

The Spirit of Place and Other Essays eBook

The Spirit of Place and Other Essays by Alice Meynell

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THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

With mimicry, with praises, with echoes, or with answers, the poets have all but outsung the bells. The inarticulate bell has found too much interpretation, too many rhymes professing to close with her inaccessible utterance, and to agree with her remote tongue. The bell, like the bird, is a musician pestered with literature.

To the bell, moreover, men do actual violence. You cannot shake together a nightingale's notes, or strike or drive them into haste, nor can you make a lark toll for you with intervals to suit your turn, whereas wedding-bells are compelled to seem gay by mere movement and hustling. I have known some grim bells, with not a single joyous note in the whole peal, so forced to hurry for a human festival, with their harshness made light of, as though the Bishop of Hereford had again been forced to dance in his boots by a merry highwayman.

The clock is an inexorable but less arbitrary player than the bellringer, and the chimes await their appointed time to fly—wild prisoners—by twos or threes, or in greater companies. Fugitives—one or twelve taking wing—they are sudden, they are brief, they are gone; they are delivered from the close hands of this actual present. Not in vain is the sudden upper door opened against the sky; they are away, hours of the past.

Of all unfamiliar bells, those which seem to hold the memory most surely after but one hearing are bells of an unseen cathedral of France when one has arrived by night; they are no more to be forgotten than the bells in "Parsifal." They mingle with the sound of feet in unknown streets, they are the voices of an unknown tower; they are loud in their own language. The spirit of place, which is to be seen in the shapes of the fields and the manner of the crops, to be felt in a prevalent wind, breathed in the breath of the earth, overheard in a far street-cry or in the tinkle of some black-smith, calls out and peals in the cathedral bells. It speaks its local tongue remotely, steadfastly, largely, clamorously, loudly, and greatly by these voices; you hear the sound in its dignity, and you know how familiar, how childlike, how life-long it is in the ears of the people. The bells are strange, and you know how homely they must be. Their utterances are, as it were, the classics of a dialect.

Spirit of place! It is for this we travel, to surprise its subtlety; and where it is a strong and dominant angel, that place, seen once, abides entire in the memory with all its own accidents, its habits, its breath, its name. It is recalled all a lifetime, having been perceived a week, and is not scattered but abides, one living body of remembrance. The untravelled spirit of place—not to be pursued, for it never flies, but always to be discovered, never absent, without variation—lurks in the by-ways and rules over the towers, indestructible, an indescribable

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unity. It awaits us always in its ancient and eager freshness. It is sweet and nimble within its immemorial boundaries, but it never crosses them. Long white roads outside have mere suggestions of it and prophecies; they give promise not of its coming, for it abides, but of a new and singular and unforeseen goal for our present pilgrimage, and of an intimacy to be made. Was ever journey too hard or too long that had to pay such a visit? And if by good fortune it is a child who is the pilgrim, the spirit of place gives him a peculiar welcome, for antiquity and the conceiver of antiquity (who is only a child) know one another; nor is there a more delicate perceiver of locality than a child. He is well used to words and voices that he does not understand, and this is a condition of his simplicity; and when those unknown words are bells, loud in the night, they are to him as homely and as old as lullabies.

If, especially in England, we make rough and reluctant bells go in gay measures, when we whip them to run down the scale to ring in a wedding—bells that would step to quite another and a less agile march with a better grace—there are belfries that hold far sweeter companies. If there is no music within Italian churches, there is a most curious local immemorial music in many a campanile on the heights. Their way is for the ringers to play a tune on the festivals, and the tunes are not hymn tunes or popular melodies, but proper bell-tunes, made for bells. Doubtless they were made in times better versed than ours in the sub-divisions of the arts, and better able to understand the strength that lies ready in the mere little submission to the means of a little art, and to the limits—nay, the very embarrassments—of those means. If it were but possible to give here a real bell-tune—which cannot be, for those melodies are rather long—the reader would understand how some village musician of the past used his narrow means as a composer for the bells, with what freshness, completeness, significance, fancy, and what effect of liberty.

These hamlet-bells are the sweetest, as to their own voices, in the world. Then I speak of their antiquity I use the word relatively. The belfries are no older than the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the time when Italy seems to have been generally rebuilt. But, needless to say, this is antiquity for music, especially in Italy. At that time they must have had foundries for bells of tender voices, and pure, warm, light, and golden throats, precisely tuned. The hounds of Theseus had not a more just scale, tuned in a peal, than a North Italian belfry holds in leash. But it does not send them out in a mere scale, it touches them in the order of the game of a charming melody. Of all cheerful sounds made by man this is by far the most light-hearted. You do not hear it from the great churches. Giotto's coloured tower in Florence, that carries the bells for Santa Maria del Fiore and Brunelleschi's silent dome, does not ring more than four contralto notes, tuned with sweetness, depth, and dignity, and swinging one musical phrase which softly fills the country.

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The village belfry it is that grows so fantastic and has such nimble bells. Obviously it stands alone with its own village, and can therefore hear its own tune from beginning to end. There are no other bells in earshot. Other such dovecote-doors are suddenly set open to the cloud, on a *festa* morning, to let fly those soft-voiced flocks, but the nearest is behind one of many mountains, and our local tune is uninterrupted. Doubtless this is why the little, secluded, sequestered art of composing melodies for bells—charming division of an art, having its own ends and means, and keeping its own wings for unfolding by law—dwells in these solitary places. No tunes in a town would get this hearing, or would be made clear to the end of their frolic amid such a wide and lofty silence.

Nor does every inner village of Italy hold a bell-tune of its own; the custom is Ligurian. Nowhere so much as in Genoa does the nervous tourist complain of church bells in the morning, and in fact he is made to hear an honest rout of them betimes. But the nervous tourist has not, perhaps, the sense of place, and the genius of place does not signal to him to go and find it among innumerable hills, where one by one, one by one, the belfries stand and play their tunes. Variable are those lonely melodies, having a differing gaiety for the festivals; and a pitiful air is played for the burial of a villager.

As for the poets, there is but one among so many of their bells that seems to toll with a spiritual music so loud as to be unforgotten when the mind goes up a little higher than the earth, to listen in thought to earth's untethered sounds. This is Milton's curfew, that sways across one of the greatest of all the seashores of poetry—"the wide-watered."

MRS. DINGLEY

We cannot do her honour by her Christian name. {1} All we have to call her by more tenderly is the mere D, the D that ties her to Stella, with whom she made the two-in-one whom Swift loved "better a thousand times than life, as hope saved." MD, without full stops, Swift writes it eight times in a line for the pleasure of writing it. "MD sometimes means Stella alone," says one of many editors. "The letters were written nominally to Stella and Mrs. Dingley," says another, "but it does not require to be said that it was really for Stella's sake alone that they were penned." Not so. "MD" never stands for Stella alone. And the editor does not yet live who shall persuade one honest reader, against the word of Swift, that Swift loved Stella only, with an ordinary love, and not, by a most delicate exception, Stella and Dingley, so joined that they make the "she" and "her" of every letter. And this shall be a paper of reparation to Mrs. Dingley.

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No one else in literary history has been so defrauded of her honours. In love “to divide is not to take away,” as Shelley says; and Dingley’s half of the tender things said to MD is equal to any whole, and takes nothing from the whole of Stella’s half. But the sentimentalist has fought against Mrs. Dingley from the outset. He has disliked her, shirked her, misconceived her, and effaced her. Sly sentimentalist—he finds her irksome. Through one of his most modern representatives he has but lately called her a “chaperon.” A chaperon!

MD was not a sentimentalist. Stella was not so, though she has been pressed into that character; D certainly was not, and has in this respect been spared by the chronicler; and MD together were “saucy charming MD,” “saucy little, pretty, dear rogues,” “little monkeys mine,” “little mischievous girls,” “nautinautinautidear girls,” “brats,” “huzzies both,” “impudence and saucy-face,” “saucy noses,” “my dearest lives and delights,” “dear little young women,” “good dallars, not crying dallars” (which means “girls”), “ten thousand times dearest MD,” and so forth in a hundred repetitions. They are, every now and then, “poor MD,” but obviously not because of their own complaining. Swift called them so because they were mortal; and he, like all great souls, lived and loved, conscious every day of the price, which is death.

The two were joined by love, not without solemnity, though man, with his summary and wholesale ready-made sentiment, has thus obstinately put them asunder. No wholesale sentiment can do otherwise than foolishly play havoc with such a relation. To Swift it was the most secluded thing in the world. “I am weary of friends, and friendships are all monsters, except MD’s;” “I ought to read these letters I write after I have done. But I hope it does not puzzle little Dingley to read, for I think I mend: but methinks,” he adds, “when I write plain, I do not know how, but we are not alone, all the world can see us. A bad scrawl is so snug; it looks like PMD.” Again: “I do not like women so much as I did. MD, you must know, are not women.” “God Almighty preserve you both and make us happy together.” “I say Amen with all my heart and vitals, that we may never be asunder ten days together while poor Presto lives.” “Farewell, dearest beloved MD, and love poor, poor Presto, who has not had one happy day since he left you, as hope saved.”

With them—with her—he hid himself in the world, at Court, at the bar of St. James’s coffee-house, whither he went on the Irish mail-day, and was “in pain except he saw MD’s little handwriting.” He hid with them in the long labours of these exquisite letters every night and morning. If no letter came, he comforted himself with thinking that “he had it yet to be happy with.” And the world has agreed to hide under its own manifold and lachrymose blunders the grace and singularity—the distinction—of this sweet romance. “Little, sequestered pleasure-house”—it seemed as though “the many could not miss it,” but not even the few have found it.

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It is part of the scheme of the sympathetic historian that Stella should be the victim of hope deferred, watching for letters from Swift. But day and night Presto complains of the scantiness of MD's little letters; he waits upon "her" will: "I shall make a sort of journal, and when it is full I will send it whether MD writes or not; and so that will be pretty." "Naughty girls that will not write to a body!" "I wish you were whipped for forgetting to send. Go, be far enough, negligent baggages." "You, Mistress Stella, shall write your share, and then comes Dingley altogether, and then Stella a little crumb at the end; and then conclude with something handsome and genteel, as 'your most humble cumdumble.'" But Scott and Macaulay and Thackeray are all exceedingly sorry for Stella.

Swift is most charming when he is feigning to complain of his task: "Here is such a stir and bustle with this little MD of ours; I must be writing every night; O Lord, O Lord!" "I must go write idle things, and twittle twattle." "These saucy jades take up so much of my time with writing to them in the morning." Is it not a stealthy wrong done upon Mrs. Dingley that she should be stripped of all these ornaments to her name and memory? When Swift tells a woman in a letter that there he is "writing in bed, like a tiger," she should go gay in the eyes of all generations.

They will not let Stella go gay, because of sentiment; and they will not let Mrs. Dingley go gay, because of sentiment for Stella. Marry come up! Why did not the historians assign all the tender passages (taken very seriously) to Stella, and let Dingley have the jokes, then? That would have been no ill share for Dingley. But no, forsooth, Dingley is allowed nothing.

