishness. Death, in short, is a positive and defined condition, but it belongs entirely to the dead person.

In the same way boredom, which is the next condition to death, being a decay of the vitality, is a positive and defined condition, but it is only positive and defined as regards the person bored. The person who produces the effect may be generally a bore or he may be the very reverse. He may have been explaining something full of wild interest or of ravishing humour. Dickens would be a bore in satirically hitting off the Circumlocution Office if he were satirically hitting it off to a Soudanese Arab. Mr. Gus Elen (that great philosopher) would be a bore if he were imitating every tone and gesture of the South London navy to a hermit from Tibet. Precisely in the same manner there may be much real interest in the man who has just been unfolding the romance of sewing-machines or the matchless poetry of cattle food to our rude barbaric ears. We may have presented merely the stupid composure of the savage in the presence of the really passionate drama of the lawsuit which his aunt by marriage had with the trustees under his great-grandfather's will. The blame, if there be blame, is with us for being bored. The subject is not a dull one; there is no such thing in the world as a dull subject. The mere fact that he, our interlocutor, a person to all mortal appearance very much stupider than we are, has found out the secret and captured the charm of that subject is sufficient demonstration that it is not eternally or necessarily

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a dull subject. If he can be excited about the principle of the lever or the abominable conduct of the Robinsons, why cannot we? We are subdued; he is wild; there in a phrase is his final and immeasurable superiority. The man who is happy is naturally and necessarily superior to the man who is weary. The sadness and inertia of the bored person may be educated or intellectual, but they cannot possibly be such good things in themselves as the great purpose, the starry enthusiasm and the heavenly happiness of the bore.

The true attitude towards this matter would save a great deal of error and a great deal of pessimism about the world we live in. Pessimism, which is, of course, mainly the product of the rich and idle classes in almost all cases, means essentially this: that the idle cannot understand that the strenuous and exact details which do not interest them can possibly interest other people. Because the fluctuations of leather or the minutiae of amateur photography bore them, they imagine that they must bore those who talk about them. In their eyes a thing becomes dull in so far as it absorbs a man and shuts out other matters. This is true in a certain social sense, but in the ultimate psychological sense it is the reverse of the truth, for the absorption of the man and the exclusion of other matters show not how dull the subject is, but how fascinating it is. Because a man refuses to come out of Eden, they assume that he is being detained in gaol.

The case is very strongly exhibited, for instance, in the common idea that mathematics is a dull subject, whereas the testimony of all those who have any dealings with it shows that it is one of the most thrilling and tantalising

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and enchanting subjects in the world. It is abstract, but so, to all appearance, is theology. Men have hurled themselves on the spears of their enemies rather than admit that the second person of the Trinity was not co-eternal with the first. Men have been burned by inches rather than allow that the charge to Peter was to be understood as a charge to him as an individual rather than to him as a representative of the Apostles. Of such questions as these it is perfectly reasonable for anyone to say that, in his opinion, they are preposterous and fanatical questions. And what men have before now done for the abstractions of theology I have little doubt that they would, if necessary, do for the abstractions of mathematics. If human history and human variety teach us anything at all, it is supremely probable that there are men who would be stabbed in battle or burnt at the stake rather than admit that three angles of a triangle could be together greater than two right angles.

The truth surely is that it is perfectly permissible and perfectly natural to become bored with a subject just as it is perfectly permissible and perfectly natural to be thrown from a horse or to miss a train or to look up the answer to a puzzle at the end of the book. But it is not a triumph: if it is anything at all, it is a defeat. We have certainly no right to assume offhand that the fault lies with the horse or with the subject. A very good example of this may be found, for instance, in that revolt against the family which is going on almost everywhere at this moment; in the innumerable millions of absolutely exceptional geniuses and temperaments who are renouncing the claims of family because the family misunderstands them or the family

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bores them. In some isolated cases they are certainly right; in almost every case they may conceivably be right. But at the back of all, one has a dark and profound conviction that these secessions would suddenly dwindle almost to nothingness if for one single instant the seceders regarded the boredom as a failure on their own part rather than as a failure on the part of the family. But so in truth it is. A family quarrel, for instance, may be a very squalid and tiresome affair if we happen at that moment to be sickened or exhausted, or, in other words, if we happen at that moment to be squalid and tiresome ourselves. But assuredly a family quarrel is not uninteresting in itself. Anybody who has ever had to do with any sort of practical collision between the interests and emotions of any five or six human beings must assuredly and clearly be certain of this—that the pen of Balzac would be needed adequately to depict their characters, that the ethical charity of Herbert Spencer would be necessary to define their claims, that only Shakespeare could embody their emotions, and only God can judge their souls.

Let no one flatter himself that he leaves his family life in search of art, or knowledge; he leaves it because he is fleeing from the baffling knowledge of humanity and from the impossible art of life. He may be right; but it must not be said of him that he gave it up because Mrs. Brown was unsympathetic, or because Uncle Jonas was a bore, or because Aunt Maria did not understand him. It must be said that he, pardonably enough, failed to realise the exquisite fragrance of the character of Mrs. Brown; that he, pardonably enough, did not detect the dim but delicate

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colours of the soul of Uncle Jonas; that he, pardonably enough, did not understand Aunt Maria. Being bored is the sin, not being a bore. Because of the weakness of humanity we may allow to men revolutions and emancipations and the breaking of bonds. But the strong man, the ideal, would be interested in any circle into which, in the course of nature, he fell. The hero would be a most domesticated person; the Over-Man would sit at the feet of his grandmother.

CONVENTIONS AND THE HERO

THE CYNICS (pretty little lambs) tell us that experience and the advance of years teach us the hollowness and artificiality of things. In our youth, they say, we imagine ourselves among roses, but when we pluck them they are red paper. Now, I believe everybody alive knows that the reverse of this is the truth. We grow conservative as we grow old, it is true. But we do not grow conservative because we have found so many new things spurious. We grow conservative because we have found so many old things genuine. We begin by thinking all conventions, all traditions, false and meaningless. Then one convention after another, one tradition after another, begins to explain itself, begins to beat with life under our hand. We thought these things were simply stuck on to human life; we find that they are rooted. We thought it was only a tiresome regulation that we should take off our hats to a lady; we find it is the pulse of chivalry and the splendour of the West. We thought it was artificial to dress for dinner. We realise that the festive idea, the idea of the wedding garment, is more natural than Nature itself. As I say, the precise opposite of the cynical statement is the truth. Our ardent boyhood believes things to be dead; and graver manhood discovers them to be alive. We waken in our infancy and believe ourselves surrounded by red paper. We pluck at it and find that it is roses.

Conventions and the Hero

A good instance may be found in the case of a great man who has been the sole spiritual support of me and many others, who will remain one of our principal spiritual supports. Walt Whitman is, I suppose, beyond question the ablest man America has yet produced. He also happens to be, incidentally, one of the greatest men of the nineteenth century. Ibsen is all very well, Zola is all very well and Maeterlinck is all very well; but we have begun already to get to the end of them. And we have not yet begun to get to the beginning of Whitman. The egoism of which men accuse him is that sense of human divinity which no one has felt since Christ. The baldness of which men accuse him is simply that splendidly casual utterance which no sage has used since Christ. But all the same, this gradual and glowing conservatism which grows upon us as we live leads us to feel that in just those points in which he violated the chief conventions of poetry, in just those points he was wrong. He was mistaken in abandoning metre in poetry; not because in forsaking it he was forsaking anything ornamental or anything civilized, as he himself thought. In forsaking metre he was forsaking something quite wild and barbarous, something as instinctive as anger and as necessary as meat. He forgot that all real things move in a rhythm, that the heart beats in harmony, that the seas rise and ebb in harmony. He forgot that any child who shouts falls into some sort of repetition and assonance, that the wildest dancing is at the bottom monotonous. The whole of Nature moves in a recurrent music; it is only with a considerable effort of civilization that we can contrive to be other than musical. The whole world talks poetry; it is

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only we who, with elaborate ingenuity, manage to talk prose.

The same that is true of Whitman's violation of metre is true, though in a minor degree, of his violation of what is commonly called modesty. Decorum itself is of little social value; sometimes it is a sign of social decay. Decorum is the morality of immoral societies. The people who care most about modesty are often those who care least about chastity; no better examples could be given than oriental Courts or the west-end drawing-rooms. But all the same Whitman was wrong. He was wrong because he had at the back of his mind the notion that modesty or decency was in itself an artificial thing. This is quite a mistake. The roots of modesty, like the roots of mercy or of any other traditional virtue, are to be found in all fierce and primitive things. A wild shyness, a fugitive self-possession, belongs to all simple creatures. It belongs to children; it belongs to savages; it belongs even to animals.

To conceal something is the first of Nature's lessons; it is far less elaborate than to explain everything. And if women are, as they certainly are, much more dignified and much more modest than men, if they are more reticent, and, in the excellent current phrase, "keep themselves to themselves" much more, the reason is very simple; it is because women are much more fierce and much more savage than men. To be thoroughly immodest is an exceedingly elaborate affair. To have complete self-revelation one must have complete self-consciousness. Thus it is that while from the beginning of the world men have had the most exquisite philosophies and social arrangements,

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nobody ever thought of complete indecency, indecency on principle, until we reached a high and complex state of civilization. To conceal some things came to us like eating bread. To talk about everything never appeared until the age of the motor-car.

THE PESSIMIST AND THE DOOR-KNOCKER

ONE OF the best men I know, who has been on the chivalrous side in every contest, and whom, therefore, I forbear to name for fear of ruining his political career, came to me a little while ago and complained seriously of my optimistic rhetoric. He protested especially against an article in which I said what seemed to me a mild and even banal thing. I said that none of our social proposals for the betterment of the poor would be anything approaching to so good a sign as the fact that the poor themselves began to admire their own door-knockers. As I say, this seemed to me self-evident; but my friend felt that it implied some kind of justification of the sullen average of the life of the meaner modernity. Now, I agree that the modern world wants waking up more than it wants anything else, and I think that the question only remains as to how it is to be woken up. He thinks it should be woken up by calling door-knockers despicable; I think it should be woken up by calling door-knockers divine.

The door-knocker, as a matter of fact, was an example taken absolutely at random. Yet, as a fact, a door-knocker is so full of significance that any person of quite average intelligence might write volumes of poems about it. It is—to name but a few of the things beyond question—the symbol of courtesy, the guardian of the home, the declaration of the proposed meeting between man and man, the

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salute to the rights of the individual, the sign of the bringing of news, the herald of happiness, the herald of calamity, the iron hammer of love and death. That we have a knocker on our doors means almost everything that is meant by the whole of our ritual and literature. It means that we are not boors and barbarians; that we do not call on a man by climbing into the window or dropping down the chimney. It means all that was ever meant by the old fairy stories, in which a horn was hung up outside the castle of the giant or the magician, so that the daring visitor might have to blow it, and utter in echoing sound the thing that he dared. That trumpet, somewhat conventionalised in pattern and no longer, I must admit, adaptable as a wind instrument, still hangs outside every door in Brixton. It is still there, however neglected and debased in form, to express a dim sentiment that it is a serious thing to go into the house of a man. It is there to say that the meeting between one of God's images and another is a grave and dreadful matter, to be begun with thunder.

Now this is not, as my opponent will immediately say it is, purely fanciful. It is the plain historical fact. The reason that we have knockers is that we are a polite civilisation, as they said in the eighteenth century, and wish to have formal summonses and ritual declarations before we walk slap into another man's parlour. And the reason why our door-knockers are decorated—decorated so sadly, so strangely—is that we have a blank and vague feeling that anything connected with our polite civilization ought to be decorated in some way. Consequently everything that we

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have to do with, from motor-cars to postmen, from sewing-machines to field guns, is decorated in some weak, dubious way. There is, I am firmly convinced, no such thing in use as an undecorated object. There is always some silly stripe on it, or some totally unmeaning twirl, or some moulding or other. We persist in decorating things even when it is quite evident that we are making them much uglier than they were before. No one can deny that a postman's clothes are more decorative (strictly speaking) than any that the individual postman would ever have evolved for himself. At the same time no one can believe that the individual postman (whatever his natural talent) would have evolved anything so ugly entirely by himself. Well, we decorate things and decorate them badly. We see a door-knocker, we know in some vague way that it is a civilized thing and that therefore it ought to be ornamental. But why is it that, as a matter of fact, the ornamentation of the knocker is so bad? (Why is it that the same amount of trouble which has been evidently expended in making the knocker elaborately ugly has not been expended in making it elaborately beautiful?) When we have come to this question we have come to the whole issue.

Is it true that the knocker is ugly because people are so fond of the knocker as it is? Is it true that the average intelligent dweller in Brixton consciously regards the knocker on his front door as fulfilling all ideals as a symbol of hospitality and ancient civility? The truth is very simple, I fear; he never looks at the door-knocker in any way. The things that men see every day are the things they never see at all. I rather fancy that there are a fair number of

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suburbans like myself, who could not tell me what the shape of their own knocker really is. I fear that their satisfaction with it does not arise from the mystic pleasure which I preach. I fear they do not bow slightly and lift their hands as they approach it. I fear they do not kiss it feverishly on moonless nights.

Now not only do I not think that the contentment with the ugliness of suburban knockers originates with a mystic respect for them. I think it originates with the absence of a mystic respect for them. What we of the Brixton atmosphere really feel is that our knockers are good enough as knockers; they are quite evidently inadequate as sculptured allegories. As long as we take the knocker as an unmeaning thing it is well enough. But if once we took it as a meaning thing, we should find it falling terribly short. If once we saw in the knocker all that it really means, we should tear down the present knockers and substitute others, possibly symbolic of the spiritual condition of the houses and householders within. Lonely and unsociable persons would be allegorised on their front-doors with a forbidding mask and two uplifted and repelling hands. Hospitable families would be symbolised by some iron cherub, the thumb jerked over the right shoulder, to show the glowing kindness within. I could illustrate the differences for ever, filling a street in Battersea with my gargoyles. But the main fact is clear. We leave our knockers as they are because we do not care about knockerity, about the divine Platonic knocker that hangs upon the gate of Heaven. The moment we see that, we alter our knockers. The moment we care about politics and a sane order of society,

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we have a revolution. The moment we see how splendid is the meaning of a row of things, we smash them all. Why, then, should it be said that to praise the significance of Brixton knockers is to perpetuate the Brixton evil?

JANUARY ONE

LAST NIGHT as I heard the New Year bells go like great guns in the darkness, I made a New Year resolution, which consisted of forty-eight sections, forty-six of which are intensely interesting, but do not concern the reader. The last two may possibly be of public interest, because I intend to break them. They were (1) that, heaven helping me, I would not write about the New Year; (2) that I would not write about anything else, but retire to a monastery of my own religion, which is not yet quite what you could call founded. These were exaggerations, born of that exhilaration which is greater than the exhilaration of light, the living exhilaration of darkness. Daylight is in many ways an illusion, since it makes us feel that the secret of things is a long way off; darkness makes us feel that it is very close.

In the dark I feel as if I were a savage. The one result on my mind as a result of reading recent studies of savage worship, is that savages are sensible whoever else isn't. I feel, I say, like a reasonable philosophical savage who has not allowed a mechanical chatter of words to rob him of his natural and delightful ecstasy, of his natural and delightful terror. I feel like a savage who believed that a bear of enormous size had made the stars, and that this bear had suddenly taken a fancy to him personally and embraced him. So much for how I feel in the dark.

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New Years and such things are extraordinarily valuable. They are arbitrary divisions of time; they are a sudden and ceaseless cutting in two of time. But when we have an endless serpent in front of us, what can we do but cut it in two? Time is apparently endless, and it is beyond all question a serpent. The real reason why times and seasons and feasts and anniversaries arose is because this serpent of time would otherwise drag his slow length along over all our impressions, and there would be no opportunity of sharply realising the change from one impression to another. So far from interruptions being in their nature bad for our aesthetic feelings, an interruption is in its nature good. It would be an exceedingly good thing if we had the dread of such an interruption constantly before us when we are enjoying anything. It would be good if we expected a bell to ring towards the end of a sunset. It would be good if we thought the clock might strike while we were in the perfect pleasure of staring at sea and sky. Such a sudden check would bring all our impressions into an intense and enjoyable compass, would make the vast sky a single sapphire, the vast sea a single emerald. After long experience of the glories of sensation men find that it is necessary to put to our feelings this perfect artistic limit. And after a little longer experience they find that the God in whom they hardly believe has, as the perfect artist, put the perfect artistic limit—death.

Death is a time limit; but differs in many ways from New Year's Day. The divisions of time which men have adopted are in a sort of way a mild mortality. When we see the Old Year out, we do what many eminent men have done,

January One

and what all men desire to do; we die temporarily. Whenever we admit that it is Tuesday we fulfil St. Paul, and die daily. I doubt if the strongest stoic that ever existed on earth could endure the idea of a Tuesday following on a Tuesday, and a Tuesday on that, and a Tuesday on that, and all the days being Tuesdays till the Day of Judgment, which might be (by some strange and special mercy) a Wednesday.

The divisions of time are arranged so that we may have a start or shock at each reopening of the question. The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul and a new nose; new feet, a new backbone, new ears, and new eyes. It is that we should look out instantaneously on an impossible earth; that we should think it very odd that grass should be green instead of being reasonably purple; that we should think it almost unintelligible that a lot of straight trees should grow out of the round world instead of a lot of round world growing out of the straight trees. The object of the cold and hard definitions of time is almost exactly the same as those of the cold and hard definitions of theology; it is to wake people up. Unless a particular man made New Year resolutions, he would make no resolutions. Unless a man starts afresh about things, he will certainly do nothing effective. Unless a man starts on the strange assumption that he has never existed before, it is quite certain that he will never exist afterwards. Unless a man be born again, he shall by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Of such dramatic renaissances New Year's Day is the great example. Doubtless this division of time can be

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described as an artificiality; but doubtless also it can be described more correctly, as a great artificial thing ought always to be described—that is, as one of the great masterpieces of man. Man has, as I have urged in the case of religion, perceived with a tolerable accuracy his own needs. He has seen that we tend to tire of the most eternal splendours, and that a mark on our calendar, or a crash of bells at midnight maybe, reminds us that we have only recently been created. Let us make New Year resolutions, but not only resolutions to be good. Also resolutions to notice that we have feet, and thank them (with a courtly bow) for carrying us.

THE WAY TO THE STARS

ALL EDINBURGH is darkened with a cloudy and purple darkness, for the clouds cling close about the city, as they always do cling and always ought to cling; and it is raining, as it always is and always ought to be. Whoever invented the phrase "blowing great guns" meant it for a wind like the wind that is now blowing; for the wind is really like great guns, as it comes in explosive blasts, one after another, that have the reverberations of artillery. In this rain and wind and in a state of great joy, though of confused intelligence, I am walking the steep, bleak streets beloved by so many of the Romantics. The sky above me, dark as it is, is blackened by a spire, like the spine of a half-buried cathedral, the immense monument of Scott. And the air that bursts between its arches wraps me, as in a cloak, in that wild wet wind which inspired Stevenson and slew him.

