

# Side Lights eBook

## Side Lights by James Runciman

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# Page 1

## A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR.

*By grant Allen.*

I knew James Runciman but little, and that little for the most part in the way of business. But no one could know that ardent and eager soul at all, no matter how slightly, without admiring and respecting much that was powerful and vigorous in his strangely-compounded personality. His very look attracted. He had human weaknesses not a few, but all of the more genial and humane sort; for he was essentially and above everything a lovable man, a noble, interesting, and unique specimen of genuine, sincere, whole-hearted manhood.

He was a Northumbrian by birth, "and knew the Northumbrian coast," says one of his North-Country friends, "like his mother's face." His birthplace was at Cresswell, a little village near Morpeth, where he was born in August, 1852, so that he was not quite thirty-nine when he finally wore himself out with his ceaseless exertions. He had a true North-Country education, too, among the moors and cliffs, and there drank in to the full that love of nature, and especially of the sea, which forms so conspicuous a note in his later writings. Heather and wave struck the keynotes. A son of the people, he went first, in his boyhood, to the village school at Ellington; but on his eleventh birthday he was removed from the wild north to a new world at Greenwich. There he spent two years in the naval school; and straightway began his first experiences of life on his own account as a pupil teacher at North Shields Ragged School, not far from his native hamlet.

"A worse place of training for a youth," says a writer in *The Schoolmaster*, "it would be hard to discover. The building was unsuitable, the children rough, and the neighbourhood vile—and the long tramp over the moors to Cresswell and back at week ends was, perhaps, what enabled the young apprentice to preserve his health of mind and body. His education was very much in his own hands. He managed in a few weeks to study enough to pass his examinations with credit. The rest of his time was spent in reading everything which came in his way, so that when he entered Borough-road in January, 1871, he was not only almost at the top of the list, but he was the best informed man of his year. His fellow candidates remember even now his appearance during scholarship week. Like David, he was ruddy of countenance, like Saul he towered head and shoulders above the rest, and a mass of fair hair fell over his forehead. Whene'er he took his walks abroad he wore a large soft hat, and a large soft scarf, and carried a stick that was large but not soft."

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To this graphic description I will add a second one. “He was a splendid all-round athlete,” says another friend, who knew him at this time, in the British and Foreign School Society’s London college. “Six feet two or three in height, and with a fine muscular development, he could box, wrestle, fence, or row with all comers, and beat them with ridiculous ease. No one could have been made to believe that he would die, physically worn out, before he was forty. His intellectual mastery was as unquestioned as his physical superiority; he always topped the examination lists, to the chagrin of some of the lecturers, whom he teased sadly by protesting against injustice the moment it peeped out, by teaching all the good young men to smoke prodigiously, by scattering revolutionary verses about the college, and finally by collecting and burning in one grand bonfire every copy of an obnoxious text-book under which the students had long suffered.”

This was indeed the germ of the man as we all knew him long afterwards.

Runciman left the college to take up the mastership of a London Board School in a low part of Deptford; and here he soon gained an extraordinary influence over the population of one of the worst slums in London. Mr. Thomas Wright, the “Journeyman Engineer,” has already told in print elsewhere the story of Runciman’s descent into the depths of Deptford, how he set about humanising the shoeless, starving, conscience-little waifs who were drafted into his school, and how, before many months had passed, he never walked through the squalid streets of his own quarter without two or three loving little fellows all in tatters trying to touch the hem of his garment, while a group of the more timid followed him admiringly afar off. From the children, his good influence extended to the parents; and it was an almost every-day occurrence for visitors from the slums to burst into the school to fetch the master to some coster who was “a-killin’ his woman.” The brawny young giant would dive into the courts where the police go in couples, clamber ricketty stairs, and “interview” the fighting pair. “His plan was to appeal to the manliness of the offender, and make him ashamed of himself; often such a visit ended in a loan, whereby the ‘barrer’ was replenished and the surly husband set to work; but if all efforts at peacemaking were useless, this new apostle had methods beyond the reach of the ordinary missionary—he would (the case deserving it) drop his mild, insinuating, persuasive tones, and not only threaten to pulp the incorrigible blackguard into a jelly, but proceed to do it.”

Runciman, however, was much more in fibre than a mere schoolmaster. He worked hard at his classes by day; he worked equally hard by night at his own education, and at his first attempts at journalism. He matriculated at London University, and passed his first B.Sc. examination. At one and the same time he was carrying on his own school, in the far East End, contributing largely to an educational paper, *The Teacher*, and writing two or three pages a week in *Vanity Fair*, which he long sub-edited. His powers of work were enormous, and he systematically overtaxed them.



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It is not surprising that, under this strain and stress, even that magnificent physique showed signs of breaking down, like every other writer's. A long holiday on the Mediterranean, and another at Torquay, restored him happily to his wonted health; but he saw he must now choose between schoolmastering and journalism. To run the two abreast was too much, even for James Runciman's gigantic powers. Permanent work on *Vanity Fair* being offered to him on his return, he decided to accept it; and thenceforth he plunged with all the strength and ardour of his fervid nature into his new profession.

"It was during this period of insatiable greed for work," says the correspondent of a Nottingham journal, "that I first knew him. You may wonder how he could possibly get through the tasks which he set himself. You would not wonder if you had seen him, when he was in the humour, tramp round the room and pour out a stream of talk on men and books which might have gone direct into print at a high marketable value. The London correspondent of a Nottingham paper says that Runciman was justly vain of the speed of his pen. That is true. He considered that a journalist ought to be able to dictate an article at the rate of 150 words a minute to a shorthand writer. I doubt whether anybody can do that, but Runciman certainly thought he could. He loved to settle a thing off on the instant with one huge effort. Here is an authentic story that shows his method. It is a physical performance, but he tackled journalistic obstacles in the same spirit:

"A parent, who fancied he had a grievance, burst furiously into the schoolroom one day, and startled its quietness with a string of oaths. 'That isn't how we talk here,' said Runciman, in his quiet way. 'Will you step into my room if you have anything to discuss?' Another volley of oaths was the reply, and the unwary parent added that he wasn't going out, and nobody could put him out. Runciman was not the man to allow such a challenge of his authority and prowess to be issued before his scholars and to go unanswered. Without another word, he took the man by the coat-collar with one hand, by the most convenient part of his breeches with the other hand, carried him to the door, gave him a half-a-dozen admonitory shakings, and chucked him down outside. Then he returned and made this cool entry in the school log-book: 'Father of the boy — came into the school to-day, and was very disorderly. I carried him out and chastised him.'"

