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# Affirmations

Havelock Ellis

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AFFIRMATIONS.

# AFFIRMATIONS

BY

HAVELOCK ELLIS

LONDON:
WALTER SCOTT, LIMITED
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1898

# PREFACE.

THERE are at least two ways of looking at books and at the personalities books express. In its chief but rarer aspect literature is the medium of art, and as such can raise no ethical problems. Whatever morality or immorality art may hold is quiescent, or lifted into an atmosphere of radiant immortality where questioning is irrelevant. Of the literature that is all art we need not even speak, unless by chance we too approach it as artists, trying to grasp it by imaginative insight. In literature, as elsewhere, art should only be approached as we would approach Paradise, for the sake of its joy. It would be well, indeed, if we could destroy or forget all that has ever been written about the world's great books, even if it were once worth while to write those books about books. How happy, for instance, the world might be if there were no literature about the Bible, if Augustine and Aquinas and Calvin and thousands of smaller men had not danced on it so long, stamping every page of it into mire, that now the vision of a single line, in its simple sense, is almost an effort of inspiration. All my life long I have been casting away the knowledge I have gained from books about literature, and from opinions about life, and coming to literature itself or to life itself, a slow and painful progress towards that Heaven of knowledge where a child is king.

But there is another kind of literature, a literature which is not all art—the literature of life. Literature

differs from design or music by being closer to life, by being fundamentally not an art at all, but merely the development of ordinary speech, only rising at intervals into the region of art. It is so close to life that largely it comes before us much as the actual facts of life come before us. So that while we were best silent about the literature of art, sanctified by time and the reverence of many men, we cannot question too keenly the literature of life. In this book I deal with questions of life as they are expressed in literature, or as they are suggested by literature. Throughout I am discussing morality as revealed or disguised by literature. I may not care, indeed, to pervert my subjects in order to emphasise my opinions, but I frankly take my subjects chiefly on those sides which suit my own pleasure, and I select them solely because they do that so well. I use them as the ancient device of the stalking-horse was used, to creep up more closely to the game that my soul loves best.

So far as possible I dwell most on those aspects of my subjects which are most questionable. It was once brought against me that I had a predilection for such aspects. Assuredly it is so. If a subject is not questionable it seems to me a waste of time to discuss it. The great facts of the world are not questionable; they are there for us to enjoy, or to suffer, in silence, not to talk about. Our best energies should be spent in attacking and settling questionable things that so we may enlarge the sphere of the unquestionable—the sphere of real life—and be ready to meet new questions as they arise. It is only by dealing with the questionable aspects of the world that criticism of life can ever have any saving virtue for us. It is waste of life to use literature for pawing over the unquestionable. Even a

healthy dog, having once ascertained the essential virtue of a bone, contentedly eats it, or buries it.

And yet, it may well be, there is a time for affirming the simple eternal facts of life, a time, even, when those simple eternal facts have drifted so far from us that we count them also questionable. The present moment has seemed to me a fitting one to set a few such affirmations in order. The century now nearly over has performed many dirty and laborious tasks; it has had to organise its own unwieldiness, to cleanse its Augean stables of the filth it has itself deposited, to pull down the buildings it has itself erected. When we witness such work carried out—blunderingly, it may be, but yet, we thought, humbly—we may well point out what splendid fellows these modest, begrimed toilers really were, what useful and noble work they were engaged in, how large a promise they bear for the future. That was my own point of view. But the case is altered when these yet unwashed toilers rise up around us in half-intoxicated jubilation over the triumphs of their own little epoch, well assured that there never was such an age or such a race since the world began. Then we may well pause. It is time to recall the simple eternal facts of life. It is time to affirm the existence of those verities which are wrought into our very structure everywhere and always, and in the face of which the paltry triumphs of an “era” fall back into insignificance.

Yet every man must make his own affirmations. The great questions of life are immortal, only because no one can answer them for his fellows. I claim no general validity for my affirmations. It has been well said that certain books possess a value that is in the ratio of the spiritual vigour of those who use

them, acting as a tonic to the strong, still further dissolving and enfeebling the weakness of the weak. It would be presumptious to claim any potent and peculiar energy for this book; but the observation is one which a reader may do well always to bear in mind. The final value of any book is not in the beliefs which it may give us or take away from us, but in its power to reveal to us our own real selves. If I can stimulate any one in the search for his own proper affirmations, he and I may well rest content. He is welcome to cast aside mine as the idle conclusions of a dreamer lying in the sunshine. Our own affirmations are always the best. Let us but be sure that they are our own, that they have grown up slowly and quietly, fed with the strength of our own blood and brain. Only with the help of such affirmations can we find a staff to comfort us through the valley of life. It is only when they utter affirmations, one has said, that the wands of the angels blossom.

H. E.

*August 1897.*

# CONTENTS.


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| NIETZSCHE | 1 |
| CASANOVA | 86 |
| ZOLA | 131 |
| HUYSMANS | 158 |
| ST. FRANCIS AND OTHERS | 212 |

# AFFIRMATIONS.

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# NIETZSCHE.

FOR some years the name of Friedrich Nietzsche has been the war-cry of opposing factions in Germany. It is not easy to take up a German periodical without finding some trace of the passionate admiration or denunciation which this man has called forth. If we turn to Scandinavia or to France, whither his fame and his work are also penetrating, we find that the same results have followed. And we may expect a similar outburst in England now that the translation of his works has at last begun. At present, however, I know of no attempt to deal with Nietzsche from the British point of view, and that is my excuse for trying to define his personality and influence.[1] I do not come forward as the champion of Nietzschianism or of Anti-Nietzschianism. It appears to me that any human individuality that has strongly aroused the love and hatred of men must be far too complex for absolute condemnation or absolute approval. Apart from praise or blame, which seem here alike impertinent, Nietzsche is without doubt an extraordinarily interesting figure. He is the modern incarnation of that image of intellectual pride which Marlowe created in Faustus. A man who has certainly stood at the finest summit of modern

culture, who has thence made the most determined effort ever made to destroy modern morals, and who now leads a life as near to death as any life outside the grave can be, must needs be a tragic figure. It is a figure full of significance, for it represents one of the greatest spiritual forces which have appeared since Goethe, full of interest also to the psychologist, and surely not without its pathos, perhaps its horror, for the man in the street.

## I.

It has only lately become possible to study Nietzsche's life-history. For a considerable period the Nietzsche-Archiv at Naumburg and Weimar has been accumulating copious materials which have now been utilised by Nietzsche's sister, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, in the production of an authoritative biography. This sister is herself a remarkable person; for many years she lived in close association with her brother, so that she was supposed, though without reason, to have exerted an influence over his thought; then she married Dr. Förster, the founder of the New Germany colony in Paraguay; on his death she returned home to write the history of the colony, and has since devoted herself to the care of her brother and his fame. Only the first two volumes of the *Leben Nietzsche's* have yet appeared, but they enable us to trace his development to his departure from Basel, and throw light on his whole career.

Nietzsche belonged, according to the ancestral tradition (though the name, I am told, is a common one in Wendish Silesia), to a noble Polish family called Nietzky, who on account of strong Protestant convictions abandoned their country and their title during the eighteenth century and settled in

Germany. Notwithstanding the large amount of German blood in his veins, he always regarded himself as essentially a Pole. The Poles seemed to him the best endowed and most knightly of Sclavonic peoples, and he once remarked that it was only by virtue of a strong mixture of Sclavonic blood that the Germans entered the ranks of gifted nations. He termed the Polish Chopin the deliverer of music from German heaviness and stupidity, and when he speaks of another Pole, Copernicus, who reversed the judgment of the whole world, one may divine a reference to what in later years Nietzsche regarded as his own mission. In adult life Nietzsche's keen and strongly marked features were distinctly Polish, and when abroad he was frequently greeted by Poles as a fellow-countryman; at Sorrento, where he once spent a winter, the country people called him Il Polacco.

Like Emerson (to whose writings he was strongly attracted throughout life) and many another strenuous philosophic revolutionary, Nietzsche came of a long race of Christian ministers. On both sides his ancestors were preachers, and from first to last the preacher's fervour was in his own blood. The eldest of three children (of whom one died in infancy), Friedrich Nietzsche was born in 1844 at Röcken, near Lützen, in Saxony. His father—who shortly after his son's birth fell down the parsonage steps, injuring his head so severely that he died within twelve months—is described as a man of noble and poetic nature, with a special talent for music, inherited by his son; though once described by his son as "a tender, lovable, morbid man," he belonged to a large and very healthy family, who mostly lived to an extreme old age, preserving their mental and physical vigour to the last. The Nietzsches were a proud, sincere folk, very clannish,

looking askance at all who were not Nietzsches. Nietzsche's mother, said to be a charming woman and possessed of much physical vigour, was again a clergyman's daughter. The Oehler family, to which she belonged, was also very large, very healthy, and very long-lived; she was only eighteen at her son's birth, and is still alive to care for him in his complete mental decay. I note these facts, which are given with much precision and detail in the biography, because they certainly help us to understand Nietzsche. It is evident that he is no frail hectic flame of a degenerating race. There seems to be no trace of insanity or nervous disorder at any point in the family history, as far back as it is possible to go. On the contrary, he belonged to extremely vigorous stocks, possessing unusual moral and physical force, people of "character." A similar condition of things is not seldom found in the history of genius. In such a case the machine is, as it were, too highly charged with inherited energy, and works at a pressure which ultimately brings it to perdition. All genius must work without rest, it cannot do otherwise; only the most happily constituted genius works without haste.

The sister's account of the children's early life is a very charming part of this record, and one which in the nature of things rarely finds place in a biography. She describes her first memories of the boy's pretty face, his long fair hair, and large, dark, serious eyes. He could not speak until he was nearly three years old, but at four he began to read and write. He was a quiet, rather obstinate child, with fits of passion which he learnt to control at a very early age; his self-control became so great that, as a boy, on more than one occasion he deliberately burnt his hand, to show that Mucius Scævola's act was but a trifling matter.

The widowed mother went with her children to settle at Naumburg on the Saale with her husband's mother, a woman of fine character with views of her own, one of which was that children of all classes should first be brought up together. Little Fritz was therefore sent to the town school, but the experiment was not altogether successful. He was a serious child, fond of solitude, and was called "the little parson" by his comrades. "The fundamental note of his disposition," writes a schoolfellow in after-life, "was a certain melancholy which expressed itself in his whole being." He avoided his fellows and sought beautiful scenery, as he continued to do throughout life. At the same time he was a well-developed, vigorous boy, who loved games of various kinds, especially those of his own invention. But although the children lived to the full the fantastic life of childhood, the sister regretfully confesses that they remained models of propriety. Fritz was "a very pious child; he thought much about religious matters, and was always concerned to put his thoughts into practice." It is curious that, notwithstanding his instinctive sympathy with the Greek spirit and his philological aptitudes, he found Greek specially difficult to learn. At the age of ten appeared his taste for verse-making, and also for music, and he soon began to show that inherited gift for improvisation by which he was always able to hold his audience spellbound. Even as a boy the future moralist made a deep impression on those who knew him, and he reminded one person of the youthful Jesus in the Temple. "We Nietzsches hate lies," an aunt was accustomed to say; in Friedrich sincerity was a very deep-rooted trait, and he exercised an involuntary educational influence on those who came near him.

In 1858 a place was found for him at Pforta, a remarkable school of almost military discipline. Here many of the lines of his future activity were definitely laid down. At an even earlier date, excited by the influence of Humboldt, he had been fascinated by the ideal of universal culture, and at Pforta his intellectual energies began to expand. Here also, in 1859, when a pianoforte edition of *Tristan* was first published, Nietzsche became an enthusiastic Wagnerian, and even to the last *Tristan* remained for him "music *par excellence*." Here, too, he began those philological studies which led some years later to a professorship. He turned to philology, however, as he himself recognised, because of the need he felt to anchor himself to some cool logical study which would not grip his heart like the restless and exciting artistic instincts which had hitherto chiefly moved him. During the latter part of his stay at this very strenuous educational establishment young Nietzsche was a less brilliant pupil than during the earlier part. His own individuality was silently growing beneath the disciplinary pressure which would have dwarfed a less vigorous individuality. His philosophic aptitudes began to develop and take form; he wished also to devote himself to music; and he pined at the confinement, longing for the forest and the woodman's axe. It was the beginning of a long struggle between the impulses of his own self-centred nature and the duties imposed from without, by the school, the university, and, later, his professorship; he always strove to broaden and deepen these duties to the scope of his own nature, but the struggle remained. It was the immediate result of this double strain that, during 1862, strong and healthy as the youth appeared, he began to suffer from headaches and eye-troubles, cured by temporary removal from

the school. He remained extremely short-sighted, and it was only by an absurd error in the routine examination that, some years later, he was passed for military service in the artillery.

In the following year, 1863, Nietzsche met a schoolfellow's sister, an ethereal little Berlin girl, who for a while appealed to "the large, broad-shouldered, shy, rather solemn and stiff youth." To this early experience, which never went beyond poetic *Schwärmerei*, his sister is inclined to trace the origin of Nietzsche's view of women as very fragile, tender little buds. The experience is also interesting because it appears to stand alone in his life. We strike here on an organic abnormality in this congenital philosopher. Nietzsche's attitude was not the crude misogyny of Schopenhauer, who knew women chiefly as women of the streets. Nietzsche knew many of the finest women of his time, and he sometimes speaks with insight and sympathy of the world as it appears to women; but there was clearly nothing in him to answer to any appeal to passion, and his attitude is well summed up in an aphorism of his own *Zarathustra*: "It is better to fall into the hands of a murderer than into the dreams of an ardent woman." "All his life long," his sister writes, "my brother remained completely apart from either great passion or vulgar pleasure. His whole passion lay in the world of knowledge; only very temperate emotions remained over for anything else. In later life he was grieved that he had never attained to *amour passion*, and that every inclination to a feminine personality quickly changed to a tender friendship, however fascinatingly pretty the fair one might be." He would expend much sympathy on unhappy lovers, yet he would shake his head, saying to himself or others: "And all that over a little girl!"

Young Nietzsche left Pforta, in 1863, with the most various and incompatible scientific tastes and interests (always excepting in mathematics, for which he never possessed any aptitude), but, as he himself remarked, none that would fit him for any career. One point in regard to the termination of his school-life is noteworthy: he chose Theognis as the subject of his valedictory dissertation. His meditations on this moralist and aristocrat, so contemptuous of popular rule, may have served as the starting-point of some of his own later views on Greek culture. In 1864 he became a student at Bonn, and the year that followed was of special import in his inner development; he finally threw off the beliefs of his early youth; he discovered his keen critical faculty; and self-contained independence became a visible mark of his character, though always disguised by amiable and courteous manners. At Bonn his life seems to have been fairly happy, though he was by no means a typical German student. He spent much money, but it was chiefly on his artistic tastes—music and the theatre—or on little tours. No one could spend less on eating and drinking; like Goethe and like Heine, he had no love for tobacco or for beer, and he was repelled by the thick, beery good-humour of the German student. People who drink beer and smoke pipes every evening, he always held, were incapable of understanding his philosophy; for they could not possibly possess the clarity of mind needed to grasp any delicate or complex intellectual problem. He returned home from Bonn “a picture of health and strength, broad-shouldered, brown, with rather fair thick hair, and exactly the same height as Goethe;” and then went to continue his studies at Leipzig.

Notwithstanding the youth’s efforts to subdue his

emotional and æsthetic restlessness by cool and hard work, he was clearly tortured by the effort to find a philosophic home for himself in the world. This effort absorbed him all day long, frequently nearly all the night. At this time he chanced to take up on a bookstall a totally unknown work, entitled *Der Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*; in obedience to an unusual impulse he bought the book without consideration, and from that moment began an acquaintance with Schopenhauer which for many years exerted a deep influence on his life. At that time, probably, he could have had no better guide into paths of peace; but even as a student he was a keen critic of Schopenhauer's system, valuing him chiefly as, in opposition to Kant, "the philosopher of a re-awakened classical period, a Germanised Hellenism." Schumann's music and long solitary walks aided in the work of recuperation. A year or two later Nietzsche met the other great god who shared with Schopenhauer his early worship. "I cannot bring my heart to any degree of critical coolness before this music," he wrote, in 1868, after listening to the overture to the *Meistersinger*; "every fibre and nerve in me thrills; it is a long time since I have been so carried away." I quote these words, for we shall, I think, find later that they have their significance. A few weeks afterwards he was invited to meet the master, and thus began a relationship that for Nietzsche was fateful.

Meanwhile his philological studies were bringing him distinction. A lecture on Theognis was pronounced by Ritschl to be the best work by a student of Nietzsche's standing that he had ever met with. Then followed investigations into the sources of Suidas, a lengthy examination *De fontibus Diogenis Laertii*, and palæographic studies in connection with

Terence, Statius, and Orosius. He was now also consciously perfecting his German style, treating language, he remarks, as a musical instrument on which one must be able to improvise, as well as play what is merely learnt by heart. In 1869, when only in his twenty-sixth year, and before he had taken his doctor's degree, he accepted the chair of classical philology at Basel. He was certainly, as he himself said, not a born philologist. He had devoted himself to philology—I wish to insist on this significant point—as a sedative and tonic to his restless energy; in this he was doubtless wise, though his sister seems to suggest that he thereby increased his mental strain. But he had no real vocation for philology, and it is curious that when the Basel chair was offered to him he was proposing to himself to throw aside philology for chemistry. Philologists, he declares again and again, are but factory hands in the service of science. At the best philology is a waste of acuteness, since it merely enables us to state facts which the study of the present would teach us much more swiftly and surely. Thus it was that he instinctively broadened and deepened every philological question he took up, making it a channel for philosophy and morals. With his specifically philological work we are not further concerned.

I have been careful to present the main facts in Nietzsche's early development because they seem to me to throw light on the whole of his later development. So far he had published nothing except in philological journals. In 1871, after he had settled at Basel, appeared his first work, an essay entitled *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, dedicated to Wagner. The conception of this essay was academic, but in Nietzsche's hands the origin of tragedy became merely the text for an exposition of

his own philosophy of art at this period. He traces two art impulses in ancient Greece: one, starting in the phenomena of dreaming, which he associates with Apollo; the other, starting in the phenomena of intoxication, associated with Dionysus, and through singing, music and dithyramb leading up to the lyric. The union of these, which both imply a pessimistic view of life, produced folksong and finally tragedy, which is thus the outcome of Dionysiac music fertilised by Apollonian imagery. Socrates the optimist, with his views concerning virtue as knowledge, vice as ignorance, and his identification of virtue with happiness, led to the decay of tragedy and the triumph of Alexandrian culture, in the net of which the whole modern world is still held. Now, however, German music is producing a new birth of tragedy through Wagner, who has again united music and myth, inaugurated an era of art culture, and built the bridge to a new German heathenism. This remarkable essay produced considerable controversy and much consternation among Nietzsche's philological friends and teachers, who resented—reasonably enough, we may well admit—the subordination of philology to modern philosophy and art, and could not understand the marvellous swan they had hatched. A philologist Nietzsche could never have continued, but this book publicly put an end to any hope of academic advancement. It remains characteristic of Nietzsche's first period, as we may call whatever he wrote before 1876, in its insistence on the primary importance of æsthetic as opposed to intellectual culture; and it is characteristic of his whole work in its grip of the connection between the problems and solutions of Hellenic times and the problems and solutions of the modern world. For Nietzsche the Greek world was

not the model of beautiful mediocrity imagined by Winckelmann and Goethe, nor did it date from the era of rhetorical idealism inaugurated by Plato. The real Hellenic world came earlier, and the true Hellenes were sturdy realists enamoured of life, reverencing all its manifestations and signs, and holding in highest honour that sexual symbol of life which Christianity, with its denial of life, despises. Plato Nietzsche hated; he had wandered from all the fundamental instincts of the Hellene. His childish dialectic can only appeal, Nietzsche said, to those who are ignorant of French masters like Fontenelle. The best cure for Plato, he held, is Thucydides, the last of the old Hellenes who were brave in the face of reality; Plato fled from reality into the ideal and was a Christian before his time. Heraclitus was Nietzsche's favourite Greek thinker, and he liked to point out that the moralists of the Stoa may be traced back to the great philosopher of Ephesus.

*Die Geburt der Tragödie* is the prelude to all Nietzsche's work. He outgrew it, but in one point at least it sounds a note which recurs throughout all his work. He ever regarded the Greek conception of Dionysus as the key to the mystery of life. In *Götzendämmerung*, the last of his works, this is still affirmed, more distinctly than ever. "The fundamental Hellenic instinct," he there wrote, "was first revealed in the Dionysiac mysteries. What was it the Greek assured to himself in these mysteries? Eternal life, the eternal return of life, the future promised and consecrated in the present, the triumphal affirmation of life over death and change, *true* life or immortality through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality. Thus the sexual symbol was to the Greeks the profoundest and most venerable symbol in the whole range of ancient

piety. Every individual act of reproduction, of conception, of birth was a festival awaking the loftiest emotions. The doctrine of the mysteries proclaimed the holiness of pain; the pangs of childbirth sanctified all pain. All growth and development, every promise for the future, is conditioned by pain. To ensure the eternal pleasure of creation, the eternal affirmation of the will to live, the eternity of birth-pangs is absolutely required. All this is signified by the word Dionysus: I know no higher symbolism than this Greek Dionysiac symbolism. In it the deepest instinct of life, of the future of life, the eternity of life, is experienced religiously; generation, the way to life, is regarded as a sacred way. Christianity alone, with its fundamental horror of life, has made sexuality an impure thing, casting filth on the beginning, the very condition, of our life."

Between 1873 and 1876 Nietzsche wrote four essays—on David Strauss, the Use and Abuse of History in relation to Life, Schopenhauer as an Educator, and Richard Wagner—which were published as a series of *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*. The essay on Strauss was written soon after the great war, amid the resulting outburst of flamboyant patriotism and the widely-expressed conviction that the war was a victory of "German culture." Fresh from the world of Greece, Nietzsche pours contempt on that assumption. Culture, he says, is, above all, unity of artistic style in every expression of a people's life. The exuberance of knowledge in which a German glories is neither a necessary means of culture nor a sign of it, being, indeed, more allied to the opposite of culture—to barbarism. It is in this barbarism that the modern German lives, that is to say, in a chaotic mixture of all styles. Look at his

clothing, Nietzsche continues, his houses, his streets, all his manners and customs. They are a turmoil of all styles in which he peacefully lives and moves. Such culture is really a phlegmatic absence of all sense of culture. Largely, also, it is merely a bad imitation of the real and productive culture of France which it is supposed to have conquered in 1870. Let there be no chatter, he concludes, about the triumph of German culture, for at present no real German culture exists. The heroic figures of the German past were not "classics," as some imagine; they were seekers after a genuine German culture, and so regarded themselves. The would-be children of culture in Germany to-day are Philistines without knowing it, and the only unity they have achieved is a methodical barbarism. Nietzsche attacks Strauss by no means as a theologian, but as a typical "culture-Philistine." He was moved to this by the recent publication of *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube*. I can well understand the emotions with which that book filled him, for I, too, read it soon after its publication, and can vividly recall the painful impression made on me by its homely pedestrianism, the dull unimaginativeness of the man who could only compare the world to a piece of machinery, an engine that creaks in the working, a sort of vast Lancashire mill in which we must spend every moment in feverish labour, and for our trouble perhaps be caught between the wheels and cogs. But I was young, and my youthful idealism, eager for some vital and passionate picture of the world, inevitably revolted against so tawdry and mechanical a conception. Nietzsche, then and ever, failed to perceive that there is room, after all, for the modest sturdy bourgeois labourer who, at the end of a hard life in the service of truth, sits down to enjoy his

brown beer and Haydn's quartettes, and to repeat his homely confession of faith in the world as he sees it. Nietzsche failed to realise that Strauss's limitations were essential to the work he had to do, and that he remained a not unworthy follower of those German heroes who were not "classics," but honest seekers after the highest they knew. In this hypertrophied repulsion for the everyday work of the intellectual world we touch on a defect in Nietzsche's temperament which we must regard as fundamental, and which wrought in him at last to wildest issues.

In another of these essays, *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, Nietzsche sets forth his opinions concerning his early master in philosophy. It is a significant indication of the qualities that attracted him to Schopenhauer that he compares him to Montaigne, thus at once revealing his own essential optimism, and the admiration which he then and always felt for the great French masters of wisdom. He regards Schopenhauer as the leader from Kant's caves of critical scepticism to the open sky with its consoling stars. Schopenhauer saw the world as a whole, and was not befooled by the analysis of the colours and canvas wherewith the picture is painted. Kant, in spite of the impulse of his genius, never became a philosopher. "If any one thinks I am thus doing Kant an injustice, he cannot know what a philosopher is, *i.e.*, not merely a great thinker but also a real man;" and he goes on to explain that the mere scholar who is accustomed to let opinions, ideas, and things in books always intervene between him and facts, will never see facts, and will never be a fact to himself; whereas the philosopher must regard himself as the symbol and abbreviation of all the facts of the world. It remained an axiom with Nietzsche that the philosopher must first of all be a "real man."

In this essay, which Nietzsche always preferred to his other early works, he thus for the first time clearly sets forth his conception of the philosopher as a teacher, a liberator, a guide to fine living; Schopenhauer's metaphysical doctrine he casts aside with indifference. Unconsciously, as in late years he seems to have admitted, he was speaking of himself and setting forth his own aims. Thus it is characteristic that he here also first expressed his conception of the value of individuality. Shakespeare had asked:

"Which can say
more
Than this rich praise, that you alone are you?"

But Shakespeare was only addressing a single beloved friend. Nietzsche addresses the same thought to the common "you." "At bottom every man well knows that he can only live one single life in the world, and that never again will so strange a chance shake together into unity such singularly varied elements as he holds: he knows that, but he hides it like a bad conscience." This was a sane and democratic individualism; in later years, as we shall see, it assumed stranger shapes.

At Basel Nietzsche lived in close communion with Wagner and Frau Cosima, who at this time regarded him as the prophet of the music-drama. The essay on Wagner, which starts from the standpoint reached in the previous essays, seems to justify this confidence. There is a deep analogy for those to whom distance is no obscuring cloud, Nietzsche remarks, between Kant and the Eleatics, Schopenhauer and Empedocles, Wagner and Æschylus. "The world has been orientalised long enough, and men now seek to

be hellenised." The Gordian knot has been cut and its strands are fluttering to the ends of the world; we need a series of Anti-Alexanders mighty enough to bring together the scattered threads of life. Wagner is such an Anti-Alexander, a great astringent force in the world. For "it is not possible to present the highest and purest operations of dramatic art, and not therewith to renew morals and the state, education and affairs." Bayreuth is the sacred consecration on the morning of battle. "The battles which art brings before us are a simplification of the actual battles of life; its problems are an abbreviation of the endlessly involved reckoning of human action and aspiration. But herein lies the greatness and value of art, that it calls forth the appearance of a simpler world, a shorter solution of the problems of life. No one who suffers in life can dispense with that appearance, just as no one can dispense with sleep." Wagner has simplified the world, Nietzsche continues; he has related music to life, the drama to music; he has intensified the visible things of the world, and made the audible visible. Just as Goethe found in poetry an expression for the painter's vocation he had missed, so Wagner utilised in music his dramatic instinct. And Nietzsche further notes the democratic nature of Wagner's art, so strenuously warm and bright as to reach even the lowliest in spirit. Wagner takes off the stigma that clings to the word "common," and brings to all the means of attaining spiritual freedom. "For," says Nietzsche, "whosoever will be free, must make himself free; freedom is no fairy's gift to fall into any man's lap." Such are the leading thoughts in an essay which remains an interesting philosophic appreciation of the place of Wagner's art in the modern world; yet one may well admit that it is often over-strained,

with a strain that expresses the obscure struggle of nascent antagonism.

It is, indeed, *Wagner in Bayreuth* which brings to an end Nietzsche's first period, and leads up to the crash which inaugurated his later period. Hitherto Nietzsche's work was unquestionably sane both in substance and form. No doubt it had called forth much criticism; work so vigorous, sincere, and independent could not fail to arouse hostility. But as we look back to-day, these fine essays represent, with much youthful enthusiasm, the best that was known and thought in Germany a quarter of a century ago. Nietzsche's opinions on Wagner and Schopenhauer, on individualism and democracy, the significance of early Hellenism for moderns, the danger of an excessive historical sense, the conception of culture less as a striving after intellectual knowledge than as that which arouses within us the philosopher, the artist, and the saint—all these ideas, wild as some of them seemed to Nietzsche's German contemporaries, are the ideas which have now largely permeated European culture. The same cannot be said of his later ideas.

It was at the first Bayreuth festival in 1876 that this chapter in Nietzsche's life was finally closed. His profound admiration for Wagner, his intimate intercourse with the greatest figure in the German world of art, had hitherto been the chief fact in his life. All his ideals of life and his hopes for the future had grown up around the figure of Wagner, who seemed the leader into a new Promised Land. During the previous two years, however, Nietzsche had seen little of Wagner, who had left Switzerland, and he had been unable to realise either his own development or Wagner's. Whatever enthusiasm

Nietzsche may have felt in early life for a return to German heathenism, he was yet by race and training and taste by no means allied to primitive Germanism; it was towards Greece and towards France that his conception of national culture really drew him. Wagner was far more profoundly Teutonic, and in the Nibelung cycle, which Nietzsche was about to witness for the first time on the stage, Wagner had incarnated the spirit of Teutonic heathenism with an overwhelming barbaric energy which, as Nietzsche could now realise, was utterly alien to his own most native instincts. Thus it was that Bayreuth marked the crisis of a subtle but profound realisation, the most intense self-realisation he had yet attained.

The whole history of this Wagner episode in Nietzsche's life is full of interest. The circumstantial narrative in the second volume of the *Leben Nietzsche's* renders it clear at every point, and reveals a tragedy which has its significance for the study of genius generally. Nietzsche, it must be remembered, was more than thirty years younger than Wagner. He was younger, and also he was less corrupted by the world than Wagner. The great artist of the music-drama possessed, or had acquired, a practical good sense in all that concerned the realisation of his own mighty projects such as always marks the greatest and most successful of the world's supreme artists. Like Shakespeare, he knew that the dyer's hand must ever be a little subdued to what it works in, if the radiant beauty of his stuffs is ever to be perfectly achieved. But Nietzsche could never endure any fleck on his hand; he shrank with horror from every soiling contact; he was an artist who regarded life itself as the highest art. He could never have carried through the rough task of dying the gorgeous

garments of a narrower but more perfectly attainable art. Nietzsche's idealised admiration for Wagner was complicated, after his appointment to the Basel chair, by a deep personal friendship for the Master, the chief friendship of his life. And his friendships were deeper than those of most; although they show no traces of sexual tincture they were hypertrophied by the defective sexuality of the man who always regarded friendship as a more massive and poignant emotion than love. That there were on either side any petty faults to cause a rift in friendship there is no reason whatever to believe. Nietzsche was above such, and Wagner's friendship was always hearty until he realised that Nietzsche was no longer his disciple, and then he dropped him, silently, as a workman drops a useless tool. In addition it must be noted that Nietzsche was probably at this time often over-strained, almost hysterical,—at least so, we may gather, he impressed Wagner, who urged him to marry a rich wife and to travel,—and he was still afflicted by a disorder which not even genius can escape in youth, he was still something of what we vulgarly call a "prig"; he had not yet quite outgrown "the youthful Jesus in the Temple." "Your brother with his air of delicate distinction is a most uncomfortable fellow," said Wagner to Frau Förster-Nietzsche; "one can always see what he is thinking; sometimes he is quite embarrassed at my jokes—and then I crack them more madly than ever." Wagner's jokes, it appears, were of a homely and plebeian sort, not appealing to one who lived naturally and habitually in an atmosphere of keen intellectual activity. Bearing all this in mind, one can imagine the impression made upon Nietzsche by the inaugural festival at Bayreuth for which he had just written an impassioned and yet philosophic

prologue. Wagner was absorbed in using all his considerable powers of managing men in finally vanquishing the difficulties in his way. To any one who could see the festival from the inside, as Nietzsche was able to see it, there were all the inevitable squabbles and scandals and comic *contretemps* which must always mark the inception of a great undertaking, but which to-day are hidden from us, pilgrims from many lands, as we ascend to that hillside structure which is the chief living shrine of art in Europe. And the people who were crowding in to this "sacred consecration on the morning of battle" were aristocrats and plutocrats—bejewelled, corpulent, commonplace—headed by the old Emperor, anxious to do his duty, decorously joining in the applause as he whispered "Horrible! horrible!" to his *aide-de-camp*, and hurrying away as quickly as possible to the military manœuvres. There was more than enough here to make his own just issued battle-cry seem farcical to Nietzsche. All was conspiring to one end. The conception of the sanctity of Bayreuth, his personal reverence for Wagner were slipping away together, and at the same time he was forced to realise that the barbaric Germanism of this overpowering Nibelung music was not the music for him. His development would inevitably have carried him away from Wagner, but the festival brought on the crisis with a sudden clash. Nietzsche had finally conquered the mightiest of his false ideals, and stood for ever after free and independent of all his early gods; but the wounds of that victory were never quite closed to the last: a completely serene and harmonious conception of things, so far as Wagner was concerned, Nietzsche never attained.

