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Emerson and Other Essays : Large Print



JOHN JAY CHAPMAN

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EMERSON

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

JOHN JAY CHAPMAN

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EMERSON

I

"Leave this hypocritical prating about the masses. Masses are rude, lame, unmade, pernicious in their demands and influence, and need not to be flattered, but to be schooled. I wish not to concede anything to them, but to tame, drill, divide, and break them up, and draw individuals out of them. The worst of charity is that the lives you are asked to preserve are not worth preserving. Masses! The calamity is the masses. I do not wish any mass at all, but honest men only, lovely, sweet, accomplished women only, and no shovel-handed, narrow-brained, gin-drinking million stockingers or lazzaroni at all. If government knew how, I should like to see it check, not multiply the population. When it reaches its true law of action, every man that is born will be hailed as essential. Away with this hurrah of masses, and let us

> have the considerate vote of single men spoken on their honor and their conscience."

This extract from The Conduct of Life gives fairly enough the leading thought of Emerson's life. The unending warfare between the individual and society shows us in each generation a poet or two, a dramatist or a musician who exalts and deifies the individual, and leads us back again to the only object which is really worthy of enthusiasm or which can permanently excite it,—the character of a man. It is surprising to find this identity of content in all great deliverances. The only thing we really admire is personal liberty. Those who fought for it and those who enjoyed it are our heroes.

But the hero may enslave his race by bringing in a system of tyranny; the battle-cry of freedom may become a dogma which crushes the soul; one good custom may corrupt the world. And so the inspiration of one age becomes the damnation of the next. This crystallizing of life into death has occurred so often that it may almost be regarded as one of the laws of progress.

Emerson represents a protest against the tyranny of democracy. He is the most recent example of elemental hero-worship. His opinions are absolutely unqualified except by his temperament. He expresses a form of belief in the importance of the individual which is independent of any personal relations he has with the world. It is as if a man had been withdrawn from the earth and dedicated to condensing and embodying this eternal idea—the value of the individual soul—so vividly, so vitally, that his words could not die, yet in such illusive and

abstract forms that by no chance and by no power could his creed be used for purposes of tyranny. Dogma cannot be extracted from it. Schools cannot be built on it. It either lives as the spirit lives, or else it evaporates and leaves nothing. Emerson was so afraid of the letter that killeth that he would hardly trust his words to print. He was assured there was no such thing as literal truth, but only literal falsehood. He therefore resorted to metaphors which could by no chance be taken literally. And he has probably succeeded in leaving a body of work which cannot be made to operate to any other end than that for which he designed it. If this be true, he has accomplished the inconceivable feat of eluding misconception. If it be true, he stands alone in the history of teachers; he has circumvented fate, he has left an unmixed blessing behind him.

The signs of those times which brought forth Emerson are not wholly undecipherable. They are the same times which gave rise to every character of significance during the period before the war. Emerson is indeed the easiest to understand of all the men of his time, because his life is freest from the tangles and qualifications of circumstance. He is a sheer and pure type and creature of destiny, and the unconsciousness that marks his development allies him to the deepest phenomena. It is convenient, in describing him, to use language which implies consciousness on his part, but he himself had no purpose, no theory of himself; he was a product.

The years between 1820 and 1830 were the most pitiable through which this country has ever passed. The conscience of the North was pledged to the Missouri Compromise, and that Compromise neither slumbered nor slept. In New England, where the old

theocratical oligarchy of the colonies had survived the Revolution and kept under its own waterlocks the new flood of trade, the conservatism of politics reinforced the conservatism of religion; and as if these two inquisitions were not enough to stifle the soul of man, the conservatism of business self-interest was superimposed. The history of the conflicts which followed has been written by the radicals, who negligently charge up to self-interest all the resistance which establishments offer to change. But it was not solely self-interest, it was conscience that backed the Missouri Compromise, nowhere else, naturally, so strongly as in New England. It was conscience that made cowards of us all. The white-lipped generation of Edward Everett were victims, one might even say martyrs, to conscience. They suffered the most terrible martyrdom that can fall to man, a martyrdom which injured their immortal volition and dried up the springs of life. If it were not that our poets have too seldom deigned to dip into real life, I do not know what more awful subject for a poem could have been found than that of the New England judge enforcing the fugitive slave law. For lack of such a poem the heroism of these men has been forgotten, the losing heroism of conservatism. It was this spiritual power of a committed conscience which met the new forces as they arose, and it deserves a better name than these new forces afterward gave it. In 1830 the social fruits of these heavy conditions could be seen in the life of the people. Free speech was lost.

"I know no country," says Tocqueville, who was here in 1831, "in which there is so little independence of mind and freedom of discussion as in America." Tocqueville recurs to the point again and again. He cannot disguise his surprise at it, and it tinged his

whole philosophy and his book. The timidity of the Americans of this era was a thing which intelligent foreigners could not understand. Miss Martineau wrote in her Autobiography: "It was not till months afterwards that I was told that there were two reasons why I was not invited there [Chelsea] as elsewhere. One reason was that I had avowed, in reply to urgent questions, that I was disappointed in an oration of Mr. Everett's; and another was that I had publicly condemned the institution of slavery. I hope the Boston people have outgrown the childishness of sulking at opinions not in either case volunteered, but obtained by pressure. But really, the subservience to opinion at that time seemed a sort of mania."

The mania was by no means confined to Boston, but qualified this period of our history throughout the Northern States. There was no literature. "If great writers have not at present existed in America, the reason is very simply given in the fact that there can be no literary genius without freedom of opinion, and freedom of opinion does not exist in America," wrote Tocqueville. There were no amusements, neither music nor sport nor pastime, indoors or out of doors. The whole life of the community was a life of the intelligence, and upon the intelligence lay the weight of intellectual tyranny. The pressure kept on increasing, and the suppressed forces kept on increasing, till at last, as if to show what gigantic power was needed to keep conservatism dominant, the Merchant Province put forward Daniel Webster.

The worst period of panic seems to have preceded the anti-slavery agitations of 1831, because these agitations soon demonstrated that the sky did not fall nor the earth yawn and swallow Massachusetts

because of Mr. Garrison's opinions, as most people had sincerely believed would be the case. Some semblance of free speech was therefore gradually regained.

Let us remember the world upon which the young Emerson's eyes opened. The South was a plantation. The North crooked the hinges of the knee where thrift might follow fawning. It was the era of Martin Chuzzlewit, a malicious caricature,—founded on fact. This time of humiliation, when there was no free speech, no literature, little manliness, no reality, no simplicity, no accomplishment, was the era of American brag. We flattered the foreigner and we boasted of ourselves. We were over-sensitive, insolent, and cringing. As late as 1845, G.P. Putnam, a most sensible and modest man, published a book to show what the country had done in the field of culture. The book is a monument of the age. With all its good sense and good humor, it justifies foreign contempt because it is explanatory. Underneath everything lay a feeling of unrest, an instinct,—"this country cannot permanently endure half slave and half free,"—which was the truth, but which could not be uttered.

So long as there is any subject which men may not freely discuss, they are timid upon all subjects. They wear an iron crown and talk in whispers. Such social conditions crush and maim the individual, and throughout New England, as throughout the whole North, the individual was crushed and maimed.

The generous youths who came to manhood between 1820 and 1830, while this deadly era was maturing, seem to have undergone a revulsion against the world almost before touching it; at least two of them

suffered, revolted, and condemned, while still boys sitting on benches in school, and came forth advancing upon this old society like gladiators. The activity of William Lloyd Garrison, the man of action, preceded by several years that of Emerson, who is his prophet. Both of them were parts of one revolution. One of Emerson's articles of faith was that a man's thoughts spring from his actions rather than his actions from his thoughts, and possibly the same thing holds good for society at large. Perhaps all truths, whether moral or economic, must be worked out in real life before they are discovered by the student, and it was therefore necessary that Garrison should be evolved earlier than Emerson.

The silent years of early manhood, during which Emerson passed through the Divinity School and to his ministry, known by few, understood by none, least of all by himself, were years in which the revolting spirit of an archangel thought out his creed. He came forth perfect, with that serenity of which we have scarce another example in history,—that union of the man himself, his beliefs, and his vehicle of expression that makes men great because it makes them comprehensible. The philosophy into which he had already transmuted all his earlier theology at the time we first meet him consisted of a very simple drawing together of a few ideas, all of which had long been familiar to the world. It is the wonderful use he made of these ideas, the closeness with which they fitted his soul, the tact with which he took what he needed, like a bird building its nest, that make the originality, the man.

The conclusion of Berkeley, that the external world is known to us only through our impressions, and that therefore, for aught we know, the whole universe

exists only in our own consciousness, cannot be disproved. It is so simple a conception that a child may understand it; and it has probably been passed before the attention of every thinking man since Plato's time. The notion is in itself a mere philosophical catch or crux to which there is no answer. It may be true. The mystics made this doctrine useful. They were not content to doubt the independent existence of the external world. They imagined that this external world, the earth, the planets, the phenomena of nature, bore some relation to the emotions and destiny of the soul. The soul and the cosmos were somehow related, and related so intimately that the cosmos might be regarded as a sort of projection or diagram of the soul.

Plato was the first man who perceived that this idea could be made to provide the philosopher with a vehicle of expression more powerful than any other. If a man will once plant himself firmly on the proposition that *he is* the universe, that every emotion or expression of his mind is correlated in some way to phenomena in the external world, and that he shall say how correlated, he is in a position where the power of speech is at a maximum. His figures of speech, his tropes, his witticisms, take rank with the law of gravity and the precession of the equinoxes. Philosophical exaltation of the individual cannot go beyond this point. It is the climax.

This is the school of thought to which Emerson belonged. The sun and moon, the planets, are mere symbols. They signify whatever the poet chooses. The planets for the most part stay in conjunction just long enough to flash his thought through their symbolism, and no permanent relation is established between the soul and the zodiac. There is, however,

one link of correlation between the external and internal worlds which Emerson considered established, and in which he believed almost literally, namely, the moral law. This idea he drew from Kant through Coleridge and Wordsworth, and it is so familiar to us all that it hardly needs stating. The fancy that the good, the true, the beautiful,—all things of which we instinctively approve,—are somehow connected together and are really one thing; that our appreciation of them is in its essence the recognition of a law; that this law, in fact all law and the very idea of law, is a mere subjective experience; and that hence any external sequence which we coördinate and name, like the law of gravity, is really intimately connected with our moral nature,—this fancy has probably some basis of truth. Emerson adopted it as a corner-stone of his thought.

Such are the ideas at the basis of Emerson's philosophy, and it is fair to speak of them in this place because they antedate everything else which we know of him. They had been for years in his mind before he spoke at all. It was in the armor of this invulnerable idealism and with weapons like shafts of light that he came forth to fight.

In 1836, at the age of thirty-three, Emerson published the little pamphlet called Nature, which was an attempt to state his creed. Although still young, he was not without experience of life. He had been assistant minister to the Rev. Dr. Ware from 1829 to 1832, when he resigned his ministry on account of his views regarding the Lord's Supper. He had married and lost his first wife in the same interval. He had been abroad and had visited Carlyle in 1833. He had returned and settled in Concord, and

had taken up the profession of lecturing, upon which he in part supported himself ever after. It is unnecessary to review these early lectures. "Large portions of them," says Mr. Cabot, his biographer, "appeared afterwards in the Essays, especially those of the first series." Suffice it that through them Emerson had become so well known that although Nature was published anonymously, he was recognized as the author. Many people had heard of him at the time he resigned his charge, and the story went abroad that the young minister of the Second Church had gone mad. The lectures had not discredited the story, and Nature seemed to corroborate it. Such was the impression which the book made upon Boston in 1836. As we read it to-day, we are struck by its extraordinary beauty of language. It is a supersensuous, lyrical, and sincere rhapsody, written evidently by a man of genius. It reveals a nature compelling respect,—a Shelley, and yet a sort of Yankee Shelley, who is mad only when the wind is nor'-nor'west; a mature nature which must have been nourished for years upon its own thoughts, to speak this new language so eloquently, to stand so calmly on its feet. The deliverance of his thought is so perfect that this work adapts itself to our mood and has the quality of poetry. This fluency Emerson soon lost; it is the quality missing in his poetry. It is the efflorescence of youth.

> "In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his

> slough, and at what period soever of life is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years.... It is the uniform effect of culture on the human mind, not to shake our faith in the stability of particular phenomena, as heat, water, azote; but to lead us to regard nature as phenomenon, not a substance; to attribute necessary existence to spirit; to esteem nature as an accident and an effect."

Perhaps these quotations from the pamphlet called Nature are enough to show the clouds of speculation in which Emerson had been walking. With what lightning they were charged was soon seen.

In 1837 he was asked to deliver the Phi Beta Kappa oration at Cambridge. This was the opportunity for which he had been waiting. The mystic and eccentric young poet-preacher now speaks his mind, and he turns out to be a man exclusively interested in real life. This recluse, too tender for contact with the rough facts of the world, whose conscience has retired him to rural Concord, pours out a vial of wrath. This cub puts forth the paw of a full-grown lion.

Emerson has left behind him nothing stronger than this address, The American Scholar. It was the first application of his views to the events of his day, written and delivered in the heat of early manhood while his extraordinary powers were at their height. It moves with a logical progression of which he soon lost the habit. The subject of it, the scholar's relation

to the world, was the passion of his life. The body of his belief is to be found in this address, and in any adequate account of him the whole address ought to be given.

"Thus far," he said, "our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. Perhaps the time is already come when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill.... The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him life; it went out from him truth.... Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record. The poet chanting was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine, also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: hence-forward it is settled the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant.... Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire.... The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there

a favorite, but the sound estate of every man.... Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence. The literature of every nation bears me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakspearized now for two hundred years.... These being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He, and he only, knows the world. The world of any moment is the merest appearance. Some great decorum, some fetish of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depended on this particular up or down. The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy. Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom." Dr. Holmes called this speech of Emerson's our "intellectual Declaration of Independence," and indeed it was. "The Phi Beta Kappa speech," says Mr. Lowell, "was an event without any former parallel in our literary annals,—a scene always to be treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration. What crowded and breathless aisles, what windows clustering with eager heads, what enthusiasm of approval, what grim silence of foregone dissent!"

The authorities of the Divinity School can hardly have been very careful readers of Nature and The American Scholar, or they would not have invited Emerson, in 1838, to deliver the address to the graduating class. This was Emerson's second opportunity to apply his beliefs directly to society. A few lines out of the famous address are enough to show that he saw in the church of his day signs of the same decadence that he saw in the letters: "The

prayers and even the dogmas of our church are like the zodiac of Denderah and the astronomical monuments of the Hindoos, wholly insulated from anything now extant in the life and business of the people. They mark the height to which the waters once rose.... It is the office of a true teacher to show us that God is, not was; that he speaketh, not spake. The true Christianity—a faith like Christ's in the infinitude of man—is lost. None believeth in the soul of man, but only in some man or person old and departed. Ah me! no man goeth alone. All men go in flocks to this saint or that poet, avoiding the God who seeth in secret. They cannot see in secret; they love to be blind in public. They think society wiser than their soul, and know not that one soul, and their soul, is wiser than the whole world."

It is almost misleading to speak of the lofty utterances of these early addresses as attacks upon society, but their reception explains them. The element of absolute courage is the same in all natures. Emerson himself was not unconscious of what function he was performing.

The "storm in our wash-bowl" which followed this Divinity School address, the letters of remonstrance from friends, the advertisements by the Divinity School of "no complicity," must have been cheering to Emerson. His unseen yet dominating ambition is shown throughout the address, and in this note in his diary of the following year:—

> "*August 31.* Yesterday at the Phi Beta Kappa anniversary. Steady, steady. I am convinced that if a man will be a true scholar he shall have perfect freedom. The young people and the mature hint at odium and the

> aversion of forces to be presently encountered in society. I say No; I fear it not."

The lectures and addresses which form the latter half of the first volume in the collected edition show the early Emerson in the ripeness of his powers. These writings have a lyrical sweep and a beauty which the later works often lack. Passages in them remind us of Hamlet:—

> "How silent, how spacious, what room for all, yet without space to insert an atom;—in graceful succession, in equal fulness, in balanced beauty, the dance of the hours goes forward still. Like an odor of incense, like a strain of music, like a sleep, it is inexact and boundless. It will not be dissected, nor unravelled, nor shown.... The great Pan of old, who was clothed in a leopard skin to signify the beautiful variety of things and the firmament, his coat of stars,—was but the representative of thee, O rich and various man! thou palace of sight and sound, carrying in thy senses the morning and the night and the unfathomable galaxy; in thy brain, the geometry of the City of God; in thy heart, the bower of love and the realms of right and wrong.... Every star in heaven is discontent and insatiable. Gravitation and chemistry cannot content them. Ever they woo and court the eye of the beholder. Every man who comes into the world they seek to fascinate and possess, to pass into his mind, for they desire to republish themselves in a more delicate world than

> that they occupy.... So it is with all immaterial objects. These beautiful basilisks set their brute glorious eyes on the eye of every child, and, if they can, cause their nature to pass through his wondering eyes into him, and so all things are mixed."

Emerson is never far from his main thought:—

> "The universe does not attract us till it is housed in an individual." "A man, a personal ascendency, is the only great phenomenon."
>
> "I cannot find language of sufficient energy to convey my sense of the sacredness of private integrity."

On the other hand, he is never far from his great fear: "But Truth is such a fly-away, such a sly-boots, so untransportable and unbarrelable a commodity, that it is as bad to catch as light." "Let him beware of proposing to himself any end.... I say to you plainly, there is no end so sacred or so large that if pursued for itself will not become carrion and an offence to the nostril."

There can be nothing finer than Emerson's knowledge of the world, his sympathy with young men and with the practical difficulties of applying his teachings. We can see in his early lectures before students and mechanics how much he had learned about the structure of society from his own short contact with the organized church.

> "Each finds a tender and very intelligent conscience a disqualification for success. Each requires of the practitioner a certain shutting of the eyes, a certain dapperness

> and compliance, an acceptance of customs, a sequestration from the sentiments of generosity and love, a compromise of private opinion and lofty integrity.... The fact that a new thought and hope have dawned in your breast, should apprise you that in the same hour a new light broke in upon a thousand private hearts.... And further I will not dissemble my hope that each person whom I address has felt his own call to cast aside all evil customs, timidity, and limitations, and to be in his place a free and helpful man, a reformer, a benefactor, not content to slip along through the world like a footman or a spy, escaping by his nimbleness and apologies as many knocks as he can, but a brave and upright man who must find or cut a straight road to everything excellent in the earth, and not only go honorably himself, but make it easier for all who follow him to go in honor and with benefit...."

Beneath all lay a greater matter,—Emerson's grasp of the forms and conditions of progress, his reach of intellect, which could afford fair play to every one.

His lecture on The Conservative is not a puzzling *jeu d' esprit*, like Bishop Blougram's Apology, but an honest attempt to set up the opposing chessmen of conservatism and reform so as to represent real life. Hardly can such a brilliant statement of the case be found elsewhere in literature. It is not necessary to quote here the reformer's side of the question, for Emerson's whole life was devoted to it. The conservatives' attitude he gives with such accuracy and such justice that the very bankers of State Street

seem to be speaking:—

> "The order of things is as good as the character of the population permits. Consider it as the work of a great and beneficent and progressive necessity, which, from the first pulsation in the first animal life up to the present high culture of the best nations, has advanced thus far....
>
> "The conservative party in the universe concedes that the radical would talk sufficiently to the purpose if we were still in the garden of Eden; he legislates for man as he ought to be; his theory is right, but he makes no allowance for friction, and this omission makes his whole doctrine false. The idealist retorts that the conservative falls into a far more noxious error in the other extreme. The conservative assumes sickness as a necessity, and his social frame is a hospital, his total legislation is for the present distress, a universe in slippers and flannels, with bib and pap-spoon, swallowing pills and herb tea. Sickness gets organized as well as health, the vice as well as the virtue."

It is unnecessary to go, one by one, through the familiar essays and lectures which Emerson published between 1838 and 1875. They are in everybody's hands and in everybody's thoughts. In 1840 he wrote in his diary: "In all my lectures I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man. This the people accept readily enough, and even with commendation, as long as I call the lecture Art or Politics, or Literature or the

Household; but the moment I call it Religion they are shocked, though it be only the application of the same truth which they receive elsewhere to a new class of facts." To the platform he returned, and left it only once or twice during the remainder of his life.

His writings vary in coherence. In his early occasional pieces, like the Phi Beta Kappa address, coherence is at a maximum. They were written for a purpose, and were perhaps struck off all at once. But he earned his living by lecturing, and a lecturer is always recasting his work and using it in different forms. A lecturer has no prejudice against repetition. It is noticeable that in some of Emerson's important lectures the logical scheme is more perfect than in his essays. The truth seems to be that in the process of working up and perfecting his writings, in revising and filing his sentences, the logical scheme became more and more obliterated. Another circumstance helped make his style fragmentary. He was by nature a man of inspirations and exalted moods. He was subject to ecstasies, during which his mind worked with phenomenal brilliancy. Throughout his works and in his diary we find constant reference to these moods, and to his own inability to control or recover them. "But what we want is consecutiveness. 'T is with us a flash of light, then a long darkness, then a flash again. Ah! could we turn these fugitive sparkles into an astronomy of Copernican worlds!"

In order to take advantage of these periods of divination, he used to write down the thoughts that came to him at such times. From boyhood onward he kept journals and commonplace books, and in the course of his reading and meditation he collected innumerable notes and quotations which he indexed for ready use. In these mines he "quarried," as Mr.

Cabot says, for his lectures and essays. When he needed a lecture he went to the repository, threw together what seemed to have a bearing on some subject, and gave it a title. If any other man should adopt this method of composition, the result would be incomprehensible chaos; because most men have many interests, many moods, many and conflicting ideas. But with Emerson it was otherwise. There was only one thought which could set him aflame, and that was the thought of the unfathomed might of man. This thought was his religion, his politics, his ethics, his philosophy. One moment of inspiration was in him own brother to the next moment of inspiration, although they might be separated by six weeks. When he came to put together his star-born ideas, they fitted well, no matter in what order he placed them, because they were all part of the same idea.

His works are all one single attack on the vice of the age, moral cowardice. He assails it not by railings and scorn, but by positive and stimulating suggestion. The imagination of the reader is touched by every device which can awake the admiration for heroism, the consciousness of moral courage. Wit, quotation, anecdote, eloquence, exhortation, rhetoric, sarcasm, and very rarely denunciation, are launched at the reader, till he feels little lambent flames beginning to kindle in him. He is perhaps unable to see the exact logical connection between two paragraphs of an essay, yet he feels they are germane. He takes up Emerson tired and apathetic, but presently he feels himself growing heady and truculent, strengthened in his most inward vitality, surprised to find himself again master in his own house.

The difference between Emerson and the other moralists is that all these stimulating pictures and suggestions are not given by him in illustration of a general proposition. They have never been through the mill of generalization in his own mind. He himself could not have told you their logical bearing on one another. They have all the vividness of disconnected fragments of life, and yet they all throw light on one another, like the facets of a jewel. But whatever cause it was that led him to adopt his method of writing, it is certain that he succeeded in delivering himself of his thought with an initial velocity and carrying power such as few men ever attained. He has the force at his command of the thrower of the discus.

His style is American, and beats with the pulse of the climate. He is the only writer we have had who writes as he speaks, who makes no literary parade, has no pretensions of any sort. He is the only writer we have had who has wholly subdued his vehicle to his temperament. It is impossible to name his style without naming his character: they are one thing.

Both in language and in elocution Emerson was a practised and consummate artist, who knew how both to command his effects and to conceal his means. The casual, practical, disarming directness with which he writes puts any honest man at his mercy. What difference does it make whether a man who can talk like this is following an argument or not? You cannot always see Emerson clearly; he is hidden by a high wall; but you always know exactly on what spot he is standing. You judge it by the flight of the objects he throws over the wall,—a bootjack, an apple, a crown, a razor, a volume of verse. With one or other of these missiles, all

delivered with a very tolerable aim, he is pretty sure to hit you. These catchwords stick in the mind. People are not in general influenced by long books or discourses, but by odd fragments of observation which they overhear, sentences or head-lines which they read while turning over a book at random or while waiting for dinner to be announced. These are the oracles and orphic words that get lodged in the mind and bend a man's most stubborn will. Emerson called them the Police of the Universe. His works are a treasury of such things. They sparkle in the mine, or you may carry them off in your pocket. They get driven into your mind like nails, and on them catch and hang your own experiences, till what was once his thought has become your character.

"God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please; you can never have both." "Discontent is want of self-reliance; it is infirmity of will." "It is impossible for a man to be cheated by any one but himself."

The orchestration with which Emerson introduces and sustains these notes from the spheres is as remarkable as the winged things themselves. Open his works at a hazard. You hear a man talking.

> "A garden is like those pernicious machineries we read of every month in the newspapers, which catch a man's coat-skirt or his hand, and draw in his arm, his leg, and his whole body to irresistible destruction. In an evil hour he pulled down his wall and added a field to his homestead. No land is bad, but land is worse. If a man own land, the land owns him. Now let him leave home if he dare. Every tree and graft,

> every hill of melons, row of corn, or quickset hedge, all he has done and all he means to do, stand in his way like duns, when he would go out of his gate."

Your attention is arrested by the reality of this gentleman in his garden, by the first-hand quality of his mind. It matters not on what subject he talks. While you are musing, still pleased and patronizing, he has picked up the bow of Ulysses, bent it with the ease of Ulysses, and sent a shaft clear through the twelve axes, nor missed one of them. But this, it seems, was mere byplay and marksmanship; for before you have done wondering, Ulysses rises to his feet in anger, and pours flight after flight, arrow after arrow, from the great bow. The shafts sing and strike, the suitors fall in heaps. The brow of Ulysses shines with unearthly splendor. The air is filled with lightning. After a little, without shock or transition, without apparent change of tone, Mr. Emerson is offering you a biscuit before you leave, and bidding you mind the last step at the garden end. If the man who can do these things be not an artist, then must we have a new vocabulary and rename the professions.