There are passages, nevertheless, which can hardly be taken from her. For now and then Swift parts his dear MD. When he does so he invariably drops those initials and writes "Stella" or "Ppt" for the one, and "D" or "Dingley" for the other. There is no exception to this anywhere. He is anxious about Stella's "little eyes," and about her health generally; whereas Dingley is strong. Poor Ppt, he thinks, will not catch the "new fever," because she is not well; "but why should D escape it, pray?" And Mrs. Dingley is rebuked for her tale of a journey from Dublin to Wexford. "I doubt, Madam Dingley, you are apt to lie in your travels, though not so bad as Stella; she tells thumpers." Stella is often reproofed for her spelling, and Mrs. Dingley writes much the better hand. But she is a puzzle-headed woman, like another. "What do you mean by my fourth letter, Madam Dinglibus? Does not Stella say you had my fifth, goody Blunder?" "Now, Mistress Dingley, are you not an impudent slut to except a letter next packet? Unreasonable baggage! No, little Dingley, I am always in bed by twelve, and I take great care of myself." "You are a pretending slut, indeed, with your 'fourth' and 'fifth' in the

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margin, and your 'journal' and everything. O Lord, never saw the like, we shall never have done." "I never saw such a letter, so saucy, so journalish, so everything." Swift is insistently grateful for their inquiries for his health. He pauses seriously to thank them in the midst of his prattle. Both women—MD—are rallied on their politics: "I have a fancy that Ppt is a Tory, I fancy she looks like one, and D a sort of trimmer."

But it is for Dingley separately that Swift endured a wild bird in his lodgings. His man Patrick had got one to take over to her in Ireland. "He keeps it in a closet, where it makes a terrible litter; but I say nothing; I am as tame as a clout."

Forgotten Dingley, happy in this, has not had to endure the ignominy, in a hundred essays, to be retrospectively offered to Swift as an unclaimed wife; so far so good. But two hundred years is long for her to have gone stripped of so radiant a glory as is hers by right. "Better, thanks to MD's prayers," wrote the immortal man who loved her, in a private fragment of a journal, never meant for Dingley's eyes, nor for Ppt's, nor for any human eyes; and the rogue Stella has for two centuries stolen all the credit of those prayers, and all the thanks of that pious benediction.

SOLITUDE

The wild man is alone at will, and so is the man for whom civilization has been kind. But there are the multitudes to whom civilization has given little but its reaction, its rebound, its chips, its refuse, its shavings, sawdust and waste, its failures; to them solitude is a right foregone or a luxury unattained; a right foregone, we may name it, in the case of the nearly savage, and a luxury unattained in the case of the nearly refined. These has the movement of the world thronged together into some blind by-way.

Their share in the enormous solitude which is the common, unbounded, and virtually illimitable possession of all mankind has lapsed, unclaimed. They do not know it is theirs. Of many of their kingdoms they are ignorant, but of this most ignorant. They have not guessed that they own for every man a space inviolate, a place of unhidden liberty and of no obscure enfranchisement. They do not claim even the solitude of closed corners, the narrow privacy of the lock and key; nor could they command so much. For the solitude that has a sky and a horizon they know not how to wish.

It lies in a perpetual distance. England has leagues thereof, landscapes, verge beyond verge, a thousand thousand places in the woods, and on uplifted hills. Or rather, solitudes are not to be measured by miles; they are to be numbered by days. They are freshly and freely the dominion of every man for the day of his possession. There is loneliness for innumerable solitaires. As many days as there are in all the ages, so many solitudes are there for men. This is the open house of the earth; no one is

refused. Nor is the space shortened or the silence marred because, one by one, men in multitudes have been alone there before. Solitude is separate experience. Nay, solitudes are not to be numbered by days, but by men themselves. Every man of the living and every man of the dead might have had his "privacy of light."

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It needs no park. It is to be found in the merest working country; and a thicket may be as secret as a forest. It is not so difficult to get for a time out of sight and earshot. Even if your solitude be enclosed, it is still an open solitude, so there be "no cloister for the eyes," and a space of far country or a cloud in the sky be privy to your hiding-place. But the best solitude does not hide at all.

This the people who have drifted together into the streets live whole lives and never know. Do they suffer from their deprivation of even the solitude of the hiding-place? There are many who never have a whole hour alone. They live in reluctant or indifferent companionship, as people may in a boarding-house, by paradoxical choice, familiar with one another and not intimate. They live under careless observation and subject to a vagabond curiosity. Theirs is the involuntary and perhaps the unconscious loss which is futile and barren.

One knows the men, and the many women, who have sacrificed all their solitude to the perpetual society of the school, the cloister, or the hospital ward. They walk without secrecy, candid, simple, visible, without moods, unchangeable, in a constant communication and practice of action and speech. Theirs assuredly is no barren or futile loss, and they have a conviction, and they bestow the conviction, of solitude deferred.

Who has painted solitude so that the solitary seemed to stand alone and inaccessible? There is the loneliness of the shepherdess in many a drawing of J.F. Millet. The little figure is away, aloof. The girl stands so when the painter is gone. She waits so on the sun for the closing of the hours of pasture. Millet has her as she looks, out of sight.

Now, although solitude is a prepared, secured, defended, elaborate possession of the rich, they too deny themselves the natural solitude of a woman with a child. A newly-born child is so nursed and talked about, handled and jolted and carried about by aliens, and there is so much importunate service going forward, that a woman is hardly alone long enough to become aware, in recollection, how her own blood moves separately, beside her, with another rhythm and different pulses. All is commonplace until the doors are closed upon the two. This unique intimacy is a profound retreat, an absolute seclusion. It is more than single solitude; it is a redoubled isolation more remote than mountains, safer than valleys, deeper than forests, and further than mid-sea.

That solitude partaken—the only partaken solitude in the world—is the Point of Honour of ethics. Treachery to that obligation and a betrayal of that confidence might well be held to be the least pardonable of all crimes. There is no innocent sleep so innocent as sleep shared between a woman and a child, the little breath hurrying beside the longer, as a child's foot runs. But the favourite crime of the sentimentalist is that of a woman against her child. Her power, her intimacy, her opportunity, that should be her accusers, are held to excuse her. She gains the most slovenly of indulgences and the grossest compassion, on the vulgar grounds that her crime was easy.

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Lawless and vain art of a certain kind is apt to claim to-day, by the way, some such fondling as a heroine of the dock receives from common opinion. The vain artist had all the opportunities of the situation. He was master of his own purpose, such as it was; it was his secret, and the public was not privy to his artistic conscience. He does violence to the obligations of which he is aware, and which the world does not know very explicitly. Nothing is easier. Or he is lawless in a more literal sense, but only hopes the world will believe that he has a whole code of his own making. It would, nevertheless, be less unworthy to break obvious rules obviously in the obvious face of the public, and to abide the common rebuke.

It has just been said that a park is by no means necessary for the preparation of a country solitude. Indeed, to make those far and wide and long approaches and avenues to peace seems to be a denial of the accessibility of what should be so simple. A step, a pace or so aside, is enough to lead thither.

A park insists too much, and, besides, does not insist very sincerely. In order to fulfil the apparent professions and to keep the published promise of a park, the owner thereof should be a lover of long seclusion or of a very life of loneliness. He should have gained the state of solitariness which is a condition of life quite unlike any other. The traveller who may have gone astray in countries where an almost life-long solitude is possible knows how invincibly apart are the lonely figures he has seen in desert places there. Their loneliness is broken by his passage, it is true, but hardly so to them. They look at him, but they are not aware that he looks at them. Nay, they look at him as though they were invisible. Their un-self-consciousness is absolute; it is in the wild degree. They are solitaires, body and soul; even when they are curious, and turn to watch the passer-by, they are essentially alone. Now, no one ever found that attitude in a squire's figure, or that look in any country gentleman's eyes. The squire is not a life-long solitary. He never bore himself as though he were invisible. He never had the impersonal ways of a herdsman in the remoter Apennines, with a blind, blank hut in the rocks for his dwelling. Millet would not even have taken him as a model for a solitary in the briefer and milder sylvan solitudes of France. And yet nothing but a life-long, habitual, and wild solitariness would be quite proportionate to a park of any magnitude.

If there is a look of human eyes that tells of perpetual loneliness, so there is also the familiar look that is the sign of perpetual crowds. It is the London expression, and, in its way, the Paris expression. It is the quickly caught, though not interested, look, the dull but ready glance of those who do not know of their forfeited place apart; who have neither the open secret nor the close; no reserve, no need of refuge, no flight nor impulse of flight; no moods but what they may brave out in the street, no hope of news from solitary counsels.

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THE LADY OF THE LYRICS

She is eclipsed, or gone, or in hiding. But the sixteenth century took her for granted as the object of song; she was a class, a state, a sex. It was scarcely necessary to waste the lyrist's time—time that went so gaily to metre as not to brook delays—in making her out too clearly. She had no more of what later times call individuality than has the rose, her rival, her foil when she was kinder, her superior when she was cruel, her ever fresh and ever conventional paragon. She needed not to be devised or divined; she was ready. A merry heart goes all the day; the lyrist's never grew weary. Honest men never grow tired of bread or of any other daily things whereof the sweetness is in their own simplicity.

The lady of the lyrics was not loved in mortal earnest, and her punishment now and then for her ingratitude was to be told that she was loved in jest. She did not love; her fancy was fickle; she was not moved by long service, which, by the way, was evidently to be taken for granted precisely like the whole long past of a dream. She had not a good temper. When the poet groans it seems that she has laughed at him; when he flouts her, we may understand that she has chidden her lyrist in no temperate terms. In doing this she has sinned not so much against him as against Love. With that she is perpetually reprov'd. The lyrist complains to Love, pities Love for her scorning, and threatens to go away with Love, who is on his side. The sweetest verse is tuned to love when the loved one proves worthy.

There is no record of success for this policy. She goes on dancing or scolding, as the case may be, and the lyrist goes on boasting of his constancy, or suddenly renounces it for a day. The situation has variants, but no surprise or ending. The lover's convention is explicit enough, but it might puzzle a reader to account for the lady's. Pride in her beauty, at any rate, is hers—pride so great that she cannot bring herself to perceive the shortness of her day. She is so unobservant as to need to be told that life is brief, and youth briefer than life; that the rose fades, and so forth.

Now we need not assume that the lady of the lyrics ever lived. But taking her as the perfectly unanimous conception of the lyrists, how is it she did not discover these things unaided? Why does the lover invariably imagine her with a mind intensely irritable under his own praise and poetry? Obviously we cannot have her explanation of any of these matters. Why do the poets so much lament the absence of truth in one whose truth would be of little moment? And why was the convention so pleasant, among all others, as to occupy a whole age—nay, two great ages—of literature?

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Music seems to be principally answerable. For the lyrics of the lady are “words for music” by a great majority. There is hardly a single poem in the Elizabethan Song-books, properly so named, that has what would in our day be called a tone of sentiment. Music had not then the tone herself; she was ingenious, and so must the words be. She had the air of epigram, and an accurately definite limit. So, too, the lady of the lyrics, who might be called the lady of the stanzas, so strictly does she go by measure. When she is quarrelsome, it is but fugishness; when she dances, she does it by a canon. She could not but be perverse, merrily sung to such grave notes.