The beauty of Edinburgh as a city is absolutely individual, and consists in one separate atmosphere and one separate class of qualities. It consists chiefly in a quality that may be called "abruptness", an unexpected alternation of heights and depths. It seems like a city built on precipices; a perilous city. Although the actual ridges and valleys are not (of course) really very high or very deep, they stand up like strong cliffs; they fall like open chasms. There are turns of the steep street that take the breath away like a literal

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abyss. There are thoroughfares, full, busy and lined with shops, which yet give the emotion of an Alpine stair. It is, in the only adequate word for it, a sudden city. Great roads rush down hills like rivers in spate. Great buildings rush up like rockets. But the sensation produced by this violent variety of levels is one even more complex and bizarre. It is partly owing to the aforesaid variety, the high and low platform of the place. It is partly owing to the hundred veils of the vaporous atmosphere, which make the earth itself look like the sky, as if the town were hung in heaven, descending like the New Jerusalem.

But the impression is odd and even eerie; it is sometimes difficult for a man to shake off the suggestion that each road is a bridge over the other roads, as if he were really rising by continual stages higher and higher through the air. He fancies he is on some open scaffolding of streets, scaling the sky. He almost imagines that, if he lifted a paving-stone, he might look down through the opening, and see the moon. This weird sense of the city as a sort of starry ladder has so often come upon me when climbing the Edinburgh ways in cloudy weather that I have been tempted to wonder whether any of the old men of the town were thinking of the experience when they chose the strange and splendid motto of the Scotch capital. Never, certainly, did a great city have a heraldic motto which was so atmospherically accurate. It might have been invented by a poet—I might almost say by a landscape painter. The motto of Edinburgh, as you may still see it, I think, carved over the old Castle gate is, “*Sic Itur ad Astra*”: “This Way to the Stars”.

The Way to the Stars

This element in a city is not a mere local oddity, or even a mere local charm. This abrupt sublimity, this sharp and decisive dignity, is in some sense the essential element of a city which is a city at all. The true nature of civic beauty is extraordinarily little understood in our own time. I hope it will get itself understood before the London County Council takes London thoroughly and properly in hand. When we talk of a town as a dull or ugly thing in comparison with the country, we are judging quite carelessly by a few unfortunate examples. A shaggy wilderness is better than some cities; similarly, a shaggy chimpanzee is better than some statues of eminent politicians. But when we think of a statue, we do not always think of an ugly statue. But when we think nowadays of a great city we do think almost exclusively of an ugly city, of Birmingham, Manchester or London. There are pathetic failures in city building, as there are pathetic failures in statuary—Birmingham and Manchester are human failures, faint and feeble, and full of that sense of defeat which our poets call a Celtic sorrow.

But every city is not like Birmingham, a home of lost causes. Some cities are really successful, and present the solid and definite achievement of the thing at which their builders aimed; and when they do this they present, just as a fine statue presents, something of the direct divinity of man, something immeasurably superior to mere nature, to mere common mountains, to mere vulgar stars. The urban civilization of Brixton is doubtless dull compared with the dullest horsepond in the real country. But the eternal cataracts and the sea in all its thunders and splendour

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are utterly commonplace compared with a real city. Birmingham is a failure not because it is a town, but because it is not a town. The modern city is ugly not because it is a city, but because it is not enough of a city, because it is a jungle, because it is confused and anarchic, and surging with selfish and materialistic energies. In short, the modern town is offensive because it is a great deal too like nature; a great deal too like the country.

From where I stand I can see the sombre pillars of the Scott Monument, like a tangle of great trees, and between them and behind them a shoulder of Arthur's Seat. They both show a dark and decisive outline; but I know the real difference between them, and the real difference is the whole difference between the handiwork and the image of God. The difference is that the outline of the mountain looks decisive, but the outline of the monument is decisive. If I went to the top of the mountain (which I have not the smallest intention of doing) I know that I should find vague curves of clay, vague masses of grass; everything which my contemporaries call evolutionary and I call without form and void. But if I were to climb up the face of the Scott Monument, I know that I should find lines of sculpture and masonry which were meant to be decisive and are decisive. In a word, I should find certainty, or conviction, or dogma, which is the thing that belongs to man only, and which, if you take it away from him, will not leave him even a man. For it is the whole business of humanity in this world to deny evolution, to make absolute distinctions, to take a pen and draw round certain actions a line that nature does not recognise; to take a pencil and draw

The Way to the Stars

round the human face a black line that is not there. I repeat, it is the business of the divine human reason to deny that evolutionary appearance whereby all species melt into each other. This is probably what was meant by Adam naming the animals.

As I turn indoors another great roar of wind breaks about the monument, as if the giant it symbolizes had cried aloud in his sleep. And it is with a sense of the namelessly appropriate that my thoughts rest for a moment upon that enormous and unequal writer who has just this difference from Dickens, from Thackeray, from Jane Austen, from George Eliot, from all his equals, that he had some manner of suggesting at certain moments that every man he wrote of was a king in disguise.

HEROIC WIT

AS I came out from a performance of Rostand's *L'Aiglon* I walked very slowly down the Paris streets and pondered upon the real nature of the French genius. *L'Entente Cordiale* is like a great many other modern agreements in this, that it is a magnificent idea made just a little too easy. We see this in the alleged reconciliation of creed with creed. If one sect really did understand another sect, the situation would not only be splendid, but terrible. It might mean the end of the world and the coming of the unanswerable understanding. But too often such an alliance does not mean that one sect really understands the other sect, but that each sect leaves off understanding itself.

Something of the same kind appears in the dangerous facility with which the English and French pay each other compliments. It is not at all easy for any good Englishman to understand how good the French are. There are many and strange things flowing between us. If a man who is a sincere son of this country does catch a glimpse of real French virtue (that mountainous thing), it will not generally be from study, or even travel, but from some splendid accident, such as having a French friend or a peculiar enthusiasm for some particular French writer. One thing is certain, that as long as an Englishman admires the French for being gay, polite, romantic, excitable, and so on, he knows nothing about them. It is when he can say

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in some degree, at least, that he admires the French for being stolid, sane, practical, and profoundly respectable and middle-class that he has caught at least a glimpse of this great and perplexing people.

One odd thing is that by a kind of half-accidental bigotry the versions of the French which the English receive on most points are curiously partial; they tell the wrong half of the truth. Thus, to take a large matter, I was always taught to realise that the French Revolution was ferocious; I was never taught to realise that it has been, in the long run, very successful. Thus, to take a small matter, I was always told that Parisian cabmen drove violently; I never realised that they also drive very well. I had always heard the bad things about French newspapers as compared to ours—that they are skimpy, scrappy, badly printed, and deficient in foreign news. In short, I have always heard the bad thing about French newspapers which is simply that they are bad newspapers. But I have never heard the good thing (the almost divinely good thing) about French newspapers—which is that they are not newspapers at all. They are commonly more in the nature of pamphlets or proclamations, and they are commonly very brilliant pamphlets, and very important proclamations. We English also conducted our politics largely by individual pamphlets in the seventeenth century—when our politics were serious.

There is a better example than all these of this kind of half truth about the French. It consists in the fact that the English always say, when they wish to praise the French intelligence, that that intelligence is marked by what is called wit. It has passed into a kind of proverb that the

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French are witty, with a kind of dim implication that they are very little else than witty. And the word wit, as we use it, conveys the impression of something thin and slight. We think of it as trivial in its object and purely verbal in its form; and we always ascribe it to the indolent and self-indulgent. As a matter of fact, of course, that mental clarity of which wit is a part, requires a certain austerity; one might almost say asceticism. A man might fast in the desert in order to get his brain clear enough to make a good repartee. But the case with the French is much stronger than this. The case with the French is that they have developed in their literature and their politics a peculiar kind of wit which is not only essentially serious, but essentially passionate. It is not thin conversation. It is not even like conversation. It is as heavy as a cannon ball—only it also travels as quick. It is a kind of sensational wit. We might call it, perhaps, heroic wit. If you do not happen to remember any other instances of the thing I mean, if you do not remember any of the great oracular lines of the French classical dramatists, for instance, or any of the deadly arrows of Voltaire, or any of the cataclysmic epigrams of the orators of the French Revolution, if you remember none of these there is a name that will immediately recall the matter of which I speak—Victor Hugo. One might quote a hundred instances from him. Take this one for example. How often have you and I tried to find words to express the scorn which we felt for the materialistic argument which maintains (to the manifest contradiction of history) that idealism and poetry are not influential in politics? “The people,” says Victor Hugo somewhere,

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“cry out scornfully ‘Bah! the poet is in the clouds’. So is the thunderbolt.”

To consider such sayings merely verbal tricks is to misunderstand the whole nature of literature. The aim of literature is to give something pointed in the mere form which shall correspond to something pointed, something inexpressibly pointed in the emotions. Verbal wit like Victor Hugo's has the same effect on the emotions as rhyme. Rhyme gives a ringing finality to a sentiment; the ear hears that something has been decided even before the brain can take it in. I believe some critics of Shakespeare blame him for ending a blank-verse scene with a rhymed couplet so often. It seems to me not only natural, but splendid, that the speech at the last should rise into a kind of recurrent song. That air of finishing the matter at a blow which verbal rhyme gives in the plays of Shakespeare, verbal wit gives in the plays of Victor Hugo and in the plays of Rostand. It is not in the least what we mean by wit, something frigid and fugitive; it is not only emotional, but violent with emotion. There was one Englishman who understood the use of heroic wit—an Englishman immensely great and abominably neglected: Tom Hood. He understood the tragic and poignant use of verbal coincidences. He knew that the most profound and terrible and religious thing in literature was a profound and terrible and religious pun. But in France the thing appears to be permanent and instinctive. Even while I was in Paris there was a public debate between some steady-going Radical and the chivalrous, the magnanimous, the almost mythical *Déroulède*. “Your plebicitary President,” said the Radical to *Dérou-*

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lède, “would be just as likely as any other tyrant to knock you in the eye and make you see all the colours of the rainbow.” “I only wish to see three of them,” retorted the Nationalist leader. That is absolutely the Hugoesque method; to express the most violent things by means of the most superficial. And as I have said, we shall never understand the French until we understand that this wit of theirs is not mere wit, as we mean the word. In fact, this can be very simply seen by noticing the connotation of the word for wit in the two languages. What we call wit they call *esprit*—spirit. When they want to call a man witty, they call him *spirituel*. They actually use the same word for wit which they use for the Holy Ghost.

THE SINS OF THE RUSSIAN PRINCES

THE DIFFICULTY of understanding Russia is needlessly increased by the reckless and vague phrases which are used by English writers in their attempts at political description and historical parallel. There has crept into our writing a very vile habit of using the names of all past periods as terms of abuse. If we do not like something we call it tribal, we call it feudal, we call it medieval, we call it worthy of the Stuarts, we call it despotic, we call it oligarchical, we call it barbarism, we call it militarism, we talk of aristocrats, we talk of bureaucrats, as if all these things were the same and everybody suffered from all of them except ourselves. We forget the evident fact that most of these things not only do not go together, but cannot possibly go together. It is obvious that a despot always tries to break an aristocracy. It is obvious that an aristocracy always tries to break a despot. It is obvious that in all countries where a bureaucracy rules an aristocracy does not rule. It is obvious that feudalism means the holding of land in return for occasional and amateur fighting.

It is obvious, therefore, that where there is feudalism there cannot be militarism. Militarism is a modern thing; there was no militarism in the Middle Ages; there was only war, which is much nicer. Some revolutionists lump together, as if the two were alike, that power of the police which comes from too much government, as in Prussia,

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with that power of the rich which comes from mere anarchy, as in America. Generally speaking, the people that suffers from one kind of tyranny does not suffer from the other. Almost every Frenchman has his own separate field. Almost every Englishman has his own separate form of Christianity. In England we have an aristocracy, but not an autocracy. In Russia they have an autocracy, but not an aristocracy. In Russia the tyrants are commonly like Trepoff, men of quite humble birth, and in Russia such men can often enjoy the pardonable pleasure of beating a gentleman.

There is one of these pseudo-historical phrases in connection with Russia which is especially irritating to the intellect. Whatever else you call Russia, do not call it medieval. The standing peculiarity of Russia is that it is the one country in Europe which never passed through the Middle Ages at all. It has none of the distinctive things which the Middle Ages made. Little or nothing of the great Gothic architecture, the cathedrals and the churches; little or nothing of the typically medieval universities; little or nothing of the chivalry and knighthood; little or nothing of the elaborate legalities deduced from the Roman Law. But there is one example of a medieval thing with a medieval name which towers above all others. If Russia were medieval she would probably have always kept, at least in form, that strictly medieval thing, a Parliament.

The peasant in Russia is pre-medieval, and I suppose pre-historic. The government and national direction of Russia is post-medieval, is almost modern. The whole thing began in the eighteenth century, and it began as one

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of the despotisms of the eighteenth century. Those despotisms all had a definite character. One of them was destroyed in France. One of them survived in Russia. They all had a secret and powerful police and have made the word policeman smell worse than the word thief. They all ruled, as Fouché ruled and Trepoff ruled, by *lettres-de-cachet*, by sudden arrests and sudden disappearances. They all impressed the world as Frederick of Prussia impressed it, by exact and cruel training of a professional army. They were all very tyrannical and they were all very enlightened. They had read the Encyclopaedia, and were interested in the beginnings of science. They liked despotism, not because it was old and slow, but because it was new and rapid and businesslike. They liked tyranny, not because it was clumsy, but because it was exact. They disliked freedom, but they encouraged free thought. Two or three of these tyrants were actually freethinkers: Frederick of Prussia was the friend of Voltaire; Catherine of Prussia was the friend of Diderot.

A slight book, a popular book, may, like a straw, show these truths of history, which are like the wind, violent, but like the wind, invisible. *Celebrated Crimes of the Russian Court* by Alexandre Dumas is such a book, which, like so many others bearing his name, may or may not be his own, but is at least his own type of subject and type of treatment. It is not the history of the Russian Court; it is not even the drama of the Russian Court; it is confessedly the melodrama of that Court. He is concerned with pulling only the one black thread of conspiracy and crime out of the complex web of a wide nation through a varied century.

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He is concerned not with doors, but with trapdoors; not with faces but with masks. Yet even through this romanticism, through this almost vulgar romanticism, the reader can feel this essentially eighteenth-century quality in the Court of Russia. The night is full of knives; the palace is a palace of death; blood, like a serpent, crawls from under closed doors. We are in a very wicked time, and a very strange one. But we are still in the Age of Reason. We are still in the *Age des Philosophes*. We are still in the strange cold time when even the oppressors were rationalists.

It may be difficult to say with precision why these crimes of the Russian Court, always bloody, sometimes almost bestial, nevertheless affect the reader with this air of arid civilization and even of politeness. But the contrast can best be seen if we compare them mentally for a moment with the most violent tales that vary the history of the true Middle Ages. If anyone wishes to see how utterly un-medieval is the Russian autocracy, let him compare these sins with any of the sins that mark the medieval kings. The medieval kings are kept permanently simple in the presence of the simplest of all things—mysticism. Clear colours of vice and virtue are quartered quite plainly on their shields; angels and devils pull them quite plainly down this or that road on a recognised map of the world. They go right or they go wrong, like the Prince and Princess in a fairy tale; if they repent, their repentance is always as violent as a crime. When they blaspheme God they blaspheme a real God, a God who they think is there, and that is the only bold or interesting part of blasphemy. But the sins of the Russian Princes have none of the bright colour and clear

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outline that mark the old tales of Rufus, of Becket, of William Wallace, of Eleanor and Rosamond, of Abelard and Heloïse. They are bleak and even blasé crimes, crimes committed in a vacuum. Their very lust seems cold, and more like hunger than passion. They have lost religion; they have missed Revolution; they are left intriguing without even a clear object of intrigue.

THE MIRROR

LOST SOMEWHERE in the enormous plains of time, there wanders a dwarf who is the image of God, who has produced on a yet more dwarfish scale an image of creation. The pigmy picture of God we call Man; the pigmy picture of creation we call Art. It is an undervaluing of the function of man to say that he only expresses his own personality. An artist will indeed express his own personality, but chiefly by his interest in other personalities, butchers, bakers, and bishops—or even his interest in impersonalities, wind, or rain, or music, or metaphysics. His business (as something secondary but divine) is to make the world over again, and that is the meaning of all portraits and public buildings. Still, he has to make a world, like a god; not merely to make a noise, like an animal or an aesthetic egoist. Even if he tries to paint things as they are he will, of course, inevitably paint them as they ought to be; but this tendency should be an unconscious one. He will by instinct humanise the most inhuman monster and domesticate the most wild of the wild beasts. Of his own nature he will try to understand a horse better than the horse understands himself, as did the pagan emperor. Of his own nature he will see birds and beasts as omens rather than animals, as did the pagan augurs.

This was well illustrated in the older times by the habit of making every other animal an arbitrary symbol of some

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human virtue. Thus the lion was magnanimity, since he would not molest virgins; though few of us would actually fling maiden ladies into the cages of the Zoo to test the theory. Thus the pelican stood for charity; though few of us have ever had our sins forgiven or our debts expunged by any such bird.

The first natural history was all supernatural, and man made allegories out of the animals rather than classifications. This was undoubtedly a mistaken extreme of the mere imposition of man's theory upon nature. For that reason, no doubt, the science of heraldry, with all its lucid logic, suggestive history, and splendid decorative art, has dropped out of the ages and dragged all real aristocracy down with it. But it was only the extreme version of something that must permanently limit all human art. None of us can really say what is the value of a pine tree to a pine tree, of a herring to a herring, or even of a dog to a dog. Still less can any of us say what is the value of any of them to that unthinkable and throned reality which made them all.

Therefore, into any human art, however imitative, there must necessarily creep an element of the creatively human. Every horse a man draws will be partly human, like a centaur, and, therefore, partly fabulous. Every fish a man draws will be partly human, like a merman, and, therefore, partly legendary. Nevertheless, this mystical touch will only come in truly if the man is trying to trace the real outlines of a fish or a horse.

All this personal energy is only effective so long as it seems impersonal; the moment the modern artist abandons all attempt upon the reality he practically loses all power

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upon the romance. In a strong, well-painted picture you will indeed only see the elephant through the atmosphere. But in some of the faint and flimsy modern pictures you can see the atmosphere through the elephant. The modern artist, only too often, loses himself in seeking to find and fix himself; he imposes a fictitious self upon that unthinking real self which otherwise would be expressed freely. He has become an individualist, and ceased to be an individual. Nay, he has even become a madman in the most frightful and vivid meaning of the term. He has become conscious of his sub-consciousness.