It may well be that the change was also physical. The excitement of the festival precipitated an organic

catastrophe towards which he had long been tending. His sister finds the original source of this catastrophe in the war of 1870. He desired to serve his country as a combatant, but the University would only allow him leave to attend to the wounded. The physical and emotional over-tension involved by his constant care of six young wounded men culminated in a severe illness, which led on to a never-ending train of symptoms—eye-troubles, dyspepsia, headache, insomnia—which were perhaps aggravated by the reckless use of drugs. I have already noted passages which indicate that he was himself aware of a consuming flame within, and that from time to time he made efforts to check its ravages. That it was this internal flame which largely produced the breakdown is shown by the narrative of Nietzsche's friend, Dr. Kretzer, who was with him at Bayreuth. It was evident he was seriously ill, Kretzer tells us, utterly changed and broken down. His eye-troubles were associated, if not with actual brain disease, at all events with a high degree of neurasthenia.[2] At Bayreuth, Nietzsche was forced to realise the peril of his position as he had never realised it before. He could no longer disguise from himself that he must break with all the passionate interests of his past. It was an essential measure of hygiene, almost a surgical operation. This is indeed how he has himself put the matter. In the preface to *Der Fall Wagner*, he said that it had been to him a necessary self-discipline to take part against all that was morbid within himself, against Wagner, against Schopenhauer, against all the impassioning interests of modern life, and to view the world, so far as possible, with the philosopher's eyes, from an immense height. And again he speaks of Wagner's art as a beaker of ecstasy so subtle and profound that it

acts like poison and leaves no remedy at last but flight from the siren's cave. Nietzsche was henceforth in the position of a gouty subject who is forced to abandon port wine and straightway becomes an apostle of total abstinence. The remedy seems to have been fairly successful. But the disease was in his bones. Impassioning interests that were far more subtly poisonous slowly developed within him, and twelve years later flight had become impossible, even if he was still able to realise the need for fight.

Nietzsche broke very thoroughly with his past, yet the break has been exaggerated, and he himself often helped to exaggerate it. He was in the position of a beleaguered city which has been forced to abandon its outer walls and concentrate itself in the citadel; and however it may have been in ancient warfare, in spiritual affairs such a state of things involves an offensive attitude towards the former line of defence. The positions we have abandoned constitute a danger to the positions we have taken up. Many of the world's fiercest persecutors have but persecuted their old selves, and there seems to be psychological necessity for such an attitude. Yet a careful study of Nietzsche's earlier activity reveals many germs of later developments. The critical attitude towards conventional morality, the individualism, the optimism, the ideal of heroism, which dominate his later thought, exist as germs in his earlier work. Even the flagrant contrast between *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* and *Der Fall Wagner* was the outcome of a gradual development. In the earlier essay Nietzsche had justly pointed out that Wagner's instincts were fundamentally dramatic. As years went on he brooded over this idea; the nimble and lambent wit of his later days played around it until Wagner became a mere actor in his work and in his

life, a rhetorician, an incarnate falsehood, the personification of latter-day decadence, the Victor Hugo of music, the Bernini of music, the modern Cagliostro. At the same time he admits that Wagner represents the modern spirit, and that it is reasonable for a musician to say that though he hates Wagner he can tolerate no other music. The fact is, one may well repeat, that Nietzsche was not Teuton enough to abide for ever with Wagner. He compares him contemptuously with Hegel, cloud-compellers both, masters of German mists and German mysticism, worshippers of Wotan, the god of bad weather, the god of the Germans. “How could they miss what we, we Halcyonians, miss in Wagner—*la gaya scienza*, the light feet, wit, fire, grace, strong logic, the dance of the stars, arrogant intellectuality, the quivering light of the south, the smooth sea—perfection?” It was scarcely, however, the Halcyonian in Nietzsche that stood between him and Wagner. That is well shown by his attitude towards *Parsifal*. Whatever we may think of the ideas embodied in *Parsifal*, it may yet seem to us the most solemn, the most graciously calm and beautiful spectacle that has ever been fitly set to music. In Nietzsche the thinker and the moralist were so much stronger than the artist that he could see nothing here but bad psychology, bad thinking, and bad religion.

The rebellion against Wagner was inevitable. It is evident that Nietzsche had not gained complete mastery of his own personality in his earlier work. It is brilliant, full of fine perceptions and critical insight, but as a personal utterance incomplete. It renders the best ideas of the time, not the best ideas that Nietzsche could contribute to the time. The shock of 1876 may have been a step towards the disintegration of his intellect, but it was also a rally,

a step towards a higher self-realisation. Nietzsche had no genuine affinity with Schopenhauer or with Wagner, though they were helpful to his development; he was no pessimist, he was no democrat. As he himself said, “I understood the philosophic pessimism of the nineteenth century as the symptom of a finer strength of thought, a more victorious fulness of life. In the same way Wagner’s music signified to me the expression of a Dionysiac mightiness of soul in which I seemed to hear, as in an earthquake, the upheaval of the primitive powers of life, after age-long repression.” Now he only needed relief, “golden, tender, oily melodies,” to soothe the leaden weight of life, and these he found in *Carmen*.

Any discussion of the merits of the question as between Wagner and Bizet, the earlier and the later Nietzsche, seems to me out of place, though much has been made of it by those who delight to see a giant turn and rend himself. Nietzsche himself said he was writing for psychologists, and it is not unfair to add that it is less “Wagner’s case” that he presents to us than “Nietzsche’s case.” As to the merits of the case, we may alike admit that Nietzsche’s enthusiasm for Wagner was not excessive, and that the pleasant things he said of *Carmen* are fully justified; we may address both the early and the late Nietzsche in the words habitually used by the landlord of the “Rainbow”: “You’re both wrong and you’re both right, as I allus says.” Most of the mighty quarrels that have sent men to battle and the stake might have been appeased had each side recognised that both were right in their affirmations, both wrong in their denials.

Nietzsche occupied his chair at Basel for some

years longer; in 1880 his health forced him to resign and he was liberally pensioned. As a professor he treated the most difficult questions of Greek study, and devoted his chief attention to his best pupils, who in their turn adored him. Basel is an admirable residence for a cosmopolitan thinker; it was easy for Nietzsche to keep in touch with all that went on from Paris to St. Petersburg. He was also on terms of more or less intimate friendship with the finest spirits in Switzerland, with Keller the novelist, Böcklin the painter, Burckhardt the historian. We are told that he was a man of great personal charm in social intercourse. But his associates at Basel never suspected that in this courteous and amiable professor was stored up an explosive energy which would one day be felt in every civilised land. With pen in hand his criticism of life was unflinching, his sincerity arrogant; when the pen was dropped he became modest, reserved, almost timorous.

The work he produced between 1877 and 1882 seems to me to represent the maturity of his genius. It includes *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, *Morgenröthe*, and *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*. In form all these volumes belong to *pensée* literature. They deal with art, with religion, with morals and philosophy, with the relation of all these to life. Nietzsche shows himself in these *pensées* above all a freethinker, emancipated from every law save that of sincerity, wide-ranging, serious, penetrative, often impassioned, as yet always able to follow his own ideal of self-restraint.

After leaving Basel he spent the following nine years chiefly at health resorts and in travelling. We find him at Sorrento, Venice, Genoa, Turin, Sils Maria, as well as at Leipzig. Doubtless his fresh and

poignant *pensées* are largely the outcome of strenuous solitary walks in the Engadine or among the Italian lakes. We may assume that during most of these years he was fighting, on the whole successfully fighting, for mental health. Yet passages that occur throughout his books seem to suggest that his thoughts may have sometimes turned to the goal towards which he was tending. It is a mistake, he points out, to suppose that insanity is always the symptom of a degenerating culture, although to nod towards the asylum is a convenient modern way of slaying spiritual tyrants; it is in primitive and developing stages of culture that insanity has played its chief part; only by virtue of what seemed to be the "Divine" turbulence of insanity and epilepsy could any new moral law make progress among early cultures. Just as for us there seems a little madness in all genius, so for them there seemed a little genius in all madness; sorcerers and saints agonised in solitude and abstinence for some gleam of madness which would bring them faith in themselves and openly justify their mission.

What may perhaps be called Nietzsche's third period began in 1883 with *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the most extraordinary of all his works, mystical and oracular in form, but not mystical in substance. Zarathustra has only a distant relationship to his prototype Zoroaster, though Nietzsche had a natural sympathy with the symbolism of fire and water, with the reverence for light and purity, which mark the rites associated with the name of the Bactrian prophet; he has here allowed himself to set forth his own ideas and ideals in the free and oracular manner of all ancient scriptures, and is thus enabled to present his visions in a concrete form. *Zarathustra*, for the first and last time, gave scope to the artist

within Nietzsche, and with all its extravagance and imperfection it must remain for good or evil his most personal utterance. It was followed by *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, *Der Fall Wagner*, and *Götzendämmerung*. It is during this period that we trace the growth of the magnification of his own personal mission which finally became a sort of megalomania. ("I have given to men the deepest book they possess, my *Zarathustra*," he wrote towards the end.) In form the books of this period are sometimes less fragmentary than those of the second period; in substance they are marked by their emphatic, often extravagant, almost reckless insistence on certain views of morality. If in the first period he was an apostle of culture, in the second a freethinker, pronouncing judgment on all things in heaven and earth, he was now exclusively a moralist, or, as he would prefer to say, an immoralist. It was during this period that he worked out his "master morality"—the duty to be strong—in opposition to the "slave morality" of Christianity, with its glorification of weakness and pity, and that he consistently sought to analyse and destroy the traditional conceptions of good and evil on which our current morality rests. The last work which he planned, but never completed, was a re-valuation of all values, *Umwerthung aller Werthe*, which would have been his final indictment of the modern world, and the full statement of his own immoralism and Dionysiac philosophy.

It is sometimes said that Nietzsche's mastery of his thought and style was increasing up to the last. This I can scarcely admit, even as regards style. No doubt there is at the best a light and swift vigour of movement in these last writings which before he had never attained. He can pour out now a shimmering

stream of golden phrases with which he has intoxicated himself, and tries to intoxicate us. We may lend ourselves to the charm, but it has no enduring hold. This master of gay or bitter invective no longer possesses the keenly reasoned and piercing insight of the earlier Nietzsche. We feel that he has become the victim of obsessions which drive him like a leaf before the wind, and all his exuberant wit is unsubstantial and pathetic as that of Falstaff. The devouring flame has at length eaten the core out of the man and his style, leaving only this coruscating shell. And at a touch even this thin shell collapsed into smouldering embers.

From a child Nietzsche was subject to strangely prophetic dreams. In a dream which, when a boy, he put into literary form, he tells how he seemed to be travelling forward amid a glorious landscape, while carolling larks ascended to the clouds, and his whole life seemed to stretch before him in a vista of happy years; “and suddenly a shrill cry reached our ears; it came from the neighbouring lunatic asylum.” Even in 1876 his friends began to see that Nietzsche attached extraordinary importance to his own work. After he wrote *Zarathustra*, this self-exaltation increased, and began to find expression in his work. Latterly, it is said, he came to regard himself as the incarnation of the genius of humanity. It has always been found a terrible matter to war with the moral system of one’s age; it will have its revenge, one way or another, from within or from without, whatever happens after. Nietzsche strove for nothing less than to remodel the moral world after his own heart’s desire, and his brain was perishing of exhaustion in the immense effort. In 1889—at the moment when his work at last began to attract attention—he became hopelessly insane. A period of severe hallucinatory

delirium led on to complete dementia, and he passes beyond our sight.

## II.

Nietzsche was by temperament a philosopher after the manner of the Greeks. In other words, philosophy was not to him, as to the average modern philosopher, a matter of books and the study, but a life to be lived. It seemed to him to have much less concern with "truth" than with the essentials of fine living. He loved travel and movement, he loved scenery, he loved cities and the spectacle of men; above all, he loved solitude. The solitude of cities drew him strongly; he envied Heraclitus his desert study amid the porticoes and peristyles of the immense temple of Diana. He had, however, his own favourite place of work, to which he often alludes, the Piazza di San Marco at Venice, amid the doves, in front of the strange and beautiful structure which he "loved, feared, and envied;" and here in the spring, between ten o'clock and midday, he found his best philosophic laboratory.

It was in Italy that Nietzsche seems to have found himself most at home, although there are no signs that he felt any special sympathy with the Italians, that is to say in later than Renaissance days. For the most part he possessed very decided sympathies and antipathies. His antipathy to his own Germans lay in the nature of things. Every prophet's message is primarily directed to his own people. And Nietzsche was unsparing in his keen criticism of the Germans. He tells somewhere with a certain humour how people abroad would ask him if Germany had produced of late no great thinker or artist, no really good book, and how with the courage of despair he

would at last reply, “Yes, Bismarck!” Nietzsche was willing enough to recognise the kind of virtue personified in Bismarck. But with that recognition nearly all was said in favour of Germany that Nietzsche had to say. There is little in the German spirit that answered to his demands. He admired clearness, analytic precision, and highly organised intelligence, light and alert. He saw no sufficient reason why profundity should lack a fine superficies, nor why strength should be ungainly. His instinctive comparison for a good thinker was always a good dancer. As a child he had been struck by seeing a rope-dancer, and throughout life dancing seemed to him the image of the finest culture, supple to bend, strong to retain its own equilibrium, an exercise demanding the highest training and energy of all the muscles of a well-knit organism. But the indubitable intellectual virtues of the bulky and plodding German are scarcely those which can well be symbolised by an Otero or a Caicedo. “There is too much beer in the German intellect,” Nietzsche said. For the last ten centuries Germany has wilfully stultified herself; “nowhere else has there been so vicious a misuse of the two great European narcotics, alcohol and Christianity,” to which he was inclined to add music. (“The theatre and music,” he remarked in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, “are the haschisch and betel of Europeans, and the history of the so-called higher culture is largely the history of narcotics.”) “Germans regard bad writing,” he said, “as a national privilege; they do not write prose as one works at a statue, they only improvise.” Even “German virtue”—and this was the unkindest cut of all—had its origin in eighteenth century France, as its early preachers, such as Kant and Schiller, fully recognised. Thus it happens that the German has no

perceptions—coupling his Goethe with a Schiller, and his Schopenhauer with a Hartmann—and no tact, "no finger for *nuances*," his fingers are all claws. The few persons of high culture whom he had met in Germany, he noted towards the end of his life, and especially Frau Cosima Wagner, were all of French origin. Nietzsche regarded it as merely an accident that he was himself born in Germany, just as it was merely an accident that Heine the Jew, and Schopenhauer the Dutchman, were born there. Yet, as I have already hinted, we may take these utterances too seriously. There are passages in his works—though we meet them rarely—which show that Nietzsche recognised and admired the elemental energy, the depth and the contradictions in the German character; he attributed them largely to mixture of races.

Nietzsche was not much attracted to the English. It is true that he names Landor as one of the four masters of prose this century has produced, while another of these is Emerson, with whom he had genuine affinity, although his own intellect was keener and more passionate, with less sunny serenity. For Shakespeare, also, his admiration was deep. And when he had outgrown his early enthusiasm for Schopenhauer, the fine qualities which he still recognised in that thinker—his concreteness, lucidity, reasonableness—seemed to him English. He was usually less flattering towards English thought. Darwinism, for instance, he thought, savoured too much of the population question, and was invented by English men of science who were oppressed by the problems of poverty. The struggle for existence, he said, is only an exception in nature; it is exuberance, an even reckless superfluity, which rules. For English

philosophic thought generally he had little but contempt. J. S. Mill was one of his “impossibilities”; the English and French sociologists of to-day, he said, have only known degenerating types of society, devoid of organising force, and they take their own debased instincts as the standard of social codes in general. Modern democracy, modern utilitarianism, are largely of English manufacture, and he came at last to hate them both. During the past century, he asserted, they have reduced the whole spiritual currency of Europe to a dull plebeian level, and they are the chief causes of European vulgarity. It is the English, he also asserted—George Eliot, for instance—who, while abolishing Christian belief, have sought to bolster up the moral system which was created by Christianity, and which must necessarily fall with it. It is, moreover, the English, who with this democratic and utilitarian plebeianism have seduced and perverted the fine genius of France.

Just as we owe to England the vulgarity which threatens to overspread Europe, so to France we owe the conception of a habit of nobility, in every best sense of the word. On that point Nietzsche’s opinion never wavered. The present subjection of the French spirit to this damnable Anglo-mania, he declared, must never lead us to forget the ardent and passionate energy, the intellectual distinction, which belonged to the France of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[3] The French, as Nietzsche always held, are the one modern European nation which may be compared with the Greeks. In *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* he names six French writers—Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Fontenelle (in the *Dialogues des Morts*), Vauvenarges, Chamfort—who bring us nearer to Greek antiquity than any other group of modern authors, and contain

more real thought than all the books of the German philosophers put together. The only French writer of the present century for whom he cared much (putting aside Mérimée) was Stendhal, who possesses some of the characters of the earlier group. The French, he points out, are the most Christian of all nations, and have produced the greatest saints. He enumerates Pascal ("the first among Christians, who was able to unite fervour, intellect, and candour;—think of what that means!"), Fénelon, Mme. de Guyon, De Rancé, the founder of the Trappists who have flourished nowhere but in France, the Huguenots, Port-Royal—truly, he exclaims, the great French freethinkers encountered foemen worthy of their steel! The land which produced the most perfect types of Anti-Christianity produced also the most perfect types of Christianity. He defends, also, that seeming superficiality which in a great Frenchman, he says, is but the natural epidermis of a rich and deep nature, while a great German's profundity is too often strangely bottled up from the light in a dark and contorted phial.

I have briefly stated Nietzsche's feeling as regards each of the three chief European peoples, because we are thus led up to the central points of his philosophy —his attitude towards modern religion and his attitude towards modern morals. We are often apt to regard these matters as of little practical importance; we think it the reasonable duty of practical social politics to attend to the immediate questions in hand, and leave these wider questions to settle themselves. Rightly or wrongly, that was not how Nietzsche looked at the matter. He was too much of a philosopher, he had too keen a sense of the vital relation of things, to be content with the policy of tinkering society, wherever it seems to need mending

most badly, avoiding any reference to the whole. That is our English method, and no doubt it is a very sane and safe method, but, as we have seen, Nietzsche was not in sympathy with English methods. His whole significance lies in the thorough and passionate analysis with which he sought to dissect and to dissolve, first, “German culture,” then Christianity, and lastly, modern morals, with all that these involve.

It is scarcely necessary to point out, that though Nietzsche rejoiced in the title of freethinker, he can by no means be confounded with the ordinary secularist. He is not bent on destroying religion from any anæsthesia of the religious sense, or even in order to set up some religion of science which is practically no religion at all. He is thus on different ground from the great freethinkers of France, and to some extent of England. Nietzsche was himself of the stuff of which great religious teachers are made, of the race of apostles. So when he writes of the founder of Christianity and the great Christian types, it is often with a poignant sympathy which the secularist can never know; and if his knife seems keen and cruel, it is not the easy indifferent cruelty of the pachydermatous scoffer. When he analyses the souls of these men and the impulses which have moved them, he knows with what he is dealing: he is analysing his own soul.

A mystic Nietzsche certainly was not; he had no moods of joyous resignation. It is chiefly the religious ecstasy of active moral energy that he was at one with. The sword of the spirit is his weapon rather than the merely defensive breastplate of faith. St. Paul is the consummate type of such religious forces, and whatever Nietzsche wrote of that apostle

—the inventor of Christianity, as he truly calls him—is peculiarly interesting. He hates him, indeed, but even his hatred thrills with a tone of intimate sympathy. It is thus in a remarkable passage in *Morgenröthe*, where he tells briefly the history and struggles of that importunate soul, so superstitious and yet so shrewd, without whom there would have been no Christianity. He describes the self-torture of the neurotic, sensual, refined "Jewish Pascal," who flagellated himself with the law that he came to hate with the hatred of one who had a genius for hatred; who in one dazzling flash of illumination realised that Jesus by accomplishing the law had annihilated it, and so furnished him with the instrument he desired to wreak his passionate hatred on the law, and to revel in the freedom of his joy. Nietzsche possesses a natural insight in probing the wounds of self-torturing souls. He excels also in describing the effects of extreme pain in chasing away the mists from life, in showing to a man his own naked personality, in bringing us face to face with the cold and terrible fact. It is thus that, coupling the greatest figure in history with the greatest figure in fiction, he compares the pathetic utterance of Jesus on the cross —"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—with the disillusionment of the dying Don Quixote. Of Jesus himself he speaks no harsh word, but he regarded the atmosphere of Roman decay and languor—though very favourable for the production of fine personalities—as ill-adapted to the development of a great religion. The Gospels lead us into the atmosphere of a Russian novel, he remarks in one of his last writings, *Der Antichrist*, an atmosphere in which the figure of Jesus had to be coarsened to be understood; it became moulded in men's minds by memories of more familiar types—

prophet, Messiah, wonder-worker, judge; the real man they could not even see. “It must ever be a matter for regret that no Dostoievsky lived in the neighbourhood of this most interesting *décadent*, I mean some one who could understand the enthralling charm of just this mixture of the sublime, the morbid, and the childlike.” Jesus, he continues, never denied the world, the state, culture, work; he simply never knew or realised their existence; his own inner experience—“life,” “light,” “truth”—was all in all to him. The only realities to him were inner realities, so living that they make one feel “in Heaven” and “eternal”; this it was to be “saved.” And Nietzsche notes, as so many have noted before him, that the fact that men should bow the knee in Christ’s name to the very opposite of all these things, and consecrate in the “Church” all that he threw behind him, is an insoluble example of historical irony. “Strictly speaking, there has only been one Christian, and he died on the cross. The Gospel *died* on the cross.”

There may seem a savour of contempt in the allusion to Jesus as an “interesting *décadent*,” and undoubtedly there is in *Der Antichrist* a passionate bitterness which is not found in Nietzsche’s earlier books. But he habitually used the word *décadent* in a somewhat extended and peculiar sense. The *décadent*, as Nietzsche understood him, was the product of an age in which virility was dead and weakness was sanctified; it was so with the Buddhist as well as with the Christian, they both owe their origin and their progress to “some monstrous disease of will.” They sprang up among creatures who craved for some “Thou shalt,” and who were apt only for that one form of energy which the weak possess, fanaticism. By an instinct which may be regarded as sound by

those who do not accept his disparagement of either, Nietzsche always coupled the Christian and the anarchist; to him they were both products of decadence. Both wish to revenge their own discomfort on this present world, he asserted, the anarchist immediately, the Christian at the last day. Instead of feeling, "*I* am worth nothing," the *décadent* says, "*Life* is worth nothing,"—a terribly contagious state of mind which has covered the world with the vitality of a tropical jungle. It cannot be too often repeated, Nietzsche continues, that Christianity was born of the decay of antiquity, and on the degenerate people of that time it worked like a soothing balm; their eyes and ears were sealed by age and they could no longer understand Epicurus and Epictetus. At such a time purity and beneficence, large promises of future life, worked sweetly and wholesomely. But for fresh young barbarians Christianity is poison. It produces a fundamental enfeeblement of such heroic, childlike, and animal natures as the ancient Germans, and to that enfeeblement, indeed, we owe the revival of classic culture; so that the conclusion of the whole matter is here, as ever, Nietzsche remarks, that "it is impossible to say whether, in the language of Christianity, God owes more thanks to the Devil, or the Devil to God, for the way in which things have come about." But in the interaction of the classic spirit and the Christian spirit, Nietzsche's own instincts were not on the side of Christianity, and as the years went on he expresses himself in ever more unmeasured language. He could not take up the *Imitation of Christ*—the very word "imitation" being, as indeed Michelet had said before, the whole of Christianity—without physical repugnance. And in the *Götzendämmerung* he compares the Bible with the

Laws of Manu (though at the same time asserting that it is a sin to name the two books in the same breath): "The *sun* lies on the whole book. All those things on which Christianity vents its bottomless vulgarity—procreation, for example, woman, marriage—are here handled earnestly and reverently, with love and trust. I know no book in which so many tender and gracious things are said about women as in the Laws of Manu." Again in *Der Antichrist*—which represents, I repeat, the unbalanced judgments of his last period—he tells how he turns from Paul with delight to Petronius, a book of which it can be said *è tutto festo*, "immortally sound, immortally serene." In the whole New Testament, he adds, there is only one figure we can genuinely honour—that of Pilate.

On the whole, Nietzsche's attitude towards Christianity was one of repulsion and antagonism. At first he appears indifferent, then he becomes calmly judicial, finally he is bitterly hostile. He admits that Christianity possesses the virtues of a cunningly concocted narcotic to soothe the leaden griefs and depressions of men whose souls are physiologically weak. But from first to last there is no sign of any genuine personal sympathy with the religion of the poor in spirit. Epicureanism, the pagan doctrine of salvation, had in it an element of Greek energy, but the Christian doctrine of salvation, he declares, raises its sublime development of hedonism on a thoroughly morbid foundation. Christianity hates the body; the first act of Christian triumph over the Moors, he recalls, was to close the public baths which they had everywhere erected. "With its contempt for the body Christianity was the greatest misfortune that ever befell humanity." And at the end of *Der Antichrist* he sums up his concentrated

hatred: “I *condemn* Christianity; I raise against the Christian Church the most terrible accusation that any accuser has ever uttered. It is to me the most profound of all thinkable corruptions.”

It is scarcely necessary to add that Nietzsche’s condemnation of Christianity extended to the Christian God. He even went so far as to assert that it was the development of Christian morality itself —“the father-confessor sensitiveness of the Christian conscience translated and sublimed into a scientific conscience”—which had finally conquered the Christian God. He held that polytheism had played an important part in the evolution of culture. Gods, heroes, supernatural beings generally, were inestimable schoolmasters to bring us to the sovereignty of the individual. Polytheism opened up divine horizons of freedom to humanity. “Ye shall be as gods.” But it has not been so with monotheism. The doctrine of a single God, in whose presence all others were false gods, favours stagnation and unity of type; monotheism has thus perhaps constituted “the greatest danger which humanity has had to meet in past ages.” Nor are we yet freed from its influence. “For centuries after Buddha died men showed his shadow in a cave—a vast terrible shadow. God is dead: but thousands of years hence there will probably be caves in which his shadow may yet be seen. And we—we must go on fighting that shadow!” How deeply rooted Nietzsche believed faith in a god to be is shown by the fantastic conclusion to *Zarathustra*. A strange collection of *Uebermenschen*—the men of the future—are gathered together in Zarathustra’s cave: two kings, the last of the popes—thrown out of work by the death of God —and many miscellaneous creatures, including a donkey. As Zarathustra returns to his cave he hears

the sound of prayer and smells the odour of incense; on entering he finds the *Uebermenschen* on their knees intoning an extraordinary litany to the donkey, who has "created us all in his own image."

In his opposition to the Christian faith and the Christian God, Nietzsche by no means stands alone, however independent he may have been in the method and standpoint of his attack. But in his opposition to Christian morality he was more radically original. There is a very general tendency among those who reject Christian theology to shore up the superstructure of Christian morality which rests on that theology. George Eliot, in her writings at all events, has been an eloquent and distinguished advocate of this process; Mr. Myers, in an oft-quoted passage, has described with considerable melodramatic vigour the "sibyl in the gloom" of the Trinity Fellows' Garden at Cambridge, who withdrew God and Immortality from his grasp, but, to his consternation, told him to go on obeying Duty. What George Eliot proposed was one of those compromises so dear to our British minds. Nietzsche would none of it. Hence his contemptuous treatment of George Eliot, of J. S. Mill, of Herbert Spencer, and so many more of our favourite intellectual heroes who have striven to preserve Christian morality while denying Christian theology. Nietzsche regarded our current moral ideals, whether formulated by bishops or by anarchists, as alike founded on a Christian basis, and when that foundation is sapped they cannot stand.

The motive of modern morality is pity, its principle is altruistic, its motto is "Love your neighbour as yourself," its ideal self-abnegation, its end the greatest good of the greatest number. All these things were abhorrent to Nietzsche, or so far as

he accepted them, it was in forms which gave them new values. Modern morality, he said, is founded on an extravagant dread of pain, in ourselves primarily, secondarily in others. Sympathy is fellow-suffering; to love one's neighbour as oneself is to dread his pain as we dread our own pain. The religion of love is built upon the fear of pain. "On n'est bon que par la pitié;" the acceptance of that doctrine Nietzsche considers the chief outcome of Christianity, although, he thinks, not essential to Christianity, which rested on the egoistic basis of personal salvation: "One thing is needful." But it remains the most important by-product of Christianity, and has ever been gaining strength. Spinoza and Kant stood firmly outside the stream, but the French freethinkers, from Voltaire onwards, were not to be outdone in this direction by Christians, while Comte with his "Vivre pour autrui" even out-Christianised Christianity, and Schopenhauer in Germany, J. S. Mill in England, carried on the same doctrine. "The great question of life," said Benjamin Constant in *Adolphe*—and it is a saying that our finest emotions are quick to echo—"is the pain that we cause."

Both the sympathetic man and the unsympathetic man, Nietzsche argues, are egoists. But the unsympathetic man he held to be a more admirable kind of egoist. It is best to win the strength that comes of experience and suffering, and to allow others also to play their own cards and win the same strength, shedding our tears in private, and abhorring soft-heartedness as the foe of all manhood and courage. To call the unsympathetic man "wicked," and the sympathetic man "good," seemed to Nietzsche a fashion in morals, a fashion which will have its day. He believed he was the first to point out the danger of the prevailing fashion as a sort of

moral impressionism, the outcome of the hyperæsthesia peculiar to periods of decadence. Not indeed that Christianity is, or could be, carried out among us to its fullest extent: "That would be a serious matter. If we were ever to become the object to others of the same stupidities and importunities which they expend on themselves, we should flee wildly as soon as we saw our 'neighbour' approach, and curse sympathy as heartily as we now curse egoism." Our deepest and most personal griefs, Nietzsche remarks elsewhere, remain unrevealed and incomprehensible to nearly all other persons, even to the "neighbour" who eats out of the same dish with us. And even though my grief should become visible, the dear sympathetic neighbour can know nothing of its complexity and results, of the organic economy of my soul. That my grief may be bound up with my happiness troubles him little. The devotee of the "religion of pity" will heal my sorrows without a moment's delay; he knows not that the path to my Heaven must lie through my own Hell, that happiness and unhappiness are twin sisters who grow up together, or remain stunted together.

"Morality is the mob-instinct working in the individual." It rests, Nietzsche asserts, on two thoughts: "the community is worth more than the individual," and "a permanent advantage is better than a temporary advantage;" whence it follows that all the advantages of the community are preferable to those of the individual. Morality thus becomes a string of negative injunctions, a series of "Thou shalt nots," with scarcely a positive command amongst them; witness the well-known table of Jewish commandments. Now Nietzsche could not endure mere negative virtues. He resented the subtle change which has taken place in the very meaning of the

word “virtue,” and which has perverted it from an expression of positive masculine qualities into one of merely negative feminine qualities. In his earliest essay he referred to “active sin” as the Promethean virtue which distinguishes the Aryans. The only moral codes that commended themselves to him were those that contained positive commands alone: “Do this! Do it with all your heart, and all your strength, and all your dreams!—and all other things shall be taken away from you!” For if we are truly devoted to the things that are good to do we need trouble ourselves little about the things that are good to leave undone.

Nietzsche compared himself to a mole boring down into the ground and undermining what philosophers have for a couple of thousand years considered the very surest ground to build on—the trust in morals. One of his favourite methods of attack is by the analysis of the “conscience.” He points out that whatever we were regularly required to do in youth by those we honoured and feared created our “good conscience.” The dictates of conscience, however urgent, thus have no true validity as regards the person who experiences them. “But,” some one protests, “must we not trust our feelings?” “Yes,” replies Nietzsche, “trust your feelings, but still remember that the inspiration which springs from feelings is the grandchild of an opinion, often a false one, and in any case not your own. To trust one’s feelings—that means to yield more obedience to one’s grandfather and grandmother and their grandparents than to the gods within *our own* breasts: our own reason and our own experience.” Faith in authority is thus the source of conscience; it is not the voice of God in the human heart but the voice of man. The sphere of the moral

is the sphere of tradition, and a man is moral because he is dependent on a tradition and not on himself. Originally everything was within the sphere of morals, and it was only possible to escape from that sphere by becoming a law-giver, medicine-man, demigod—that is to say by making morals. To be customary is to be moral,—I still closely follow Nietzsche's thought and expression,—to be individual is to be wicked. Every kind of originality involves a bad conscience. Nietzsche insists with fine eloquence, again and again, that every good gift that has been given to man put a bad conscience into the heart of the giver. Every good thing was once new, unaccustomed, *immoral*, and gnawed at the vitals of the finder like a worm. Primitive men lived in hordes, and must obey the horde-voice within them. Every new doctrine is wicked. Science has always come into the world with a bad conscience, with the emotions of a criminal, at least of a smuggler. No man can be disobedient to custom and not be immoral, and feel that he is immoral. The artist, the actor, the merchant, the freethinker, the discoverer, were once all criminals, and were persecuted, crushed, rendered morbid, as all persons must be when their virtues are not the virtues idealised by the community. The whole phenomena of morals are animal-like, and have their origin in the search for prey and the avoidance of pursuit.