It was while he was engaged on *Vanity Fair* that I first met Runciman—I should think somewhere about the year 1880. He then edited (or sub-edited) for a short time that clever but abortive little journal, *London*, started by Mr. W.E. Henley, and contributed to by Andrew Lang, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edmund Gosse, and half a dozen more of us. Here we met not infrequently. I was immensely impressed by Runciman's vigorous personality, and by his profound sympathy with the troubles and trials and poverty of the real people. He called himself a Conservative, it is true, while I called myself a Radical; but, except in name, I could not see much difference between our democratic

tendencies. Runciman appeared to me a most earnest and able thinker, full of North-country grit, and overflowing with energy.



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His later literary work is well known to the world. He contributed to the *St. James's Gazette* an admirable series of seafaring sketches, afterwards reprinted as "The Romance of the North Coast." He also wrote "special" articles for the *Standard* and the *Pall Mall*, as well as essays on social and educational topics for the *Contemporary* and the *Fortnightly*. The humour and pathos of pupil-teaching were exquisitely brought out in his "School Board Idylls" and "Schools and Scholars"; his knowledge of the sea and his experience of fishermen supplied him with materials for "Skippers and Shellbacks" and for "Past and Present." He was always a lover of his kind, so his work has almost invariably a strong sympathetic note; and perhaps his best-known book, "A Dream of the North Sea," was written in support of the Mission to Fishermen. He produced but one novel, "Grace Balmaign's Sweetheart"; but his latest work, "Joints in our Social Armour," returned once more to that happier vein of picturesque description which sat most easily and naturally upon him.

The essays which compose the present volume were contributed to the columns of the *Family Herald*. And this is their history:—For many years I had answered the correspondence and written the social essays in that excellent little journal—a piece of work on which I am not ashamed to say that I always look back with affectionate pleasure. Several years since, however, I found myself compelled by health to winter abroad, and therefore unable to continue my weekly contributions. Who could fill up the gap? Who answer my dear old friends and questioners? The proprietor asked me to recommend a substitute. I bethought me instinctively at once of Runciman. The work was, indeed, not an easy one for which to find a competent workman. It needed a writer sufficiently well educated to answer a wide range of questions on the most varied topics, yet sufficiently acquainted with the habits, ideas, and social codes of the lower middle class and the labouring people to throw himself readily into their point of view on endless matters of life and conduct. Above all, it needed a man who could sympathise genuinely with the simplest of his fellows. The love troubles of housemaids, the perplexities as to etiquette, or as to practical life among shop-girls and footmen, must strike him, not as ludicrous, but as subjects for friendly advice and assistance. The fine-gentleman journalist would clearly have been useless for such a post as that. Runciman was just cut out for it. I suggested the work to him, and he took to it kindly. The editor was delighted with the way he buckled up to his new task, and thanked me warmly afterwards for recommending so admirable and so gentle a workman. Those who do not know the nature of the task may smile; but the man who answers the *Family Herald* correspondence, stands in the position of confidant and father-confessor to tens of thousands of troubled and anxious souls among his fellow-countrymen, and still more his fellow-countrywomen. It is, indeed, a *sacerdoce*. The essays are usually contributed by the same person who answers the correspondence; and the collection of Runciman's papers reprinted in this little volume will show that they have often no mean literary value.



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For many years, however, Runciman had systematically overworked, and in other ways abused, his magnificent constitution. The seeds of consumption were gradually developed. But the crash came suddenly. Early in the summer of 1891, he broke down altogether. He was sent to a hydropathic establishment at Matlock; but the doctors discovered he was already in a most critical condition, and four weeks later advised his wife to take him back to his own home at Kingston. His splendid physique seemed to run down with a rush, and when a month was over, he died, on July —th, a victim to his own devouring energy—perhaps, too, to the hardships of a life of journalism.

“This was a man,” said his friendly biographer, whom I have already quoted. No sentence could more justly sum up the feeling of all who knew James Runciman. “Bare power and tenderness, and such sadly human weakness”—that is the verdict of one who well knew him. I cannot claim to have known him well myself; but it is an honour to be permitted to add a memorial stone to the lonely cairn of a fellow-worker for humanity.

G.A.

### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD ABOUT THE BOOK.**

BY W.T. STEAD.

James Runciman was a remarkably gifted man who died just about the time when he ought to have been getting into harness for his life's work. He had in him, more than most men, the materials out of which an English Zola might have been made. And as we badly need an English Zola, and have very few men out of whom such a genius could be fashioned, I have not ceased to regret the death of the author of this volume. For Zola is the supreme type in our day of the novelist-journalist, the man who begins by getting up his facts at first-hand with the care and the exhaustiveness of a first-rate journalist, and who then works them up with the dramatic and literary skill of a great novelist. Charles Reade was something of the kind in his day; but he has left no successor.

James Runciman might have been such an one, if he had lived. He had the tireless industry, the iron constitution, the journalist's keen eye for facts, the novelist's inexhaustible fund of human sympathy. He was a literary artist who could use his pen as a brush with brilliant effect, and he had an amazing facility in turning out “copy.” He had lived to suffer, and felt all that he wrote. There was a marvellous range in his interests. He had read much, he improvised magnificently, and there was hardly anything that he could not have done if only—but, alas! it is idle mooning in the land of Might-Have-Beens!