When man remakes anything therefore he must always make it slightly after his own image. If he carves the most formless Missing Link it will be a little more man than monkey. If he outlines the most infant and embryo rhinoceros, it may have (as they say of the infants) its father's nose. But these scattered and elusive human traits are the nearest that he can really get to a complete self-representation. The one thing an artist must not be allowed to paint is himself; the less he thinks about that commonplace person the better. Rembrandt indeed painted himself several times, and Rembrandt was a great man. But as he painted himself every time totally differently I do not fancy that he was really very attentive to his sitter. To peer into the looking-glass is indeed a poetic and fascinating thing, as Lewis Carroll knew; but not in order to see oneself. Oneself is indeed rather an irritating obstruction in that magic doorway. Alice did not look into the looking-glass to find Alice. She sought to peer through those strange doorways and wonder about those alien windows, which

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open outwards into everywhere in that shining and silent land: windows which are indeed

Magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faerie lands forlorn.

Furniture, perspective, exits are worth the artist's staring at in a mirror. For they have a weird, unconscious, and foreign look, as if they were parts of that other world to which we half belong. But an artist should never try to find himself as the man in the mirror. For however subtly he lurk or swiftly he leap, he can never catch the man in the mirror unawares.

Most of us, I fancy, have found the strongest personalities in the people who do not know that they have any. Waters that are rushing upwards rush outwards, and spread themselves all over the earth. It is only the sinking waters that swirl inwards to their own centre in the spirals of the whirlpool. Yet the most perilous waters of all, worse than whirlpool or wild high tide, are those that stand still for a moment and reflect a man's face.

A CHARGE OF IRREVERENCE

SOMETIMES it seems possible that we may live to see men (that is, some men) divided upon aesthetics and questions of taste as bitterly as upon questions of faith or morals; that the streets may run with blood upon a question of carpets; that mobs may rise to destroy some fashion in bonnets; and that bands of armed rioters may rush down the street shouting "Dados, Dados!" and burning enormous heaps of Early Victorian furniture. I do not think that it will come to this, because aesthetics do not tend like morals to create the quality of sudden valour. But it has already come to this: that there are many people, far too many people in the modern world, who really entertain, touching matters of mere taste, the same temper of vigilance, of violence, and of certain pent-up and permanent exasperation which it is natural for men to feel upon very combative questions of right and wrong. Many moderns, in short, do treat taste as if it were a matter of morality. I can only hope that they do not treat morality as a matter of taste. Many of these people have been writing me letters lately, very indignant letters, in connection with an article in defence of Noise which I wrote some little time ago. It is highly typical of the truth in question—the substitution of aesthetic for ethical quarrels—that my correspondents were more annoyed about this subject than about any other. I have constantly defended things which many readers really

A Charge of Irreverence

think wrong; things such as Christianity, Patriotism, and Eating Meat. But I never received so many hearty denunciations, designed to make me writhe and regard myself as a really wicked fellow, as I have received in connection with the subject of Noise, which has nothing to do with wickedness or goodness at all, a liking for loud sounds being a thing exactly parallel to a liking for bright colours—which idle taste I also entertain. One correspondent, indeed, did introduce into the question a criticism which verged on morality. He rebuked me for making game of my own death-bed. I do not know how to reply to him except by making game of it. It is the only use to which I can at present put that important piece of family furniture.

In the name of reverence and of everything else we must get rid of this notion. It is absolutely useless and absurd to tell a man that he must not joke about sacred subjects. It is useless and absurd for a simple reason: because there are no subjects that are not sacred subjects. Every instant of human life is awful. Every step, every stirring of a finger, is full of an importance so huge and even so horrible that a man might go mad if he thought of it. If it is wrong to joke about one's death-bed it is wrong to joke about the veal and ham pie which, if pursued with much devotion, may very likely have a great deal to do with bringing one to that death-bed. If it is wrong to joke about a dying man it is wrong to joke about any man. For every man is a dying man; a man dying slow or fast. In short, if we say that we must not jest about solemn subjects, what we really mean or ought to mean is that we must not jest at all. And that is what some of the old Puritan ascetics (for

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whom I for one have a vast respect and admiration) did mean. They did mean and they did say that one should not joke at all; that life was too uniformly serious to be joked about. That seems to me to be one of the two reasonable and possible positions; that life is too uniformly serious to be joked about. There is one other possible position, and that I adopt; I say that life is too uniformly serious not to be joked about.

Of course there is a sane distinction in the matter, though my fiery correspondent neither perceives nor observes it. I think we may jest on any subject. But I do not think that we may jest on any occasion. It is really irreverent to speak frivolously at those particular moments at which the seriousness of the matter is being specially and fiercely felt. We joke about death-beds, but not at death-beds. We play the fool on the subject of the Church; we do not play the fool in the church. This is because such special times are dedicated by human instinct to the brief but direct consideration of the fact that life is serious. Life is serious all the time; but living cannot be serious all the time. That is the whole human use and meaning of a church: that we enter a small building in order to see for the first time the universe outside. A church acts precisely as a camera obscura. It tightens up our varied experiences and makes them our pictures. By making life small it makes it serious. All men tend to take seriously the low arches and the little lamps. All men tend to take frivolously, to take recklessly, to take with entire levity, the terrible universe outside, the infinite heavens and the stars. The physical universe is at once shapeless and slippery; it eludes our grasp; it is all

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over the place; it is everywhere and nowhere. Nature is too large to be taken seriously.

There is perhaps only one other fact of moral experience to be borne in mind in the matter. In one sense, as has been said above, everything is intense and solemn; but in a more everyday sense there are some things which we may be permitted to call frivolous. Such matters are neckties, trousers, cigars, lawn tennis, golf, fireworks, chemistry, astronomy, geology, biology, and so on. If you wish to be frequently solemn, if you have a continually flowing spring of superfluous solemnity, I beseech you put your solemnity into these things. In these things solemnity will do no harm. Observe and imitate the admirable Scotch nation. They joke about their religion; but they never joke about their golf. You cannot be too solemn about golf to be a good golfer; you can be a great deal too solemn about Christianity to be a good Christian. You may safely put into your neckties solemnity, and nothing but solemnity, because neckties are not the whole of your life—at least, I hope not. But in anything that does cover the whole of your life—in your philosophy and your religion—you must have mirth. If you do not have mirth you will certainly have madness.

THE PARADOX OF HUMILITY

I HAVE been reading *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, which is a collection of the sayings and doings of the whole Franciscan Brotherhood in its early days, as developed and distorted by popular religious tradition rather than by formal religious biography. There are, of course, official Catholic histories of St. Francis; this is an unofficial—very unofficial—biography. The tales range from the most everyday trivialities to the wildest fairy tales. In one paragraph we read how Friar Juniper gave money to a poor man. In the next paragraph we may read how St. Francis made a bargain with a fierce wolf, which nodded its head at each clause of the treaty and ended by shaking hands with the Saint in order to ratify it. Such a book may be treated in many ways by a modern man. He may turn it over as a mere antiquated plaything. He may burn it as a scrapbook of insane superstitions; which is certainly a more Christian way of treating it. But if he wishes, by a stretch of imagination, really to understand what it means, he must abandon condescension as much as anger. He must ask himself what was this strange morning of the Middle Ages of which Francis was the morning star. It will not be enough to rejoice at Francis; it will be necessary, if only for a moment, to rejoice with him. We must try and understand what really separated Francis from the monks before him. And for that we must also realise what united him to the monks before him—what was medieval Christianity?

The Paradox of Humility

When in the near future the real collision comes between Christianity and the genuine forces opposed to it, the central symbol and standard round which the whole battle will rage will be the problem of the thing called Humility. The other virtues the moderns will admit even if they weaken or distort them. Mercy they will admit, though they may degrade it into humanitarianism. Justice they will admit, though they may deaden it until it becomes merely order. Even faith they will be forced to admit, because of the high degree of faith which is necessary for the acceptance of their own philosophies. But they will be able plausibly and defensibly, and with an air of modern intelligence, to deny that humility is a virtue at all. There they have on their side some pagan and some Eastern examples of virtue; and there they have on their side (or appear to have on their side) all that instinctive and even admirable rhetoric of vainglory and self-exaltation which has made so much of the poetry and oratory of mankind. Yet this doctrine of pagan pride will break down as it broke down before. There is something attractive in the "Quid times? Caesarem vobis". But after all, it did not prevent the gentleman getting knifed in the Capitol. I do not know how other readers of the story are affected by it; but it always seemed to me that the main impression of Caesar's character is that of a man most desolately unhappy. And if we ask the cause of this unhappiness, we shall not be far wrong if we merely call it the absence of humility. Nothing ever startled Caesar; that is, nothing ever pleased him.

The modern interest in St. Francis is great, but not always appropriate. If we want to state his historical

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position fairly we must first of all keep in mind this standing paradox of humility. Francis was certainly something more than the ordinary devout monk. But Francis must not be exhibited in the modern world as a sort of modern aesthete, with the garments of a Rossetti picture and the ethics of a vegetarian restaurant. Francis was a typical thirteenth-century man; a fighter with lance and sword in his youth, a man of strong appetites strongly suppressed, a dogmatic Catholic, and a powerful popular leader. Francis did not start a campaign against osprey feathers or bearing reins; he started something very different. What he did do, I think, was this: Up to his time humility had been rightly insisted on by the Church mainly as the source of moral improvement. To put the thing shortly, Christianity had taught men to be humble that they might realise how bad things were. Francis was the first (after Christ himself) to teach men to be humble that they might realise how good things were. Pride is not only an enemy to instruction. Pride is an enemy to amusement. The main lesson of St. Francis of Assisi is this idea of an almost fantastic self-effacement corresponding to an almost fantastic pleasure. Matthew Arnold expressed distress and disapproval when Francis referred to his own body as "my brother the donkey". It was exactly because Matthew Arnold thought more of Matthew Arnold than Francis did of Francis that Francis was so much the jollier of the two. Arnold could never have written the *Canticle of the Creatures* with its roaring fraternity of the universe. It is only he who can say "my brother the donkey" who can feel "my brother the sun".

The Paradox of Humility

Here, then, is where we have to place St. Francis and his happy legends. He marks the point where humility has at last become successful because it has at last become joyful. The sin of the pagan world has at last been expiated and left behind. Christianity, even humanly considered, was the immense repentance of Roman Europe. It was somewhat of a death-bed repentance. It was necessary, but it was morbid. St. Francis, so to speak, is still on the sick bed, but he has the uproarious high spirits which so often go with convalescence. Discipline, poverty, self-abasement have contrived to restore health to the ruined European character. The later pagan had worshipped himself. The earlier Christian had been forced to revile himself. When he had begun to revile himself he began to forget himself. When he had begun to forget himself he began to enjoy himself.

There is but a faint shade which turns grey into purple. There is but one nameless tint that is between the poorest of colours and the richest of colours. That grey turning purple is the nearest simile we can find for the poverty and pleasure of the Franciscans. But the thing is very fresh and delicate, like the dawning observation of infancy. The Franciscan monk is only conscious of his unworthiness. He is not conscious of his hilarity. This paradox of a humiliation which is named creating an exultation which is not named is the whole poetry of this grey and silver daybreak of the medieval civilization; and it is the root of all the irony and fantasy which a modern feels in reading these tales. For example, there is one tale of how Brother Juniper "played see-saw to abase himself". The reader

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has a kind of subconscious conviction that he really played see-saw to amuse himself. But the real truth is somewhere between the two, and is a matter of more subtle psychology. The man did sincerely feel that in joining a grotesque game of children he was in some way breaking the back of his own natural pride. But there also entered into the operation involuntarily and invisibly a breath from the paradise of children. And, indeed, see-saw (besides being an excellent game) is a very good symbol of the principle that he that abaseth himself shall be exalted.

A FAIRY TALE

IN NOVELS, romances, scientific reports and similar documents, we have all come across the story of the man who, on waking up, forgets his name and wanders out into the streets without an identity. He can exercise an ordinary intelligence; he can perform all ordinary functions, but he cannot remember who he is. I am in this position. But then, as it is a comfort to me to reflect, so are you. Every human being has forgotten who he is and where he came from. We are all blasted with one great obliteration of memory. We none of us saw ourselves born; and if we had, it would not have cleared up the mystery. Parents are a delight; but they are not an explanation. The one thing that no man, however adventurous, can get behind, is his own existence; the one thing that no man, however learned, can ever know, is his own name. It is easier to comprehend the cosmos than to comprehend the ego; it is easier even to know where you are than to know who you are. We have forgotten our own meaning, and we are all wandering about the streets without keepers. All that we call commonsense and practicality and worldly wisdom only means that we forget that we have forgotten. All that we mean by religion and poetry only means that for one wild moment we remember that we forget.

I was sitting the other day on a heap of stones in the Isle of Thanet, when I remembered that I had forgotten. Not a straw had stirred; not a bird had spoken; but my blood

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ran cold, and I knew at once that I was in fairyland. The commonplace country landscape of Thanet lent itself more to the fairy notion than any imaginable mountains or lakes or caves. It is always easier to see this elvish look in plain and familiar objects because of a fact that men in our day mostly fail to understand; because it is exactly the homeliest part of man that is nearest to heaven and hell. We can think of a stool or a pot being bewitched; we cannot easily think of a cartoon by Raphael being bewitched. Neither can we think easily of the Alps being bewitched; it would require a witch of some force of character. But a domestic and even prosaic landscape, like that of this flat corner of Kent, can be soaked in a supernaturalism all the more awful from being detached and alien from the landscape itself. Everything that stood up around me stood up shapeless and yet with some horrible hint of the human shape. Everything looked as if it had a face somewhere, but a face that was hidden or turned away. I seemed to be looking at the ugly back of everything. The stunted hedge looked like a line of hoary and hairy hobgoblins staring away from me towards the sun. The dwarfish trees were deformed and twisted by the silent and evil magic of the sea; they seemed to have hump-backs and hidden faces. Everything was at once secretive and vigilant; even the heap of stones beneath me seemed to be all eyes. But all external oddities were secondary to, or perhaps only symbolic of, the sudden sense of a sacred and splendid ignorance that had fallen upon my soul; the enigma of being alive. Saints have not discovered the answer. Philosophers have not even discovered the riddle. But

A Fairy Tale

in that moment at least I remembered that I could not remember.

But there is one merely human work in which the fundamental mood is truly and wisely recorded—I mean in the fairy tales. I can never understand why it is that those who happen to disbelieve in Christianity do not go back to the great, healthy, permanent human tradition outside Christianity. Because you cannot rise to faith, you need not sink to natural philosophy. If I did not put my faith in the Gospel, I should not put it in Haeckel. I should put it in Jack the Giant Killer. I should put it in these enduring human stories, with their celebration of hope, surprise, courage, the fulfilment of contracts, and the natural relations of mankind. The point is apart from my present purpose, and I will not pursue it here; but I fancy that it is one of the strange testimonies to Christianity that its opponents do not get clear of it into the original human condition, but go mad with mere reaction and anarchy. Those who object to the faith often object to the human fables; those who dislike Christianity carry their absurdity to the point of disliking Paganism too.

The essence of fairyland is this; that it is a country of which we do not know the laws. This is also a peculiarity of the universe in which we live. We do not know anything about the laws of nature; we do not even know whether they are laws. All that we can do is to take first by faith (from our parents, aunts, and nurses), and afterwards by very meagre experiment (during the miserably insufficient period of three score years and ten), the general proposition that there is some sort of strange connection, often repeated

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but still unexplained, between lighted gunpowder and a loud bang. And it is here that we may see the deep and sound philosophy of the fairy tale. The chemist says: "Mix these three substances and the bang will follow." The good wizard in the fairy tale says: "Eat these three apples and the giant's head will fall off." But the chemist talks in a particular tone and style, which suggests that there is an abstract philosophy, some sort of inevitable connection between the three substances and the bang. Sometimes he calls it a necessity, which means a thing that cannot be broken. Sometimes he calls it a law, which means a thing that can be broken. But he always means that the mind sees a connection between the two things—as the mind sees a connection between four and eight—and the mind does nothing of the sort. The fairy-tale method is far more philosophical. The wizard says: "Do this one extraordinary thing and that other totally different extraordinary thing does continually follow. I don't know why it does; I don't even know that it will always do it. But it is a tip worth knowing when you want to kill a giant." We do not know that these natural repetitions all round us are laws; we do not know that they are necessities. What we do know about them is that they are magic spells—that is, conditions which exist, but the nature of which is mystical altogether. Water is bewitched, so that it always goes downhill. Birds are bewitched, so that they fly. The sun is bewitched, so that it shines.

I rose from the heap of stones having become altogether a citizen of fairyland. I grasped my stick like a sword and went up the white road looking for giants. I was

A Fairy Tale

disappointed for some little time, the two or three people whom I met being so far as I could estimate actually smaller than myself. But there was something of a rapid rigidity in the road running in front of me like a lean white hound, that dragged me on in undiminished confidence in the wonders that awaited me. For it is a mark of the essential morality of fairyland (a thing too commonly overlooked) that happiness in fairyland, like happiness anywhere else, involves an object and even a challenge; we can only admire scenery if we want to get past it. No man can take his ease in Elfland as in the land of the lotus eater. Children are its citizens, and children do not want to take their ease. I hoped to find a castle and an ogre; if I had luck a three-headed ogre, for in Elfland all sport is the defiance of something stronger; our only hunting is the hunting of big game. I wanted him large and wicked, very wicked. A minute after the road and hedges turned at an abrupt angle, and I saw before me something that snapped my last faith in reasonable things.

There in front of me, solid and silent in the sun, was the unmistakable ogre's castle—turreted and castellated, with an extravagant skyline, exactly as I had seen it brightly coloured in my nursery picture-books. With all my elvish feelings I had not really believed that I should find such a fantastic fortress on a road in Kent. Turning to a fat, elderly countryman who was standing by a haystack (himself no doubt a fairy), I said, "Who lives in this place?" "That place," he said, "why that's Mr. Harry Marks' place." And I leaned upon my stick and gazed and thought of the war in Elfland.

THE CURIOUS ENGLISHMAN

THE TREES closed over us in a complete dome of foliage; but the sun was so strong that it glared through the translucent leaves as if through coloured glass of green and gold. We were sitting at one of those singular woodland restaurants which the Germans, with their instinct at once for the obvious and the picturesque, scatter along the line of their toy railways in their ornamental forests. To come upon such a place is like coming upon the house which Hansel and Gretel found in the German forest, the house made of things to eat. This house was also largely made of things to eat, and we began to eat it. My German friend spread on his plate a colour scheme of sausages, and procured a beer mug like a moderate-sized tower. I ordered a glass of white German wine, and took from my knapsack the remains of what had once been English biscuits, but were now in the last stage of dissolution. It was when we had finished this slight refreshment, and I was expecting either a rich conversation or a rich silence (in both of which all nice Germans excel), that the awful thing happened. It came like a thunderbolt. My companion shut down sharply the lid of his mug.