Progress is thus a gradual emancipation from morals. We have to recognise the services of the men who fight in this struggle against morals, and who are crushed into the ranks of criminals. Not that we need pity them. "It is a new *justice* that is called for, a new *mot d'ordre*. We need new philosophers. The moral world also is round. The moral world also has its antipodes, and the antipodes also have their right

to exist. A new world remains to be discovered—and more than one! Hoist sail, O philosophers!"

"Men must become both better *and wickeder*." So spake Zarathustra; or, as he elsewhere has it, "It is with man as with a tree, the higher he would climb into the brightness above, the more vigorously his roots must strive earthwards, downwards, into the darkness and the depths—into the wicked." Wickedness is just as indispensable as goodness. It is the ploughshare of wickedness which turns up and fertilises the exhausted fields of goodness. We must no longer be afraid to be wicked; we must no longer be afraid to be hard. "Only the noblest things are very hard. This new command, O my brothers, I lay upon you—become hard."

In renewing our moral ideas we need also to renew our whole conception of the function and value of morals. Nietzsche advises moralists to change their tactics: "Deny moral values, deprive them of the applause of the crowd, create obstacles to their free circulation; let them be the shame-faced secrets of a few solitary souls; *forbid morality*! In so doing you may perhaps accredit these things among the only men whom one need have on one's side, I mean heroic men. Let it be said of morality to-day as Meister Eckard said: 'I pray God that he may rid me of God!'" We have altogether over-estimated the importance of morality. Christianity knew better when it placed "grace" above morals, and so also did Buddhism. And if we turn to literature, Nietzsche maintains, it is a vast mistake to suppose that, for instance, great tragedies have, or were intended to have, any moral effect. Look at *Macbeth*, at *Tristan und Isolde*, at *Œdipus*. In all these cases it would have been easy to make guilt the pivot of the drama. But

the great poet is in love with passion. “He calls to us: It is the charm of charms; this exciting, changing, dangerous, gloomy, yet often sun-filled existence! It is an *adventure* to live—take this side or that, it will always be the same!’ So he speaks to us out of a restless and vigorous time, half drunken and dazed with excess of blood and energy, out of a wickeder time than ours is; and we are obliged to set to rights the aim of a Shakespeare and make it righteous, that is to say, to misunderstand it.”

We have to recognise a diversity of moral ideals. Nothing is more profoundly dangerous than, with Kant, to create impersonal categorical imperatives after the Chinese fashion, to generalise “virtue,” “duty,” and “goodness,” and sacrifice them to the Moloch of abstraction. “Every man must find his own virtue, his own categorical imperative;” it must be founded on inner necessity, on deep personal choice. Only the simpleton says: “Men ought to be like this or like that.” The real world presents to us a dazzling wealth of types, a prodigious play of forms and metamorphoses. Yet up comes a poor devil of a moralist, and says to us: “No! men ought to be something quite different!” and straightway he paints a picture of himself on the wall, and exclaims: “Ecce homo!” But one thing is needful, that a man should attain the fullest satisfaction. Every man must be his own moralist.

These views might be regarded as “lax,” as predisposing to easy self-indulgence. Nietzsche would have smiled at such a notion. Not yielding, but mastering, was the key to his personal morality. “Every day is badly spent,” he said, “in which a man has not once denied himself; this gymnastic is inevitable if a man will retain the joy of being his

own master." The four cardinal virtues, as Nietzsche understood morals, are sincerity, courage, generosity, and courtesy. "Do what you will," said Zarathustra, "but first be one of those who *are able to will*. Love your neighbour as yourself—but first be one of those who *are able to love themselves*." And again Zarathustra spoke: "He who belongs to me must be strong of bone and light of foot, eager for fight and for feast, no sulker, no John o' Dreams, as ready for the hardest task as for a feast, sound and hale. The best things belong to me and mine, and if men give us nothing, then we take them: the best food, the purest sky, the strongest thoughts, the fairest women!" There was no desire here to suppress effort and pain. That Nietzsche regarded as a mark of modern Christian morals. It is pain, more pain and deeper, that we need. The discipline of suffering alone creates man's pre-eminence. "Man unites in himself the creature and the creator: there is in him the stuff of things, the fragmentary and the superfluous, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but there is also in him the creator, the sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine blessedness of the spectator on the seventh day." Do you pity, he asks, what must be fashioned, broken, forged, refined as by fire? But our pity is spent on one thing alone, the most effeminate of all weaknesses—pity. This was the source of Nietzsche's admiration for war, and indifference to its horror; he regarded it as the symbol of that spiritual warfare and bloodshed in which to him all human progress consisted. He might, had he pleased, have said with the Jew and the Christian, that without shedding of blood there shall be no remission of sins. But with a difference, for as he looked at the matter, every man must be his own saviour, and it is his own blood that must be

shed; there is no salvation by proxy. That was expressed in his favourite motto: *Virescit volnere virtus.*

Nietzsche's ideal man is the man of Epictetus, as he describes him in *Morgenröthe*, the laconic, brave, self-contained man, not lusting after expression like the modern idealist. The man whom Epictetus loved hated fanaticism, he hated notoriety, he knew how to smile. And the best was, added Nietzsche, that he had no fear of God before his eyes; he believed firmly in reason, and relied, not on divine grace, but on himself. Of all Shakespeare's plays *Julius Cæsar* seemed to Nietzsche the greatest, because it glorifies Brutus; the finest thing that can be said in Shakespeare's honour, Nietzsche thought, was that—aided perhaps by some secret and intimate experience—he believed in Brutus and the virtues that Brutus personified. In course of time, however, while not losing his sympathy with Stoicism, it was Epicureanism, the heroic aspects of Epicureanism, which chiefly appealed to Nietzsche. He regarded Epicurus as one of the world's greatest men, the discoverer of the heroically idyllic method of living a philosophy; for one to whom happiness could never be more than an unending self-discipline, and whose ideal of life had ever been that of a spiritual nomad, the methods of Epicurus seemed to yield the finest secrets of good living. Socrates, with his joy in life and in himself, was also an object of Nietzsche's admiration. Among later thinkers, Helvetius appealed to him strongly. Goethe and Napoleon were naturally among his favourite heroes, as were Alcibiades and Cæsar. The latest great age of heroes was to him the Italian Renaissance. Then came Luther, opposing the rights of the peasants, yet himself initiating a peasants' revolt of the intellect,

and preparing the way for that shallow plebeianism of the spirit which has marked the last two centuries.

Latterly, in tracing the genealogy of modern morals, Nietzsche's opinions hardened into a formula. He recognised three stages of moral evolution: first, the *pre-moral* period of primitive times, when the beast of prey was the model of conduct, and the worth of an action was judged by its results. Then came the *moral* period, when the worth of an action was judged not by its results, but by its origin; this period has been the triumph of what Nietzsche calls slave-morality, the morality of the mob; the goodness and badness of actions is determined by atavism, at best by survivals; every man is occupied in laying down laws for his neighbour instead of for himself, and all are tamed and chastised into weakness in order that they may be able to obey these prescriptions. Nietzsche ingeniously connected his slave-morality with the accepted fact that for many centuries the large, fair-haired aristocratic race has been dying out in Europe, and the older down-trodden race—short, dark, and broad-headed—has been slowly gaining predominance. But now we stand at the threshold of the *extra-moral* period. Slave-morality, Nietzsche asserted, is about to give way to master-morality; the lion will take the place of the camel. The instincts of life, refusing to allow that anything is forbidden, will again assert themselves, sweeping away the feeble negative democratic morality of our time. The day has now come for the man who is able to rule himself, and who will be tolerant to others not out of his weakness, but out of his strength; to him nothing is forbidden, for he has passed beyond goodness and beyond wickedness.

III.

So far I have attempted to follow with little or no comment what seems to me the main current of Nietzsche's thought. It may be admitted that there is some question as to which is the main current. For my own part I have no hesitation in asserting that it is the current which expands to its fullest extent between 1876 and 1883 in what I term Nietzsche's second or middle period; up to then he had not gained complete individuality; afterwards began the period of uncontrolled aberrations. Thus I am inclined to pass lightly over the third period, during which the conception of "master-morality" attained its chief and most rigid emphasis, although I gather that to Nietzsche's disciples as to his foes this conception seems of primary importance. This idea of "master-morality" is in fact a solid fossilised chunk, easy to handle for friendly or unfriendly hands. The earlier and more living work—the work of the man who truly said that it is with thinkers as with snakes: those that cannot shed their skins die—is less obviously tangible. So the "master-morality" it is that your true Nietzschian is most likely to close his fist over. It would be unkind to say more, for Nietzsche himself has been careful to scatter through his works, on the subject of disciples and followers generally, very scathing remarks which must be sufficiently painful to any faithful Nietzschian.

We are helped in understanding Nietzsche's philosophic significance if we understand his precise ideal. The psychological analysis of every great thinker's work seems to reveal some underlying fundamental image or thought—often enough simple and homely in character—which he has carried with him into the most abstract regions. Thus Fraser has

found good reason to suppose that Hegel's main ideas were suggested by the then recent discovery of galvanism. In Nietzsche's case this key is to be found in the persistent image of an attitude. As a child, his sister tells us, he had been greatly impressed by a rope-dancer who had performed his feats over the market-place at Naumburg, and throughout his work, as soon as he had attained to real self-expression, we may trace the image of the dancer. "I do not know," he somewhere says, "what the mind of a philosopher need desire more than to be a good dancer. For dancing is his ideal, his art also, indeed his only piety, his 'divine worship.'" In all Nietzsche's best work we are conscious of this ideal of the dancer, strong, supple, vigorous, yet harmonious and well-balanced. It is the dance of the athlete and the acrobat rather than the make-believe of the ball-room, and behind the easy equipoise of such dancing lie patient training and effort. The chief character of good dancing is its union of the maximum of energetic movement with the maximum of well-balanced grace. The whole muscular system is alive to restrain any excess, so that however wild and free the movement may seem it is always measured; excess would mean ignominious collapse. When in his later years Nietzsche began, as he said, to "philosophise with the hammer," and to lay about him savagely at every hollow "idol" within reach, he departed from his better ideal of dancing, and his thinking became intemperate, reckless, desperate.

Nietzsche had no system, probably because the idea that dominated his thought was an image, and not a formula, the usual obsession of philosophers, such as may be clapped on the universe at any desired point. He remarks in one place that a philosopher believes the worth of his philosophy to

lie in the structure, but that what we ultimately value are the finely carven and separate stones with which he builded, and he was clearly anxious to supply the elaborated stones direct. In time he came to call himself a realist, using the term, in no philosophic sense, to indicate his reverence for the real and essential facts of life, the things that conduce to fine living. He desired to detach the "bad conscience" from the things that are merely wicked traditionally, and to attach it to the things that are anti-natural, anti-instinctive, anti-sensuous. He sought to inculcate veneration for the deep-lying sources of life, to take us down to the bed-rock of life, the rock whence we are hewn. He held that man, as a reality, with all his courage and cunning, is himself worthy of honour, but that man's ideals are absurd and morbid, the mere dregs in the drained cup of life; or, as he eventually said—and it is a saying which will doubtless seal his fate in the minds of many estimable persons—man's ideals are his only *partie honteuse*, of which we may avoid any close examination. Nietzsche's "realism" was thus simply a vigorous hatred of all dreaming that tends to depreciate the value of life, and a vivid sense that man himself is the *ens realissimum*.

A noteworthy point in Nietzsche's conception of philosophy is his increasingly clear conception of its fundamentally psychological character. I mean to say that Nietzsche knows that a man's philosophy, to be real, must be the inevitable outcome of his own psychic constitution. It is a point that philosophers have never seen. Perhaps Nietzsche was the first, however hesitatingly, to realise it. It is only in the recognition of this fact that the eirenicon of philosophies—and one might add, of religions—can ever be found. The philosopher of old said: "This is

*my* conception of the universe;" it was well. But he was apt to add: "It is *the* conception of the universe," and so put himself hopelessly in the wrong. It is as undignified to think another man's philosophy as to wear another man's cast-off clothes. Only the poor in spirit or in purse can find any satisfaction in doing either. A philosophy or religion can only fit the man for whom it was made. "There has only been one Christian," as Nietzsche put it, "and he died on the cross." But why waste energy in trying to manufacture a second Christian? We may be very sure that we can never find another Christian whom Christianity would fit so admirably as it once fitted Christ. Why not rest content with Christ? Let Brown be a Brownite and Robinson a Robinsonian. It is not good that they should exchange their philosophies, or that either should insist on thrusting his threadbare misfits on Jones, who prefers to be metaphysically naked. When men have generally begun to realise this the world will be a richer and an honester world, and a pleasanter one as well. That Nietzsche had vaguely begun to realise it seems to me his chief claim to distinction in the purely philosophic field.

To recognise the free and direct but disconnected nature of Nietzsche's many-sided vision of the world is to lessen the force of his own antagonisms as well as of the antagonisms he has excited. Much of Nietzsche's work, especially in the third period, is the utterance of profound half-truths, keenly and personally felt, but still half-truths of which he has himself elsewhere supplied the complements. The reason is that during that period he was not so much expressing himself as appealing passionately against himself to those failing forces whose tonic influence he thirsted after. The hardness, the keen sword, the

reckless energy he idealised were the things that had slipped utterly away and left him defenceless to the world. He grew to worship cruel strength as the consumptive Keats, the sickly Thoreau, loved beauty and health, with "the desire of the moth for the star." Such an attitude has its rightness and power, so long as we understand it, though it comes short of the serenity of the greatest spirits who seek, like Goethe, to live at each moment in the whole. The master-morality of Nietzsche's later days, on which friends and foes have alike insisted, is a case in point. This appears to have been hailed, or resented, as a death-blow struck at the modern democratic *régime*. To take a broad view of Nietzsche's philosophic attitude is to realise that both views are alike out of place. On this matter, as on many others, Nietzsche moved in a line which led him to face an opposite direction in his decay from that which he faced in his immaturity. He began by regarding democracy as the standard of righteousness, and ended by asserting that the world only exists for the production of a few great men. It would be foolish to regard either of the termini as the last outpost of wisdom. But in the passage between these two points many excellent things are said by the way. Nietzsche was never enamoured of socialism or democracy for its own sake; reasonably enough, he will not even admit that we have yet attained democracy; though the horses, indeed, are new, as yet "the roads are the same old roads, the wheels the same old wheels." But he points out that the value of democracy lies in its guarantee of individual freedom: Cyclopean walls are being built, with much toil and dust, but the walls will be a rampart against any invasion of barbarians or any new slavery, against the despotism of capital and the despotism of party. The workers may regard

the walls as an end in themselves; we are free to value them for the fine flowers of culture which will grow in the gardens they inclose. To me, at least, this attitude of Nietzsche's maturity seems the ample justification of democracy.

Nietzsche was not, however, greatly interested in questions of government; he was far more deeply interested in questions of morals. In his treatment of morals—no doubt chiefly in the last period—there is a certain element of paradox. It must again be pointed out that this is to be explained by the organic demands of Nietzsche's own nature. In attacking the excessive tendency to sympathy which he seemed to see around him he was hygienically defending himself from his own excessive sympathy. His sister quotes with a smile the declaration that his Paradise lay beneath the shadow of his sword; we scarcely need her assurance of his tender-hearted sensitiveness. He could attack relentlessly, but he never attacked a person save as the symbol of what he regarded as a false principle held in undeserved honour. When he realised that the subject of such attack was really a living person he was full of remorse. He attacked Strauss because Strauss was the successful representative of a narrow ideal of culture; a few months later Strauss died, having, it now appears, borne the onset philosophically enough, and Nietzsche was full of grief lest he had embittered the dying man's last hours. It was because he had himself suffered from the excesses of his own sympathy that he was able so keenly to analyse the secrets of sympathy. He spoke as the Spanish poet says that every poet—and indeed every seer—must always speak, *por la boca de su herida*, through the mouth of his wound. That is why his voice is often so poignantly intimate; it is also why we sometimes find

this falsetto note of paradox. In his last period, Nietzsche grows altogether impatient of morals, calls himself an immoralist, fervently exhorts us to become wickeder. But if any young disciple came to the teacher asking, "What must I do to become wickeder?" it does not appear that Nietzsche bade him to steal, bear false witness, commit adultery, or do any other of the familiar and commonly-accepted wickednesses. Nietzsche preached wickedness with the same solemn exaltation that Carducci lauded Satan. What he desired was far indeed from any rehabilitation of easy vice; it was the justification of neglected and unsanctified virtues.

At the same time, and while Nietzsche's immoralist is just as austere a person as the mere moralists who have haunted the world for many thousand years, it is clear that Nietzsche wished strictly to limit the sphere of morals. He never fails to point out how large a region of life and art lies legitimately outside the moral jurisdiction. In an age in which many moralists desire to force morals into every part of life and art—and even assume a certain air of virtue in so doing—the "immoralist" who lawfully vindicates any region for free cultivation is engaged in a proper and wholesome task.

No doubt, however, there will be some to question the value of such a task. Nietzsche the immoralist can scarcely be welcome in every camp, although he remains always a force to be reckoned with. The same may be said of Nietzsche the freethinker. He was, perhaps, the typical freethinker of the age that comes after Renan. Nietzsche had nothing of Renan's genial scepticism and smiling disillusionment; he was less tender to human weakness, for all his long Christian ancestry less

Christian, than the Breton seminarist remained to the last. He seems to have shaken himself altogether free of Christianity—so free, that except in his last period he even speaks of it without bitterness—though by no means wholly untouched by that nostalgia of the cloister which now and then pursues even those of us who are farthest from any faith in Christian dogma. He never sought, as among ourselves Pater sought, the germ of Christianity in things pagan, the undying essence of paganism in things Christian. Heathen as he was, I do not think even Heine's visions of the gods in exile could have touched him; he never felt the charm of fading and faded things. It is remarkable. It is scarcely less remarkable that, far as he was from Christianity, he was equally far from what we usually call "paganism," the pasteboard paganism of easy self-indulgence and cheerful irresponsibility. It was not so that he understood Hellenism. Matthew Arnold once remarked that the Greeks were never sick or sad. Nietzsche knew better. The greater part of Greek literature bears witness that the Hellenes were for ever wrestling with the problems of pain. And none who came after have more poignantly uttered the pangs of human affairs, or more sweetly the consolations of those pangs, than the great disciples of the Greeks who created the Roman world. The classic world of nymphs and fauns is an invention of the moderns. The real classic world, like the modern world, was a world of suffering. The difference lay in the method of facing that suffering. Nietzsche chose the classic method from no desire to sport with Amaryllis in the shade, but because he had known forms of torture for which the mild complacencies of modern faith seemed to offer no relief. If we must regard Nietzsche as a pagan, it is as the Pascal of paganism. The

freethinker, it is true, was more cheerful and hopeful than the believer, but there is the same tragic sincerity, the same restless self-torment, the same sense of the abyss.[4]

There still remains Nietzsche, the apostle of culture, the philosopher engaged in the criticism of life. From first to last, wherever you open his books, you light on sayings that cut to the core of the questions that every modern thinking man must face. I take, almost at random, a few passages from a single book: of convictions he writes that “a man possesses opinions as he possesses fish, in so far as he owns a fishing-net; a man must go fishing and be lucky, then he has his own fish, his own opinions; I speak of living opinions, living fish. Some men are content to possess fossils in their cabinets—and convictions in their heads.” Of the problem of the relation of science to culture he says well: “The best and wholesomest thing in science, as in mountains, is the air that blows there. It is because of that air that we spiritual weaklings avoid and defame science;” and he points out that the work of science—with its need for sincerity, infinite patience, complete self-abnegation—calls for men of nobler make than poetry needs. When we have learnt to trust science and to learn from it, then it will be possible so to tell natural history that “every one who hears it is inspired to health and gladness as the heir and continuer of humanity.” This is how he rebukes those foolish persons who grow impatient with critics: “Remember that critics are insects who only sting to live and not to hurt: they want our blood and not our pain.” And he utters this wise saying, himself forgetting it in later years: “Growth in wisdom may be exactly measured by decrease in bitterness.”

Nietzsche desires to prove nothing, and is reckless of consistency. He looks at every question that comes before him with the same simple, intent, penetrative gaze, and whether the aspects that he reveals are new or old, he seldom fails to bring us a fresh stimulus. Culture, as he understood it, consists for the modern man in the task of choosing the simple and indispensable things from the chaos of crude material which to-day overwhelms us. The man who will live at the level of the culture of his time is like the juggler who must keep a number of plates spinning in the air; his life must be a constant training in suppleness and skill so that he may be a good athlete. But he is also called on to exert his skill in the selection and limitation of his task. Nietzsche is greatly occupied with the simplification of culture. Our suppleness and skill must be exercised alone on the things that are vital, essential, primitive; the rest may be thrown aside. He is for ever challenging the multifarious materials for culture, testing them with eye and hand; we cannot prove them too severely, he seems to say, nor cast aside too contemptuously the things that a real man has no need of for fine living. What must I do to be saved? What do I need for the best and fullest life?—that is the everlasting question that the teacher of life is called upon to answer. And we cannot be too grateful to Nietzsche for the stern penetration—the more acute for his ever-present sense of the limits of energy—with which he points from amid the mass to the things which most surely belong to our eternal peace.

Nietzsche's style has often been praised. The style was certainly the man. There can be little doubt, moreover, that there is scarcely any other German style to compare with it, though such eminence means far less in a country where style has rarely

been cultivated than it would mean in France or even England. Sallust awoke his sense for style, and may account for some characteristics of his style. He also enthusiastically admired Horace as the writer who had produced the maximum of energy with the minimum of material. A concentrated Roman style, significant and weighty at every point, *ære perennius*, was always his ideal. Certainly the philologist's aptitudes helped here to teach him the value and force of words, as jewels for the goldsmith to work with, and not as mere worn-out counters to slip through the fingers. One may call it a muscular style, a style wrought with the skilful strength of hand and arm. It scarcely appeals to the ear. It lacks the restful simplicity of the greatest masters, the plangent melody, the seemingly unconscious magic quivering along our finest-fibred nerves. Such effects we seem to hear now and again in Schopenhauer, but rarely or never from any other German. This style is titanic rather than divine, but the titanic virtues it certainly possesses in fullest measure: robust and well-tempered vigour, concentration, wonderful plastic force in moulding expression. It becomes over-emphatic at last. When Nietzsche threw aside the dancer's ideal in order to "philosophise with the hammer," the result on his style was as disastrous as on his thought; both alike took on the violent and graceless character of the same implement. He speaks indeed of the virtue of hitting a nail on the head, but it is a less skilled form of virtue than good dancing.

Whether he was dancing or hammering, however, Nietzsche certainly converted the whole of himself into his work, as in his view every philosopher is bound to do, "for just that art of transformation *is* philosophy." That he was entirely successful in being

a “real man” one may doubt. His excessive sensitiveness to the commonplace in life, and his deficiency in the sexual instinct—however highly he may have rated the importance of sex in life—largely cut him off from true fellowship with the men who are most “real” to us. He was less tolerant and less humane than his master Goethe; his incisive insight, and, in many respects, better intellectual equipment, are more than compensated by this lack of breadth. But, as his friend the historian Burckhardt has said, he worked mightily for the increase of independence in the world. Every man, indeed, works with the limitations of his qualities, just as we all struggle beneath the weight of the superincumbent atmosphere; our defects are even a part of our qualities, and it would be foolish to quarrel with them. Nietzsche succeeded in being himself, and it was a finely rare success. Whether he was a “real man” matters less. With passionate sincerity he expressed his real self and his best self, abhorring, on the one hand, what with Voltaire and Verlaine he called “literature,” and, on the other, all that mere indigested material, the result of mental dyspepsia, of which he regarded Carlyle as the supreme warning. A man’s real self, as he repeated so often, consists of the things which he has truly digested and assimilated; he must always “conquer” his opinions; it is only such conquests which he has the right to report to men as his own. His thoughts are born of his pain; he has imparted to them of his own blood, his own pleasure and torment. Nietzsche himself held that suffering and even disease are almost indispensable to the philosopher; great pain is the final emancipator of the spirit, those great slow pains that take their time, and burn us up like green wood. “I doubt whether such pain betters us,” he remarks,

"but I know that it deepens us." That is the stuff of Nietzsche's Hellenism, as expressed in the most lighthearted of his books. *Virescit volnere virtus.* It is that which makes him, when all is said, a great critic of life.

It is a consolation to many—I have seen it so stated in a respectable review—that Nietzsche went mad. No doubt also it was once a consolation to many that Socrates was poisoned, that Jesus was crucified, that Bruno was burnt. But hemlock and the cross and the stake proved sorry weapons against the might of ideas even in those days, and there is no reason to suppose that a doctor's certificate will be more effectual in our own. Of old time we killed our great men as soon as their visionary claims became inconvenient; now, in our mercy, we leave the tragedy of genius to unroll itself to the bitter close. The devils to whom the modern Faustus is committed have waxed cunning with the ages. Nietzsche has met, in its most relentless form, the fate of Pascal and Swift and Rousseau. That fact may carry what weight it will in any final estimate of his place as a moral teacher: it cannot touch his position as an aboriginal force. He remains in the first rank of the distinguished and significant personalities our century has produced.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[1] This statement (made at the end of 1895) has ceased to be true, but it explains the genesis of this study, and I leave it standing.

[2] The most convincing word-portrait of Nietzsche I have met with (by M. Schuré) dates from the visit to Bayreuth:—"I was struck both by the superiority of his intellect

and the strangeness of his face. A broad forehead, short hair brushed back, the prominent cheek-bones of the Slav. The heavy moustache and the bold outline of the face would have given him the aspect of a cavalry officer if it had not been for his timid and haughty air. The musical voice and slow speech indicated the artist's organisation, while the circumspect meditative carriage was that of a philosopher. Nothing more deceptive than the apparent calm of his expression. The fixed eye revealed the painful travail of thought. It was at once the eye of an acute observer and a fanatical visionary. The double character of this gaze produced a disquieted and disquieting impression, all the more so since it seemed to be always fixed on a single point. In moments of effusion this gaze was softened to a dream-like sweetness, but soon became hostile again." This picture is confirmed by Nietzsche's sister, who also refers to his "unusually large, beautiful, and brilliant eyes."

[3] One may be allowed to regret that Nietzsche was not equally discriminating in his judgment of our country. Had he not been blinded by the spiritual plebeianism of the nineteenth century in England, he might also have discerned in certain periods some of the same ardent and heroic qualities which he recognised in sixteenth century France, the more easily since at that time the same Renaissance wave had effected a considerable degree of spiritual union between France and England. In George Chapman, for instance, at his finest and lucidest moments the typical ethical representative of our greatest literary age, Nietzsche would have found a man after his own heart, not only one who scarcely yielded to himself in generous admiration of

the great qualities of the French spirit but a man of “absolute and full soul” who was almost a precursor of his own “immoralism,” a lover of freedom, of stoic self-reliance, one who was ever seeking to enlarge the discipline of a fine culture in the direction of moral freedom and dignity.

[4] Pater’s description of the transition we may trace from the easy prose of Pascal’s first book to the “perpetual *agonia*” of his later work, applies with scarcely a change to the similar transition in Nietzsche:—“Everywhere in the *Letters* he had seemed so great a master —a master of himself—never at a loss, taking the conflict so lightly, with so light a heart: in the great Atlantean travail of the *Thoughts* his feet sometimes ‘are almost gone.’ In his soul’s agony theological abstractions seem to become personal powers.... In truth, into his typical diagnosis, as it may seem, of the tragedy of the human soul, there have passed not merely the personal feelings, the temperament of an individual, but his malady also, a physical malady.”

# CASANOVA.

THERE are few more delightful books in the world than Casanova's *Mémoires*.—That is a statement I have long vainly sought to see in print. It is true, one learns casually that various eminent literary personages have cherished a high regard for this autobiography, have even considered it the ideal autobiography, that Wendell Holmes was once heard defending Casanova, that Thackeray found him good enough to steal from. But these eminent personages —and how many more we shall never know—locked up the secret of their admiration for this book in some remote casket of their breasts; they never confided it to the cynical world. Every properly constituted "man of letters" has always recognised that any public allusion to Casanova should begin and end with lofty moral reprobation of his unspeakable turpitude.

No doubt whatever—and this apart from the question as to whether his autobiography should be counted as moral or immoral literature—Casanova delivered himself bound into the hands of the moralists. He recognised this; his autobiography, as he himself truly said, was "a confession, if ever there was one." But he wrote at the end of a long and full life, in the friendly seclusion of a lonely Bohemian castle, when all things had become indifferent to him save the vivid memories of the past. It mattered little to him that the whirlwind of 1789 had just swept away the eighteenth century together with the moral

maxims that passed current in that century. We have to accept these facts at the outset when we approach Casanova. And if a dweller in the highly respectable nineteenth century may be forgiven a first exclamation of horror at Casanova's wickedness, he has wofully failed in critical insight if he allows that exclamation to be his last word concerning these *Mémoires*.

There are at least three points of view from which Casanova's *Mémoires* are of deep and permanent interest. In the first place they constitute an important psychological document as the full and veracious presentation of a certain human type in its most complete development. In the second place, as a mere story of adventure and without reference to their veracity, the *Mémoiries* have never been surpassed, and only equalled by books written on a much smaller scale. In the third place, we here possess an unrivalled picture of the eighteenth century in its most characteristic aspects throughout Europe.

## I.

Casanova lived in an age which seems to have been favourable to the spontaneous revelation of human nature in literature. It was not only the age in which the novel reached full development; it was the age of diaries and autobiographies. Pepys, indeed, though he died in the eighteenth century, had written his diary long before; but during Casanova's lifetime Boswell was writing that biography which is so wonderful largely because it is so nearly an autobiography. Casanova's communicative countryman, Gozzi, was also his contemporary. Rousseau's *Confessions* only preceded Casanova's

*Mémoires* by a few years, and a little later Restif de la Bretonne wrote *Monsieur Nicolas*, and Madame Roland her *Mémoires Particulières*. All these autobiographies are very unlike Casanova's. They mostly seem to present the shady sides of otherwise eminent and respectable lives. The highly-placed government official of versatile intellectual tastes exhibits himself as a monster of petty weaknesses; the eloquent apostle of the return to Nature uncovers the corroding morbidities we should else never suspect; the philanthropic pioneer in social reform exposes himself in a state of almost maniacal eroticism; the austere heroine who was nourished on Plutarch confesses that she is the victim of unhappy passion. We are conscious of no such discords in Casanova's autobiography. Partly it may be because we have no other picture of Casanova before our eyes. Moreover, he had no conventional ideals to fall short of; he was an adventurer from the first. "I am proud because I am nothing," he used to say. He could not boast of his birth; he never held high position; for the greatest part of his active career he was an exile; at every moment of his life he was forced to rely on his own real and personal qualities. But the chief reason why we feel no disturbing discord in Casanova's *Mémoires* lies in the admirable skill with which he has therein exploited his unquestionable sincerity. He is a consummate master in the dignified narration of undignified experiences. Fortified, it is true, by a confessed and excessive *amour propre*, he never loses his fine sense of equilibrium, his power of presenting his own personality broadly and harmoniously. He has done a few dubious things in his time, he seems to say, and now and again found himself in positions that were ridiculous enough; but as he looks back he feels that

the like may have happened to any of us. He views these things with complete human tolerance as a necessary part of the whole picture, which it would be idle to slur over or apologise for. He records them simply, not without a sense of humour, but with no undue sense of shame. In his heart, perhaps, he is confident that he has given the world one of its greatest books, and that posterity will require of him no such rhetorical justification as Rousseau placed at the head of his *Confessions*.