There is, in all this effectiveness of Emerson, no pose, no literary art; nothing that corresponds even remotely to the pretended modesty and ignorance with which Socrates lays pitfalls for our admiration in Plato's dialogues.

It was the platform which determined Emerson's style. He was not a writer, but a speaker. On the platform his manner of speech was a living part of his words. The pauses and hesitation, the abstraction, the searching, the balancing, the turning forward and

back of the leaves of his lecture, and then the discovery, the illumination, the gleam of lightning which you saw before your eyes descend into a man of genius,—all this was Emerson. He invented this style of speaking, and made it express the supersensuous, the incommunicable. Lowell wrote, while still under the spell of the magician: "Emerson's oration was more disjointed than usual, even with him. It began nowhere, and ended everywhere, and yet, as always with that divine man, it left you feeling that something beautiful had passed that way, something more beautiful than anything else, like the rising and setting of stars. Every possible criticism might have been made on it but one,—that it was not noble. There was a tone in it that awakened all elevating associations. He boggled, he lost his place, he had to put on his glasses; but it was as if a creature from some fairer world had lost his way in our fogs, and it was *our* fault, not his. It was chaotic, but it was all such stuff as stars are made of, and you couldn't help feeling that, if you waited awhile, all that was nebulous would be whirled into planets, and would assume the mathematical gravity of system. All through it I felt something in me that cried, 'Ha! ha!' to the sound of the trumpets."

It is nothing for any man sitting in his chair to be overcome with the sense of the immediacy of life, to feel the spur of courage, the victory of good over evil, the value, now and forever, of all great-hearted endeavor. Such moments come to us all. But for a man to sit in his chair and write what shall call up these forces in the bosoms of others—that is desert, that is greatness. To do this was the gift of Emerson. The whole earth is enriched by every moment of converse with him. The shows and shams of life become transparent, the lost kingdoms are brought

back, the shutters of the spirit are opened, and provinces and realms of our own existence lie gleaming before us.

It has been necessary to reduce the living soul of Emerson to mere dead attributes like "moral courage" in order that we might talk about him at all. His effectiveness comes from his character; not from his philosophy, nor from his rhetoric nor his wit, nor from any of the accidents of his education. He might never have heard of Berkeley or Plato. A slightly different education might have led him to throw his teaching into the form of historical essays or of stump speeches. He might, perhaps, have been bred a stonemason, and have done his work in the world by travelling with a panorama. But he would always have been Emerson. His weight and his power would always have been the same. It is solely as character that he is important. He discovered nothing; he bears no relation whatever to the history of philosophy. We must regard him and deal with him simply as a man.

Strangely enough, the world has always insisted upon accepting him as a thinker: and hence a great coil of misunderstanding. As a thinker, Emerson is difficult to classify. Before you begin to assign him a place, you must clear the ground by a disquisition as to what is meant by "a thinker", and how Emerson differs from other thinkers. As a man, Emerson is as plain as Ben Franklin.

People have accused him of inconsistency; they say that he teaches one thing one day, and another the next day. But from the point of view of Emerson there is no such thing as inconsistency. Every man is each day a new man. Let him be to-day what he is

to-day. It is immaterial and waste of time to consider what he once was or what he may be.

His picturesque speech delights in fact and anecdote, and a public which is used to treatises and deduction cares always to be told the moral. It wants everything reduced to a generalization. All generalizations are partial truths, but we are used to them, and we ourselves mentally make the proper allowance. Emerson's method is, not to give a generalization and trust to our making the allowance, but to give two conflicting statements and leave the balance of truth to be struck in our own minds on the facts. There is no inconsistency in this. It is a vivid and very legitimate method of procedure. But he is much more than a theorist: he is a practitioner. He does not merely state a theory of agitation: he proceeds to agitate. "Do not," he says, "set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle anything as false or true. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred, none are profane. I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no past at my back." He was not engaged in teaching many things, but one thing,—Courage. Sometimes he inspires it by pointing to great characters,—Fox, Milton, Alcibiades; sometimes he inspires it by bidding us beware of imitating such men, and, in the ardor of his rhetoric, even seems to regard them as hindrances and dangers to our development. There is no inconsistency here. Emerson might logically have gone one step further and raised inconsistency into a jewel. For what is so useful, so educational, so inspiring, to a timid and conservative man, as to do something inconsistent and regrettable? It lends character to him at once. He breathes freer and is stronger for the experience.

Emerson is no cosmopolitan. He is a patriot. He is not like Goethe, whose sympathies did not run on national lines. Emerson has America in his mind's eye all the time. There is to be a new religion, and it is to come from America; a new and better type of man, and he is to be an American. He not only cared little or nothing for Europe, but he cared not much for the world at large. His thought was for the future of this country. You cannot get into any chamber in his mind which is below this chamber of patriotism. He loves the valor of Alexander and the grace of the Oxford athlete; but he loves them not for themselves. He has a use for them. They are grist to his mill and powder to his gun. His admiration of them he subordinates to his main purpose,—they are his blackboard and diagrams. His patriotism is the backbone of his significance. He came to his countrymen at a time when they lacked, not thoughts, but manliness. The needs of his own particular public are always before him.

> "It is odd that our people should have, not water on the brain, but a little gas there. A shrewd foreigner said of the Americans that 'whatever they say has a little the air of a speech.'"
>
> "I shall not need to go into an enumeration of our national defects and vices which require this Order of Censors in the State.... The timidity of our public opinion is our disease, or, shall I say, the publicness of opinion, the absence of private opinion."
>
> "Our measure of success is the moderation and low level of an individual's judgment. Dr. Channing's piety and wisdom had such

> weight in Boston that the popular idea of religion was whatever this eminent divine held."
>
> "Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity, the squalid contentment of the times."

The politicians he scores constantly.

> "Who that sees the meanness of our politics but congratulates Washington that he is long already wrapped in his shroud and forever safe." The following is his description of the social world of his day: "If any man consider the present aspects of what is called by distinction *society*, he will see the need of these ethics. The sinew and heart of man seem to be drawn out, and we are become timorous, desponding whimperers."

It is the same wherever we open his books. He must spur on, feed up, bring forward the dormant character of his countrymen. When he goes to England, he sees in English life nothing except those elements which are deficient in American life. If you wish a catalogue of what America has not, read English Traits. Emerson's patriotism had the effect of expanding his philosophy. To-day we know the value of physique, for science has taught it, but it was hardly discovered in his day, and his philosophy affords no basis for it. Emerson in this matter transcends his philosophy. When in England, he was fairly made drunk with the physical life he found there. He is like Caspar Hauser gazing for the first time on green fields. English Traits is the ruddiest book he ever wrote. It is a hymn to force, honesty,

and physical well-being, and ends with the dominant note of his belief: "By this general activity and by this sacredness of individuals, they [the English] have in seven hundred years evolved the principles of freedom. It is the land of patriots, martyrs, sages, and bards, and if the ocean out of which it emerged should wash it away, it will be remembered as an island famous for immortal laws, for the announcements of original right which make the stone tables of liberty." He had found in England free speech, personal courage, and reverence for the individual.

No convulsion could shake Emerson or make his view unsteady even for an instant. What no one else saw, he saw, and he saw nothing else. Not a boy in the land welcomed the outbreak of the war so fiercely as did this shy village philosopher, then at the age of fifty-eight. He saw that war was the cure for cowardice, moral as well as physical. It was not the cause of the slave that moved him; it was not the cause of the Union for which he cared a farthing. It was something deeper than either of these things for which he had been battling all his life. It was the cause of character against convention. Whatever else the war might bring, it was sure to bring in character, to leave behind it a file of heroes; if not heroes, then villains, but in any case strong men. On the 9th of April, 1861, three days before Fort Sumter was bombarded, he had spoken with equanimity of "the downfall of our character-destroying civilization.... We find that civilization crowed too soon, that our triumphs were treacheries; we had opened the wrong door and let the enemy into the castle."

"Ah," he said, when the firing began, "sometimes

gunpowder smells good." Soon after the attack on Sumter he said in a public address, "We have been very homeless for some years past, say since 1850; but now we have a country again.... The war was an eye-opener, and showed men of all parties and opinions the value of those primary forces that lie beneath all political action." And it was almost a personal pledge when he said at the Harvard Commemoration in 1865, "We shall not again disparage America, now that we have seen what men it will bear."

The place which Emerson forever occupies as a great critic is defined by the same sharp outlines that mark his work, in whatever light and from whatever side we approach it. A critic in the modern sense he was not, for his point of view is fixed, and he reviews the world like a search-light placed on the top of a tall tower. He lived too early and at too great a distance from the forum of European thought to absorb the ideas of evolution and give place to them in his philosophy. Evolution does not graft well upon the Platonic Idealism, nor are physiology and the kindred sciences sympathetic. Nothing aroused Emerson's indignation more than the attempts of the medical faculty and of phrenologists to classify, and therefore limit individuals. "The grossest ignorance does not disgust me like this ignorant knowingness."

We miss in Emerson the underlying conception of growth, of development, so characteristic of the thought of our own day, and which, for instance, is found everywhere latent in Browning's poetry. Browning regards character as the result of experience and as an ever changing growth. To Emerson, character is rather an entity complete and eternal from the beginning. He is probably the last

great writer to look at life from a stationary standpoint. There is a certain lack of the historic sense in all he has written. The ethical assumption that all men are exactly alike permeates his work. In his mind, Socrates, Marco Polo, and General Jackson stand surrounded by the same atmosphere, or rather stand as mere naked characters surrounded by no atmosphere at all. He is probably the last great writer who will fling about classic anecdotes as if they were club gossip. In the discussion of morals, this assumption does little harm. The stories and proverbs which illustrate the thought of the moralist generally concern only those simple relations of life which are common to all ages. There is charm in this familiar dealing with antiquity. The classics are thus domesticated and made real to us. What matter if Æsop appear a little too much like an American citizen, so long as his points tell?

It is in Emerson's treatment of the fine arts that we begin to notice his want of historic sense. Art endeavors to express subtle and ever changing feelings by means of conventions which are as protean as the forms of a cloud; and the man who in speaking on the plastic arts makes the assumption that all men are alike will reveal before he has uttered three sentences that he does not know what art is, that he has never experienced any form of sensation from it. Emerson lived in a time and clime where there was no plastic art, and he was obliged to arrive at his ideas about art by means of a highly complex process of reasoning. He dwelt constantly in a spiritual place which was the very focus of high moral fervor. This was his enthusiasm, this was his revelation, and from it he reasoned out the probable meaning of the fine arts. "This," thought Emerson, his eye rolling in a fine frenzy of moral feeling, "this

must be what Apelles experienced, this fervor is the passion of Bramante. I understand the Parthenon." And so he projected his feelings about morality into the field of the plastic arts. He deals very freely and rather indiscriminately with the names of artists,—Phidias, Raphael, Salvator Rosa,—and he speaks always in such a way that it is impossible to connect what he says with any impression we have ever received from the works of those masters.

In fact, Emerson has never in his life felt the normal appeal of any painting, or any sculpture, or any architecture, or any music. These things, of which he does not know the meaning in real life, he yet uses, and uses constantly, as symbols to convey ethical truths. The result is that his books are full of blind places, like the notes which will not strike on a sick piano.

It is interesting to find that the one art of which Emerson did have a direct understanding, the art of poetry, gave him some insight into the relation of the artist to his vehicle. In his essay on Shakespeare there is a full recognition of the debt of Shakespeare to his times. This essay is filled with the historic sense. We ought not to accuse Emerson because he lacked appreciation of the fine arts, but rather admire the truly Goethean spirit in which he insisted upon the reality of arts of which he had no understanding. This is the same spirit which led him to insist on the value of the Eastern poets. Perhaps there exist a few scholars who can tell us how far Emerson understood or misunderstood Saadi and Firdusi and the Koran. But we need not be disturbed for his learning. It is enough that he makes us recognize that these men were men too, and that their writings mean something not unknowable to us.

The East added nothing to Emerson, but gave him a few trappings of speech. The whole of his mysticism is to be found in Nature, written before he knew the sages of the Orient, and it is not improbable that there is some real connection between his own mysticism and the mysticism of the Eastern poets.

Emerson's criticism on men and books is like the test of a great chemist who seeks one or two elements. He burns a bit of the stuff in his incandescent light, shows the lines of it in his spectrum, and there an end.

It was a thought of genius that led him to write Representative Men. The scheme of this book gave play to every illumination of his mind, and it pinned him down to the objective, to the field of vision under his microscope. The table of contents of Representative Men is the dial of his education. It is as follows: Uses of Great Men; Plato, or The Philosopher; Plato, New Readings; Swedenborg, or The Mystic; Montaigne, or The Sceptic; Shakespeare, or The Poet; Napoleon, or The Man of the World; Goethe, or The Writer. The predominance of the writers over all other types of men is not cited to show Emerson's interest in The Writer, for we know his interest centred in the practical man,—even his ideal scholar is a practical man,—but to show the sources of his illustration. Emerson's library was the old-fashioned gentleman's library. His mines of thought were the world's classics. This is one reason why he so quickly gained an international currency. His very subjects in Representative Men are of universal interest, and he is limited only by certain inevitable local conditions. Representative Men is thought by many persons to be his best book. It is certainly filled with the strokes of a master. There

exists no more profound criticism than Emerson's analysis of Goethe and of Napoleon, by both of whom he was at once fascinated and repelled.

II

The attitude of Emerson's mind toward reformers results so logically from his philosophy that it is easily understood. He saw in them people who sought something as a panacea or as an end in itself. To speak strictly and not irreverently, he had his own panacea,—the development of each individual; and he was impatient of any other. He did not believe in association. The very idea of it involved a surrender by the individual of some portion of his identity, and of course all the reformers worked through their associations. With their general aims he sympathized. "These reforms," he wrote, "are our contemporaries; they are ourselves, our own light and sight and conscience; they only name the relation which subsists between us and the vicious institutions which they go to rectify." But with the methods of the reformers he had no sympathy: "He who aims at progress should aim at an infinite, not at a special benefit. The reforms whose fame now fills the land with temperance, anti-slavery, non-resistance, no-government, equal labor, fair and generous as each appears, are poor bitter things when prosecuted for themselves as an end." Again: "The young men who have been vexing society for these last years with regenerative methods seem to have made this mistake: they all exaggerated some special means, and all failed to see that the reform of reforms must be accomplished without means."

Emerson did not at first discriminate between the movement of the Abolitionists and the hundred and one other reform movements of the period; and in this lack of discrimination lies a point of extraordinary interest. The Abolitionists, as it afterwards turned out, had in fact got hold of the issue which was to control the fortunes of the republic for thirty years. The difference between them and the other reformers was this: that the Abolitionists were men set in motion by the primary and unreasoning passion of pity. Theory played small part in the movement. It grew by the excitement which exhibitions of cruelty will arouse in the minds of sensitive people.

It is not to be denied that the social conditions in Boston in 1831 foreboded an outbreak in some form. If the abolition excitement had not drafted off the rising forces, there might have been a Merry Mount, an epidemic of crime or insanity, or a mob of some sort. The abolition movement afforded the purest form of an indulgence in human feeling that was ever offered to men. It was intoxicating. It made the agitators perfectly happy. They sang at their work and bubbled over with exhilaration. They were the only people in the United States, at this time, who were enjoying an exalted, glorifying, practical activity.

But Emerson at first lacked the touchstone, whether of intellect or of heart, to see the difference between this particular movement and the other movements then in progress. Indeed, in so far as he sees any difference between the Abolitionists and the rest, it is that the Abolitionists were more objectionable and distasteful to him. "Those," he said, "who are urging with most ardor what are called the greatest benefits

to mankind are narrow, conceited, self-pleasing men, and affect us as the insane do." And again: "By the side of these men [the idealists] the hot agitators have a certain cheap and ridiculous air; they even look smaller than others. Of the two, I own I like the speculators the best. They have some piety which looks with faith to a fair future unprofaned by rash and unequal attempts to realize it." He was drawn into the abolition cause by having the truth brought home to him that these people were fighting for the Moral Law. He was slow in seeing this, because in their methods they represented everything he most condemned. As soon, however, as he was convinced, he was ready to lecture for them and to give them the weight of his approval. In 1844 he was already practically an Abolitionist, and his feelings upon the matter deepened steadily in intensity ever after.

The most interesting page of Emerson's published journal is the following, written at some time previous to 1844; the exact date is not given. A like page, whether written or unwritten, may be read into the private annals of every man who lived before the war. Emerson has, with unconscious mastery, photographed the half-spectre that stalked in the minds of all. He wrote: "I had occasion to say the other day to Elizabeth Hoar that I like best the strong and worthy persons, like her father, who support the social order without hesitation or misgiving. I like these; they never incommode us by exciting grief, pity, or perturbation of any sort. But the professed philanthropists, it is strange and horrible to say, are an altogether odious set of people, whom one would shun as the worst of bores and canters. But my conscience, my unhappy conscience respects that hapless class who see the faults and stains of our social order, and who pray and strive incessantly to

right the wrong; this annoying class of men and women, though they commonly find the work altogether beyond their faculty, and their results are, for the present, distressing. They are partial, and apt to magnify their own. Yes, and the prostrate penitent, also,—he is not comprehensive, he is not philosophical in those tears and groans. Yet I feel that under him and his partiality and exclusiveness is the earth and the sea and all that in them is, and the axis around which the universe revolves passes through his body where he stands."

It was the defection of Daniel Webster that completed the conversion of Emerson and turned him from an adherent into a propagandist of abolition. Not pity for the slave, but indignation at the violation of the Moral Law by Daniel Webster, was at the bottom of Emerson's anger. His abolitionism was secondary to his main mission, his main enthusiasm. It is for this reason that he stands on a plane of intellect where he might, under other circumstances, have met and defeated Webster. After the 7th of March, 1850, he recognized in Webster the embodiment of all that he hated. In his attacks on Webster, Emerson trembles to his inmost fibre with antagonism. He is savage, destructive, personal, bent on death.

This exhibition of Emerson as a fighting animal is magnificent, and explains his life. There is no other instance of his ferocity. No other nature but Webster's ever so moved him; but it was time to be moved, and Webster was a man of his size. Had these two great men of New England been matched in training as they were matched in endowment, and had they then faced each other in debate, they would not have been found to differ so greatly in power.

Their natures were electrically repellent, but from which did the greater force radiate? Their education differed so radically that it is impossible to compare them, but if you translate the Phi Beta Kappa address into politics, you have something stronger than Webster,—something that recalls Chatham; and Emerson would have had this advantage,—that he was not afraid. As it was, he left his library and took the stump. Mr. Cabot has given us extracts from his speeches:—

> "The tameness is indeed complete; all are involved in one hot haste of terror,—presidents of colleges and professors, saints and brokers, lawyers and manufacturers; not a liberal recollection, not so much as a snatch of an old song for freedom, dares intrude on their passive obedience.... Mr. Webster, perhaps, is only following the laws of his blood and constitution. I suppose his pledges were not quite natural to him. He is a man who lives by his memory; a man of the past, not a man of faith and of hope. All the drops of his blood have eyes that look downward, and his finely developed understanding only works truly and with all its force when it stands for animal good; that is, for property. He looks at the Union as an estate, a large farm, and is excellent in the completeness of his defence of it so far. What he finds already written he will defend. Lucky that so much had got well written when he came, for he has no faith in the power of self-government. Not the smallest municipal provision, if it were new, would receive his sanction. In Massachusetts, in 1776, he would, beyond

> all question, have been a refugee. He praises Adams and Jefferson, but it is a past Adams and Jefferson. A present Adams or Jefferson he would denounce.... But one thing appears certain to me: that the Union is at an end as soon as an immoral law is enacted. He who writes a crime into the statute book digs under the foundations of the Capitol.... The words of John Randolph, wiser than he knew, have been ringing ominously in all echoes for thirty years: 'We do not govern the people of the North by our black slaves, but by their own white slaves.' ... They come down now like the cry of fate, in the moment when they are fulfilled."

The exasperation of Emerson did not subside, but went on increasing during the next four years, and on March 7, 1854, he read his lecture on the Fugitive Slave Law at the New York Tabernacle: "I have lived all my life without suffering any inconvenience from American Slavery. I never saw it; I never heard the whip; I never felt the check on my free speech and action, until the other day, when Mr. Webster, by his personal influence, brought the Fugitive Slave Law on the country. I say Mr. Webster, for though the bill was not his, it is yet notorious that he was the life and soul of it, that he gave it all he had. It cost him his life, and under the shadow of his great name inferior men sheltered themselves, threw their ballots for it, and made the law.... Nobody doubts that Daniel Webster could make a good speech. Nobody doubts that there were good and plausible things to be said on the part of the South. But this is not a question of ingenuity, not a question of syllogisms, but of sides. *How came he there*? ... But the question

which history will ask is broader. In the final hour when he was forced by the peremptory necessity of the closing armies to take a side,—did he take the part of great principles, the side of humanity and justice, or the side of abuse, and oppression and chaos? ... He did as immoral men usually do,—made very low bows to the Christian Church and went through all the Sunday decorums, but when allusion was made to the question of duty and the sanctions of morality, he very frankly said, at Albany, 'Some higher law, something existing somewhere between here and the heaven—I do not know where.' And if the reporters say true, this wretched atheism found some laughter in the company."

It was too late for Emerson to shine as a political debater. On May 14, 1857, Longfellow wrote in his diary, "It is rather painful to see Emerson in the arena of politics, hissed and hooted at by young law students." Emerson records a similar experience at a later date: "If I were dumb, yet would I have gone and mowed and muttered or made signs. The mob roared whenever I attempted to speak, and after several beginnings I withdrew." There is nothing "painful" here: it is the sublime exhibition of a great soul in bondage to circumstance.

The thing to be noted is that this is the same man, in the same state of excitement about the same idea, who years before spoke out in The American Scholar, in the Essays, and in the Lectures.

What was it that had aroused in Emerson such Promethean antagonism in 1837 but those same forces which in 1850 came to their culmination and assumed visible shape in the person of Daniel Webster? The formal victory of Webster drew

Emerson into the arena, and made a dramatic episode in his life. But his battle with those forces had begun thirteen years earlier, when he threw down the gauntlet to them in his Phi Beta Kappa oration. Emerson by his writings did more than any other man to rescue the youth of the next generation and fit them for the fierce times to follow. It will not be denied that he sent ten thousand sons to the war.

In speaking of Emerson's attitude toward the anti-slavery cause, it has been possible to dispense with any survey of that movement, because the movement was simple and specific and is well remembered. But when we come to analyze the relations he bore to some of the local agitations of his day, it becomes necessary to weave in with the matter a discussion of certain tendencies deeply imbedded in the life of his times, and of which he himself was in a sense an outcome. In speaking of the Transcendentalists, who were essentially the children of the Puritans, we must begin with some study of the chief traits of Puritanism.

What parts the factors of climate, circumstance, and religion have respectively played in the development of the New England character no analysis can determine. We may trace the imaginary influence of a harsh creed in the lines of the face. We may sometimes follow from generation to generation the course of a truth which at first sustained the spirit of man, till we see it petrify into a dogma which now kills the spirits of men. Conscience may destroy the character. The tragedy of the New England judge enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law was no new spectacle in New England. A dogmatic crucifixion of the natural instincts had been in progress there for two hundred years. Emerson, who is more free from

dogma than any other teacher that can be named, yet comes very near being dogmatic in his reiteration of the Moral Law.

Whatever volume of Emerson we take up, the Moral Law holds the same place in his thoughts. It is the one statable revelation of truth which he is ready to stake his all upon. "The illusion that strikes me as the masterpiece in that ring of illusions which our life is, is the timidity with which we assert our moral sentiment. We are made of it, the world is built by it, things endure as they share it; all beauty, all health, all intelligence exist by it; yet we shrink to speak of it or range ourselves by its side. Nay, we presume strength of him or them who deny it. Cities go against it, the college goes against it, the courts snatch any precedent at any vicious form of law to rule it out; legislatures listen with appetite to declamations against it and vote it down."

With this very beautiful and striking passage no one will quarrel, nor will any one misunderstand it.

The following passage has the same sort of poetical truth. "Things are saturated with the moral law. There is no escape from it. Violets and grass preach it; rain and snow, wind and tides, every change, every cause in Nature is nothing but a disguised missionary." ...

But Emerson is not satisfied with metaphor. "We affirm that in all men is this majestic perception and command; that it is the presence of the eternal in each perishing man; that it distances and degrades all statements of whatever saints, heroes, poets, as obscure and confused stammerings before its silent revelation. *They* report the truth. *It* is the truth." In this last extract we have Emerson actually affirming

that his dogma of the Moral Law is Absolute Truth. He thinks it not merely a form of truth, like the old theologies, but very distinguishable from all other forms in the past.

Curiously enough, his statement of the law grows dogmatic and incisive in proportion as he approaches the borderland between his law and the natural instincts: "The last revelation of intellect and of sentiment is that in a manner it severs the man from all other men; makes known to him *that the spiritual powers are sufficient to him if no other being existed*; that he is to deal absolutely in the world, as if he alone were a system and a state, and though all should perish could make all anew." Here we have the dogma applied, and we see in it only a new form of old Calvinism as cruel as Calvinism, and not much different from its original. The italics are not Emerson's, but are inserted to bring out an idea which is everywhere prevalent in his teaching.

In this final form, the Moral Law, by insisting that sheer conscience can slake the thirst that rises in the soul, is convicted of falsehood; and this heartless falsehood is the same falsehood that has been put into the porridge of every Puritan child for six generations. A grown man can digest doctrine and sleep at night. But a young person of high purpose and strong will, who takes such a lie as this half-truth and feeds on it as on the bread of life, will suffer. It will injure the action of his heart. Truly the fathers have eaten sour grapes, therefore the children's teeth are set on edge.