The waiters staggered back to right and left. For you must know that in Germany this is a signal that a man will drink no more. If he does not make the signal, but leaves the lid open, the attendants go on pouring in beer

The Curious Englishman

with the automatic placidity of a quiet river flowing over the stones. The intellectual principle of the thing is subtle and interesting. These waiters seem to regard drinking beer as the normal state of a human being. Not drinking beer they regard as a positive, exceptional, and even daring, action, to be emphasised by some startling signal. My friend made this startling signal, and almost immediately stood upright.

“You will come,” he said earnestly, “and see the Roman camp; the Roman remains?”

“My friend,” I replied equally earnestly, “I will not come and see the Roman camp; the Roman remains. I will stop where I am, and drink this Roman wine and eat these ancient Roman biscuits.”

“They look ancient,” he replied, “but scarcely Roman.”

“What language is ‘bis’,” I asked, “and of what past participle is ‘cuit’ a corruption? Where did you learn the word ‘wine’? and who planted vines in your valleys? You may go and look at ruins; for you think that the old civilization is dead. But I think the old civilization is still alive; and I will no more weep because this one Roman camp is in ruins, than I will weep because this one English biscuit is in ruins. In the same way you think Christianity is dead; so naturally you go and look at Christian abbeys. But I think Christianity is still alive, and I can go and look at Christian tram-cars. Rome and what it stands for is not for me a thing for museums. So I will sit on this ancient Roman stool at this ancient Roman table and eat my ancient Roman lunch. Roman camp! Why, all Europe is still a camp, and a Roman camp! Roman remains! Why,

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what are you and I but Roman remains? Let us look at each other."

"At any rate," said my friend, putting on his hat, "I am not a remains, for I am not remaining."

"I suppose I shall have to go with you," I said, getting to my feet, "and to enliven the unsupportable stupidity of sightseeing I will tell you a true story. I will tell you a little tale about a great man I once met, of whom it is sufficient to say that compared with him I am a sightseer."

I was once passing across Normandy in my boyhood, and seeing for the first time the tall, flamboyant churches which stand like tall, eternal lilies in that garden of architecture. I was a sightseer in those days, and a very good thing too. Now, in the long list of the splendid spired towns of which I wished to see as many as possible, there was one which was a doubtful case. It lay a long way out of the route, and was itself tiny and trivial, save for certain details about the parish church, which were said to join the Renaissance and the later Medieval building in a somewhat strange way. After some hesitation I left the main journey and took the long loop that led me to this minor curiosity. It was a small hill standing in the middle of an immense plain with poplars. The church hung on the crest of the hill, the town lay at the bottom, and it was as dull a town as there can well be in the world. It was ugly with the extreme ugliness of French utilitarianism, and rigid to the very final pitch of French respectability. It was also very small, and seemed like a forgotten suburb of the universe. Leaving my baggage in a desolate café, I climbed the hill,

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and with considerable relief reached the church, the only place that could possibly repay the visit. And it did repay it. Without being so striking in general design as some of the great Norman churches, it had a quaint conglomeration of the two great styles, the late Christian and the revived Pagan, which could scarcely be seen so well elsewhere. There were actually caryatids in the confusion of Gothic ornament. It seemed like some great struggle in stone, the war between the saints and the heathen heroes in a moment of its frenzy frozen for ever.

I descended the hill and re-entered that repulsive little town. I went into the dingy café and asked for dinner, and when I sat down to it I found to my supreme astonishment that there was another Englishman quietly eating his dinner opposite.

He was a man with a carefully pointed beard, hair touched with grey, and eyes touched with a sort of satire; he had very much the look of a certain kind of young Oxford don; I mean the tolerable kind. We fell into conversation first about the weather, then about the sky, then about heaven and hell, and everything there is. It is literally true that I have hardly ever in my life met a man with more real intellectual force. He knew things as they are known, not merely by a man who is learned, but by a man who is learning—that is, who is still alive. He talked like a man of the world, but also like a man of all the other worlds. In the course of some conversation (I think about Buddha), I asked him if he had arrived that afternoon.

“No,” he replied carelessly, “I came here first four years ago.”

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“Great Heavens!” I cried, quite startled. “Have you been in this hole for four years? Have you never left it?”

“Yes,” he said simply. “I once went out for a week. I found a railway train, and got into it. It brought me back here.”

Then, as if dreamily, he added, “An omen, perhaps. I suppose I shall die here.”

“Have you any reason for stopping here?” I asked.

“Not the faintest reason,” he replied, with a sort of languid fervour.

For a moment I was stunned to find such a man chained to such a spot. Then I suddenly remembered the church.

“After all,” I said, “I suppose that architecture is inexhaustible. A good Gothic church is a sort of human forest. One could live in the Parthenon and always find beauty. But one could live in an old church and actually even find novelty. I suppose you have not got to the end of that church yet.”

“I have not got to the beginning of it,” he answered, calmly finishing his coffee. “I have never been up to look at it.”

I never saw again the ugly town or the beautiful church or the incomprehensible man who clung to the ugly town and would not look at the beautiful church. I do not know whether he meant how little we should think of lovely things or how happy we can really be with dull things. But he meant something; he was that kind of man.

“If you ask me,” said my German friend, “I should say that the police were looking for him.” And with that we came out above the great curves of the Roman Camp.

THE GRAVE-DIGGER

IN LOOKING over some medieval books in the beautiful Rylands Library at Manchester I was much struck by that perfection and precision in the decorative illumination which so many have praised and so few have realised in this industrious medieval art. But I was even more affected by a quality that belongs at once to the simplest and the soundest human feeling. Plato held this view, and so does every child. Plato held, and the child holds, that the most important thing about a ship (let us say) is that it is a ship. Thus, all these pictures are designed to express things in their quiddity. If these old artists draw a ship, everything is sacrificed to expressing the "shipishness" of the ship. If they draw a tower, its whole object is to be towering. If they draw a flower, its whole object is to be flowering. Their pencils often go wrong as to how the thing looks; their intellects never go wrong as to what the thing is.

These pictures are childish in the proper and complimentary sense of the word. They are childish in this sense, that they are Platonist. When we are very young and vigorous and human we believe in things; it is only when we are very old and dissolute and decaying that we believe in the aspects of things. To see a thing in aspects is to be crippled, to be defective. A full and healthy man realises a thing called a ship; he realises it simultaneously from all sides and with all senses. One of his senses tells him that

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the ship is tall or white, another that the ship is moving or standing still, another that it is battling with broken and noisy waves, another that it is surrounded and soaked with the smell of the sea. But a deaf man would only know that the ship was moving by the passing of objects. A blind man would only know that the ship was moving by the sound of the swirling water. A blind and deaf man would only know that a ship was moving by the fact that he was seasick. This is the thing called "impressionism", that typically modern thing.

Impressionism means shutting up all of one's nine million organs and avenues of appreciation except one. Impressionism means that, whereas Nature has made our senses and impressions support each other, we desire to suppress one part of perception and employ the other. Impressionism, in short, may be justly summarised as "winking the other eye". The impressionist desires to treat mankind as a brood of the Cyclops. It is not surprising that Whistler wore a monocle; his philosophy was monocular. But the vice is not confined to the pictorial impressionist who deals with visible powers. Just as the painter of that type asks us to use only one of our eyes, so the poet of that type asks us to use only one lobe of our brain.

The characteristic of the finest and most typical modern plays is that they rule out altogether any element inconsistent with their subtle theme. I might almost say with their secret theme. The laughter is excluded at the box-office. A man may say of *Hamlet* or of *Romeo and Juliet* that the tragedy seems to him inadequate. But at least he must allow that this tragedy has been at least adequate

The Grave-digger

to admit and to overshadow comedy. Hamlet's dignity may be destroyed by the German critic; but at least Hamlet's dignity is not destroyed by the Grave-digger. Hamlet meets the Grave-digger, and realises quite as well as any modern that serious things can be laughed at even by those who are closest to them. The hilarious song of the Grave-digger is the great heroic song of all human democracy, and the first few notes of that cry would have cracked from end to end, like the blast of cockcrow, the whole world of Pelleas and Melisande.

There are some who say that Shakespeare was vitally anti-democratic, because every now and then he curses the rabble—as if every lover of the people had not often had cause to curse the rabble. For this is the very definition of the rabble—it is the people when the people are undemocratic. But if anyone fancies that Shakespeare did not, consciously or unconsciously, realise the rude veracity and violent humour of the people, the complete answer is to be found in the mere figure of the Grave-digger. “Has this fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making?” In that Shakespeare has shown the utter inferiority of Hamlet to the Grave-digger. Hamlet by himself might almost be a character in Maeterlinck. He wishes to make the play of *Hamlet* a Maeterlinck play—united, artistic, melancholy, in a monotone. He wishes the Grave-digger to be sad at his grave-digging; he wishes the Grave-digger to be in the picture. But the Grave-digger refused to be in the picture, and the grave-digger will always refuse. The common man, engaged in tragic occupation, has always refused and will always refuse, to be tragic.

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If anybody really understands the London poor he will admit that there are two things that really strike him—first, the persistent tragedy of the poor; and, secondly, their persistent farce and their persistent frivolity. Fortunately for the world, these men have the power of raising a riotous carol of satire out of the deep pit in which they dig. Fortunately for the world, they have so little feeling of their business that they sing at grave-making. Shakespeare showed that he was not incapable of the ultimate comprehension of democracy when he made the hind happy and the prince a failure. Many have criticised the chaos of corpses that occurs at the end of *Hamlet*. But, after all, nobody professes to have found the corpse of the Grave-digger among the débris. If poets have made their tragedies out of kings it was partly not out of servility, but out of pity. The man who has dug and drained and ploughed and cut wood from the beginning of the world has lived under innumerable Governments, sometimes good and generally bad. But, as far as we have ever heard of him, he has always sung at his work. The grave-diggers, the poor men, always sang at their work when they were building the tombs of the Pharaohs. And in our civilized modern cities they are still singing at their work, although the graves that they are digging are their own.

My rambling meditations began among the Gothic illuminations of the Rylands Library, and they may very rightly end there. In all these pictured and painted medieval Bibles or missals there are traces of many fancies and fashions, but there is not even the trace of a trace of this one modern heresy of artistic monotone. There is not the

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trace of a trace of this idea of the keeping of comedy out of tragedy. The moderns who disbelieve in Christianity treat it much more reverently than these Christians who did believe in Christianity. The wildest joke in Voltaire is not wilder than some of the jokes coloured here by men, meek and humble, in their creed.

To mention one thing out of a thousand, take this. I have seen a picture in which the seven-headed beast of the Apocalypse was included among the animals in Noah's Ark, and duly provided with a seven-headed wife to assist him in propagating that important race to be in time for the Apocalypse. If Voltaire had thought of that, he would certainly have said it. But the restrictions of these men were restrictions of external discipline; they were not like ours, restrictions of mood. It might be a question how far people should be allowed to make jokes about Christianity; but there was no doubt that they should be allowed to feel jokes about it. There was no question of that merely impressional theory that we should look through only one peep-hole at a time. Their souls were at least stereoscopic. They had nothing to do with that pictorial impressionism which means closing one eye. They had nothing to do with that philosophical impressionism which means being half-witted.

THE ORTHODOXY OF HAMLET

I AM sometimes tempted to think (like every other person who does think) that the people would always be right if only they were not educated. But this is, of course, quite the wrong way of putting it. The truth is that there is no such thing as education; there is only this education and that education. We are all ready to die in order to give the people this education, and (I hope sincerely) we are all ready to die to prevent the people having that education. Dr. Strong, in *David Copperfield*, educated little boys; but Mr. Fagin, in *Oliver Twist*, also educated little boys; they were both what we now call "educationalists".

But though the first mode of statement is certainly erroneous, one is driven back upon it sometimes in considering the case of the drama. I enjoy the drama far too much ever to be a dramatic critic; and I think that in this I am at one with that real people which never speaks. If anybody wants to know what political democracy is, the answer is simple; it is a desperate and partly hopeless attempt to get at the opinion of the best people—that is, of the people who do not trust themselves. A man can rise to any rank in an oligarchy. But an oligarchy is simply a prize for impudence. An oligarchy says that the victor may be any kind of man, so long as he is not a humble man.

A man in an oligarchical state (such as our own) may become famous by having money, or famous by having

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an eye for colour, or famous for having social or financial or military success. But he cannot become famous for having humility, like the great saints. Consequently all the simple and hesitating human people are kept entirely out of the running; and the cads stand for the common people, although as a matter of fact the cads are a minority of the common people. So it is quite especially with the drama. It is utterly untrue that the people do not like Shakespeare. That part of the people that does not like Shakespeare is simply that part of the people that is depopularised. If a certain crowd of Cockneys is bored with *Hamlet*, the Cockneys are not bored because they are too complex and ingenious for *Hamlet*. They feel that the excitement of the saloon bar, of the betting ring, of the half-penny paper, of the topical music hall, is more complex and ingenious than *Hamlet*; and so it is.

In the absolutely strict sense of the word, the Cockneys are too aesthetic to enjoy *Hamlet*. They have goaded and jaded their artistic feelings too much to enjoy anything simply beautiful. They are aesthetes; and the definition of an aesthetic is a man who is experienced enough to admire a good picture, but not inexperienced enough to see it. But if you really took simple people, honourable peasants, kind old servants, dreamy tramps, genial thieves, and brigands, to see *Hamlet*, they would simply be sorry for Hamlet. That is to say, they would simply appreciate the fact that it was a great tragedy.

Now I believe in the judgment of all uncultured people; but it is my misfortune that I am the only quite uncultured person in England who writes articles. My brethren are

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silent. They will not back me up; they have something better to do. But a few days ago when I saw Miss Julie Marlowe and Mr. Sothern give their very able representation of *Hamlet*, certain things came into my mind about that play which I feel sure that the other uncultured persons share with me. But they will not speak; with a strange modesty they hide their lack of cultivation under a bushel.

There is a threadbare joke which calls the gallery in a theatre "the gods". For my part I accept that joke quite seriously. The people in the gallery are the gods. They are the ultimate authority so far as anything human is the ultimate authority. I do not see anything unreasonable in the actor calling upon them with the same gesture with which he calls upon the mountain of Olympus. When the actor looks down, brooding in despair or calling up black Erebus or the evil spirits, then, in such moments, by all means let him bend his black brows and look down into the stalls. But if there be in any acted play anything to make him lift up his heart to heaven, then in God's name, when he looks up to heaven, let him see the poor.

There is one little point, for instance, upon which I think the public have mistaken Hamlet, not through themselves but through the critics. There is one point on which the uneducated would probably have gone right; only they have been perverted by the educated. I mean this: that everybody in the modern world has talked of Hamlet as a sceptic. The mere fact of seeing the play acted very finely and swiftly by Miss Marlowe and Mr. Sothern has simply swept the last rags of this heresy out of my head. The really interesting thing about Hamlet was that he

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was not a sceptic at all. He did not doubt at all, except in the sense that every sane man doubts, including popes and crusaders. The primary point is quite clear. If Hamlet had been a sceptic at all there would have been no tragedy of Hamlet. If he had had any scepticism to exercise, he could have exercised it at once upon the highly improbable ghost of his father. He could have called that eloquent person a hallucination, or some other unmeaning thing, have married Ophelia, and gone on eating bread and butter. This is the first evident point.

The tragedy of Hamlet is not that Hamlet is a sceptic. The tragedy of Hamlet is that he is very much too good a philosopher to be a sceptic. His intellect is so clear that it sees at once the rational possibility of ghosts. But the utter mistake of regarding Hamlet as a sceptic has many other instances. The whole theory arose out of quoting stilted passages out of their context, such as "To be or not to be", or (much worse) the passage in which he says with an almost obvious gesture of fatigue, "Why then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either bad or good, but thinking makes it so". Hamlet says this because he is getting sick of the society of two silly men; but if anyone wishes to see how entirely opposite is Hamlet's attitude he can see it in the same conversation. If anyone wishes to listen to the words of a man who in the most final sense is not a sceptic, here are his words:

This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to me than a foul

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and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

Oddly enough I have heard this passage quoted as a pessimistic passage. It is, perhaps, the most optimistic passage in all human literature. It is the absolute expression of the ultimate fact of the faith of Hamlet; his faith that, although he cannot see the world is good, yet certainly it is good; his faith that, though he cannot see man as the image of God, yet certainly he is the image of God. The modern, like the modern conception of Hamlet, believes only in mood. But the real Hamlet, like the Catholic Church, believes in reason. Many fine optimists have praised man when they felt like praising him. Only Hamlet has praised man when he felt like kicking him as a monkey of the mud. Many poets, like Shelley and Whitman, have been optimistic when they felt optimistic. Only Shakespeare has been optimistic when he felt pessimistic. This is the definition of a faith. A faith is that which is able to survive a mood. And Hamlet had this from first to last. Early he protests against a law that he recognises: "O that the Everlasting had not fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter." Before the end he declares that our clumsy management will be turned to something, "rough-hew it how we will".

If Hamlet had been a sceptic he would have had an easy life. He would not have known that his moods were moods. He would have called them Pessimism or Materialism, or

The Orthodoxy of Hamlet

some silly name. But Hamlet was a great soul, great enough to know that he was not the world. He knew that there was a truth beyond himself, therefore he believed readily in the things most unlike himself, in Horatio and his ghost. All through his story we can read his conviction that he is wrong. And that to a clear mind like his is only another way of stating that there is something that is right. The real sceptic never thinks he is wrong; for the real sceptic does not think that there is any wrong. He sinks through floor after floor of a bottomless universe. But Hamlet was the very reverse of a sceptic. He was a thinker.

THE PERPETUATION OF PUNISHMENT

SURELY something ought to be done in connection with our system of police and punishment. A case has quite recently come within my knowledge which I will describe in the strict and prosaic terms required for such a matter. It is one of the innumerable truths of human life which have come to me from the custom, the admirable and beautiful custom, of driving in hansom cabs. This habit has nothing to do with low considerations of comfort or convenience; it is a custom, and, being a custom, I, who am the most conservative of mankind, adhere to it. I know quite well that many other modern inventions have become far more cabbish than cabs. I know that motor cabs whistle by me like the wind. I know that electric trams flash by me like the thunderbolt as I toil along in this antiquated vehicle. The hansom cab has been called the gondola of London; alas! it has become as antiquated, as inconvenient, as truly national as the gondola of Venice. I cannot help the fact that Radicals alone love the past. If I had been born in the time of coaches I should still go to Brighton by coach. When the last lost hansom is wrecked upon some ruined street or shore, I shall be tipped out of it.

But I have been misled into a lyric, whereas my meaning was even practical and painful. I have got many good things out of riding in hansom cabs; incidentally the ride.

The Perpetuation of Punishment

I fancy that the surliness of the hansom cabman must be chiefly created by the haughtiness of indignant ladies. I could tell many stories to the everlasting credit of cabmen. Once, I remember, I was leaving the house of some politician in Berkeley Square literally without a penny in my pocket. A hansom cabman, innocently supposing that a man in evening dress must have money (which is almost infinitely untrue), came up and offered to drive me to Battersea. I told him the exact facts—that I had no money at all, and was not even very certain of getting it tomorrow. He drove me back the whole of the way by his own request for nothing. Those stories are not told as jokes in *Punch*.