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The collected essays included in this volume were contributed by Mr. Runciman to the pages of *The Family Herald*. In the superfine circles of the Sniffy, this fact is sufficient to condemn them unread. For of all fools the most incorrigible is surely the conventional critic who judges literary wares not by their intrinsic merit or demerit, but by the periodical in which they first saw the light. The same author may write in the same day two articles, putting his best work and thought into each, but if he sends one to *The Saturday Review* and the other to *The Family Herald*, those who relish and admire his writing in the former would regard it as little less than a *betise* to suggest that the companion article in *The Family Herald* could be anything but miserable commonplace, which no one with any reputation to lose in “literary circles” would venture to read. The same arrogance of ignorance is observable in the supercilious way in which many men speak of the articles appearing in other penny miscellanies of popular literature. They richly deserve the punishment which Mr. Runciman reminds us Sir Walter Scott inflicted upon some blatant snobs who were praising Coleridge’s poetry in Coleridge’s presence. “One gentleman had been extravagantly extolling Coleridge, until many present felt a little uncomfortable. Scott said, ‘Well, I have lately read in a provincial paper some verses which I think better than most of their sort.’ He then recited the lines ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’ which are now so famous. The eulogist of Coleridge refused to allow the verses any merit. To Scott he addressed a series of questions—‘Surely you must own that this is bad?’ ‘Surely you cannot call this anything but poor?’ At length Coleridge quietly broke in, ‘For Heaven’s sake, leave Mr. Scott alone! I wrote the poem’” (p. 39).

Such lessons are more needed now than ever. Only by stripes can the vulgar pseudo-cultured be taught their folly.

The post of father-confessor and general director to the readers of *The Family Herald* which Mr. Runciman filled in succession to Mr. Grant Allen is one which any student of human nature might envy. There is no dissecting-room of the soul like the Confessional, where the priest is quite impalpable and impersonal and the penitent secure in the privacy of an anonymous communication. The ordinary man and woman have just as much of the stuff of tragedy and comedy in their lives as the Lord Tomnoddy or Lady Fitzboodle, and as there are many more of them—thank Heaven!—than the lords and ladies, the masses afford a far more fertile field for the psychological student of life and character than the classes. They are, besides, much less artificial. There are fewer apes and more men and women among people who don’t pay income tax than among those who do. As Director-General of the Answers to Correspondents column of *The Family Herald* Mr. Runciman was brought into more vitalising touch with the broad and solid realities of the average life of the average human being, with all its wretched pettiness and its pathetic anxieties, its carking cares and its wild, irrational aspirations, than he would have been if he had spent his nights in dining out in Mayfair and lounged all day in the clubs of Pall Mall.



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The essays which he contributed to *The Family Herald* were therefore adjusted to the note which every week was sounded by his innumerable correspondents. He was in touch with his public. He did not write above their heads. His contributions were eminently readable, bright, sensible, and interesting. He always had something to say, and he said it, as was his wont, crisply, deftly, and well. And through the chinks and crevices of the smoothly written essay you catch every now and then glimpses of the Northumbrian genius whose life burnt itself out at the early age of thirty-nine.

For James Runciman was anything but a smug, smooth, sermonical essayist. He was a Berserker of the true Northern breed, whose fiery soul glowed none the less fiercely because he wore a large soft hat instead of the Viking's helmet and wielded a pen rather than sword or spear. Like the war-horse in Job, he smelled the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting. His soul rejoiced in conflict, in the storm and the stress of the struggle both of nature and of man. It was born in his blood, and what was lacking at birth came to him in the north-easter which hurled the waves of the Northern Sea in unavailing fury against the Northumbrian coast. He lived at a tension too great to be maintained without incessant stimulus. It was an existence like that of the heroes of Valhalla, who recruited at night the energies dissipated in the battles of the day by quaffing bumpers of inexhaustible mead. In these essays we have the Berserker in his milder moods, his savagery all laid aside, with but here and there a glint, as of sun-ray on harness, to remind us of the sinking in the glory and pride of his strength.

The essays abound with traces of that consummate mastery of English which distinguished all his writings. He, better than any man of our time, could use such subtle magic of woven words as to make the green water of the ocean surge and boil into white foam on the printed page. As befitted a dweller on the north-east coast, he passionately loved the sea. The sea and the sky are the two exits by which dwellers in the slums of Deptford and in North Shields can escape from the inferno of life. He was a close observer of nature and of men. In his pictures of life in the depths he was a grim and uncompromising realist, who, however, was kept from pessimism by his faith in good women and his knowledge of worse men in the past than even "the Squire" and the valet-keeping prize-fighters of our time.

There was a sensible optimism about James Runciman, Conservative though he styled himself,—although there are probably few who would suspect that from such an essay as the bitter description of English life in "Quiet Old Towns" or his lamentation over the unequal distribution of wealth. His sympathy with the suffering of the poor—of the real poor—was a constant passion, and he showed it quite as much by his somewhat Carlylean denunciation of the reprobate as by his larger advocacy of measures that seemed to him best calculated to prevent the waste of child-life.



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More than anything else there is in these essays the oozing through of the bitter but kindly cynicism of a disillusionised man of the world. His essay, for instance, entitled "Vanity of Vanities," is full of the sense of vanity of human effort. And yet against the whole current of this tendency to despondency and despair, we have such an essay as "Are we Wealthy?" in which he declared the day of declamation has passed, but that all things are possible to organisation. "In many respects it is a good world, but it might be made better, nobler, finer in every quarter, if the poor would only recognise wise and silent leaders, and use the laws which men have made in order to repair the havoc which other men have also made." But he reverts to the note of sad and kindly cynicism as he contemplates this supreme ironic procession of life with the laughter of gods in the background, even although he hastens to remind us that much may be made of it if we are wise.

These prose sermons by a tamed Berserker remind us somewhat of a leopard in harness. But they are good sermons for all that, veritable *tours de force* considering who is their author and how alien to him was the practice of preaching. His essay entitled "A Little Sermon on Failures" might be read with profit in many a pulpit, and "Vanity of Vanities" would serve as an admirable discourse on Ecclesiastes. They illustrate the manysidedness of their gifted author not less than his sympathetic treatment of distress and want in "Men who are Down."

These fragments snatched from the mass of his literary output need no introduction from me. Mr. Grant Allen has written with friendly appreciation of the man. I gladly join him in paying a tribute of posthumous respect and admiration to James Runciman and his work.

W.T.S.