So fixed was the law of this perversity that none in the song-books is allowed to be kind enough for a “melody,” except one lady only. She may thus derogate, for the exceedingly Elizabethan reason that she is “brown.” She is brown and kind, and a “sad flower,” but the song made for her would have been too insipid, apparently, without an antithesis. The fair one is warned that her disdain makes her even less lovely than the brown.

Fair as a lily, hard to please, easily angry, ungrateful for innumerable verses, uncertain with the regularity of the madrigal, and inconstant with the punctuality of a stanza, she has gone with the arts of that day; and neither verse nor music will ever make such another lady. She refused to observe the transiency of roses; she never really intended—much as she was urged—to be a shepherdess; she was never persuaded to mitigate her dress. In return, the world has let her disappear. She scorned the poets until they turned upon her in the epigram of many a final couplet; and of these the last has been long written. Her “No” was set to counterpoint in the part-song, and she frightened Love out of her sight in a ballet. Those occupations are gone, and the lovely Elizabethan has slipped away. She was something less than mortal.

But she who was more than mortal was mortal too. This was no lady of the unanimous lyrists, but a rare visitant unknown to these exquisite little talents. She was not set for singing, but poetry spoke of her; sometimes when she was sleeping, and then Fletcher said—

None can rock Heaven to sleep but her.

Or when she was singing, and Carew rhymed—

Ask me no more whither doth haste
The nightingale when May is past;
For in your sweet dividing throat
She winters, and keeps warm her note.

Sometimes when the lady was dead, and Carew, again, wrote on her monument—

And here the precious dust is laid,
Whose purely-tempered clay was made
So fine that it the guest betrayed.

But there was besides another Lady of the lyrics; one who will never pass from the world, but has passed from song. In the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century this lady was Death. Her inspiration never failed; not a poet but found it as fresh as the inspiration of life. Fancy was not quenched by the inevitable thought in those days, as it is in ours, and the phrase lost no dignity by the integrity of use.

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To every man it happens that at one time of his life—for a space of years or for a space of months—he is convinced of death with an incomparable reality. It might seem as though literature, living the life of a man, underwent that conviction in those ages. Death was as often on the tongues of men in older ages, and oftener in their hands, but in the sixteenth century it was at their hearts. The discovery of death did not shake the poets from their composure. On the contrary, the verse is never measured with more majestic effect than when it moves in honour of this Lady of the lyrics. Sir Walter Raleigh is but a jerky writer when he is rhyming other things, however bitter or however solemn; but his lines on death, which are also lines on immortality, are infinitely noble. These are, needless to say, meditations upon death by law and violence; and so are the ingenious rhymes of Chidioc Tichborne, written after his last prose in his farewell letter to his wife—"Now, Sweet-cheek, what is left to bestow on thee, a small recompense for thy deservings"—and singularly beautiful prose is this. So also are Southwell's words. But these are exceptional deaths, and more dramatic than was needed to awake the poetry of the meditative age.

It was death as the end of the visible world and of the idle business of life—not death as a passage nor death as a fear or a darkness—that was the Lady of the lyrics. Nor was their song of the act of dying. With this a much later and much more trivial literature busied itself. Those two centuries felt with a shock that death would bring an end, and that its equalities would make vain the differences of wit and wealth which they took apparently more seriously than to us seems probable. They never wearied of the wonder. The poetry of our day has an entirely different emotion for death as parting. It was not parting that the lyrics sang of; it was the mere simplicity of death. None of our contemporaries will take such a subject; they have no more than the ordinary conviction of the matter. For the great treatment of obvious things there must evidently be an extraordinary conviction.

But whether the chief Lady of the lyrics be this, or whether she be the implacable Elizabethan feigned by the love-songs, she has equally passed from before the eyes of poets.

JULY

One has the leisure of July for perceiving all the differences of the green of leaves. It is no longer a difference in degrees of maturity, for all the trees have darkened to their final tone, and stand in their differences of character and not of mere date. Almost all the green is grave, not sad and not dull. It has a darkened and a daily colour, in majestic but not obvious harmony with dark grey skies, and might look, to inconstant eyes, as prosaic after spring as eleven o'clock looks after the dawn.

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Gravity is the word—not solemnity as towards evening, nor menace as at night. The daylight trees of July are signs of common beauty, common freshness, and a mystery familiar and abiding as night and day. In childhood we all have a more exalted sense of dawn and summer sunrise than we ever fully retain or quite recover; and also a far higher sensibility for April and April evenings—a heartache for them, which in riper years is gradually and irretrievably consoled.

But, on the other hand, childhood has so quickly learned to find daily things tedious, and familiar things importunate, that it has no great delight in the mere middle of the day, and feels weariness of the summer that has ceased to change visibly. The poetry of mere day and of late summer becomes perceptible to mature eyes that have long ceased to be sated, have taken leave of weariness, and cannot now find anything in nature too familiar; eyes which have, indeed, lost sight of the further awe of midsummer daybreak, and no longer see so much of the past in April twilight as they saw when they had no past; but which look freshly at the dailiness of green summer, of early afternoon, of every sky of any form that comes to pass, and of the darkened elms.

Not unbeloved is this serious tree, the elm, with its leaf sitting close, unthrilled. Its stature gives it a dark gold head when it looks alone to a late sun. But if one could go by all the woods, across all the old forests that are now meadowlands set with trees, and could walk a county gathering trees of a single kind in the mind, as one walks a garden collecting flowers of a single kind in the hand, would not the harvest be a harvest of poplars? A veritable passion for poplars is a most intelligible passion. The eyes do gather them, far and near, on a whole day's journey. Not one is unperceived, even though great timber should be passed, and hill-sides dense and deep with trees. The fancy makes a poplar day of it. Immediately the country looks alive with signals; for the poplars everywhere reply to the glance. The woods may be all various, but the poplars are separate.

All their many kinds (and aspens, their kin, must be counted with them) shake themselves perpetually free of the motionless forest. It is easy to gather them. Glances sent into the far distance pay them a flash of recognition of their gentle flashes; and as you journey you are suddenly aware of them close by. Light and the breezes are as quick as the eyes of a poplar-lover to find the willing tree that dances to be seen.

No lurking for them, no reluctance. One could never make for oneself an oak day so well. The oaks would wait to be found, and many would be missed from the gathering. But the poplars are alert enough for a traveller by express; they have an alarum aloft, and do not sleep. From within some little grove of other trees a single poplar makes a slight sign; or a long row of poplars suddenly sweep the wind. They are salient everywhere, and full of replies. They are as fresh as streams.

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It is difficult to realize a drought where there are many poplars. And yet their green is not rich; the coolest have a colour much mingled with a cloud-grey. It does but need fresh and simple eyes to recognize their unfaded life. When the other trees grow dark and keep still, the poplar and the aspen do not darken—or hardly—and the deepest summer will not find a day in which they do not keep awake. No waters are so vigilant, even where a lake is bare to the wind.

When Keats said of his Dian that she fastened up her hair “with fingers cool as aspen leaves,” he knew the coolest thing in the world. It is a coolness of colour, as well as of a leaf which the breeze takes on both sides—the greenish and the greyish. The poplar green has no glows, no gold; it is an austere colour, as little rich as the colour of willows, and less silvery than theirs. The sun can hardly gild it; but he can shine between. Poplars and aspens let the sun through with the wind. You may have the sky sprinkled through them in high midsummer, when all the woods are close.

Sending your fancy poplar-gathering, then, you ensnare wild trees, beating with life. No fisher’s net ever took such glancing fishes, nor did the net of a constellation’s shape ever enclose more vibrating Pleiades.

WELLS

The world at present is inclined to make sorry mysteries or unattractive secrets of the methods and supplies of the fresh and perennial means of life. A very dull secret is made of water, for example, and the plumber sets his seal upon the floods whereby we live. They are covered, they are carried, they are hushed, from the spring to the tap; and when their voices are released at last in the London scullery, why, it can hardly be said that the song is eloquent of the natural source of waters, whether earthly or heavenly. There is not one of the circumstances of this capture of streams—the company, the water-rate, and the rest—that is not a sign of the ill-luck of modern devices in regard to style. For style implies a candour and simplicity of means, an action, a gesture, as it were, in the doing of small things; it is the ignorance of secret ways; whereas the finish of modern life and its neatness seem to be secured by a system of little shufflings and surprises.

Dress, among other things, is furnished throughout with such fittings; they form its very construction. Style does not exist in modern arrayings, for all their prettiness and precision, and for all the successes—which are not to be denied—of their outer part; the happy little swagger that simulates style is but another sign of its absence, being prepared by mere dodges and dexterities beneath, and the triumph and success of the present art of raiment—“fit” itself—is but the result of a masked and lurking labour and device.

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The masters of fine manners, moreover, seem to be always aware of the beauty that comes of pausing slightly upon the smaller and slighter actions, such as meaner men are apt to hurry out of the way. In a word, the workman, with his finish and accomplishment, is the dexterous provider of contemporary things; and the ready, well-appointed, and decorated life of all towns is now altogether in his hands; whereas the artist craftsman of other times made a manifestation of his means. The first hides the streams, under stress and pressure, in paltry pipes which we all must make haste to call upon the earth to cover, and the second lifted up the arches of the aqueduct.

The search of easy ways to live is not always or everywhere the way to ugliness, but in some countries, at some dates, it is the sure way. In all countries, and at all dates, extreme finish compassed by hidden means must needs, from the beginning, prepare the abolition of dignity. This is easy to understand, but it is less easy to explain the ill-fortune that presses upon the expert workman, in search of easy ways to live, all the ill-favoured materials, makes them cheap for him, makes them serviceable and effectual, urges him to use them, seal them, and inter them, turning the trim and dull completeness out to the view of the daily world. It is an added mischance. Nor, on the other hand, is it easy to explain the beautiful good luck attending the simpler devices which are, after all, only less expert ways of labour. In those happy conditions, neither from the material, suggesting to the workman, nor from the workman looking askance at his unhandsome material, comes a first proposal to pour in cement and make fast the underworld, out of sight. But fate spares not that suggestion to the able and the unlucky at their task of making neat work of the means, the distribution, the traffick of life.

The springs, then, the profound wells, the streams, are of all the means of our lives those which we should wish to see open to the sun, with their waters on their progress and their way to us; but, no, they are lapped in lead.

King Pandion and his friends lie not under heavier seals.

Yet we have been delighted, elsewhere, by open floods. The hiding-place that nature and the simpler crafts allot to the waters of wells are, at their deepest, in communication with the open sky. No other mine is so visited; for the noonday sun himself is visible there; and it is fine to think of the waters of this planet, shallow and profound, all charged with shining suns, a multitude of waters multiplying suns, and carrying that remote fire, as it were, within their unalterable freshness. Not a pool without this visitant, or without passages of stars. As for the wells of the Equator, you may think of them in their last recesses as the daily bathing-places of light; a luminous fancy is able so to scatter fitful figures of the sun, and to plunge them in thousands within those deeps.