To understand the civilization of cities, we must look at the rural population from which they draw their

life. We have recently had our attention called to the last remnants of that village life so reverently gathered up by Miss Wilkins, and of which Miss Emily Dickinson was the last authentic voice. The spirit of this age has examined with an almost pathological interest this rescued society. We must go to it if we would understand Emerson, who is the blossoming of its culture. We must study it if we would arrive at any intelligent and general view of that miscellaneous crop of individuals who have been called the Transcendentalists.

Between 1830 and 1840 there were already signs in New England that the nutritive and reproductive forces of society were not quite wholesome, not exactly well adjusted. Self-repression was the religion which had been inherited. "Distrust Nature" was the motto written upon the front of the temple. What would have happened to that society if left to itself for another hundred years no man can guess. It was rescued by the two great regenerators of mankind, new land and war. The dispersion came, as Emerson said of the barbarian conquests of Rome, not a day too soon. It happened that the country at large stood in need of New England as much as New England stood in need of the country. This congested virtue, in order to be saved, must be scattered. This ferment, in order to be kept wholesome, must be used as leaven to leaven the whole lump. "As you know," says Emerson in his Eulogy on Boston, "New England supplies annually a large detachment of preachers and schoolmasters and private tutors to the interior of the South and West.... We are willing to see our sons emigrate, as to see our hives swarm. That is what they were made to do, and what the land wants and invites."

For purposes of yeast, there was never such leaven as the Puritan stock. How little the natural force of the race had really abated became apparent when it was placed under healthy conditions, given land to till, foes to fight, the chance to renew its youth like the eagle. But during this period the relief had not yet come. The terrible pressure of Puritanism and conservatism in New England was causing a revolt not only of the Abolitionists, but of another class of people of a type not so virile as they. The times have been smartly described by Lowell in his essay on Thoreau:—

> "Every possible form of intellectual and physical dyspepsia brought forth its gospel. Bran had its prophets.... Everybody had a Mission (with a capital M) to attend to everybody else's business. No brain but had its private maggot, which must have found pitiably short commons sometimes. Not a few impecunious zealots abjured the use of money (unless earned by other people), professing to live on the internal revenues of the spirit. Some had an assurance of instant millennium so soon as hooks and eyes should be substituted for buttons. Communities were established where everything was to be common but common sense.... Conventions were held for every hitherto inconceivable purpose."

Whatever may be said of the Transcendentalists, it must not be forgotten that they represented an elevation of feeling, which through them qualified the next generation, and can be traced in the life of New England to-day. The strong intrinsic character lodged in these recusants was later made manifest;

for many of them became the best citizens of the commonwealth,—statesmen, merchants, soldiers, men and women of affairs. They retained their idealism while becoming practical men. There is hardly an example of what we should have thought would be common in their later lives, namely, a reaction from so much ideal effort, and a plunge into cynicism and malice, scoundrelism and the flesh-pots. In their early life they resembled the Abolitionists in their devotion to an idea; but with the Transcendentalists self-culture and the aesthetic and sentimental education took the place of more public aims. They seem also to have been persons of greater social refinement than the Abolitionists.

The Transcendentalists were sure of only one thing,—that society as constituted was all wrong. In this their main belief they were right. They were men and women whose fundamental need was activity, contact with real life, and the opportunity for social expansion; and they keenly felt the chill and fictitious character of the reigning conventionalities. The rigidity of behavior which at this time characterized the Bostonians seemed sometimes ludicrous and sometimes disagreeable to the foreign visitor. There was great gravity, together with a certain pomp and dumbness, and these things were supposed to be natural to the inhabitants and to give them joy. People are apt to forget that such masks are never worn with ease. They result from the application of an inflexible will, and always inflict discomfort. The Transcendentalists found themselves all but stifled in a society as artificial in its decorum as the court of France during the last years of Louis XIV.

Emerson was in no way responsible for the

movement, although he got the credit of having evoked it by his teaching. He was elder brother to it, and was generated by its parental forces; but even if Emerson had never lived, the Transcendentalists would have appeared. He was their victim rather than their cause. He was always tolerant of them and sometimes amused at them, and disposed to treat them lightly. It is impossible to analyze their case with more astuteness than he did in an editorial letter in The Dial. The letter is cold, but is a masterpiece of good sense. He had, he says, received fifteen letters on the Prospects of Culture. "Excellent reasons have been shown us why the writers, obviously persons of sincerity and elegance, should be dissatisfied with the life they lead, and with their company.... They want a friend to whom they can speak and from whom they may hear now and then a reasonable word." After discussing one or two of their proposals,—one of which was that the tiresome "uncles and aunts" of the enthusiasts should be placed by themselves in one delightful village, the dough, as Emerson says, be placed in one pan and the leaven in another,—he continues: "But it would be unjust not to remind our younger friends that whilst this aspiration has always made its mark in the lives of men of thought, in vigorous individuals it does not remain a detached object, but is satisfied along with the satisfaction of other aims." Young Americans "are educated above the work of their times and country, and disdain it. Many of the more acute minds pass into a lofty criticism ... which only embitters their sensibility to the evil, and widens the feeling of hostility between them and the citizens at large.... We should not know where to find in literature any record of so much unbalanced intellectuality, such undeniable apprehension

without talent, so much power without equal applicability, as our young men pretend to.... The balance of mind and body will redress itself fast enough. Superficialness is the real distemper.... It is certain that speculation is no succedaneum for life." He then turns to find the cure for these distempers in the farm lands of Illinois, at that time already being fenced in "almost like New England itself," and closes with a suggestion that so long as there is a woodpile in the yard, and the "wrongs of the Indian, of the Negro, of the emigrant, remain unmitigated," relief might be found even nearer home.

In his lecture on the Transcendentalists he says: " ... But their solitary and fastidious manners not only withdraw them from the conversation, but from the labors of the world: they are not good citizens, not good members of society; unwillingly they bear their part of the public and private burdens; they do not willingly share in the public charities, in the public religious rites, in the enterprises of education, of missions foreign and domestic, in the abolition of the slave-trade, or in the temperance society. They do not even like to vote." A less sympathetic observer, Harriet Martineau, wrote of them: "While Margaret Fuller and her adult pupils sat 'gorgeously dressed,' talking about Mars and Venus, Plato and Goethe, and fancying themselves the elect of the earth in intellect and refinement, the liberties of the republic were running out as fast as they could go at a breach which another sort of elect persons were devoting themselves to repair; and my complaint against the 'gorgeous' pedants was that they regarded their preservers as hewers of wood and drawers of water, and their work as a less vital one than the pedantic orations which were spoiling a set of well-meaning women in a pitiable way." Harriet Martineau, whose

whole work was practical, and who wrote her journal in 1855 and in the light of history, was hardly able to do justice to these unpractical but sincere spirits.

Emerson was divided from the Transcendentalists by his common sense. His shrewd business intellect made short work of their schemes. Each one of their social projects contained some covert economic weakness, which always turned out to lie in an attack upon the integrity of the individual, and which Emerson of all men could be counted on to detect. He was divided from them also by the fact that he was a man of genius, who had sought out and fought out his means of expression. He was a great artist, and as such he was a complete being. No one could give to him nor take from him. His yearnings found fruition in expression. He was sure of his place and of his use in this world. But the Transcendentalists were neither geniuses nor artists nor complete beings. Nor had they found their places or uses as yet. They were men and women seeking light. They walked in dry places, seeking rest and finding none. The Transcendentalists are not collectively important because their *Sturm und Drang* was intellectual and bloodless. Though Emerson admonish and Harriet Martineau condemn, yet from the memorials that survive, one is more impressed with the sufferings than with the ludicrousness of these persons. There is something distressing about their letters, their talk, their memoirs, their interminable diaries. They worry and contort and introspect. They rave and dream. They peep and theorize. They cut open the bellows of life to see where the wind comes from. Margaret Fuller analyzes Emerson, and Emerson Margaret Fuller. It is not a wholesome ebullition of vitality. It is a

nightmare, in which the emotions, the terror, the agony, the rapture, are all unreal, and have no vital content, no consequence in the world outside. It is positively wonderful that so much excitement and so much suffering should have left behind nothing in the field of art which is valuable. All that intelligence could do toward solving problems for his friends Emerson did. But there are situations in life in which the intelligence is helpless, and in which something else, something perhaps possessed by a ploughboy, is more divine than Plato.

If it were not pathetic, there would be something cruel—indeed there is something cruel—in Emerson's incapacity to deal with Margaret Fuller. He wrote to her on October 24, 1840: "My dear Margaret, I have your frank and noble and affecting letter, and yet I think I could wish it unwritten. I ought never to have suffered you to lead me into any conversation or writing on our relation, a topic from which with all persons my Genius warns me away."

The letter proceeds with unimpeachable emptiness and integrity in the same strain. In 1841 he writes in his diary: "Strange, cold-warm, attractive-repelling conversation with Margaret, whom I always admire, most revere when I nearest see, and sometimes love; yet whom I freeze and who freezes me to silence when we promise to come nearest."

Human sentiment was known to Emerson mainly in the form of pain. His nature shunned it; he cast it off as quickly as possible. There is a word or two in the essay on Love which seems to show that the inner and diaphanous core of this seraph had once, but not for long, been shot with blood: he recalls only the pain of it. His relations with Margaret Fuller seem

never normal, though they lasted for years. This brilliant woman was in distress. She was asking for bread, and he was giving her a stone, and neither of them was conscious of what was passing. This is pitiful. It makes us clutch about us to catch hold, if we somehow may, of the hand of a man.

There was manliness in Horace Greeley, under whom Miss Fuller worked on the New York Tribune not many years afterward. She wrote: "Mr. Greeley I like, —nay, more, love. He is in his habit a plebeian, in his heart a nobleman. His abilities in his own way are great. He believes in mine to a surprising degree. We are true friends."

This anæmic incompleteness of Emerson's character can be traced to the philosophy of his race; at least it can be followed in that philosophy. There is an implication of a fundamental falsehood in every bit of Transcendentalism, including Emerson. That falsehood consists in the theory of the self-sufficiency of each individual, men and women alike. Margaret Fuller is a good example of the effect of this philosophy, because her history afterward showed that she was constituted like other human beings, was dependent upon human relationship, and was not only a very noble, but also a very womanly creature. Her marriage, her Italian life, and her tragic death light up with the splendor of reality the earlier and unhappy period of her life. This woman had been driven into her vagaries by the lack of something which she did not know existed, and which she sought blindly in metaphysics. Harriet Martineau writes of her: "It is the most grievous loss I have almost ever known in private history, the deferring of Margaret Fuller's married life so long. That noble last period of her life is happily on record

as well as the earlier." The hardy Englishwoman has here laid a kind human hand on the weakness of New England, and seems to be unconscious that she is making a revelation as to the whole Transcendental movement. But the point is this: there was no one within reach of Margaret Fuller, in her early days, who knew what was her need. One offered her Kant, one Comte, one Fourier, one Swedenborg, one the Moral Law. You cannot feed the heart on these things.

Yet there is a bright side to this New England spirit, which seems, if we look only to the graver emotions, so dry, dismal, and deficient. A bright and cheery courage appears in certain natures of which the sun has made conquest, that almost reconciles us to all loss, so splendid is the outcome. The practical, dominant, insuppressible active temperaments who have a word for every emergency, and who carry the controlled force of ten men at their disposal, are the fruits of this same spirit. Emerson knew not tears, but he and the hundred other beaming and competent characters which New England has produced make us almost envy their state. They give us again the old Stoics at their best.

Very closely connected with this subject—the crisp and cheery New England temperament—lies another which any discussion of Emerson must bring up,—namely, Asceticism. It is probable that in dealing with Emerson's feelings about the plastic arts we have to do with what is really the inside, or metaphysical side, of the same phenomena which present themselves on the outside, or physical side, in the shape of asceticism.

Emerson's natural asceticism is revealed to us in

almost every form in which history can record a man. It is in his philosophy, in his style, in his conduct, and in his appearance. It was, however, not in his voice. Mr. Cabot, with that reverence for which every one must feel personally grateful to him, has preserved a description of Emerson by the New York journalist, N.P. Willis: "It is a voice with shoulders in it, which he has not; with lungs in it far larger than his; with a walk which the public never see; with a fist in it which his own hand never gave him the model for; and with a gentleman in it which his parochial and 'bare-necessaries-of-life' sort of exterior gives no other betrayal of. We can imagine nothing in nature (which seems too to have a type for everything) like the want of correspondence between the Emerson that goes in at the eye and the Emerson that goes in at the ear. A heavy and vase-like blossom of a magnolia, with fragrance enough to perfume a whole wilderness, which should be lifted by a whirlwind and dropped into a branch of aspen, would not seem more as if it could never have grown there than Emerson's voice seems inspired and foreign to his visible and natural body." Emerson's ever exquisite and wonderful good taste seems closely connected with this asceticism, and it is probable that his taste influenced his views and conduct to some small extent.

The anti-slavery people were not always refined. They were constantly doing things which were tactically very effective, but were not calculated to attract the over-sensitive. Garrison's rampant and impersonal egotism was good politics, but bad taste. Wendell Phillips did not hesitate upon occasion to deal in personalities of an exasperating kind. One sees a certain shrinking in Emerson from the taste of the Abolitionists. It was not merely their doctrines or

their methods which offended him. He at one time refused to give Wendell Phillips his hand because of Phillips's treatment of his friend, Judge Hoar. One hardly knows whether to be pleased at Emerson for showing a human weakness, or annoyed at him for not being more of a man. The anecdote is valuable in both lights. It is like a tiny speck on the crystal of his character which shows us the exact location of the orb, and it is the best illustration of the feeling of the times which has come down to us.

If by "asceticism" we mean an experiment in starving the senses, there is little harm in it. Nature will soon reassert her dominion, and very likely our perceptions will be sharpened by the trial. But "natural asceticism" is a thing hardly to be distinguished from functional weakness. What is natural asceticism but a lack of vigor? Does it not tend to close the avenues between the soul and the universe? "Is it not so much death?" The accounts of Emerson show him to have been a man in whom there was almost a hiatus between the senses and the most inward spirit of life. The lower register of sensations and emotions which domesticate a man into fellowship with common life was weak. Genial familiarity was to him impossible; laughter was almost a pain. "It is not the sea and poverty and pursuit that separate us. Here is Alcott by my door,—yet is the union more profound? No! the sea, vocation, poverty, are seeming fences, but man is insular and cannot be touched. Every man is an infinitely repellent orb, and holds his individual being on that condition.... Most of the persons whom I see in my own house I see across a gulf; I cannot go to them nor they come to me."

This aloofness of Emerson must be remembered only

as blended with his benignity. "His friends were all that knew him," and, as Dr. Holmes said, "his smile was the well-remembered line of Terence written out in living features." Emerson's journals show the difficulty of his intercourse even with himself. He could not reach himself at will, nor could another reach him. The sensuous and ready contact with nature which more carnal people enjoy was unknown to him. He had eyes for the New England landscape, but for no other scenery. If there is one supreme sensation reserved for man, it is the vision of Venice seen from the water. This sight greeted Emerson at the age of thirty. The famous city, as he approached it by boat, "looked for some time like nothing but New York. It is a great oddity, a city for beavers, but to my thought a most disagreeable residence. You feel always in prison and solitary. It is as if you were always at sea. I soon had enough of it."

Emerson's contempt for travel and for the "rococo toy," Italy, is too well known to need citation. It proceeds from the same deficiency of sensation. His eyes saw nothing; his ears heard nothing. He believed that men travelled for distraction and to kill time. The most vulgar plutocrat could not be blinder to beauty nor bring home less from Athens than this cultivated saint. Everything in the world which must be felt with a glow in the breast, in order to be understood, was to him dead-letter. Art was a name to him; music was a name to him; love was a name to him. His essay on Love is a nice compilation of compliments and elegant phrases ending up with some icy morality. It seems very well fitted for a gift-book or an old-fashioned lady's annual.

"The lovers delight in endearments, in avowals of

love, in comparisons of their regards.... The soul which is in the soul of each, craving a perfect beatitude, detects incongruities, defects, and disproportion in the behavior of the other. Hence arise surprise, expostulation, and pain. Yet that which drew them to each other was signs of loveliness, signs of virtue; and these virtues are there, however eclipsed. They appear and reappear and continue to attract; but the regard changes, quits the sign and attaches to the substance. This repairs the wounded affection. Meantime, as life wears on, it proves a game of permutation and combination of all possible positions of the parties, to employ all the resources of each, and acquaint each with the weakness of the other.... At last they discover that all which at first drew them together—those once sacred features, that magical play of charms—was deciduous, had a prospective end like the scaffolding by which the house was built, and the purification of the intellect and the heart from year to year is the real marriage, foreseen and prepared from the first, and wholly above their consciousness.... Thus are we put in training for a love which knows not sex nor person nor partiality, but which seeks wisdom and virtue everywhere, to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom.... There are moments when the affections rule and absorb the man, and make his happiness dependent on a person or persons. But in health the mind is presently seen again," etc.

All this is not love, but the merest literary coquetry. Love is different from this. Lady Burton, when a very young girl, and six years before her engagement, met Burton at Boulogne. They met in the street, but did not speak. A few days later they were formally introduced at a dance. Of this she writes: "That was a night of nights. He waltzed with me once, and spoke

to me several times. I kept the sash where he put his arm around me and my gloves, and never wore them again."

A glance at what Emerson says about marriage shows that he suspected that institution. He can hardly speak of it without some sort of caveat or precaution. "Though the stuff of tragedy and of romances is in a moral union of two superior persons whose confidence in each other for long years, out of sight and in sight, and against all appearances, is at last justified by victorious proof of probity to gods and men, causing joyful emotions, tears, and glory,—though there be for heroes this *moral union*, yet they too are as far as ever from, an intellectual union, and the moral is for low and external purposes, like the corporation of a ship's company or of a fire club." In speaking of modern novels, he says: "There is no new element, no power, no furtherance. 'Tis only confectionery, not the raising of new corn. Great is the poverty of their inventions. *She was beautiful, and he fell in love*.... Happy will that house be in which the relations are formed by character; after the highest and not after the lowest; the house in which character marries and not confusion and a miscellany of unavowable motives.... To each occurs soon after puberty, some event, or society or way of living, which becomes the crisis of life and the chief fact in their history. In women it is love and marriage (which is more reasonable), and yet it is pitiful to date and measure all the facts and sequel of an unfolding life from such a youthful and generally inconsiderate period as the age of courtship and marriage.... Women more than all are the element and kingdom of illusion. Being fascinated they fascinate. They sec through Claude Lorraines. And how dare any one, if he could, pluck away the

coulisses, stage effects and ceremonies by which they live? Too pathetic, too pitiable, is the region of affection, and its atmosphere always liable to mirage."

We are all so concerned that a man who writes about love shall tell the truth that if he chance to start from premises which are false or mistaken, his conclusions will appear not merely false, but offensive. It makes no matter how exalted the personal character of the writer may be. Neither sanctity nor intellect nor moral enthusiasm, though they be intensified to the point of incandescence, can make up for a want of nature.

This perpetual splitting up of love into two species, one of which is condemned, but admitted to be useful—is it not degrading? There is in Emerson's theory of the relation between the sexes neither good sense, nor manly feeling, nor sound psychology. It is founded on none of these things. It is a pure piece of dogmatism, and reminds us that he was bred to the priesthood. We are not to imagine that there was in this doctrine anything peculiar to Emerson. But we are surprised to find the pessimism inherent in the doctrine overcome Emerson, to whom pessimism is foreign. Both doctrine and pessimism are a part of the Puritanism of the times. They show a society in which the intellect had long been used to analyze the affections, in which the head had become dislocated from the body. To this disintegration of the simple passion of love may be traced the lack of maternal tenderness characteristic of the New England nature. The relation between the blood and the brain was not quite normal in this civilization, nor in Emerson, who is its most remarkable representative.

If we take two steps backward from the canvas of this mortal life and glance at it impartially, we shall see that these matters of love and marriage pass like a pivot through the lives of almost every individual, and are, sociologically speaking, the *primum mobile* of the world. The books of any philosopher who slurs them or distorts them will hold up a false mirror to life. If an inhabitant of another planet should visit the earth, he would receive, on the whole, a truer notion of human life by attending an Italian opera than he would by reading Emerson's volumes. He would learn from the Italian opera that there were two sexes; and this, after all, is probably the fact with which the education of such a stranger ought to begin.

In a review of Emerson's personal character and opinions, we are thus led to see that his philosophy, which finds no room for the emotions, is a faithful exponent of his own and of the New England temperament, which distrusts and dreads the emotions. Regarded as a sole guide to life for a young person of strong conscience and undeveloped affections, his works might conceivably be even harmful because of their unexampled power of purely intellectual stimulation.

Emerson's poetry has given rise to much heart-burning and disagreement Some people do not like it. They fail to find the fire in the ice. On the other hand, his poems appeal not only to a large number of professed lovers of poetry, but also to a class of readers who find in Emerson an element for which they search the rest of poesy in vain.

It is the irony of fate that his admirers should be

more than usually sensitive about his fame. This prophet who desired not to have followers, lest he too should become a cult and a convention, and whose main thesis throughout life was that piety is a crime, has been calmly canonized and embalmed in amber by the very forces he braved. He is become a tradition and a sacred relic. You must speak of him under your breath, and you may not laugh near his shrine.

Emerson's passion for nature was not like the passion of Keats or of Burns, of Coleridge or of Robert Browning; compared with these men he is cold. His temperature is below blood-heat, and his volume of poems stands on the shelf of English poets like the icy fish which in Caliban upon Setebos is described as finding himself thrust into the warm ooze of an ocean not his own.

But Emerson is a poet, nevertheless, a very extraordinary and rare man of genius, whose verses carry a world of their own within them. They are overshadowed by the greatness of his prose, but they are authentic. He is the chief poet of that school of which Emily Dickinson is a minor poet. His poetry is a successful spiritual deliverance of great interest. His worship of the New England landscape amounts to a religion. His poems do that most wonderful thing, make us feel that we are alone in the fields and with the trees,—not English fields nor French lanes, but New England meadows and uplands. There is no human creature in sight, not even Emerson is there, but the wind and the flowers, the wild birds, the fences, the transparent atmosphere, the breath of nature. There is a deep and true relation between the intellectual and almost dry brilliancy of Emerson's feelings and the landscape itself. Here is no defective

English poet, no Shelley without the charm, but an American poet, a New England poet with two hundred years of New England culture and New England landscape in him.

People are forever speculating upon what will last, what posterity will approve, and some people believe that Emerson's poetry will outlive his prose. The question is idle. The poems are alive now, and they may or may not survive the race whose spirit they embody; but one thing is plain: they have qualities which have preserved poetry in the past. They are utterly indigenous and sincere. They are short. They represent a civilization and a climate.

His verse divides itself into several classes. We have the single lyrics, written somewhat in the style of the later seventeenth century. Of these The Humble Bee is the most exquisite, and although its tone and imagery can be traced to various well-known and dainty bits of poetry, it is by no means an imitation, but a masterpiece of fine taste. The Rhodora and Terminus and perhaps a few others belong to that class of poetry which, like Abou Ben Adhem, is poetry because it is the perfection of statement. The Boston Hymn, the Concord Ode, and the other occasional pieces fall in another class, and do not seem to be important. The first two lines of the Ode,

> "O tenderly the haughty day
> Fills his blue urn with fire."

are for their extraordinary beauty worthy of some mythical Greek, some Simonides, some Sappho, but the rest of the lines are commonplace. Throughout his poems there are good bits, happy and golden lines, snatches of grace. He himself knew the quality of his poetry, and wrote of it,

"All were sifted through and through,
Five lines lasted sound and true."

He is never merely conventional, and his poetry, like his prose, is homespun and sound. But his ear was defective: his rhymes are crude, and his verse is often lame and unmusical, a fault which can be countervailed by nothing but force, and force he lacks. To say that his ear was defective is hardly strong enough. Passages are not uncommon which hurt the reader and unfit him to proceed; as, for example:—

"Thorough a thousand voices
Spoke the universal dame:
'Who telleth one of my meanings
Is master of all I am.'"

He himself has very well described the impression his verse is apt to make on a new reader when he says,—

"Poetry must not freeze, but flow."

The lovers of Emerson's poems freely acknowledge all these defects, but find in them another element, very subtle and rare, very refined and elusive, if not altogether unique. This is the mystical element or strain which qualifies many of his poems, and to which some of them are wholly devoted.

There has been so much discussion as to Emerson's relation to the mystics that it is well here to turn aside for a moment and consider the matter by itself. The elusiveness of "mysticism" arises out of the fact that it is not a creed, but a state of mind. It is formulated into no dogmas, but, in so far as it is communicable, it is conveyed, or sought to be

conveyed, by symbols. These symbols to a sceptical or an unsympathetic person will say nothing, but the presumption among those who are inclined towards the cult is that if these symbols convey anything at all, that thing is mysticism. The mystics are right. The familiar phrases, terms, and symbols of mysticism are not meaningless, and a glance at them shows that they do tend to express and evoke a somewhat definite psychic condition.