Now, I knew a cabman who stole. He did his turn of imprisonment, and came out of it as few men do, fundamentally healthy in his aim and point of view. He had often driven me, and he still spoke to me as a free man speaks to another, and told me that he did not want, if he could help it, to be driven to such desperation again; and I made him promise always to let me know before he was so driven. He could not get a character for any employment; he could not offer what is called a “deserving” case to any organized charity. He told me that he meant to hawk a basket of flowers, and I gave him the money to buy it as naturally as I would have given it to any of my own friends. The man’s attitude was entirely human and conceivable; I did not doubt his sorrow for his first sin, and I do not doubt it now. I felt quite certain that I was simply putting straight a path that had not gone very crooked. I went away into the country; when I came back he had been put in prison again for hawking flowers without

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a licence; without the licence that he could not get. And his old conviction was brought up against him.

The modern world is wicked, because it is civilized. What is specially shameful and pitiless in modern punishment is not the severity of the punishment; it is the continuity of the punishment. The modern philosophers say that they do not like the idea of everlasting punishment in the other world. Let them rest content. They have created everlasting punishment in this world. What is frightful about modern punishment is exactly that it is as logical as Calvinism. Its horror is that it is rational, that it remembers, that it treats the man who has broken trust as for ever untrustworthy. There may be something in this which pleases those who have Calvinistic, Materialistic, or Theosophical minds, minds that enjoy the recurrence of an unforgiving, that is, a dead, law. But you and I only have the tradition of Christian charity, and we should say, Beat the man about with a great stick and then let him go free for ever.

In reading the old records of religious communities, even the most ferocious, such as New England or the Presbyterian Government of West Scotland in Burns's time, we always have a feeling that the sin was punished and wiped out, savagely punished, perhaps, but also savagely understood; regarded as a thing that a man might do and that a man might recover from doing. It will be a terrible thing in the modern world if the making of punishment mild only means making it eternal. To be in hot hell for ever is bad enough; to be in a tepid hell for ever and to be asked to admit the humane temperature—that is intolerable.

The Perpetuation of Punishment

Nobody wants a punishment to be humane; a punishment, so long as it is a punishment, cannot be humane. But everybody wants a punishment to be human; everybody wants a punishment to have just these two qualities about it. First, that a man can inflict it and remain a man. Second, that a man can receive it and remain a man. If it passes these limits the victim may very well kill the executioner or the executioner may very well kill himself.

Now these limits may be crossed and doubtless have been crossed by certain horrible punishments in the past; I can well imagine a man cutting his throat merely because he had stood by and seen a woman stripped and scourged as were many women quite late in the history of England and Ireland, or some negro burnt alive as he still is in the United States. But some part of this shocking shame lies on us all. For we stand by and permit that one thing in punishment which makes it worse than any ancient torture—its perpetuation. It is exactly this that defines torture: that it goes on. It is exactly this that is in the literal and real sense of the word inhuman. This modern scientific punishment in which a man cannot get away from his past belongs to the same world as that detestable determinism which declares also that he cannot get away from his past. It is making memory stronger than will. It is a thing not natural to men; and it will not long be endured among them.

HISTORY VERSUS THE HISTORIANS

IN MY innocent and ardent youth I had a fixed fancy. I held that children in a school ought to be taught history, and ought to be taught nothing else. The story of human society is the only fundamental framework outside of religion in which everything can fall into its place. A boy cannot see the importance of Latin simply by learning Latin. But he might see it by learning the history of the Latins. Nobody can possibly see any sense in learning geography or in learning arithmetic—both studies are obviously nonsense. But on the eager eve of Austerlitz, where Napoleon was fighting a superior force in a foreign country, one might see the need for Napoleon knowing a little geography and a little arithmetic. I have thought that if people would only learn history, they would learn to learn everything else. Algebra might seem ugly, yet the very name of it is connected with something so romantic as the Crusades, for the word is from the Saracens. Greek might be ugly until one knew the Greeks, but surely not afterwards. History is simply humanity. And history will humanise all studies, even anthropology.

Since that age of innocence I have, however, realised that there is a difficulty in this teaching of history. And the difficulty is that there is no history to teach. This is not a scrap of cynicism—it is a genuine and necessary product of the many points of view and the strong mental separations

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of our society, for in our age every man has a cosmos of his own, and is therefore horribly alone. There is no history; there are only historians. To tell the tale plainly is now much more difficult than to tell it treacherously. It is unnatural to leave the facts alone; it is instinctive to pervert them. The very words involved in the chronicles—"Pagan", "Puritan", "Catholic", "Republican", "Imperialist"—are words which make us leap out of our arm-chairs.

No good modern historians are impartial. All modern historians are divided into two classes—those who tell half the truth, like Macaulay and Froude, and those who tell none of the truth, like Hallam and the Impartials. The angry historians see one side of the question. The calm historians see nothing at all, not even the question itself.

But there is another possible attitude towards the records of the past, and I have never been able to understand why it has not been more often adopted. To put it in its curtest form, my proposal is this: That we should not read historians, but history. Let us read the actual text of the times. Let us, for a year, or a month, or a fortnight, refuse to read anything about Oliver Cromwell except what was written while he was alive. There is plenty of material; from my own memory (which is all I have to rely on in the place where I write) I could mention offhand many long and famous efforts of English literature that cover the period. Clarendon's History, Evelyn's Diary, the Life of Colonel Hutchinson. Above all let us read all Cromwell's own letters and speeches, as Carlyle published them. But before we read them let us carefully paste pieces of stamp-paper

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over every sentence written by Carlyle. Let us blot out in every memoir every critical note and every modern paragraph. For a time let us cease altogether to read the living men on their dead topics. Let us read only the dead men on their living topics.

I have just come by accident on a striking case of what I mean. Most modern notions of the earlier and better Middle Ages are drawn either from historians or from novels. The novels are very much the more reliable of the two. The novelist has at least to try to describe human beings; which the historian often does not attempt. But generally speaking, it is to novels first and then to partisan histories that we owe our impressions of this epoch.

The average modern Englishman's idea of the Middle Ages is a stratification of several modern views of them which might be summarised thus:

1. The Old Romantic View, with its wandering knights and captive princesses. According to this, the Dark Ages were not so much dark as lit exclusively by moonlight. This view was fictitious, but not false; for since love and venture exist in all ages, they did exist in the Middle Ages.

2. The Cheap Manchester View, which Dickens floundered into in his happy ignorance, which enabled the smug merchant to say with a snigger that no doubt it was very romantic for a Jew to have his teeth pulled out; and even to suggest that the feudal heroes took care to lock themselves up in steel and iron before they ventured into battle. To this, one obvious answer was to ask the merchant whether the knight was ever as ingloriously safe as his armourer, and whether even his armourer was not a braver

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man than the merchant who in modern Birmingham lives by making the tools of death.

3. The Rossetti View that the age was one of tender transparencies and sacred perfumes; a strong dose of Chaucer's Miller can be recommended as a desperate remedy for this.

4. The Condescending View; as when Macaulay said of the Pilgrims with the utmost solemnity that in an age when men were too ignorant to travel from curiosity, "or the desire of gain", it was just as well that they should travel from superstition. I have always delighted in this idea that the ecstatic traveller and the heroic traveller were mere foreshadowings and prophecies of the commercial traveller. The Palmer kissed the Land of Christ, and the Crusader fell with forty wounds at Ascalon, that they might make smooth in the desert a highway for the bagman.

Now Dickens and Rossetti and Macaulay were very great men, and though none of them knew very much about the Middle Ages, their views on that time are bound to be interesting. But there is another humble class of men who might be allowed to tell us something about the Middle Ages. I mean the men who lived in the Middle Ages. There are in existence medieval memoirs which are nearly as amusing as Pepys, and much more truthful. In England they are almost entirely unknown. But I am very glad to find that the Chronicles of Joinville and the Chronicle of Villehardouin have been translated into excellent English. Let anyone open Joinville's rambling story, and he will find the Middle Ages of Macaulay and Rossetti and Dickens and Miss Jane Porter fall from him like a cumbrous

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cloak. He will find himself among men as human and sensible as himself, a little more brave and much more convinced of their first principles. Joinville reveals himself as innocently as Pepys, and reveals himself as a very much finer fellow. The reader will find it impossible not to respect the man; his lumbering punctiliousness about truth, when he explains what part of a scene he saw himself and what he heard reported; his prompt and instinctive veracity, as when St. Louis asked him, "Is it better to be a leper or commit a mortal sin?" and he answered, "I would rather commit fifty mortal sins"; his perpetual and generous praise of others in battle; his rooted affections and simple pride in the affection of others for him; his slight touchiness about his dignity as a gentleman, which St. Louis rebuked in him, but which is, even to a shade, the exact touchiness of Colonel Newcome. Above all we must thank him for his picture of the Great King in whom the lion lay down with the lamb. The shafts of St. Louis' judgment fly across the ages and hit the joints in every harness.

I had intended to tell some tales out of these books but I must at least defer them. They would all be to the same tune, the tune to which Chaucer's pilgrims walked when the Miller with his bagpipes played them out of town. If the eighteenth century was the Age of Reason, the thirteenth was the Age of Commonsense. When St. Louis said that extravagant dress was indeed sinful, but that men should dress well "that their wives might the more easily love them", we can feel the age that is talking about facts, and not about fads. There was plenty of romance, indeed;

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we not only see St. Louis giving humorous judgments under a garden tree, we see also St. Louis leaping from his ship into the sea with the shield at his neck and the lance in his hand. But it is not a romance of darkness nor a romance of moonlight, but a romance of the sun at noonday.

TOMMY AND THE TRADITIONS

A LITTLE while ago I was trying to convince the writers and readers of an excellent Socialist paper that the democracy was very decent after all. I did not succeed. The Socialist writers and readers were really delightful, and even playful people; but they could not swallow such a paradox as the statement that the poor are really right and the rich really wrong. In those quarters (in consequence) there has ever since been a disposition to connect my name with gin, a drink which I dislike, and with wife-beating, a pastime for which I lack the adequate energy. I have often wondered whether it would be worth while to try and explain again why I think that the poor are really quite right; and I was suddenly precipitated into the enterprise this morning. The impulse was only this—that as I walked past a dreary row of dwellings I heard a slatternly woman say to a very big child, “Now, Tommy, run away and play.” She did not say it brutally, but with a hearty and healthy impatience, such as is natural to her sex.

I want to make one more attempt to revive the dead tradition of democracy by discussing what was involved in that remark. First, we must get it into our heads that a thing can be a superstition and still be true. Ten thousand people may recite a thing as a lie, and it may still be a truth, in spite of their saying it. Thus Liberalism is true; but many Liberals are mere myths. Christianity can be be-

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lieved; but some Christians are quite incredible. A hypocrite can hand on a truth. The Whigs of the early eighteenth century handed on the theory of liberty and self-government, though there was practically not one of them who was not a dirty courtier and a corrupt tyrant. The fashionable French priests of the later eighteenth century handed on the tradition of Catholicism, though there was hardly one of them who was not an atheist. But when democracy came, it was glad the Whigs had kept the tradition of Algernon Sydney. When the Catholic revival came, it was glad the French clergy had kept the tradition of St. Louis. Therefore, when I say that the poor have the right tradition I do not mean necessarily that they are going on in exactly the right way. I do not even mean that they think they are going on in the right way. As a matter of fact, they don't. The great difficulty is to persuade the poor that they are as right as they are.

I mean that just as there was an important truth in the Whig Parliaments even when they were corrupt, just as there was an important truth in the Christian religion even when the Christians did not think so, so there is a truth which the poor possess in their misery and confusion, which we do not possess in our largest schemes of social reform. The point is not that they have gone specially right; but that they have stayed tolerably right while we have gone specially wrong.

I have often urged instances of this. For the sake of clearness I will repeat one of them only. The very poor are always despised and rebuked because of their fuss and expenditure on funerals. Only to-day I saw that a public

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body refused aid to those who had gone any length in such expenditure. Now I do not mean that their crape is my abstract conception of robes of mourning, or that the conversation of Mrs. Brown with Mrs. Jones over the coffin has the dignity of "Lycidas". I do not even say that educated people could not do it better. I say that they are not trying to do it at all. Educated people have got some chilly fad to the effect that making a fuss about death is morbid or vulgar. The educated people are entirely wrong on the fundamental point of human psychology. The uneducated people are entirely right on the point.

The one way to make bereavement tolerable is to make it important. To gather your friends, to have a gloomy festival, to talk, to cry, to praise the dead—all that does change the atmosphere, and carry human nature over the open grave. The nameless torture is to try and treat it as something private and casual, as our elegant stoics do. That is at once pride and pain and hypocrisy. The only way to make less of death is to make more of it. The poor have this blind tradition, and will not be torn away from it. They do it in a bad social system; they do it in a bad way; but they have all humanity behind them, and in the noise and heat of their houses of mourning is the smoke of the baked meats of Hamlet and the dust and echo of the funeral games of Patroclus.

Now take a more cheerful instance: the poor have, in practice, a certain view of work and play. And it is the right view; the root view of all mankind. I do not mean that their work and play are better; they are not. They do not play specially well; and they work as little as they

Tommy and the Traditions

can, and so should I in their shoes. What they have got right is the philosophy; the original principle of the thing. They differ from us and from the aristocracy (pardon the distinction) simply in this: that their work is work and their play is play. Work is doing what you do not like; play is doing what you like. The whole point of work is law; the whole point of play is liberty. There should be hours of labour, and they should be laborious; there should be hours of freedom, and they should be free.

That sounds simple enough: but the educated classes cannot understand it. The educationalists cannot understand it. The public schools cannot understand it. The whole English upper class is built on the negation of it. A gentleman is taught to treat half his work as play (diplomacy, Parliament, finance), and then to treat more than half his play as work, by training for matches and bursting blood vessels in a race. He is taught to play at politics and work at cricket. At the English schools (as Mr. Maurice Baring sketched very cleverly in an article), a game has practically ceased to be a game; it has become a specially dull lesson, where boys are bored by having to look interested. But the athletic school is not alone to blame; the intellectual educationalists are quite as bad. They want to make children's play significant and instructive. They arrange children in Pre-Raphaelite patterns. They make them dance ethically or yell aesthetically. They want to follow children when they play, and make their games useful. They might as well follow them when they sleep, and make their dreams useful. Play is a rest, like sleep.

The woman who said "Run away and play" to Tommy

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on the doorstep was the weary guardian of an eternal commonsense. Probably Tommy had a bad time sometimes; probably she made him work; but at least she did not make him play. She let him play. He fed on loneliness and liberty. That hour of play at least was not Froebel's contribution nor Dr. Arnold's contribution to Tommy. That hour was Tommy's contribution to Tommy. I do not know whether I have succeeded, or ever shall succeed, in conveying what I mean about these people, and how they hold a battered shape of truth, while we hold perfected forms of error. But at least my work for this Friday evening is done. I shall run away and play.

ENGLAND AND CARICATURE

ENGLISH literature has extracted and emphasised one very splendid thing; you never hear of it in patriotic speeches or in books about race or nationality, but it is the great contribution of the English temperament to the best life of the world. So far as it can be defined, it may be called the humane use of caricature. It consists in calling a man ugly as a compliment. If we wish to appreciate it we must remember the part played by satire and epigram in the largest part of human literature. Almost everywhere laughter has been used as a lash; if revelations were made about a man's wig or wooden leg, an enemy had done it. Men reminded a man maliciously of his bodily weakness, especially if it was a set-off against his worldly power.

Take, for instance, the case of two of the greatest riders and conquerors among the children of men. Julius Caesar was bald, and he could not cover it with all his laurels. It was always morally as well as physically his unprotected spot. His enemies could say: "You have conquered Gaul, but you are bald. You have faced Pompey in arms and Cicero in argument, but for all that you are bald." And he felt it himself, I think, for he was a vain man; the head of Caesar was like the heel of Achilles.

Take, again, that huge hunter and fighter who hurled himself on shore at Hastings and created our country by a raid: William the Norman. If ever a man might have

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regarded himself as successful his name was William of Falaise. But in his later years (like many other great men) he grew rather stout, and when a Frenchman made a joke about it William went mad with vanity and violent shame. The mountain quivered to its foundations. He struggled into the saddle, and led a crusade against the Comic Frenchman; shouted like a man possessed that he would burn cities and waste provinces to wipe out the insult, and passing like a pillar of fire at night across the perishing land, brought his own wild life to an end, was deserted by all men, died and stank upon the stones.

Such is the power of one really vulgar joke to pull down the mighty from their seat. And for such purposes it is bitter but wholesome; it is right that some slave should whisper the "hominem memento te". He who seems more than man, ought to be reminded that he is only man. It should be done, even if it can only be done by telling him that he is less than a man—less by a leg or so. It is quite right that the poor man who has no hat should publicly comment on the fact that the rich man has no hair. But, though it redresses the balance, it does not bring about the purest state of feeling. We do not reconcile by pointing out the balance and distribution of glass eyes and wooden legs in all classes of the community. It produces equality, but hardly fraternity. And in some literatures it has run riot until it became utterly devilish, and men have earned as much shame by inventing physical epigrams as if they had invented physical tortures.

It is just here, however, that the most characteristic English literature, from Chaucer to Dickens, has the singular

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glory. It is as coarse as any literature; but it is far less malignant than most. The young fool in *David Copperfield* said that he would rather “be knocked down by a man with blood in him than picked up by a man without”; and understanding “blood” not as gentility, but as generosity, I incline to agree with him. Certainly, if what I wanted was kindness, I would rather be knocked down by Fielding than picked up by Voltaire. The only really harsh English writer was not English. For Swift was an Irishman, and a very typical Irishman—disdainfully courageous, consistent yet perverse, above all like his countryman, Mr. Bernard Shaw, inhuman through the very sincerity of his humanitarianism. But this is a digression, which is repugnant to my feelings. The point is that this English literary style, coarse and yet kind, has done more than anything else to create the possibility of a genial grotesque. As I have said, Julius Caesar was bald and tried to cover his baldness with laurels. But Mr. Pickwick was bald and we feel that his head would be defaced by laurels. Nay, we feel that his head would be defaced by hair. We like him eternally bald.