In the preface to the *Mémoires*, Casanova is sufficiently frank. He has not scrupled, he tells us, to defraud fools and rascals, "when necessary," and he has never regretted it. But such incidents have been but episodes in his life. He is not a sensualist, he says, for he has never neglected his duty—"when I had any"—for the allurements of sense; yet the main business of his life has ever been in the world of sense; "there is none of greater importance." "I have always loved women and have done my best to make them love me. I have also delighted in good cheer, and I have passionately followed whatever has excited my curiosity." Now in old age he reviews the joys of his life. He has learnt to be content with one meal a day, in spite of a sound digestion, but he recalls the dishes that delighted him: Neapolitan macaroni, Spanish olla podrida, Newfoundland cod, high-flavoured game, old cheese (has he not collected material for a *Dictionnaire des Fromages*?), and without any consciousness of abrupt transition he passes on to speak of the fragrant sweetness of the women he had loved. Then with a smile of pity he turns on those who call such tastes depraved, the poor insensate fools who think the Almighty is only able to enjoy our sorrow and abstinence, and bestows upon us for nought the gift of self-respect,

the love of praise, the desire to excel, energy, strength, courage, and the power to kill ourselves when we will. And with the strain of Stoicism which is ever present to give fibre to his Epicureanism, he quotes the maxim which might well belong to both philosophies: “Nemo læditur nisi a seipso.”

The fact that Casanova was on one side a Venetian must count for something in any attempt to explain him. Not indeed that Venice ever produced more than one Casanova; I would imply no such disrespect to Venice—or to Casanova—but the racial soil was favourable to such a personality. The Venetians are a branch of a more northern people who long since settled by the southern sea to grow mellow in the sunshine. It suited them well, for they expanded into one of the finest races in Christendom, and certainly one of the least Christian races there, a solid, well-tempered race, self-controlled and self-respecting. The Venetian genius is the genius of sensuous enjoyment, of tolerant humanity, of unashamed earthliness. Whatever was sane and stable in Casanova, and his instinctive distaste for the morbid and perverse, he owes to his Venetian maternal ancestry. If it is true that he was not a mere sensualist, it was by no means because of his devotion to duty—“when I had any,”—but because the genuine sensualist is only alive on the passive side of his nature, and in Casanova’s nervous system the development of the sensory fibres is compensated and held in balance by the equal vigour of the motor fibres; what he is quick to enjoy he is strong and alert to achieve. Thus he lived the full and varied life that he created for himself at his own good pleasure out of nothing, by the sole power of his own magnificent wits. And now the self-sufficing Venetian sits down to survey his work and finds that it is

good. It has not always been found so since. A “self-made” man, if ever there was one, Casanova is not revered by those who worship self-help. The record of his life will easily outlive the largest fortune ever made in any counting-house, but the life itself remains what we call a “wasted” life. Thrift, prudence, modesty, scrupulous integrity, strict attention to business—it is useless to come to Casanova for any of these virtues. They were not even in his blood; he was only half Venetian.

The Casanova family was originally Spanish. The first Casanova on record was a certain Don Jacobo, of illegitimate birth, who in the middle of the fifteenth century became secretary to King Alfonso. He fell in love with a lady destined to the religious life, and the day after she had pronounced her vows he carried her off from her convent to Rome, where he finally obtained the forgiveness and benediction of the Pope. The son of this union, Don Juan, killed an officer of the King of Naples, fled from Rome, and sought fortune with Columbus, dying on the voyage. Don Juan’s son, Marcantonio, secretary to a cardinal, was noted in his day as an epigrammatic poet; but his satire was too keen, and he also had to flee from Rome. His son became a colonel, and, unlike his forefathers, died peacefully, in extreme old age, in France. In this soldier’s grandson, Casanova’s father, the adventurous impulsiveness of the family again came out; he ran away from home at nineteen with a young actress, and himself became an actor; subsequently he left the actress and then fell in love with a young Venetian beauty of sixteen, Zanetta Farusi, a shoemaker’s daughter. But a mere actor could find no favour in a respectable family, so the young couple ran away and were married; the hero

of these *Mémoires*, born on the 2nd April, 1725, was their first-born. There is probably no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of this family history, but if one desired to invent an ancestry for Casanova he could scarcely better it.

His race helps to account for Casanova, but the real explanation of the man can only lie in his own congenital organisation. That he was a radically abnormal person is fairly clear. Not that he was morbid either in body or mind. On the contrary, he was a man of fine presence, of abounding health—always looking ten years younger than his age—of the most robust appetites, a great eater, who delighted to see others, especially women, eat heartily also, a man of indubitable sexual vigour; however great the demands he made upon his physical energy it seldom failed to respond, and his capacity for rest was equally great; he could sleep nineteen hours at a stretch. His mental health was not less sound. The most punctilious alienist, with this frank and copious history before him, could not commit Casanova to an asylum. Whatever offences against social codes he may have committed, Casanova can scarcely be said to have sinned against natural laws. He was only abnormal because so natural a person within the gates of civilisation is necessarily abnormal and at war with his environment. Far from being the victim of morbidities and perversities, Casanova presents to us the natural man *in excelsis*. He was a man for whom the external world existed, and who reacted to all the stimuli it presents to the healthy normal organism. His intelligence was immensely keen and alert, his resourcefulness, his sagacious audacity, his presence of mind, were all of the first order. He was equally swift to feel, to conceive, and to act. His mental

organisation was thus singularly harmonious, and hence his success in gratifying his eager and immense appetite for the world, an appetite unsatiated and insatiable even to the last, or he would have found no pleasure in writing these *Mémoires*. Casanova has been described as a psychological type of instability. That is to view him superficially. A man who adapts himself so readily and so effectively to any change in his environment or in his desires only exhibits the instability which marks the most intensely vital organisms. The energy and ability which Casanova displayed in gratifying his instincts would have sufficed to make a reputation of the first importance in any department, as a popular statesman, a great judge, a merchant prince, and enabled him to die worn out by the monotonous and feverish toil of the senate, the court, or the counting-house. Casanova chose to *live*. A crude and barbarous choice it seems to us, with our hereditary instinct to spend our lives in wasting the reasons for living. But it is certain that Casanova never repented his choice. Assuredly we need not, for few judges, statesmen, or merchants have ever left for the joy of humanity any legacy of their toil equal to these *Mémoires*.

But such swift energy of vital action and reaction, such ardour of deed in keeping pace with desire, are in themselves scarcely normal. Casanova's abnormality is suggested by the tendency to abnormality which we find in his family. We have seen what men his ancestors were; in reading the *Mémoires* we gather incidentally that one of his brothers had married, though impotent, and another brother is described as a somewhat feeble-minded ne'er-do-well. All the physical and mental potency of the family was intensely concentrated in Casanova.

Yet he himself in early childhood seems to have been little better than an idiot either in body or mind. He could recall nothing that happened before he was eight years of age. He was not expected to live; he suffered from prolonged hæmorrhages from the nose, and the vision of blood was his earliest memory. As a child he habitually kept his mouth open, and his face was stupid. "Thickness of the blood," said the physicians of those days; it seems probable that he suffered from growths in the nose which, as we now know, produce such physical and mental inferiority as Casanova describes. The cure was spontaneous. He was taken to Padua, and shortly afterwards began to develop wonderfully both in stature and intelligence. In after years he had little cause to complain either of health or intellect. It is notable, however, that when, still a boy, he commenced his ecclesiastical training (against his wishes, for he had chosen to be a doctor), he failed miserably as a preacher, and broke down in the pulpit; thus the Church lost a strange ornament. Moreover, with all his swift sensation and alert response, there was in Casanova an anomalous dulness of moral sensibility. The insults to Holy Religion which seem to have brought him to that prison from which he effected his marvellous escape, were scarcely the serious protests of a convinced heretic; his deliberate trickery of Mme. d'Urfé was not only criminal but cruel. His sense of the bonds of society was always somewhat veiled, and although the veil never became thick, and might be called the natural result of an adventurer's life, one might also, perhaps, maintain that it was a certain degree of what is sometimes called moral imbecility that made Casanova an adventurer. But while we thus have to recognise that he was a man of dulled moral sensibility, we must

also recognise that he possessed a vigorous moral consciousness of his own, or we misunderstand him altogether. The point to be remembered is that the threshold of his moral sensibility was not easily reached. There are some people whose tactile sensibility is so obtuse that it requires a very wide separation of the æsthesiometer to get the right response. It was so with Casanova's moral sensitiveness. But, once aroused, his conscience responded energetically enough. It seems doubtful whether, from his own point of view, he ever fell into grave sin, and therefore he is happily free from remorse. No great credit is thus due to him; the same psychological characteristic is familiar in all criminals. It is not difficult to avoid plucking the apples of shame when so singularly few grow on your tree.

Casanova's moral sensibility and its limits come out, where a man's moral sensibility will come out, in his relations with women. Women played a large part in Casanova's life; he was nearly always in love. We may use the word "love" here in no euphemistic sense, for although Casanova's passions grew and ripened with the rapidity born of long experience in these matters, so fresh is the vitality of the man that there is ever a virginal bloom on every new ardour. He was as far removed from the cold-blooded libertine typified in Laclos's Valmont, unscrupulously using women as the instruments of his own lust, as from Laura's sonneteering lover. He had fully grasped what the latest writer on the scientific psychology of sex calls the secondary law of courting, namely, the development in the male of an imaginative attentiveness to the psychical and bodily states of the female, in place of an exclusive attentiveness to his own gratification. It is not

impossible that in these matters Casanova could have given a lesson to many virtuous husbands of our own highly moral century. He never sank to the level of the vulgar maxim that "all's fair in love and war." He sought his pleasure in the pleasure, and not in the complaisance, of the women he loved, and they seem to have gratefully and tenderly recognised his skill in the art of love-making. Casanova loved many women, but broke few hearts. The same women appear again and again through his pages, and for the most part no lapse of years seems to deaden the gladness with which he goes forth to meet them anew. That he knew himself well enough never to take either wife or mistress must be counted as a virtue, such as it was, in this incomparable lover of so many women. A man of finer moral fibre could scarcely have loved so many women; a man of coarser fibre could never have left so many women happy.

This very lack of moral delicacy which shuts Casanova off from the finest human development is an advantage to the autobiographer. It insures his sincerity because he is unconscious of offence; it saves us from any wearisome self-justification, because, for all his amused self-criticism, he sees no real need for justification. In Rousseau's *Confessions* we hear the passionate pleader against men at the tribunal of God; here we are conscious neither of opponent nor tribunal. Casanova is neither a pillar of society nor yet one of the moral Samsons who delight to pull down the pillars of society; he has taken the world as it is, and he has taken himself as he is, and he has enjoyed them both hugely. So he is free to set forth the whole of himself, his achievements, his audacities, his failures, his little weaknesses and superstitions, his amours, his

quarrels, his good fortune and his bad fortune in the world that on the whole he has found so interesting and happy a place to dwell in. And his book remains an unending source of delightful study of the man of impulse and action in all his moods. The self-reliant man, immensely apt for enjoyment, who plants himself solidly with his single keen wit before the mighty oyster of the world, has never revealed himself so clearly before.

What manner of man Casanova seemed to his contemporaries has only been discovered of recent years; and while the picture which we obtain of him has been furnished by his enemies, and was not meant to flatter, it admirably supports the *Mémoires*. In 1755 a spy of the Venetian Inquisition reported that Casanova united impiety, imposture, and wantonness to a degree that inspired horror. It was in that same year that he was arrested, chiefly on the charge of contempt for religion, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Fifteen months later he had effected his famous escape, and was able to pursue his career as an assured and accomplished adventurer who had brilliantly completed his apprenticeship. It is not until many years later, in 1772, when his long efforts to obtain pardon from his country still remained unsuccessful, that we obtain an admirable picture of him from the Venetian agent at Ancona. "He comes and goes where he will," the agent reports, "with open face and haughty mien, always well equipped. He is a man of some forty years at most [really about forty-eight, thus confirming Casanova's statement that he was always taken for some ten years younger than his years], of lofty stature, of fine and vigorous aspect, with bright eyes and very brown skin. He wears a short, chestnut-coloured peruke. I am told

that his character is bold and disdainful, but especially that he is full of speech, and of witty and well-instructed speech." Two years later Casanova was at last permitted to return to Venice. He there accepted the post of secret agent of the State Inquisition for service within the city. Like Defoe and Toland, who were also secret political agents, he attempted to justify himself on grounds of public duty. In a few years, however, he was dismissed, perhaps, as Baschet suggests, on account of the fact that his reports contained too much philosophy and not enough espionage; probably it was realised that a man of such powerful individuality and independence was not fitted for servile uses. Finally, in 1782, he was banished from Venice for an offence to which the blood of the Casanovas had always been easily inclined—he published an audacious satire against a patrician. From Venice he went to Trieste, and thence to Vienna. There he met Count Waldstein, a fervent adept of Kabbalistic science, a subject in which Casanova himself claimed to be proficient; he had found it useful in certain dealings with credulous people. In 1784 the count offered him the post of librarian, with a salary of one thousand florins, at his castle of Dux, in Bohemia. It is said to be a fine castle, and is still noted for its charming park. Here this prince of Bohemians spent the remainder of his life, devoting seven years to the *Mémoires*, on which he was still engaged at his death. A terra-cotta bust discovered at the castle (and etched some years ago for *Le Livre*) shows him in mature age, a handsome, energetic, and imposing head, with somewhat deep-set eyes; it is by no means the head of a scamp, but rather that of a philosopher, a philosopher with unusual experience of affairs, a successful statesman, one might say. A medallion

portrait, of later date, which has also been reproduced, shows him at the age of sixty-three with lean, eager face, and lofty, though receding forehead, the type of the man of quick perception and swift action, the eagle type of man. The Prince de Ligne has also left a description of him as he appeared in old age, now grown very irritable, ready to flare up at any imagined insult, engaged in perpetual warfare with domestics, but receiving the highest consideration from those who knew how to appreciate the great qualities of the man and his unequalled experiences, and who knew also how to indulge his susceptibilities and smile at his antique fashions. Once he went off in a huff to Weimar, and was graciously received by the Duke, but he soon came back again; all the favours there were showered on a certain court favourite, one Goethe. It is clear, as we read the Prince de Ligne's detailed description, that the restless old adventurer had need, even in the peaceful seclusion of Dux, of all the consolation yielded by Socrates, Horace, Seneca, and Boethius, his favourite philosophers. Here, at Dux, on the 4th of June 1798, Casanova died. "Bear witness that I have lived as a philosopher and die as a Christian;" that, we are told, was his last utterance after he had received the sacraments.

From that moment Casanova with everything that concerned him was covered by a pall of oblivion. He seems to have been carelessly cast aside, together with the century of which he was so characteristic, and, as it now appears, so memorable a child. The world in which he had lived so joyously and completely had been transformed by the Revolution. The new age of strenuous commercialism and complacent philanthropy was in its vigorous youth, a sword in its right hand and a Bible in its left. The

only adventurer who found favour now was he who took the glad news of salvation to the heathen, or mowed them down to make new openings for trade. Had he been born later, we may be well assured, Casanova would have known how to play his part; he would not have fallen short of Borrow, who became an agent of the Bible Society. But as it was, what had the new age to do with Casanova? No one cared, no one even yet has cared, so much as to examine the drawers and cupboards full of papers which he left behind at Dux. Only on the 13th of February, 1820, was the oblivion a little stirred. On that date a certain Carlo Angiolieri appeared at Leipzig in the office of the famous publisher, Brockhaus, carrying a voluminous manuscript in the handwriting (as we now know) of Casanova and bearing the title, *Histoire de ma Vie jusqu'à l'an 1797*.

But even the appearance of Carlo Angiolieri failed to dissipate the gloom. Fifty years more were to pass before the figure of Casanova again became clear. This man, so ardently alive in every fibre, had now become a myth. The sagacious world—which imparts the largest dole of contempt to the pilgrim who brings back to it the largest gifts—refused to take Casanova seriously. The shrewd critic wondered who wrote Casanova, just as he has since wondered who wrote Shakespeare. Paul Lacroix paid Stendhal the huge compliment of suggesting that he had written the *Mémoires*, a sufficiently ingenious suggestion, for in Stendhal's Dauphiny spirit there is something of that love of adventure which is supremely illustrated in Casanova. But we now know that, as Armand Baschet first proved, Casanova himself really wrote his own *Mémoires*. Moreover, so far as investigation has yet been able to go, he wrote with strict regard to truth. Wherever it is possible to test Casanova, his

essential veracity has always been vindicated. In the nature of things it is impossible to verify much that he narrates. When, however, we remember that he was telling the story of his life primarily for his own pleasure, it is clear that he had no motive for deception; and when we consider the surpassingly discreditable episodes which he has recorded, we may recall that he has given not indeed positive proof of sincerity, but certainly the best that can be given in the absence of direct proof. It remains a question how far a man is able to recollect the details of the far past—the conversations he held, the garments he wore, the meals he ate—so precisely as Casanova professes to recollect them. This is a psychological problem which has not yet been experimentally examined. There are, however, great individual differences in memory, and there is reason to believe that an organisation, such as Casanova's, for which the external world is so vivid, is associated with memory-power of high quality. That this history is narrated with absolute precision of detail Casanova himself would probably not have asserted. But there is no reason to doubt his good faith, and there is excellent reason to accept the substantial accuracy of his narrative. It remains a personal document of a value which will increase rather than diminish as time goes by. It is one of the great autobiographical revelations which the ages have left us, with Augustine's, Cellini's, Rousseau's, of its own kind supreme.

II.

The *Mémoires* are authentic; they give us what they profess to give us—the true story of a man who unites (as it has been well said) the characters of Gil

Blas and of Figaro. Thus Casanova was the incarnation in real life of the two most typical imaginative figures of his century. Yet even if the *Mémoires* had been the invention of some novelist of surpassing genius they would still possess extraordinary interest. We may forget that the book is an autobiography, and still find it, as a story of adventure, the apotheosis of the picaresque novel.

The picaresque novel—although a Frenchman brought it to perfection in *Gil Blas*—arose and flourished in Spain, Casanova's ancestral country, and its piquancy, variety, and audacity seem to have been very congenial to the Spanish spirit and the Spanish soil. Casanova's *Mémoires* carry this form of story on to a broader and in some respects higher plane. The old *picaro* never dared affront the world; he cringed before it and slunk behind its back to make grimaces. Casanova, too, was an adventurer living by his wits, but he approached the world with the same self-confidence as he approached a beautiful woman, and having won its favours treats it with the same consideration. Unlike the *picaro* whose delight it is to reveal the pettinesses of the men he has duped, Casanova shows his magnificence in adventure by regarding the world as a foeman worthy of all his courtesy; and with incomparable impartiality, as well as skill, he presents to us the narrative of all the perils he encountered or sought. Few old men sitting down in the evening of their days to chatter of old times have been so free as Casanova from the vices of senile literature. He never maunders of the things that are so dear to the aged merely because they are past; he introduces no superfluous reflections or comments. We recognise that the hand which keeps this pen so surely to the point is the hand of a man of action. Casanova's skill

in narrative is conspicuously shown in the love-adventures which form so large and important a part of his book, as of his life. (Men usually regard love as a bagatelle, he says somewhere, but, for his own part, he adds, he has found no more important business in life.) There would seem to be nothing so difficult as to tell a long series of amours, unshrinkingly, from first to last, without drawing a curtain at any stage. Nearly every writer in fiction or in autobiography who has attempted this has only produced an effect of weary monotony or else of oppressive closeness. But Casanova succeeds. Partly this is due to the variety and individuality he is able to give, not only to every incident, but to every woman he meets; so that his book is a gallery of delightful women, drawn with an art that almost recalls his great contemporary, Goethe. Partly it seems he was aided by his vivid and sympathetic Venetian temperament; his swift, unliterary style finds time for no voluptuous languors. He was aided even by his immodesty, for in literature as in the plastic arts and in life itself, the nude is nearer to virtue than the *décolleté*. The firm and absolute precision of every episode in these *Mémoires* leaves no room for any undue dallying with the fringes of love's garments. Casanova tells his story swiftly and boldly, with no more delay than is needed to record every essential detail; he is the absolute anti-type to Sterne as a narrator; the most libertine of authors, he is yet free from prurience. Thus the man of action covers the romancer with confusion; this supreme book of adventures is a real man's record of his own real life.

But let us forget that it is an autobiography and take it merely as a story. Its immense range of human interest, its audacious realism, its freedom

from perversity, entitle us to regard it as a typical story of adventure. And I ask myself: What is the relation of such a book to life? what is the moral worth of Casanova's *Mémoires*?

A foolish, superfluous question, I know, it seems to many. And I am willing to admit that there may possibly be things in life which it is desirable to do, and yet undesirable to moralise over; I would even assert that the moral worth of many of our actions lies precisely in their unconsciousness of any moral worth. Yet beneath the freest moral movements there must be a solid basis of social law, just as beneath the most gracious movements of the human body there lies the regulated play of mechanical law. When we find it assumed that there are things which are good to do and not good to justify we may strongly suspect that we have come across a mental muddle.

To see the matter rightly we must take it at the beginning. No one can rightly see the moral place of immoral literature—the literature of adventure—in the case of adults unless he sees it in the case of children. Of late years the people who write in newspapers and magazines have loudly abused all stories of the crudely heroic order, the stories of impossible virtue and unheard-of villainy in far-away lands, of marvellously brave bands under extravagantly reckless leaders, who march on through careless bloodshed to incredible victory or incalculable treasure. The hero of the average boy—magnificent sombrero on head, pistols in belt, galloping off on his mighty charger, a villain grasped by the scruff of the neck in each outstretched hand—has been severely mauled. The suggestions offered for the displacement of this literature furnish

documents for the psychologist. Let us have cheap lives of Jesus and the Apostle Paul! let us flood the world with the sober romances licensed by religious societies!—say those good people in the newspapers and the magazines. If they have ever themselves been children, and if so, how they came into the world shrouded in an impenetrable caul which will for ever shut them out from insight into the hearts of the young, is not known, and perhaps is no matter. Putting aside these estimable persons, there is in every heart a chamber dedicated to the impossible, and the younger the heart the larger is this golden ventricle. For the child who can just read, Jack the Giant-killer, and the story of those human-souled swans which make the swan a mystic bird for all our lives, are better worth knowing than any fact of the visible world. Some day the Life of Jesus, and even perhaps the Life of Paul, will seem to be among the sweetest and strangest of the world's fairy-tales; but that day will hardly come until every church and chapel has been spiritually razed to the ground. It cannot come to the generation which has had the name of Jesus thrust down its throat in Sunday-schools and board-schools. We English are a practical, common-sense people, and we cure our children of any hearty taste for religion as confectioners are said to cure their assistants of any excessive taste for sweets, by a preliminary surfeit. No doubt we are very wise, but we postpone indefinitely the day when children will come to our religious tales in the pure gladness of their joy in the marvellous.

In the meantime there ought not to be any doubt that children should be fed on fairy-tales as their souls' most natural food. Nothing can make up for the lack of them at the outset, just as no later supply

of milk can compensate for the starvation involved in feeding infants on starch. The power of assimilating fairy-tales is soon lost, and unless the child has a rarely powerful creative imagination its spiritual growth on this side at least remains for ever stunted.

If then childhood needs its pure fairy-land, and youth its fairy-land of impossible adventure, what fairy-land is left for adult age? Scarcely the novel. The modern novel in its finest manifestations, however engrossingly interesting, takes us but a little step from the passionate interests of our own lives. If I turn to the two recent novels which have most powerfully interested me—Huysmans' *En Route* and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*—I find that their interest lies largely in the skill with which they present and concentrate two mighty problems of actual life, the greatest of all problems, religion and sex. In adult life we seek a fairy-land occupied by beings at once as real as ourselves, and yet far removed from the sphere of our own actual interests and the heavy burden of the atmosphere under which we live; only so can it fascinate the imaginations of those who have outgrown the simple imaginative joys of early life. Casanova's *Mémoires* is the perfected type of the books which answer these requirements. It is unflinchingly real, immensely varied, the audaciously truthful narrative of undeniably human impulses. And yet it carries us out of relation with the problems of our actual life; it leads us into the realm of fairy-land.

But—analysing the matter a little more closely—it may still fairly be asked whether a book which, in spite of its remoteness, represents a form of human life, must not have a certain bearing on morals. Is not a part of its attraction, and indeed that of all

fairy-lands, the existence of a different code of morals? It seems to me that this is so. But precisely in that lies the moral value of such literature. Indeed the whole question of the moral value of art—that is to say, of æsthetic enjoyment—is really involved here. The matter is worth looking into.

It is one of Schopenhauer's unforgettable sayings, that whatever course of action we take in life there is always some element in our nature which could only find satisfaction in an exactly contrary course; so that, take what road we will, we yet always remain restless and unsatisfied in part. To Schopenhauer that reflection made for pessimism; it need not. The more finely and adequately we adjust ourselves to the actual conditions of our life the larger, no doubt, the unused and unsatisfied region within us. But it is just here that art comes in. Art largely counts for its effects on playing on these unused fibres of our organism, and by so doing it serves to bring them into a state of harmonious satisfaction—moralises them, if you will. Alienists have described a distressing form of insanity peculiar to old maids who have led honourable lives of abstinence and abnegation. After years of seeming content with the conditions of their lot they begin to manifest uncontrollable obsessions and erotic impulses; the unused elements of life, which they had shut down in the cellars of their souls and almost forgotten, have at last arisen in rebellion, clamouring tumultuously for satisfaction. The old orgies—the Saturnalian festival at Christmas and the Midsummer Festival on St. John's Day—bear witness that the ancients in their wisdom recognised that the bonds of the actual daily moral life must sometimes be relaxed lest they break from over-tension. We have lost the orgy, but in its place we have art. Our respectable matrons no

longer send out their daughters with torches at midnight into the woods and among the hills, where dancing and wine and blood may lash into their flesh the knowledge of the mysteries of life, but they take them to *Tristan*, and are fortunately unable to see into those carefully brought-up young souls on such occasions. The moralising force of art lies, not in its capacity to present a timid imitation of our experiences, but in its power to go beyond our experience, satisfying and harmonising the unfulfilled activities of our nature. That art should have such an effect on those who contemplate it is not surprising when we remember that, to some extent, art has a similar influence on its creators. "Libertin d'esprit mais sage de mœurs," it was said of Watteau. Mohammed when he wrote so voluptuously of the black-eyed houris of Paradise was still young and the blameless husband of an aged woman.

> "Singing is sweet; but be sure of this,
> Lips only sing when they cannot kiss."

It has been said of Wagner that he had in him the instincts of an ascetic and of a satyr, and the first is just as necessary as the second to the making of a great artist. It is a very ancient observation that the most unchaste verse has often been written by the chastest poets, and that the writers who have written most purely have found their compensation in living impurely.[5] In the same manner it has always been found in Christendom, both among Catholics and Protestants, that much of the most licentious literature has been written by the clergy, by no means because the clergy are a depraved class, but precisely because the austerity of their lives renders necessary for them these emotional athletics. Of

course, from the standpoint of simple nature, such literature is bad, it is merely a form of that obscenity which, as Huysmans has acutely remarked, can, only be produced by those who are chaste; in Nature desire passes swiftly into action, leaving little or no trace on the mind. A certain degree of continence—I do not mean merely in the region of sex but in the other fields of human action also—is needed as a breeding-ground for the dreams and images of desire to develop into the perfected visions of art. But the point of view of society is scarcely that of unadulterated nature. In society we have not always room for the swift and free passage of impulse into action; to avoid the evils of repressed impulse this play of the emotions on a higher and serener plane becomes essential. Just as we need athletics to expand and harmonise the coarser unused energies of the organism, so we need art and literature to expand and harmonise its finer energies, emotion being, as it may not be superfluous to point out, itself largely a muscular process, motion in a more or less arrested form, so that there is here more than a mere analogy. Art from this point of view is the athletics of the emotions.

The adventures of fairy-land—of which for our age I take Casanova's *Mémoires* as the type—constitute an important part of this athletics. It may be abused, just as we have the grosser excesses of the runner and the cyclist; but it is the abuse and not the use which is pernicious, and under the artificial conditions of civilisation the contemplation of the life and adventures of the heroically natural man is an exercise with fine spiritual uses. Such literature thus has a moral value: it helps us to live peacefully within the highly specialised routine of civilisation.

That is the underlying justification for Casanova's *Mémoires* as moral literature. But there is no reason why it should emerge into consciousness when we take up these *Mémoires*, any more than a man need take up a branch of physical athletics with any definite hygienic aim. It is sufficient to be moved by the pure enjoyment of it. And there must be something unwholesome and abnormal—something corrupt at the core—in any civilised man or woman who cannot win some enjoyment from this book.

III.

The more I contemplate the eighteenth century the more interesting I find it. In my youth it seemed to me unworthy of a glance. The books and the men, Shelley above all, who stirred my young blood belonged to the early nineteenth century. I was led to regard the last century as a dull period of stagnation and decay, a tomb into which the spirit of man sank after the slow death which followed the Renaissance. The dawn of the nineteenth century was an Easter Day of the human soul, rising from the sepulchre and flinging aside the old eighteenth century winding-sheet.

I have nothing yet to say against the early nineteenth century, which was indeed only the outcome of the years that went before, but I have gained a new delight in the men of the eighteenth century. It was in that age that the English spirit found its most complete intellectual expression, unaffected by foreign influence. When that spirit, reviving after the wars that lamentably cut short the development of Chaucer's magnificent song, again began its free literary development—no doubt with some stimulus from Humanism—it was suddenly

smothered at birth by the Renaissance wave from Italy and France. We may divine how it would have developed independently if we think of John Heywood's dramatic sketches—pale as those are after the Miller's tale in which for the first and last time Chaucer perfectly mated English realism to the lyric grace of English idealism—and to some extent, also, when we turn to the later Heywood's plays, or Dekker's, and especially to the robust and tolerant humanity, the sober artistic breadth of the one play of Porter's which has come down to us. But the intoxicating melodies of Ronsard and his fellows were heard from over sea, and the men of the English Renaissance arose—Lyly and Lodge and Campion with their refinements, Greene and Nash with their gay and brilliant music, Marlowe with his arrogant, irresistible energy—and brought to birth an absolutely new spirit, which may have been English enough in its rich and virginal elements, but received the seminal principle from abroad. It needed a century and more for that magnificent tumult to subside, and for the old English spirit to reappear and reach at last full maturity, by happy chance again in association with France, though this time it is England that chiefly plays the masculine part and impregnates France. Thus the eighteenth century was an age in which the English spirit found complete self-expression, and also an age in which England and France joined hands intellectually, and stood together at the summit of civilisation, with no rivals, unless Goethe and Kant may suffice to stand for a whole people. In the great Englishmen of these days we find the qualities which are truly native to Britain, and which have too often been torn and distracted by insane aberrations. There is a fine sobriety and sagacity in the English spirit, a mellow

human solidity, such as the Romans possessed always, but which we in our misty and storm-swept island have often exchanged, perhaps for better, but certainly for other qualities. It was not so in the eighteenth century, and by no accident the historian who has most finely expressed the genius of Rome was an eighteenth century Englishman. All the most typical men of that age possessed in varying degree the same qualities: Locke, Swift, Fielding, Hume, Richardson, Goldsmith, Hogarth, Johnson, Godwin. Thus the eighteenth century should undoubtedly be a source of pride to the British heart. England's reputation in the world rests largely on our poetic aptitudes and our political capacity. Eighteenth century England is not obviously pre-eminent in either respect, although it was the great age of our political development and the seed-time of our second great poetic age; it produced scarcely more than a single first-class poet exclusively within its limits, and it lost America. Yet our greatest philosopher, our greatest historian, our greatest biographer, nearly all our greatest novelists, our great initiators in painting, who were indirectly the initiators of the greater art of France, belong wholly to this century, and an unequalled cluster of our greatest poets belongs to its close. And these men were marked by sanity and catholicity, a superb solidity of spirit; they became genuinely cosmopolitan without losing any of their indigenous virtues. Without the eighteenth century we should never have known many of the greatest qualities which are latent, and too often only latent, in our race. Landor and Wordsworth alone were left to carry something of the spirit of the English eighteenth century far on into the literature of our own wholly alien century.