## SIDE LIGHTS.

### I.

#### LETTER-WRITERS.

Since old Leisure died, we have come to think ourselves altogether too fine and too busy to cultivate the delightful art of correspondence. Dickens seems to have been almost the last man among us who gave his mind to letter-writing; and his letters contain some of his very best work, for he plunged into his subject with that high-spirited abandonment which we see in "Pickwick," and the full geniality of his mind came out delightfully. The letter in which he describes a certain infant schoolboy who lost himself at the Great Exhibition is one of the funniest things in literature, but it is equalled in positive value by some of the more serious letters which the great man sent off in the intervals of his heavy labour. Dickens could do nothing by halves, and thus, at times

when he could have earned forty pounds a day by sheer literary work, he would spend hours in answering people whom he had never seen, and, what is more remarkable, these "task"-letters were marked by all the brilliant strength and spontaneity



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of his finest chapters. He was the last of the true correspondents, and we shall not soon look upon his like again. With all the contrivances for increasing our speed of communication, and for enabling us to cram more varied action into a single life, we have less and less time to spare for salutary human intercourse. The post-card symbolises the tendency of the modern mind. We have come to find out so many things which ought to be done that we make up our minds to do nothing whatever thoroughly; and the day may come when the news of a tragedy ruining a life or a triumph crowning a career will be conveyed by a sixpenny telegram. In the bad old days, when postage was dear and the means of conveyance slow, people who could afford to correspond at all sat down to begin a letter as though they were about to engage in some solemn rite. Every patch of the paper was covered, and every word was weighed, so that the writer screwed the utmost possible value for his money out of the post-office. The letters written in the last century resembled the deliberate and lengthy communications of Roman gentlemen like Cicero: and there is little wonder that the good folk made the most of their paper and their time. We find Godwin casually mentioning the fact that he paid twenty-one shillings and eightpence for the postage of a letter from Shelley; readers of *The Antiquary* will remember that Lovel paid twenty-five shillings postage for one epistle, besides half a guinea for the express rider. *Certes* a man had good need to drive a hard bargain with the Post Office in those pinching times! Of course the “lower orders”—poor benighted souls—were not supposed to have any correspondence at all, and the game was kept up by gentlemen of fortune, by merchants, by eager and moneyed lovers, and by stray persons of literary tastes, who could manage to beg franks from members of Parliament and other dignitaries. One gentleman, not of literary tastes, once franked a cow and sent her by post; but this kind of postal communication was happily rare. The best of the letter-writers felt themselves bound to give their friends good worth for their money, and thus we find the long chatty letters of the eighteenth century purely delightful. I do not care much for Lord Chesterfield’s correspondence; he was eternally posing with an eye on the future—perhaps on the very immediate future. As Johnson sternly said, “Lord Chesterfield wrote as a dancing-master might write,” and he spoke the truth. Fancy a man sending such stuff as this to a raw boy—“You will observe the manners of the people of the best fashion there; not that they are—it may be—the best manners in the world, but because they are the best manners of the place where you are, to which a man of sense always conforms. The nature of things is always and everywhere the same; but the modes of them vary more or less in every country, and an easy and genteel conformity to them, or rather the assuming of them at proper times and proper places,



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is what particularly constitutes a man of the world, and a well-bred man!" All true enough, but how shallow, and how ineffably conceited! Here is another absurd fragment—"My dear boy, let us resume our reflections upon men, their character, their manners—in a word, our reflections upon the World." It is quite like Mr. Pecksniff's finest vein. There is not a touch of nature or vital truth in the Chesterfield letters, and the most that can be said of them is that they are the work of a fairly clever man who was flattered until he lost all sense of his real size. If we take the whole bunch of finikin sermons and compare them with the one tremendous knock-down letter which Johnson sent to the dandy earl, we can easily see who was the Man of the pair. When we return to Walpole, the case is different. Horace never posed at all; he was a natural gentleman, and anything like want of simplicity was odious to him. The age lives in his charming letters; after going through them we feel as though we had been on familiar terms with that wicked, corrupt, outwardly delightful society that gambled and drank, and scandalised the grave spirits of the nation, in the days when George III. was young. Horace Walpole was the letter-writer of letter-writers; his gossip carries the impress of truth with it; and, though he had no style, no brilliancy, no very superior ability, yet, by using his faculties in a natural way, he was able to supply material for two of the finest literary fragments of modern times. I take it that the most stirring and profoundly wise piece of modern history is Carlyle's brief account of William Pitt, given in the "Life of Frederick the Great." Once we have read it we feel as though the great commoner had stood before us for a while under a searching light; his figure is imprinted on the very nerves, and no man who has read carefully can ever shake off an impression that seems burnt into the fibre of the mind. This superlatively fine historic portrait was painted by Carlyle solely from Walpole's material—for we cannot reckon chance newspaper scraps as counting for much—and thus the gossip of Strawberry Hill conferred immortality on himself and on our own Titanic statesman. But Walpole's influence did not end there. Whoever wants to read a very good and charming work should not miss seeing Sir George Trevelyan's "Life of Charles James Fox." To praise this book is almost an impertinence. I content myself with saying that those who once taste its fascination go back to it again and again, and usually end by placing it with the books that are "the bosom friends" of men. Now the grim Scotchman lit up Horace's letters with the lurid furnace-glow of his genius; Sir George held the serene lamp of the scholar above the same letters, and lo, we have two pieces that can only die when the language dies! What a feat for a mere letter-writer to achieve! Let ambitious correspondents take example by Horace Walpole, and learn that simplicity is the first, best—nay, the only—object to be aimed at by the letter-writer.



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We have forgotten the easy style of Walpole; we do not any longer care much for Johnson, though his letters are indeed models; we have no time for lovely whimsical elaborations like those of Cowper or Charles Lamb; but still some of us—persons of inferior mind perhaps—do attempt to write letters. To these I have a word to say. So far as I can judge, after passing many, many hundreds and thousands of letters through my hands, the best correspondents nowadays are either those who have been educated to the finest point, and who therefore dare not be affected, or those who have no education at all. A little while ago I went through a terrific letter from a young man, who took up seventeen enormous double sheets of paper in trying to tell me something about himself. The handwriting was good, the air of educated assurance breathed from the style was quite impassive, and the total amount of six thousand eight hundred words was sufficient to say anything in reason. Yet this voluminous writer managed to say nothing in particular excepting that he thought himself very like Lord Byron, that he was fond of courting, and that his own talents were supreme. Now a simple honest narrative of youthful struggles would have held me attentive, but I found much difficulty in keeping a judicial mind on this enormous effusion. Why? Because the writer was a bad correspondent; he was so wrapped up in himself that he could not help fancying that every one else must be in the same humour, and thus he produced a dull, windy letter in spite of his tolerable smattering of education. On the other hand, I often study simple letters which err in the matter of spelling and grammar, but which are enthralling in interest. A domestic servant modestly tells her troubles and gives the truth about her life; every word burns with significance—and Shakespeare himself could do no more than give music of style and grave coherence to the narrative. The servant writes well because she keeps clear of high-sounding phrases, and writes with entire sincerity. It is the sincerity that attracts the judicious reader, and it is only by sincerity that any letter-writer can please other human creatures. Beauty of style counts for a great deal; I would not sacrifice the exquisite daintiness of epistolary style in Lamb or Coleridge or Thackeray or Macaulay for gold. But style is not everything, and the very best letter I ever read—the letter which stands first in my opinion as a model of what written communications should be—is without grammar or form or elegance. It is simply a document in which the writer suppresses himself, and conveys all the intelligence possible in a limited space. To all letter-writers I would say, “Let your written words come direct from your own mind. The moment you try to reproduce any thought or any cadence of language which you have learned from books you become a bore, and no sane man can put up with you. But, if you resolve that the thought set down shall be yours and yours alone,