Similarly, as I said, William the Conqueror (like the man in the *Bab Ballads*) “owned his chief and only grief was being very bulky”; he was fat, and furious when reminded of it. But, again, Mr. Pickwick was fat; but we do not wish him otherwise. Rather we feel that his rotundity is like the rotundity of the world; that he is swelling till he takes on the enormous curves of the universe. “Phiz” dwelt upon the baldness of Pickwick and the fatness of Pickwick because he liked him and them. The satirists of most societies would have insisted on these

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points as being the weak points of some bad man; but "Phiz" insists on them as if they were the strong points even of a good one. The French prince called William fat because he had had too much of him. But Dickens made Pickwick fat because you cannot have too much of a good thing. In this matter, however, the pictures of *Pickwick* are even more important than the letterpress. And, indeed, it will commonly be found that the English love of clear comicality for its own sake will be seen better in the old, clear, comic illustrations by "Phiz" and Cruickshank than in any other place. Close your eyes and call up before your mind, say, an old English illustration of an angry admiral with a wooden leg. The wooden leg is insisted on, but not with contempt, and yet, again, not with commiseration. It is insisted on with gusto, as if the Admiral had grown his wooden leg by the sheer energy of his character. In any ordinary satire, in any ordinary sentimentality, the point would be that the Admiral had lost a leg. Here it is rather the point that he has gained a wooden leg.

THE HEROIC THAT HAPPENED

SOME little time ago Mr. Bernard Shaw, faced with the frightful difficulty of explaining how a man of his intelligence could be anything else nowadays but an orthodox Christian, invented (as is his wont) a really new argument, good or bad. The old-fashioned blasphemers (who are the most lovable of men) had always denounced Bible stories as silly stories; they were too clumsy and faulty to be believed. But Mr. Shaw said of the central Bible story, not that it was too faulty to be believed, but that it was too faultless to be believed. He rejected it not because it was imperfect, but because it was perfect. He declared that the story of Calvary was to be discredited precisely because it was sublime, because it was pointed and poetic. Things so artistic as that (he said in effect) do not happen.

I am not concerned here to offer any of the many minor criticisms which might be made upon this view. I might remark for the hundredth time upon the hundredth example of the fact that the enemy of Christianity is always eating his own words and deserting his own standard; that the attack on that faith can only be kept up even for three generations by each one of its accusers repudiating the last accusation, by every son of scepticism disowning his own father. I might even suggest that if the Superman ever came on earth Mr. Shaw would not complain if he talked naturally in poetry—if he asked for the mustard in an

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impromptu sonnet. If it be imaginable that the Superman on earth might speak poetry, it is surely not unlikely that God on earth might act poetry. But I am not entangled in any of these considerations. It is only one much more innocent aspect of Mr. Shaw's theory that I propose to attack.

He said that a certain tale is probably unhistorical because it is dignified and dramatic, a thing with an artistic climax. I am concerned to point out that Mr. Shaw said this because he had not really read or understood human history; because he has allowed his great genius and sympathy to be suffocated with the materialism of a mean modern environment. The truth is that the things which astonish us in the tremendous tale of the Passion are things which not only would happen at a divine crisis, but which have happened at every genuine human crisis. It is only in epochs of exhaustion and mere pottering about with problems that they do not occur. Mr. Shaw, when he suggested that the Passion was too artistic to happen, really meant that it was too artistic to happen in the Fabian Society or in the London School of Economics. But in history it did happen. It happened again and again.

We talk of art as something artificial in comparison with life. But I sometimes fancy that the very highest art is more real than life itself. At least this is true: that in proportion as passions become real they become poetical; the lover is always trying to be the poet. All real energy is an attempt at harmony and a high swing of rhythm; and if we were only real enough we should all talk in rhyme. However this may be, it is unquestionable in the case of

The Heroic that Happened

great public affairs. Whenever you have real practical politics you have poetical politics. Whenever men have succeeded in wars they have sung war songs; whenever you have the useful triumph you have also the useless trophy.

But the thing is more strongly apparent exactly where the great Fabian falls foul of it, in the open scenes of history and the actual operation of events. The things that actually did happen all over the world are precisely the things which he thinks could not have happened in Galilee; the artistic isolation, the dreadful dialogues in which each speaker was dramatic, the prophecies flung down like gauntlets, the high invocations of history, the marching and mounting excitement of the story, the pulverising and appropriate repartees. These things do happen; they have happened; they are attested, in all the cases where the soul of man had become poetic in its very peril. At every one of its important moments the most certain and solid history reads like a historical novel.

A peasant girl, called half-witted, did promise to defeat the victors of Agincourt; and did it; it ought to be a legend, but it happens to be a fact. A poet and a poetess did fall in love and eloped secretly to a sunny clime; it is obviously a three-volume novel; but it happened. Nelson did die in the act of winning the one battle that could change the world. It is a grossly improbable coincidence; but it is too late to alter it now. Napoleon did win the Battle of Austerlitz; it is unnatural; but it is not my fault. When the general who had surrendered a republican town returned saying easily, "I have done everything," Robespierre did ask,

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with an air of enquiry, "Are you dead?" When Robespierre coughed in his cold harangue, Garnier did say, "The blood of Danton chokes you." Strafford did say of his own desertion of Parliament, "If I do it, may my life and death be set on a hill for all men to wonder at." Disraeli did say, "The time will come when you shall hear me."

The heroic is a fact, even when it is a fact of coincidence or of miracle; and a fact is a thing which can be admitted without being explained. But I would in conclusion merely hint that there is a very natural explanation of this frightful felicity, either of phrase or action, which so many men have exhibited on so many scaffolds or battlefields. It is merely that when a man has found something which he prefers to life, he then for the first time begins to live. A promptitude of poetry opens in his soul of which our paltry experiences do not possess the key. When once he has despised this world as a mere instrument, it becomes a musical instrument; it falls into certain artistic harmonies around him. If Nelson had not worn his stars he would not have been hit. But if he had not worn his stars he would not have been Nelson; and if he had not been Nelson he might have lost the battle. It is all quite natural; nothing requires any explanation; except Nelson—except why a man should feel most alive when he is doing his best to die.

ON KEEPING A DOG

CYNICS often speak of the disillusioning effects of experience, but I for one have found that nearly all things not evil are better in experience than in theory. I found love with a small *l* more thrilling than Love with a large one, and when I saw the Mediterranean it was bluer than the colour blue. In theory, for example, sleep is a negative thing, a mere cessation of life. But nothing will persuade me that sleep is not really quite positive, some mysterious pleasure which is too perfect to be remembered. It must be some drawing on our divine energies, some forgotten refreshment at the ancient fountains of life. If this is not so, why do we cling to sleep when we have already had enough of it; why does waking up always seem like descending from heaven upon earth? I believe that sleep is a sacrament; or, what is the same thing, a food.

Here, however, I only want to maintain that the real experience of things is often much better than our poetic anticipation of them; that peaks are often higher than they look in pictures and truths more terribly true than they appear in copy-books. Take, for example, the innovation which I have of late introduced into my domestic life; he is a four-legged innovation in the shape of an Aberdeen terrier. I have always imagined myself to be a lover of all animals, because I have never met any animal that I definitely disliked. Most people draw the line somewhere.

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Lord Roberts disliked cats; the best woman I know objects to spiders; a Theosophist I know protects, but detests, mice; and many leading humanitarians have an objection to human beings.

But I cannot recall ever having shrunk from an animal; I do not mind a slug, however slimy he is, nor a rhinoceros, however much his horn is exalted. When I was a little boy I used to keep a pack of snails as representing what I thought the proper pace of hunting. Thus I fell into the mistake common to many modern universalists and humanitarians. I thought that I loved all God's creatures, whereas the only point was that I did not hate them. I did not dislike the camel for having a hump or the whale for containing blubber. But I could not seriously have supposed that the time would ever come when a whale's blubber would move my heart with a quiver of affection; or that I should know one camel's hump among others as one knows the profile of a beautiful woman. This is the first of the extraordinary effects of having a dog upon one who has never had one before. One loves an animal like a man instead of merely accepting an animal like an optimist.

But then, again, if the dog is loved he is loved as a dog; not as a fellow-citizen, or an idol, or a pet, or a product of evolution. The moment you are responsible for one respectable animal, that moment an abyss opens as wide as the world between cruelty and the necessary coercion of animals. There are some people who talk of what they call "Corporal Punishment", and class under that head the hideous torture inflicted on unfortunate citizens in our prisons and workhouses, and also the smack one gives to a

On Keeping a Dog

silly boy or the whipping of an intolerable terrier. You might as well invent a phrase called "Reciprocal Concussion" and leave it to be understood that you included under this head kissing, kicking, the collision of boats at sea, the embracing of young Germans, and the meeting of comets in mid-air.

That is the second moral value of the thing; the moment you have an animal in your charge you soon discover what is really cruelty to animals, and what is only kindness to them. For instance, some people have called it inconsistent in me to be an anti-vivisectionist and yet to be in favour of ordinary sports. I can only say that I can quite imagine myself shooting my dog, but cannot imagine myself vivisecting him.

But there is something deeper in the matter than all that, only the hour is late, and both the dog and I are too drowsy to interpret it. He lies in front of me curled up before the fire, as so many dogs must have lain before so many fires. I sit on one side of that hearth, as so many men must have sat by so many hearths. Somehow this creature has completed my manhood; somehow, I cannot explain why, a man ought to have a dog. A man ought to have six legs; those other four legs are part of him. Our alliance is older than any of the passing and priggish explanations that are offered of either of us; before evolution was, we were. You can find it written in a book that I am a mere survival of a squabble of anthropoid apes; and perhaps I am. I am sure I have no objection. But my dog knows I am a man, and you will not find the meaning of that word written in any book as clearly as it is written in his soul.

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It may be written in a book that my dog is canine; and from this it may be deduced that he must hunt with a pack, since all canines hunt with a pack. Hence it may be argued (in the book) that if I have one Aberdeen terrier I ought to have twenty-five Aberdeen terriers. But my dog knows that I do not ask him to hunt with a pack; he knows that I do not care a curse whether he is canine or not so long as he is my dog. That is the real secret of the matter which the superficial evolutionists cannot be got to see. If traceable history be the test, civilization is much older than the savagery of evolution. The civilized dog is older than the wild dog of science. The civilized man is older than the primitive man of science. We feel it in our bones that we are the antiquities, and that the visions of biology are the fancies and the fads. The books do not matter; the night is closing in, and it is too dark to read books. Faintly against the fading firelight can be traced the prehistoric outlines of the man and the dog.

THE BIGOT

BIGOTRY is an incapacity to conceive seriously the alternative to a proposition. It has nothing whatever to do with belief in the proposition itself. A man may be sure enough of something to be burned for it or to make war on the world, and yet be no inch nearer to being a bigot. He is only a bigot if he cannot understand that his dogma is a dogma, even if it is true. Persecution may be immoral, but it is not necessarily irrational; the persecutor may comprehend with his intellect the errors that he drives forth with his spear. It is not bigoted (for instance) to treat the Koran as supernatural. But it is bigoted to treat the Koran as natural; as obvious to anybody and common to everybody. It is not bigoted for a Christian to regard Chinamen as heathens. It is rather when he insists on regarding them as Christians that his bigotry begins.

One of the most fashionable forms of bigotry exhibits itself in the discovery of fantastic and trivial explanations of things that need no explanation. We are in this cloudland of prejudice (for example) when we say that a man becomes an atheist because he wants to go on the spree; or that a man becomes a Roman Catholic because the priests have trapped him; or that a man becomes a Socialist because he envies the rich. For all these random and remote explanations show that we have never seen, like a clear diagram, the real explanation: that Atheism, Catholicism, and

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Socialism are all quite plausible philosophies. A man does not need to be driven or trapped or bribed into them; because a man can be converted to them.

True liberality, in short, consists of being able to imagine the enemy. The free man is not he who thinks all opinions equally true or false; that is not freedom, but feeble-mindedness. The free man is he who sees the errors as clearly as he sees the truth. The more solidly convinced a man really is, the less he will use phrases like, "No enlightened person can really hold——"; or, "I cannot understand how Mr. Jones can possibly maintain——", followed by some very old, mild, and defensible opinion. A progressive person may hold anything he likes. I do understand quite well how Mr. Jones maintains those maniacal opinions which he does maintain. If a man sincerely believes that he has the map of the maze, it must show the wrong paths just as much as the right. He should be able to imagine the whole plan of an error: the complete logic of a fallacy. He must be able to *think* it if he does not believe it.

It is admitted, even in dictionaries, that an example assists a definition. I take an instance of the error of bigotry out of my own biography, so to speak. Nothing is more marked in this strange epoch of ours than the combination of an exquisite tact and a sympathy in things of taste and artistic style, with an almost brutal stupidity in the things of abstract thought. There are no great fighting philosophers to-day because we care only about tastes; and there is no disputing about tastes. A principal critic on the "New Age" made a remark about me a little while ago which amused me very much. After saying many things much too

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complimentary but marvellously sympathetic, and offering many criticisms which were really delicate and exact, he ended up (as far as I remember) with these astounding words: "But I never can really feel a man to be my intellectual equal who believes in any dogma." It was like seeing a fine Alpine climber fall five hundred feet into the mud.

For this last sentence is the old, innocent, and stale thing called Bigotry; it is the failure of the mind to imagine any other mind. My unhappy critic is among the poorest of the children of men; he has only one universe. Everyone, of course, must see one cosmos as the true cosmos; but *he* cannot see any other cosmos, even as a hypothesis.

My own intelligence is less fine, but at least it is much more free. I can see six or seven universes quite plain. I can see the spiral world up which Mrs. Besant hopefully crawls; I can see the clockwork cosmos in time with which Mr. McCabe's brain ticks so accurately; I can see the nightmare world of Mr. Hardy, its Creator cruel and half-witted like a village idiot; I can see the illusive world of Mr. Yeats, a gorgeous curtain that covers only darkness; and I have no doubt that I shall be able to see my critic's philosophy also, if he should ever give himself the trouble to express it in intelligent terms. But as the expression "anyone who believes in any dogma" means to a rational mind no more or rather less than "Yip-i-addy-i-ay", I regret I can only at present include him among the great bigots of history.

FEAR

THAT GREAT wave of barbarism that swept over Western Europe in the nineteenth century, and which has been called the Rise of Rationalism, has this note in it even more savage than its other notes of savagery: that it sought to make a man's soul the slave of his body. It did not say that the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak—the free and generous doctrine of religion. It said that the spirit was unwilling because the flesh was strong. The body was not a timid slave, but an insulting tyrant. The most abstruse pleasure, the most ethereal agony, was to be explained by physiological causes that nobody could possibly test. Every happy morning was due to a good breakfast; every unhappy morning was due to a bad night. The red streaks of morning owed everything to the red streaks of bacon; the white night (as the French call it) brought forth the grey day. Mr. F.'s aunt talked about a proud stomach; if ever the stomach was proud it must have been in the mid-Victorian age. The one-eyed ogre in Euripides who worshipped his own huge inside did not worship it in so ultimate and mystical a manner as this. He only worshipped it as the final end and asylum of everything, sheep, goats, wine, men, heroes, and demigods. But the one-eyed ogre of science worshipped the stomach not only as the end of heroes, but as the beginning of them.

I have always in a meek manner had a notion that the truth was exactly the other way about. So far from thinking

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that most moral pleasures are really material, I fancy that a great many apparently material pleasures are chiefly moral. So far from admitting that the bacon makes you enjoy the beautiful morning, I think it highly probable that only the beautiful morning makes you tolerate the bacon. So far from the sunset being poetic in consequence of salmon, I believe you look upon salmon (for the first few minutes) almost as dreamily and spiritually as upon the sunset: it is associated with luxury, and you think of its pink and silver as a table decoration long before you remember its taste. I loathe gin, because its associations are oppressive and poisonous; but if I were a teetotaller I should still like red wine on the table.

But this strange truth, that (things seemingly substantial are really spiritual,) is even better proved from unpleasant than from pleasant things. I know no grimmer or more vivid case than that of fear. Almost each one of us knows of something—I will not say from which he would run yelling (though that is likely enough)—but in face of which his physical courage would give out, and only his moral courage remain. To put the point more shortly, each of us knows a peril which he might indeed accept, but only as one accepts death.

I know of one powerful writer who is really afraid of animals—vitaly afraid. I know another entirely firm and intelligent person whom headlong speed, as in a motor or on a spirited horse, utterly unhinges. I know a grown-up man who is still frightened in the dark. I know another who has a sudden horror that the room is too small and he will be suffocated.

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These men are not incurable lunatics; if they were I could mention their names. They are quite important people in the modern world; and if I told you their names you would all revolt, the more brutal into denial, the more sensitive into suicide. I myself am not at all afraid of animals (I never tried sharks), I am not afraid, especially, of horses or motors, even when they run away; and I have been run away with as often as an heiress. I do not remember the dark very well, because I am mostly asleep there, but what I know of it seems as comfortable as an old thick cloak; and though perhaps most rooms are too small for me, it is other people who suffer from the fact, and not I. I have my fear, however; I am horribly afraid of height and space, of the vertigo of infinity. I trust (with trembling) that I should scale a cliff or cross a chasm for any need of honour; but if I did it would be exactly like being shot for the same need. Whether the fact proves me braver or less brave, I should never expect to emerge alive. I would much rather walk the plank from a solid and comfortable pirate's ship into a close and comfortable sea than walk the plank seven feet long from one Eiffel Tower to another.

Now the notable truths about these truths are two. First, that these are the vivid and violent fears. In a riot, in a duel, in a shipwreck, in a capture by brigands, we all have a cheery doubt about ourselves: we all expect to be braver than we expect; a paradox at the root of all romance. But these other terrors are truths; they frighten us before they are facts. The man I know is aware by Divine prophecy that if a dog moves at him he will move away. I am sure beforehand that I shall not enjoy climbing a

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factory tower with occasional footholds, even before the genial and boisterous invitation (from a Lancashire mill-owner) comes to me to do so.

This is the first point, that these are the vital fears; and this is the second point, that these fears that are vital are exactly those that are not physical. The dog-dreader knows as well as I do that a dog who dangerously bites is quite as exceptional among dogs as an Indian Thug who strangles is exceptional among men. I know quite well that falling from the Eiffel Tower would be no more dangerous than falling from one's own chimney pot: both persons falling would be quite safe—safe to be killed. What plucks my inside out of me is not the idea of death. Nay, rather it is the idea of life, the awful idea of immortality. It is the infinity of the fall that freezes the spirit: it is the thought of not dying. In short, it is not death I fear, but hell; for hell must mean an infinity of falling.

I fancy that if every one of those queer indestructible dreads were sympathetically examined it would be found that in each case the core of the terror was spiritual. A man is afraid of the dark, not because of thieves, but because of ghosts; or rather because of neither, but because of a blinding agnosticism that both are meant to symbolise. A man is afraid of animals, not because they are dangerous, but because they are animal; they represent that rude, unquenchable life in the universe that is the rival of man and his rebuke. Fear is of the body, perhaps; but terror is only of the soul. The body runs with fear: it is only the soul that stands still with it.