And their brothers of France were their most worthy peers. This spirit, indeed, which we see so conspicuously in the finest men of their age in England and France, was singularly widespread throughout Europe, a cheerful sobriety, a solid humanity, little troubled by any of those "movements" which were to become so prolific and so noisy in the next century. Christianity, it seemed, was decaying. Diderot, well informed on English affairs, wrote to a friend that in a few years it would be extinct, and looking at the state of the English Church at that time, no one could reasonably have surmised that Zinzendorf in Germany, and after him Wesley in England on a lower plane and Law on a higher plane, had already initiated that revival of Christianity which in our own century was destined to work itself out so obstreperously. But the world seemed none the worse for the apparent subsidence of Christianity; in the opinion of many it seemed to be very much the better. The tolerant paganism of classic days appeared to be reasserting itself, robustly in England, with a delicate refinement in France,—setting the paganism of Watteau against the paganism of Fielding—while Goethe and the Germans generally were striving to rescue and harmonise the best of Christianity with the best of antiquity. European civilisation was fully expanded; for a long time no great disturbing force had arisen, and though on every side the tender buds of coming growths might have been detected, they could not yet reveal their strength. Such a period certainly has its terrible defects; mellowness is not far from rottenness. But then youth also has its defects, and its crude acidity is still further from perfection. The nineteenth century has a higher moral standard than the eighteenth, so at least we in our self-

righteousness have been accustomed to think. But even if so, the abstract existence of a high moral standard is another thing from the prevalence of high moral living. Whatever the standard may be, it is a question whether the lives are much different. In the one case the standard is much above the practice, in the other only a little above it—that is the chief difference. And the advantages of winding the standard up to the higher pitch are not so unmixed as is sometimes assumed. One need not question these advantages, well recognised in the present century. But the advantages of a lower standard are less often recognised. There is especially the great advantage that we attain a higher degree of sincerity, and sincerity, if not itself the prime virtue, is surely, whatever the virtue may be, its chief accompaniment. A life that is swathed and deformed in much drapery is not so wholesome or so effective as one that can live nearer to the sun. And the unrecognisable villain is most pernicious; the brigand who holds a revolver at your head is better than the sleek and well-dressed thief who opens the proceedings with prayer. The eighteenth has been called a gross and unintelligent century. In the department of criticism, indeed, this century in England (for it was far otherwise in Germany) comes very short of our own century, and it is largely this failure to measure the precise value of things in æsthetic perception which now makes that age seem so shocking. From this point of view every great age —and not least our own greatest Elizabethan age—is equally defective. A period of energetic life cannot afford to spend much time on the solitary contemplation of its own bowels of æsthetic emotion. To produce a Pater is the one exquisite function of a spiritually barren and exhausted age. And still the

eighteenth century redeems its critical grossness by making even this later development possible; it lifted the man of letters from the place of a dependent to the place of a free man boldly prophesying in his own right; and, moreover, it was the first century which dared to claim the complete equality of men and women with all which that involves.

If it has required a certain insight for the child of our own century to discover the great qualities of the last century, there cannot be much doubt about the final judgment of the most competent judges. The eighteenth was, as Renouvier has called it, the first century of humanity since Christ, while at the same time, as Lange has said, it was penetrated through by the search for the ideal, or, as a more recent thinker concludes, it was a century dominated by the maxim *Salus populi suprema est lex*, holding in its noble aspirations after general happiness the germs of all modern socialism. In art and literature it saw the fresh spring of those blossoms which opened so splendidly and faded so swiftly in our century; it was the century not only of Hogarth and Fielding and Voltaire, but of Blake and Rousseau, of Diderot, of Swedenborg and Mesmer, of the development of modern music with Mozart and Beethoven, of the unparalleled enthusiasm awakened by the discovery of the Keltic world. And as its crowning glory the eighteenth century claims Goethe. Men will scarcely look back to our own century as so good to live in. One may well say that he would have gladly lived in the thirteenth century, perhaps the most interesting of all since Christ, or in the sixteenth, probably the most alive of all, or the eighteenth, surely the most human. But why have lived in the nineteenth, the golden age of machinery, and of men used as machines?

Eighteenth century Europe, being what it was, formed a perfect stage for Casanova to play his part on. With his Spanish and Italian blood, he was of the race of those who had come so actively to the front in the last days of old classic Rome, and his immediate ancestors had lived in the centre of the pagan Rome of the Renaissance. Thus he carried with him traditions which consorted well with much in the eighteenth century. And he had that in him, moreover, which no tradition can give, the incommunicable vitality in the presence of which all tradition shrivels into nothingness.

Casanova knew not only Italy, France, England, Germany, and Holland; he had visited Spain, Russia, Poland, Greece, Turkey, and Asia Minor. He was received by Benedict XII., by Frederick II. of Prussia, by the Empress Catherine, by Joseph II. He was at home in Paris, in London, in Berlin, in Vienna; he knew Munich, Dresden, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Barcelona. His picture of London is of great interest. He spent much of the year 1763 there, and some of his most interesting experiences, romantic and psychological, occurred during that period. He even dated the close of what he calls the second act in the comedy of his life from that visit to London, the next and concluding act being one of slow declination. So profound was his depression at this time that one day he went towards the Thames at the Tower with the deliberate intention of drowning himself, having first filled his pockets with bullets to ensure sinking. Fortunately an English friend (to whom the world owes thanks) met him on the way, read his resolve in his face, and insisted on carrying him off to a very convivial party, whose indecorous proceedings, although Casanova only remained a passive witness, served to dissipate all thoughts of

suicide. He is not, however, prejudiced against England; on the contrary, he finds that no nation offers so many interesting peculiarities to the attentive observer. As usual, in London Casanova mixed indiscriminately with the best and the worst society; his wit, his knowledge, his imperturbable effrontery, his charming conversation, served to open any door that he desired to open. He gives us curious glimpses into the lives of English noblemen of the day, and not less intimate pictures of the *chevaliers d'industrie* who preyed upon them. In the course of one adventure with people of the latter sort he was haled before the eminent blind magistrate Sir John Fielding, whom he seems to have mistaken, though this is not quite clear, for his yet more eminent brother Henry. He also met Kitty Fischer, the most fashionable *cocotte* of her day, whom we may yet see as Reynolds caught her in a well-inspired moment, dilating her sensitive nostrils, radiantly inhaling the joy of life, and he tells us anecdotes of her extravagance, of the jewels she wore, of the thousand guinea banknote which she ate in a sandwich.[6]

Throughout Europe Casanova knew many of the most celebrated people of his time, though it is clear —as one would expect from a man of his impartial humanity—he seldom went out of his way to meet them. His visit to Voltaire is a distinct contribution to our knowledge of that sage; he admired Helvetius, and wondered how a man of so many virtues could have denied virtue; D'Alembert he thought the most truly modest man he had ever met, an interesting tribute from the most truly immodest man of that period. The value of Casanova's record of the eighteenth century lies, however, by no means in the glimpses he has given us of great personalities: that has been much better done by much more

insignificant writers. It is as a picture of the manners and customs of the eighteenth century throughout Europe that the *Mémoires* are invaluable. Casanova saw Europe from the courts of kings to the lowest *bas fonds*. He lived in the castles of French and Italian nobles, in the comfortable homes of Dutch merchants, in his own house in Pall Mall, in taverns and inns and peasants' cottages anywhere. He had no intellectual prejudices, he had an immense versatility in tastes and practical aptitudes, he was genuinely interested in all human things. Thus he approached life with no stereotyped set of opinions, but with all the aloofness of an unclassed adventurer, who was at the same time a scholar and a man of letters. It can scarcely be that there is any record to compare with this as a vivid and impartial picture of the eighteenth century, in its robust solidity, its cheerful and tolerant scepticism, its serene and easy gaiety, its mellow decay. That is our final debt to this unique and immortal book.

What should be our last word about Casanova? It is true that although—if indeed one should not say because—he was so heroically natural Casanova was not an average normal man. It is scarcely given to the average man to expend such versatile and reckless skill in the field of the world, or to find so large a part wherein to play off that skill. But neither are the saints and philosophers normal; St. Bernard was not normal, nor yet Spinoza. And surely it is a poor picture of the world which would show us St. Bernard and Spinoza and shut out Casanova. "Vous avez l'outil universel," Fabrice said to Gil Blas. Casanova's brain was just such a tool of universal use, and he never failed to use it. For if you would find the supreme type of the human animal in the

completest development of his rankness and cunning, in the very plenitude of his most excellent wits, I know not where you may more safely go than to the *Mémoires* of the self-ennobled Jacques Casanova Chevalier de Seingalt.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[5] I take the first example which comes to hand, for whatever it may be worth:—"Luttrell was talking of Moore and Rogers—the poetry of the former so licentious, that of the latter so pure; much of its popularity owing to its being so carefully weeded of everything approaching to indelicacy; and the contrast between the *lives* and the *works* of the two men—the former a pattern of conjugal and domestic regularity, the latter of all the men he had ever known the greatest sensualist" (Greville's *Memoirs*, vol. iii. p. 324).

[6] For another side of life we may read his description of the English Sunday:—"On Sunday one dares neither to play at cards nor to perform music. The numerous spies who infest the streets of this capital listen to the sounds which come from the parlours of the houses, and if they suspect any gaming or singing they conceal themselves and slip in at the first opportunity to seize those bad Christians who dare to profane the Lord's Day by amusements which everywhere else are counted innocent. In revenge the English may go with impunity to sanctify the holy day in the taverns and brothels which are so plentiful in this city." One may compare with this Mme. de Staël's almost Dantesque description—so at least it remains in the memory—of the gloom of the Scotch Sabbath in the days of Burns. This statement of the matter remained

substantially accurate until almost yesterday. So long it remained for the English spirit to re-conquer Sunday! It must be remembered that Puritanism, while always a part of the English spirit, was not originally its predominant note; it only became so as an inevitable reaction against the exotic Renaissance movement. Mary Stuart made Knox, Charles I. made Cromwell, and both monarchs were intimately associated with the last wave of the Renaissance.

# ZOLA.

ZOLA'S name—a barbarous, explosive name, like an anarchist's bomb—has been tossed about amid hoots and yells for a quarter of a century. In every civilised country we have heard of the man who has dragged literature into the gutter, who has gone down to pick up the filth of the streets, and has put it into books for the filthy to read. And in every civilised country his books have been read, by the hundred thousand.

To-day, his great life-work is completed. At the same time, the uproar that it aroused has, to a large extent, fallen silent. Not that there is any general agreement as to the rank of the author of the Rougon-Macquart series; but the storms that greeted it have worn themselves out, and it is recognised that there are at least two sides to this as to any other question. Such a time is favourable to the calm discussion of Zola's precise position.

The fundamental assertion of those who, in their irreconcilable opposition to Zola, have rightly felt that abuse is not argument, has always been that Zola is no artist. The matter has usually presented itself to them as a question of Idealism *versus* Realism. Idealism, as used by the literary critic, seems to mean a careful selection of the facts of life for artistic treatment, certain facts being suited for treatment in the novel, certain other facts being not so suited; while the realist, from the literary critic's point of view, is one who flings all facts indiscriminately into his pages. I think that is a fair

statement of the matter, for the literary critic does not define very clearly; still less does he ask himself how far the idealism he advocates is merely traditional, nor, usually, to what extent the manner of presentation should influence us. He does not ask himself these questions, nor need we ask him, for in the case of Zola (or, indeed, of any other so-called "realist") there is no such distinction. There is no absolute realism, merely a variety of idealisms; the only absolute realism would be a phonographic record, illustrated photographically, after the manner of the cinematograph. Zola is just as much an idealist as George Sand. It is true that he selects very largely from material things, and that he selects very profusely. But the selection remains, and where there is deliberate selection there is art. We need not trouble ourselves here—and I doubt whether we are ever called upon to trouble ourselves—about "Realism" and "Idealism." The questions are: Has the artist selected the right materials? Has he selected them with due restraint?

The first question is a large one, and, in Zola's case at all events, it cannot, I think, be answered on purely æsthetic grounds; the second may be answered without difficulty. Zola has himself answered it; he admits that he has been carried away by his enthusiasm, and perhaps, also, by his extraordinary memory for recently-acquired facts (a memory like a sponge, as he has put it, quickly swollen and quickly emptied); he has sown details across his page with too profuse a hand. It is the same kind of error as Whitman made, impelled by the same kind of enthusiasm. Zola expends immense trouble to get his facts; he has told how he ransacked the theologians to obtain body and colour for *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*, perhaps the best of his earlier

books. But he certainly spent no more preliminary labour on it than Flaubert spent on *Madame Bovary*, very far less than Flaubert spent on the study of Carthage for *Salammbô*. But the results are different; the one artist gets his effects by profusion and multiplicity of touches, the other by the deliberate self-restraint with which he selects and emphasises solely the salient and significant touches. The latter method seems to strike more swiftly and deeply the ends of art. Three strokes with the brush of Frans Hals are worth a thousand of Denner's. Rich and minute detail may impress us, but it irritates and wearies in the end. If a man takes his two children on to his knees, it matters little whether he places Lénore on his right knee and Henri on his left, or the other way about; the man himself may fail to know or to realise, and the more intense his feelings the less likely is he to know. When we are living deeply, the facts of our external life do not present themselves to us in elaborate detail; a very few points are—as it has been termed—focal in consciousness, while the rest are marginal in subconsciousness. A few things stand out vividly at each moment of life; the rest are dim. The supreme artist is shown by the insight and boldness with which he seizes and illuminates these bright points at each stage, leaving the marginal elements in due subordination. Dramatists so unlike as Ford and Ibsen, novelists so unlike as Flaubert and Tolstoi, yet alike impress us by the simple vividness of their artistic effects. The methods adopted by Zola render such effects extremely difficult of attainment. Perhaps the best proof of Zola's remarkable art is the skill with which he has neutralised the evil results of his ponderous method. In his most characteristic novels, as *L'Assommoir*, *Nana*, *Germinal*, his efforts to

attain salient perspective in the mass of trivial or technical things—to build a single elaborate effect out of manifold details—are often admirably conducted. Take, for instance, the Voreux, the coal-pit which may almost be said to be the hero of *Germinal* rather than any of the persons in the book. The details are not interesting, but they are carefully elaborated, and the Voreux is finally symbolised as a stupendous idol, sated with human blood, crouching in its mysterious sanctuary. Whenever Zola wishes to bring the Voreux before us, this formula is repeated. And it is the same, in a slighter degree, with the other material personalities of the book. Sometimes, in the case of a crowd, this formula is simply a cry. It is so with the Parisian mob who yell "A Berlin!" in the highly-wrought conclusion to *Nana*; it is so with the crowd of strikers in *Germinal* who shout for bread. It is more than the tricky repetition of a word or a gesture, overdone by Dickens and others; it is the artful manipulation of a carefully-elaborated, significant phrase. Zola seems to have been the first who has, deliberately and systematically, introduced this sort of *leit-motiv* into literature, as a method of summarising a complex mass of details, and bringing the total impression of them before the reader. In this way he contrives to minimise the defects of his method, and to render his complex detail focal. He sometimes attains poignantly simple effects by the mere repetition of a *leit-motiv* at the right moment. And he is able at times, also, to throw aside his detailed method altogether, and to reach effects of tragic intensity. The mutilation of Maigrat's corpse is a scene which can scarcely have been described in a novel before. Given the subject, Zola's treatment of it has the strength, brevity, and certainty of touch which only belong to great masters of art. That Zola

is a great master of his art, *L'Assommoir* and *Germinal* —which, so far as I have read Zola, seem his two finest works—are enough to prove. Such works are related to the ordinary novel much as Wagner's music-dramas are related to the ordinary Italian opera. Wagner reaches a loftier height of art than Zola; he had a more complete grasp of all the elements he took in hand to unite. Zola has not seen with sufficient clearness the point of view of science, and the limits of its capacity for harmonising with fiction; nor has he with perfect sureness of vision always realised the ends of art. He has left far too much of the scaffolding standing amid his huge literary structures; there is too much mere brute fact which has not been wrought into art. But, if Zola is not among the world's greatest artists, I do not think we can finally deny that he is a great artist.

To look at Zola from the purely artistic standpoint, however, is scarcely to see him at all. His significance for the world generally, and even for literature, lies less in a certain method of using his material—as it may be said to lie, for example, in the case of the Goncourts—than in the material itself, and the impulses and ideas that prompted his selection of that material. These growing piles of large books are the volcanic ejecta of an original and exuberant temperament. To understand them we must investigate this temperament.

A considerable and confused amount of racial energy was stored up in Zola. At once French, Italian, and Greek—with a mother from the central Beauce country of France, more fruitful in corn than in intellect, and a father of mixed Italian and Greek race, a mechanical genius in his way, with enthusiastic energies and large schemes—he presents

a curious combination of potential forces, perhaps not altogether a very promising combination. One notes that the mechanical engineer in the father seems to have persisted in the son, not necessarily by heredity, but perhaps by early familiarity and association. Young Zola was a delicate child and by no means a brilliant schoolboy, though he once won a prize for memory; such ability as he showed was in the direction of science; he had no literary aptitudes. He seems to have adopted literature chiefly because pen and ink come handiest to the eager energies of a poor clerk. It is scarcely fanciful to detect the mechanical aptitudes still. Just as all Huxley's natural instincts were towards mechanics, and in physiology he always sought for the "go" of the organism, so Zola, however imperfect his scientific equipment may be, has always sought for the "go" of the social organism. The history of the Rougon-Macquart family is a study in social mathematics: given certain family strains, what is the dynamic hereditary outcome of their contact?

To the making of Zola there went, therefore, this curious racial blend, as a soil ready to be fertilised by any new seed, and a certain almost instinctive tendency to look at things from the mechanical and material point of view. To these, in very early life, a third factor was added of the first importance. During long years after his father's death, Zola, as a child and youth, suffered from poverty, poverty almost amounting to actual starvation, the terrible poverty of respectability. The whole temper of his work and his outlook on the world are clearly conditioned by this prolonged starvation of adolescence. The timid and reserved youth—for such, it is said, has been Zola's character both in youth and manhood—was shut up with his fresh

energies in a garret while the panorama of the Paris world was unfolded below him. Forced both by circumstances and by temperament to practise the strictest chastity and sobriety, there was but one indulgence left open to him, an orgy of vision. Of this, as we read his books, we cannot doubt that he fully availed himself, for each volume of the Rougon-Macquart series is an orgy of material vision.[7]

Zola remained chaste, and, it is said, he is still sober—though we are told that his melancholy morose face lights up like a gourmet's at the hour of his abstemious dinner—but this early eagerness to absorb the sights as well as the sounds, and one may add the smells, of the external world, has at length become moulded into a routine method. To take some corner of life, and to catalogue every detail of it, to place a living person there, and to describe every sight and smell and sound around him, although he himself may be quite unconscious of them—that, in the simplest form, is the recipe for making a *roman expérimental*. The method, I wish to insist, was rooted in the author's experience of the world. Life only came to him as the sights, sounds, smells, that reached his garret window. His soul seems to have been starved at the centre, and to have encamped at the sensory periphery. He never tasted deep of life, he stored up none of those wells of purely personal emotion from which great artists have hoisted up the precious fluid which makes the bright living blood of their creations. How different he is in this respect from the other great novelist of our day, who has also been a volcanic force of world-wide significance! Tolstoi comes before us as a man who has himself lived deeply, a man who has had an intense thirst for life, and who has satisfied that thirst. He has craved to know life, to know women,

the joy of wine, the fury of battle, the taste of the ploughman's sweat in the field. He has known all these things, not as material to make books, but as the slaking of instinctive personal passions. And in knowing them he has stored up a wealth of experiences from which he drew as he came to make books, and which bear about them that peculiar haunting fragrance only yielded by the things which have been lived through, personally, in the far past. Zola's method has been quite otherwise: when he wished to describe a great house he sat outside the palatial residence of M. Menier, the chocolate manufacturer, and imagined for himself the luxurious fittings inside, discovering in after years that his description had come far short of the reality; before writing *Nana*, he obtained an introduction to a courtesan, with whom he was privileged to lunch; his laborious preparation for the wonderful account of the war of 1870, in *La Débâcle*, was purely one of books, documents, and second-hand experiences; when he wished to write of labour he went to the mines and to the fields, but never appears to have done a day's manual work. Zola's literary methods are those of the *parvenu* who has tried to thrust himself in from outside, who has never been seated at the table of life, who has never really lived. That is their weakness. It is also their virtue. There is no sense of satiety in Zola's work as there is in Tolstoi's. One can understand how it is that, although their methods are so unlike, Tolstoi himself regards Zola as the one French novelist of the day who is really alive. The starved lad, whose eyes were concentrated with longing on the visible world, has reaped a certain reward from his intellectual chastity; he has preserved his clearness of vision for material things, an eager, insatiable, impartial vision. He is a zealot

in his devotion to life, to the smallest details of life. He has fought like the doughtiest knight of old-world romance for his lady's honour, and has suffered more contumely than they all. "On barde de fer nos urinoirs!" he shouts in a fury of indignation in one of his essays; it is a curious instance of the fanatic's austere determination that no barrier shall be set up to shut out the sights and smells of the external world. The virgin freshness of his thirst for life gives its swelling, youthful vigour to his work, its irrepressible energy.

It has, indeed, happened with this unsatisfied energy as it will happen with such energies; it has retained its robustness at the sacrifice of the sweetness it might otherwise have gained. There is a certain bitterness in Zola's fury of vision, as there is also in his gospel of "Work! work! work!" One is conscious of a savage assault on a citadel which, the assailant now well knows, can never be scaled. Life cannot be reached by the senses alone; there is always something that cannot be caught by the utmost tension of eyes and ears and nose; a well-balanced soul is built up, not alone on sensory memories, but also on the harmonious satisfaction of the motor and emotional energies. That cardinal fact must be faced even when we are attempting to define the fruitful and positive element in Zola's activity.

The chief service which Zola has rendered to his fellow-artists and successors, the reason of the immense stimulus he supplies, seems to lie in the proofs he has brought of the latent artistic uses of the rough, neglected details of life. The Rougon-Macquart series has been to his weaker brethren like that great sheet knit at the four corners, let down

from Heaven full of four-footed beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air, and bearing in it the demonstration that to the artist as to the moralist nothing can be called common or unclean. It has henceforth become possible for other novelists to find inspiration where before they could never have turned, to touch life with a vigour and audacity of phrase which, without Zola's example, they would have trembled to use, while they still remain free to bring to their work the simplicity, precision, and inner experience which he has never possessed. Zola has enlarged the field of the novel. He has brought the modern material world into fiction in a more definite and thorough manner than it has ever been brought before, just as Richardson brought the modern emotional world into fiction; such an achievement necessarily marks an epoch. In spite of all his blunders, Zola has given the novel new power and directness, a vigour of fibre which was hard indeed to attain, but which, once attained, we may chasten as we will. And in doing this he has put out of court, perhaps for ever, those unwholesome devotees of the novelist's art who work out of their vacuity, having neither inner nor outer world to tell of.

Zola's delight in exuberant detail, it is true, is open to severe criticism. When, however, we look at his work, not as great art but as an important moment in the evolution of the novel, this exuberance is amply justified. Such furious energy in hammering home this demonstration of the artistic utility of the whole visible modern world may detract from the demonstrator's reputation for skill; it has certainly added to the force of the demonstration. Zola's luxuriance of detail—the heritage of that romantic movement of which he was

the child—has extended impartially to every aspect of life he has investigated, to the working of a mine, to the vegetation of the Paradou, to the ritual of the Catholic Church. But it is not on the details of inanimate life, or the elaborate description of the industrial and religious functions of men, that the rage of Zola's adversaries has chiefly been spent. It is rather on his use of the language of the common people and on his descriptions of the sexual and digestive functions of humanity. Zola has used slang —the *argot* of the populace—copiously, chiefly indeed in *L'Assommoir*, which is professedly a study of low life, but to a less extent in his other books. A considerable part of the power of *L'Assommoir*, in many respects Zola's most perfect work, lies in the skill with which he uses the language of the people he is dealing with; the reader is bathed throughout in an atmosphere of picturesque, vigorous, often coarse *argot*. There is, no doubt, a lack of critical sobriety in the profusion and reiteration of vulgarisms, of coarse oaths, of the varied common synonyms for common things. But they achieve the end that Zola sought, and so justify themselves.

They are of even greater interest as a protest against the exaggerated purism which has ruled the French language for nearly three centuries, and while rendering it a more delicate and precise instrument for scientific purposes, has caused it to become rather bloodless and colourless for the artist's purposes, as compared with the speech used by Rabelais, Montaigne, and even Molière, the great classics who have chiefly influenced Zola. The romantic movement of the present century, it is true, added colour to the language, but scarcely blood; it was an exotic, feverish colour which has not permanently enriched French speech. A language

rendered anæmic by over-clarification cannot be fed by exotic luxuries but by an increase in the vigorous staples of speech, and Zola was on the right track when he went to the people's common speech, which is often classic in the true sense and always robust. Doubtless he has been indiscriminate and even inaccurate in his use of *argot*, sometimes giving undue place to what is of merely temporary growth. But the main thing was to give literary place and prestige to words and phrases which had fallen so low in general esteem, in spite of their admirable expressiveness, that only a writer of the first rank and of unequalled audacity could venture to lift them from the mire. This Zola has done; and those who follow him may easily exercise the judgment and discretion in which he has been lacking.

Zola's treatment of the sexual and the digestive functions, as I pointed out, has chiefly aroused his critics. If you think of it, these two functions are precisely the central functions of life, the two poles of hunger and love around which the world revolves. It is natural that it should be precisely these fundamental aspects of life which in the superficial contact of ordinary social intercourse we are for ever trying more and more to refine away and ignore. They are subjected to an ever-encroaching process of attenuation and circumlocution, and as a social tendency this influence is possibly harmless or even beneficial. But it is constantly extending to literature also, and here it is disastrous. It is true that a few great authors—classics of the first rank—have gone to extremes in their resistance to this tendency. These extremes are of two kinds: the first issuing in a sort of coprolalia, or inclination to dwell on excrement, which we find to a slight extent in Rabelais and to a marked extent in the half-mad

Swift; in its fully-developed shape this coprolalia is an uncontrollable instinct found in some forms of insanity. The other extreme is that of pruriency, or the perpetual itch to circle round sexual matters, accompanied by a timidity which makes it impossible to come right up to them; this sort of impotent fumbling in women's placket-holes finds its supreme literary exponent in Sterne. Like coprolalia, when uncontrolled, prurience is a well-recognised characteristic of the insane, leading them to find a vague eroticism everywhere. But both these extreme tendencies have not been found incompatible with the highest literary art. Moreover, their most pronounced exponents have been clerics, the conventional representatives of the Almighty. However far Zola might go in these directions, he would still be in what is universally recognised as very good company. He has in these respects by no means come up with Father Rabelais and Dean Swift and the Rev. Laurence Sterne; but there can be little doubt that, along both lines, he has missed the restraint of well-balanced art. On the one hand he over-emphasises what is repulsive in the nutritive side of life, and on the other hand, with the timid obsession of chastity, he over-emphasises the nakedness of flesh. In so doing, he has revealed a certain flabbiness in his art, although he has by no means diminished his service in widening the horizon of literary speech and subject. Bearing in mind that many crowned kings of literature have approached these subjects quite as closely as Zola, and far less seriously, it does not seem necessary to enter any severer judgment here.

To enlarge the sphere of language is an unthankful task, but in the long run literature owes an immense debt to the writers who courageously

add to the stock of strong and simple words. Our own literature for two centuries has been hampered by the social tendency of life to slur expression, and to paraphrase or suppress all forceful and poignant words. If we go back to Chaucer, or even to Shakespeare, we realise what power of expression we have lost. It is enough, indeed, to turn to our English Bible. The literary power of the English Bible is largely due to the unconscious instinct for style which happened to be in the air when it was chiefly moulded, to the simple, direct, unashamed vigour of its speech. Certainly, if the discovery of the Bible had been left for us to make, any English translation would have to be issued at a high price by some esoteric society, for fear lest it should fall into the hands of the British matron. It is our British love of compromise, we say, that makes it possible for a spade to be called a spade on one day of the week, but on no other; our neighbours, whose minds are more logically constituted, call it *le cant Britannique*. But our mental compartments remain very water-tight, and on the whole we are even worse off than the French who have no Bible. For instance, we have almost lost the indispensable words “belly” and “bowels,” both used so often and with such admirable effect in the Psalms; we talk of the “stomach,” a word which is not only an incorrect equivalent, but at best totally inapt for serious or poetic uses. Any one who is acquainted with our old literature, or with the familiar speech of the common folk, will recall similar instances of simple, powerful expressions which are lost or vanishing from literary language, leaving no available substitute behind. In modern literary language, indeed, man scarcely exists save in his extremities. For we take the pubes as a centre, and we thence describe a circle with a

radius of some eighteen inches—in America the radius is rather longer—and we forbid any reference to any organ within the circle, save that maid-of-all-work the "stomach"; in other words, we make it impossible to say anything to the point concerning the central functions of life.

It is a question how far real literature can be produced under such conditions, not merely because literature is thus shut out from close contact with the vital facts of life, but because the writer who is willing to be so shut out, who finds himself most at home within the social limits of speech, will probably not be made of the heroic stuff that goes to the moulding of a great writer. The social limits of speech are useful enough, for we are all members of society, and it is well that we should have some protection against the assaults of unbridled vulgarity. But in literature we may choose to read what we will, or to read nothing, and the man who enters the world of literature timidly equipped with the topics and language of the drawing-room is not likely to go far. I once saw it stated depreciatingly in a grave literary review that a certain novel by a woman writer dealt with topics that are not even discussed by men at their clubs. I had never read it, but it seemed to me then that there might be hope for that novel. No doubt it is even possible in literature to fall below the club standard, but unless you can rise above the club standard, better stay at the club, tell stories there, or sweep the crossing outside.

All our great poets and novelists from Chaucer to Fielding wrote sincerely and heroically concerning the great facts of life. That is why they are great, robustly sane, radiantly immortal. It is a mistake to suppose that no heroism was involved in their case;

for though no doubt they had a freer general speech on their side they went beyond their time in daring to mould that speech to the ends of art, in bringing literature closer to life. It was so even with Chaucer; compare him with his contemporaries and successors; observe how he seeks to soothe the susceptibilities of his readers and to deprecate the protests of the "precious folk." There is no great art at any epoch without heroism, though one epoch may be more favourable than another to the exercise of such heroism in literature. In our own age and country daring has passed out of the channels of art into those of commerce, to find exercise, foolish enough sometimes, in the remotest corners of the earth. It is because our literature is not heroic, but has been confined within the stifling atmosphere of the drawing-room, that English poets and novelists have ceased to be a power in the world and are almost unknown outside the parlours and nurseries of our own country. It is because in France there have never ceased to be writers here and there who have dared to face life heroically and weld it into art that the literature of France is a power in the world wherever there are men intelligent enough to recognise its achievements. When literature that is not only fine but also great appears in England we shall know it as such by its heroism, if by no other mark.

Language has its immense significance because it is the final incarnation of a man's most intimate ideals. Zola's style and method are monotonous—with a monotony which makes his books unreadable when we have once mastered his secret—and the burden they express is ever the same: the energy of natural life. Whatever is robust, whatever is wholesomely exuberant, whatever, wholesomely or

not, is possessed by the devouring fury of life—of such things Zola can never have enough. The admirable opening of *La Terre*, in which a young girl drives the cow, wild for the male, to the farm where the stockbull is kept, then leading the appeased animal home again, symbolises Zola's whole view of the world. All the forces of Nature, it seems to him, are raging in the fury of generative desire or reposing in the fulness of swelling maturity. The very earth itself, in the impressive pages with which *Germinal* closes, is impregnated with men, germinating beneath the soil, one day to burst through the furrows and renew the old world's failing life. In this conception of the natural energies of the world—as manifested in men and animals, in machines, in every form of matter—perpetually conceiving and generating, Zola reaches his most impressive effects, though these effects are woven together of elements that are separately of no very exquisite beauty, or subtle insight, or radical novelty.

In considering Zola, we are indeed constantly brought back to the fact that most of the things that he has tried to do have been better done by more accomplished artists. The Goncourts have extended the sphere of language, even in the direction of slang, and have faced many of the matters that Zola has faced, and with far more delicate, though usually more shadowy, art; Balzac has created as large and vivid a world of people, though drawing more of it from his own imagination; Huysmans has greater skill in stamping the vision of strange or sordid things on the brain; Tolstoi gives a deeper realisation of life; Flaubert is as audaciously naturalistic, and has, as well, that perfect self-control which should always accompany audacity. And in Flaubert, too, we find something of the same irony as in Zola.

This irony, however, is a personal and characteristic feature of Zola's work. It is irony alone which gives it distinction and poignant incisiveness. Irony may be called the soul of Zola's work, the embodiment of his moral attitude towards life. It has its source, doubtless, like so much else that is characteristic, in his early days of poverty and aloofness from the experiences of life. There is a fierce impartiality—the impartiality of one who is outside and shut off—in this manner of presenting the brutalities and egoisms and pettinesses of men. The fury of his irony is here equalled by his self-restraint. He concentrates it into a word, a smile, a gesture. Zola believes, undoubtedly, in a reformed, even perhaps a revolutionised, future of society, but he has no illusions. He sets down things as he sees them. He has no tendernesses for the working-classes, no pictures of rough diamonds. We may see this very clearly in *Germinal*. Here every side of the problem of modern capitalism is presented: the gentle-natured shareholding class unable to realise a state of society in which people should not live on dividends and give charity; the official class with their correct authoritative views, very sure that they will always be needed to control labour and maintain social order; and the workers, some brutalised, some suffering like dumb beasts, some cringing to the bosses, some rebelling madly, a few striving blindly for justice.