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that the turns of phrase shall be such as you would use in talking with your intimates, that each word shall be prompted by your own knowledge or your belief, then it does not matter a pin if you are ignorant of spelling, grammar, and all the graces; you will be a pleasing correspondent.” Look at the letters of Lady Sarah Lennox, who afterwards became the mother of the brilliant Napiers. This lady did not know how to put in a single stop, and her spelling is more wildly eccentric than words can describe, yet her letters are enthralling, and natural fire and fun actually seem to derive piquancy from the schoolgirlish errors. If you sit down to write with the intention of being impressive, you may not make a fool of yourself, but the chances are all in that direction; whereas, if you resolve with rigid determination to say something essential about some fact and to say it in your own way, you will produce a piece of valuable literature. Of course there are times when dignity and gravity are necessary in correspondence, but even dignity cannot be divorced from simplicity. Supposing that, by an evil chance, a person finds himself bound to inflict an epistolary rebuff on another, the rebuff entirely fails if a single affected word is inserted. The most perfect example of a courteous snub with which I am acquainted was sent by a master of measured and ornamental prose. Gibbon, the historian, received a very lengthy and sarcastic letter from the famous Doctor Priestley, of Birmingham. Priestley blamed Gibbon for his covert mode of attacking Christianity, and observed that Servetus was more to be admired for his courage as a martyr than for his services as a scientific discoverer. Now Gibbon knew by instinct that the historic style would at once become ludicrous if used to answer such a letter; so he deserted his ordinary majestic manner, and wrote thus—

“SIR—As I do not pretend to judge of the sentiments or intentions of another, I shall not inquire how far you are inclined to suffer or inflict martyrdom. It only becomes me to say that the style and temper of your last letter have satisfied me of the propriety of declining all further correspondence, whether public or private, with such an adversary.”

A perfect sneer, a perfectly guarded and telling rebuff. But I do not care to speak about the literature of quarrels; my concern is mainly with those readers who have relatives scattered here and there, and who try to keep up communications with the said relatives. Judging from the countless letters which I see, only a small percentage of people understand that the duty of a correspondent is to say something. As a general rule, it may be taken for granted that abstract reflections are a bore; and I am certain that an exiled Englishman would be far more delighted with the letter of a child who told him about the farm or the cows, or the people in the street, or the marriages and christenings and engagements, than he would be with



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miles of sentiment from an adult, no matter how noble might be the language in which the sentiment was couched. Partly, then, as a hint to the good folk who load the foreign-bound mails, partly as a hint to my own army of correspondents,[1] I have given a fragment of the fruits of wide experience. Remember that stately Sir William Temple is all but forgotten; chatty Pepys is immortal. Windy Philip de Commines is unread; Montaigne is the delight of leisurely men all the world over. The mighty Doctor Robertson is crowned chief of bores; the despised Boswell is likely to be the delight of ages to come. The lesson is—be simple, be natural, be truthful; and let style, grace, grammar, and everything else take care of themselves. I spoke just now of the best letter I have ever read, and I venture to give a piece of it—

[1] Written when Mr. Runciman answered correspondents of the *Family Herald*.

“DEAR MADAM,—No doubt you and Frank’s friends have heard the sad fact of his death here, through his uncle or the lady who took his things. I will write you a few lines, as a casual friend that sat by his death-bed. Your son, Corporal Frank H. —, was wounded near Fort Fisher. The wound was in the left knee, pretty bad. On the 4th of April the leg was amputated a little above the knee; the operation was performed by Dr. Bliss, one of the best surgeons in the Army—he did the whole operation himself. The bullet was found in the knee. I visited and sat by him frequently, as he was fond of having me. The last ten or twelve days of April I saw that his case was critical. The last week in April he was much of the time flighty, but always mild and gentle. He died 1st of May. Frank, as far as I saw, had everything requisite in surgical treatment, nursing, &c. He had watchers most of the time—he was so good and well-behaved and affectionate. I myself liked him very much. I was in the habit of coming in afternoons and sitting by him and soothing him; and he liked to have me—liked to put his arm out and lay his hand on my knee—would keep it so a long while. Towards the last he was more restless and flighty at night—often fancied himself with his regiment, by his talk sometimes seemed as if his feelings were hurt by being blamed by his officers for something he was entirely innocent of—said, ‘I never in my life was thought capable of such a thing, and never was.’ At other times he would fancy himself talking, as it seemed, to children and such like—his relatives, I suppose—and giving them good advice—would talk to them a long while. All the time he was out of his head not one single bad word or idea escaped him. It was remarked that many a man’s conversation in his senses was not half so good as Frank’s delirium. He seemed quite willing to die—he had become weak and had suffered a good deal, and was quite resigned, poor boy! I do not know his past life, but I feel as if it must have been good; at any rate, what I saw of

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him here under the most trying circumstances, with a painful wound, and among strangers, I can say that he behaved so brave, so composed, and so sweet and affectionate, it could not be surpassed.... I thought perhaps a few words, though from a stranger, about your son, from one who was with him at the last, might be worth while, for I loved the young man, though I but saw him immediately to lose him.”

The grammar here is all wrong, but observe the profound goodness of the writer; he hides nothing he knows that bereaved mother wants to know about her Frank, her boy; and he tells her everything essential with rude and noble tenderness, just as though the woman’s sorrowing eyes were on his face. It is a beautiful letter, bald as it is, and I commend the style to writers on all subjects, even though a schoolmaster could pick the syntax to pieces.