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Round images lie in the dark waters, but in the bright waters the sun is shattered out of its circle, scattered into waves, broken across stones, and rippled over sand; and in the shallow rivers that fall through chestnut woods the image is mingled with the mobile figures of leaves. To all these waters the agile air has perpetual access. Not so can great towns be watered, it will be said with reason; and this is precisely the ill-luck of great towns.

Nevertheless, there are towns, not, in a sense, so great, that have the grace of visible wells; such as Venice, where every *campo* has its circle of carved stone, its clashing of dark copper on the pavement, its soft kiss of the copper vessel with the surface of the water below, and the cheerful work of the cable.

Or the Romans knew how to cause the parted floods to measure their plain with the strong, steady, and level flight of arches from the watersheds in the hills to the and city; and having the waters captive, they knew how to compel them to take part, by fountains, in this Roman triumph. They had the wit to boast thus of their brilliant prisoner.

None more splendid came bound to Rome, or graced captivity with a more invincible liberty of the heart. And the captivity and the leap of the heart of the waters have outlived their captors. They have remained in Rome, and have remained alone. Over them the victory was longer than empire, and their thousands of loud voices have never ceased to confess the conquest of the cold floods, separated long ago, drawn one by one, alive, to the head and front of the world.

Of such a transit is made no secret. It was the most manifest fact of Rome. You could not look to the city from the mountains or to the distance from the city without seeing the approach of those perpetual waters—waters bound upon daily tasks and minute services. This, then, was the style of a master, who does not lapse from “incidental greatness,” has no mean precision, out of sight, to prepare the finish of his phrases, and does not think the means and the approaches are to be plotted and concealed. Without anxiety, without haste, and without misgiving are all great things to be done, and neither interruption in the doing nor ruin after they are done finds anything in them to betray. There was never any disgrace of means, and when the world sees the work broken through there is no disgrace of discovery. The labour of Michelangelo’s chisel, little more than begun, a Roman structure long exposed in disarray—upon these the light of day looks full, and the Roman and the Florentine have their unrefuted praise.

THE FOOT

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Time was when no good news made a journey, and no friend came near, but a welcome was uttered, or at least thought, for the travelling feet of the wayfarer or the herald. The feet, the feet were beautiful on the mountains; their toil was the price of all communication, and their reward the first service and refreshment. They were blessed and bathed; they suffered, but they were friends with the earth; dew in grass at morning, shallow rivers at noon, gave them coolness. They must have grown hard upon their mountain paths, yet never so hard but they needed and had the first pity and the readiest succour. It was never easy for the feet of man to travel this earth, shod or unshod, and his feet are delicate, like his colour.

If they suffered hardship once, they suffer privation now. Yet the feet should have more of the acquaintance of earth, and know more of flowers, freshness, cool brooks, wild thyme, and salt sand than does anything else about us. It is their calling; and the hands might be glad to be stroked for a day by grass and struck by buttercups, as the feet are of those who go barefoot; and the nostrils might be flattered to be, like them, so long near moss. The face has only now and then, for a resting-while, their privilege.

If our feet are now so severed from the natural ground, they have inevitably lost life and strength by the separation. It is only the entirely unshod that have lively feet. Watch a peasant who never wears shoes, except for a few unkind hours once a week, and you may see the play of his talk in his mobile feet; they become as dramatic as his hands. Fresh as the air, brown with the light, and healthy from the field, not used to darkness, not grown in prison, the foot of the *contadino* is not abashed. It is the foot of high life that is prim, and never lifts a heel against its dull conditions, for it has forgotten liberty. It is more active now than it lately was—certainly the foot of woman is more active; but whether on the pedal or in the stirrup, or clad for a walk, or armed for a game, or decked for the waltz, it is in bonds. It is, at any rate, inarticulate.

It has no longer a distinct and divided life, or none that is visible and sensible. Whereas the whole living body has naturally such infinite distinctness that the sense of touch differs, as it were, with every nerve, and the fingers are so separate that it was believed of them of old that each one had its angel, yet the modern foot is, as much as possible, deprived of all that delicate distinction: undone, unspecialized, sent back to lower forms of indiscriminate life. It is as though a landscape with separate sweetness in every tree should be rudely painted with the blank—blank, not simple—generalities of a vulgar hand. Or as though one should take the pleasures of a day of happiness in a wholesale fashion, not “turning the hours to moments,” which joy can do to the full as perfectly as pain.

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The foot, with its articulations, is suppressed, and its language confused. When Lovelace likens the hand of Amarantha to a violin, and her glove to the case, he has at any rate a glove to deal with, not a boot. Yet Amarantha's foot is as lovely as her hand. It, too, has a "tender inward"; no wayfaring would ever make it look anything but delicate; its arch seems too slight to carry her through a night of dances; it does, in fact, but balance her. It is fit to cling to the ground, but rather for springing than for rest.

And, doubtless, for man, woman, and child the tender, irregular, sensitive, living foot, which does not even stand with all its little surface on the ground, and which makes no base to satisfy an architectural eye, is, as it were, the unexpected thing. It is a part of vital design and has a history; and man does not go erect but at a price of weariness and pain. How weak it is may be seen from a footprint: for nothing makes a more helpless and unsymmetrical sign than does a naked foot.

Tender, too, is the silence of human feet. You have but to pass a season amongst the barefooted to find that man, who, shod, makes so much ado, is naturally as silent as snow. Woman, who not only makes her armed heel heard, but also goes rustling like a shower, is naturally silent as snow. The vintager is not heard among the vines, nor the harvester on his threshing-floor of stone. There is a kind of simple stealth in their coming and going, and they show sudden smiles and dark eyes in and out of the rows of harvest when you thought yourself alone. The lack of noise in their movement sets free the sound of their voices, and their laughter floats.

But we shall not praise the "simple, sweet" and "earth-confiding feet" enough without thanks for the rule of verse and for the time of song. If Poetry was first divided by the march, and next varied by the dance, then to the rule of the foot are to be ascribed the thought, the instruction, and the dream that could not speak by prose. Out of that little physical law, then, grew a spiritual law which is one of the greatest things we know; and from the test of the foot came the ultimate test of the thinker: "Is it accepted of Song?"

The monastery, in like manner, holds its sons to little trivial rules of time and exactitude, not to be broken, laws that are made secure against the restlessness of the heart fretting for insignificant liberties—trivial laws to restrain from a trivial freedom. And within the gate of these laws which seem so small, lies the world of mystic virtue. They enclose, they imply, they lock, they answer for it. Lesser virtues may flower in daily liberty and may flourish in prose; but infinite virtues and greatness are compelled to the measure of poetry, and obey the constraint of an hourly convent bell. It is no wonder that every poet worthy the name has had a passion for metre, for the very verse. To him the difficult fetter is the condition of an interior range immeasurable.

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HAVE PATIENCE, LITTLE SAINT

Some considerable time must have gone by since any kind of courtesy ceased, in England, to be held necessary in the course of communication with a beggar. Feeling may be humane, and the interior act most gentle; there may be a tacit apology, and a profound misgiving unexpressed; a reluctance not only to refuse but to be arbiter; a dislike of the office; a regret, whether for the unequal distribution of social luck or for a purse left at home, equally sincere; howbeit custom exacts no word or sign, nothing whatever of intercourse. If a dog or a cat accosts you, or a calf in a field comes close to you with a candid infant face and breathing nostrils of investigation, or if any kind of animal comes to you on some obscure impulse of friendly approach, you acknowledge it. But the beggar to whom you give nothing expects no answer to a question, no recognition of his presence, not so much as the turn of your eyelid in his direction, and never a word to excuse you.

Nor does this blank behaviour seem savage to those who are used to nothing else. Yet it is somewhat more inhuman to refuse an answer to the beggar's remark than to leave a shop without "Good morning." When complaint is made of the modern social manner—that it has no merit but what is negative, and that it is apt even to abstain from courtesy with more lack of grace than the abstinence absolutely requires—the habit of manner towards beggars is probably not so much as thought of. To the simply human eye, however, the prevalent manner towards beggars is a striking thing; it is significant of so much.

Obviously it is not easy to reply to begging except by the intelligible act of giving. We have not the ingenuous simplicity that marks the caste answering more or less to that of Vere de Vere, in Italy, for example. An elderly Italian lady on her slow way from her own ancient ancestral *palazzo* to the village, and accustomed to meet, empty-handed, a certain number of beggars, answers them by a retort which would be, literally translated, "Excuse me, dear; I, too, am a poor devil," and the last word she naturally puts into the feminine.

Moreover, the sentence is spoken in all the familiarity of the local dialect—a dialect that puts any two people at once upon equal terms as nothing else can do it. Would it were possible to present the phrase to English readers in all its own helpless good-humour. The excellent woman who uses it is practising no eccentricity thereby, and raises no smile. It is only in another climate, and amid other manners, that one cannot recall it without a smile. To a mind having a lively sense of contrast it is not a little pleasant to imagine an elderly lady of corresponding station in England replying so to importunities for alms; albeit we have nothing answering to the good fellowship of a broad patois used currently by rich and poor, and yet slightly grotesque in the

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case of all speakers—a dialect in which, for example, no sermon is ever preached, and in which no book is ever printed, except for fun; a dialect “familiar, but by no means vulgar.” Besides, even if our Englishwoman could by any possibility bring herself to say to a mendicant, “Excuse me, dear; I, too, am a poor devil,” she would still not have the opportunity of putting the last word punctually into the feminine, which does so complete the character of the sentence.

The phrase at the head of this paper is the far more graceful phrase of excuse customary in the courteous manners of Portugal. And everywhere in the South, where an almost well-dressed old woman, who suddenly begins to beg from you when you least expected it, calls you “my daughter,” you can hardly reply without kindness. Where the tourist is thoroughly well known, doubtless the company of beggars are used to savage manners in the rich; but about the by-ways and remoter places there must still be some dismay at the anger, the silence, the indignation, and the inexpensive haughtiness wherewith the opportunity of alms-giving is received by travellers.

In nothing do we show how far the West is from the East so emphatically as we show it by our lofty ways towards those who so manifestly put themselves at our feet. It is certainly not pleasant to see them there; but silence or a storm of impersonal protest—a protest that appeals vaguely less to the beggars than to some not impossible police—does not seem the most appropriate manner of rebuking them. We have, it may be, a scruple on the point of human dignity, compromised by the entreaty and the thanks of the mendicant; but we have a strange way of vindicating that dignity when we refuse to man, woman, or child the recognition of a simply human word. Nay, our offence is much the greater of the two. It is not merely a rough and contemptuous intercourse, it is the refusal of intercourse—the last outrage. How do we propose to redress those conditions of life that annoy us when a brother whines, if we deny the presence, the voice, and the being of this brother, and if, because fortune has refused him money, we refuse him existence?