There is no loophole in Zola's impartiality; the gradual development of the seeming hero of *Germinal*, Etienne Lantier, the agitator, honest in his revolt against oppression, but with an unconscious bourgeois ideal at his heart, seems unerringly right. All are the victims of an evil social system, as Zola sees the world, the enslaved workers as much as the

overfed masters; the only logical outcome is a clean sweep—the burning up of the chaff and straw, the fresh furrowing of the earth, the new spring of a sweet and vigorous race. That is the logical outcome of Zola's attitude, the attitude of one who regards our present society as a thoroughly vicious circle. His pity for men and women is boundless; his disdain is equally boundless. It is only towards animals that his tenderness is untouched by contempt; some of his most memorable passages are concerned with the sufferings of animals. The New Jerusalem may be fitted up, but the Montsou miners will never reach it; they will fight for the first small, stuffy, middle-class villa they meet on the way. And Zola pours out the stream of his pitiful, pitiless irony on the weak, helpless, erring children of men. It is this moral energy, combined with his volcanic exuberance, which lifts him to a position of influence above the greater artists with whom we may compare him.

It is by no means probable that the world will continue to read Zola much longer. His work is already done; but when the nineteenth century is well past it may be that he will still have his interest. There will be plenty of material, especially in the newspapers, for the future historian to reconstruct the social life of the latter half of the nineteenth century. But the material is so vast that these historians will possibly be even more biassed and one-sided than our own. For a vivid, impartial picture—on the whole a faithful picture—of certain of the most characteristic aspects of this period, seen indeed from the outside, but drawn by a contemporary in all its intimate and even repulsive details, the reader of a future age can best go to Zola. What would we not give for a thirteenth century Zola! We should read with painful, absorbed interest

a narrative of the Black Death as exact as that of nineteenth century alcoholism in *L'Assommoir*. The story of how the serf lived, as fully told as in *La Terre*, would be of incomparable value. The early merchant and usurer would be a less dim figure if *L'Argent* had been written about him. The abbeys and churches of those days have in part come down to us, but no *Germinal* remains to tell of the lives and thoughts of the men who hewed those stones, and piled them, and carved them. How precious such record would have been we may realise when we recall the incomparable charm of Chaucer's prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. But our children's children, with the same passions alive at their hearts under incalculably different circumstances, will in the pages of the Rougon-Macquart series find themselves back again among all the strange remote details of a vanished world. What a fantastic and terrible page of old-world romance!

**FOOTNOTES:**

[7] "Mes souvenirs," he told a psychological interviewer, "ont une puissance, un relief extraordinaire; ma mémoire est énorme, prodigieuse, elle me gêne; quand j'évoque les objets que j'ai vus, je les revois tels qu'ils sont réellement avec leurs lignes, leurs formes, leurs couleurs, leurs odeurs, leurs sons; *c'est une matérialisation à outrance*; le soleil qui les éclaire m'éblouit presque; l'odeur me suffoque, les détails s'accrochent à moi et m'empêchent de voir l'ensemble. Aussi pour le ressaisir me faut-il attendre un certain temps. Cette possibilité d'évocation ne dure pas très longtemps; le relief de l'image est d'une exactitude, d'une intensité inouïes, puis l'image s'efface, disparaît, cela s'en va." This

description suggests myopia, and it is a fact that Zola has been short-sighted from youth; he first realised it at sixteen. His other senses, especially smell, are very keen—largely, however, as an outcome of attention or practice. Thus while his tactile sensibility and sensibility to pain are acute, his olfactory keenness is rather qualitative than quantitative; that is to say that it mainly consists in a marked memory for odours, a tendency to be emotionally impressed by them, and an ability to distinguish them in which he resembles professional perfumers. All these and many other facts have been very precisely ascertained by means of the full psychological and anthropological study of M. Zola which has been carried out by experts under the superintendence of Dr. Toulouse.

# HUYSMANS.

IN trying to represent the man who wrote the extraordinary books grouped around *A Rebours* and *En Route*, I find myself carried back to the decline of the Latin world. I recall those restless Africans who were drawn into the vortex of decadent Rome, who absorbed its corruptions with all the barbaric fervour of their race, and then with a more natural impetus of that youthful fervour threw themselves into the young current of Christianity, yet retaining in their flesh the brand of an exotic culture. Tertullian, Augustine, and the rest gained much of their power, as well as their charm, because they incarnated a fantastic mingling of youth and age, of decayed Latinity, of tumultuously youthful Christianity. Huysmans, too, incarnates the old and the new, but with a curious, a very vital difference. To-day the *rôles* are reversed; it is another culture that is now young, with its aspirations after human perfection and social solidarity, while Christianity has exchanged the robust beauty of youth for the subtler beauty of age. “The most perfect analogy to our time which I can find,” wrote Renan to his sister amid the tumults of Paris in 1848, a few weeks after Huysmans had been born in the same city, “is the moment when Christianity and paganism stood face to face.” Huysmans had wandered from ancestral haunts of mediæval peace into the forefront of the struggles of our day, bringing the clear, refined perceptions of old culture to the intensest vision of the modern world yet attained, but never at rest,

never once grasping except on the purely æsthetic side the significance of the new age, always haunted by the memory of the past and perpetually feeling his way back to what seems to him the home of his soul.—The fervent seeker of those early days, indeed, but *à rebours*!

This is scarcely a mere impression; one might be tempted to say that it is strictly the formula of this complex and interesting personality. Coming on the maternal side from an ordinary Parisian bourgeois stock, though there chanced to be a sculptor even along this line, on the paternal side he belongs to an alien aristocracy of art. From father to son his ancestors were painters, of whom at least one, Cornelius Huysmans, still figures honourably in our public galleries, while the last of them left Breda to take up his domicile in Paris. Here his son, Joris Karl, has been the first of the race to use the pen instead of the brush, yet retaining precisely those characters of "veracity of imitation, jewel-like richness of colour, perfection of finish, emphasis of character," which their historian finds in the painters of his land from the fourteenth century onwards. Where the Meuse approaches the Rhine valley we find the home of the men who, almost alone in the north, created painting and the arts that are grouped around painting, and evolved religious music. On the side of art the Church had found its chief builders in the men of these valleys, and even on the spiritual side also, for here is the northern home of mysticism. Their latest child has fixed his attention on the feverish activities of Paris with the concentrated gaze of a stranger in a strange land, held by a fascination which is more than half repulsion, always missing something, he scarcely knows what. He has ever been seeking the satisfaction he had missed,

sometimes in the æsthetic vision of common things, sometimes in the refined Thebaid of his own visions, at length more joyfully in the survivals of mediæval mysticism. Yet as those early Africans still retained their acquired Roman instincts, and that fantastic style which could not be shaken off, so Huysmans will surely retain to the last the tincture of Parisian modernity.

Yet we can by no means altogether account for Huysmans by race and environment. Every man of genius is a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth, unlike other men, seeing everything as it were at a different angle, mirroring the world in his mind as in those concave or convex mirrors which elongate or abbreviate absurdly all who approach them. No one ever had a keener sense of the distressing absurdity of human affairs than M. Huysmans. The Trocadero is not a beautiful building, but to no one else probably has it appeared as an old hag lying on her back and elevating her spindle shanks towards the sky. Such images of men's works and ways abound in Huysmans' books, and they express his unaffected vision of life, his disgust for men and things, a shuddering disgust, yet patient, half-amused. I can well recall an evening spent some years ago in M. Huysmans' company. His face, with the sensitive, luminous eyes, reminded one of Baudelaire's portraits, the face of a resigned and benevolent Mephistopheles who has discovered the absurdity of the Divine order but has no wish to make any improper use of his discovery. He talked in low and even tones, never eagerly, without any emphasis or gesture, not addressing any special person; human imbecility was the burden of nearly all that he said, while a faint twinkle of amused wonderment lit up his eyes. And throughout all his books until almost

the last “l’éternelle bêtise de l’humanité” is the ever-recurring refrain.

Always leading a retired life, and specially abhorring the society and conversation of the average literary man, M. Huysmans has for many years been a government servant—a model official, it is said—at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Here, like our own officials at Whitehall, he serves his country in dignified leisure—on the only occasion on which I have seen him in his large and pleasant *bureau*, he was gazing affectionately at Chéret’s latest *affiche*, which a lady of his acquaintance had just brought to show him—and such duties of routine, with the close contact with practical affairs they involve, must always be beneficial in preserving the sane equipoise of an imaginative temperament. In this matter Huysmans has been more fortunate than his intimate friend Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, who had wandered so far into the world of dreams that he lost touch with the external world and ceased to distinguish them clearly. One is at first a little surprised to hear of the patient tact and diplomacy which the author of *A Rebours* spent round the death-bed of the author of *Contes Cruels* to obtain the dying dreamer’s consent to a ceremony of marriage which would legitimate his child. But Huysmans’ sensitive nervous system and extravagant imagination have ever been under the control of a sane and forceful intellect; his very idealism has been nourished by the contemplation of a world which he has seen too vividly ever to ignore. We may read that in the reflective deliberation of his grave and courteous bearing, somewhat recalling, as more than one observer has noted, his own favourite animal, the cat, whose outward repose of Buddhistic contemplation envelops a highly-strung nervous

system, while its capacity to enjoy the refinements of human civilisation comports a large measure of spiritual freedom and ferocity. Like many another man of letters, Huysmans suffers from neuralgia and dyspepsia; but no novelist has described so persistently and so poignantly the pangs of toothache or the miseries of *maux d'estomac*, a curious proof of the peculiarly personal character of Huysmans' work throughout. His sole pre-occupation has been with his own impressions. He possessed no native genius for the novel. But with a very sound instinct he set himself, almost at the outset of his career, to describe intimately and faithfully the crudest things of life, the things most remote from his own esoteric tastes but at that time counted peculiarly "real." There could be no better discipline for an idealist. Step by step he has left the region of vulgar actualities to attain his proper sphere, but the marvellous and slowly won power of expressing the spiritually impalpable in concrete imagery is the fruit of that laborious apprenticeship. He was influenced in his novels at first by Goncourt, afterwards a little by Zola, as he sought to reproduce his own vivid and personal vision of the world. This vision is like that of a man with an intense exaltation of the senses, especially the senses of sight and smell. Essentially Huysmans is less a novelist than a poet, with an instinct to use not verse but prose as his medium. Thus he early fell under the influence of Baudelaire's prose-poems. His small and slight first volume, *Le Drageoir à Epices*, bears witness to this influence, while yet revealing a personality clearly distinct from Baudelaire's. This personality is already wholly revealed in the quaint audacity of the little prose-poem entitled "L'Extase." Here, at the very outset of Huysmans' career, we catch an unconscious echo of

mediæval asceticism, the voice, it might be, of Odo of Cluny, who nearly a thousand years before had shrunk with horror from embracing a "sack of dung;" "quomodo ipsum stercoris saccum amplecti desideramus!" "L'Extase" describes how the lover lies in the wood clasping the hand of the beloved and bathed in a rapture of blissful emotion; "suddenly she rose, disengaged her hand, disappeared in the bushes, and I heard as it were the rustling of rain on the leaves;" at once the delicious dream fled and the lover awakes to the reality of commonplace human things. That is a parable of the high-strung idealism, having only contempt for whatever breaks in on its ideal, which has ever been the mark of Huysmans. His sensitive ear is alive to the gentlest ripple of nature, and it jars on him; it becomes the deafening Niagara of "the incessant deluge of human foolishness;" all his art is the research for a Heaven where the voice of Nature shall no more be heard. Baudelaire was also such a hyperæsthetic idealist, but the human tenderness which vibrates beneath the surface of Baudelaire's work has been the last quality to make itself more than casually felt in Huysmans. It is the defect which vitiated his early work in the novel, when he was still oscillating between the prose-poem and the novel, clearly conscious that while the first suited him best only in the second could mastery be won. His early novels are sometimes portentously dull, with a lack of interest, or even attempt to interest, which itself almost makes them interesting, as frank ugliness is. They are realistic with a veracious and courageously abject realism, never, like Zola's, carefully calculated for its pictorial effectiveness, but dealing simply with the trivialest and sordidest human miseries. His first novel *Marthe*—which inaugurated the long series of

novels devoted to state-regulated prostitution in those slaughter-houses of love, as Huysmans later described them, where Desire is slain at a single stroke,—sufficiently repulsive on the whole, is not without flashes of insight which reveal the future artist, and to some readers indeed make it more interesting than *La Fille Elisa*, which the Goncourts published shortly afterwards. Unlike the crude and awkward *Marthe*—though that book reveals the influence of the Goncourts—*La Fille Elisa* shows the hand of an accomplished artist, but it is also the work of a philanthropist writing with an avowed object, and of a fine gentleman ostentatiously anxious not to touch pitch with more than a finger-tip. The Preface to *Marthe* contains a declaration which remains true for the whole of Huysmans' work: "I set down what I see, what I feel, what I have lived, writing it as well as I am able, *et voilà tout*!" But it has ever been a dangerous task to set down what one sees and feels and has lived; for no obvious reason, except the subject, *Marthe* was immediately suppressed by the police. This first novel remains the least personal of Huysmans' books; in his next novel, *Les Sœurs Vatard*—a study of Parisian workgirls and their lovers—a more characteristic vision of the world begins to be revealed, and from that time forward there is a continuous though irregular development both in intellectual grip and artistic mastery. "Sac au Dos," which appeared in the *Soirées de Médan*, represents a notable stage in this development, for here, as he has since acknowledged, Huysmans' hero is himself. It is the story of a young student who serves during the great war in the Garde Mobile of the Seine, and is invalided with dysentery before reaching the front. There is no story, no striking impression to record—

nothing to compare with Guy de Maupassant's incomparably more brilliant "Boule-de-Suif," also dealing with the fringe of war, which appears in the same volume—no opportunity for literary display, nothing but a record of individual feelings with which the writer seems satisfied because they are interesting to himself. It is, in fact, the germ of that method which Huysmans has since carried to so brilliant a climax in *En Route*. All the glamour of war and the enthusiasm of patriotism are here—long before Zola wrote his *Débâcle*—reduced to their simplest terms in the miseries of the individual soldier whose chief aspiration it becomes at last to return to a home where the necessities of nature may be satisfied in comfort and peace. At that time Huysmans' lack of patriotic enthusiasm seemed almost scandalous; but when we bear in mind his racial affinities it is natural that he should, as he once remarked to an interviewer, "prefer a Leipzig man to a Marseilles man," "the big, phlegmatic, taciturn Germans" to the gesticulating and rhetorical people of the French south. In *Là-Bas*, at a later date, through the mouth of one of his characters, Huysmans goes so far as to regret the intervention of Joan of Arc in French history, for had it not been for Joan France and England would have been restored to their racial and prehistoric unity, consolidated into one great kingdom under Norman Plantagenets, instead of being given up to the southerners of Latin race who surrounded Charles VII.

The best of Huysmans' early novels is undoubtedly *En Ménage*. It is the intimate history of a young literary man who, having married a wife whom he shortly afterwards finds unfaithful, leaves her, returns to his bachelor life, and in the end becomes reconciled to her. This picture of a studious

man who goes away with his books to fight over again the petty battles of bachelorhood with the *bonne* and the *concierge* and his own cravings for womanly love and companionship, reveals clearly for the first time Huysmans' power of analysing states of mind that are at once simple and subtle. Perhaps no writer surprises us more by his revealing insight into the commonplace experiences which all a novelist's traditions lead him to idealise or ignore. As a whole, however, *En Ménage* is scarcely yet a master's work, a little laboured, with labour which cannot yet achieve splendour of effect. Nor can a much slighter story, *A Vau l'Eau*, which appeared a little later, be said to mark a further stage in development, though it is a characteristic study, this sordid history of Folantin, the poor, lame, discontented, middle-aged clerk. Cheated and bullied on every side, falling a prey to the vulgar woman of the street who boisterously takes possession of him in the climax of the story, all the time feeling poignantly the whole absurdity of the situation, there is yet one spot where hope seems possible. He has no religious faith; "and yet," he reflects, "yet mysticism alone could heal the wound that tortures me." Thus Folantin, though like André in *En Ménage* he resigns himself to the inevitable stupidity of life, yet stretches out his hands towards the Durtal of Huysmans' latest work.

In all these novels we feel that Huysmans has not attained to full self-expression. Intellectual mastery, indeed, he is attaining, but scarcely yet the expression of his own personal ideals. The poet in Huysmans, the painter enamoured of beauty and seeking it in unfamiliar places, has little scope in these detailed pictures of sordid or commonplace life. At this early period it is still in prose-poems, especially in *Croquis Parisiens*, that this craving finds

satisfaction. Des Esseintes, the hero of *A Rebours*, who on so many matters is Huysmans' mouthpiece, of all forms of literature preferred the prose-poem when, in the hands of an alchemist of genius, it reveals a novel concentrated into a few pages or a few lines, the concrete juice, the essential oil of art. It was "a communion of thought between a magical writer and an ideal reader, a spiritual collaboration among a dozen superior persons scattered throughout the world, a delectation offered to the finest wits, and to them alone accessible." Huysmans took up this form where Baudelaire and Mallarmé had left it, and sought to carry it yet further. In that he was scarcely successful. The excess of tension in the tortured language with which he elaborates his effects too often holds him back from the goal of perfection. We must yet value in *Croquis Parisiens* its highly wrought and individual effects of rhythm and colour and form. In France, at all events, Huysmans is held to inaugurate the poetic treatment of modern things—a characteristic already traceable in *Les Sœurs Vatard*—and this book deals with the æsthetic aspects of latter-day Paris, with the things that are "ugly and superb, outrageous and yet exquisite," as a type of which he selects the Folies-Bergère, at that time the most characteristic of Parisian music-halls, and he was thus the first to discuss the æsthetic value of the variety stage which has been made cheaper since. For the most part, however, these *Croquis* are of the simplest and most commonplace things—the forlorn Bièvre district, the poor man's *café*, the roast-chestnut seller—extracting the beauty or pathos or strangeness of all these things. "Thy garment is the palette of setting suns, the rust of old copper, the brown gilt of Cordovan leather, the sandal and saffron tints of the autumn foliage.... When I

contemplate thy coat of mail I think of Rembrandt's pictures, I see again his superb heads, his sunny flesh, his gleaming jewels on black velvet. I see again his rays of light in the night, his trailing gold in the shade, the dawning of suns through dark arches." The humble bloater has surely never before been sung in language which recalls the Beloved of the "Song of Songs." Huysmans has carried to an even extravagant degree that re-valuation of the world's good in which genius has ever found its chief function. To abase the mighty and exalt the humble seems to man the divinest of prerogatives, for it is that which he himself exercises in his moments of finest inspiration. To find a new vision of the world, a new path to truth, is the instinct of the artist or the thinker. He changes the whole system of our organised perceptions. That is why he seems to us at first an incarnate paradox, a scoffer at our most sacred verities, making mountains of our mole-hills and counting as mere mole-hills our everlasting mountains, always keeping time to a music that clashes with ours, at our hilarity *tristis, in tristitia hilaris*.

In 1889 *A Rebours* appeared. Not perhaps his greatest achievement, it must ever remain the central work in which he has most powerfully concentrated his whole vision of life. It sums up the progress he had already made, foretells the progress he was afterwards to make, in a style that is always individual, always masterly in its individuality. Technically, it may be said that the power of *A Rebours* lies in the fact that here for the first time Huysmans has succeeded in uniting the two lines of his literary development: the austere analysis in the novels of commonplace things mostly alien to the writer, and the freer elaboration in the prose-poems

of his own more intimate personal impressions. In their union the two streams attain a new power and a more intimately personal note. Des Esseintes, the hero of this book, may possibly have been at a few points suggested by a much less interesting real personage in contemporary Paris, the Comte de Montesquiou-Fezensac, but in the main he was certainly created by Huysmans' own brain, as the representative of his author's hyperæsthetic experience of the world and the mouthpiece of his most personal judgments. The victim of over-wrought nerves, of neuralgia and dyspepsia, Des Esseintes retires for a season from Paris to the solitude of his country house at Fontenay, which he has fitted up, on almost cloistral methods, to soothe his fantasy and to gratify his complex æsthetic sensations, his love of reading and contemplation. The finest pictures of Gustave Moreau hang on the walls, with the fantastic engravings of Luyken, and the strange visions of Odilon Redon. He has a tortoise curiously inlaid with precious stones; he delights in all those exotic plants which reveal Nature's most unnatural freaks; he is a sensitive amateur of perfumes, and considers that the pleasures of smell are equal to those of sight or sound; he possesses a row of little barrels of liqueurs so arranged that he can blend in infinite variety the contents of this instrument, his "mouth-organ" he calls it, and produce harmonies which seem to him comparable to those yielded by a musical orchestra. But the solitary pleasures of this palace of art only increase the nervous strain he is suffering from; and at the urgent bidding of his doctor Des Esseintes returns to the society of his abhorred fellow-beings in Paris, himself opening the dyke that admitted the "waves of human mediocrity" to engulf his refuge.

And this wonderful confession of æsthetic faith—with its long series of deliberately searching and decisive affirmations on life, religion, literature, art—ends with a sudden solemn invocation that is surprisingly tremulous: "Take pity, O Lord, on the Christian who doubts, on the sceptic who desires to believe, on the convict of life who embarks alone, in the night, beneath a sky no longer lit by the consoling beacons of ancient faith."

"He who carries his own most intimate emotions to their highest point becomes the first in file of a long series of men;" that saying is peculiarly true of Huysmans. But to be a leader of men one must turn one's back on men. Huysmans' attitude towards his readers was somewhat like that of Thoreau, who spoke with lofty disdain of such writers as "would fain have one reader before they die." As he has since remarked, Huysmans wrote *A Rebours* for a dozen persons, and was himself more surprised than any one at the wide interest it evoked. Yet that interest was no accident. Certain æsthetic ideals of the latter half of the nineteenth century are more quintessentially expressed in *A Rebours* than in any other book. Intensely personal, audaciously independent, it yet sums up a movement which has scarcely now worked itself out. We may read it and re-read, not only for the light which it casts on that movement, but upon every similar period of acute æsthetic perception in the past.

## II.

The æsthetic attitude towards art which *A Rebours* illuminates is that commonly called decadent. Decadence in art, though a fairly simple

phenomenon, and world-wide as art itself, is still so ill understood that it may be worth while to discuss briefly its precise nature, more especially as manifested in literature.

Technically, a decadent style is only such in relation to a classic style. It is simply a further development of a classic style, a further specialisation, the homogeneous, in Spencerian phraseology, having become heterogeneous. The first is beautiful because the parts are subordinated to the whole; the second is beautiful because the whole is subordinated to the parts. Among our own early prose-writers Sir Thomas Browne represents the type of decadence in style. Swift's prose is classic, Pater's decadent. Hume and Gibbon are classic, Emerson and Carlyle decadent. In architecture, which is the key to all the arts, we see the distinction between the classic and the decadent visibly demonstrated; Roman architecture is classic, to become in its Byzantine developments completely decadent, and St. Mark's is the perfected type of decadence in art; pure early Gothic, again, is strictly classic in the highest degree because it shows an absolute subordination of detail to the bold harmonies of structure, while later Gothic, grown weary of the commonplaces of structure and predominantly interested in beauty of detail, is again decadent. In each case the earlier and classic manner—for the classic manner, being more closely related to the ends of utility, must always be earlier—subordinates the parts to the whole, and strives after those virtues which the whole may best express; the later manner depreciates the importance of the whole for the benefit of its parts, and strives after the virtues of individualism. All art is the rising and falling of the slopes of a rhythmic curve between these two classic

and decadent extremes.

Decadence suggests to us going down, falling, decay. If we walk down a real hill we do not feel that we commit a more wicked act than when we walked up it. But if it is a figurative hill then we view Hell at the bottom. The word "corruption"—used in a precise and technical sense to indicate the breaking up of the whole for the benefit of its parts—serves also to indicate a period or manner of decadence in art. This makes confusion worse, for here the moralist feels that surely he is on safe ground. But as Nietzsche, with his usual acuteness in cutting at the root of vulgar prejudice, has well remarked (in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*), even as regards what is called the period of "corruption" in the evolution of societies, we are apt to overlook the fact that the energy which in more primitive times marked the operations of the community as a whole has now simply been transferred to the individuals themselves, and this aggrandisement of the individual really produces an even greater amount of energy. The individual has gained more than the community has lost. An age of social decadence is not only the age of sinners and degenerates, but of saints and martyrs, and decadent Rome produced an Antoninus as well as a Heliogabalus. No doubt social "corruption" and literary "corruption" tend to go together; an age of individualism is usually an age of artistic decadence, and we may note that the chief literary artists of America—Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman—are for the most part in the technical sense decadents.

Rome supplies the first clear types of classic and decadent literature, and the small group of recent French writers to whom the term has been more

specifically applied were for the most part peculiarly attracted by later Latin literature. So far as I can make out, it is to the profound and penetrating genius of Baudelaire that we owe the first clear apprehension of the legitimate part which decadence plays in literature. We may trace it, indeed, in his own style, clear, pure, and correct as that style always remains, as well as in his literary preferences. He was a good Latinist, and his favourite Latin authors were Apuleius, Juvenal, Petronius, Saint Augustine, Tertullian, and other writers in prose and verse of the early Christian Church. He himself wrote a love-poem in rhymed Latin verse, adding to it a note concerning the late Latin decadence regarded as "the supreme sigh of a vigorous person already transformed and prepared for the spiritual life," and specially apt to express passion as the modern world feels it, one pole of the magnet at the opposite end of which are Catullus and his band. "In this marvellous tongue," he added, "solecism and barbarism seem to me to render the forced negligences of a passion which forgets itself and mocks at rules. Words taken in a new meaning reveal the charming awkwardness of the northern barbarian kneeling before the Roman beauty." But the best early statement of the meaning of decadence in style—though doubtless inspired by Baudelaire—was furnished by Gautier in 1868 in the course of the essay on Baudelaire which is probably the most interesting piece of criticism he ever achieved. The passage is long, but so precise and accurate that it must here in part be quoted: "The poet of the *Fleurs du Mal* loved what is improperly called the style of decadence, and which is nothing else but art arrived at that point of extreme maturity yielded by the slanting suns of aged civilisations: an ingenious complicated style, full of shades and of

research, constantly pushing back the boundaries of speech, borrowing from all the technical vocabularies, taking colour from all palettes and notes from all key-boards, struggling to render what is most inexpressible in thought, what is vague and most elusive in the outlines of form, listening to translate the subtle confidences of neurosis, the dying confessions of passion grown depraved, and the strange hallucinations of the obsession which is turning to madness. The style of decadence is the ultimate utterance of the Word, summoned to final expression and driven to its last hiding-place. One may recall in this connection the language of the later Roman Empire, already marbled with the greenness of decomposition, and, so to speak, gamy, and the complicated refinements of the Byzantine school, the last forms of Greek art falling into deliquescence. Such indeed is the necessary and inevitable idiom of peoples and civilisations in which factitious life has replaced natural life, and developed unknown wants in men. It is, besides, no easy thing, this style disdained of pedants, for it expresses new ideas in new forms, and in words which have not yet been heard. Unlike the classic style it admits shadow.... One may well imagine that the fourteen hundred words of the Racinian vocabulary scarcely suffice the author who has undertaken the laborious task of rendering modern ideas and things in their infinite complexity and multiple colouration."

Some fifteen years later, Bourget, again in an essay on Baudelaire (*Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine*), continued the exposition of the theory of decadence, elaborating the analogy to the social organism which enters the state of decadence as soon as the individual life of the parts is no longer

subordinated to the whole. “A similar law governs the development and decadence of that other organism which we call language. A style of decadence is one in which the unity of the book is decomposed to give place to the independence of the page, in which the page is decomposed to give place to the independence of the phrase, and the phrase to give place to the independence of the word.” It was at this time (about 1884) that the term “decadent” seems first to have been applied by Barrès and others to the group of which Verlaine, Huysmans, Mallarmé were the most distinguished members, and in so far as it signified an ardent and elaborate search for perfection of detail beyond that attained by Parnassian classicality it was tolerated or accepted. Verlaine, indeed, was for the most part indifferent to labels, neither accepting nor rejecting them, and his work was not bound up with any theory. But Huysmans, with the intellectual passion of the pioneer in art, deliberate and relentless, has carried both the theory and the practice of decadence in style to the farthest point. In practice he goes beyond Baudelaire, who, however enamoured he may have been of what he called the phosphorescence of putrescence, always retained in his own style much of what is best in the classic manner. Huysmans’ vocabulary is vast, his images, whether remote or familiar, always daring,—“dragged,” in the words of one critic, “by the hair or by the feet, down the worm-eaten staircase of terrified Syntax,”—but a heart-felt pulse of emotion is restrained beneath the sombre and extravagant magnificence of this style, and imparts at the best that modulated surge of life which only the great masters can control.

Des Esseintes’s predilections in literature are elaborated through several chapters, and without

question he faithfully reflects his creator's impressions. He was indifferent or contemptuous towards the writers of the Latin Augustan age; Virgil seemed to him thin and mechanical, Horace a detestable clown; the fat redundancy of Cicero, we are told, and the dry constipation of Cæsar alike disgusted him; Sallust, Livy, Juvenal, even Tacitus and Plautus, though for these he had words of praise, seemed to him for the most part merely the delights of pseudo-literary readers. Latin only began to be interesting to Des Esseintes in Lucan, for here at least, in spite of the underlying hollowness, it became expressive and studded with brilliant jewels. The author whom above all he delighted in was Petronius—who reminded Des Esseintes of the modern French novelists he most admired—and several eloquent pages are devoted to that profound observer, delicate analyst, and marvellous painter who modelled his own vivid and precise style out of all the idioms and slang of his day. After Petronius there was a gap in his collection of Latin authors until the second century of our own era is reached with Apuleius and the sterner Christian contemporaries of that jovial pagan, Tertullian and the rest, in whose hands the tongue that in Petronius had reached supreme maturity now began to dissolve. For Tertullian he had little admiration, and none for Augustine, though sympathising with his *City of God* and his general disgust for the world. But the special odour which the Christians had by the fourth century imparted to decomposing pagan Latin was delightful to him in such authors as Commodian of Gaza, whose tawny, sombre, and tortuous style he even preferred to Claudian's sonorous blasts, in which the trumpet of paganism was last heard in the world. He was also able to maintain interest in

Prudentius, Sedulius, and a host of unknown Christians who combined Catholic fervour with a Latinity which had become, as it were, completely putrid, leaving but a few shreds of torn flesh for the Christians to "marinate in the brine of their new tongue." His shelves continued to show Latin books of the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries, among which he found special pleasure in the Anglo-Saxon writers, and only finally ceased at the beginning of the tenth century, when "the curiosity, the complicated *naïveté*" of the earlier tongue were finally lost in scholastic philosophy and mere cartalaries and chronicles.[8] Then, with a formidable leap of ten centuries, his Latin books gave place to nineteenth century French books.

Des Esseintes is no admirer of Rabelais or Molière, of Voltaire or Rousseau. Among the older French writers he read only Villon, D'Aubigné, Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Nicole, and especially Pascal. Putting these aside, his French library began with Baudelaire, whose works he had printed in an edition of one copy, in episcopal letters, in large missal *format*, bound in flesh-coloured pig-skin; he found an unspeakable delight in reading this poet who, "in an age when verse only served to express the external aspects of things, had succeeded in expressing the inexpressible, by virtue of a muscular and sinewy speech which more than any other possessed the marvellous power of fixing with strange sanity of expression the most morbid, fleeting, tremulous states of weary brains and sorrowful souls." After Baudelaire the few French books on Des Esseintes's shelves fall into two groups, one religious, one secular. Most of the French clerical writers he disregarded, for they yield a pale flux of words which seemed to him to come from a school-girl in a

convent. Lacordaire he regarded as an exception, for his language had been fused and moulded by ardent eloquence, but for the most part the Catholic writers he preferred were outside the Church. For Hello's *Homme*, especially, he cherished profound admiration, and an inevitable sympathy for its author, who seemed to him "a cunning engineer of the soul, a skilful watchmaker of the brain, delighting to examine the mechanism of a passion and to explain the play of the wheelwork," and yet united to this power of analysis all the fanaticism of a Biblical prophet, and the tortured ingenuity of a master of style—an ill-balanced, incoherent, yet subtle personality. But above all he delighted in Barbey d'Aurevilly, shut out from the Church as an unclean and pestiferous heretic, yet glorying to sing her praises, insinuating into that praise a note of almost sadistic sacrilege, a writer at once devout and impious, altogether after Des Esseintes's own heart, so that a special copy of the *Diaboliques*, in episcopal violet and cardinal purple, printed on sanctified vellum with initials adorned by satanic tails, formed one of his most cherished possessions. In D'Aurevilly's style alone he truly recognised the same gaminess, the speckled morbidity, the flavour as of a sleepy pear which he loved in decadent Latin and the monastic writers of old time. Of contemporary secular books he possessed not many; by force of passing them through the screw-press of his brain few were finally found solid enough to emerge intact and bear rereading, and in this process he had accelerated "the incurable conflict which existed between his ideas and those of the world into which by chance he had been born." Certain selected works of the three great French novelists of his time—Flaubert, Goncourt, and Zola—still remained, for in

all three he found in various forms that “nostalgie des au-delà” by which he was himself haunted; and with Baudelaire, these three were, in modern profane literature, the authors by whom he had chiefly been moulded. The scanty collection also included Verlaine, Mallarmé, Poe, and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, whose firm fantastic style and poignantly ironic attitude towards the utilitarian modern world he found entirely to his taste. Finally, there only remained the little anthology of prose-poems. Des Esseintes thought it improbable that he would ever make any additions to his library; it seemed impossible to him that a decadent language —“struggling on its death-bed to repair all the omissions of joy and bequeath the subtlest memories of pain”—would ever go beyond Mallarmé. This brief summary of the three chapters, all full of keen if wayward critical insight, which describe Des Esseintes’s library, may serve at once both to indicate the chief moulding influences on Huysmans’ own style and to illustrate the precise nature of decadence in art and the fundamental part it plays.