## II.

### ON WRITING ONESELF OUT.

Lord Beaconsfield once compared his opponents on the Treasury Bench to a line of exhausted volcanoes. They had taken office when they were full of mighty aspirations; they had poured forth measures of all sorts with prodigal vigour; and at last they were reduced to wait, supine and helpless, for the inevitable swing of the political pendulum. A similar process of exhaustion goes on among literary men; and there are certain symptoms which cause expert persons to say, “Ah, poor Blank seems to have written himself out!” I have occasionally alluded to this most distressing topic, but I have never discussed it fully.

The subject of brain-exhaustion has a very peculiar interest for the public as well as for the professional penman; half the slovenly prose which ordinary men use in their correspondence is due to the bad models set by written-out men, and the agonising exhibitions made by some thousands of public speakers in this devoted and long-suffering land are also due to the purblind weakness of the exhausted man. The wrought-out writer is not permitted to cease from work; he goes on droning out his fixed quantity of mortal dreariness day by day and week by week until his mind spins along a particular groove, and he probably repeats himself every day of his life without being aware that he is anything but brilliantly original. I am obliged to study many novels, and I know many most successful workers who at this present time are turning out the same fiction under varied names with monotonous regularity. They are not quite like an old hand whom I knew long ago, who used to promote the characters in novelettes of his own and turn them on to the market again and again; the effusions of this genius were not of sufficient importance to attract attention from folk with clear memories, and I believe that he escaped detection in a miraculous way. His untitled country gentleman

became a baronet, the injured heroine was similarly moved up on the social scale, and the noble effort



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came forth with a fresh name, while the knowing old impostor chuckled in his garret and pouched his pittance. I believe the funny soul has passed away; but really there are many very pretentious persons who do little more than vary his methods unconsciously. Poor James Grant delighted many a schoolboy, and perhaps his best work was never quite so much appreciated as it ought to have been. "The Black Dragoons," "The Queen's Own," and "The Romance of War" all contained good work, and many gallant lads delighted their hearts with them; I know that one youth at least learned "The Black Dragoons" by heart, and amused the people in a lonely farm-house by reciting whole chapters on winter nights, and I have some reason to believe that the book gave the boy a taste for literature which ended in his becoming a novelist. But, as Grant went on with machine-like regularity, how curiously similar to each other his books became! Narvaez Cifuentes, in "The Romance of War," is the type of all the villains; the young dragoons were all alike; the wooden heroines might have been chopped out by a literary carpenter from one model; the charges, the escapes, the perils of the hero never varied very much from volume to volume; and the fact was obvious that the brain had ceased to develop any strikingly original ideas and only the busy hand worked on. A very sarcastic personage once observed that "it is better for literary men to read a little occasionally." To outsiders the advice may seem like a piece of grotesque fun; but those who know much of literary work are well aware that a writer may very easily become possessed by a sick disgust of books which never leaves him. He will look at volumes of extracts, he will skim poetry, he will read eagerly for a few days or weeks in order to get up a subject; but the pure delight in literature for its own sake has left him, and he is as decidedly prosaic a tradesman as his own hosier. Such a man soon joins the written-out division, and, unless he travels much or has a keenly humorous eye for the things about him, he runs a very good chance of becoming an intolerable bore. He forgets that the substance of his brain is constantly fading, and that he needs not only to replenish the physical substance of the organ by constant care, but to replenish all his dwindling stores of knowledge, ideas, and even of verbal resources. Among the older authors there were some who offered melancholy spectacles of mental exhaustion; and the practised reader knows how to look for particular features in their work, just as he looks for Wouvermans' white horse and Beaumont's brown tree. These literary spinners forget the example of Macaulay, who was quite contented if he turned out two foolscap pages as his actual completed task in mere writing for one day. He was never tired of laying in new stores, and he persistently refreshed his memory by running over books which he had read oftentimes before. The books and manuscripts which Gibbon read in twenty

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years reached such an enormous number that, when he attempted to form a catalogue of them, he was compelled to give up the task in despair; he was constantly adding to the enormous reservoir of knowledge which he had at command, and thus his work never grew stale, and he was ready instantly with a hundred illustrative lights on any point which chanced to crop up either in conversation or in the course of his reading. The cheap and flashy writer is inclined to disdain the men who are thorough in their studies; but, while his work grows thin and poor, the judicious reader's becomes marked by more and more of richness and fulness.

Burke kept his vast accumulations of knowledge perfectly fresh; and I notice in him that, instead of growing more staid and commonplace in his style as he increased in years, he grew more vigorous, until he actually slid into the excess of gaudy redundancy. I am sorry that his prose ever became Asiatic in its splendour; but even that fact shows how steadfast effort may prevent a man from writing away his originality and his freshness of manner. Observe the sad results of an antagonistic proceeding for even the mightiest of brains. Sir Walter Scott was building up his brain until he was forty years old; then we had the Homeric strength of "Marmion," the perfect art of the "Antiquary," the unequalled romantic interest of "Guy Mannering," "Rob Roy," "Ivanhoe," "Quentin Durward." The long years of steady production drained that most noble flood of knowledge and skill until we reached the obvious fatuity of "Count Robert" and the imbecilities of "Castle Dangerous." Any half-dozen of such books as "Redgauntlet," "The Pirate," and "Kenilworth" were sufficient to give a man the reputation of being great—and yet even that overwhelming opulence was at last worn down into mental poverty. Poor Scott never gave himself time to recover when once his descent of the last perilous slope had begun, and he suffered for his folly in not resting.