We take the matter too seriously, or not seriously enough, to hold it in the indifference of the wise. “Have patience, little saint,” is a phrase that might teach us the cheerful way to endure our own unintelligible fortunes in the midst, say, of the population of a hill-village among the most barren of the Maritime Alps, where huts of stone stand among the stones of an unclothed earth, and there is no sign of daily bread. The people, albeit unused to travellers, yet know by instinct what to do, and beg without the delay of a moment as soon as they see your unwonted figure. Let it be taken for granted that you give all you can; some form of refusal becomes necessary at last, and the gentlest—it is worth while to remember—is the most effectual. An indignant tourist, one who to the portent of a puggaree which, perhaps, he wears on a grey day, adds that of ungovernable rage, is so wild a visitor that no attempt at all is made to understand him; and the beggars beg dismayed but unalarmed, uninterruptedly, without a pause or a

conjecture. They beg by rote, thinking of something else, as occasion arises, and all indifferent to the violence of the rich.

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It is the merry beggar who has so lamentably disappeared. If a beggar is still merry anywhere, he hides away what it would so cheer and comfort us to see; he practises not merely the conventional seeming, which is hardly intended to convince, but a more subtle and dramatic kind of semblance, of no good influence upon the morals of the road. He no longer trusts the world with a sight of his gaiety. He is not a wholehearted mendicant, and no longer keeps that liberty of unstable balance whereby an unattached creature can go in a new direction with a new wind. The merry beggar was the only adventurer free to yield to the lighter touches of chance, the touches that a habit of resistance has made imperceptible to the seated and stable social world.

The visible flitting figure of the unfettered madman sprinkled our literature with mad songs, and even one or two poets of to-day have, by tradition, written them; but that wild source of inspiration has been stopped; it has been built over, lapped and locked, imprisoned, led underground. The light melancholy and the wind-blown joys of the song of the distraught, which the poets were once ingenious to capture, have ceased to sound one note of liberty in the world's ears. But it seems that the grosser and saner freedom of the happy beggar is still the subject of a Spanish song.

That song is gay, not defiant it is not an outlaw's or a robber's, it is not a song of violence or fear. It is the random trolling note of a man who owes his liberty to no disorder, failure, or ill-fortune, but takes it by choice from the voluntary world, enjoys it at the hand of unreluctant charity; who twits the world with its own choice of bonds, but has not broken his own by force. It seems, therefore, the song of an indomitable liberty of movement, light enough for the puffs of a zephyr chance.

THE LADIES OF THE IDYLL

Little Primrose dames of the English classic, the wife and daughters of the Vicar of Wakefield have no claim whatever to this name of lady. It is given to them in this page because Goldsmith himself gave it to them in the yet undepreciated state of the word, and for the better reason that he obviously intended them to be the equals of the men to whom he marries them, those men being, with all their faults, gentlemen. Goldsmith, in a word, meant them to be ladies, of country breeding, but certainly fit for membership of that large class of various fortune within which the name makes a sufficient equality.

He, their author, thought them sufficient. Having amused himself ingeniously throughout the story with their nameless vulgarities, he finally hurries them into so much sentiment as may excuse the convention of heroes in love. He plays with their coarseness like a perfectly pleased and clever showman, and then piously and happily shuts up his couples—the gentle Dr. Primrose with his abominable Deborah; the excellent Mr. Burchell with the paltry Sophia; Olivia—but no, Olivia is not so certainly happy ever after; she has a captured husband ready for her in a state of ignominy, but she has also a forgotten farmer somewhere in the background—the unhappy man

whom, with her father's permission, this sorry heroine had promised to marry in order that his wooing might pluck forward the lagging suit of the squire.

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Olivia, then, plays her common trick upon the harmless Williams, her father conniving, with a provision that he urges with some demonstration of virtue: she shall consent to make the farmer happy if the proposal of the squire be not after all forthcoming. But it is so evident her author knew no better, that this matter may pass. It involves a point of honour, of which no one—neither the maker of the book nor anyone he made—is aware. What is better worth considering is the fact that Goldsmith was completely aware of the unredeemed vulgarity of the ladies of the *Idyll*, and cheerfully took it for granted as the thing to be expected from the mother-in-law of a country gentleman and the daughters of a scholar. The education of women had sunk into a degradation never reached before, inasmuch as it was degraded in relation to that of men. It would matter little indeed that Mrs. Primrose “could read any English book without much spelling” if her husband and son were as definitely limited to journeyman’s field-labour as she was to the pickling and the gooseberry wine. Any of those industries is a better and more liberal business than unselect reading, for instance, or than unselect writing. Therefore let me not be misunderstood to complain too indiscriminately of that century or of an unlettered state. What is really unhandsome is the new, slovenly, and corrupt inequality whereinto the century had fallen.

That the mother of daughters and sons should be fatuous, a village worldling, suspicious, ambitious, ill-bred, ignorant, gross, insolent, foul-mouthed, pushing, importunate, and a fool, seems natural, almost innocently natural, in Goldsmith’s story; the squalid Mrs. Primrose is all this. He is still able, through his Vicar, in the most charmingly humorous passage in the book, to praise her for her “prudence, economy, and obedience.” Her other, more disgusting, characteristics give her husband an occasion for rebuking her as “Woman!” This is done, for example, when, despite her obedience, she refuses to receive that unlucky schemer, her own daughter, returned in ruins, without insulting her by the sallies of a kitchen sarcasm.

She plots with her daughters the most disastrous fortune hunt. She has given them a teaching so effectual that the Vicar has no fear lest the paltry Sophia should lose her heart to the good, the sensible Burchell, who had saved her life; for he has no fortune. Mrs. Primrose begins grotesquely, with her tedious histories of the dishes at dinner, and she ends upon the last page, anxious, amid the general happiness, in regard to securing the head of the table. Upon these feminine humours the author sheds his Vicar’s indulgent smile. What a smile for a self-respecting husband to be pricked to smile! A householder would wince, one would think, at having opportunity to bestow its tolerance upon his cook.

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Between these two housewifely appearances, Mrs. Primrose potters through the book; plots—always squalidly; talks the worst kinds of folly; takes the lead, with a loud laugh, in insulting a former friend; crushes her repentant daughter with reproaches that show envy rather than indignation, and kisses that daughter with congratulation upon hearing that she had, unconsciously and unintentionally, contracted a valid marriage (with a rogue); spoils and makes common and unclean everything she touches; has but two really gentle and tender moments all through the story; and sets, once for all, the example in literature of the woman we find thenceforth, in Thackeray, in Douglas Jerrold, in Dickens, and *un peu partout*.

Hardly less unspiritual, in spite of their conventional romance of youth and beauty, are the daughters of the squalid one. The author, in making them simple, has not abstained from making them cunning. Their vanities are well enough, but these women are not only vain, they are so envious as to refuse admiration to a sister-in-law—one who is their rival in no way except in so much as she is a contemporary beauty. “Miss Arabella Wilmot,” says the pious father and vicar, “was allowed by all (except my two daughters) to be completely pretty.”

They have been left by their father in such brutal ignorance as to be instantly deceived into laughing at bad manners in error for humour. They have no pretty or sensitive instincts. “The jests of the rich,” says the Vicar, referring to his own young daughters as audience, “are ever successful.” Olivia, when the squire played off a dullish joke, “mistook it for humour. She thought him, therefore, a very fine gentleman.” The powders and patches for the country church, the ride thither on Blackberry, in so strange a procession, the face-wash, the dreams and omens, are all good gentle comedy; we are completely convinced of the tedium of Mrs. Primrose’s dreams, which she told every morning. But there are other points of comedy that ought not to precede an author’s appeal to the kind of sentiment about to be touched by the tragic scenes of *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

In odd sidling ways Goldsmith bethinks himself to give his principal heroine a shadow of the virtues he has not bestowed upon her. When the unhappy Williams, above-mentioned, has been used in vain by Olivia, and the squire has not declared himself, and she is on the point of keeping her word to Williams by marrying him, the Vicar creates a situation out of it all that takes the reader roundly by surprise: “I frequently applauded her resolution in preferring happiness to ostentation.” The good Goldsmith! Here is Olivia perfectly frank with her father as to her exceedingly sincere preference for ostentation, and as to her stratagem to try to obtain it at the expense of honour and of neighbour Williams; her mind is as well known to her father as her father’s mind is known to Oliver Goldsmith, and as Oliver Goldsmith’s, Dr. Primrose’s, and Olivia’s minds are known to the reader. And in spite of all, your Goldsmith and your Vicar turn you this phrase to your very face. You hardly know which way to look; it is so disconcerting.

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Seeing that Olivia (with her chance-recovered virtue) and Sophia may both be expected to grow into the kind of matronhood represented by their mother, it needs all the conditions of fiction to surround the close of their love-affairs with the least semblance of dignity. Nor, in fact, can it be said that the final winning of Sophia is an incident that errs by too much dignity. The scene is that in which Burchell, revealed as Sir William Thornhill, feigns to offer her in marriage to the good-natured rogue, Jenkinson, fellow prisoner with her father, in order that, on her indignant and distressed refusal, he may surprise her agreeably by crying, "What? Not have him? If that be the case, I think I must have you myself." Even for an avowedly eccentric master of whims, this is playing with forbidden ironies. True, he catches her to his breast with ardour, and calls her "sensible." "Such sense and such heavenly beauty," finally exclaims the happy man. Let us make him a present of the heavenly beauty. It is the only thing not disproved, not dispraised, not disgraced, by a candid study of the Ladies of the Idyll.

A DERIVATION

By what obscure cause, through what ill-directed industry, and under the constraint of what disabling hands, had the language of English poetry grown, for an age, so rigid that a natural writer at the end of the eighteenth century had much ado to tell a simple story in sufficient verse? All the vital exercise of the seventeenth century had left the language buoyant; it was as elastic as deep and mobile waters; then followed the grip of that incapacitating later style. Much later, English has been so used as to become flaccid—it has been stretched, as it were, beyond its power of rebound, or certainly beyond its power of rebound in common use (for when a master writes he always uses a tongue that has suffered nothing). It is in our own day that English has been so overstrained. In Crabbe's day it had been effectually curbed, hindered, and hampered, and it cannot be said of Crabbe that he was a master who takes natural possession of a language that has suffered nothing. He was evidently a man of talent who had to take his part with the times, subject to history. To call him a poet was a mere convention. There seems to be not a single moment of poetry in his work, and assuredly if he had known the earlier signification of the word he would have been the last man to claim the incongruous title of poet. But it is impossible to state the question as it would have presented itself to Crabbe or to any other writer of his quality entering into the same inheritance of English.

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It is true that Crabbe read and quoted Milton; so did all his contemporaries; and to us now it seems that poetry cannot have been forgotten by any age possessing *Lycidas*. Yet that age can scarcely be said to have in any true sense possessed *Lycidas*. There are other things, besides poetry, in Milton's poems. We do not entirely know, perhaps, but we can conjecture how a reader in Crabbe's late eighteenth century, looking in Milton for authority for all that he unluckily and vainly admired, would well find it. He would find the approval of Young's "Night Thoughts" did he search for it, as we who do not search for it may not readily understand. A step or so downwards, from a few passages in "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained," an inevitable drop in the derivation, a depression such as is human, and everything, from Dryden to "The Vanity of Human Wishes," follows, without violence and perhaps without wilful misappreciation. The poet Milton fathered, legitimately enough, an unpoetic posterity. Milton, therefore, who might have kept an age, and many a succeeding age, on the heights of poetry by lines like these—

Who sing and singing in their glory move—

by this, and by many and many another so divine—Milton justified also the cold excesses of his posterity by the example of more than one group of blank verse lines in his greatest poem. Manifestly the sanction is a matter of choice, and depends upon the age: the age of Crabbe found in Milton such ancestry as it was fit for.