We have to recognise that decadence is an æsthetic and not a moral conception. The power of words is great, but they need not befool us. The classic herring should suggest no moral superiority over the decadent bloater. We are not called upon to air our moral indignation over the bass end of the musical clef. All confusion of intellectual substances is foolish, and one may well sympathise with that fervid unknown metaphysician to whom we owe the Athanasian creed when he went so far as to assert that it is damnable. It is not least so in the weak-headed decadent who falls into the moralist’s snare and complacently admits his own exceeding wickedness. We may well reserve our finest

admiration for the classic in art, for therein are included the largest and most imposing works of human skill; but our admiration is of little worth if it is founded on incapacity to appreciate the decadent. Each has its virtues, each is equally right and necessary. One ignorant of plants might well say, on gazing at a seed-capsule with its seeds disposed in harmonious rows, that there was the eternally natural and wholesome order of things, and on seeing the same capsule wither and cast abroad its seeds to germinate at random in the earth, that here was an unwholesome and deplorable period of decay. But he would know little of the transmutations of life. And we have to recognise that those persons who bring the same crude notions into the field of art know as little of the life of the spirit.

III.

For some years after the appearance of *A Rebours* Huysmans produced nothing of any magnitude. *En Rade*, his next novel, the experience of a Parisian married couple who, under the stress of temporary pecuniary difficulties, go into the country to stay at an uncle's farm, dwells in the memory chiefly by virtue of two vividly naturalistic episodes, the birth of a calf and the death of a cat. More interesting, more intimately personal, are the two volumes of art criticism, *L'Art Moderne* and *Certains*, which Huysmans published at about this period. Degas, Rops, Raffaelli, Odilon Redon are among the artists of very various temperament whom Huysmans either discovered, or at all events first appreciated in their full significance, and when he writes of them it is not alone critical insight which he reveals, but his own personal vision of the world.

To Huysmans the world has ever been above all a vision; it was no accident that the art that appeals most purely to the eyes is that of which he has been the finest critic. One is tempted, indeed, to suggest that this aptitude is the outcome of heredity, of long generations devoted to laborious watchfulness of the desire of the eye in the external world, not indeed by actual accumulation of acquired qualities, but by the passing on of a nervous organism long found so apt for this task. He has ever been intensely preoccupied with the effort to express those visible aspects of things which the arts of design were made to express, which the art of speech can perhaps never express. The tortured elaboration of his style is chiefly due to this perpetual effort to squeeze tones and colours out of this foreign medium. The painter's brain holds only a pen and cannot rest until it has wrung from it a brush's work. But not only is the sense of vision marked in Huysmans. We are conscious of a general hyperæsthesia, an intense alertness to the inrush of sensations, which we might well term morbid if it were not so completely intellectualised and controlled. Hearing, indeed, appears to be less acutely sensitive than sight, the poet is subordinated to the painter, though that sense still makes itself felt, and the heavy multicoloured paragraphs often fall at the close into a melancholy and poignant rhythm laden with sighs. It is the sense of smell which Huysmans' work would lead us to regard as most highly developed after that of sight. The serious way in which Des Esseintes treats perfumes is characteristic, and one of the most curious and elaborate of the *Croquis Parisiens* is "Le Gousset," in which the capacities of language are strained to define and differentiate the odours of feminine armpits. Again, earlier, in a preface written for Hannon's

*Rimes de Joie*, Huysmans points out that that writer—who failed to fulfil his early promise—alone of contemporary poets possessed "la curiosité des parfums," and that his chief poem was written in honour of what Huysmans called "the libertine virtues of that glorious perfume," opoponax. This sensitiveness to odour is less marked in Huysmans' later work, but the dominance of vision remains.

The two volumes of essays on art incidentally serve to throw considerable light on Huysmans' conception of life. For special illustration we may take his attitude towards women, whom in his novels he usually treats, from a rather conventionally sexual point of view, as a fact in man's life rather than as a subject for independent analysis. In these essays we may trace the development of his own personal point of view, and in comparing the earlier with the later volume we find a change which is significant of the general evolution of Huysmans' attitude towards life. He is at once the ultra-modern child of a refined civilisation and the victim of nostalgia for an ascetic mediævalism; his originality lies in the fact that in him these two tendencies are not opposed but harmonious, although the second has only of late reached full development. In a notable passage in *En Rade*, Jacques, the hero, confesses that he can see nothing really great or beautiful in a harvest field, with its anodyne toil, as compared with a workshop or a steamboat, "the horrible magnificence of machines, that one beauty which the modern world has been able to create." It is so that Huysmans views women also; he is as indifferent to the feminine ideals of classic art as to its literary ideals. In *L'Art Moderne*, speaking with admiration of a study of the nude by Gauguin, he proceeds to lament that no one has painted the unclothed modern

woman without falsification or premeditated arrangement, real, alive in her own intimate personality, with her own joys and pains incarnated in the curves of her flesh, and the lash of childbirth traceable on her flanks. We go to the Louvre to learn how to paint, he remarks, forgetting that "beauty is not uniform and invariable, but changes with the age and the climate, that the Venus of Milo, for instance, is now not more beautiful and interesting than those ancient statues of the New World, streaked and tattooed and adorned with feathers; that both are but diverse manifestations of the same ideal of beauty pursued by different races; that at the present date there can be no question of reaching the beautiful by Venetian, Greek, Dutch, or Flemish rites; but only by striving to disengage it from contemporary life, from the world that surrounds us." "Un nu fatigué, délicat, affiné, vibrant" can alone conform to our own time; and he adds that no one has truly painted the nude since Rembrandt. It is instructive to turn from this essay to that on Degas, written some six years later. It may fairly be said that to Degas belongs the honour of taking up the study of the nude at the point where Rembrandt left it; and like Rembrandt, he has realised that the nude can only be rightly represented in those movements, postures, and avocations by which it is naturally and habitually exposed. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Huysmans at once grasped the full significance of the painter's achievement. But he has nothing now to say of the beauty that lies beneath the confinement of modern garments, "the delicious charm of youth, grown languid, rendered as it were divine by the debilitating air of cities." On the contrary, he emphasises the vision which Degas presents of women at the bath-tub revealing in every "frog-like

and simian attitude" their pitiful homeliness, "the humid horror of a body which no washing can purify." Such a glorified contempt of the flesh, he adds, has never been achieved since the Middle Ages. There we catch what had now become the dominant tone in Huysmans' vision; the most modern things in art now suggest to him, they seem to merge into, the most mediæval and ascetic. And if we turn to the essay on Félicien Rops in the same volume—the most masterly of his essays—we find the same point developed to the utmost. Rops in his own way is as modern and as daring an artist of the nude as Degas. But, as Huysmans perceives, in delineating the essentially modern he is scarcely a supreme artist, is even inferior to Forain, who in his own circumscribed region is insurpassable. Rops, as Huysmans points out, is the great artist of the symbolical rather than the naturalistic modern, a great artist who furnishes the counterpart to Memlinc and Fra Angelico. All art, Huysmans proceeds, "must gravitate, like humanity which has given birth to it and the earth which carries it, between the two poles of Purity and Wantonness, the Heaven and the Hell of art." Rops has taken the latter pole, in no vulgar nymphomaniacal shapes, but "to divulge its causes, to summarise it Catholically, if one may say so, in ardent and sorrowful images"; he has drawn women who are "diabolical Theresas, satanised saints." Following in the path initiated by Baudelaire and Barbey D'Aurevilly, Huysmans concludes, Rops has restored Wantonness to her ancient and Catholic dignity. Thus is Huysmans almost imperceptibly led back to the old standpoint from which woman and the Devil are one.

*Certains* was immediately followed by *Là-bas*. This novel is mainly a study of Satanism, in which

Huysmans interested himself long before it attracted the general attention it has since received in France. There are, however, three lines of interest in the book, the story of Gilles de Rais and his Sadism, the discussion of Satanism culminating in an extraordinary description of a modern celebration of the Black Mass, and the narration of Durtal's *liaison* with Madame Chantelouve, wherein Huysmans reaches, by firm precision and triumphant audacity, the highest point he has attained in the analysis of the secrets of passion. But though full of excellent matter, the book loses in impressiveness from the multiplicity of these insufficiently compacted elements of interest.

While not among his finest achievements, however, it serves to mark the definite attainment of a new stage in both the spirit and the method of his work. Hitherto he had been a realist, in method if not in spirit, and had conquered the finest secrets of naturalistic art; by the help of *En Ménage* alone, as Hennequin, one of his earliest and best critics has said, "it will always be possible to restore the exact physiognomy of Paris to-day." At the outset of *Là-bas* there is a discussion concerning the naturalistic novel and its functions which makes plain the standpoint to which Huysmans had now attained. Pondering the matter, Durtal, the hero of the book, considers that we need, on the one hand, the veracity of document, the precision of detail, the nervous strength of language, which realism has supplied; but also, on the other hand, we must draw water from the wells of the soul. We cannot explain everything by sexuality and insanity; we need the soul and the body in their natural reactions, their conflict and their union. "We must, in short, follow the great high-way so deeply dug out by Zola, but it is also

necessary to trace a parallel path in the air, another road by which we may reach the Beyond and the Afterward, to achieve thus, in one word, a spiritualistic naturalism." Dostoievsky comes nearest to this achievement, he remarks, and the real psychologist of the century is not Stendhal but Hello. In another form of art the early painters—Italian, German, especially Flemish—realised this ideal. Durtal sees a consummate revelation of such spiritual naturalism in Matthæus Grünewald's crucifixion at Cassel—the Christ who was at once a putrid and unaureoled corpse and yet a manifest god bathed in invisible light, the union of outrageous realism and outrageous idealism. "Thus from triumphal ordure Grünewald extracted the finest mints of dilection, the sharpest essences of tears." One may say that the tendency Huysmans here so clearly asserts had ever been present in his work. But in his previous novels his own native impulse was always a little unduly oppressed by the naturalistic formulas of Goncourt and Zola. The methods of these great masters had laid a burden on his work, and although the work developed beneath, and because of, that burden, a sense of laborious pain and obscurity too often resulted. Henceforth this disappears. Huysmans retains his own complexity of style, but he has won a certain measure of simplicity and lucidity. It was a natural development, no doubt furthered also by the position which Huysmans had now won in the world of letters. *A Rebours*, which he had written for his own pleasure, had found an echo in thousands of readers, and the consciousness of an audience inspired a certain clarity of speech. From this time we miss the insults directed at the *bêtise* of humanity. These characteristics clearly mark Huysmans' next and perhaps greatest book, in which the writer who

had conquered all the secrets of decadent art now sets his face towards the ideals of classic art.

In *En Route*, indeed, these new qualities of simplicity, lucidity, humanity, and intensity of interest attain so high a degree that the book has reached a vast number of readers who could not realise the marvellous liberation from slavery to its material which the slow elaboration of art has here reached. In *A Rebours* Huysmans succeeded in taking up the prose-poem into his novel form, while at the same time certainly sacrificing something of the fine analysis of familiar things which he had developed in *En Ménage*. In *En Route* he takes the novel from the point he had reached in *A Rebours*, incorporates into it that power of analysis which has now reached incomparable simplicity and acuity, and thus wields the whole of the artistic means which he has acquired during a quarter of a century to one end, the presentation of a spiritual state which has become of absorbing personal interest to himself.

I well remember hearing M. Huysmans, many years ago, tell how a muddle-headed person had wished to commission him to paint a head of Christ. It seemed then a deliciously absurd request to make of the author of *A Rebours*, and his face wore the patient smile which the spectacle of human stupidity was wont to evoke, but I have since thought that that muddle-headed person was wiser than he knew. As we look back on Huysmans' earlier work it is now easy to see how he has steadily progressed towards his present standpoint. *En Route* does not represent, as some might imagine, the reaction of an exhausted debauchee or even the self-deception of a disappointed man of the world. The temperament of Durtal is that of André and Folantin and Des

Esseintes; from the first, in the *Drageoir à Epices*, Huysmans has been an idealist and a seeker, by no means an ascetic, rather a man whose inquisitive senses and restless imagination had led him to taste of every forbidden fruit, but never one to whom the vulgar pleasures of life could offer any abiding satisfaction. The more precise record of Des Esseintes's early sexual life may help us here; while for the penultimate stage Durtal's relations with Madame Chantelouve in *Là-bas*, and the mingled attraction and repulsion which he felt for her, are certainly significant. In *En Route* Durtal magnifies his own wickedness, as Bunyan did in his *Grace Abounding*; the saints have always striven to magnify their wickedness, leaving to the sinners the congenial function of playing at righteousness. To trace the real permanence of Huysmans' attitude towards religion it is enough to turn back to *A Rebours*. Des Esseintes had been educated by the Jesuits, and it sometimes seemed to him that that education had put into him some extra-terrestrial ferment which never after ceased to work, driving him in search of a new world and impossible ideals. He could find no earthly place of rest; he sought to build for himself a "refined Thebaid" as a warm and comfortable ark wherein to find shelter from the flood of human imbecility. He was already drawn towards the Church by many bonds, by his predilection for early Christian Latinity, by the exquisite beauty of the ecclesiastical art of the Middle Ages, by his love for monastic mediæval music, "that emaciated music which acted instinctively on his nerves" and seemed to him precious beyond all other. Just as Nietzsche was always haunted by the desire for a monastery for freethinkers, so Des Esseintes dreamed of a hermitage, of the advantages of the cloistered life of

convents, wherein men are persecuted by the world for meting out to it the just contempt of silence.

Des Esseintes, and even the Durtal of *Là-bas*, always put aside these thoughts with the reflection that, after all, the Church is only an out-worn legend, a magnificent imposture. In *En Route* Durtal has taken a decisive step. He has undergone that psychological experience commonly called "conversion." It is only of recent years that the phenomena of conversion have been seriously studied, but we know at all events that it is not intellectual, not even necessarily moral transformation, though it may react in either direction, but primarily an emotional phenomenon; and that it occurs especially in those who have undergone long and torturing disquietude, coming at last as the spontaneous resolution of all their doubts, the eruption of a soothing flood of peace, the silent explosion of inner light. The insight with which this state is described in *En Route* seems to testify to a real knowledge of it. No obvious moral or intellectual change is effected in Durtal, but he receives a new experience of reposeful faith, a conviction deeper than all argument. It is really the sudden emergence into consciousness of a very gradual process, and the concrete artistic temperament which had been subjected to the process reacts in its own way. A more abstract intelligence would have asked: "But, after all, is my faith true?" Durtal, in the presence of the growing structure of sensory and imaginative forms within him, which has become as it were a home, feels that the question of its truth has fallen into the background. Its perfect fitness has become the affirmation of its truth. Henceforth it is the task of his life to learn how best to adapt himself to what he

recognises as his eternal home. *En Route* represents a stage in this adaptation.

By a rare chance—a happier chance than befell Tolstoi under somewhat similar circumstances—a new development in artistic achievement has here run parallel, and in exquisite harmony, with the new spiritual development. The growing simplicity of Huysmans' work has reached a point beyond which it could not perhaps be carried without injury to his vivid and concrete style. And the new simplicity of spirit, of which it is the reflection, marks the final retreat into the background of that unreasonable contempt for humanity which ran through nearly all the previous books, and now at last passes even into an ecstasy of adoration in the passages concerning old Simon, the monastery swine-herd. Huysmans has chiefly shown his art, however, by relying almost solely for the interest of his book on his now consummate power of analysis. This power, which we may perhaps first clearly trace in "Sac au Dos," had developed in *En Ménage* into a wonderful skill to light up the unexplored corners of the soul and to lay bare those terrible thoughts which are, as he has somewhere said, the lamentable incarnation of "the unconscious ignominy of pure souls." In his earlier masterpiece, *A Rebours*, however, it is little seen, having mostly passed into æsthetic criticism. The finest episode of emotional analysis here is the admirable chapter in which Des Esseintes's attempt to visit London is narrated. All his life he had wished to see two countries, Holland and England. (And here we may recall that the former is Huysmans' own ancestral land, and that his French critics find in his work a distinct flavour of English humour.) He had actually been to Holland, and with visions won from the pictures of Rembrandt, Steen, and Teniers he had

returned disillusioned. Now he went to Galignani's, bought an English Baedeker, entered the bodega in the Rue de Rivoli to drink of that port which the English love, and then proceeded to a tavern opposite the Gare St. Lazare to eat what he imagined to be a characteristic English meal, surrounded by English people, and haunted by memories of Dickens. And as time went by he continued to sit still, while all the sensations of England seemed to pass along his nerves, still sat until at last the London mail had started. "Why stir," he asked himself, "when one can travel so magnificently in a chair?... Besides, what can one expect save fresh disillusionment, as in Holland?... And then I have experienced and seen what I wanted to experience and see. I have saturated myself with English life; it would be madness to lose by an awkward change of place these imperishable sensations.... He called a cab and returned with his portmanteaus, parcels, valises, rugs, umbrellas, and sticks to Fontenay, feeling the physical and mental fatigue of a man who returns home after a long and perilous journey." There could be no happier picture of the imaginative life of the artistic temperament. But in *En Route* analysis is the prime element of interest; from first to last there is nothing to hold us but this searching and poignant analysis of the fluctuations of Durtal's soul through the small section which he here travels in the road towards spiritual peace. And on the way, lightly, as by chance, the author drops the finest appreciations of liturgical æsthetics, of plain-chant, of the way of the Church with the soul, of the everlasting struggle with the Evil One. There could, for instance, be no better statement than this of one of the mystic's secrets: "There are two ways of ridding ourselves of a thing which burdens us, casting it away or letting it

fall. To cast away requires an effort of which we may not be capable, to let fall imposes no labour, is simpler, without peril, within reach of all. To cast away, again, implies a certain interest, a certain animation, even a certain fear; to let fall is absolute indifference, absolute contempt; believe me, use this method, and Satan will flee." How many forms of Satan there are in the world before which we may profitably meditate on these words! To strive or cry in the face of human stupidity is not the way to set it to flight; that is the lesson which Des Esseintes would never listen to, which Durtal has at last learnt.[9]

*En Route* is the first of a trilogy, and the names of the succeeding volumes, *La Cathédrale* and *L'Oblat*, sufficiently indicate the end of the path on which Durtal, if not indeed his creator, has started. But however that may prove, whatever Huysmans' own final stage may be, there can be little doubt that he is the greatest master of style, and within his own limits the subtlest thinker and the acutest psychologist who in France to-day uses the medium of the novel. Only Zola can be compared with him, and between them there can be no kind of rivalry. Zola, with his immense and exuberant temperament, his sanity and width of view, his robust and plebeian art, has his own place on the high-road of modern literature. Huysmans, an intellectual and æsthetic aristocrat, has followed with unflinching sincerity the by-path along which his own more high-strung and exceptional temperament has led him, and his place, if seemingly a smaller one, is at least as sure; wherever men occupy themselves with the literature of the late nineteenth century they will certainly sometimes talk about Zola, sometimes read Huysmans. Zola's cyclopean architecture can only be seen as a whole when we have completed the weary

task of investigating it in detail; in Huysmans we seek the expressiveness of the page, the sentence, the word. Strange as it may seem to some, it is the so-called realist who has given us the more idealised rendering of life; the concentrated vision of the idealist in his own smaller sphere has revealed not alone mysteries of the soul, but even the exterior secrets of life. True it is that Huysmans has passed by with serene indifference, or else with contempt, the things which through the ages we have slowly learnt to count beautiful. But on the other hand, he has helped to enlarge the sphere of our delight by a new vision of beauty where before to our eyes there was no beauty, exercising the proper function of the artist who ever chooses the base and despised things of the world, even the things that are not, to put to nought the things that are. Therein the decadent has his justification. And while we may accept the pioneer's new vision of beauty, we are not called upon to reject those old familiar visions for which he has no eyes, only because his gaze must be fixed upon that unfamiliar height towards which he is leading the men who come after.

## IV.

Huysmans very exquisitely represents one aspect of the complex modern soul, that aspect which shrinks from the grosser forces of Nature, from the bare simplicity of the naked sky or the naked body, the "incessant deluge of human foolishness," the eternal oppression of the commonplace, to find a sedative for its exasperated nerves in the contemplation of esoteric beauty and the difficult search for the mystic peace which passes all understanding. "Needs must I rejoice beyond the

age," runs the motto from the old Flemish mystic Ruysbroeck set on the front of *A Rebours*, "though the world has horror of my joy and its grossness cannot understand what I would say." Such is decadence; such, indeed, is religion, in the wide and true sense of the word. Christianity itself, as we know it in the western church, sprang from the baptism of young barbarism into Latin decadence. Pagan art and its clear serenity, science, rationalism, the bright, rough vigour of the sun and the sea, the adorable mystery of common life and commonplace human love, are left to make up the spirit that in any age we call "classic."

Thus what we call classic corresponds on the spiritual side to the love of natural things, and what we call decadent to the research for the things which seem to lie beyond Nature. "Corporea pulchritudo in pelle solummodo constat. Nam si viderent homines hoc quod subtus pellem est, sicut lynces in Beotia cernere interiore dicuntur, mulieres videre nausearent. Iste decor in flegmate et sanguine et humore ac felle constitit." That is St. Odo of Cluny's acute analysis of woman, who for man is ever the symbol of Nature: beauty is skin-deep, drowned in excretions which we should scarcely care to touch with the finger's tip. And for the classic vision of Nature, listen to that fantastic and gigantic Englishman, Sir Kenelm Digby, whose *Memoirs*, whose whole personality, embodied the final efflorescence of the pagan English Renaissance. He has been admitted by her maids to the bedchamber of Venetia Stanley, the famous beauty who afterwards became his wife; she is still sleeping, and he cannot resist the temptation to undress and lie gently and reverently beside her, as half disturbed in her slumber she rolled on to her side from beneath

the clothes; “and her smock was so twisted about her fair body that all her legs and the best part of her thighs were naked, which lay so one over the other that they made a deep shadow where the never-satisfied eyes wished for the greatest light. A natural ruddiness did shine through the skin, as the sunbeams do through crystal or water, and ascertained him that it was flesh that he gazed upon, which yet he durst not touch for fear of melting it, so like snow it looked. Her belly was covered with her smock, which it raised up with a gentle swelling, and expressed the perfect figure of it through the folds of that discourteous veil. Her paps were like two globes —wherein the glories of the heaven and the earth were designed, and the azure veins seemed to divide constellations and kingdoms—between both which began the milky way which leadeth lovers to their Paradise, somewhat shadowed by the yielding downwards of the uppermost of them as she lay upon her side, and out of that darkness did glisten a few drops of sweat like diamond sparks, and a more fragrant odour than the violets or primroses, whose season was nearly passed, to give way to the warmer sun and the longest days.” They play with the same counters, you observe, these two, Odo and Digby, with skin, sweat, and so forth, each placing upon them his own values. Idealists both of them, the one idealises along the line of death, the other along the line of life which the whole race has followed, and both on their own grounds are irrefutable, the logic of life and the logic of death, alike solidly founded in the very structure of the world, of which man is the measuring-rod.

The classic party of Nature seems, indeed, the stronger—in seeming only, and one recalls that, of the two witnesses just cited, the abbot of Cluny was

the most venerated man of his age, while no one troubled even to publish Digby's *Memoirs* until our own century—but it carries weakness in its very strength, the weakness of a great political party formed by coalition. It has not alone idealists on its side, but for the most part also the blind forces of robust vulgarity. So that the more fine-strung spirits are sometimes driven to a reaction against Nature and rationalism, like that of which Huysmans, from "L'Extase" onwards, has been the consistent representative. At the present moment such a reaction has attained a certain ascendency.

Christianity once fitted nearly every person born into the European world; there must needs be some to whom, in no modern devitalised form but in its purest essence, it is still the one refuge possible. No doubt conditions have changed; the very world itself is not what it was to the mediæval man. One has to recognise that the modern European differs in this from his mediæval ancestor that now we know how largely the world is of our own making. The sense of interiority, as the psychologists say, is of much later development than the sense of exteriority. For the mediæval man,—as still to-day for the child in the darkness,—his dreams and his fancies, every organic thrill in eye or ear, seemed to be flashed on him from a world of angels and demons without. In a sense which is scarcely true to-day the average man of those days—not the finer or the coarser natures, it may well be—might be said to be the victim of a species of madness, a paranoia, a systematised persecutional delusion. He could not look serenely in the face of the stars or lie at rest among the fir-cones in the wood, for who knew what ambush of the Enemy might not lurk behind these things? Even in

flowers, as St. Cyprian said, the Enemy lay hidden.

> "Nil jocundum, nil amœnum,
> Nil salubre, nil serenum,
> Nihil dulce, nihil plenum."

There was only one spot where men might huddle together in safety—the church. There the blessed sound of the bells, the contact of holy water, the smell of incense, the sight of the Divine Flesh, wove a spiritual coat of mail over every sensory avenue to the soul. The winds of hell might rave, the birds of night dash themselves against the leaden spires of that fortress whence alone the sky seemed blue with hope.

Huysmans, notwithstanding a very high degree of intellectual subtlety, is by virtue of his special æsthetic and imaginative temperament carried back to the more childlike attitude of this earlier age. The whole universe appears to him as a process of living images; he cannot reason in abstractions, cannot *rationalise*; that indeed is why he is inevitably an artist. Thus he is a born leader in a certain modern emotional movement.

That movement, as we know, is one of a group of movements now peculiarly active. We see them on every hand, occultism, theosophy, spiritualism, all those vague forms on the borderland of the unknown which call to tired men weary of too much living, or never strong enough to live at all, to hide their faces from the sun of nature and grope into cool, delicious darkness, soothing the fever of life. It is foolish to resent this tendency; it has its rightness; it suits some, who may well cling to their private dream if life itself is but a dream. At the worst we may

remember that, however repugnant such movements may be, to let fall remains a better way of putting Satan to flight than to cast away. And at the best one should know that this is part of the vital process by which the spiritual world moves on its axis, alternating between darkness and light.

Therefore soak yourself in mysticism, follow every intoxicating path to every impossible Beyond, be drunken with mediævalism, occultism, spiritualism, theosophy, and even, if you will, protestantism—the cup that cheers, possibly, but surely not inebriates—for the satisfaction that comes of all these is good while it lasts. Yet be sure that Nature is your home, and that from the farthest excursions you will return the more certainly to those fundamental instincts which are rooted in the zoological series at the summit of which we stand. For the whole spiritual cosmogony finally rests, not indeed on a tortoise, but on the emotional impulses of the mammal vertebrate which constitute us men.

Meanwhile we will not grieve because in the course of our pilgrimage on earth the sun sets. It has always risen again. We may lighten the darkness of the journey by admiring the beauty of night, plucking back the cowl if needs must we wear it.—*Eia, fratres, pergamus.*

**FOOTNOTES:**

[8] It may be gathered from the Preface he wrote at a later date for M. Remy de Gourmont's delightful volume, *Le Latin Mystique*, that Huysmans would no longer draw a line at this point; for he here speaks with enthusiasm of the styles of St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas d'Aquinas.

[9] In the seventeenth century a great English man of science, Stephen Hales, had discovered the same truth, for we are told that “he could look even upon wicked men, and those who did him unkind offices, without any emotion of particular indignation, not from want of discernment or sensibility; but he used to consider them only like those experiments which, upon trial, he found could never be applied to any useful purpose, and which he therefore calmly and dispassionately laid aside.”

# ST. FRANCIS AND OTHERS.

THE religion of Jesus was the invention of a race which itself never accepted that religion. In the East religions spring up, for the most part, as naturally as flowers, and, like flowers, are scarcely a matter for furious propaganda. These deep sagacious Eastern men threw us of old this rejected flower, as they have since sent us the vases and fans they found too tawdry; and when we send our missionaries out to barter back the gift at a profit, they say no word, but their faces wear the mysterious Eastern smile. Yet for us, at all events, the figure of Jesus symbolises, and will always symbolise, a special attitude towards life, made up of tender human sympathy and mystical reliance on the unseen forces of the world. In certain stories of the Gospels, certain sayings, in many of the parables, this attitude finds the completest expression of its sweetest abandonment. But to us, men of another race living in far distant corners of the world, it seems altogether oriental and ascetic, a morbid exceptional phenomenon. And as a matter of fact Jesus found no successor. Over the stage of those gracious and radiant scenes swiftly fell a fire-proof curtain, wrought of systematic theology and formal metaphysics, which even the divine flames of that wonderful personality were unable to melt.

Something even stronger than theology or metaphysics has served to cut us off from the spirit of Jesus, and that is the spirit of Paul, certainly the real founder of “Christianity,” as we know it, for

Jerome, Augustine, Luther, were all the children of Paul, and in no respect the children of Jesus. That marvellous little Jew painted in its main outlines the picture of Christianity which in the theatre of this world has for so many centuries shut us off from Jesus. Impelled by the intense and concentrated energy of his twisted suffering nature, Paul brought "moral force" into our western world, and after it that infinite procession of hypocrisies and cruelties and artificialities which still trains loathsomely across the scene of civilised life. Jesus may have been a visionary, but his visions were in divine harmony with the course of nature, with the wine and the bread of life, with children and with flowers. We may be very sure that Paul never considered the lilies, or found benediction with children. He trampled on nature when it came in his way, and for the rest never saw it. He was not, as Festus thought, a madman, but whether or not, as his experiences seem to indicate, he was a victim to the "sacred disease" of epilepsy, concerning his profoundly neurotic temperament there can be no manner of question.

He flung himself on to men, this terrible apostle of the "Gentiles," thrusting faith down their throats at the point of a spiritual sword so fiery and keen that, by no miracle, it soon became a sword of steel with red blood dripping from its point. Well-nigh everything that has ever been evil in Christianity, its temporal power, its accursed intolerance, its contempt for reason, for beautiful living, for every sweet and sunny and simple aspect of the world—all that is involved in the awful conception of "moral force"—flows directly from Paul. What eternal torture could be adequate for so monstrous an offender? And yet, when you think of the potent

personality concentrated in this morbid man, of his courage, of the intolerance that he wreaked on himself, the flashes of divine insight in his restless and turbulent spirit, of the humility of the neuropath who desired to be “altogether mad,” the pathos of it all, indignation falls silent. What can be said?

Thus Paul and not Peter was the rock on which the Church was built, and whatever virtues the Church may have possessed have not been the virtues of Jesus but the quite other virtues of Paul. Yet Jesus has not wholly been left without witness even in Europe, and it is the special charm and significance of Francis of Assisi that he, if not alone certainly chief among European men, has incarnated some measure of the graciousness that was in Jesus, and made it visible and real to the European world. And he has done that by no means through the influence of the Church, or by imitation, but by wholly natural and spontaneous impulse. To understand Francis we must first of all realise that he was in no sense and at no time the creature of the Church, being indeed from first to last in a very real sense antagonistic to the Church. The whole world as Francis knew it was Christian, and he was by no means a man of inquisitive analytic intellectual type, a Bruno or a Campanella; he accepted Christianity because it was there, and while remaining in it was never of it, resenting fiercely any attempt of the Church to encroach on the free activity of his personality, dispensing himself of any intimate adherence not by intellectual sophistries, but by lightly brushing away science and theology altogether as useless superfluities.

An acute psychologist has well remarked that those famous historical persons who have passed

through two antithetical phases of character, survive for us usually only in one of those phases, that we can remember only the post-conversion Augustine and the pre-abdication Diocletian. Such one-sided views of great and complex characters suit our rough and lazy methods of ordinary thought, content to regard a man only on that side which has been most prominently displayed to the world. But such methods are fatal to any clear psychological conception of character or to any sound ethical conception of life. Francis lived one of these double-sided lives, and the Francis we remember is the emaciated saint already developing the stigmata of divine grace. In his earlier biographies we catch glimpses of a younger and quite other Francis, *in vanitatibus nutritus insolenter*, the spendthrift companion of nobles, proud to surpass them in youthful extravagance and dissipation, the head of a band which dazzled the citizens of Assisi with the luxury of their rich garments and the sound of their festive songs by night, a passionate lover of chivalry and the troubadours, whose music then filled the air, so full of gaiety that he sometimes seemed almost mad to the grave citizens of his town, one whose nature it was from the first to go to excess, always to a fine and generous excess, that spiritual excess which Blake called the road to the palace of wisdom.