In Lord Tennyson's case we see how wisdom may preserve a man's power. The poet who gave us "Ulysses" so long ago, the poet who brought forth such a magnificent work as "Maud," retained his power so fully that thirty years after "Maud" he gave us "Rizpah." This continued freshness, lasting nearly threescore years, is simply due to economy of physical and mental resource, which is far more important than any economy of money. Charles Dickens cannot be said to have been fairly written out at any time; but he was often perilously near that condition; only his power of throwing himself with eagerness into any scheme of relaxation saved him; and, but for the readings and the unhappy Sittingbourne railway accident, he might be with us now full of years and honours. When he did suffer himself to be worked to a low ebb for a time, his writing was very bad. Even in the flush of his youth, when he was persuaded to write "Oliver Twist" in a hurry, he fell far below his own standard. I have lately read the



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book after many years, and while I find nearly all the comic parts admirable, some of the serious portions strike me as being so curiously stilted and bad that I can hardly bring myself to believe that Dickens touched them. An affectionate student of his books can almost always account for the bad patches in Dickens by collating the novels with the letters and diary. Much of the totally nauseating gush of the Brothers Cheeryble must have been turned out only by way of stop-gap; and there are passages in "Little Dorrit" which may have been done speedily enough by the author, but which no one of my acquaintance can reckon as bearable. Dickens saw the danger of exhausting himself before he reached fifty-four years of age, and tried to repair damages inflicted by past excesses; but he was too late, and though "Edwin Drood" was quite in his best manner, he could not keep up the effort—and we lost him.

As for the dismal hacks who sometimes call themselves journalists, I cannot grow angry with them; but they do test the patience of the most stolid of men. To call them writers—*ecrivains*—would be worse than flattery; they are paper-stainers, and every fresh dribble of their incompetence shows how utterly written out they are. Let them have a noble action to describe, or let them have a world-shaking event given them as subject for comment, the same deadly mechanical dulness marks the description and the article. Look at an article by Forbes or McGahan or Burleigh—an article wherein the words seem alive—and then run over a doleful production of some complacent hack, and the astounding range that divides the zenith of journalism from the nadir may at once be seen. The poor hack has all his little bundle of phrases tied up ready to his hand; but he has no brain left, and he cannot rearrange his verbal stock-in-trade in fresh and vivid combinations. The old, old sentences trickle out in the old, old way. Our friends, "the breach than the observance," "the cynosure of all eyes," "the light fantastic toe," "beauty when unadorned," "the poor Indian," and all the venerable army come out on parade. The weariful writer fills up his allotted space; but he does not give one single new idea, and we forget within a few minutes what the article pretended to say—in an hour we have forgotten even the name of the subject treated.

As one looks around on the corps of writers now living, one feels inclined to ask the old stale question, "And pray what time do you give yourself for thinking?" The hurrying reporter or special correspondent needs only to describe in good prose the pictures that pass before his eye; but what is required of the man who stays at home and spins out his thoughts as the spider spins his thread? He must take means to preserve his own freshness, or he grows more and more unreadable with a rapidity which lands him at last among the helpless, hopeless dullards; if he persists in expending the last remnants of his ideas, he may at last be reduced to such extremities

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that he will be forced to fill up his allotted space by describing the interesting vagaries of his own liver. Scores of written-out men pretend to instruct the public daily or weekly; the supply of rank commonplace is pumped up, but the public rush away to buy some cheap story which has signs of life in it. My impression is that it is not good for writers to consort too much with men of their own class; the slang of literature is detestable, and a man soon begins to use it at all seasons if he lives in the literary atmosphere. The actor who works in the theatre at night, and lives only among his peers during the day, ends by becoming a mummer even in private life; a teacher who does not systematically shake off the taint of the school is among the most tiresome of creatures; the man who hurries from race-meeting to race-meeting seems to lose the power of talking about anything save horses and bets; and the literary man cannot hope to escape the usual fate of those who narrow their horizon. When a man once settles down as "literary" and nothing else, he does not take long in reaching complete nullity. His power of emitting strings of grammatical sentences remains; but the sentences are only exudations from an awful blankness—he is written out. The rush after money has latterly brought some of our most exquisite writers of fiction into a condition which is truly lamentable; the very beauties which marked their early work have become garish and vulgarised, and, in running through the early chapters of a new novel, a reader of fair intelligence discovers that he could close the book and tell the story for himself. One artist cannot get away from sentimental merchant-seamen and lovely lady-passengers; another must always bring in an infant that is cast on shore near a primitive village; another must have for characters a roguish trainer of race-horses, an honest jockey, a dark villain who tampers with race-horses, and a dashing young man who is saved from ruin by betting on a race; another drags in a surprisingly lofty-minded damsel who grows up pure and noble amid the most repulsive surroundings; another can never forget the lost will; another depends on a mock-modest braggart who kills scores of people in a humorous way. The mould remains the same in each case, although there may be casual variations in the hue of the material poured out and moulded. All these forlorn folk are either verging toward the written-out condition or have reached the last level of flatness. Like the great painters who work for Manchester or New York millionaires, these novelists produce stuff which is only shoddy; they lower their high calling, and they prepare themselves to pass away into the ranks of the nameless millions whose works are ranged along miles of untouched shelves in the great public libraries. Fame may not be greatly worth trying for; but at least a man may try to turn out the very best work of which he is capable. Some of our brightest refuse to aim at the highest, and they land in the dim masses of the written-out.

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### III.

#### THE DECLINE OF LITERATURE.

It may seem almost an impertinence to use such a word as “decline” in connection with literature at a date when every crossing-sweeper can read, when free libraries are multiplied, when a new novel is published every day all the year round, and when thousands and tens of thousands of books—scientific, historical, critical—are poured out from the presses. We have several weekly journals devoted almost entirely to the work of criticising the new volumes which appear, and the literary caste in society is both numerous and powerful. In the face of all this I assert that the true literary spirit is declining, and that the pure enthusiasm of other days is passing away.