Crabbe, then, was not a poet of poetry. But he came into possession of a metrical form charged by secondary poets with a contented second-class dignity that bears constant reference, in the way of respect rather than of imitation, to the state and nobility of Pope at his best—the couplet. The weak yet rigid "poetry" that fell to his lot owed all the decorum it possessed to the mechanical defences and props—the exclusions especially—of this manner of versification. The grievous thing was that, being moved to write simply of simple things, he had no more supple English for his purpose. His effort to disengage the phrase—long committed to convention and to an exposed artifice—did but prove how surely the ancient vitality was gone.

His preface to "The Borough, a Poem," should be duly read before the "poem" itself, for the prose has a propriety all its own. Everything is conceived with the most perfect moderation, and then presented in a form of reasoning that leaves you no possible ground of remonstrance. In proposing his subject Crabbe seems to make an unanswerable apology with a composure that is almost sweet. For instance, at some length and with some nobility he anticipates a probable conjecture that his work was done "without due examination and revisal," and he meets the conjectured criticism thus: "Now, readers are, I believe, disposed to treat with more than common severity those writers who have been led into presumption

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by the approbation bestowed upon their diffidence, and into idleness and unconcern by the praises given to their attention." It would not be possible to say a smaller thing with greater dignity and gentleness. It is worth while to quote this prose of a "poet" who lived between the centuries, if only in order to suggest the chastening thought, "It is a pity that no one, however little he may have to say, says it now in this form!" The little, so long as it is reasonable, is so well suited in this antithesis and logic. Is there no hope that journalism will ever take again these graces of unanswerable argument? No: they would no longer wear the peculiar aspect of adult innocence that was Crabbe's.

A COUNTERCHANGE

"Il s'est trompé de defunte." The writer of this phrase had his sense of that portly manner of French, and his burlesque is fine; but—the paradox must be risked—because he was French he was not able to possess all its grotesque mediocrity to the full; that is reserved for the English reader. The words are in the mouth of a widower who, approaching his wife's tomb, perceives there another "monsieur." "Monsieur," again; the French reader is deprived of the value of this word, too, in its place; it says little or nothing to him, whereas the Englishman, who has no word of the precise bourgeois significance that it sometimes bears, but who must use one of two English words of different allusion—man or I gentleman—knows the exact value of its commonplace. The serious Parisian, then, sees "un autre monsieur;" as it proves anon, there had been a divorce in the history of the lady, but the later widower is not yet aware of this, and explains to himself the presence of "un monsieur" in his own place by that weighty phrase, "Il s'est trompé de defunte."

The strange effect of a thing so charged with allusion and with national character is to cause an English reader to pity the mocking author who was debarred by his own language from possessing the whole of his own comedy. It is, in fact, by contrast with his English that an Englishman does possess it. Your official, your professional Parisian has a vocabulary of enormous, unrivalled mediocrity. When the novelist perceives this he does not perceive it all, because some of the words are the only words in use. Take an author at his serious moments, when he is not at all occupied with the comedy of phrases, and he now and then touches a word that has its burlesque by mere contrast with English. "L'Histoire d'un Crime," of Victor Hugo, has so many of these touches as to be, by a kind of reflex action, a very school of English. The whole incident of the omnibus in that grave work has unconscious international comedy. The Deputies seated in the interior of the omnibus had been, it will be remembered, shut out of their Chamber by the perpetrator of the Coup d'Etat, but each had his official scarf.

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Scarf—pish!—"l'écharpe!" "Ceindre l'écharpe"—there is no real English equivalent. Civic responsibility never was otherwise adequately expressed. An indignant deputy passed his scarf through the window of the omnibus, as an appeal to the public, "et l'agita." It is a pity that the French reader, having no simpler word, is not in a position to understand the slight burlesque. Nay, the mere word "public," spoken with this peculiar French good faith, has for us I know not what untransferable gravity.

There is, in short, a general international counterchange. It is altogether in accordance with our actual state of civilization, with its extremely "specialized" manner of industry, that one people should make a phrase, and another should have and enjoy it. And, in fact, there are certain French authors to whom should be secured the use of the literary German whereof Germans, and German women in particular, ought with all severity to be deprived. For Germans often tell you of words in their own tongue that are untranslatable; and accordingly they should not be translated, but given over in their own conditions, unaltered, into safer hands. There would be a clearing of the outlines of German ideas, a better order in the phrase; the possessors of an alien word, with the thought it secures, would find also their advantage.

So with French humour. It is expressly and signally for English ears. It is so even in the commonest farce. The unfortunate householder, for example, who is persuaded to keep walking in the conservatory "pour rétablir la circulation," and the other who describes himself "sous-chef de bureau dans l'enregistrement," and he who proposes to "faire hommage" of a doubtful turbot to the neighbouring "employé de l'octroi"—these and all their like speak commonplaces so usual as to lose in their own country the perfection of their dulness. We only, who have the alternative of plainer and fresher words, understand it. It is not the least of the advantages of our own dual English that we become sensible of the mockery of certain phrases that in France have lost half their ridicule, uncontrasted.

Take again the common rhetoric that has fixed itself in conversation in all Latin languages—rhetoric that has ceased to have allusions, either majestic or comic. To the ear somewhat unused to French this proffers a frequent comedy that the well-accustomed ear, even of an Englishman, no longer detects. A guard on a French railway, who advised two travellers to take a certain train for fear they should be obliged to "vegeter" for a whole hour in the waiting-room of such or such a station seemed to the less practised tourist to be a fresh kind of unexpected humourist.

One of the phrases always used in the business of charities and subscriptions in France has more than the intentional comedy of the farce-writer; one of the most absurd of his personages, wearying his visitors in the country with a perpetual game of bowls, says to them: "Nous jouons cinquante centimes—les benefices seront versés intégralement a

la souscription qui est ouverte a la commune pour la construction de notre maison d'ecole."

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"Fletrir," again. Nothing could be more rhetorical than this perfectly common word of controversy. The comic dramatist is well aware of the spent violence of this phrase, with which every serious Frenchman will reply to opponents, especially in public matters. But not even the comic dramatist is aware of the last state of refuse commonplace that a word of this kind represents. Refuse rhetoric, by the way, rather than Emerson's "fossil poetry," would seem to be the right name for human language as some of the processes of the several recent centuries have left it.

The French comedy, then, is fairly stuffed with thin-S for an Englishman. They are not all, it is true, so finely comic as "Il s'est trompe de defunte." In the report of that dull, incomparable sentence there is enough humour, and subtle enough, for both the maker and the reader; for the author who perceives the comedy as well as custom will permit, and for the reader who takes it with the freshness of a stranger. But if not so keen as this, the current word of French comedy is of the same quality of language. When of the fourteen couples to be married by the mayor, for instance, the deaf clerk has shuffled two, a looker-on pronounces: "Il s'est empetre dans les futurs." But for a reader who has a full sense of the several languages that exist in English at the service of the several ways of human life, there is, from the mere terminology of official France, high or low—daily France—a gratuitous and uncovenanted smile to be had. With this the wit of the report of French literature has not little to do. Nor is it in itself, perhaps, reasonably comic, but the slightest irony of circumstance makes it so. A very little of the mockery of conditions brings out all the latent absurdity of the "sixieme et septieme arron-dissements," in the twinkling of an eye. So is it with the mere "domicile;" with the aid of but a little of the burlesque of life, the suit at law to "reintegrer le domicile conjugal" becomes as grotesque as a phrase can make it. Even "a domicile" merely—the word of every shopman—is, in the unconscious mouths of the speakers, always awaiting the lightest touch of farce, if only an Englishman hears it; so is the advice of the police that you shall "circuler" in the street; so is the request, posted up, that you shall not, in the churches.

So are the serious and ordinary phrases, "maison nuptiale," "maison mortuaire," and the still more serious "repos dominical," "oraison dominicale." There is no majesty in such words. The unsuspecting gravity with which they are spoken broadcast is not to be wondered at, the language offering no relief of contrast; and what is much to the credit of the comic sensibility of literature is the fact that, through this general unconsciousness, the ridicule of a thousand authors of comedy perceives the fun, and singles out the familiar thing, and compels that most elaborate dulness to amuse us. *Us*, above all, by virtue of the custom of counterchange here set forth.

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Who shall say whether, by operation of the same exchange, the English poets that so persist in France may not reveal something within the English language—one would be somewhat loth to think so—reserved to the French reader peculiarly? Byron to the multitude, Edgar Poe to the select? Then would some of the mysteries of French reading of English be explained otherwise than by the plainer explanation that has hitherto satisfied our haughty curiosity. The taste for rhetoric seemed to account for Byron, and the desire of the rhetorician to claim a taste for poetry seemed to account for Poe. But, after all, *patatras!* Who can say?

RAIN

Not excepting the falling stars—for they are far less sudden—there is nothing in nature that so outstrips our unready eyes as the familiar rain. The rods that thinly stripe our landscape, long shafts from the clouds, if we had but agility to make the arrowy downward journey with them by the glancing of our eyes, would be infinitely separate, units, an innumerable flight of single things, and the simple movement of intricate points.

The long stroke of the raindrop, which is the drop and its path at once, being our impression of a shower, shows us how certainly our impression is the effect of the lagging, and not of the haste, of our senses. What we are apt to call our quick impression is rather our sensibly tardy, unprepared, surprised, outrun, lightly bewildered sense of things that flash and fall, wink, and are overpast and renewed, while the gentle eyes of man hesitate and mingle the beginning with the close. These inexpert eyes, delicately baffled, detain for an instant the image that puzzles them, and so dally with the bright progress of a meteor, and part slowly from the slender course of the already fallen raindrop, whose moments are not theirs. There seems to be such a difference of instants as invests all swift movement with mystery in man's eyes, and causes the past, a moment old, to be written, vanishing, upon the skies.

The visible world is etched and engraved with the signs and records of our halting apprehension; and the pause between the distant woodman's stroke with the axe and its sound upon our ears is repeated in the impressions of our clinging sight. The round wheel dazzles it, and the stroke of the bird's wing shakes it off like a captivity evaded. Everywhere the natural haste is impatient of these timid senses; and their perception, outrun by the shower, shaken by the light, denied by the shadow, eluded by the distance, makes the lingering picture that is all our art. One of the most constant causes of all the mystery and beauty of that art is surely not that we see by flashes, but that nature flashes on our meditative eyes. There is no need for the impressionist to make haste, nor would haste avail him, for mobile nature doubles upon him, and plays with his delays the exquisite game of visibility.