There is a certain mood of mind experienced by most of us in which we feel the mystery of existence; in which our consciousness seems to become suddenly separated from our thoughts, and we find ourselves asking, "Who am I? What are these thoughts?" The mood is very apt to overtake us while engaged in the commonest acts. In health it is always momentary, and seems to coincide with the instant of the transition and shift of our attention from one thing to another. It is probably connected with the transfer of energy from one set of faculties to another set, which occurs, for instance, on our waking from sleep, on our hearing a bell at night, on our observing any common object, a chair or a pitcher, at a time when our mind is or has just been thoroughly preoccupied with something else. This displacement of the attention occurs in its most notable form when we walk from the study into the open fields. Nature then attacks us on all sides at once, overwhelms, drowns, and destroys our old thoughts, stimulates vaguely and all at once a thousand new ideas, dissipates all focus of thought and dissolves our attention. If we happen to be mentally fatigued, and we take a walk in the country, a sense of immense relief, of rest and joy, which nothing else on earth can give, accompanies this distraction of the mind from its problems. The reaction fills us with a sense of

mystery and expansion. It brings us to the threshold of those spiritual experiences which are the obscure core and reality of our existence, ever alive within us, but generally veiled and sub-conscious. It brings us, as it were, into the ante-chamber of art, poetry, and music. The condition is one of excitation and receptiveness, where art may speak and we shall understand. On the other hand, the condition shows a certain dethronement of the will and attention which may ally it to the hypnotic state.

Certain kinds of poetry imitate this method of nature by calling on us with a thousand voices at once. Poetry deals often with vague or contradictory statements, with a jumble of images, a throng of impressions. But in true poetry the psychology of real life is closely followed. The mysticism is momentary. We are not kept suspended in a limbo, "trembling like a guilty thing surprised," but are ushered into another world of thought and feeling. On the other hand, a mere statement of inconceivable things is the *reductio ad absurdum* of poetry, because such a statement puzzles the mind, scatters the attention, and does to a certain extent superinduce the "blank misgivings" of mysticism. It does this, however, *without* going further and filling the mind with new life. If I bid a man follow my reasoning closely, and then say, "I am the slayer and the slain, I am the doubter and the doubt," I puzzle his mind, and may succeed in reawakening in him the sense he has often had come over him that we are ignorant of our own destinies and cannot grasp the meaning of life. If I do this, nothing can be a more legitimate opening for a poem, for it is an opening of the reader's mind. Emerson, like many other highly organized persons, was acquainted with the mystic mood. It was not momentary with him. It haunted him, and he seems

to have believed that the whole of poetry and religion was contained in the mood. And no one can gainsay that this mental condition is intimately connected with our highest feelings and leads directly into them.

The fault with Emerson is that he stops in the ante-chamber of poetry. He is content if he has brought us to the hypnotic point. His prologue and overture are excellent, but where is the argument? Where is the substantial artistic content that shall feed our souls?

The Sphinx is a fair example of an Emerson poem. The opening verses are musical, though they are handicapped by a reminiscence of the German way of writing. In the succeeding verses we are lapped into a charming reverie, and then at the end suddenly jolted by the question, "What is it all about?" In this poem we see expanded into four or five pages of verse an experience which in real life endures an eighth of a second, and when we come to the end of the mood we are at the end of the poem.

There is no question that the power to throw your sitter into a receptive mood by a pass or two which shall give you his virgin attention is necessary to any artist. Nobody has the knack of this more strongly than Emerson in his prose writings. By a phrase or a common remark he creates an ideal atmosphere in which his thought has the directness of great poetry. But he cannot do it in verse. He seeks in his verse to do the very thing which he avoids doing in his prose: follow a logical method. He seems to know too much what he is about, and to be content with doing too little. His mystical poems, from the point of view of such criticism as this, are all alike in that they all seek to do the same thing. Nor does he always

succeed. How does he sometimes fail in verse to say what he conveys with such everlasting happiness in prose!

> "I am owner of the sphere,
> Of the seven stars and the solar year,
> Of Cæsar's hand and Plato's brain,
> Of Lord Christ's heart and Shakespeare's strain."

In these lines we have the same thought which appears a few pages later in prose: "All that Shakespeare says of the king, yonder slip of a boy that reads in the corner feels to be true of himself." He has failed in the verse because he has thrown a mystical gloss over a thought which was stronger in its simplicity; because in the verse he states an abstraction instead of giving an instance. The same failure follows him sometimes in prose when he is too conscious of his machinery.

Emerson knew that the sense of mystery accompanies the shift of an absorbed attention to some object which brings the mind back to the present. "There are times when the cawing of a crow, a weed, a snowflake, a boy's willow whistle, or a farmer planting in his field is more suggestive to the mind than the Yosemite gorge or the Vatican would be in another hour. In like mood, an old verse, or certain words, gleam with rare significance." At the close of his essay on History he is trying to make us feel that all history, in so far as we can know it, is within ourselves, and is in a certain sense autobiography. He is speaking of the Romans, and he suddenly pretends to see a lizard on the wall, and proceeds to wonder what the lizard has to do with the Romans. For this he has been quite properly

laughed at by Dr. Holmes, because he has resorted to an artifice and has failed to create an illusion. Indeed, Dr. Holmes is somewhere so irreverent as to remark that a gill of alcohol will bring on a psychical state very similar to that suggested by Emerson; and Dr. Holmes is accurately happy in his jest, because alcohol does dislocate the attention in a thoroughly mystical manner.

There is throughout Emerson's poetry, as throughout all of the New England poetry, too much thought, too much argument. Some of his verse gives the reader a very curious and subtle impression that the lines are a translation. This is because he is closely following a thesis. Indeed, the lines are a translation. They were thought first, and poetry afterwards. Read off his poetry, and you see through the scheme of it at once. Read his prose, and you will be put to it to make out the connection of ideas. The reason is that in the poetry the sequence is intellectual, in the prose the sequence is emotional. It is no mere epigram to say that his poetry is governed by the ordinary laws of prose writing, and his prose by the laws of poetry.

The lines entitled Days have a dramatic vigor, a mystery, and a music all their own:—

> "Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,
> Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
> And marching single in an endless file,
> Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
> To each they offer gifts after his will,
> Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds
> them all.
> I, in my pleached garden, watched the
> pomp,

> Forgot my morning wishes, hastily
> Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
> Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
> Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn."

The prose version of these lines, which in this case is inferior, is to be found in Works and Days: "He only is rich who owns the day.... They come and go like muffled and veiled figures, sent from a distant friendly party; but they say nothing, and if we do not use the gifts they bring, they carry them as silently away."

That Emerson had within him the soul of a poet no one will question, but his poems are expressed in prose forms. There are passages in his early addresses which can be matched in English only by bits from Sir Thomas Browne or Milton, or from the great poets. Heine might have written the following parable into verse, but it could not have been finer. It comes from the very bottom of Emerson's nature. It is his uttermost. Infancy and manhood and old age, the first and the last of him, speak in it.

> "Every god is there sitting in his sphere. The young mortal enters the hall of the firmament; there is he alone with them alone, they pouring on him benedictions and gifts, and beckoning him up to their thrones. On the instant, and incessantly, fall snowstorms of illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that, and whose movements and doings he must obey; he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now

> that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment new changes and new showers of deceptions to baffle and distract him. And when, by and by, for an instant, the air clears and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones,—they alone with him alone."

With the war closes the colonial period of our history, and with the end of the war begins our national life. Before that time it was not possible for any man to speak for the nation, however much he might long to, for there was no nation; there were only discordant provinces held together by the exercise on the part of each of a strong and conscientious will. It is too much to expect that national character shall be expressed before it is developed, or that the arts shall flourish during a period when everybody is preoccupied with the fear of revolution. The provincial note which runs through all our literature down to the war resulted in one sense from our dependence upon Europe. "All American manners, language, and writings," says Emerson, "are derivative. We do not write from facts, but we wish to state the facts after the English manner. It is the tax we pay for the splendid inheritance of English Literature." But in a deeper sense this very dependence upon Europe was due to our disunion among ourselves. The equivocal and unhappy self-assertive patriotism to which we were consigned by fate, and which made us perceive and resent the condescension of foreigners, was the logical outcome of our political situation.

The literature of the Northern States before the war, although full of talent, lacks body, lacks courage. It

has not a full national tone. The South is not in it. New England's share in this literature is so large that small injustice will be done if we give her credit for all of it. She was the Academy of the land, and her scholars were our authors. The country at large has sometimes been annoyed at the self-consciousness of New England, at the atmosphere of clique, of mutual admiration, of isolation, in which all her scholars, except Emerson, have lived, and which notably enveloped the last little distinguished group of them. The circumstances which led to the isolation of Lowell, Holmes, Longfellow, and the Saturday Club fraternity are instructive. The ravages of the war carried off the poets, scholars, and philosophers of the generation which immediately followed these men, and by destroying their natural successors left them standing magnified beyond their natural size, like a grove of trees left by a fire. The war did more than kill off a generation of scholars who would have succeeded these older scholars. It emptied the universities by calling all the survivors into the field of practical life; and after the war ensued a period during which all the learning of the land was lodged in the heads of these older worthies who had made their mark long before. A certain complacency which piqued the country at large was seen in these men. An ante-bellum colonial posing, inevitable in their own day, survived with them. When Jared Sparks put Washington in the proper attitude for greatness by correcting his spelling, Sparks was in cue with the times. It was thought that a great man must have his hat handed to him by his biographer, and be ushered on with decency toward posterity. In the lives and letters of some of our recent public men there has been a reminiscence of this posing, which we condemn as absurd because we forget it is merely

archaic. Provincial manners are always a little formal, and the pomposity of the colonial governor was never quite worked out of our literary men.

Let us not disparage the past. We are all grateful for the New England culture, and especially for the little group of men in Cambridge and Boston who did their best according to the light of their day. Their purpose and taste did all that high ideals and good taste can do, and no more eminent literati have lived during this century. They gave the country songs, narrative poems, odes, epigrams, essays, novels. They chose their models well, and drew their materials from decent and likely sources. They lived stainless lives, and died in their professors' chairs honored by all men. For achievements of this sort we need hardly use as strong language as Emerson does in describing contemporary literature: "It exhibits a vast carcass of tradition every year with as much solemnity as a new revelation."

The mass and volume of literature must always be traditional, and the secondary writers of the world do nevertheless perform a function of infinite consequence in the spread of thought. A very large amount of first-hand thinking is not comprehensible to the average man until it has been distilled and is fifty years old. The men who welcome new learning as it arrives are the picked men, the minor poets of the next age. To their own times these secondary men often seem great because they are recognized and understood at once. We know the disadvantage under which these Humanists of ours worked. The shadow of the time in which they wrote hangs over us still. The conservatism and timidity of our politics and of our literature to-day are due in part to that fearful pressure which for sixty years was never lifted

from the souls of Americans. That conservatism and timidity may be seen in all our past. They are in the rhetoric of Webster and in the style of Hawthorne. They killed Poe. They created Bryant.

Since the close of our most blessed war, we have been left to face the problems of democracy, unhampered by the terrible complications of sectional strife. It has happened, however, that some of the tendencies of our commercial civilization go toward strengthening and riveting upon us the very traits encouraged by provincial disunion. Wendell Phillips, with a cool grasp of understanding for which he is not generally given credit, states the case as follows:—

> "The general judgment is that the freest possible government produces the freest possible men and women, the most individual, the least servile to the judgment of others. But a moment's reflection will show any man that this is an unreasonable expectation, and that, on the contrary, entire equality and freedom in political forms almost invariably tend to make the individual subside into the mass and lose his identity in the general whole. Suppose we stood in England to-night. There is the nobility, and here is the church. There is the trading class, and here is the literary. A broad gulf separates the four; and provided a member of either can conciliate his own section, he can afford in a very large measure to despise the opinions of the other three. He has to some extent a refuge and a breakwater against the tyranny of what we call public opinion. But in a country like

> ours, of absolute democratic equality, public opinion is not only omnipotent, it is omnipresent. There is no refuge from its tyranny, there is no hiding from its reach; and the result is that if you take the old Greek lantern and go about to seek among a hundred, you will find not one single American who has not, or who does not fancy at least that he has, something to gain or lose in his ambition, his social life, or his business, from the good opinion and the votes of those around him. And the consequence is that instead of being a mass of individuals, each one fearlessly blurting out his own convictions, as a nation, compared to other nations, we are a mass of cowards. More than all other people, we are afraid of each other."

If we take a bird's-eye view of our history, we shall find that this constant element of democratic pressure has always been so strong a factor in moulding the character of our citizens, that there is less difference than we could wish to see between the types of citizenship produced before the war and after the war.

Charles Pollen, that excellent and worthy German who came to this country while still a young man and who lived in the midst of the social and intellectual life of Boston, felt the want of intellectual freedom in the people about him. If one were obliged to describe the America of to-day in a single sentence, one could hardly do it better than by a sentence from a letter of Follen to Harriet Martineau written in 1837, after the appearance of one of her books: "You have pointed out the two most striking

national characteristics, 'Deficiency of individual moral independence and extraordinary mutual respect and kindness.'"

Much of what Emerson wrote about the United States in 1850 is true of the United States to-day. It would be hard to find a civilized people who are more timid, more cowed in spirit, more illiberal, than we. It is easy to-day for the educated man who has read Bryce and Tocqueville to account for the mediocrity of American literature. The merit of Emerson was that he felt the atmospheric pressure without knowing its reason. He felt he was a cabined, cribbed, confined creature, although every man about him was celebrating Liberty and Democracy, and every day was Fourth of July. He taxes language to its limits in order to express his revolt. He says that no man should write except what he has discovered in the process of satisfying his own curiosity, and that every man will write well in proportion as he has contempt for the public.

Emerson seems really to have believed that if any man would only resolutely be himself, he would turn out to be as great as Shakespeare. He will not have it that anything of value can be monopolized. His review of the world, whether under the title of Manners, Self-Reliance, Fate, Experience, or what-not, leads him to the same thought. His conclusion is always the finding of eloquence, courage, art, intellect, in the breast of the humblest reader. He knows that we are full of genius and surrounded by genius, and that we have only to throw something off, not to acquire any new thing, in order to be bards, prophets, Napoleons, and Goethes. This belief is the secret of his stimulating power. It is this which gives his writings a radiance like that which shone

from his personality.

The deep truth shadowed forth by Emerson when he said that "all the American geniuses lacked nerve and dagger" was illustrated by our best scholar. Lowell had the soul of the Yankee, but in his habits of writing he continued English tradition. His literary essays are full of charm. The Commemoration Ode is the high-water mark of the attempt to do the impossible. It is a fine thing, but it is imitative and secondary. It has paid the inheritance tax. Twice, however, at a crisis of pressure, Lowell assumed his real self under the guise of a pseudonym; and with his own hand he rescued a language, a type, a whole era of civilization from oblivion. Here gleams the dagger and here is Lowell revealed. His limitations as a poet, his too much wit, his too much morality, his mixture of shrewdness and religion, are seen to be the very elements of power. The novelty of the Biglow Papers is as wonderful as their world-old naturalness. They take rank with greatness, and they were the strongest political tracts of their time. They imitate nothing; they are real.

Emerson himself was the only man of his times who consistently and utterly expressed himself, never measuring himself for a moment with the ideals of others, never troubling himself for a moment with what literature was or how literature should be created. The other men of his epoch, and among whom he lived, believed that literature was a very desirable article, a thing you could create if you were only smart enough. But Emerson had no literary ambition. He cared nothing for belles-lettres. The consequence is that he stands above his age like a colossus. While he lived his figure could be seen from Europe towering like Atlas over the culture of

the United States.

Great men are not always like wax which their age imprints. They are often the mere negation and opposite of their age. They give it the lie. They become by revolt the very essence of all the age is not, and that part of the spirit which is suppressed in ten thousand breasts gets lodged, isolated, and breaks into utterance in one. Through Emerson spoke the fractional spirits of a multitude. He had not time, he had not energy left over to understand himself; he was a mouthpiece.

If a soul be taken and crushed by democracy till it utter a cry, that cry will be Emerson. The region of thought he lived in, the figures of speech he uses, are of an intellectual plane so high that the circumstances which produced them may be forgotten; they are indifferent. The Constitution, Slavery, the War itself, are seen as mere circumstances. They did not confuse him while he lived; they are not necessary to support his work now that it is finished. Hence comes it that Emerson is one of the world's voices. He was heard afar off. His foreign influence might deserve a chapter by itself. Conservatism is not confined to this country. It is the very basis of all government. The bolts Emerson forged, his thought, his wit, his perception, are not provincial. They were found to carry inspiration to England and Germany. Many of the important men of the last half-century owe him a debt. It is not yet possible to give any account of his influence abroad, because the memoirs which will show it are only beginning to be published. We shall have them in due time; for Emerson was an outcome of the world's progress. His appearance marks the turning-point in the history of that enthusiasm for pure democracy

which has tinged the political thought of the world for the past one hundred and fifty years. The youths of England and Germany may have been surprised at hearing from America a piercing voice of protest against the very influences which were crushing them at home. They could not realize that the chief difference between Europe and America is a difference in the rate of speed with which revolutions in thought are worked out.

While the radicals of Europe were revolting in 1848 against the abuses of a tyranny whose roots were in feudalism, Emerson, the great radical of America, the arch-radical of the world, was revolting against the evils whose roots were in universal suffrage. By showing the identity in essence of all tyranny, and by bringing back the attention of political thinkers to its starting-point, the value of human character, he has advanced the political thought of the world by one step. He has pointed out for us in this country to what end our efforts must be bent.

WALT WHITMAN

It would be an ill turn for an essay-writer to destroy Walt Whitman,—for he was discovered by the essayists, and but for them his notoriety would have been postponed for fifty years. He is the mare's nest of "American Literature," and scarce a contributor to The Saturday Review but has at one time or another raised a flag over him.

The history of these chronic discoveries of Whitman as a poet, as a force, as a something or a somebody, would write up into the best possible monograph on the incompetency of the Anglo-Saxon in matters of criticism.

English literature is the literature of genius, and the Englishman is the great creator. His work outshines the genius of Greece. His wealth outvalues the combined wealth of all modern Europe. The English mind is the only unconscious mind the world has ever seen. And for this reason the English mind is incapable of criticism.

There has never been an English critic of the first rank, hardly a critic of any rank; and the critical work of England consists either of an academical bandying of a few old canons and shibboleths out of Horace or Aristotle, or else of the merest impressionism, and wordy struggle to convey the sentiment awakened by the thing studied.

Now, true criticism means an attempt to find out what something is, not for the purpose of judging it, or of imitating it, nor for the purpose of illustrating something else, nor for any other ulterior purpose whatever.

The so-called canons of criticism are of about as much service to a student of literature as the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer are to the student of church history. They are a part of his subject, of course, but if he insists upon using them as a tape measure and a divining-rod he will produce a judgment of no possible value to any one, and interesting only as a record of a most complex state of mind.

The educated gentlemen of England have surveyed literature with these time-honored old instruments, and hordes of them long ago rushed to America with their theodolites and their quadrants in their hands. They sized us up and they sized us down, and they never could find greatness in literature among us till Walt Whitman appeared and satisfied the astrologers.

Here was a comet, a man of the people, a new man, who spoke no known language, who was very uncouth and insulting, who proclaimed himself a "barbaric yawp," and who corresponded to the English imagination with the unpleasant and rampant wildness of everything in America,—with Mormonism and car factories, steamboat explosions, strikes, repudiation, and whiskey; whose form violated every one of their minor canons as America violated every one of their social ideas.

Then, too, Whitman arose out of the war, as Shakespeare arose out of the destruction of the Armada, as the Greek poets arose out of the repulse of the Persians. It was impossible, it was unprecedented, that a national revulsion should not produce national poetry—and lo! here was Whitman.

It may safely be said that the discovery of Whitman as a poet caused many a hard-thinking Oxford man to sleep quietly at night. America was solved.

The Englishman travels, but he travels after his mind has been burnished by the university, and at an age when the best he can do in the line of thought is to make an intelligent manipulation of the few notions he leaves home with. He departs an educated gentleman, taking with him his portmanteau and his ideas. He returns a travelled gentleman, bringing with him his ideas and his portmanteau. He would as

soon think of getting his coats from Kansas as his thoughts from travel. And therefore every impression of America which the travelling Englishman experienced confirmed his theory of Whitman. Even Rudyard Kipling, who does not in any sense fall under the above description, has enough Anglo-Saxon blood in him to see in this country only the fulfilment of the fantastic notions of his childhood.

But imagine an Oxford man who had eyes in his head, and who should come to this country, never having heard of Whitman. He would see an industrious and narrow-minded population, commonplace and monotonous, so uniform that one man can hardly be distinguished from another, law-abiding, timid, and traditional; a community where the individual is suppressed by law, custom, and instinct, and in which, by consequence, there are few or no great men, even counting those men thrust by necessary operation of the laws of trade into commercial prominence, and who claim scientific rather than personal notice.

The culture of this people, its architecture, letters, drama, etc., he would find were, of necessity, drawn from European models; and in its poetry, so far as poetry existed, he would recognize a somewhat feeble imitation of English poetry. The newspaper verses very fairly represent the average talent for poetry and average appreciation of it, and the newspaper verse of the United States is precisely what one would expect from a decorous and unimaginative population,—intelligent, conservative, and uninspired.

Above the newspaper versifiers float the minor poets, and above these soar the greater poets; and the

characteristics of the whole hierarchy are the same as those of the humblest acolyte,—intelligence, conservatism, conventional morality.

Above the atmosphere they live in, above the heads of all the American poets, and between them and the sky, float the Constitution of the United States and the traditions and forms of English literature.

This whole culture is secondary and tertiary, and it truly represents the respectable mediocrity from which it emanates. Whittier and Longfellow have been much read in their day,—read by mill-hands and clerks and school-teachers, by lawyers and doctors and divines, by the reading classes of the republic, whose ideals they truly spoke for, whose yearnings and spiritual life they truly expressed.

Now, the Oxford traveller would not have found Whitman at all. He would never have met a man who had heard of him, nor seen a man like him.

The traveller, as he opened his Saturday Review upon his return to London, and read the current essay on Whitman, would have been faced by a problem fit to puzzle Montesquieu, a problem to floor Goethe.

And yet Whitman is representative. He is a real product, he has a real and most interesting place in the history of literature, and he speaks for a class and type of human nature whose interest is more than local, whose prevalence is admitted,—a type which is one of the products of the civilization of the century, perhaps of all centuries, and which has a positively planetary significance.

There are, in every country, individuals who, after a

sincere attempt to take a place in organized society, revolt from the drudgery of it, content themselves with the simplest satisfactions of the grossest need of nature, so far as subsistence is concerned, and rediscover the infinite pleasures of life in the open air.

If the roadside, the sky, the distant town, the soft buffeting of the winds of heaven, are a joy to the aesthetic part of man, the freedom from all responsibility and accountability is Nirvana to his moral nature. A man who has once tasted these two joys together, the joy of being in the open air and the joy of being disreputable and unashamed, has touched an experience which the most close-knit and determined nature might well dread. Life has no terrors for such a man. Society has no hold on him. The trifling inconveniences of the mode of life are as nothing compared with its satisfactions. The worm that never dies is dead in him. The great mystery of consciousness and of effort is quietly dissolved into the vacant happiness of sensation,—not base sensation, but the sensation of the dawn and the sunset, of the mart and the theatre, and the stars, the panorama of the universe.

To the moral man, to the philosopher or the business man, to any one who is a cog in the wheel of some republic, all these things exist for the sake of something else. He must explain or make use of them, or define his relation to them. He spends the whole agony of his existence in an endeavor to docket them and deal with them. Hampered as he is by all that has been said and done before, he yet feels himself driven on to summarize, and wreak himself upon the impossible task of grasping this cosmos with his mind, of holding it in his hand, of

subordinating it to his purpose.

The tramp is freed from all this. By an act as simple as death, he has put off effort and lives in peace.

It is no wonder that every country in Europe shows myriads of these men, as it shows myriads of suicides annually. It is no wonder, though the sociologists have been late in noting it, that specimens of the type are strikingly identical in feature in every country of the globe.

The habits, the physique, the tone of mind, even the sign-language and some of the catch-words, of tramps are the same everywhere. The men are not natally out-casts. They have always tried civilized life. Their early training, at least their early attitude of mind towards life, has generally been respectable. That they should be criminally inclined goes without saying, because their minds have been freed from the sanctions which enforce law. But their general innocence is, under the circumstances, very remarkable, and distinguishes them from the criminal classes.

When we see one of these men sitting on a gate, or sauntering down a city street, how often have we wondered how life appeared to him; what solace and what problems it presented. How often have we longed to know the history of such a soul, told, not by the police-blotter, but by the poet or novelist in the heart of the man!

Walt Whitman has given utterance to the soul of the tramp. A man of genius has passed sincerely and normally through this entire experience, himself unconscious of what he was, and has left a record of it to enlighten and bewilder the literary world.

In Whitman's works the elemental parts of a man's mind and the fragments of imperfect education may be seen merging together, floating and sinking in a sea of insensate egotism and rhapsody, repellent, divine, disgusting, extraordinary.

Our inability to place the man intellectually, and find a type and reason for his intellectual state, comes from this: that the revolt he represents is not an intellectual revolt. Ideas are not at the bottom of it. It is a revolt from drudgery. It is the revolt of laziness.

There is no intellectual coherence in his talk, but merely pathological coherence. Can the insulting jumble of ignorance and effrontery, of scientific phrase and French paraphrase, of slang and inspired adjective, which he puts forward with the pretence that it represents thought, be regarded, from any possible point of view, as a philosophy, or a system, or a belief? Is it individualism of any statable kind? Do the thoughts and phrases which float about in it have a meaning which bears any relation to the meaning they bear in the language of thinkers? Certainly not. Does all the patriotic talk, the talk about the United States and its future, have any significance as patriotism? Does it poetically represent the state of feeling of any class of American citizens towards their country? Or would you find the nearest equivalent to this emotion in the breast of the educated tramp of France, or Germany, or England? The speech of Whitman is English, and his metaphors and catch-words are apparently American, but the emotional content is cosmic. He put off patriotism when he took to the road.

The attraction exercised by his writings is due to

their flashes of reality. Of course the man was a poseur, a most horrid mountebank and ego-maniac. His tawdry scraps of misused idea, of literary smartness, of dog-eared and greasy reminiscence, repel us. The world of men remained for him as his audience, and he did to civilized society the continuous compliment of an insane self-consciousness in its presence.