The later Francis survived; the early Francis is forgotten. But we may be assured that there would have been no Francis the saint if there had not been Francis the sinner. That grace and elation, the tender humanity and infinite delight in natural things, even the profound contempt for luxury and superfluity, were not learnt in any of the saint's beloved Umbrian cells; they were the final outcome of a beautifully free and excessive life acting on an exquisitely fine-

strung organism. Rarely has any follower of Francis attained in any measure to his level of exalted freedom, joy, and simplicity in saintliness. It was not alone that they could not possess his organism, but they had not lived his life. Their piety even blinded their eyes, and just as the biographers of Jesus omitted all reference to the formative years of his life, so also the biographers of Francis gradually eliminated the early records, terrified at the thought that their founder may not have been a virgin. We do not win any clear psychological insight into the man until we realise this.

It is not alone the psychological aspect which becomes clear in the light of Francis's early life. These stages of development have their ethical significance also. It seems to be too often forgotten that repression and licence are two sides of the same fact. We can only attain a fine temperance through a fine freedom, even a fine excess. The women who think that they must at all costs repress themselves, and the men who—usually with the help of certain private "accommodements"—consider repression as the proper ideal, have missed the true safeguards against licence, and flounder for ever in a turbid sea, at war with themselves, at war with nature. The saints knew better. By a process of spiritual Pasteurism, a natural and spontaneous process, they guaranteed their eternal peace. All the real saints, so far as we know them, had many phases, such of them as were saints from their mothers' wombs possessing a significance which for human beings generally is minimal. The real saints in all ages have forgotten so many beautiful things, storing so many wonderful experiences in their past. We should not dye our clothes, says St. Clement of Alexandria, our life should now be anything but a pageant. Flower-like

garments should be abandoned, and Bacchic revelries, “useful for tragedies, not for life.” The dyes of Sardis—olive, green, rose-coloured, scarlet, and ten thousand other hues—invented for voluptuousness, the garments of embroidered gold and purple, dipped in perfume, stained in saffron, the bright diaphanous tissues of the dancing girl—to all these we must bid farewell. But we cannot bid them farewell unless we have known them. If you would be a saint you must begin by being something other than a saint. This it was that St. Clement forgot, or never knew.

In youth we are so full of energy, and life seems so long. In our ethical fervour we accept Clement’s theory of conduct at his own valuation. One is so scrupulous of others, so anxious lest he hurt them; and another is so contemptuous of others, so eager to hold himself back from all but the highest good, and never to let himself fully go. And there is a fine thrill of pleasure in the self-restraint, an athletic tension of the soul. It is as if the infant at the breast should say, I will hold myself back from sucking; I will take only just ever so little, and not let myself go and draw in the delicious stream with no after-thought; there will be time for that when I am grown up. But it is not so. There is only one time in life for milk, only one time for youth; we cannot postpone life or retrace its milestones, and what is once lost is lost for ever. The cold waters of self-restraint and self-denial, as we first put our young feet in them, send a tonic shiver along the nerves, and we go on and on. But suddenly we find that the water has risen to our breasts, to our chins, that it is too late, too late, that we shall never again move and breathe freely in the open air and sunshine. That is the fate that overtakes the young

ascetic ideal. Unhappier yet are those who snatch the cup of life so hastily in youth and fill it with such muddy waters that the dregs cling to their lips for ever, spoiling the taste of the most exquisite things. To live remains an art, an art which every one must learn, and which no one can teach.

It may seem that I speak of out-worn things, and that the problem of saintliness has little relation to the moral problems of our time. It is far otherwise. You have never seen the world if you have not realised that an element of asceticism lies at the foundation of life. You may expel it with the fork of reason or of self-enjoyment, but being part of Nature herself it must ever return. All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding in. The man who makes the one or the other his exclusive aim in life will die before he has ever begun to live. The man who has carried one part of the process to excess before turning to the other will indeed learn what life is, and may leave behind him the memory of a pattern saint. But he alone is the wise master of living who from first to last has held the double ideal in true honour. In these, as in other matters, we cannot know the spiritual facts unless we realise the physical facts of life. All life is a building up and a breaking down, a taking in and a giving out, a perpetually anabolic and katabolic rhythm. To live rightly we must imitate both the luxury of Nature and her austerity.

What should be the place of asceticism in modern life? Evidently there is in human nature an instinct which craves for the sharpening of enjoyment which comes from simplicity and a finely-tempered abstinence, a measured drawing back when also it were possible recklessly to let go. It is easy to wave

aside religious asceticism. That, it seems, may well be left to those who decide to invest their enjoyments in a heavenly bank which will pay large dividends in another world. There still remains the rational asceticism that is sweet either for its own sake, or for its immediate and visible results in human joy.

When we contemplate the modern world from a broadly biological standpoint, there can be but little difficulty in finding free and wholesome scope for the ascetic instinct. For the Christian or Buddhist ascetic of old (as in some measure for his feeble modern imitator, the theosophist) asceticism was a rapturous indifference to life for the sake of something that seemed more than life, something that was itself a "higher life," and only to be achieved in the treading under foot of all that men counted life. Such conceptions belong to the past, and can only be revivified in the failing imaginations of the weary and the aged who belong to the past. The more subtle and complex conception of life which has grown up in the modern world traces life to its roots and finds it most precious where it is most intense. When we wish to carve out a world for ourselves it is the periphery which we cut away and not the core. The immense accretions of that periphery in the modern world make clearer to us than it was to our predecessors that it is in the simple and elementary things that our life consists. It is to the honour of Francis that in a vague, imperfect way he foresaw this. Aided by his early experiences, he cast aside the superfluities of knowledge and labour and skill—all that vain plethora of mere formal things and prescribed acts which men foolishly count life—and symbolising them in wealth, joyfully espoused Poverty as a bride. For poverty to

Francis meant contact with Nature and with men. The free play of the individual soul in contact with Nature and men, Francis instinctively felt, is joy and liberation; and if the simple-minded saint went farther than this, and allowed a certain set of dogmatic opinions and conventional abstentions, we may be sure that herein he had no warrant of personal inspiration, but was content to follow the well-nigh unquestioned traditions of his day. Francis fought, not for Christianity and still less for the Church, but for the great secret of fine living which he had personally divined. It was by a true instinct that his modern biographer finds the motto of his life in the exquisite saying of the saint's great precursor, Joachim of Flora, that the true ascetic counts nothing his own, save only his harp: "Qui vere monachus est nihil reputat esse suum nisi citharam."

In former days we used to regard the civilised man as in some way incorporating in his organism and bringing into the world with him the inheritance of the ages of human culture. Now the tendency is to regard civilisation as a growth totally outside man, and to consider the man himself as a savage who merely adapts himself to civilisation as he grows up, bringing, it may be, his own little contribution to its development, but himself remaining practically a savage. Thus Weismann has argued that the development of music is purely a development of traditions, and that given the traditions any savage has a chance of becoming a Bach or a Beethoven. I think this is a more extreme view than the facts warrant us in taking. But it is fairly obvious that there has been no growth of the human intellect during at least the last two or three thousand years. We cannot beat the Romans at government; we cannot express passion better than Sappho, or form

better than Phidias. We have produced no more truly scientific physicians than Hippocrates or Galen; we cannot map out the world more philosophically than Aristotle, nor play at ball with it with a greater dialectical facility than Plato. What we have done is to burden ourselves with a vaster mass of tradition. Civilisation is the garment which man makes to clothe himself with. It is for each of us to help to put in a patch here, to sew on a button there, or to work in more embroidery. But the individual himself, with his own personal organic passions, never becomes part of the garment, he only wears it. Not, indeed, that we are called upon to refuse to wear it. The person who can so refuse to follow the whole tradition of the race whence he springs is organically abnormal, not to say morbid. His fellows have a fair right to call him a lunatic or a criminal. The real question is whether we shall allow ourselves to be crushed to the earth, lame, impotent, and anæmic, by the mere garment of civilisation, or whether we shall so strive to live that we wear it loosely and easily and athletically, recognising that it is infinitely less precious than the humanity it clothes, still not without its beauty and its use.

If we wish to realise how many things are not required for fine living we may contemplate the "triumphs of the Victorian era." Contemplating these we are enabled also to see that they mostly belong to the mechanical side of existence, among the things that are remote from the core of life. The new energy that all these inventions may give you on one side they take from you on the other. They run on the energy that you yourself supply. They are but devices for burdening your progress and draining away your energy. For what does it avail though tons of food are piled before you at the banquet of life if the

capacity of your stomach remains strictly limited? Only the more exquisite quality of the banquet, with a finer equity in its distribution, could have brought you new joy and strength. The exquisite things of life are to-day as rare and as precious as ever they were. If the Victorian era had given a keener sauce to hunger, a more ravishing delight to love, if it had added a new joy to the sunlight, or a more delicious thrill to the springtime, if it had made any of these things a larger part of the common life, there indeed were a triumph to boast of! But so far as one can see, the Victorian era has mostly helped to cover over and push away from men the essential joys of living. Even those who prate so gleefully of its triumphs find chief of these its narcotics. Let us use these "triumphs" as much as we will, they belong to the unessential background against which the real drama of our life must still be played.

We waste so much of our time on the things that are not truly essential, worrying ourselves and others. Only one thing is really needful, whether with this man we say "Seek first the kingdom of Heaven," or with that, "Make to yourself a perfect body." It matters little, because he who pointed to the kingdom of Heaven came eating and drinking, the friend of publicans and sinners, and he who pointed to the body sought solitude and the keenest spiritual austerity. The body includes the soul, and the kingdom of Heaven includes the body. The one thing needful is to seek wisely the fullest organic satisfaction. The more closely we cling to that which satisfies the deepest cravings of the organism, the more gladly we shall let fall the intolerable burden of restraints and licences which are not required for fine living. "The true ascetic counts nothing his own save only his harp." It is best to feel light and elate,

free in every limb. Every man may have his burden to bear; let him only beware that he bears no burden which is not a joy to carry. If a man cannot sing as he carries his cross he had better drop it.

One has to admit that among English-speaking races at all events the conditions have not been favourable for fine living. The racial elements that have chiefly gone to making the English-speaking peoples have been mainly characterised by energy, and while energy is the prime constituent of living, it is scarcely sufficient for fine living. It is quality rather than quantity of life which finally counts: that is the terrible fact it has taken so long for our race to learn. To plough deep in the furrows of life, to scatter human seed broadcast, to bring to birth your random millions to wilt and fade in the black fog of London alleys or the hot steam of Lancashire mills, casting abroad the residue to wreak the vengeance in their blood on every fair and unspoilt land the world may hold—that is scarcely yet civilisation; fishes that spawn in the deep have carried the art of living as far as that. Not energy, even when it shows itself in the blind fury of righteousness, suffices to make civilisation, but sincerity, intelligence, sympathy, grace, and all those subtle amenities which go to what we call, perhaps imperfectly enough, humanity —therein more truly lie the virtues of fine living.

It seems not unnecessary to point out that civilisation was immortal long before the first Englishman was born. The races that have given the world the chief examples of fine living have never, save sometimes in their decay, sought quantity rather than quality of life. Some of the world's most eternal cities are its smallest cities. If indeed the reckless excess of human life tended to produce

happiness, we might well recognise compensation, and rest content. But, as we know, that is not so. The country that men call the wealthiest is the poorest in humanity when the lives and safeties of its workers are concerned, the law of our righteousness demanding that the weakest shall go to the wall.

One asks oneself if such a condition of things is fatally necessary. If that were so, then indeed the outlook of the world is dark. If the ideal of quantity before quality, of brute energy, of complacent self-righteousness, is for ever to dominate a large part of the world through the English-speaking peoples, then indeed we may die happy that the memory and the vision of better things were yet extant in our time.

Yet surely it is not necessary. If civilisation is a tradition then we may mould that tradition. We are no longer fatally damned into the world. If our fathers ate sour grapes our teeth are not on edge. And even so far as the influence of race counts, there is yet to be set against it the influence of climate. In sunnier English-speaking lands we may already trace a new foreign element of grace and suavity, a deeper insight into the art of living, clearly due in large measure to sky alone. When races change their sky, unlike individuals, they change their dispositions also.

But if we put aside this factor—though it is one of much significance when we recall the accumulating evidence that under proper conditions the white races can live and flourish in hot climes—are there no reasons for thinking that even the English in England may acquire those aptitudes which make not only for the grosser virtues of civilisation, but also for those finer qualities which alone make life truly worth living? I think there are.

It is common for pessimists of the baser sort to lament the relative decay of English supremacy in manufacturing and commercial energy, and to look enviously at the development in these directions of other and younger lands. Such an attitude is in any case inhuman, since these younger countries, especially Germany, are undertaking the cruder tasks of civilisation in at once a more scientific and a more humane spirit than we have ever been able to achieve. But it is also uncalled for. As a civilisation declines in brutal material energy it gains in spiritual refinement, thus winning more subtle and permanent influence. Egypt in her old age helped to mould young Greece, which in turn as she fell civilised her barbarian Roman conquerors. Of early vigorous Rome nothing remains save the empty echo of heroic virtue; but on the magnificent compost of Roman, Alexandrian, and Byzantine decay we northerners are flourishing even to-day. France has not taken a leading part in the grosser work of modern civilisation, but her laboratories of ideas, her workshops of beauty, above all her skill in the fine art of living, have given her an influence over men's minds which swarming millions of pale factory hands and an inconceivable tonnage of mercantile shipping have not so far given to us. But in the very dying down of these grosser energies there is hope, for we may be sure that the forces of life are not yet extinct, and that worthier and subtler ends will float before our eyes as the sculleries and outhouse offices of life are gradually removed elsewhere. England, there can be little doubt, is peculiarly fitted to exercise the finer functions of civilisation, if not indeed for the world generally, at all events for those peoples of the globe which are allied to her wholly by language and largely by race. In new countries, in the hurry of

cities, in the barren solitude of plains and hills, men have no time or no chance to elaborate the ideals and visions for which they yet thirst; they are not in touch with those great traditions on which alone all worthy and abiding effort must finally rest. The little group of islands hidden in this far corner of the Atlantic, bathed in their everlasting halo of iridescent mist, will be a sacred shrine for fully half the world. It was the womb in which the world's most energetic race was elaborated; we may be sure that the mother feeling will never die out. Every great name and episode in the slow incubation of the race has its place and association there. Nothing there which is not visibly bathed in that glory which for ever touches us in the far past. In the light of a newer civilisation every aspect of it will claim the picturesque beauty of the past. And if, as Ribot has lately asserted, the factories of this century will haunt the minds of future men with the same picturesque suggestion as the ruins of thirteenth century abbeys to-day haunt us, how rich a treasure England will possess here! Men will come from afar to wander among the ruined factories and furnaces of Lancashire and the Midlands, to gaze at the crumbling charm of those structures once mortared by tears and blood. They will seek the massive whirr of vanished mills at dawn, the prolonged clatter of clogs along the pavement, the flutter of shawls down dark alleys, the echo of brutal forgotten oaths. Their eyes will vainly try to recall the men and women of the Victorian era, huddled together in pathetic self-satisfaction beneath a black pall of smoke and disease and death, playing out the tragedy they called life. A tender melancholy mightier than beauty will cling to the decay of that vanished past.

So far we have been developing the modern

applications of that spirit of *simplicity*—of sincere and natural asceticism—which was a chief part of the secret of the Umbrian saint's charm. Francis—as in an earlier age the great Cynics of Greece, and in a later age the New England transcendentalists—enables us to see that asceticism is a natural instinct; he knew that so far from being an effort to crush the body it was an effort to give elation and freedom to the body—*Gaude, frater corpus!*—and that so far from being an appeal to sorrow it was a perpetual appeal to joy. Let us throw aside the useless burdens of life, he seems to say, the things that oppress body and mind,—care and wealth and learning and books,—that thus we may become free to concentrate ourselves on the natural things of the world, attaining therein the joy of living. That was the simplicity of Francis. There is another vaguer and subtler aspect of his personality which may be expressed by the allied word *purity*. I mean that clearness and perfect crystalline transparency symbolised by water, in which it has its source. That Francis, with all his fine natural instincts, fully realised all the implications of purity, either on its physical or its spiritual sides, one may well doubt. Purity has never been a great Christian virtue, though ever greatly talked about in Christendom; and while the reliance of Francis on instinct carried him far beyond the age and the faith in which he lived, his indifference to the intellectual grip of things which was part of that natural instinct caused him to be often swayed by the conventions and traditions around him.

It has been well said that purity—which in the last analysis is physical cleanness—is the final result of evolution after which Nature is ever striving. When she had attained to the production of naked

savage man, a creature no longer encumbered with the care of his fur but freely and constantly bathed by the elements, the perfection of purity was attained. With the wearing of clothes dirt was again brought into the world; and so-called civilised man—except when he possesses leisure for prolonged attention to his person and his clothes—is once more brought to the level of the lower animals, indeed below them, for few animals spend so little time and trouble in attaining cleanliness as garmented man. Pagan classic times, no doubt, cherished a cult of the body which involved a high regard for physical purity. That is the very reason why such purity has never been a Christian or modern virtue. The early Church, feeling profound antagonism to the vices which in classic times were associated with the bath, from the outset frequently denied that there was any need for cleanliness at all. Even so cultured a Christian as Clement of Alexandria would only admit that women should be clean; it was not necessary for men; "the bath is to be taken by women for cleanliness and health, by men for health alone;" in later days the hatred of cleanliness often became quite whole-hearted. Thus it happens that throughout Europe and wherever the influence of Christianity has spread there has been on the whole an indifference to dirt, which is indeed not uncommonly found among degraded peoples untouched by Christianity, but is certainly nowhere else found in association with a grade of culture in most other matters so high. To the Roman the rites of the bath formed one of the very chief occupations of life, and to this race it has happened, as probably to no other ancient race, that their baths have often survived their temples; Rome holds no more memorable relic than the Baths of Caracalla. For the

Mohammedan the love of water is part of religion, and the energy and skill with which in its prime Islamic civilisation exploited the free and beautiful use of water, are still to be traced throughout southern Spain. In the fine civilisation of Japan, again, the pursuit of physical purity has ever been a simple and unashamed public duty, and "a Japanese crowd," says Professor Chamberlain, "is the sweetest in the world." How different things are in Christendom one need not insist.

It is, however, impossible to overrate the magnitude of the issues which are directly and indirectly enfolded in this question of physical purity. Christianity, with its studied indifference to cleanliness, is, after all, a force from the outside so far as we are concerned; every spontaneous reflective movement of progress involves a reaction against it. On the physical side it is the mark of the better social classes that they are clean, and any striving for betterment among the masses is on the physical side a striving for greater cleanliness. Personal dirtiness is the real and permanent dividing line of classes. The instinctive physical shrinking of the clean person from the dirty person—except at the rare moments when some stronger emotion comes into play—is profound and inevitable. Nearly every form of honest natural vulgarity it is possible to find tolerable and sometimes even charming, but personal physical unwholesomeness remains an impossible barrier. There is no social equality between the clean and the dirty. The question of physical purity lies at the root of the real democratic problem.

Our attitude towards physical purity inevitably determines our attitude towards the body generally. Without the ideal of cleanliness the body becomes

impure. It cannot be shown. Complete concealment becomes the ideal of the impure. And however pure and excellent the body may actually be among ourselves, the traditions of the past remain. The Greeks considered the dislike to nakedness as a mark of Persian and other barbarians; the Japanese—the Greeks of another age and clime—had not conceived the reasons for avoiding nakedness until taught by the lustful and shame-faced eyes of western barbarians. Among ourselves it is "disgusting" even to-day to show so much as the foot.[10] We certainly could not imitate St. Francis, who broke with his old life by abandoning his father's house and all that he owned, absolutely naked.

There is no real line of demarcation between physical purity and spiritual purity, and the spiritual impurity which marks our civilisation is certainly related to the physical impurity which has so long been a tradition of Christendom. Both alike are a consciousness of uncleanness involving a cloak of hypocrisy. We may well recall that *sincerity*, if we carry its history sufficiently far back, is one with physical purity. In some districts of Italy a girl shows that she is chaste by joining in a certain procession and bearing the symbols of purity in her hand. At all events so it was once. All women now walk in the procession of the chaste. In civilised modern life everywhere, indeed, we all walk in that procession, and bright lustful eyes mingled with faint starved eyes both look out incongruously from behind the same monotonously chaste masks. We have forgotten, if we ever knew, that the filthy rags of our righteousness have alike robbed desire of its purity and restraint of its beauty.

How far Francis had instinctively divined the

meaning and significance of purity, either on the physical or the moral side, it would be idle to attempt to inquire too precisely. But this delicate and admirable saint brings us into an atmosphere in which the true grace of purity may at least be discerned. His indifference to nakedness, his affection for animals and interest in their loves, his audacious banding together of men and women in one order, his gospel of joy and his everlasting delight in all natural and elementary things, make up a whole inconceivably different from that vision of the world which the great mediæval monks, from St. Bernard downwards, spent their lives in maintaining. He brings us to a point at which we are enabled to go beyond his own insight, a point at which we may not only see that asceticism is a simple and natural instinct, not alone recognise the beauty of sex in flowers and birds, but in human creatures also, and learn at last that the finest secrets of purity are known only to the man and woman who have mingled the scent of their sweat with the wild thyme.

At the present moment it may indeed be said that the purity which is one with sincerity presents itself to us more broadly and more clearly in the road of our evolution than it ever has before. Even on the physical side secrecy is becoming impossible, and as the progress of physical science makes matter more and more transparent to our eyes, sincerity must ever become a more stringent and inevitable virtue. And on the psychic side, also, purity—if you will, sincerity—is even more surely imposing itself. Within our own time we have been privileged to see psychology taken from the study into the laboratory and into the market-place. There is no recess of the soul—however intimate, however, as we have been

taught to think, disgusting—that is not now opened to the childlike, all-scrutinising curiosity of science. We may perhaps rebel, but so it is. There are no mysteries left, no noisome abysses of ignorance veiled by the pretty mists of innocence. In the face of this tendency private vice must ever become more difficult; we are learning to detect the whole man in the slightest quiver of his muscles. Thus, again, purity becomes yet more stringent and inevitable. We gaze at all facts now, and find none too mean or too sacred for study. But it is fatal to gaze at certain facts if you cannot gaze purely. In that lies the final triumph of purity. We may rebel, I repeat, but so it is, so it must remain.

I do not wish to insist here on the moral aspects of purity—grave and profound as these are—for I am dealing less with the social aspects of simplicity and purity than with what I would call their religious aspects, their power to win our personal peace and joy. How far we are to-day, at all events in England, from the simplicity and purity of Francis in the search for peace and joy is brought home very clearly to those who have ever made it their business to observe the masses of our population in their finest moments of would-be peace and joy. Many years ago a curious fascination drew me every Bank Holiday to haunt the structure and grounds of the Crystal Palace, near which I then lived. The vision of humanity in the mass, when it has lost the interest which individuals possess, and taken on the more abstract interest belonging to the species, has for me at least always had a certain attraction. But these Bank Holiday crowds had a more special interest. They summed up and wrote large the characteristics of a nation. These thirty thousand persons belonging to the class which by virtue of greater fertility

furnishes the ultimate substance of all classes, seemed to reveal to me the heart of my own people. The perpetual, violent movement, the meaningless shouts and yells, the haggard bands of young women standing in the corridors to tramp wearily a treadmill variation of the Irish jig until they fell into an almost hypnotic state, the wistful, weary looks in the dull eyes of these seekers, rushing on among the plaster images of old serene gods, seeing nothing but always moving, moving they knew not whither, faint, yet pursuing they knew not what,—the whole of the northern soul, the English soul above all, was there. On! on! never mind how or where: that seemed the perpetual cry of these pale, lean, awkward youths and women. And I would think of the bands of boys and girls in the mediæval crusading epidemics, starting from the north with the same eyes, asking for Jerusalem at every town, soon to be slain or drowned in unknown obscure ways. Or sometimes I recalled the bas-reliefs in the museum at Naples—that most fascinating of museums—which show how the failing Greek genius concentrated its now spiritualised energy in the forms of Dionysus and his mænads. With eager face grown languid he leans on the great thyrsus, which bends beneath his weight, and in front his mænads, upheld by the ardour of the search, with heads thrown back and flying hair, still beat their cymbals desperately, seeking, until they have grown almost unconscious of search, a far-away joy, an ever-fleeting ideal, of which they have at last forgotten the name. And so for hours my gaze would be fixed on the pathetic vulgarity of those terrible crowds.

Of late I have been able to see how the other vigorous and reproductive race—the race that chiefly shares with England the partition of the uncivilised

world—comports itself at its great festivals. The Russians are a profoundly and consciously religious race, and I recall above all the unforgettable scene at the ancient monastery of Troitsa, near Moscow, as it appeared on the festival of the Assumption, when pilgrims, women mostly, in every variety of gay costume, crowded thither on foot from all parts of Russia. There, at length within the walls of that monastery-fortress on the hill at Sergievo, they fervently kiss the sacred relics, and having been served by the dark-robed, long-haired monks with soup and black bread, they lie down and fall asleep, placid and motionless, on all sides. Young women, grasping the pilgrim's staff, a little droop sometimes in the lips, yet with large brawny thighs beneath the short skirts, stolid great-breasted women of middle age, wrinkled old women decked in their ancient traditional adornments—all this gay-coloured multitude fling themselves down to sleep on the church steps, around its walls, over the silent graves, heaped up anywhere that the march of on-coming pilgrims leaves a little space, tired mænads filled for once with the wine their souls craved, colossal images of immense appeasement. It is the orgy of a strong, silent, much-suffering race, with all the charm of childhood yet upon it, too humane to be ferocious in its energy.

We English subordinate the sensory to the motor side of life, and even find our virtue in so doing. To live in the present, to suffer and to enjoy our actual evil and good, facing it squarely and making our account with it—that we cannot do: that was the way of the Greeks and Romans; it is not our way. We are ever poets and idealists, down to the dregs of life's cup. We must strive and push, using our

muscles to narcotise our senses, ever contemptuous of the people who more fully exercise their senses to grasp the world around them. For the sake of this muscular auto-intoxication we miss the finest moments life has to give. The Japanese masses, who fix their popular festival for the day when the cherry-tree is in finest bloom, and take their families into the woods to sip tea and pass the day deliciously with the flowers, are born to a knowledge of that mystery which Francis painfully conquered. The people to whom such an art of enjoyment is the common practice of the common people may possibly not succeed in sending ugly and shoddy goods to clothe and kill the beautiful skins of every savage tribe under heaven, but we need not fear to affirm that they have learnt secrets of civilisation which are yet hidden from us in England.

The worth of a civilisation, we may be very sure, is more surely measured by its power to multiply among the common people the possibility of having and enjoying such moments than by the mileage of cotton goods its factories can yield, or even by the output of Bibles its weary factory hands can stitch. We can know no moments of finer or purer exhilaration, whether we breathe the bright air of Australian solitudes and watch the virgin hills lie fold within fold beneath the stainless sunlight, or in the dimmer and damper air of this old country recline on Surrey heights by the great beeches of the old deserted Pilgrim's Way and meditate of the past. There are few things sweeter or more profitable than to lie on the velvety floor of a little pine wood on a forgotten southern height in May, where tall clumps of full-flowered rhododendra blend with the fragrant gorse which spreads down to the sparkling sea, and

to throw aside everything and dream. In such moments at such spots we reach the summits of life, learning those secrets of asceticism which Francis knew so well.

Thus by his words and by his deeds Francis still has his significance for us. He brought asceticism from the cell into the fields, and became the monk of Nature. One may doubt whether, as Renan thought, the Song to the Sun is the supreme modern expression of the religious spirit, but without doubt it gathers up vaguely and broadly the things that most surely belong to our eternal peace in this world. That it is the simplest and naturalest things to which eternal joy belongs is the divine secret which makes Francis a prince among saints, and it was by a true inspiration that he dedicated the chief utterance of his worship of joy in life to the sun.

If it should ever chance that a sane instinct of worship is born again on earth among civilised men, let us be sure that nothing will seem more worthy of worship than the sun, the source of that energy out of which we and all our ideals ultimately spring. Some day, again, perhaps, men will greet the rising of the sun at the summer solstice on the hills with music and song and dance, framing their most exquisite liturgical art to the honour of that supreme source of all earthly life. It was natural, doubtless, that at some stage of human progress new-found moral conceptions should intrude themselves as worthier of human worship. But even the cross itself —if not its great rival the lunar Mohammedan crescent—was first the symbol of sun-worship, of the source of life. We may yet rescue that sacred symbol, now fallen to such sorrowful uses, bearing it onwards to sunnier heights of wholeness and joy.

Religions are many, and in the mass they seem to us—blinded to the social functions that religions originally subserved—endlessly harsh and cruel. But in their summits, in their finest personalities, they are simple and natural enough, and alike lovely. Look at the Jesus of the Gospels, the friend of publicans and sinners, the marriage guest at Cana, so tender-hearted in the house of Simon, the author of those sayings of quintessential natural wisdom preserved to us in that string of adorable pearls men call the Sermon on the Mount. Look at the prophet of Islam, when gazing back at the earth as it seemed to recede into the distance at the end of his long career, he counted as first among its claims the simple natural joys: “I love your world because of its women and its perfumes.” And we remember the depths to which Christianity and Mohammedanism have alike fallen. Look, again, at Francis, who in no prim academical sense may be called the first modern apostle of sweetness and light, a man who found joy unspeakable in inhaling the fragrance of flowers, in watching the limpid waters of mountain streams, and whose most characteristic symbol is the soaring lark he loved so well. And we remember that a century later even Chaucer, that sweetest and most sympathetic of poets, can only speak of his friar in words that seem to be of inevitable and unconscious irony. For every religion begins as the glorious living flame of a lovely human personality,—or so it seems,—and continues as a barren cinder-heap. As such, as a Church, whether pagan or Christian, it can scarcely afford us either light or heat.

Why, one asks oneself, is it necessary for me to choose between Paul and Petronius? Why pester me on the one hand with the breastplate of faith and the helmet of salvation, on the other with the feast of

Trimalchio and the kisses of Giton? “A plague of both your houses!” We are not barbarians, tortured by a moral law, neither are we all pagans with unmixed instincts of luxury. We are the outcome of a civilisation in which not only has what we are pleased to regard as the sensual fury of the ape and tiger become somewhat chastened, but the ascetic fury of the monk and priest also. Let the child of the south feast still in the house of Trimalchio with unwounded conscience, if he can; we will not forbid him. And let the barbarian still flagellate his tense rebellious nerves with knotted spiritual scourges, if only so can he draw out the best music they yield; we will be the first to applaud. But most of us have little to do with the one or the other. The palmiest days of both ended a thousand years ere we were born. Before the threshold of our modern world was reached Francis sang in the sun and smiled away the spectres that squatted on the beautiful things of the earth. On the threshold of our world Rabelais built his Abbey of Thelème, in whose rule was but one clause, *Fay ce que vouldras*, a rule which no pagan or Christian had ever set up before, because never before except as involved in the abstract conceptions of philosophers, had the thought of voluntary co-operation, of the unsolicited freedom to do well, appeared before European men.

What have we to do also, it may be added, with modernity, with the fashions of an hour? It is well, indeed, to live in the present, whatever that present may be, but sooner or later we are pushed back, weary or disillusioned, on the inspiration of our own personality. All the activity of Francis only wrought a plague of grey friars, scattered like dust on the highways of Europe. But Francis still remains, and all things wither into nothingness in the presence of one

natural man who dared to be himself. The best of us can scarcely hope to be more successful than Francis. But at least we may be ourselves. “Whatever happens I must be emerald:” that, Antoninus said, is the emerald’s morality; that must remain our finest affirmation.

Our feet cling to the earth, and it is well that we should learn to grip it closely and nakedly. But the earth beneath us is not all of Nature; there are instincts within us that lead elsewhere, and it is part of the art of living to use naturally all those instincts. In so doing the spiritual burdens which the ages have laid upon us glide away into thin air.

And for us, as for him who wrote *De Imitatione Christi*—however far differently—there are still two wings by which we may raise ourselves above the earth, simplicity, that is to say, and purity.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[10] Thus one learns from the newspapers that the offence of wearing sandals has involved ejection even from so great a centre of enlightenment as the Reading Room of the British Museum, while the mere assertion that an actress appeared on the stage with bare legs was so damaging that it involved an action for slander, a public apology, and the payment of “a substantial sum” in compensation.

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