THE LOVE OF LEAD

IT IS said that when the armies of Napoleon were in great straits in their long defence of democracy they tore the lead from the churches to make their bullets. This is a very accidental but a very perfect symbol of the French Revolution. The very shots that shattered the old order came from the old order. Democracy was only the fulfilment of ideas that had been believed for ages; divine justice and the dignity of men. Just as the Jacobins would have been badly off without the heavy lead on the church, so they would have been badly off without the heavy dogmas of the Church. Truth, mercy, honour, these are everywhere the same, as the substance of the metal lead is everywhere the same. The substance is there; and the substance must not be altered. But it makes a great deal of difference whether it stands stiff and still in churches or is spat out suddenly in shots.

I admit an enormous fascination for the substance called lead. Pewter has long been the fashionable artistic material; the thing that came next after silver as the moon comes after the sun. Pewter certainly has noble associations for any energetic and thirsty Englishman; yet (in defiance of such tender thoughts) I will still say that lead is more lovable than pewter. Lead is the humblest of the metals; it is always put where it is invisible—and where it is indispensable. It is put on the keels of boats, where nobody

The Love of Lead

can see it and everybody relies on it. It is put in the shrouds of the sea-sunken dead, whom we desire to see no more. It is filtered into the heavy heads of walking-sticks—to make them much heavier, though much less like walking-sticks. In these and many more departments it is simply hidden, as something too humble and shameful. Even in the gun it is invisible by concealment until it becomes invisible by speed.

Yet lead has really an effect on a discriminating artistic taste which is unlike that of all other metals. Lead is to all other metals much what the sea is to all the capes, crests, and definite shapes of land: it is something strong, yet soluble. Gold we think of as standing out stiffly in rays, crowns, and aureoles. Silver we think of as orbiting itself into shining plates like a mirror, or into shields like the moon. Steel we think of as pointing itself like pikes or as splitting itself up into sword blades. But lead we think of as almost liquid. We think of it as a grey, sluggish, and even ice-bound sea, that may move slowly, or very slowly be melted—but which can be melted and can move. Steel we conceive as springing upwards in straight lines; iron as arching over in very rigid and mathematical arches. But lead is the only material we think of as flowing downwards. “Tears of steel” would be affected; and “tears of copper” would be nonsense. They would both seem to belong to that advanced school of art and letters that prides itself on extravagantly expressing nothing at all. But “tears of lead” would not be a far-fetched expression; it would express a certain heavy, humble, and descending element in the very substance itself. Some of those tears of

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lead—round and real drops—were caught by Napoleon's soldiers.

Another artistic element in lead, of course, is the same that has given its more fictitious importance to pewter; that a certain obscuration of the glint of silver seems actually to make it more silvery. One never feels the light more than in the twilight. In both these baser metals the silver is veiled: but pewter wears the light and tawdry veil of a wanton; lead the deep and real veil of a widow. The grey glimmer of lead pipes in the light is really very beautiful; though no aesthete is, as a rule, found standing and staring at it. But, then, aesthetes never do anything but what they are told. When they heard that pewter was beautiful they rushed off and bought all the pewter mugs out of the public-houses. If they had stopped and emptied the mugs instead of buying them, they might have known more than they do about the English democracy and been much more use in the English Revolution which is coming upon us. A pious and conscientious person ought always to understand the humble utility, the quiet daily social service of anything, before he presumes artistically to admire its beauty. We should realise that cornfields are good before we see that they are golden; we should know that trees will bear fruit before we even allow them to bear flowers. On the same simple, reverent law of service, we should never presume to like pewter unless we like beer; we should never presume to admire lead till we are ready to fire off bullets.

But for those whom these two types of adventure mysteriously fail to attract, there are other literary and artistic

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aspects of lead. There is surely something very moving in the manner in which it was used in the glorious old Gothic windows to bind together all the colours and to constitute the outline of everything. No other metal, we feel, would have done for that. Gold would have been too gaudy and steel too stern; these bands of grand, grey, weighty and lowly matter were right for the enclosure of those gigantic jewels of the church. Those red-hot reds, those burning yellows and tropic blues could not be outlined in silver-point. They had to be blocked in by heavier boundaries. They had to be, as they were, outlined by a very big and broad lead pencil.

My love for the great lead pencil that has scrawled such coloured pictures almost (one may say) on the sky is not only a petty personal taste. It is not merely a love for the lead pencil with which I write these leaden articles. It is not merely a natural private sympathy with all heavy substances. I seem to feel in the substance called lead much of that massive and neglected matter which makes the forgotten framework of our world. This thing that cannot bend like steel or burn like gold is very typical of that tireless average of humanity that is neither cunning nor showy, that droops and descends only too easily, whose trend, in a sense, is downwards. My sympathies are with these. I choose the leaden casket—like Bassanio. For the matter of that, many kings that have gone in gold and steel have come without choice upon a leaden casket, if it were only a leaden coffin. But those grey skeletons that rib the rich pictures of the saints affect me with great emotion. They are like the grey belts of the poor that surround

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the few glorious legends of poverty. Keep them in your churches through rain and ruin as a permanent praise of humility and holy patience. It is right that there should be such a witness.

But do not quite forget that they can be made into bullets.

THE APRIL FOOL

ONE OF the elemental jokes of this earth is the fact that (going merely by the eye and its associations) a winter landscape looks warm and a summer landscape looks cool. In winter the earth seems to be comfortably huddled in white furs, which are called snow. In summer she seems to be fanning herself with green fans, which are called foliage. That heavy half-violet white of snow is really one of the warmest colours. That glistening or gleaming green of leaves is really one of the coolest colours. A white snow-bank looks as warm as a white blanket. A green forest looks as cool as a green sea. This is, no doubt, an illusion of my eye. In the curiously exact and philosophic phrase of our fathers, it is all my eye. A full and generous philosophy draws its strength from all the senses; and I can always correct the illusion of my eye merely by putting my nose out of the front door.

For this reason we should remember and treasure the spring which we are now enjoying. We shall never, perhaps, be able to recall it or bring it back. Other springs will come and go and disappear on dancing feet; but they will pass with a perpetual promise of return. The crocuses that tried to grow in my garden will try again, and will probably succeed next time.

But never again, perhaps, shall I look out on a garden in April covered, not with the gold of the crocuses, but with

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the splendid silver of the snow. As it is, I look on that most glorious of sights: a collision. You may call it, if you like, an overlapping: the spring has begun before the winter has left off. If it comes to that, you can call any collision an overlapping; you can say that the Horsham train overlapped the Brighton express and ten passengers were killed. The essential is that this entanglement of advancing spring with retreating winter has all the crashing qualities of a battle. I look out on my garden and see time sharpened and shortened, and all things become contemporary. I see the snow shooting downwards with arrows at the flowers; and the flowers fighting upwards with shields and spears against the snow. And I see the double paradox of the seasons: the comfortable colours of snow side by side with all the airiness and eagerness of the early plants. I see all the warmth of the winter and the coldness of the spring.

Ritual and traditional things are mostly right, because they are mostly popular. Outside the solemn dates of dedication and sanctity there are one or two that are almost equally solemn. One of the most perfect feasts of the year is the one called April Fool's Day. It is the day of practical jokes, and by that perfect artistic instinct that endures in the heart of humanity it was fixed for a day in early spring.

For spring is a practical joke. You cannot imagine anyone trying to make anyone an April Fool in October. The April Fool symbolizes (and experiences) the three great qualities of April, its expectancy, its gaiety, and its disappointment. Mankind made this joke at this particular time of the year because this particular time of the year is full of such bright uncertainty. I put my head out of the

The April Fool

window and see white patches which, by this time of the year, might well be white narcissus. Then I find they are only snow; and Nature, rocking with laughter down to her remotest chasms and caves, roars with laughter and thunders "April Fool!"

In those glorious old pantomimes which I can just remember, pantomimes concerned with really important things, such as sausages or policemen, there was one feature which in my childhood almost inebriated my intellect. Making a policeman into sausages seems almost the definition of Social Reform. Turning the wicked Bluebeard into the innocent, and indeed somewhat idiotic, Pantaloon might well be taken as the salvation of the soul, in which everyone becomes as a little child. But in spite of these figures of a more farcical philosophy, I still most vividly remember a thing that in the old pantomimes was called the Transformation Scene. It was a world of fierce and fearfully increasing transparency. Wall behind wall turned slowly into window behind window. By countless and incalculable gradations the foreground failed and the distance deepened. The last scene began in the Black Dungeon where the hero had been flung; the black dungeon became first a grey dungeon, and then a rather wavering white dungeon, and then faded into the Ivory Palace of the King of the Orchids. People did their best to dance and sing in the Ivory Palace, but the more they danced and sang the more rapidly and translucently it turned into the Orange Garden of the Fairy Filigree.

That is what is nice about the spring, especially the English spring. It is like a Transformation Scene; one can

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still see the white pillars of winter, although the green groves of summer have already begun to glitter through them. Some of us believe that the heart of England is even now unfolding itself in the old sensational but silent manner of the last scene in the pantomime. Others believe that the front scene of which we are so tired is unalterably fixed and cannot become transparent. But I think we can still make the back-scene shine through it—even if we have to set fire to the theatre.

THE PUN

A PIECE of peculiarly bad advice is constantly given to modern writers, especially to modern theologians: that they should adapt themselves to the spirit of the age. If there is one thing that has made shipwreck of mankind from the beginning it has been the spirit of the age, which always means exaggerating still further something that is grossly exaggerated already. The spirit of the age always means taking the crinolines that are already inconvenient and widening them till they become impossible. But if anyone wants a good minor example he could hardly find a better one than the ancient and often barbaric kind of humour that goes by the name of the pun.

For the pun has two distinct functions; a rare function, which is eternal, and a fashionable function, which is dead. If we take first the last and least of the two we must put ourselves for a moment into an ancestral atmosphere now utterly forgotten. In the Bohemian half of the Early Victorian world wit reigned as a kind of institution. Wit was to these intellectual people something like what sport is to simpler people; it was a permanent open competition, free but yet formal lists in which young men could win their spurs.

Wit, which is in this sense warlike (as compared with humour, which may be accidental or even partly unconscious), must of necessity tend to fixed and perhaps even pedantic forms of flippancy. Capping verses, retorting in

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rhymed couplets, making anagrams or acrostics on any chance word or phrase, fill all the social chronicles of that time. Two eminent lawyers exchange rhymed epigrams instantaneously at a dinner table; Lamb is proud of having written impromptu a preposterous conceit about pink stockings; Douglas Jerrold goes about like some notorious duellist, always ready to impale somebody on a point. In this atmosphere it is not surprising that one of the most popular entertainments should have been the fantastic yet precise one of punning.

But though the wit was formal the fellowship was frank and uproarious. Many such men, from Lamb to Dickens, or from Sydney Smith to Leigh Hunt, were men whose ingenuity had in it a certain poetry and elemental humour. Hence followed what must always follow when high-spirited people are playing a game with rules. The limitations are enjoyed, but the limitations are strained to their utmost; each player is proud of getting a preposterous exception just inside the rule. The laughter was highest when the shot was wildest; and in this atmosphere arose the cardinal maxim of Charles Lamb, "that the worst pun is the best". It was the aim of the ideal punster that people should admire his ingenuity but in the same breath somewhat damn his impudence. This first sort of punning in pure high spirits was indeed a fashion, like singing at the dinner table. We may be permitted a partial fear that in ceasing to sing at the dinner table too many people have ceased to sing altogether, and we may be disposed to warn ourselves and each other against losing the good spirits as well as the bad puns of our fathers.

The Pun

In a primary sense puns are a perfect type of literary art. That is, they briefly embody the chief essence of art; that completeness of form should confirm completeness of idea. But while all art aims at this forcing form and meaning to go on all fours, there are three special and sharp forms of the thing which do it most clearly and defiantly. One is rhyme; another is what is called simile and metaphor, and the third is the pun. Let us take, for the sake of argument, the simile first.

Suppose a man criticising the current journalistic system wrote as follows: "When we speak of the freedom of the Press we should remember that the individual Pressman writes under considerable restrictions in the form of his work, and still more in the bias he is bound to assume." That expresses a very vivid fact, but it does not, perhaps, express it very vividly. Mr. Zangwill has expressed the same thing thus: "A public question is like a piece of paper. Much may be written on both sides; but a journalist must only write on one side." Then anyone can feel how the pungency of the intellectual protest is perfected and emphasised by a pungency in the mere verbal form. The same sense of hitting the right nail on the head can be conveyed by the coincidence called rhyme. A man writing prose in a passion of righteous indignation might perhaps say, "One can at least get rid of such a human insect, a creature who is malodorous and poisonous at once." But it would not have the special sort of ringing energy and emphasis of a couplet to the same effect:

Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,
This painted child of dirt that stinks and stings.

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This is in one way a specially good example, because it shows the proximity of assonance to other verbal tricks. If wings and stings is only a rhyme, stinks and stings is something very like a pun. And when we come to the great puns of Hood or of any other writer, we note first of all this use of the pun in sharpening and clinching a thought. Suppose (to adopt the same method) that Hood, writing a journalistic report of one of the last duels, had written: "Both principals fired in the air; and we cannot too strongly express our hope that those who think it incumbent on them to use this old form of self-vindication, may imitate such a sensible and humane interpretation of it." That is sound enough; but it is a little laborious, and does not express either the detachment or the decision of such a critic of duelling. Hood, as a fact, did write:

So each one upwards in the air
His shot he did expend.
And may all other duels have
That upshot at the end.

Here the verbal jest, falling so ridiculously right, does express, not merely the humanity of the critic, but also his humorous impartiality and unruffled readiness of intellect. Or again, on the proposal to shut the Zoological Gardens on Sunday, Hood might well have written in some newspaper: "It is difficult to see where our Puritan legislators draw the line in natural pleasures; they forbid the sight of God's works when they are animal, yet they cannot forbid them when they are vegetable or mineral." That is rational; but it has the note of plea. What is wanted for such

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fanaticisms is the note of scorn; and you get it with the double ring of a real argument and a verbal gibe:

Once let the sect triumphant to their text
Shut Nero up from Saturday till Monday;
And sure as fate they will deny us next
To see the dandelions on a Sunday.

That is the literary use of the trick, and is poetic as well as pointed: a landscape as well as a trap.

THE RIDDLE OF RESTORATION

IF YOU wish for a sharp test to divide the true romantic from the false (a valuable thing when considering the claims of a poet, a son-in-law, or a professor of modern history), about the best I can think of is this: that the false romantic likes castles as much as cathedrals. If the poet or the lover admires the ruins of a feudal fortress as much as the ruins of a religious house, then what he admires is ruins; and he is a ruin himself. He likes medievalism because it is now dead, not because it was once alive; and his pleasure in the poetic past is as frivolous as a fancy-dress ball. For the castles only bear witness to ambitions, to ambitions that are dead; dead by being frustrated or dead by being fulfilled. But the cathedrals bear witness not to ambitions but to ideals; and to ideals that are still alive. They are more than alive, indeed they are immortal because they are ideals that no man has ever been able either to frustrate or to fulfil.

Ruskin used to beat his bosom because the ancient churches were being restored. He might have reflected that we do not hear so much about the ancient castles being restored. Castles are valued as ruins, as the homes of dead men; but temples, if they are valued at all, are valued as the homes not of dead men, but of immortal gods. Ruskin was always saying that we should follow in art the laws and lessons of Nature. It is strange that he did not notice that

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the chief lesson of Nature is the lesson of Restoration. He sneered at patching up old buildings with new or giving modern imitations of antique effects. But he might as well have complained of the spring patching up the earth with primroses. He might as justly have accused this year's rose of being a poor plagiarism from last year's. Living things must constantly be broken up and destroyed; it is only the dead things that can be left alone.) But though Ruskin missed the real meaning of the propping and patching of churches, he understood better than anyone round him the essential for which such things endure. He understood better than anyone of his school and generation the point about a cathedral as distinct from a castle. And, as almost always happens in his case, his literary style rises into its most celestial reverberations when he happens, on a particular occasion, to be talking sense. Referring to the brawls and intrigues of the medieval captains, Rufus or Stephen or Richard, he contrasts them with the silent and soothing triumph of their toils in stone; and writes that peroration which is perfect both in rhythm and reason — "We know not for what they laboured, and we see no evidence of their reward; they have taken with them to the grave their powers, their honours and their errors; but they have left us their adoration."

Yet even this, though inspired, is inadequate. For adoration, that instinctive salutation of the sky as the symbol of God, would not of itself have produced the strange and special sumptuousness of medieval building. Some star-pointing pyramid, a mountain made by man; some colossal and unconnected column, as high as the

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Eiffel Tower and as cold as Cleopatra's Needle; these might well have expressed the mere uplifting of man's vague reverence into the void. But a Christian cathedral was more than an aspiration, it was a proclamation. It was not addressed only to the ultimate reality above us all; it was also addressed, in a very definite and a very detailed way, to us also; that is, to the ordinary, emotional and exasperated race of men. The spired minster was not merely meant to strike the stars like an arrow; it was also meant to shake the earth like an explosion.

If anyone wishes to know why the Gothic architecture was among all architectures unprecedentedly alive, luxuriant, exciting, complicated and comic, the answer is in one word; because it was didactic. It had to be interesting as a schoolmaster has to be interesting. It had to be exciting as a demagogue has to be exciting. All architectures, presumably, must have taught; but this was the one that talked. And it is just here we come upon the real objection to rebuilding, as conducted at present. These stones were meant to talk; and the question is whether we know what they were meant to say.

This is the real riddle about the restoration of the ancient churches. The evil is not that we do it, but that we cannot do it. Nobody in or out of an asylum, nobody, not even Ruskin, would object to a real repetition of any really splendid thing. One has a right to encore a cathedral as much as a song. No one would complain if the Louvre contained six new statues as good as the Venus of Milo. No one would grumble if the empty flats of Lincolnshire contained four more buildings as fine as the cathedral of

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Lincoln. You cannot have too much of a good thing, which is the chief demonstration of the doctrine of everlasting life.

Anyone who has ever tried to draw with a pencil knows that he can seldom quite accurately copy a line if he does not know what it is meant for. However strict or simple a curve may be, he will insensibly draw it slightly different if he knows it is a tree-branch or a sea-breaker; the vault of a crypt or the contour of a morning cloud; the wing of a strong bird or the back of a bowed old man. That is really our difficulty with the great leaping lines of the Gothic cathedrals. We admire the lines; we can to some extent copy them, but we do not always know what they mean. A conclusive and concluding example can be found in the gargoyles. He who is purely practical will maintain that they are merely waterspouts or flying buttresses; and he will copy them as such. He who is artistic or ingenious will see them only as grotesques, the horrible jokes of some stonemasons' holiday; and he will copy them as such. But quite another kind of sculpture will be needed if those flying monsters, rushing from the roof in every frantic form and dragging after them every entanglement of foliage or fish or bird or wave or element, really mean the tale in the New Testament, that Christ could cast out devils.