Perhaps this egotism and posturing is the revenge of a stilled conscience, and we ought to read in it the inversion of the social instincts. Perhaps all tramps are poseurs. But there is this to be said for Whitman, that whether or not his posing was an accident of a personal nature, or an organic result of his life, he was himself an authentic creature. He did not sit in a study and throw off his saga of balderdash, but he lived a life, and it is by his authenticity, and not by his poses, that he has survived.

The descriptions of nature, the visual observation of life, are first-hand and wonderful. It was no false light that led the Oxonians to call some of his phrases Homeric. The pundits were right in their curiosity over him; they went astray only in their attempt at classification.

It is a pity that truth and beauty turn to cant on the second delivery, for it makes poetry, as a profession, impossible. The lyric poets have always spent most of their time in trying to write lyric poetry, and the very attempt disqualifies them.

A poet who discovers his mission is already half done for; and even Wordsworth, great genius though he was, succeeded in half drowning his talents in his parochial theories, in his own self-consciousness and self-conceit.

Walt Whitman thought he had a mission. He was a professional poet. He had purposes and theories about poetry which he started out to enforce and illustrate. He is as didactic as Wordsworth, and is thinking of himself the whole time. He belonged, moreover, to that class of professionals who are always particularly self-centred, autocratic, vain, and florid,—the class of quacks. There are, throughout society, men, and they are generally men of unusual natural powers, who, after gaining a little unassimilated education, launch out for themselves and set up as authorities on their own account. They are, perhaps, the successors of the old astrologers, in that what they seek to establish is some personal professorship or predominance. The old occultism and mystery was resorted to as the most obvious device for increasing the personal importance of the magician; and the chief difference to-day between a regular physician and a quack is, that the quack pretends to know it all.

Brigham Young and Joseph Smith were men of phenomenal capacity, who actually invented a religion and created a community by the apparent establishment of supernatural and occult powers. The phrenologists, the venders of patent medicine, the Christian Scientists, the single-taxers, and all who proclaim panaceas and nostrums make the same majestic and pontifical appeal to human nature. It is this mystical power, this religious element, which floats them, sells the drugs, cures the sick, and packs the meetings.

By temperament and education Walt Whitman was fitted to be a prophet of this kind. He became a quack poet, and hampered his talents by the imposition of a monstrous parade of rattletrap

theories and professions. If he had not been endowed with a perfectly marvellous capacity, a wealth of nature beyond the reach and plumb of his rodomontade, he would have been ruined from the start. As it is, he has filled his work with grimace and vulgarity. He writes a few lines of epic directness and cyclopean vigor and naturalness, and then obtrudes himself and his mission.

He has the bad taste bred in the bone of all missionaries and palmists, the sign-manual of a true quack. This bad taste is nothing more than the offensive intrusion of himself and his mission into the matter in hand. As for his real merits and his true mission, too much can hardly be said in his favor. The field of his experience was narrow, and not in the least intellectual. It was narrow because of his isolation from human life. A poet like Browning, or Heine, or Alfred de Musset deals constantly with the problems and struggles that arise in civilized life out of the close relationships, the ties, the duties and desires of the human heart. He explains life on its social side. He gives us some more or less coherent view of an infinitely complicated matter. He is a guide-book or a note-book, a highly trained and intelligent companion.

Walt Whitman has no interest in any of these things. He was fortunately so very ignorant and untrained that his mind was utterly incoherent and unintellectual. His mind seems to be submerged and to have become almost a part of his body. The utter lack of concentration which resulted from living his whole life in the open air has left him spontaneous and unaccountable. And the great value of his work is, that it represents the spontaneous and unaccountable functioning of the mind and body in

health.

It is doubtful whether a man ever enjoyed life more intensely than Walt Whitman, or expressed the physical joy of mere living more completely. He is robust, all tingling with health and the sensations of health. All that is best in his poetry is the expression of bodily well-being.

A man who leaves his office and gets into a canoe on a Canadian river, sure of ten days' release from the cares of business and housekeeping, has a thrill of joy such as Walt Whitman has here and there thrown into his poetry. One might say that to have done this is the greatest accomplishment in literature. Walt Whitman, in some of his lines, breaks the frame of poetry and gives us life in the throb.

It is the throb of the whole physical system of a man who breathes the open air and feels the sky over him. "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed" is a great lyric. Here is a whole poem without a trace of self-consciousness. It is little more than a description of nature. The allusions to Lincoln and to the funeral are but a word or two—merest suggestions of the tragedy. But grief, overwhelming grief, is in every line of it, the grief which has been transmuted into this sensitiveness to the landscape, to the song of the thrush, to the lilac's bloom, and the sunset.

Here is truth to life of the kind to be found in King Lear or Guy Mannering, in Æschylus or Burns.

Walt Whitman himself could not have told you why the poem was good. Had he had any intimation of the true reason, he would have spoiled the poem. The recurrence and antiphony of the thrush, the lilac, the thought of death, the beauty of nature, are

in a balance and dream of natural symmetry such as no cunning could come at, no conscious art could do other than spoil.

It is ungrateful to note Whitman's limitations, his lack of human passion, the falseness of many of his notions about the American people. The man knew the world merely as an observer, he was never a living part of it, and no mere observer can understand the life about him. Even his work during the war was mainly the work of an observer, and his poems and notes upon the period are picturesque. As to his talk about comrades and Manhattanese car-drivers, and brass-founders displaying their brawny arms round each other's brawny necks, all this gush and sentiment in Whitman's poetry is false to life. It has a lyrical value, as representing Whitman's personal feelings, but no one else in the country was ever found who felt or acted like this.

In fact, in all that concerns the human relations Walt Whitman is as unreal as, let us say, William Morris, and the American mechanic would probably prefer Sigurd the Volsung, and understand it better than Whitman's poetry.

This falseness to the sentiment of the American is interwoven with such wonderful descriptions of American sights and scenery, of ferryboats, thoroughfares, cataracts, and machine-shops that it is not strange the foreigners should have accepted the gospel.

On the whole, Whitman, though he solves none of the problems of life and throws no light on American civilization, is a delightful appearance, and a strange creature to come out of our beehive. This man committed every unpardonable sin against our

conventions, and his whole life was an outrage. He was neither chaste, nor industrious, nor religious. He patiently lived upon cold pie and tramped the earth in triumph.

He did really live the life he liked to live, in defiance of all men, and this is a great desert, a most stirring merit. And he gave, in his writings, a true picture of himself and of that life,—a picture which the world had never seen before, and which it is probable the world will not soon cease to wonder at.

A STUDY OF ROMEO

The plays of Shakespeare marshal themselves in the beyond. They stand in a place outside of our deduction. Their cosmos is greater than our philosophy. They are like the forces of nature and the operations of life in the vivid world about us. We may measure our intellectual growth by the new horizons we see opening within them. So long as they continue to live and change, to expand and deepen, to be filled with new harmony and new suggestion, we may rest content; we are still growing. At the moment we think we have comprehended them, at the moment we see them as stationary things, we may be sure something is wrong; we are beginning to petrify. Our fresh interest in life has been arrested. There is, therefore, danger in an attempt to "size up" Shakespeare. We cannot help setting down as a coxcomb any man who has done it to his own satisfaction. He has pigeon-holed himself. He will not get lost. If you want him, you can lay your hand on him. He has written an autobiography. He has "sized up" himself.

In writing about Shakespeare, it is excusable to put off the armor of criticism, and speak in a fragmentary and inconclusive manner, lest by giving way to conviction, by encouraging ourselves into positive beliefs, we hasten the inevitable and grow old before our time.

Perhaps some such apology is needed to introduce

the observations on the character of Romeo which are here thrown together, and the remarks about the play itself, the acting, and the text.

It is believed by some scholars that in the second quarto edition of Romeo and Juliet, published in 1599, Shakespeare's revising hand can be seen, and that the differences between the first and second editions show the amendments, additions, and corrections with which Shakespeare saw fit to embellish his work in preparing it for the press. If this were actually the case; if we could lay the two texts on the table before us, convinced that one of them was Shakespeare's draft or acting copy, and the other Shakespeare's finished work; and if, by comparing the two, we could enter into the workshop and forge of his mind,—it would seem as if we had at last found an avenue of approach towards this great personality, this intellect the most powerful that has ever illumined human life. No other literary inquiry could compare in interest with such a study as this; for the relation which Shakespeare himself bore to the plays he created is one of the mysteries and blank places in history, a gap that staggers the mind and which imagination cannot overleap.

The student who examines both texts will be apt to conclude that the second is by no means a revised edition of the first, but that (according to another theory) the first is a pirated edition of the play, stolen by the printer, and probably obtained by means of a reporter who took down the lines as they were spoken on the stage. The stage directions in the first edition are not properly the stage directions of a dramatist as to what should be done on the stage, but seem rather the records of an eye-witness as to

what he saw happen on the stage. The mistakes of the reporter (or the perversions of the actors) as seen in the first edition generally injure the play; and it was from this circumstance—the frequency of blotches in the first edition—that the idea gained currency that the second edition was an example of Shakespeare's never-failing tact in bettering his own lines.

Perhaps, after all, it would little advance our understanding of the plays, or solve the essential puzzle,—that they actually had an author,—if we could follow every stroke of his revising pen. We should observe, no doubt, refinement of characterization, changes of stage effect, the addition of flourishes and beauties; but their origin and true meaning, the secret of their life, would be as safe as it is at present, as securely lost in the midst of all this demonstration as the manuscripts themselves were in the destruction of the Globe Theatre.

If we must then abandon the hope of seeing Shakespeare in his workshop, we may, nevertheless, obtain from the pirated text some notion of the manner in which Shakespeare was staged in his own day, and of how he fared at the hands of the early actors. Romeo and Juliet is an exceptionally difficult play to act, and the difficulties seem to have been about the same in Shakespeare's time as they are to-day. They are, in fact, inherent in the structure of the work itself.

As artists advance in life, they develop, by growing familiar with the conditions of their art, the power of concealing its limitations,—a faculty in which even the greatest artists are often deficient in their early years. There is an anecdote of Schumann which

somewhat crudely illustrates this. It is said that in one of his early symphonies he introduced a passage leading up to a climax, at which the horns were to take up the aria in triumph. At the rehearsal, when the moment came for the horns to trumpet forth their message of victory, there was heard a sort of smothered braying which made everybody laugh. The composer had arranged his climax so that it fell upon a note which the horns could not sound except with closed stops. The passage had to be rewritten. The young painter is frequently found struggling with subjects, with effects of light, which are almost impossible to render, and which perhaps an older man would not attempt. It is not surprising to find among the early works of Shakespeare that some of the characters, however true to life,—nay, because true to life,—are almost impossible to be represented on the stage. Certainly Romeo presents us with a character of the kind.

Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature seems to have antedated his knowledge of the stage. In imagining the character of Romeo, a character to fit the plot of the old story, he took little thought for his actors. In conjuring up the probabilities which would lead a man into such a course of conduct as Romeo's, Shakespeare had in his mind the probabilities and facts in real life rather than the probabilities demanded by the stage.

Romeo must be a man almost wholly made up of emotion, a creature very young, a lyric poet in the intensity of his sensations, a child in his helplessness beneath the ever-varying currents and whirlpools of his feeling. He lives in a walking and frenzied dream, comes in contact with real life only to injure himself and others, and finally drives with the collected

energy of his being into voluntary shipwreck upon the rocks of the world.

This man must fall in love at first sight. He must marry clandestinely. He must be banished for having taken part in a street fight, and must return to slay himself upon the tomb of his beloved.

Shakespeare, with his passion for realism, devotes several scenes at the opening of the play to the explanation of Romeo's state of mind. He will give us a rationalistic account of love at first sight by bringing on this young poet in a blind chaos of emotion owing to his rejection by a woman not otherwise connected with the story. It is perfectly true that this is the best and perhaps the only explanation of love at first sight. The effect upon Romeo's very boyish, unreal, and almost unpleasant lovesickness of the rejection (for which we must always respect Rosaline) is to throw him, and all the unstable elements of which he is made, into a giddy whirl, which, after a day or two, it will require only the glance of a pair of eyes to precipitate into the very elixir of true love.

All this is true, but no audience cares about the episode or requires the explanation. Indeed, it jars upon the sentimental notion of many persons to this day, and in many stage versions it is avoided.

These preparatory scenes bring out in a most subtle way the egoism at the basis of Romeo's character,—the same lyrical egoism that is in all his language and in all his conduct. When we first see Romeo, he is already in an uneasy dream. He is wandering, aloof from his friends and absorbed in himself. On meeting Juliet he passes from his first dream into a second dream. On learning of the death of Juliet he

passes into still a third and quite different dream,—or stage of dream,—a stage in which action is necessary, and in which he displays the calculating intellect of a maniac. The mental abstraction of Romeo continues even after he has met Juliet. In Capulet's garden, despite the directness of Juliet, he is still in his reveries. The sacred wonder of the hour turns all his thoughts, not into love, but into poetry. Juliet's anxieties are practical. She asks him about his safety, how he came there, how he expects to escape. He answers in madrigals. His musings are almost impersonal. The power of the moonlight is over him, and the power of the scene, of which Juliet is only a part.

> "With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls;
> For stony limits cannot hold love out,
> And what love can do that dares love attempt;
> Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.

> Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
> That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

> It is my soul that calls upon my name:
> How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
> Like softest music to attending ears."

These reflections are almost "asides." They ought hardly to be spoken aloud. They denote that Romeo

is still in his trance. They have, however, another and unfortunate influence: they retard the action of the play. As we read the play to ourselves, this accompaniment of lyrical feeling on Romeo's part does not interfere with our enjoyment. It seems to accentuate the more direct and human strain of Juliet's love.

But on the stage the actor who plays Romeo requires the very highest powers. While speaking at a distance from Juliet, and in a constrained position, he must by his voice and gestures convey these subtlest shades of feeling, throw these garlands of verse into his talk without interrupting its naturalness, give all the "asides" in such a manner that the audience feels they are in place, even as the reader does. It is no wonder that the rôle of Romeo is one of the most difficult in all Shakespeare. The demands made upon the stage are almost more than the stage can meet. The truth to nature is of a kind that the stage is almost powerless to render.

The character of Romeo cannot hope to be popular. Such pure passion, such unreasonable giving way, is not easily forgiven in a man. He must roll on the floor and blubber and kick. There is no getting away from this. He is not Romeo unless he cries like a baby or a Greek hero. This is the penalty for being a lyric poet. Had he used his mind more upon the problems of his love, and less upon its celebration in petalled phrases, his mind would not have deserted him so lamentably in the hour of his need. In fact, throughout the play, Romeo, by the exigencies of the plot, is in fair danger of becoming contemptible. For one instant only does he rise into respectability,—at the moment of his quarrel with Tybalt. At this crisis he is stung into life by the death of Mercutio, and

acts like a man. The ranting manner in which it is customary to give Romeo's words in this passage of the play shows how far most actors are from understanding the true purport of the lines; how far from realizing that these few lines are the only opportunity the actor has of establishing the character of Romeo as a gentleman, a man of sense and courage, a formidable fellow, not unfit to be the hero of a play:—

> "Alive, in triumph! and Mercutio slain!
> Away to heaven, respective lenity,
> And fire-ey'd fury be my conduct now!
> Now, Tybalt, take the 'villain' back again
> That late thou gay'st me;—for Mercutio's soul
> Is but a little way above our heads,
> Staying for thine to keep him company:
> Either thou, or I, or both, must go with him."

The first three lines are spoken by Romeo to himself. They are a reflection, not a declamation,—a reflection upon which he instantly acts. He assumes the calmness of a man of his rank who is about to fight. More than this, Romeo, the man of words and moods, when once roused, as we shall see later, in a worser cause,—when once pledged to action,—Romeo shines with a sort of fatalistic spiritual power. He is now visibly dedicated to this quarrel. We feel sure that he will kill Tybalt in the encounter. The appeal to the supernatural is in his very gesture. The audience—nay, Tybalt himself—gazes with awe on this sudden apparition of Romeo as a man of action.

This highly satisfactory conduct is soon swept away by his behavior on hearing the news of his

banishment. The boy seems to be without much stamina, after all. He is a pitiable object, and does not deserve the love of fair lady.

At Mantua the tide of his feelings has turned again, and by one of those natural reactions which he himself takes note of he wakes up unaccountably happy, "and all this day an unaccustom'd spirit lifts him above the ground with cheerful thoughts." It is the lightning before the thunderbolt.

> "Her body sleeps to Capel's monument,
> And her immortal part with angels lives.
> I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault,
> And presently took post to tell it you."

Balthasar makes no attempt to break the news gently. The blow descends on Romeo when he least expects it. He is not spared. The conduct of Romeo on hearing of Juliet's death is so close to nature as to be nature itself, yet it happens to be conduct almost impossible to be given on the stage. *He does nothing.* He is stunned. He collapses. For fully five minutes he does not speak, and yet in these five minutes he must show to the audience that his nature has been shaken to its foundations. The delirium of miraculously beautiful poetry is broken. His words are gone. His emotion is paralyzed, but his mind is alert. He seems suddenly to be grown up,—a man, and not a boy,—and a man of action. "Is it even so?" is all he says. He orders post-horses, ink and paper, in a few rapid sentences; it is evident that before speaking at all he has determined what he will do, and from now on to the end of the play Romeo is different from his old self, for a new Romeo has appeared. He is in a state of intense and calm exultation. All his fluctuating emotions have been stilled or stunned. He gives his

orders in staccato. We feel that he knows what he is going to do, and will certainly accomplish it. Meanwhile his mind is dominant. It is preternaturally active. His "asides," which before were lyrical, now become the comments of an acute intellect. His vivid and microscopic recollection of the apothecary shop, his philosophical bantering with the apothecary, his sudden violence to Balthasar at the entrance to the tomb, and his as sudden friendliness, his words and conflict with Paris, whom he kills incidentally, absent-mindedly, and, as it were, with his left hand, without malice and without remorse,—all these things show an intellect working at high pressure, while the spirit of the man is absorbed in another and more important matter.

There is a certain state of mind in which the will to do is so soon followed by the act itself that one may say the act is automatic. The thought has already begun to be executed even while it is being formed. This occurs especially where the intent is to do some horrid deed which requires preparation, firmness of purpose, ingenuity, and, above all, external calmness.

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.
> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection."

This is the phase through which Romeo is passing on the way from Mantua to Verona. His own words give us a picture of him during that ride:—

"What said my man when my betossed
soul
Did not attend him as we rode?"

He has come like an arrow, his mind closed to the external world, himself in the blind clutch of his own deadly purpose, driving on towards its fulfilment. Only at the end, when he stands before the bier of Juliet, sure of his will, beyond the reach of hindrance, alone for the first time,—only then is his spirit released in floods of eloquence; then does his triumphant purpose break into speech, and his words soar up like the flames of a great bonfire of precious incense streaming upward in exultation and in happiness.

The whole course of these last scenes of Romeo's life, which are scarcely longer than this description of them, is in the highest degree naturalistic; but the scenes are in the nature of things so difficult to present on the stage as to be fairly impossible. The very long, the very minute description of the apothecary's shop, given by a man whose heart has stopped beating, but whose mind is at work more actively and more accurately than it has ever worked before, is a thing highly sane as to its words. It must be done quietly, rapidly, and yet the impression must be created, which is created upon Balthasar, that Romeo is not in his right mind. A friend seeing him would cross the street to ask what was the matter.

The whole character of Romeo, from the beginning, has been imagined with reference to this self-destroying consummation. From his first speech we might have suspected that something destructive would come out of this man.

There is a type of highly organized being, not well

fitted for this world, whose practical activities are drowned in a sea of feeling. Egoists by their constitution, they become dangerous beings when vexed, cornered, or thwarted by society. Their fine energies have had no training in the painful constructive processes of civilization. Their first instincts, when goaded into activity, are instincts of destruction. They know no compromise. If they are not to have all, then no one shall possess anything. Romeo is not suffering in this final scene. He is experiencing the greatest pleasure of his life. He glories in his deed. It satisfies his soul. It gives him supreme spiritual activity. The deed brings widespread desolation, but to this he is indifferent, for it means the destruction of the prison against which his desires have always beaten their wings, the destruction of a material and social universe from which he has always longed to be free.

> "O, here
> Will I set up my everlasting rest,
> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh."

How much of all this psychology may we suppose was rendered apparent to the motley collection of excitable people who flocked to see the play—which appears to have been a popular one—in the years 1591-97? Probably as much as may be gathered by an audience to-day from a tolerable representation of the piece. The subtler truths of Shakespeare have always been lost upon the stage. In turning over the first quarto of Romeo and Juliet, we may see that many such matters were pruned ruggedly off by the actors. The early audiences, like the popular audiences of to-day, doubtless regarded action as the first merit of a play, and the stage managers must

have understood this. It is noticeable that, in the authentic text, the street fight with which this play opens is a carefully-worked-up scene, which comes to a climax in the entry of the prince. The reporter gives a few words only to a description of the scene. No doubt, in Shakespeare's time, the characters spoke very rapidly or all at once. It is impossible that the longer plays, like King Lear, should have been finished in an evening, unless the scenes moved with a hurry of life very different from the declamatory leisure with which our actors move from scene to scene. To make plain the course of the story was evidently the chief aim of the stage managers. The choruses are finger-posts. It is true that the choruses in Shakespeare are generally so overloaded with curious ornament as to be incomprehensible except as explanations of things already understood. The prologue to Romeo and Juliet is a riddle to which the play is the answer. One might at first suppose that the need of such finger-posts betrayed a dull audience, but no dull person was ever enlightened by Shakespeare's choruses. They play variations on the theme. They instruct only the instructed.

If interest in the course of the story be the first excitement to the theatre-goer, interest in seeing a picture of contemporary manners is probably the second. Our chief loss in reading Shakespeare is the loss of the society he depicts, and which we know only through him. In every line and scene there must be meanings which have vanished forever with the conditions on which they comment. A character on the stage has need, at the feeblest, of only just so much vitality as will remind us of something we know in real life. The types of Shakespeare which have been found substantial enough to survive the loss of their originals must have had an interest for

the first audiences, both in nature and in intensity, very different from their interest to us. The high life depicted by Shakespeare has disappeared. No one of us has ever known a Mercutio. Fortunately, the types of society seem to change less in the lower orders than in the upper classes. England swarms with old women like Juliet's nurse; and as to these characters in Shakespeare whose originals still survive, and as to them only, we may feel that we are near the Elizabethans.

We should undoubtedly suffer some disenchantment by coming in contact with these coarse and violent people. How much do the pictures of contemporary England given us by the novelists stand in need of correction by a visit to the land! How different is the thing from the abstract! Or, to put the same thought in a more obvious light, how fantastic are the ideas of the Germans about Shakespeare! How Germanized does he come forth from their libraries and from their green-rooms!

We in America, with our formal manners, our bloodless complexions, our perpetual decorum and self-suppression, are about as much in sympathy with the real element of Shakespeare's plays as a Baptist parson is with a fox-hunt. Our blood is stirred by the narration, but our constitution could never stand the reality. As we read we translate all things into the dialect of our province; or if we must mouth, let us say that we translate the dialect of the English province into the language of our empire; but we still translate. Mercutio, on inspection, would turn out to be not a gentleman,—and indeed he is not; Juliet, to be a most extraordinary young person; Tybalt, a brute and ruffian, a type from the plantation; and the only man with whom we should feel at all at ease

would be the County Paris, in whom we should all recognize a perfectly bred man. "What a man!" we should cry. "Why, he's a man of wax!"

MICHAEL ANGELO´S SONNETS

Michael Angelo is revealed by his sonnets. He wears the triple crown of painter, poet, and sculptor, and his genius was worshipped with a kind of awe even while he lived, yet we know the man best through these little pieces of himself which he broke off and gave to his friends. The fragments vibrated with the life of the man, and were recognized as wonderful things. Even in his lifetime they were treasured and collected in manuscript, and at a later day they were seized upon by the world at large.

The first published edition of the sonnets was prepared for the press many years after the death of the author by his grandnephew, who edited them to suit the taste of the seventeenth century. The extent and atrocity of his emendations can be realized by a comparison of texts. But the sonnets survived the improvements, and even made headway under them; and when, in 1863, Guasti gave the original readings to the public, the world was prepared for them. The bibliography of editions and translations which Guasti gives is enough to show the popularity of the sonnets, their universal character, their international currency.

There are upward of one hundred sonnets in every

stage of perfection, and they have given rise not only to a literature of translations, but to a literature of comment. Some years ago Mrs. Ednah Cheney published a selection of the sonnets, giving the Italian text, together with English translations by various hands. This little volume has earned the gratitude of many to whom it made known the sonnets. The Italians themselves have gone on printing the corrupt text in contempt of Guasti's labors. But it has not been left to the Italians to protect the treasures of their land. The barbarians have been the devoutest worshippers at all times. The last tribute has come from Mr. John Addington Symonds, who has done the sonnets into the English of the pre-Raphaelites, and done them, on the whole, amazingly well. His translations of the more graceful sonnets are facile, apt, and charming, and rise at times into beauty. He has, however, insisted on polishing the rugged ones. Moreover, being deficient in reverence, Mr. Symonds fails to convey reverence. Nevertheless, to have boldly planned and carried out the task of translating them all was an undertaking of so much courage, and has been done with so much success, that every rival must give in his admiration.