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Momently visible in a shower, invisible within the earth, the ministration of water is so manifest in the coming rain-cloud that the husbandman is allowed to see the rain of his own land, yet unclaimed in the arms of the rainy wind. It is an eager lien that he binds the shower withal, and the grasp of his anxiety is on the coming cloud. His sense of property takes aim and reckons distance and speed, and even as he shoots a little ahead of the equally uncertain ground-game, he knows approximately how to hit the cloud of his possession. So much is the rain bound to the earth that, unable to compel it, man has yet found a way, by lying in wait, to put his price upon it. The exhaustible cloud “outweeps its rain,” and only the inexhaustible sun seems to repeat and to enforce his cumulative fires upon every span of ground, innumerable. The rain is wasted upon the sea, but only by a fantasy can the sun’s waste be made a reproach to the ocean, the desert, or the sealed-up street. Rossetti’s “vain virtues” are the virtues of the rain, falling unfruitfully.

Baby of the cloud, rain is carried long enough within that troubled breast to make all the multitude of days unlike each other. Rain, as the end of the cloud, divides light and withholds it; in its flight warning away the sun, and in its final fall dismissing shadow. It is a threat and a reconciliation; it removes mountains compared with which the Alps are hillocks, and makes a childlike peace between opposed heights and battlements of heaven.

THE LETTERS OF MARCELINE VALMORE

“Prends garde a moi, ma fille, et couvre moi bien!” Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, writing from France to her daughter Ondine, who was delicate and chilly in London in 1841, has the same solicitous, journeying fancy as was expressed by two other women, both also Frenchwomen, and both articulate in tenderness. Eugenie de Guerin, that queen of sisters, had preceded her with her own complaint, “I have a pain in my brother’s side”; and in another age *Mme. de Sevigne* had suffered, in the course of long posts and through infrequent letters—a protraction of conjectured pain—within the frame of her absent daughter. She phrased her plight in much the same words, confessing the uncanceled union with her child that had effaced for her the boundaries of her personal life.

Is not what we call a life—the personal life—a separation from the universal life, a seclusion, a division, a cleft, a wound? For these women, such a severance was in part healed, made whole, closed up, and cured. Life was restored between two at a time of human-kind. Did these three women guess that their sufferings of sympathy with their children were indeed the signs of a new and universal health—the prophecy of human unity?

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The sign might have been a more manifest and a happier prophecy had this union of tenderness taken the gay occasion as often as the sad. Except at times, in the single case of *Mme. de Sevigne*, all three—far more sensitive than the rest of the world—were yet not sensitive enough to feel equally the less sharp communication of joy. They claimed, owned, and felt sensibly the pangs and not the pleasures of the absent. Or if not only the pangs, at least they were apprehensive chiefly in that sense which human anxiety and foreboding have lent to the word; they were apprehensive of what they feared. “Are you warm?” writes Marceline Valmore to her child. “You have so little to wear—are you really warm? Oh, take care of me—cover me well.” Elsewhere she says, “You are an insolent child to think of work. Nurse your health, and mine. Let us live like fools”; whereby she meant that she should work with her own fervent brain for both, and take the while her rest in Ondine. If this living and unshortened love was sad, it must be owned that so, too, was the story. Eugenie and Maurice de Guerin were both to die soon, and Marceline was to lose this daughter and another.

But set free from the condition and occasion of pain and sorrow, this life without boundaries which mothers have undergone seems to suggest and to portend what the progressive charity of generations may be—and is, in fact, though the continuity does not always appear—in the course of the world. If a love and life without boundaries go down from a mother into her child, and from that child into her children again, then incalculable, intricate, universal, and eternal are the unions that seem—and only seem—so to transcend the usual experience. The love of such a mother passes unchanged out of her own sight. It drops down ages, but why should it alter? What in her daughter should she make so much her own as that daughter’s love for her daughter in turn? There are no lapses.

Marceline Valmore, married to an actor who seems to have “created the classic genre” in vain, found the sons and daughters of other women in want. Some of her rich friends, she avers, seem to think that the sadness of her poems is a habit—a matter of metre and rhyme, or, at most, that it is “temperament.” But others take up the cause of those whose woes, as she says, turned her long hair white too soon. Sainte-Beuve gave her his time and influence, succoured twenty political offenders at her instance, and gave perpetually to her poor. “He never has any socks,” said his mother; “he gives them all away, like Beranger.” “He gives them with a different accent,” added the literary Marceline.

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Even when the stroller's life took her to towns she did not hate, but loved—her own Douai, where the names of the streets made her heart leap, and where her statue stands, and Bordeaux, which was, in her eyes, “rosy with the reflected colour of its animating wine”—she was taken away from the country of her verse. The field and the village had been dear to her, and her poems no longer trail and droop, but take wing, when they come among winds, birds, bells, and waves. They fly with the whole volley of a summer morning. She loved the sun and her liberty, and the liberty of others. It was apparently a horror of prisons that chiefly inspired her public efforts after certain riots at Lyons had been reduced to peace. The dead were free, but for the prisoners she worked, wrote, and petitioned. She looked at the sentinels at the gates of the Lyons gaols with such eyes as might have provoked a shot, she thinks.

During her lifetime she very modestly took correction from her contemporaries, for her study had hardly been enough for the whole art of French verse. But Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire, and Verlaine have praised her as one of the poets of France. The later critics—from Verlaine onwards—will hold that she needs no pardon for certain slight irregularities in the grouping of masculine and feminine rhymes, for upon this liberty they themselves have largely improved. The old rules in their completeness seemed too much like a prison to her. She was set about with importunate conditions—a caesura, a rhyme, narrow lodgings in strange towns, bankruptcies, salaries astray—and she took only a little gentle liberty.

THE HOURS OF SLEEP

There are hours claimed by Sleep, but refused to him. None the less are they his by some state within the mind, which answers rhythmically and punctually to that claim. Awake and at work, without drowsiness, without languor, and without gloom, the night mind of man is yet not his day mind; he has night-powers of feeling which are at their highest in dreams, but are night's as well as sleep's. The powers of the mind in dreams, which are inexplicable, are not altogether baffled because the mind is awake; it is the hour of their return as it is the hour of a tide's, and they do return.

In sleep they have their free way. Night then has nothing to hamper her influence, and she draws the emotion, the senses, and the nerves of the sleeper. She urges him upon those extremities of anger and love, contempt and terror to which not only can no event of the real day persuade him, but for which, awake, he has perhaps not even the capacity. This increase of capacity, which is the dream's, is punctual to the night, even though sleep and the dream be kept at arm's length.

The child, not asleep, but passing through the hours of sleep and their dominions, knows that the mood of night will have its hour; he puts off his troubled heart, and will answer it another time, in the other state, by day. “I shall be able to bear this when I am grown up” is not oftener in a young child's mind than “I shall endure to think of it in the

day-time.” By this he confesses the double habit and double experience, not to be interchanged, and communicating together only by memory and hope.

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Perhaps it will be found that to work all by day or all by night is to miss something of the powers of a complex mind. One might imagine the rhythmic experience of a poet, subject, like a child, to the time, and tempering the extremities of either state by messages of remembrance and expectancy.

Never to have had a brilliant dream, and never to have had any delirium, would be to live too much in the day; and hardly less would be the loss of him who had not exercised his waking thought under the influence of the hours claimed by dreams. And as to choosing between day and night, or guessing whether the state of day or dark is the truer and the more natural, he would be rash who should make too sure.

In order to live the life of night, a watcher must not wake too much. That is, he should not alter so greatly the character of night as to lose the solitude, the visible darkness, or the quietude. The hours of sleep are too much altered when they are filled by lights and crowds; and Nature is cheated so, and evaded, and her rhythm broken, as when the larks caged in populous streets make ineffectual springs and sing daybreak songs when the London gas is lighted. Nature is easily deceived; and the muse, like the lark, may be set all astray as to the hour. You may spend the peculiar hours of sleep amid so much noise and among so many people that you shall not be aware of them; you may thus merely force and prolong the day. But to do so is not to live well both lives; it is not to yield to the daily and nightly rise and fall and to be cradled in the swing of change.

There surely never was a poet but was now and then rocked in such a cradle of alternate hours. "It cannot be," says Herbert, "that I am he on whom Thy tempests fell all night."

It is in the hours of sleep that the mind, by some divine paradox, has the extremest sense of light. Almost the most shining lines in English poetry—lines that cast sunrise shadows—are those of Blake, written confessedly from the side of night, the side of sorrow and dreams, and those dreams the dreams of little chimney-sweepers; all is as dark as he can make it with the "bags of soot"; but the boy's dream of the green plain and the river is too bright for day. So, indeed, is another brightness of Blake's, which is also, in his poem, a child's dream, and was certainly conceived by him in the hours of sleep, in which he woke to write the Songs of Innocence:-

O what land is the land of dreams?
What are its mountains, and what are its streams?
O father, I saw my mother there,
Among the lilies by waters fair.
Among the lambs clothed in white,
She walk'd with her Thomas in sweet delight.

To none but the hours claimed and inspired by sleep, held awake by sufferance of sleep, belongs such a vision.

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Corot also took the brilliant opportunity of the hours of sleep. In some landscapes of his early manner he has the very light of dreams, and it was surely because he went abroad at the time when sleep and dreams claimed his eyes that he was able to see so spiritual an illumination. Summer is precious for a painter, chiefly because in summer so many of the hours of sleep are also hours of light. He carries the mood of man's night out into the sunshine—Corot did so—and lives the life of night, in all its genius, in the presence of a risen sun. In the only time when the heart can dream of light, in the night of visions, with the rhythmic power of night at its dark noon in his mind, his eyes see the soaring of the actual sun.

He himself has not yet passed at that hour into the life of day. To that life belongs many another kind of work, and a sense of other kinds of beauty; but the summer daybreak was seen by Corot with the extreme perception of the life of night. Here, at last, is the explanation of all the memories of dreams recalled by these visionary paintings, done in earlier years than were those, better known, that are the Corots of all the world. Every man who knows what it is to dream of landscape meets with one of these works of Corot's first manner with a cry, not of welcome only, but of recognition. Here is morning perceived by the spirit of the hours of sleep.

THE HORIZON

To mount a hill is to lift with you something lighter and brighter than yourself or than any meaner burden. You lift the world, you raise the horizon; you give a signal for the distance to stand up. It is like the scene in the Vatican when a Cardinal, with his dramatic Italian hands, bids the kneeling groups to arise. He does more than bid them. He lifts them, he gathers them up, far and near, with the upward gesture of both arms; he takes them to their feet with the compulsion of his expressive force. Or it is as when a conductor takes his players to successive heights of music. You summon the sea, you bring the mountains, the distances unfold unlooked-for wings and take an even flight. You are but a man lifting his weight upon the upward road, but as you climb the circle of the world goes up to face you.

Not here or there, but with a definite continuity, the unseen unfolds. This distant hill outsoars that less distant, but all are on the wing, and the plain raises its verge. All things follow and wait upon your eyes. You lift these up, not by the raising of your eyelids, but by the pilgrimage of your body. "Lift thine eyes to the mountains." It is then that other mountains lift themselves to your human eyes.