CONTRADICTING THACKERAY

I WAS recently re-reading some of the very small but very great essays of that great lady, Alice Meynell. I was much struck by a certain truth, for which she stood against very formidable antagonists, and which she triumphantly demonstrated in these little papers, often hardly longer than paragraphs. It is rather difficult to express; like so many truths that she expressed easily. It might be called the sentimentalism of the cynic; or, more correctly, the melodrama of the man of the world. It is the fact that the mere man of the world, when he lumps things together, always really groups them together by a convention like that of melodrama. He speaks so hastily that he always uses stock terms and therefore stale terms. He is none the less the dupe of romances because he refuses to take a romantic view of romances. But an unworldly woman like the woman poet I have named is not in any sense a romanticist. The unworldly woman is a realist; because she is a psychologist. Most people who talk about psychology probably do not remember the name of Psyche or remember that her emblem was the butterfly and her name the soul.

In one essay, Mrs. Meynell remarks that it grieves her greatly to have to contradict Thackeray. As a matter of fact, she is perpetually contradicting Thackeray. I mean she was contradicting him when she was not thinking of

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him; she was contradicting the whole of that attitude of tolerant and masculine scepticism which marks the man who has, indeed, seen much, but who has learnt to generalise much too easily. The experienced traveller who will tell you offhand what Chinks or niggers are like; the experienced man of pleasure who will tell you offhand what women are like; the experienced politician who will tell you offhand what crowds are like, because he only meets crowds, and never meets people—these were the spirits against which Mrs. Meynell was really waging ceaseless war till the day of her death. She was always interested in the intimate and individual story. Thackeray was always content to say that it was the old story. He meant that it was the ordinary story; but Mrs. Meynell had no difficulty in showing that it was really the ordinary made-up story.

For instance, Thackeray jumps to the conclusion that Swift was simply coldly unfaithful in the blaze of Court favour and social success; and that Stella was simply faithful and forgotten like Mariana in the Moated Grange. The romance of the deserted maiden has been repeated so often that he takes it for the only reality. But the reality was entirely the other way. It is Swift who is perpetually writing to his girl friend or, rather, his girl friends (for, as Mrs. Meynell showed, Rebecca Dingley was included in the affection) asking them with playful petulance why they do not write to him, as he is perpetually and, indeed, continuously, writing to them. Probably they were quite as fond of him as he was of them; but, simply as a matter of cold fact, it is quite clear that he wrote a great many more letters than they did. Anything less like the conventional

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picture of the pallid maiden waiting behind her casement for a lover she has lost for ever can hardly be conceived. But Thackeray made the mistake because he was a man of the world; that is, he was a man in a hurry. He accepted a ready-made explanation which was, in fact, a romantic explanation. He could not be bothered to go into detail about the individual psychology of Esther Johnson. The man who really left Stella unnoticed behind her casement was not Swift, but Thackeray. I say all this, of course, with the fullest admiration for Thackeray's genius and intelligence as a whole.

There was, I think, another case of the kind among the criticisms of Thackeray which is not mentioned among the criticisms of Mrs. Meynell. Thackeray made a mockery somewhere of the sentimentalists who believed that "Mary Queen of Scots never murdered her husband". In fact, it was because he himself was a sentimentalist that he jumped to the conclusion that she did murder her husband. He did so because he was sentimentally subject to the appeal of the "eternal triangle"; the old melodramatic relation of the lover and the husband and the wicked wife. Thackeray took it for granted that Mary Stuart was a vamp, simply because he himself had a habit of writing about vamps. There are, indeed, serious historical students who take the view that Mary was guilty; as there are other serious historical students who take the view that she was innocent. If anything, the latter opinion has lately increased among the learned. But Thackeray was not a serious historical student; he was a novelist. He thought he knew the story of Mary Stuart because he did know the story of Becky

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Sharp. But, being a man of the world, he did not realise that one woman is sometimes slightly different from another; and that Mary Stuart was not in the least like Becky Sharp.

Nor was Mary Stuart in the least like the Duchesse d'Ivry, though the Duchesse d'Ivry imagined that she was like Mary Stuart. Even if Mary was a murderess, she was not a mere humbug or vulgar-minded person on the make. She was a great many things that do not fit in with the adventures of Thackeray and fiction. She was a poet and friend of poets; she was an ardent Catholic; she was a great lady of the Renaissance interested in scholarship and the arts. At the same time she had, as all such Princes and Princesses then had, an inevitable sense of proximity to death and treason and violence which no modern humbug ever had (for such humbug is partly the result of safety), and she therefore had something of the eloquence of parley and challenge and defiance—the trumpet of the old Kings. Of that luxury on the brink of destruction the Victorian Age knew nothing, and the greatest Victorian novelists knew as little.

We know pretty well by this time the tone of the man of the world as Thackeray often described him and sometimes impersonated him. We know the sort of old stager represented by Major Pendennis or Captain Fitzboodle; he is more truly to be described as a man about town than as a man of the world. For the town is a very small part of the world; and, for that matter, his world is a very small part of the town. But perhaps the most significant truth is that the old stager is really mostly impressed by the stage.

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His cynicism comes much more from having seen cynical scenes on the stage than from having seen the comparatively earnest and even ethical scenes of real life. Above all, there is a far more complex and unexpected sort of psychology in the scenes of real life.

It was exactly that sort of complex and unexpected psychology that was the speciality of Alice Meynell's works. She knew that the wife in a French farce was expected to be unfaithful; that it was regarded as her duty to be unfaithful. But she also knew that the wife in a French home might have bold and original ideas of her own, and consider it her duty to be faithful. Mrs. Meynell's studies of historical women are to a great extent a series of studies of these fantastic females—of these faithful freaks. I do not know whether she would have included Mary Stuart as a subtle study of virtue, when so many use her as a superficial study of vice. It is not the least among the reasons for lamenting that great gap in English letters that now we shall never know.

For Mary Queen of Scots, who caused so many battles in her lifetime, will, I fancy, go on causing bigger and bigger battles after her death. I do not mean that her individual character is of such immense importance, though it is interesting enough in itself. I mean that much will depend upon the position of the modern world towards that particular part of the Renaissance, the part of the Renaissance that was opposed to the Puritans. I think it quite a mistake to suppose that such opposition to Puritanism was a mere impulse of Paganism. There was an element of heathen hedonism in the sixteenth century; there was an element of

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moral danger in that heathen hedonism; there may have been too much dallying with that moral danger in the character of Mary Queen of Scots. But there was a great deal more in her character, and it was an expression and not a negation of her religion. It was not the Pagan but the Christian who disliked the Puritan. Anyhow, the quarrel between Queen Mary and John Knox is not over yet; and, after spending an hour among the historical women of Mrs. Meynell, I am disposed to give *place aux dames*.

GOOD STORIES SPOILT BY GREAT AUTHORS

UNDER the title "Good Stories Spoilt by Great Authors" a considerable essay might be written. In fact, it shall be written. It shall be written now. The mere fact that some fable has passed through a master mind does not imply by any means that it must have been improved. Eminent men have misappropriated public stories, as they have misappropriated public stores. It is always supposed (apparently) that anyone who borrows from the original brotherhood of men is not bound to pay back. It is supposed that if Shakespeare took the legend of King Lear, or Goethe the legend of Faust, or Wagner the legend of Tannhäuser, they must have been very right and the legends ought to be grateful to them. My own impression is that they were sometimes very wrong and that the legends might sue them for slander. Briefly, it is always assumed that the poem that somebody made is vastly superior to the ballad that everybody made. For my part I take the other view. I prefer the gossip of the many to the scandal of the few. I distrust the narrow individualism of the artist, trusting rather the natural communism of the craftsmen. I think there is one thing more important than the man of genius—and that is the genius of man.

Let me promptly, in a parenthetical paragraph, confess

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that I cannot get Shakespeare into this theory of mine. As far as I can see, Shakespeare made all his stories better; and as far as I can see, he could hardly have made them worse. He seems to have specialised in making good plays out of bad novels. If Shakespeare were alive now I suppose he would make a sweet springtime comedy out of an anecdote in a sporting paper. I suppose he would make a starry and awful tragedy out of one of the penny novelettes. But as Shakespeare does not support my argument I propose to leave him out of my article.

In the instance of Milton, however, I think my case can be stoutly maintained; only that Milton's story, being Scriptural, is not perhaps so safe to dogmatise about. In one sense Milton spoiled Eden as much as the snake did. He made a magnificent poem and yet he missed the poetical point. For in "Paradise Lost" (if I remember right) Milton substitutes for the primal appetite for a strange fruit an elaborate psychological and sentimental motive. He makes Adam eat the fruit deliberately, "not deceived", with the object of sharing Eve's misfortune. In other words, he makes all human wickedness originate in an act of essential goodness, or, at the worst, of very excusable romanticism. Now all our meannesses did not begin in magnanimity; if we are cads and blackguards (as we are) it is not because our first ancestor behaved like a husband and a gentleman. The story, as it stands in the Bible, is infinitely more sublime and delicate. There all evil is traced to that ultimate unreasoning insolence which will not accept even the kindest conditions; that profoundly inartistic anarchy that objects to a limit as such. It is not indicated that the fruit was of

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attractive hue or taste; its attraction was that it was forbidden. In Eden there was a maximum of liberty and a minimum of veto; but some veto is essential even to the enjoyment of liberty. The finest thing about a free meadow is the hedge at the end of it. The moment the hedge is abolished it is no longer a meadow, but a waste, as Eden was after its one limitation was lost. This Bible idea that all sins and sorrows spring from a certain fever of pride, which cannot enjoy unless it controls, is a much deeper and more piercing truth than Milton's mere suggestion that a gentleman got entangled by his chivalry to a lady. Genesis, with sounder commonsense, makes Adam after the Fall lose his chivalry in a rather marked and startling manner.

The same theory of deterioration might be urged in the case of Goethe and the Faust legend. I do not speak, of course, of the poetry in detail, which is above any criticism. I speak of the outline of Goethe's *Faust*—or, rather, of the outline of the first part; the second part has no outline, like Mr. Mantalini's Countesses. Now the actual story of Faust, Mephistopheles and Margaret seems to me infinitely less exalted and beautiful than the old story of Faust, Mephistopheles and Helen. I had the pleasure of seeing in Yorkshire the old wooden puppet play of *Faustus* that has since been performed in London; and the Yorkshire dolls were much more living than some of the London actors. The marionettes were trying to express themselves as men; there were times, alas! when eminent actors tried to express themselves as marionettes; but that is not the true objection. The true objection is this: that, in the medieval

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play Faust is damned for doing a great sin; swearing loyalty to eternal evil that he may possess Helen of Troy, the supreme bodily beauty. The old Faust is damned for doing a great sin; but the new Faust is saved for doing a small sin—a mean sin; Goethe's Faust is not intoxicated and swept away by the intolerable sweetness of some supernatural lady. Goethe's Faust, so soon as he is made a young man, promptly and really becomes a young rascal. He gets at once into a local intrigue—I will not say into a local entanglement because (as in most similar cases) only the woman is entangled. But surely there is something of the bad side of Germany, there is something of the vulgar sentimentalist, in this hotch-potch of seduction and salvation! The man ruins the woman; the woman, therefore, saves the man; and that is the moral, *die ewige Weiblichkeit*. Somebody who has had the pleasure shall be purified because somebody else has had the pain; and so his cruelty shall finally be the same as kindness. Personally, I prefer the puppet play; where Faust is finally torn by black devils and dragged down to hell. I find it less depressing.

Again, the same principle, as far as I can make out, marks Wagner's version of *Tannhäuser*—or rather, his perversion of *Tannhäuser*. This great legend of the early Middle Ages, plainly and properly told, is one of the most tremendous things in human history or fable. *Tannhäuser*, a great knight, committed a terrible transcendental sin that cut him off from all the fellowship of sinners. He became the lover of Venus herself, the incarnation of pagan sensuality. Coming out of those evil caverns to the sun, he strayed to Rome and asked the Pope if such as he could

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repent and be saved. The Pope answered in substance, that there are limits to everything. A man so cut off from Christian sanity (he said) could no more repent than the Pope's stick cut from a tree could grow leaves again. Tannhäuser went away in despair and descended again into the caverns of eternal death, only, after he had gone the Pope looked at his stick one fine morning and saw that it was sprouting leaves. To me that tale is one terrific clash of Agnosticism and Catholicism. Wagner, I believe, made Tannhäuser return repentant for the second time. If that is not spoiling a story, I do not know what is.

Lastly (to take a much smaller case), I have noticed all over Europe discussions about the morals of the play of *Salome* which Wilde wrote in French. I do not see anything very practically immoral about the play, though much that is morbid and turgid. What strikes me most about Wilde's *Salome* is that it is startlingly inartistic. It spoils the whole point of a particularly artistic incident. The brilliant bitterness of the old Bible story consists in the complete innocence and indifference of the dancing girl. A subtle despot was plotting a statesmanlike clemency; a secretive Queen was plotting savage vengeance. A dancer (a mere child, I always fancied) was the daughter of the vengeful Queen and danced before the diplomatic despot. In riotous relaxation he asked the little girl to name any present she liked. Bewildered with such fairy-tale benevolence, the girl ran to ask her mother what she should choose; the patient and pitiless Queen saw her chance and asked for the death of her enemy. In place of this strong, ironic

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tale of a butterfly used as a hornet, *Salome* has some sickly and vulgar business of the dancer being in love with the Prophet. I am not sure about its being bad morality; for its morality is its effect on mankind. But I know it is bad art; for its art is its effect on me.

THE ROOTS OF THE WORLD

ONCE UPON a time a little boy lived in a garden in which he was permitted to pick the flowers but forbidden to pull them up by the roots. There was, however, one particular plant, insignificant, somewhat thorny, with a small, star-like flower, which he very much wanted to pull up by the roots. His tutors and guardians, who lived in the house with him, were worthy, formal people, and they gave him reasons why he should not pull it up. They were silly reasons as a rule. But none of the reasons against doing the thing was quite so silly as the little boy's reason for wanting to do it; for his reason was that Truth demanded that he should pull the thing up by the roots to see how it was growing. Still it was a sleepy, thoughtless kind of house, and nobody gave him the real answer to his argument, which was that it would kill the plant, and that there is no more Truth about a dead plant than about a live one. So one dark night, when clouds sealed the moon like a secret too good or too bad to be told, the little boy came down the old creaking stairs of his farmhouse and crept into the garden in his nightgown. He told himself repeatedly that there was no more reason against his pulling this plant off the garden than against his knocking off a thistle-top idly in a lane. Yet the darkness which he had chosen contradicted him, and also his own throbbing pulse, for he told himself continually that next

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morning he might be crucified as the blasphemer who had torn up the sacred tree.

Perhaps he might have been so crucified if he had so torn it up. I cannot say. But he did not tear it up; and it was not for want of trying. For when he laid hold of the little plant in the garden he tugged and tugged, and found the thing held as if clamped to the earth with iron. And when he strained himself a third time there came a frightful noise behind him, and either nerves or (which he would have denied) conscience made him leap back and stagger and stare around. The house he lived in was a mere bulk of blackness against a sky almost as black. Yet after staring long he saw that the very outline had grown unfamiliar, for the great chimney of the kitchen had fallen crooked and calamitous. Desperately he gave another pull at the plant, and heard far off the roof of the stables fall in and the horses shriek and plunge. Then he ran into the house and rolled himself in the bedclothes. Next morning found the kitchen ruined, the day's food destroyed, two horses dead, and three broken loose and lost. But the boy still kept a furious curiosity, and a little while after, when a fog from the sea had hidden house and garden, he dragged again at the roots of the indestructible plant. He hung on to it like a boy on the rope of a tug of war, but it did not give. Only through the grey sea-fog came choking and panic-stricken cries; they cried that the King's castle had fallen, that the towers guarding the coast were gone; that half the great sea-city had split away and slid into the sea. Then the boy was frightened for a little while, and said no more about the plant, but when he had come to a strong

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and careless manhood, and the destruction in the district had been slowly repaired, he said openly before the people, "Let us have done with the riddle of this irrational weed. In the name of Truth let us drag it up." And he gathered a great company of strong men, like an army to meet invaders, and they all laid hold of the little plant and they tugged night and day. And the Great Wall fell down in China for forty miles. And the Pyramids were split up into jagged stones. And the Eiffel Tower in Paris went over like a ninepin, killing half the Parisians; and the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour fell forward suddenly and smashed the American fleet; and St. Paul's Cathedral killed all the journalists in Fleet-street, and Japan had a record series of earthquakes and then sank into the sea. Some have declared that these last two incidents were not calamities properly so-called; but into that I will not enter. The point was that when they had tugged for about twenty-four hours the strong men of that country had pulled down about half of the civilized world, but had not pulled up the plant. I will not weary the reader with the full facts of this realistic story, with how they used first elephants and then steam-engines to tear up the flower, and how the only result was that the flower stuck fast, but that the moon began to be agitated and even the sun was a bit dicky. At last the human race interfered, as it always does at last, by means of a revolution. But long before that the boy, or man, who is the hero of this tale, had thrown up the business, merely saying to his pastors and masters, "You gave me a number of elaborate and idle reasons why I should not pull up this shrub. Why did you not give me the two

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good reasons: first, that I can't; second, that I should damage everything else if I ever tried it on?"

All those who have sought in the name of science to uproot religion seem to me very like the little boy in the garden. Sceptics do not succeed in pulling up the roots of Christianity; but they do succeed in pulling up the roots of every man's ordinary vine and fig tree, of every man's garden and every man's kitchen garden. Secularists have not succeeded in wrecking divine things; but Secularists have succeeded in wrecking secular things.

A religion cannot be shown to be monstrous at the last; a religion is monstrous from the beginning. It announces itself as extraordinary. It offers itself as extravagant. The sceptics at the most can only ask us to reject our creed as something wild. And we have accepted it as something wild. So far one would think there would be a mere impasse, a block between us and those who cannot feel as we do. But then follows the curious practical experience which has ratified religion in our reason for ever. For the enemies of religion cannot leave it alone. They laboriously attempt to smash religion. They cannot smash religion; but they do smash everything else. With your queries and dilemmas you have made no havoc in faith; from the first it was a transcendental conviction; it cannot be made any more transcendental than it was. But you have (if that is any comfort to you) made a certain havoc in common morals and commonsense.

The opponents of our religion do not commit us to accepting their axioms; our axioms remain what they were

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before; but they do commit themselves to every doctrine of insanity and despair. They do not hit us, but they do plunge past us into the marsh and the abyss.

Mr. Blatchford cannot commit us to the statement that man is not the image of God, for that statement is as dogmatic as its denial. But he can and does commit himself to the statement, humanly ludicrous and intolerable, that I must not blame a bully or praise the man who knocks him down. Evolutionists cannot drive us, because of the nameless gradation in Nature, to deny the personality of God, for a personal God might as well work by gradations as in any other way; but they do drive themselves, through those gradations, to deny the existence of a personal Mr. Jones, because he is within the scope of evolution and his edges are rubbed away. The evolutionists uproot the world, but not the flowers. The Titans never scaled heaven, but they laid waste the earth.

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