The poems are exceedingly various, some being rough and some elegant, some obvious and some obscure, some humorous, some religious. Yet they have this in common, that each seems to be the bearer of some deep harmony, whose vibrations we feel and whose truth we recognize. From the very beginning they seem to have had a provocative and stimulating effect upon others; ever since they were written, cultivated people have been writing essays about them. One of them has been the subject of repeated academical disquisition. They absorb and reflect the spirit of the times; they appeal to and

express the individual; they have done this through three centuries and throughout who shall say how many different educational conditions. Place them in what light you will, they gleam with new meanings. This is their quality. It is hard to say whence the vitality comes. They have often a brilliancy that springs from the juxtaposition of two thoughts,—a brilliancy like that produced by unblended colors roughly but well laid on. They have, as it were, an organic force which nothing can render. The best of them have the reflective power which gives back light from the mind of the reader. The profounder ones appear to change and glow under contemplation; they re-echo syllables from forgotten voices; they suggest unfathomable depths of meaning. These sonnets are protean in character; they represent different things to different people,—religion to one, love to another, philosophy to a third.

It is easy to guess what must be the fate of such poems in translation. The translator inevitably puts more of himself than of Michael Angelo into his version. Even the first Italian editor could not let them alone. He felt he must dose them with elegance. This itching to amend the sonnets results largely from the obscurity of the text. A translator is required to be, above all things, comprehensible, and, therefore, he must interpret, he must paraphrase. He is not at liberty to retain the equivocal suggestiveness of the original. The language of a translation must be chastened, or, at least, grammatical, and Michael Angelo's verse is very often neither the one nor the other.

The selections which follow are not given as representative of the different styles in the original.

They have been chosen from among those sonnets which seemed most capable of being rendered into English.

The essential nature of the sonnet is replete with difficulty, and special embarrassments are encountered in the Italian sonnet. The Italian sonnet is, both in its form and spirit, a thing so foreign to the English idea of what poetry should be, that no cultivation can ever domesticate it into the tongue. The seeds of flowers from the Alps may be planted in our gardens, but a new kind of flower will come up; and this is what has happened over and over again to the skilled gardeners of English literature in their struggles with the Italian sonnet. In Italy, for six hundred years, the sonnet has been the authorized form for a disconnected remark of any kind. Its chief aim is not so much to express a feeling as an idea—a witticism—a conceit—a shrewd saying—a clever analogy—a graceful simile—a beautiful thought. Moreover, it is not primarily intended for the public; it has a social rather than a literary function.

The English with their lyrical genius have impressed the form, as they have impressed every other form, into lyrical service, and with some success, it must be admitted. But the Italian sonnet is not lyrical. It is conversational and intellectual, and many things which English instinct declares poetry ought not to be. We feel throughout the poetry of the Latin races a certain domination of the intelligence which is foreign to our own poetry. But in the sonnet form at least we may sympathize with this domination. Let us read the Italian sonnets, then, as if they were prose; let us seek first the thought and hold to that, and leave the eloquence to take care of itself. It is the thought, after all, which Michael Angelo himself

cared about. He is willing to sacrifice elegance, to truncate words, to wreck rhyme, prosody, and grammar, if he can only hurl through the verse these thoughts which were his convictions.

The platonic ideas about life and love and art, which lie at the bottom of most of these sonnets, are familiar to us all. They have been the reigning commonplace ideas of educated people for the last two thousand years. But in these sonnets they are touched with new power; they become exalted into mystical importance. We feel almost as if it were Plato himself that is talking, and the interest is not lessened when we remember that it is Michael Angelo. It is necessary to touch on this element in the sonnets, for it exists in them; and because while some will feel chiefly the fiery soul of the man, others will be most struck by his great speculative intellect.

It is certain that the sonnets date from various times in Michael Angelo's life; and, except in a few cases, it must be left to the instinct of the reader to place them. Those which were called forth by the poet's friendship for Vittoria Colonna were undoubtedly written towards the close of his life. While he seems to have known Vittoria Colonna and to have been greatly attached to her for many years, it is certain that in his old age he fell in love with her. The library of romance that has been written about this attachment has added nothing to Condivi's simple words:—

> "He greatly loved the Marchesana of Pescara, with whose divine spirit he fell in love, and was in return passionately beloved of her; and he still keeps many of her

> letters, which are full of most honest and tenderest love, such as used to issue from a heart like hers; and he himself had written her many and many a sonnet full of wit and tenderness. She often left Viterbo and other places, where she had gone for pleasure, and to pass the summer, and came to Rome for no other reason than to see Michael Angelo. And in return he bore her so much love that I remember hearing him say that he regretted nothing except that when he went to see her on her death-bed he had not kissed her brow and her cheek as he had kissed her hand. He was many times overwhelmed at the thought of her death, and used to be as one out of his mind."

It seems, from reading the sonnets, that some of those which are addressed to women must belong to a period anterior to his friendship with Vittoria. This appears from the internal evidence of style and feeling, as well as by references in the later sonnets.

One other fact must be mentioned,—both Vittoria and Michael Angelo belonged to, or at least sympathized with, the Piagnoni, and were in a sense disciples of Savonarola. Now, it is this religious element which makes Michael Angelo seem to step out of his country and out of his century and across time and space into our own. This religious feeling is of a kind perfectly familiar to us; indeed, of a kind inborn and native to us. Whether we be reading the English prayer-book or listening to the old German Passion Music, there is a certain note of the spirit which, when we hear it, we perfectly recognize as a part of ourselves. What we recognize is, in fact, the Protestantism which swept over Europe during the

century of Michael Angelo's existence; which conquered Teutonic Europe, and was conquered, but not extinguished, in Latin Europe; and a part of which survives in ourselves. If one wishes to feel the power of Savonarola, one may do so in these sonnets. We had connected Michael Angelo with the Renaissance, but we are here face to face with the Reformation. We cannot help being a little surprised at this. We cannot help being surprised at finding how well we know this man.

Few of us are familiar enough with the language of the plastic arts to have seen without prompting this same modern element in Michael Angelo's painting and sculpture. We might, perhaps, have recognized it in the Pieta in St. Peter's. We may safely say, however, that it exists in all his works. It is in the Medicean statues; it is in the Julian marbles; it is in the Sistine ceiling. What is there in these figures that they leave us so awestruck, that they seem so like the sound of trumpets blowing from a spiritual world? The intelligence that could call them forth, the craft that could draw them, have long since perished. But the meaning survives the craft. The lost arts retain their power over us. We understand but vaguely, yet we are thrilled. We cannot decipher the signs, yet we subscribe to their import. The world from which Michael Angelo's figures speak is our own world, after all. That is the reason they are so potent, so intimate, so inimitably significant. We may be sure that the affinity which we feel with Michael Angelo, and do not feel with any other artist of that age, springs from experiences and beliefs in him which are similar to our own.

His work speaks to the moral sense more directly and more powerfully than that of any one,—so directly

and so powerfully, indeed, that we whose physical senses are dull, and whose moral sense is acute, are moved by Michael Angelo, although the rest of the *cinque cento* culture remain a closed book to us.

It is difficult, this conjuring with the unrecoverable past, so rashly done by us all. Yet we must use what light we have. Remembering, then, that painting is not the reigning mode of expression in recent times, and that in dealing with it we are dealing with a vehicle of expression with which we are not spontaneously familiar, we may yet draw conclusions which are not fantastic, if we base them upon the identity of one man's nature some part of which we are sure we understand. We may throw a bridge from the ground in the sonnets, upon which we are sure we stand firmly, to the ground in the frescos, which, by reason of our own ignorance, is less certain ground to us, and we may walk from one side to the other amid the elemental forces of this same man's mind.

XXXVIII

Give me again, ye fountains and ye streams,
  That flood of life, not yours, that swells your front
  Beyond the natural fulness of your wont.
I gave, and I take back as it beseems.
And thou dense choking atmosphere on high
  Disperse thy fog of sighs—for it is mine,
  And make the glory of the sun to shine

Again on my dim eyes.—O, Earth and Sky
Give me again the footsteps I have trod.
  Let the paths grow where I walked them bare,
  The echoes where I waked them with my prayer
Be deaf—and let those eyes—those eyes, O God,
Give me the light I lent them.—That some soul
May take my love. Thou hadst no need of it.

This rough and exceedingly obscure sonnet, in which strong feeling has condensed and distorted the language, seems to have been written by a man who has been in love and has been repulsed. The shock has restored him to a momentary realization of the whole experience. He looks at the landscape, and lo! the beauty has dropped out of it. The stream has lost its power, and the meadow its meaning. Summer has stopped. His next thought is: "But it is I who had lent the landscape this beauty. That landscape was myself, my dower, my glory, my birthright," and so he breaks out with "Give me back the light I threw upon you," and so on till the bitter word flung to the woman in the last line. The same clearness of thought and obscurity of expression and the same passion is to be found in the famous sonnet—"*Non ha l' ottimo artista alcun concetto*,"—where he blames himself for not being able to obtain her good-will—as a bad sculptor who cannot hew out the beauty from the rock, although he feels it to be there; and in that heart-breaking one where he says that people may only draw from life what they give to it, and says no good can come to a man who, looking on such great beauty, feels such pain.

It is not profitable, nor is it necessary for the comprehension of the poems, to decide to whom or at what period each one was written. There is dispute about some of them as to whether they were addressed to men or women. There is question as to others whether they are prayers addressed to Christ or love poems addressed to Vittoria. In this latter case, perhaps, Michael Angelo did not himself know which they were.

Vittoria used to instruct him in religion, and he seems to have felt for her a love so deep, so reverent, so passionate, and so touching that the words are alive in which he mentions her.

"I wished," he writes beneath a sonnet which he sent her, evidently in return for some of her own religious poems, "I wished, before taking the things that you had many times deigned to give me, in order that I might receive them the less unworthily, to make something for you from my own hand. But then, remembering and knowing that the grace of God may not be bought, and that to accept it reluctantly is the greatest sin, I confess my fault, and willingly receive the said things, and when they shall arrive, not because they are in my house, but I myself as being in a house of theirs, shall deem myself in Paradise."

We must not forget that at this time Michael Angelo was an old man, that he carried about with him a freshness and vigor of feeling that most people lose with their youth. A reservoir of emotion broke loose within him at a time when it caused his hale old frame suffering to undergo it, and reillumined his undimmed intellect to cope with it. A mystery play was enacted in him,—each sonnet is a scene. There is

the whole of a man in each of many of these sonnets. They do not seem so much like poems as like microcosms. They are elementally complete. The soul of man could be evolved again from them if the formula were lost.

XL

I know not if it be the longed for light
  Of its creator which the soul perceives,
  Or if in people's memory there lives
A touch of early grace that keeps them bright
Or else ambition,—or some dream whose might
  Brings to the eyes the hope the heart conceives
  And leaves a burning feeling when it leaves—
That tears are welling in me as I write.

The things I feel, the things I follow and the things
  I seek—are not in me,—I hardly know the place
    To find them. It is others make them mine.
It happens when I see thee—and it brings
  Sweet pain—a yes,—a no,—sorrow and grace
    Surely it must have been those eyes of thine.

There are others which give a most touching picture of extreme piety in extreme old age. And there are

still others which are both love poems and religious poems at the same time.

LV

Thou knowest that I know that thou dost know
How, to enjoy thee, I did come more near.
Thou knowest, I know thou knowest—I am here.
Would we had given our greetings long ago.
If true the hope thou hast to me revealed,
If true the plighting of a sacred troth,
Let the wall fall that stands between us both,
For griefs are doubled when they are concealed.
If, loved one,—if I only loved in thee
What thou thyself dost love,—'tis to this end
The spirit with his belovéd is allied.
The things thy face inspires and teaches me
Mortality doth little comprehend.
Before we understand we must have died.

LI

Give me the time when loose the reins I flung
Upon the neck of galloping desire.

Give me the angel face that now among
The angels,—tempers Heaven with its fire.
Give the quick step that now is grown so old,
The ready tears—the blaze at thy behest,
If thou dost seek indeed, O Love! to hold
Again thy reign of terror in my breast.
If it be true that thou dost only live
Upon the sweet and bitter pains of man
Surely a weak old man small food can give
Whose years strike deeper than thine arrows can.
Upon life's farthest limit I have stood—
What folly to make fire of burnt wood.

The occasion of the following was probably some more than wonted favor shown to him by Vittoria.

XXVI.

Great joy no less than grief doth murder men.
The thief, even at the gallows, may be killed
If, while through every vein with fear he's chilled,
Sudden reprieve do set him free again.

Thus hath this bounty from you in my pain
Through all my griefs and sufferings fiercely thrilled,
Coming from a breast with sovereign

mercy filled,
And more than weeping, cleft my heart in twain.

Good news, like bad, may bring the taker death.
The heart is rent as with the sharpest knife,
Be it pressure or expansion cause the rift.
Let thy great beauty which God cherisheth
Limit my joy if it desire my life—
The unworthy dies beneath so great a gift.

XXVIII

The heart is not the life of love like mine.
The love I love thee with has none of it.
For hearts to sin and mortal thought incline
And for love's habitation are unfit.
God, when our souls were parted from Him, made
Of me an eye—of thee, splendor and light.
Even in the parts of thee which are to fade
Thou hast the glory; I have only sight.
Fire from its heat you may not analyze,
Nor worship from eternal beauty take,
Which deifies the lover as he bows.
Thou hast that Paradise all within thine eyes
Where first I loved thee. 'T is for that love's sake
My soul's on fire with thine, beneath thy brows.

The German musicians of the seventeenth century used to write voluntaries for the organ, using the shorthand of the older notation; they jotted down the formulas of the successive harmonies expressed in terms of the chords merely. The transitions and the musical explanation were left to the individual performer. And Michael Angelo has left behind him, as it were, the poetical equivalents of such shorthand musical formulas. The harmonies are wonderful. The successions show a great grasp of comprehension, but you cannot play them without filling them out.

"Is that music, after all," one may ask, "which leaves so much to the performer, and is that poetry, after all, which leaves so much to the reader?" It seems you must be a Kapellmeister or a student, or dilettante of some sort, before you can transpose and illustrate these hieroglyphics. There is some truth in this criticism, and the modesty of purpose in the poems is the only answer to it. They claim no comment. Comment claims them. Call them not poetry if you will. They are a window which looks in upon the most extraordinary nature of modern times, —a nature whose susceptibility to impressions of form through the eye allies it to classical times; a nature which on the emotional side belongs to our own day.

Is it a wonder that this man was venerated with an almost superstitious regard in Italy, and in the sixteenth century? His creations were touched with a superhuman beauty which his contemporaries felt, yet charged with a profoundly human meaning which they could not fathom. No one epoch has held the key to him. There lives not a man and there never has lived a man who could say, "I fully understand Michael Angelo's works." It will be said

that the same is true of all the very greatest artists, and so it is in a measure. But as to the others, that truth comes as an afterthought and an admission. As to Michael Angelo, it is primary and overwhelming impression. "We are not sure that we comprehend him," say the centuries as they pass, "but of this we are sure: *Simil ne maggior uom non nacque mai*."

THE FOURTH CANTO OF THE INFERNO

There are many great works of fiction where the interest lies in the situation and development of the characters or in the wrought-up climax of the action, and where it is necessary to read the whole work before one can feel the force of the catastrophe. But Dante's poem is a series of disconnected scenes, held together only by the slender thread of the itinerary. The scenes vary in length from a line or two to a page or two; and the power of them comes, one may say, not at all from their connection with each other, but entirely from the language in which they are given.

A work of this kind is hard to translate because verbal felicities, to use a mild term, are untranslatable. What English words can render the mystery of that unknown voice that calls out of the deep,—

"Onorate 'l altissimo poeta,

Torna sua ombra che era dipartita"?

The cry breaks upon the night, full of awful greeting, proclamation, prophecy, and leaves the reader standing next to Virgil, afraid now to lift up his eyes to the poet. Awe breathes in the cadence of the words themselves. And so with many of the most splendid lines in Dante, the meaning inheres in the very Italian words. They alone shine with the idea. They alone satisfy the spiritual vision.

Of all the greatest poets, Dante is most foreign to the genius of the English race. From the point of view of English-speaking people, he is lacking in humor. It might seem at first blush as if the argument of his poem were a sufficient warrant for seriousness; but his seriousness is of a nature strange to northern nations. There is in it a gaunt and sallow earnestness which appears to us inhuman.

In the treatment of the supernatural the Teutonic nations have generally preserved a touch of humor. This is so intrinsically true to the Teutonic way of feeling that the humor seems to go with and to heighten the terror of the supernatural. When Hamlet, in the scene on the midnight terrace, addresses the ghost as "old mole," "old truepenny," etc., we may be sure that he is in a frenzy of excitement and apprehension. Perhaps the explanation of this mixture of humor and terror, is that when the mind feels itself shaken to its foundations by the immediate presence of the supernatural,—palsied, as it were, with fear,—there comes to its rescue, and as an antidote to the fear itself, a reserve of humor, almost of levity. Staggered by the unknown, the mind opposes it with the homely and the familiar. The northern nations were

too much afraid of ghosts to take them seriously. The sight of one made a man afraid he should lose his wits if he gave way to his fright. Thus it has come about that in the sincerest terror of the north there is a touch of grotesque humor; and this touch we miss in Dante. The hundred cantos of his poem are unrelieved by a single scene of comedy. The strain of exalted tragedy is maintained throughout. His jests and wit are not of the laughing kind. Sometimes they are grim and terrible, sometimes playful, but always serious and full of meaning. This lack of humor becomes very palpable in a translation, where it is not disguised by the transcendent beauty of Dante's style.

There is another difficulty peculiar to the translating of Dante into English. English is essentially a diffuse and prodigal language. The great English writers have written with a free hand, prolific, excursive, diffuse. Shakespeare, Sir Thomas Browne, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Browning, all the typical writers of English, have been many-worded. They have been men who said everything that came into their heads, and trusted to their genius to make their writings readable. The eighteenth century in England, with all its striving after classical precision, has left behind it no great laconic English classic who stands in the first rank. Our own Emerson is concise enough, but he is disconnected and prophetic. Dante is not only concise, but logical, deductive, prone to ratiocination. He set down nothing that he had not thought of a thousand times, and conned over, arranged, and digested. We have in English no prototype for such condensation. There is no native work in the language written in anything which approaches the style of Dante.

My heavy sleep a sullen thunder broke,
So that I shook myself, springing upright,
Like one awakened by a sudden stroke,
And gazed with fixed eyes and new-rested sight
Slowly about me,—awful privilege,—
To know the place that held me, if I might.
In truth I found myself upon the edge
That girds the valley of the dreadful pit,
Circling the infinite wailing with its ledge.
Dark, deep, and cloudy, to the depths of it
Eye could not probe, and though I bent mine low,
It helped my vain conjecture not a whit.
"Let us go down to the blind world below,"
Began the poet, with a face like death,
"I shall go first, thou second." "Say not so,"
Cried I when I again could find my breath,
For I had seen the whiteness of his face,
"How shall I come if thee it frighteneth?"
And he replied: "The anguish of the place
And those that dwell there thus hath painted me
With pity, not with fear. But come apace;
The spur of the journey pricks us." Thus did he
Enter himself, and take me in with him,
Into the first great circle's mystery
That winds the deep abyss about the brim.

Here there came borne upon the winds to us,
Not cries, but sighs that filled the concave dim,
And kept the eternal breezes tremulous.

The cause is grief, but grief unlinked to pain,
That makes the unnumbered peoples suffer thus.
I saw great crowds of children, women, men,
Wheeling below. "Thou dost not seek to know
What spirits are these thou seest?" Thus again
My master spoke. "But ere we further go,
Thou must be sure that these feel not the weight
Of sin. They well deserved,—and yet not so.—
They had not baptism, which is the gate
Of Faith,—thou holdest. If they lived before
The days of Christ, though sinless, in that state
God they might never worthily adore.
And I myself am such an one as these.
For this shortcoming—on no other score—
We are lost, and most of all our torment is
That lost to hope we live in strong desire."
Grief seized my heart to hear these words of his,
Because most splendid souls and hearts of fire
I recognized, hung in that Limbo there.
"Tell me, my master dear, tell me, my sire,"
Cried I at last, with eager hope to share
That all-convincing faith,—"but went there not
One,—once,—from hence,—made happy

though it were
Through his own merit or another's lot?"
"I was new come into this place," said he,
Who seemed to guess the purport of my thought,
"When Him whose brows were bound with Victory
I saw come conquering through this prison dark.
He set the shade of our first parent free,
With Abel, and the builder of the ark,
And him that gave the laws immutable,
And Abraham, obedient patriarch,
David the king, and ancient Israel,
His father and his children at his side,
And the wife Rachel that he loved so well,
And gave them Paradise,—and before these men
None tasted of salvation that have died."

We did not pause while he was talking then,
But held our constant course along the track,
Where spirits thickly thronged the wooded glen.
And we had reached a point whence to turn back
Had not been far, when I, still touched with fear,
Perceived a fire, that, struggling with the black,
Made conquest of a luminous hemisphere.
The place was distant still, but I could see
Clustered about the fire, as we drew near,
Figures of an austere nobility.

"Thou who dost honor science and love
art,
Pray who are these, whose potent dignity
Doth eminently set them thus apart?"
The poet answered me, "The honored fame
That made their lives illustrious touched
the heart
Of God to advance them." Then a voice
there came,
"Honor the mighty poet;" and again,
"His shade returns,—do honor to his
name."
And when the voice had finished its
refrain,
I saw four giant shadows coming on.
They seemed nor sad nor joyous in their
mien.
And my good master said: "See him, my
son,
That bears the sword and walks before the
rest,
And seems the father of the three,—that
one
Is Homer, sovran poet. The satirist
Horace comes next; third, Ovid; and the
last
Is Lucan. The lone voice that name
expressed
That each doth share with me; therefore
they haste
To greet and do me honor;—nor do they
wrong."

Thus did I see the assembled school who
graced
The master of the most exalted song,

That like an eagle soars above the rest.
When they had talked together, though not long,
They turned to me, nodding as to a guest.
At which my master smiled, but yet more high
They lifted me in honor. At their behest
I went with them as of their company,
And made the sixth among those mighty wits.

Thus towards the light we walked in colloquy
Of things my silence wisely here omits,
As there 'twas sweet to speak them, till we came
To where a seven times circled castle sits,
Whose walls are watered by a lovely stream.
This we crossed over as it had been dry,
Passing the seven gates that guard the same,
And reached a meadow, green as Arcady.
People were there with deep, slow-moving eyes
Whose looks were weighted with authority.
Scant was their speech, but rich in melodies.
The walls receding left a pasture fair,
A place all full of light and of great size,
So we could see each spirit that was there.
And straight before my eyes upon the green
Were shown to me the souls of those that were,

Great spirits it exalts me to have seen.
Electra with her comrades I descried,
I saw Æneas, and knew Hector keen,
And in full armor Cæsar, falcon-eyed,
Camilla and the Amazonian queen,
King Latin with Lavinia at his side,
Brutus that did avenge the Tarquin's sin,
Lucrece, Cornelia, Martia Julia,
And by himself the lonely Saladin.

The Master of all thinkers next I saw
Amid the philosophic family.
All eyes were turned on him with reverent awe;
Plato and Socrates were next his knee,
Then Heraclitus and Empedocles,
Thales and Anaxagoras, and he
That based the world on chance; and next to these,
Zeno, Diogenes, and that good leech
The herb-collector, Dioscorides.
Orpheus I saw, Livy and Tully, each
Flanked by old Seneca's deep moral lore,
Euclid and Ptolemy, and within their reach
Hippocrates and Avicenna's store,
The sage that wrote the master commentary,
Averois, with Galen and a score
Of great physicians. But my pen were weary
Depicting all of that majestic plain
Splendid with many an antique dignitary.
My theme doth drive me on, and words are vain
To give the thought the thing itself

conveys.
The six of us were now cut down to twain.
My guardian led me forth by other ways,
Far from the quiet of that trembling wind,
And from the gentle shining of those rays,
To places where all light was left behind.

ROBERT BROWNING

There is a period in the advance of any great man's influence between the moment when he appears and the moment when he has become historical, during which it is difficult to give any succinct account of him. We are ourselves a part of the thing we would describe. The element which we attempt to isolate for purposes of study is still living within us. Our science becomes tinged with autobiography. Such must be the fate of any essay on Browning written at the present time.

The generation to whom his works were unmeaning has hardly passed away. The generation he spoke for still lives. His influence seems still to be expanding. The literature of Browning dictionaries, phrase-books, treatises, and philosophical studies grows daily. Mr. Cooke in his Guide to Browning (1893) gives a condensed catalogue of the best books and essays on Browning, which covers many finely printed pages. This class of book—the text-book—is not the product of impulse. The text-book is a commercial article and follows the demand as closely as the reaper follows the crop. We can tell the acreage under cultivation by looking over the

account books of the makers of farm implements. Thousands of people are now studying Browning, following in his footsteps, reading lives of his heroes, and hunting up the subjects he treated.

This Browningism which we are disposed to laugh at is a most interesting secondary outcome of his influence. It has its roots in natural piety, and the educational value of it is very great.

Browning's individuality created for him a personal following, and he was able to respond to the call to leadership. Unlike Carlyle, he had something to give his disciples beside the immediate satisfaction of a spiritual need. He gave them not only meal but seed. In this he was like Emerson; but Emerson's little store of finest grain is of a different soil. Emerson lived in a cottage and saw the stars over his head through his skylight. Browning, on the other hand, loved pictures, places, music, men and women, and his works are like the house of a rich man,—a treasury of plunder from many provinces and many ages, whose manners and passions are vividly recalled to us. In Emerson's house there was not a peg to hang a note upon,—"this is his bookshelf, this his bed." But Browning's palace craves a catalogue. And a proper catalogue to such a palace becomes a liberal education.

Robert Browning was a strong, glowing, whole-souled human being, who enjoyed life more intensely than any Englishman since Walter Scott. He was born among books; and circumstances enabled him to follow his inclinations and become a writer,—a poet by profession. He was, from early youth to venerable age, a centre of bounding vitality, the very embodiment of spontaneous life; and the forms of

poetry in which he so fully and so accurately expressed himself enable us to know him well. Indeed, only great poets are known so intimately as we know Robert Browning.