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It is the law whereby the eye and the horizon answer one another that makes the way up a hill so full of universal movement. All the landscape is on pilgrimage. The town gathers itself closer, and its inner harbours literally come to light; the headlands repeat themselves; little cups within the treeless hills open and show their farms. In the sea are many regions. A breeze is at play for a mile or two, and the surface is turned. There are roads and curves in the blue and in the white. Not a step of your journey up the height that has not its replies in the steady motion of land and sea. Things rise together like a flock of many-feathered birds.

But it is the horizon, more than all else, you have come in search of. That is your chief companion on your way. It is to uplift the horizon to the equality of your sight that you go high. You give it a distance worthy of the skies. There is no distance, except the distance in the sky, to be seen from the level earth; but from the height is to be seen the distance of this world. The line is sent back into the remoteness of light, the verge is removed beyond verge, into a distance that is enormous and minute.

So delicate and so slender is the distant horizon that nothing less near than Queen Mab and her chariot can equal its fineness. Here on the edges of the eyelids, or there on the edges of the world—we know no other place for things so exquisitely made, so thin, so small and tender. The touches of her passing, as close as dreams, or the utmost vanishing of the forest or the ocean in the white light between the earth and the air; nothing else is quite so intimate and fine. The extremities of a mountain view have just such tiny touches as the closeness of closed eyes shuts in.

On the horizon is the sweetest light. Elsewhere colour mars the simplicity of light; but there colour is effaced, not as men efface it, by a blur or darkness, but by mere light. The bluest sky disappears on that shining edge; there is not substance enough for colour. The rim of the hill, of the woodland, of the meadow-land, of the sea—let it only be far enough—has the same absorption of colour; and even the dark things drawn upon the bright edges of the sky are lucid, the light is among them, and they are mingled with it. The horizon has its own way of making bright the pencilled figures of forests, which are black but luminous.

On the horizon, moreover, closes the long perspective of the sky. There you perceive that an ordinary sky of clouds—not a thunder sky—is not a wall but the underside of a floor. You see the clouds that repeat each other grow smaller by distance; and you find a new unity in the sky and earth that gather alike the great lines of their designs to the same distant close. There is no longer an alien sky, tossed up in unintelligible heights above a world that is subject to intelligible perspective.

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Of all the things that London has foregone, the most to be regretted is the horizon. Not the bark of the trees in its right colour; not the spirit of the growing grass, which has in some way escaped from the parks; not the smell of the earth unmingled with the odour of soot; but rather the mere horizon. No doubt the sun makes a beautiful thing of the London smoke at times, and in some places of the sky; but not there, not where the soft sharp distance ought to shine. To be dull there is to put all relations and comparisons in the wrong, and to make the sky lawless.

A horizon dark with storm is another thing. The weather darkens the line and defines it, or mingles it with the raining cloud; or softly dims it, or blackens it against a gleam of narrow sunshine in the sky. The stormy horizon will take wing, and the sunny. Go high enough, and you can raise the light from beyond the shower, and the shadow from behind the ray. Only the shapeless and lifeless smoke disobeys and defeats the summer of the eyes.

Up at the top of the seaward hill your first thought is one of some compassion for sailors, inasmuch as they see but little of their sea. A child on a mere Channel cliff looks upon spaces and sizes that they cannot see in the Pacific, on the ocean side of the world. Never in the solitude of the blue water, never between the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn, never between the Islands and the West, has the seaman seen anything but a little circle of sea. The Ancient Mariner, when he was alone, did but drift through a thousand narrow solitudes. The sailor has nothing but his mast, indeed. And but for his mast he would be isolated in as small a world as that of a traveller through the plains.

Round the plains the horizon lies with folded wings. It keeps them so perpetually for man, and opens them only for the bird, replying to flight with flight.

A close circlet of waves is the sailor's famous offing. His offing hardly deserves the name of horizon. To hear him you might think something of his offing, but you do not so when you sit down in the centre of it.

As the upspringing of all things at your going up the heights, so steady, so swift, is the subsidence at your descent. The further sea lies away, hill folds down behind hill. The whole upstanding world, with its looks serene and alert, its distant replies, its signals of many miles, its signs and communications of light, gathers down and pauses. This flock of birds which is the mobile landscape wheels and goes to earth. The Cardinal weighs down the audience with his downward hands. Farewell to the most delicate horizon.

HABITS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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Education might do somewhat to control the personal habits for which ungenerous observant men are inclined to dislike one another. It has done little. As to literature, this has had the most curiously diverse influence upon the human sensitiveness to habit. Tolstoi's perception of habits is keener than a child's, and he takes them uneasily, as a child does not. He holds them to be the occasion, if not the cause, of hatred. Anna Karenina, as she drank her coffee, knew that her sometime lover was dreading to hear her swallow it, and was hating the crooking of her little finger as she held her cup. It is impossible to live in a world of habits with such an apprehension of habits as this.

It is no wonder that Tolstoi denies to other men unconsciousness, and even preoccupation. With him perception never lapses, and he will not describe a murderer as rapt away by passion from the details of the room and the observation of himself; nor will he represent a theologian as failing—even while he thinks out and decides the question of his faith—to note the things that arrest his present and unclouded eyes. No habits would dare to live under those glances. They must die of dismay.

Tolstoi sees everything that is within sight. That he sees this multitude of things with invincible simplicity is what proves him an artist; nevertheless, for such perception as his there is no peace. For when it is not the trivialities of other men's habits but the actualities of his own mind that he follows without rest, for him there is no possible peace but sleep. To him, more than to all others, it has been said, "Watch!" There is no relapse, there is no respite but sleep or death.

To such a mind every night must come with an overwhelming change, a release too great for gratitude. What a falling to sleep! What a manumission, what an absolution! Consciousness and conscience set free from the exacted instant replies of the unrelapsing day. And at the awakening all is ready yet once more, and apprehension begins again: a perpetual presence of mind.

Dr. Johnson was "absent." No man of "absent" mind is without some hourly deliverance. It is on the present mind that presses the burden of the present world.

SHADOWS

Another good reason that we ought to leave blank, unvexed, and unencumbered with paper patterns the ceiling and walls of a simple house is that the plain surface may be visited by the unique designs of shadows. The opportunity is so fine a thing that it ought oftener to be offered to the light and to yonder handful of long sedges and rushes in a vase. Their slender grey design of shadows upon white walls is better than a tedious, trivial, or anxious device from the shop.

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The shadow has all intricacies of perspective simply translated into line and intersecting curve, and pictorially presented to the eyes, not to the mind. The shadow knows nothing except its flat designs. It is single; it draws a decoration that was never seen before, and will never be seen again, and that, untouched, varies with the journey of the sun, shifts the interrelation of a score of delicate lines at the mere passing of time, though all the room be motionless. Why will design insist upon its importunate immortality? Wiser is the drama, and wiser the dance, that do not pause upon an attitude. But these walk with passion or pleasure, while the shadow walks with the earth. It alters as the hours wheel.

Moreover, while the habit of your sunward thoughts is still flowing southward, after the winter and the spring, it surprises you in the sudden gleam of a north-westerling sun. It decks a new wall; it is shed by a late sunset through a window unvisited for a year past; it betrays the flitting of the sun into unwonted skies—a sun that takes the midsummer world in the rear, and shows his head at a sally-port, and is about to alight on an unused horizon. So does the grey drawing, with which you have allowed the sun and your pot of rushes to adorn your room, play the stealthy game of the year.

You need not stint yourself of shadows, for an occasion. It needs but four candles to make a hanging Oriental bell play the most buoyant jugglery overhead. Two lamps make of one palm-branch a symmetrical countercharge of shadows, and here two palm-branches close with one another in shadow, their arches flowing together, and their paler greys darkening. It is hard to believe that there are many to prefer a “repeating pattern.”

It must be granted to them that a grey day robs of their decoration the walls that should be sprinkled with shadows. Let, then, a plaque or a picture be kept for hanging on shadowless clays. To dress a room once for all, and to give it no more heed, is to neglect the units of the days.

Shadows within doors are yet only messages from that world of shadows which is the landscape of sunshine. Facing a May sun you see little except an infinite number of shadows. Atoms of shadow—be the day bright enough—compose the very air through which you see the light. The trees show you a shadow for every leaf, and the poplars are sprinkled upon the shining sky with little shadows that look translucent. The liveliness of every shadow is that some light is reflected into it; shade and shine have been entangled as though by some wild wind through their million molecules.

The coolness and the dark of night are interlocked with the unclouded sun. Turn sunward from the north, and shadows come to life, and are themselves the life, the action, and the transparency of their day.

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To eyes tired and retired all day within lowered blinds, the light looks still and changeless. So many squares of sunshine abide for so many hours, and when the sun has circled away they pass and are extinguished. Him who lies alone there the outer world touches less by this long sunshine than by the haste and passage of a shadow. Although there may be no tree to stand between his window and the south, and although no noonday wind may blow a branch of roses across the blind, shadows and their life will be carried across by a brilliant bird.

To the sick man a cloud-shadow is nothing but an eclipse; he cannot see its shape, its color, its approach, or its flight. It does but darken his window as it darkens the day, and is gone again; he does not see it pluck and snatch the sun. But the flying bird shows him wings. What flash of light could be more bright for him than such a flash of darkness?

It is the pulse of life, where all change had seemed to be charmed. If he had seen the bird itself he would have seen less—the bird's shadow was a message from the sun.

There are two separated flights for the fancy to follow, the flight of the bird in the air, and the flight of its shadow on earth. This goes across the window blind, across the wood, where it is astray for a while in the shades; it dips into the valley, growing vaguer and larger, runs, quicker than the wind, uphill, smaller and darker on the soft and dry grass, and rushes to meet its bird when the bird swoops to a branch and clings.

In the great bird country of the north-eastern littoral of England, about Holy Island and the basaltic rocks, the shadows of the high birds are the movement and the pulse of the solitude. Where there are no woods to make a shade, the sun suffers the brilliant eclipse of flocks of pearl-white sea birds, or of the solitary creature driving on the wind. Theirs is always a surprise of flight. The clouds go one way, but the birds go all ways: in from the sea or out, across the sands, inland to high northern fields, where the crops are late by a month. They fly so high that though they have the shadow of the sun under their wings, they have the light of the earth there also. The waves and the coast shine up to them, and they fly between lights.

Black flocks and white they gather their delicate shadows up, "swift as dreams," at the end of their flight into the clefts, platforms, and ledges of harbourless rocks dominating the North Sea. They subside by degrees, with lessening and shortening volleys of wings and cries until there comes the general shadow of night wherewith the little shadows close, complete.

The evening is the shadow of another flight. All the birds have traced wild and innumerable paths across the mid-May earth; their shadows have fled all day faster than her streams, and have overtaken all the movement of her wingless creatures. But now it is the flight of the very earth that carries her clasped shadow from the sun.

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Footnotes:

{1} I found it afterwards: it was Rebecca.

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