Religion was at the basis of his character, and it was the function of religious poetry that his work fulfilled. Inasmuch as no man invents his own theology, but takes it from the current world and moulds it to his needs, it was inevitable that Robert Browning should find and seize upon as his own all that was optimistic in Christian theology. Everything that was hopeful his spirit accepted; everything that was sunny and joyful and good for the brave soul he embraced. What was distressing he rejected or explained away. In the world of Robert Browning *everything* was right.

The range of subject covered by his poems is wider than that of any other poet that ever lived; but the range of his ideas is exceedingly small. We need not apologize for treating Browning as a theologian and a doctor of philosophy, for he spent a long life in trying to show that a poet is always really both—'and he has almost convinced us. The expositors and writers of text-books have had no difficulty in formulating his theology, for it is of the simplest kind; and his views on morality and art are logically a part of it. The "message" which poets are conventionally presumed to deliver, was, in Browning's case, a very definite creed, which may be found fully set forth in any one of twenty poems. Every line of his poetry is logically dedicated to it.

He believes that the development of the individual soul is the main end of existence. The strain and stress of life are incidental to growth, and therefore

desirable. Development and growth mean a closer union with God. In fact, God is of not so much importance in Himself, but as the end towards which man tends. That irreverent person who said that Browning uses "God" as a pigment made an accurate criticism of his theology. In Browning, God is adjective to man. Browning believes that all conventional morality must be reviewed from the standpoint of how conduct affects the actor himself, and what effect it has on his individual growth. The province of art and of all thinking and working is to make these truths clear and to grapple with the problems they give rise to.

The first two fundamental beliefs of Browning—namely: (1) that, ultimately speaking, the most important matter in the world is the soul of a man; and (2) that a sense of effort is coincident with development—are probably true. We instinctively feel them to be true, and they seem to be receiving support from those quarters of research to which we look for light, however dim. In the application of his dogmas to specific cases in the field of ethics, Browning often reaches conclusions which are fair subjects for disagreement. Since most of our conventional morality is framed to repress the individual, he finds himself at war with it—in revolt against it. He is habitually pitted against it, and thus acquires modes of thought which sometimes lead him into paradox—at least, to conclusions at odds with his premises. It is in the course of exposition, and incidentally to his main purpose as a teacher of a few fundamental ideas, that Browning has created his masterpieces of poetry.

Never was there a man who in the course of a long life changed less. What as a boy he dreamed of

doing, that he did. The thoughts of his earliest poems are the thoughts of his latest. His tales, his songs, his monologues, his dramas, his jests, his sermons, his rage, his prayer, are all upon the same theme: whatever fed his mind nourished these beliefs. His interest in the world was solely an interest in them. He saw them in history and in music; his travels and studies brought him back nothing else but proofs of them; the universe in each of its manifestations was a commentary upon them. His nature was the simplest, the most positive, the least given to abstract speculation, which England can show in his time. He was not a thinker, for he was never in doubt. He had recourse to disputation as a means of inculcating truth, but he used it like a lawyer arguing a case. His conclusions are fixed from the start. Standing, from his infancy, upon a faith as absolute as that of a martyr, he has never for one instant undergone the experience of doubt, and only knows that there is such a thing because he has met with it in other people. The force of his feelings is so much greater than his intellect that his mind serves his soul like a valet. Out of the whole cosmos he takes what belongs to him and sustains him, leaving the rest, or not noting it.

There never was a great poet whose scope was so definite. That is the reason why the world is so cleanly divided into people who do and who do not care for Browning. One real glimpse into him gives you the whole of him. The public which loves him is made up of people who have been through certain spiritual experiences to which he is the antidote. The public which loves him not consists of people who have escaped these experiences. To some he is a strong, rare, and precious elixir, which nothing else will replace. To others, who do not need him, he is a

boisterous and eccentric person,—a Heracles in the house of mourning.

Let us remember his main belief,—the value of the individual. The needs of society constantly require that the individual be suppressed. They hold him down and punish him at every point. The tyranny of order and organization—of monarch or public opinion—weights him and presses him down. This is the inevitable tendency of all stable social arrangements. Now and again there arises some strong nature that revolts against the influence of conformity which is becoming intolerable,—against the atmosphere of caste or theory; of Egyptian priest or Manchester economist; of absolutism or of democracy.

And this strong nature cries out that the souls of men are being injured, and that they are important; that your soul and my soul are more important than Cæsar—or than the survival of the fittest. Such a voice was the voice of Christ, and the lesser saviors of the world bring always a like message of revolt: they arise to fulfil the same fundamental need of the world.

Carlyle, Emerson, Victor Hugo, Browning, were prophets to a generation oppressed in spirit, whose education had oppressed them with a Jewish law of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham and Malthus, of Clarkson and Cobden,—of thought for the million, and for man in the aggregate. "To what end is all this beneficence, all this conscience, all this theory?" some one at length cries out. "For whom is it in the last analysis that you legislate? You talk *of man*, I see only *men*." To men suffering from an age of devotion to humanity came Robert Browning as a liberator.

Like Carlyle, he was understood first in this country because we had begun earlier with our theoretical and practical philanthropies, and had taken them more seriously. We had suffered more. We needed to be told that it was right to love, hate, and be angry, to sin and repent. It was a revelation to us to think that we had some inheritance in the joys and passions of mankind. We needed to be told these things as a tired child needs to be comforted. Browning gave them to us in the form of a religion. There was no one else sane or deep or wise or strong enough to know what we lacked.

If ever a generation had need of a poet,—of some one to tell them they might cry and not be ashamed, rejoice and not find the reason in John Stuart Mill; some one who should justify the claims of the spirit which was starving on the religion of humanity,—it was the generation for whom Browning wrote.

Carlyle had seized upon the French Revolution, which served his ends because it was filled with striking, with powerful, with grotesque examples of individual force. In his Hero Worship he gives his countrymen a philosophy of history based on nothing but worship of the individual. Browning with the same end in view gave us pictures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in France and Italy. He glorified what we had thought crime and error, and made men of us. He was the apostle to the educated of a most complex period, but such as he was, he was complete. Those people to whom he has been a poet know what it is for the heart to receive full expression from the lips of another.

The second thesis which Browning insists on—the identity of spiritual suffering with spiritual growth—

is the one balm of the world. It is said that recent physiological experiment shows that muscles do not develop unless exercised up to what is called the "distress point." If this shall prove to be an instance of a general law,—if the struggles and agony of the spirit are really signs of an increase of that spiritual life which is the only sort of life we can conceive of now or hereafter,—then the truth-to-feeling of much of Browning's poetry has a scientific basis. It cannot be denied that Browning held firmly two of the most moving and far-reaching ideas of the world, and he expanded them in the root, leaf, flower, and fruit of a whole world of poetic disquisition.

It is unnecessary at this day to point out the beauties of Browning or the sagacity with which he chose his effects. He gives us the sallow wife of James Lee, whose soul is known to him, Pippa the silk-spinning girl, two men found in the morgue, persons lost, forgotten, or misunderstood. He searches the world till he finds the man whom everybody will concur in despising, the mediaeval grammarian, and he writes to him the most powerful ode in English, the mightiest tribute ever paid to a man. His culture and his learning are all subdued to what he works in; they are all in harness to draw his thought. He mines in antiquity or drags his net over German philosophy or modern drawing-rooms,—all to the same end.

In that miracle of power and beauty—The Flight of the Duchess—he has improvised a whole civilization in order to make the setting of contrast which shall cause the soul of the little duchess to shine clearly. In Childe Roland he creates a cycle, an epoch of romance and mysticism, because he requires it as a stage property. In A Death in the Desert you have the East in the first century—so vividly given that you

wish instantly to travel there, Bible in hand, to feel the atmosphere with which your Bible ought always to have been filled. His reading brings him to Euripides. He sees that Alcestis can be set to his theme; and with a week or two of labor, while staying in a country house, he draws out of the Greek fable the world of his own meaning and shows it shining forth in a living picture of the Greek theatre which has no counterpart for vitality in any modern tongue.

The descriptive and narrative powers of Browning are above, beyond, and outside of all that has been done in English in our time, as the odd moments prove which he gave to the Pied Piper, The Ride from Ghent to Aix, Incident in the French Camp. These chips from his workshop passed instantly into popular favor because they were written in familiar forms.

How powerfully his gifts of utterance were brought to bear upon the souls of men will be recorded, even if never understood, by literary historians. It is idle to look to the present generation for an intelligible account of One Word More, Rabbi Ben Ezra, Prospice, Saul, The Blot on the 'Scutcheon. They must be judged by the future and by men who can speak of them with a steady lip.

It must be conceded that the conventional judgments of society are sometimes right, and Browning's mission led him occasionally into paradox and *jeux d'esprit*. Bishop Blougram is an attempt to discover whether a good case cannot be made out for the individual hypocrite. The Statue and the Bust is frankly a *reductio ad absurdum*, and ends with a query.

There is more serious trouble with others. The Grammarian's Funeral is false to fact, and will appear so to posterity. The grammarian was not a hero, and our calmer moments show us that the poem is not a great ode. It gave certain people the glow of a great truth, but it remains a paradox and a piece of exaggeration. The same must be said of a large part of Browning. The New Testament is full of such paradoxes of exaggeration, like the parable of the unjust steward, the rich man's chance for heaven, the wedding garment; but in these, the truth is apparent, —we are not betrayed. In Browning's paradoxes we are often led on and involved in an emotion over some situation which does not honestly call for the emotion.

The most noble quality in Browning is his temper. He does not proceed, as liberators generally do, by railing and pulling down. He builds up; he is positive, not negative. He is less bitter than Christianity itself.

While there is no more doubt as to the permanent value of the content of Browning than of the value of the spiritual truths of the New Testament, there is very little likelihood that his poems will be understood in the remote future. At present, they are following the waves of influence of the education which they correct. They are built like Palladio's Theatre at Vicenza, where the perspective converges toward a single seat. In order to be subject to the illusion, the spectator must occupy the duke's place. The colors are dropping from the poems already. The feeblest of them lose it first. There was a steady falling off in power accompanied by a constant increase in his peculiarities during the last twenty years of his life, and we may make some surmise as

to how Balaustion's Adventure will strike posterity by reading Parleyings with Certain People.

The distinctions between Browning's characters—which to us are so vivid—will to others seem less so. Paracelsus and Rabbi Ben Ezra, Lippo Lippi, Karshish, Caponsacchi, and Ferishtah will all appear to be run in the same mould. They will seem to be the thinnest disguises which a poet ever assumed. The lack of the dramatic element in Browning—a lack which is concealed from us by our intense sympathy for him and by his fondness for the trappings of the drama—will be apparent to the after-comers. They will say that all the characters in The Blot on the 'Scutcheon take essentially the same view of the catastrophe of the play; that Pippa and Pompilia and Phene are the same person in the same state of mind. In fact, the family likeness is great. They will say that the philosophic monologues are repetitions of each other. It cannot be denied that there is much repetition,—much threshing out of old straw. Those who have read Browning for years and are used to the monologues are better pleased to find the old ideas than new ones, which they could not understand so readily. When the later Browning takes us on one of those long afternoon rambles through his mind,—over moor and fen, through jungle, down precipice, past cataract,—we know just where we are coming out in the end. We know the place better than he did himself. Nor will posterity like Browning's manners,—the dig in the ribs, the personal application, and *de te fabula* of most of his talking. These unpleasant things are part of his success with us to whom he means life, not art. Posterity will want only art. We needed doctrine. If he had not preached, we would not have listened to him. But posterity evades the preachers and accepts

only singers. Posterity is so dainty that it lives on nothing but choice morsels. It will cull such out of the body of Browning as the anthologists are beginning to do already, and will leave the great mass of him to be rediscovered from time to time by belated sufferers from the philosophy of the nineteenth century.

There is a class of persons who claim for Browning that his verse is really good verse, and that he was a master of euphony. This cannot be admitted except as to particular instances in which his success is due to his conformity to law, not to his violation of it.

The rules of verse in English are merely a body of custom which has grown up unconsciously, and most of which rests upon some simple requirement of the ear.

In speaking of the power of poetry we are dealing with what is essentially a mystery, the outcome of infinitely subtle, numerous, and complex forces.

The rhythm of versification seems to serve the purpose of a prompter. It lets us know in advance just what syllables are to receive the emphasis which shall make the sense clear. There are many lines in poetry which become obscure the instant they are written in prose, and probably the advantages of poetry over prose, or, to express it modestly, the excuse for poetry at all, is that the form facilitates the comprehension of the matter. Rhyme is itself an indication that a turning-point has been reached. It punctuates and sets off the sense, and relieves our attention from the strain of suspended interest. All of the artifices of poetical form seem designed to a like end. Naturalness of speech is somewhat sacrificed, but we gain by the sacrifice a certain uniformity of

speech which rests and exhilarates. We need not, for the present, examine the question of euphony any further, nor ask whether euphony be not a positive element in verse,—an element which belongs to music.

The negative advantages of poetry over prose are probably sufficient to account for most of its power. A few more considerations of the same negative nature, and which affect the vividness of either prose or verse, may be touched upon by way of preface to the inquiry, why Browning is hard to understand and why his verse is bad.

Every one is more at ease in his mind when he reads a language which observes the ordinary rules of grammar, proceeds by means of sentences having subjects and predicates, and of which the adjectives and adverbs fall easily into place. A doubt about the grammar is a doubt about the sense. And this is so true that sometimes when our fears are allayed by faultless grammar we may read absolute nonsense with satisfaction. We sometimes hear it stated as a bitter epigram, that poetry is likely to endure just in proportion as the form of it is superior to the content. As to the "inferiority" of the content, a moment's reflection shows that the ideas and feelings which prevail from age to age, and in which we may expect posterity to delight, are in their nature, and of necessity, commonplace. And if by "superiority of form" it is meant that these ideas shall be conveyed in flowing metres,—in words which are easy to pronounce, put together according to the rules of grammar, and largely drawn from the vulgar tongue, —we need not wonder that posterity should enjoy it. In fact, it is just such verse as this which survives from age to age.

Browning possesses one superlative excellence, and it is upon this that he relies. It is upon this that he has emerged and attacked the heart of man. It is upon this that he may possibly fight his way down to posterity and live like a fire forever in the bosom of mankind.

His language is the language of common speech; his force, the immediate force of life. His language makes no compromises of any sort. It is not subdued to form. The emphasis demanded by the sense is very often not the emphasis demanded by the metre. He cuts off his words and forces them ruthlessly into lines as a giant might force his limbs into the armor of a mortal. The joints and members of the speech fall in the wrong places and have no relation to the joints and members of the metre.

He writes like a lion devouring an antelope. He rends his subject, breaks its bones, and tears out the heart of it. He is not made more, but less, comprehensible by the verse-forms in which he writes. The sign-posts of the metre lead us astray. He would be easier to understand if his poems were printed in the form of prose. That is the reason why Browning becomes easy when read aloud; for in reading aloud we give the emphasis of speech, and throw over all effort to follow the emphasis of the metre. This is also the reason why Browning is so unquotable—why he has made so little effect upon the language—why so few of the phrases and turns of thought and metaphor with which poets enrich a language have been thrown into English by him. Let a man who does not read poetry take up a volume of Familiar Quotations, and he will find page after page of lines and phrases which he knows by heart—from Tennyson, Milton, Wordsworth—things made familiar to him not by the

poets, but by the men whom the poets educated, and who adopted their speech. Of Browning he will know not a word. And yet Browning's poetry is full of words that glow and smite, and which have been burnt into and struck into the most influential minds of the last fifty years.

But Browning's phrases are almost impossible to remember, because they are speech not reduced to poetry. They do not sing, they do not carry. They have no artificial buoys to float them in our memories.

It follows from this uncompromising nature of Browning that when, by the grace of inspiration, the accents of his speech do fall into rhythm, his words will have unimaginable sweetness. The music is so much a part of the words—so truly spontaneous—that other verse seems tame and manufactured beside his.

Rhyme is generally so used by Browning as not to subserve the true function of rhyme. It is forced into a sort of superficial conformity, but marks no epoch in the verse. The clusters of rhymes are clusters only to the eye and not to the ear. The necessity of rhyming leads Browning into inversions,—into expansions of sentences beyond the natural close of the form,—into every sort of contortion. The rhymes clog and distress the sentences.

As to grammar, Browning is negligent. Some of his most eloquent and wonderful passages have no grammar whatever. In Sordello grammar does not exist; and the want of it, the strain upon the mind caused by an effort to make coherent sentences out of a fleeting, ever-changing, iridescent maze of talk, wearies and exasperates the reader. Of course no one

but a school-master desires that poetry shall be capable of being parsed; but every one has a right to expect that he shall be left without a sense of grammatical deficiency.

The Invocation in The Ring and the Book is one of the most beautiful openings that can be imagined.

> "O lyric love, half angel and half bird,
> And all a wonder and a wild desire—
> Boldest
> of hearts that ever braved the sun,
> Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
> And sang a kindred soul out to his face—
> Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
> When the first summons from the darkling
> earth
> Reached thee amid thy chambers,
> blanched their blue,
> And bared them of the glory—to drop
> down,
> To toil for man, to suffer or to die—
> This is the same voice: can thy soul know
> change?
> Hail then, and hearken from the realms of
> help!
> Never may I commence my song, my due
> To God who best taught song by gift of
> thee,
> Except with bent head and beseeching
> hand—
> That still, despite the distance and the
> dark
> What was, again may be; some
> interchange
> Of grace, some splendor once thy very
> thought,

> Some benediction anciently thy smile;—
> Never conclude, but raising hand and
> head
> Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet
> yearn
> For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
> Their utmost up and on—so blessing back
> In those thy realms of help, that heaven
> thy home,
> Some whiteness, which, I judge, thy face
> makes proud,
> Some wanness where, I think, thy foot
> may fall."

These sublime lines are marred by apparent grammatical obscurity. The face of beauty is marred when one of the eyes seems sightless. We re-read the lines to see if we are mistaken. If they were in a foreign language, we should say we did not fully understand them.

In the dramatic monologues, as, for instance, in The Ring and the Book and in the innumerable other narratives and contemplations where a single speaker holds forth, we are especially called upon to forget grammar. The speaker relates and reflects,—pours out his ideas in the order in which they occur to him,—pursues two or three trains of thought at the same time, claims every license which either poetry or conversation could accord him. The effect of this method is so startling, that when we are vigorous enough to follow the sense, we forgive all faults of metre and grammar, and feel that this natural Niagara of speech is the only way for the turbulent mind of man to get complete utterance. We forget that it is possible for the same thing to be done, and yet to be subdued, and stilled, and

charmed into music.

Prospero is as natural and as individual as Bishop Blougram. His grammar is as incomplete, yet we do not note it. He talks to himself, to Miranda, to Ariel, all at once, weaving all together his passions, his philosophy, his narrative, and his commands. His reflections are as profuse and as metaphysical as anything in Browning, and yet all is clear,—all is so managed that it lends magic. The characteristic and unfathomable significance of this particular character Prospero comes out of it.

> "*Prospero*. My brother and thy uncle,
> called Antonio—
> I pray thee mark me,—that a brother
> should
> Be so perfidious!—he whom next thyself,
> Of all the world I lov'd, and to him put
> The manage of my state; as at that time
> Through all the seignories it was the first,
> And Prospero, the Prime Duke, being so
> reputed
> In dignity and for the liberal arts,
> Without a parallel: those being all my
> study,
> The government I cast upon my brother,
> And to my state grew stranger, being
> transported
> And wrapped in secret studies. Thy false
> uncle—
> Dost thou attend me?"

It is unnecessary to give examples from Browning of defective verse, of passages which cannot be understood, which cannot be construed, which cannot be parodied, and which can scarcely be

pronounced. They are mentioned only as throwing light on Browning's cast of mind and methods of work. His inability to recast and correct his work cost the world a master. He seems to have been condemned to create at white heat and to stand before the astonishing draft, which his energy had flung out, powerless to complete it.

We have a few examples of things which came forth perfect, but many of even the most beautiful and most original of the shorter poems are marred by some blotches that hurt us and which one feels might have been struck out or corrected in half an hour. How many of the poems are too long! It is not that Browning went on writing after he had completed his thought,—for the burst of beauty is as likely to come at the end as at the beginning,—but that his thought had to unwind itself like web from a spider. He could not command it. He could only unwind and unwind.

Pan and Luna is a sketch, as luminous as a Correggio, but not finished. Caliban upon Setebos, on the other hand, shows creative genius, beyond all modern reach, but flounders and drags on too long. In the poems which he revised, as, for instance, Hervé Riel, which exists in two or more forms, the corrections are verbal, and were evidently done with the same fierce haste with which the poems were written.

We must not for an instant imagine that Browning was indolent or indifferent; it is known that he was a taskmaster to himself. But he *could* not write other than he did. When the music came and the verse caught the flame, and his words became sweeter, and his thought clearer, then he could sweep down like an archangel bringing new strains of beauty to the earth. But the occasions when he did this are a

handful of passages in a body of writing as large as the Bible.

Just as Browning could not stop, so he found it hard to begin. His way of beginning is to seize the end of the thread just where he can, and write down the first sentence.

> "She should never have looked at me,
> If she meant I should not love her!"
>
> "Water your damned flowerpots, do—"
>
> "No! for I'll save it! Seven years since."
>
> "But give them me, the mouth, the eyes, the brow!"
>
> "Fear Death? to feel the fog in my throat."

Sometimes his verse fell into coils as it came, but he himself, as he wrote the first line of a poem, never knew in what form of verse the poem would come forth. Hence the novel figures and strange counterpoint. Having evolved the first group of lines at haphazard, he will sometimes repeat the form (a very complex form, perhaps, which, in order to have any organic effect, would have to be tuned to the ear most nicely), and repeat it clumsily. Individual taste must be judge of his success in these experiments. Sometimes the ear is worried by an attempt to trace the logic of the rhymes which are concealed by the rough jolting of the metre. Sometimes he makes no attempt to repeat the first verse, but continues in irregular improvisation.

Browning never really stoops to literature; he makes perfunctory obeisance to it. The truth is that

Browning is expressed by his defects. He would not be Robert Browning without them. In the technical part of his art, as well as in his spirit, Browning represents a reaction of a violent sort. He was too great an artist not to feel that his violations of form helped him. The blemishes in The Grammarian's Funeral—*hoti's business, the enclitic de*—were stimulants; they heightened his effects. They helped him make clear his meaning, that life is greater than art. These savageries spoke to the hearts of men tired of smoothness and platitude, and who were relieved by just such a breaking up of the ice. Men loved Browning not only for what he was, but also for what he was not.

These blemishes were, under the circumstances, and for a limited audience, strokes of art. It is not to be pretended that, even from this point of view, they were always successful, only that they are organic. The nineteenth century would have to be lived over again to wipe these passages out of Browning's poetry.

In that century he stands as one of the great men of England. His doctrines are the mere effulgence of his personality. He himself was the truth which he taught. His life was the life of one of his own heroes; and in the close of his life—by a coincidence which is not sad, but full of meaning—may be seen one of those apparent paradoxes in which he himself delighted.

Through youth and manhood Browning rose like a planet calmly following the laws of his own being. From time to time he put forth his volumes which the world did not understand. Neglect caused him to suffer, but not to change. It was not until his work

was all but finished, not till after the publication of The Ring and the Book, that complete recognition came to him. It was given him by men and women who had been in the nursery when he began writing, who had passed their youth with his minor poems, and who understood him.

In later life Browning's powers declined. The torrent of feeling could no longer float the raft of doctrine, as it had done so lightly and for so long. His poems, always difficult, grew dry as well.

But Browning was true to himself. He had all his life loved converse with men and women, and still enjoyed it. He wrote constantly and to his uttermost. It was not for him to know that his work was done. He wrote on manfully to the end, showing, occasionally, his old power, and always his old spirit. And on his death-bed it was not only his doctrine, but his life that blazed out in the words:—

> "One who never turned his back, but
> marched breast forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break,
> Never dreamed, though right were
> worsted, wrong would triumph.
> Held, we fall to rise—are baffled to fight
> better—
> Sleep to wake."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

In the early eighties, and in an epoch when the ideals of George Eliot were still controlling, the figure of

Stevenson rose with a sort of radiance as a writer whose sole object was to entertain. Most of the great novelists were then dead, and the scientific school was in the ascendant. Fiction was entering upon its death grapple with sociology. Stevenson came, with his tales of adventure and intrigue, out-of-door life and old-time romance, and he recalled to every reader his boyhood and the delights of his earliest reading. We had forgotten that novels could be amusing.

Hence it is that the great public not only loves Stevenson as a writer, but regards him with a certain personal gratitude. There was, moreover, in everything he wrote an engaging humorous touch which made friends for him everywhere, and excited an interest in his fragile and somewhat elusive personality supplementary to the appreciation of his books as literature. Toward the end of his life both he and the public discovered this, and his railleries or sermons took on the form of personal talk.

Beneath these matters lay the fact, known to all, that the man was fighting a losing battle against mortal sickness, and that practically the whole of his work was done under conditions which made any productivity seem a miracle. The heroic invalid was seen through all his books, still sitting before his desk or on his bed, turning out with unabated courage, with increasing ability, volume after volume of gayety, of boys' story-book, and of tragic romance.

There is enough in this record to explain the popularity, running at times into hero-worship and at times into drawing-room fatuity, which makes Stevenson and his work a fair subject for study. It is not impossible that a man who met certain needs of

the times so fully, and whom large classes of people sprang forward to welcome, may in some particulars give a clew to the age.

Any description of Stevenson's books is unnecessary. We have all read them too recently to need a prompter. The high spirits and elfin humor which play about and support every work justifies them all.

One of his books, The Child's Garden of Verses, is different in kind from the rest. It has no prototype, and is by far the most original thing that he did. The unsophisticated and gay little volume is a work of the greatest value. Stevenson seems to have remembered the impressions of his childhood with accuracy, and he has recorded them without affectation, without sentimentality, without exaggeration. In depicting children he draws from life. He is at home in the mysteries of their play and in the inconsequent operations of their minds, in the golden haze of impressions in which they live. The references to children in his essays and books show the same understanding and sympathy. There is more than mere literary charm in what he says here. In the matter of childhood we must study him with respect. He is an authority.

The slight but serious studies in biography—alas! too few—which Stevenson published, ought also to be mentioned, because their merit is apt to be overlooked by the admirers of his more ambitious works. His understanding of two such opposite types of men as Burns and Thoreau is notable, and no less notable are the courage, truth, and penetration with which he dealt with them. His essay on Burns is the most comprehensible word ever said of Burns. It makes us love Burns less, but understand him more.

The problems suggested by Stevenson are more important than his work itself. We have in him that rare combination,—a man whose theories and whose practice are of a piece. His doctrines are the mere description of his own state of mind while at work.

The quality which every one will agree in conceding to Stevenson is lightness of touch. This quality is a result of his extreme lucidity, not only of thought, but of intention. We know what he means, and we are sure that we grasp his whole meaning at the first reading. Whether he be writing a tale of travel or humorous essay, a novel of adventure, a story of horror, a morality, or a fable; in whatever key he plays,—and he seems to have taken delight in showing mastery in many,—the reader feels safe in his hands, and knows that no false note will be struck. His work makes no demands upon the attention. It is food so thoroughly peptonized that it is digested as soon as swallowed and leaves us exhilarated rather than fed.

Writing was to him an art, and almost everything that he has written has a little the air of being a *tour de force*. Stevenson's books and essays were generally brilliant imitations of established things, done somewhat in the spirit of an expert in billiards. In short, Stevenson is the most extraordinary mimic that has ever appeared in literature.

That is the reason why he has been so much praised for his style. When we say of a new thing that it "has style," we mean that it is done as we have seen things done before. Bunyan, De Foe, or Charles Lamb were to their contemporaries men without style. The English, to this day, complain of Emerson that he has no style.

If a man writes as he talks, he will be thought to have no style, until people get used to him, for literature means *what has been written*. As soon as a writer is established, his manner of writing is adopted by the literary conscience of the times, and you may follow him and still have "style." You may to-day imitate George Meredith, and people, without knowing exactly why they do it, will concede you "style." Style means tradition.

When Stevenson, writing from Samoa in the agony of his South Seas (a book he could not write because he had no paradigm and original to copy from), says that he longs for a "moment of style," he means that he wishes there would come floating through his head a memory of some other man's way of writing to which he could modulate his sentences.

It is no secret that Stevenson in early life spent much time in imitating the styles of various authors, for he has himself described the manner in which he went to work to fit himself for his career as a writer. His boyish ambition led him to employ perfectly phenomenal diligence in cultivating a perfectly phenomenal talent for imitation.

There was probably no fault in Stevenson's theory as to how a man should learn to write, and as to the discipline he must undergo. Almost all the greatest artists have shown, in their early work, traces of their early masters. These they outgrow. "For as this temple waxes, the inward service of the mind and soul grows wide withal;" and an author's own style breaks through the coverings of his education, as a hyacinth breaks from the bulb. It is noticeable, too, that the early and imitative work of great men generally belongs to a particular school to which

their maturity bears a logical relation. They do not cruise about in search of a style or vehicle, trying all and picking up hints here and there, but they fall incidentally and genuinely under influences which move them and afterwards qualify their original work.

With Stevenson it was different; for he went in search of a style as Coelebs in search of a wife. He was an eclectic by nature. He became a remarkable, if not a unique phenomenon,—for he never grew up. Whether or not there was some obscure connection between his bodily troubles and the arrest of his intellectual development, it is certain that Stevenson remained a boy till the day of his death.

The boy was the creature in the universe whom Stevenson best understood. Let us remember how a boy feels about art, and why he feels so. The intellect is developed in the child with such astonishing rapidity that long before physical maturity its head is filled with ten thousand things learned from books and not drawn directly from real life.

The form and setting in which the boy learns of matters sticks in the mind as a part of the matters themselves. He cannot disentangle what is conventional from what is original, because he has not yet a first-hand acquaintance with life by which to interpret.

Every schoolboy of talent writes essays in the style of Addison, because he is taught that this is the correct way of writing. He has no means of knowing that in writing in this manner he is using his mind in a very peculiar and artificial way,—a way entirely foreign to Addison himself; and that he is really striving not so much to say something himself as to reproduce an

effect.

There is one thing which young people do not know, and which they find out during the process of growing up,—and that is that good things in art have been done by men whose entire attention was absorbed in an attempt to tell the truth, and who have been chiefly marked by a deep unconsciousness.

To a boy, the great artists of the world are a lot of necromancers, whose enchantments can perhaps be stolen and used again. To a man, they are a lot of human beings, and their works are parts of them. Their works are their hands and their feet, their organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions. To a man, it is as absurd to imitate the manner of Dean Swift in writing as it would be to imitate the manner of Dr. Johnson in eating. But Stevenson was not a man, he was a boy; or, to speak more accurately, the attitude of his mind towards his work remained unaltered from boyhood till death, though his practice and experiment gave him, as he grew older, a greater mastery over his materials. It is in this attitude of Stevenson's mind toward his own work that we must search for the heart of his mystery.

He conceived of himself as "an artist," and of his writings as performances. As a consequence, there is an undertone of insincerity in almost everything which he has written. His attention is never wholly absorbed in his work, but is greatly taken up with the notion of how each stroke of it is going to appear.

We have all experienced, while reading his books, a certain undefinable suspicion which interferes with the enjoyment of some people, and enhances that of

others. It is not so much the cream-tarts themselves that we suspect, as the motive of the giver.

> "I am in the habit," said Prince Florizel, "of looking not so much to the nature of the gift as to the spirit in which it is offered."
>
> "The spirit, sir," returned the young man, with another bow, "is one of mockery."

This doubt about Stevenson's truth and candor is one of the results of the artistic doctrines which he professed and practised. He himself regards his work as a toy; and how can we do otherwise?

It seems to be a law of psychology that the only way in which the truth can be strongly told is in the course of a search for truth. The moment a man strives after some "effect," he disqualifies himself from making that effect; for he draws the interest of his audience to the same matters that occupy his own mind; namely, upon his experiment and his efforts. It is only when a man is saying something that he believes is obviously and eternally true, that he can communicate spiritual things.

Ultimately speaking, the vice of Stevenson's theories about art is that they call for a self-surrender by the artist of his own mind to the pleasure of others, for a subordination of himself to the production of this "effect" in the mind of another. They degrade and belittle him. Let Stevenson speak for himself; the thought contained in the following passage is found in a hundred places in his writings and dominated his artistic life.

> "The French have a romantic evasion for one employment, and call its practitioners

> the Daughters of Joy. The artist is of the same family, he is of the Sons of Joy, chose his trade to please himself, gains his livelihood by pleasing others, and has parted with something of the sterner dignity of men. The poor Daughter of Joy carrying her smiles and her finery quite unregarded through the crowd, makes a figure which it is impossible to recall without a wounding pity. She is the type of the unsuccessful artist."

These are the doctrines and beliefs which, time out of mind, have brought the arts into contempt. They are as injurious as they are false, and they will checkmate the progress of any man or of any people that believes them. They corrupt and menace not merely the fine arts, but every other form of human expression in an equal degree. They are as insulting to the comic actor as they are to Michael Angelo, for the truth and beauty of low comedy are as dignified, and require of the artist the same primary passion for life for its own sake, as the truth and beauty of The Divine Comedy. The doctrines are the outcome of an Alexandrine age. After art has once learnt to draw its inspiration directly from life and has produced some masterpieces, then imitations begin to creep in. That Stevenson's doctrines tend to produce imitative work is obvious. If the artist is a fisher of men, then we must examine the works of those who have known how to bait their hooks: in fiction,—De Foe, Fielding, Walter Scott, Dumas, Balzac.

To a study of these men, Stevenson had, as we have seen, devoted the most plastic years of his life. The style and even the mannerisms of each of them, he had trained himself to reproduce. One can almost

write their names across his pages and assign each as a presiding genius over a share of his work. Not that Stevenson purloined or adopted in a mean spirit, and out of vanity. His enthusiasm was at the bottom of all he did. He was well read in the belles lettres of England and the romanticists of France. These books were his bible. He was steeped in the stage-land and cloud-land of sentimental literature. From time to time, he emerged, trailing clouds of glory and showering sparkles from his hands.

A close inspection shows his clouds and sparkles to be stage properties; but Stevenson did not know it. The public not only does not know it, but does not care whether it be so or not. The doughty old novel readers who knew their Scott and Ainsworth and Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade, their Dumas and their Cooper, were the very people whose hearts were warmed by Stevenson. If you cross-question one of these, he will admit that Stevenson is after all a revival, an echo, an after-glow of the romantic movement, and that he brought nothing new. He will scout any comparison between Stevenson and his old favorites, but he is ready enough to take Stevenson for what he is worth. The most casual reader recognizes a whole department of Stevenson's work as competing in a general way with Walter Scott.

Kidnapped is a romantic fragment whose original is to be found in the Scotch scenes of the Waverley Novels. An incident near the beginning of it, the curse of Jennet Clouston upon the House of Shaws, is transferred from Guy Mannering almost literally. But the curse of Meg Merrilies in Guy Mannering—which is one of the most surprising and powerful scenes Scott ever wrote—is an organic part of the story, whereas the transcript is a thing stuck in for effect,

and the curse is put in the mouth of an old woman whose connection with the plot is apocryphal, and who never appears again.

Treasure Island is a piece of astounding ingenuity, in which the manner is taken from Robinson Crusoe, and the plot belongs to the era of the detective story. The Treasure of Franchard is a French farce or light comedy of bourgeois life, of a type already a little old-fashioned, but perfectly authentic. The tone, the *mise-en-scène*, the wit, the character-drawing, the very language, are all so marvellously reproduced from the French, that we almost see the footlights while we read it.

The Sieur de Maletroit's Door embodies the same idea as a well-known French play in verse and in one act. The version of Stevenson is like an exquisite water-color copy, almost as good as the original.

The Isle of Voices is the production of a man of genius. No one can too much admire the legerdemain of the magician who could produce this thing; for it is a story out of the Arabian Nights, told with a perfection of mannerism, a reproduction of the English in which the later translators of the Arabian Nights have seen fit to deal, a simulation of the movement and detail of the Eastern stories which fairly takes our breath away.

It is "ask and have" with this man. Like Mephistopheles in the Raths-Keller, he gives us what vintage we call for. Olalla is an instance in point. Any one familiar with Mérimée's stories will smile at the naïveté with which Stevenson has taken the leading idea of Lokis, and surrounded it with the Spanish sunshine of Carmen. But we have "fables," moralities, and psychology, Jekyl and Hyde,

Markheim, and Will O' the Mill. We have the pasteboard feudal style, in which people say, "Ye can go, boy; for I will keep your good friend and my good gossip company till curfew—aye, and by St. Mary till the Sun get up again." We must have opera bouffe, as in Prince Otto; melodrama, as in The Pavilion on the Links; the essay of almost biblical solemnity in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne, the essay of charming humor in the style of Charles Lamb, the essay of introspection and egotism in the style of Montaigne.

Let us not for a moment imagine that Stevenson has stolen these things and is trying to palm them off on us as his own. He has absorbed them. He does not know their origin. He gives them out again in joy and in good faith with zest and amusement and in the excitement of a new discovery.

If all these many echoing voices do not always ring accurately true, yet their number is inordinate and remarkable. They will not bear an immediate comparison with their originals; but we may be sure that the vintages of Mephistopheles would not have stood a comparison with real wine.

One of the books which established Stevenson's fame was the New Arabian Nights. The series of tales about Prince Florizel of Bohemia was a brilliant, original, and altogether delightful departure in light literature. The stories are a frank and wholesome caricature of the French detective story. They are legitimate pieces of literature because they are burlesque, and because the smiling Mephistopheles who lurks everywhere in the pages of Stevenson is for this time the acknowledged showman of the piece.

A burlesque is always an imitation shown off by the foil of some incongruous setting. The setting in this case Stevenson found about him in the omnibuses, the clubs, and the railways of sordid and complicated London.

In this early book Stevenson seems to have stumbled upon the true employment of his powers without realizing the treasure trove, for he hardly returned to the field of humor, for which his gifts most happily fitted him. As a writer of burlesque he truly expresses himself. He is full of genuine fun.

The fantastic is half brother to the burlesque. Each implies some original as a point of departure, and as a scheme for treatment some framework upon which the author's wit and fancy shall be lavished.

It is in the region of the fantastic that Stevenson loved to wander, and it is in this direction that he expended his marvellous ingenuity. His fairy tales and arabesques must be read as they were written, in the humor of forty fancies and without any heavy-fisted intention of getting new ideas about life. It will be said that the defect of Stevenson is expressed by these very qualities, fancy and ingenuity, because they are contradictory, and the second destroys the first. Be this as it may, there are many people whose pleasure is not spoiled by elaboration and filigree work.

Our ability to follow Stevenson in his fantasias depends very largely upon how far our imaginations and our sentimental interests are dissociated from our interest in real life. Commonplace and common-sense people, whose emotional natures are not strongly at play in the conduct of their daily lives, have a fund of unexpended mental activity, of a very

low degree of energy, which delights to be occupied with the unreal and the impossible. More than this, any mind which is daily occupied in an attempt to grasp some of the true relations governing things as they are, finds its natural relaxation in the contemplation of things as they are not,—things as they cannot be. There is probably no one who will not find himself thoroughly enjoying the fantastic, if he be mentally fatigued enough. Hence the justification of a whole branch of Stevenson's work.

After every detraction has been allowed for, there remain certain books of Stevenson's of an extraordinary and peculiar merit, books which can hardly be classed as imitations or arabesques,—Kidnapped, Weir of Hermiston, The Merry Men. These books seem at first blush to have every element of greatness, except spontaneity. The only trouble is, they are too perfect.

If, after finishing Kidnapped, or The Merry Men, we take up Guy Mannering, or The Antiquary, or any of Scott's books which treat of the peasantry, the first impression we gain is, that we are happy. The tension is gone; we are in contact with a great, sunny, benign human being who pours a flood of life out before us and floats us as the sea floats a chip. He is full of old-fashioned and absurd passages. Sometimes he proses, and sometimes he runs to seed. He is so careless of his English that his sentences are not always grammatical; but we get a total impression of glorious and wholesome life.

It is the man Walter Scott who thus excites us. This heather, these hills, these peasants, this prodigality and vigor and broad humor, enlarge and strengthen us. If we return now to Weir of Hermiston, we seem

to be entering the cell of an alchemist. All is intention, all calculation. The very style of Weir of Hermiston is English ten times distilled.

Let us imagine that directness and unconsciousness are the great qualities of style, and that Stevenson believes this. The greatest directness and unconsciousness of which Stevenson himself was capable are to be found in some of his early writings. Across the Plains, for instance, represents his most straightforward and natural style. But it happens that certain great writers who lived some time ago, and were famous examples of "directness," have expressed themselves in the speech of their own period. Stevenson rejects his own style as not good enough for him, not direct enough, not unconscious enough; he will have theirs. And so he goes out in quest of purity and truth, and brings home an elaborate archaism.

Although we think of Stevenson as a writer of fiction, his extreme popularity is due in great measure to his innumerable essays and bits of biography and autobiography, his letters, his journals, and travels and miscellaneous reminiscences.

It was his own belief that he was a very painstaking and conscientious artist, and this is true to a great extent. On the day of his death he was engaged upon the most highly organized and ambitious thing he ever attempted, and every line of it shows the hand of an engraver on steel. But it is also true that during the last years of his life he lived under the pressure of photographers and newspaper syndicates, who came to him with great sums of money in their hands. He was exploited by the press of the United States, and this is the severest ordeal which a writer

of English can pass through. There was one year in which he earned four thousand pounds. His immeasurable generosity kept him forever under the harrow in money matters, and added another burden to the weight carried by this dying and indomitable man. It is no wonder that some of his work is trivial. The wonder is that he should have produced it at all.

The journalistic work of Stevenson, beginning with his Inland Voyage, and the letters afterwards published as Across the Plains, is valuable in the inverse ratio to its embellishment. Sidney Colvin suggested to him that in the letters Across the Plains the lights were turned down. But, in truth, the light is daylight. The letters have a freshness that midnight oil could not have improved, and this fugitive sketch is of more permanent interest than all the polite essays he ever wrote.

If we compare the earlier with the later work of Stevenson as a magazine writer, we are struck with the accentuation of his mannerisms. It is not a single style which grows more intense, but his amazing skill in many which has increased.

The following is a specimen of Stevenson's natural style, and it would be hard to find a better:—

> "The day faded; the lamps were lit; a party of wild young men, who got off next evening at North Platte, stood together on the stern platform singing The Sweet By-and-By with very tuneful voices; the chums began to put up their beds; and it seemed as if the business of the day were at an end. But it was not so; for the train stopping at some station, the cars were instantly thronged with the natives, wives and

> fathers, young men and maidens, some of them in little more than night-gear, some with stable lanterns, and all offering beds for sale."

The following is from an essay written by Stevenson while under the influence of the author of Rab and his Friends.

"One such face I now remember; one such blank some half a dozen of us labor to dissemble. In his youth he was a most beautiful person, most serene and genial by disposition, full of racy words and quaint thoughts. Laughter attended on his coming.... From this disaster like a spent swimmer he came desperately ashore, bankrupt of money and consideration; creeping to the family he had deserted; with broken wing never more to rise. But in his face there was the light of knowledge that was new to it. Of the wounds of his body he was never healed; died of them gradually, with clear-eyed resignation. Of his wounded pride we knew only by his silence."

The following is in the sprightly style of the eighteenth century:—

> "Cockshot is a different article, but vastly entertaining, and has been meat and drink to me for many a long evening. His manner is dry, brisk, and pertinacious, and the choice of words not much. The point about him is his extraordinary readiness and spirit. You can propound nothing but he has either a theory about it ready made or will have one instantly on the stocks, and proceed to lay its timbers and launch it on the minute. 'Let me see,' he will say, 'give

> me a moment, I should have some theory for that.'"

But for serious matters this manner would never do, and accordingly we find that, when the subject invites him, Stevenson falls into English as early as the time of James I.

Let us imagine Bacon dedicating one of his smaller works to his physicians:—

> "There are men and classes of men that stand above the common herd: the soldier, the sailor, and the shepherd not unfrequently; the artist rarely; rarelier still the clergyman; the physician almost as a rule.... I forget as many as I remember and I ask both to pardon me, these for silence, those for inadequate speech."

After finishing off this dedication to his satisfaction, Stevenson turns over the page and writes a NOTE in the language of two and one-half centuries later. He is now the elegant *littérateur* of the last generation—one would say James Russell Lowell:—

> "The human conscience has fled of late the troublesome domain of conduct for what I should have supposed to be the less congenial field of art: there she may now be said to rage, and with special severity in all that touches dialect, so that in every novel the letters of the alphabet are tortured, and the reader wearied, to commemorate shades of mispronunciation."

But in this last extract we are still three degrees away from what can be done in the line of gentility and

delicate effeteness of style. Take the following, which is the very peach-blow of courtesy:—

"But upon one point there should be no dubiety: if a man be not frugal he has no business in the arts. If he be not frugal he steers directly for that last tragic scene of *le vieux saltimbanque*; if he be not frugal he will find it hard to continue to be honest. Some day when the butcher is knocking at the door he may be tempted, he may be obliged to turn out and sell a slovenly piece of work. If the obligation shall have arisen through no wantonness of his own, he is even to be commended, for words cannot describe how far more necessary it is that a man should support his family than that he should attain to—or preserve—distinction in the arts," etc.

Now the very next essay to this is a sort of intoned voluntary played upon the more sombre emotions.

> "What a monstrous spectre is this man, the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged in slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself; grown upon with hair like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face; a thing to set children screaming;—and yet looked at nearlier, known as his fellows know him, how surprising are his attributes."

There is a tincture of Carlyle in this mixture. There are a good many pages of Gothic type in the later essays, for Stevenson thought it the proper tone in which to speak of death, duty, immortality, and such subjects as that. He derived this impression from the works of Sir Thomas Browne. But the solemnity of Sir Thomas Browne is like a melodious thunder,

deep, sweet, unconscious, ravishing.

> "Time sadly overcometh all things and is now dominant and sitteth upon a sphinx and looketh upon Memphis and old Thebes, while his sister Oblivion reclineth semi-somnous upon a pyramid, gloriously triumphing, making puzzles of Titanian erections, and turning old glories into dreams. History sinketh beneath her cloud. The traveller as he passeth through these deserts asketh of her 'who builded them?' And she mumbleth something, but what it is he heareth not."

The frenzy to produce something like this sadly overcomes Stevenson, in his later essays. But perhaps it were to reason too curiously to pin Stevenson down to Browne. All the old masters stalk like spectres through his pages, and among them are the shades of the moderns, even men that we have dined with.

According to Stevenson, a certain kind of subject requires a certain "treatment," and the choice of his tone follows his title. These "treatments" are always traditional, and even his titles tread closely on the heels of former titles. He can write the style of Charles Lamb better than Lamb could do it himself, and his Hazlitt is very nearly as good. He fences with his left hand as well as with his right, and can manage two styles at once like Franz Liszt playing the allegretto from the 7th symphony with an air of Offenbach twined about it.

It is with a pang of disappointment that we now and then come across a style which we recognize, yet cannot place.

People who take enjoyment in the reminiscences awakened by conjuring of this kind can nowhere in the world find a master like Stevenson. Those persons belong to the bookish classes. Their numbers are insignificant, but they are important because they give countenance to the admiration of others who love Stevenson with their hearts and souls.

The reason why Stevenson represents a backward movement in literature, is that literature lives by the pouring into it of new words from speech, and new thoughts from life, and Stevenson used all his powers to exclude both from his work. He lived and wrote in the past. That this Scotchman should appear at the end of what has been a very great period of English literature, and summarize the whole of it in his two hours' traffic on the stage, gives him a strange place in the history of that literature. He is the Improvisatore, and nothing more. It is impossible to assign him rank in any line of writing. If you shut your eyes to try and place him, you find that you cannot do it. The effect he produces while we are reading him vanishes as we lay down the book, and we can recall nothing but a succession of flavors. It is not to be expected that posterity will take much interest in him, for his point and meaning are impressional. He is ephemeral, a shadow, a reflection. He is the mistletoe of English literature whose roots are not in the soil but in the tree.

But enough of the nature and training of Stevenson which fitted him to play the part he did. The cyclonic force which turned him from a secondary London novelist into something of importance and enabled him to give full play to his really unprecedented talents will be recognized on glancing about us.

We are now passing through the age of the Distribution of Knowledge. The spread of the English-speaking race since 1850, and the cheapness of printing, have brought in primers and handbooks by the million. All the books of the older literatures are being abstracted and sown abroad in popular editions. The magazines fulfil the same function; every one of them is a penny cyclopedia. Andrew Lang heads an army of organized workers who mine in the old literature and coin it into booklets and cash.

The American market rules the supply of light literature in Great Britain. While Lang culls us tales and legends and lyrics from the Norse or Provensal, Stevenson will engage to supply us with tales and legends of his own—something just as good. The two men serve the same public.

Stevenson's reputation in England was that of a comparatively light weight, but his success here was immediate. We hailed him as a classic—or something just as good. Everything he did had the very stamp and trademark of Letters, and he was as strong in one department as another. We loved this man; and thenceforward he purveyed "literature" to us at a rate to feed sixty millions of people and keep them clamoring for more.

Does any one believe that the passion of the American people for learning and for antiquity is a slight and accidental thing? Does any one believe that the taste for imitation old furniture is a pose? It creates an eddy in the Maelstrom of Commerce. It is a power like Niagara, and represents the sincere appreciation of half educated people for second rate things. There is here nothing to be ashamed of. In

fact there is everything to be proud of in this progress of the arts, this importation of culture by the carload. The state of mind it shows is a definite and typical state of mind which each individual passes through, and which precedes the discovery that real things are better than sham. When the latest Palace Hotel orders a hundred thousand dollars' worth of Louis XV. furniture to be made—and most well made—in Buffalo, and when the American public gives Stevenson an order for Pulvis et Umbra —the same forces are at work in each case. It is Chicago making culture hum.

And what kind of a man was Stevenson? Whatever may be said about his imitativeness, his good spirits were real. They are at the bottom of his success, the strong note in his work. They account for all that is paradoxical in his effect. He often displays a sentimentalism which has not the ring of reality. And yet we do not reproach him. He has by stating his artistic doctrines in their frankest form revealed the scepticism inherent in them. And yet we know that he was not a sceptic; on the contrary, we like him, and he was regarded by his friends as little lower than the angels.

Why is it that we refuse to judge him by his own utterances? The reason is that all of his writing is playful, and we know it. The instinct at the bottom of all mimicry is self-concealment. Hence the illusive and questionable personality of Stevenson. Hence our blind struggle to bind this Proteus who turns into bright fire and then into running water under our hands. The truth is that as a literary force, there was no such man as Stevenson; and after we have racked our brains to find out the mechanism which has been vanquishing the chess players of Europe, there

emerges out of the Box of Maelzel a pale boy.

But the courage of this boy, the heroism of his life, illumine all his works with a personal interest. The last ten years of his life present a long battle with death.

We read of his illnesses, his spirit; we hear how he never gave up, but continued his works by dictation and in dumb show when he was too weak to hold the pen, too weak to speak. This courage and the lovable nature of Stevenson won the world's heart. He was regarded with a peculiar tenderness such as is usually given only to the young. Honor, and admiration mingled with affection followed him to his grave. Whatever his artistic doctrines, he revealed his spiritual nature in his work. It was this nature which made him thus beloved.

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