I emphatically deny that the actual literary artists in any line are inferior to the men of the past, and never cease to contemn the impudent talk of those who shake their heads and allude to the giants who are supposed to have lived in some unspecified era of our history. Lord Salisbury is greater than Dean Swift as a political writer; the author of “John Inglesant” is a finer stylist than any man of the last two centuries; as a writer of prose no man known in the world’s history can be compared to Mr. Ruskin; with Messrs. Froude, Gardiner, Lecky, Trevelyan, Bishop Stubbs, and Mr. Freeman we can hold our own against the historian of any date; the late Lord Tennyson and Mr. Arnold have written poetry that must live. Then in science we have a set of men who present the most momentous theories, the most profoundly thrilling facts in language which is lucid and attractive as that of a pretty fairy-tale. If we turn to our popular journals, we find learning, humour, consummate skill in style from writers who do not even sign their names. Day by day the stream of wit, logic, artistic power flows on, and for all these literary wares there must be a steady sale; and yet I am constrained to declare that literature is declining. This may sound like juggling with words in the fashion approved by Dr. Johnson when he was in his whimsical humour; but I am serious, and my meaning will shortly appear. We have more readers and fewer students. The person known as “the general reader” is nowadays fond of literary dram-drinking—he wants small pleasant doses of a stimulant that will act swiftly on his nerves; and, if he can get nothing better, he will contentedly batten on the tiny paragraphs of detached gossip which form the main delight of many fairly intelligent people. Books are cheap and easily procured, and the circulating library renders it almost unnecessary for any one to buy books at all. In myriads of houses in town or country the weekly or monthly box of books comes as regularly as the supplies of provisions; the contents are devoured, the dram-drinkers crave for further stimulant, and one book chases another out of memory. Literature is as good as and better than ever it was in the fabulous



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palmy days, but it is not so precious now; and a great work, so far from being treated as a priceless possession and a companion, is regarded only as an item in the *menu* furnished for a sort of literary debauch. A laborious historian spends ten years in studying an important period; he contrives to set forth his facts in a brilliant and exhilarating style, whereupon the word is passed that the history must be read. People meet, and the usual inquiries are exchanged—"Have you read Brown on the Union of 1707?" "Yes—skimmed it through last week. But have you seen Thomson's attack on the Apocrypha?" And so the two go on exchanging notes on their respective bundles of literary lumber, but without endeavouring to gain the least understanding of any author's meaning, and without tasting in the smallest degree any one of the ennobling properties of ripe thought or beautiful workmanship. The main thing is to be able to say that you have read a book. What you have got out of it is quite another thing with which no one is concerned; so that in some societies where the pretence of being "literary" is kept up the bewildered outsider feels as though he were listening to the discussion of a library catalogue at a sale. Timid persons think that they would be looked on lightly if they failed to show an acquaintance with the name at least of any new work; and the consequences of this silly ambition would be very droll did we not know how much loose thought, sham culture, lowering deceit arise from it. A young man lately made a great success in literature. For his first book he gained nothing, but lost a good deal; for his second he obtained twenty pounds, after he had lost his eyesight for a time, owing to his toiling by night and day; his third work brought him fame and a fortune. He happened to be in a bookseller's shop when a lady entered and said, "What is the price of Mr. Blank's works?" "Thirty shillings, madam." "Oh, that is far too much! I have to dine with him to-night, and I wanted to skim the books. But he isn't worth thirty shillings!" Twenty discourses could not exhaust the full significance of that little speech. The lady was typical of a class, and her mode of getting ready her table talk is the same which produces confusion, mean sciolism, and mental poverty among too many of those who set up as arbiters of taste. A somewhat cruel man of letters is said to have led on one of the shallow pretenders in a heartless way until the victim confidently affected knowledge of a plot, descriptions, and characters which had no existence. The trick was heartless and somewhat dishonest; but the mere fact that it could be played at all shows how far the game of literary racing has done harm.



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Let us turn from the book-clubs, the libraries, and the swarming cheap editions of our own days, and hark back for about seventy-seven years. The great Sheriff was then in the flush of his glorious manhood, and it is amazing to discover the national interest that was felt in his works as they came rapidly out. When "Rokeby" appeared, only one copy reached Cambridge, and the happy student who secured that was followed by an eager crowd demanding that the poem should be read aloud to them. When "Marmion" was sent out to the Peninsula, parties of officers were made up nightly in the lines of Torres Vedras to hear and revel in the new marvel. Sir Adam Fergusson and his company of men were sheltered in a hollow at the battle of Talavera. Sir Adam read the battle-scene from "Marmion" aloud to pass away the time; and the reclining men cheered lustily, though at intervals the screech of the French shells sounded overhead. It may be said that the publication of a new work by Dickens was a national event only a quarter of a century ago. True; but somehow even Dickens was not regarded with that grave critical interest which private citizens of the previous generation bestowed on Scott. The incomparable Sir Walter at that time was dwelling far away amid the swamps and grim hills and shaggy thickets of Ashestiel. Town-life was not for him, and he grudged the hours spent in musty law-courts. Before dawn he went joyously to his work, and long before the household was astir he had made good progress. At noon he was free to lead the life of a country farmer and sportsman; the ponies were saddled, the greyhounds uncoupled, and a merry company set off across the hills. The talk was refined and gladsome, and visitors came back refreshed and improved to the cottage. And now comes the strange part of the story—this healthy retired sporting farmer was in correspondence with the greatest and cleverest men in the British Isles, and the most masterly criticisms of literature were exchanged with a lavish freedom which seems impossible to us in the days of the post-card and the hurried gasping telegram. In our day there is absolutely no time for that leisurely conscientious study which was usual in the time when men bought their books and paid heavily for them. Even Mr. Ruskin, in his retirement on the shores of Coniston, cannot carry on that graceful and ineffably instructive correspondence which was so easy to Southey, Coleridge, and the others of that fine company who dwelt in the Lake District. Marvellous it is to observe the splendid quality of the literary criticisms which were sent to the great ones by men who had no intention of writing or selling a line. In studying the memoirs of the century we find that, long before the education movement began, there were scores of men and women who had no need to make literature a profession, but who were nevertheless skilled and cultured as the writers who worked for bread. Who now talks of Mr. Morritt of Rokeby? Yet Morritt carried



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on a voluminous correspondence with Scott and the rest of that brilliant school. Who ever thinks of George Ellis? But Ellis was the most learned of antiquaries, and devoid of the pedantry which so often makes antiquarian discourses repellent. His polished expositions have the charm that comes from a gentle soul and an exquisite intellect, while his criticism is so luminous and just that even Mr. Ruskin could hardly improve upon it. Then there were Mr. Skene, Joanna Baillie—alas, poor forgotten Joanna!—Erskine, the Shepherd, the Duke of Buccleuch, Wilson, and so many more that we grow amazed to think that even Scott was able to rear his head above them. All the school were alike in their love and enthusiasm for literature; and really they seemed to have had a better mode of living and thinking than have the smart gentlemen who think that earnest and conscientious study is only a heavy species of frivolity. And let it be marked that this wide-spread company of private citizens and public writers by no means formed a mutual admiration society, for they criticised each other sharply and wisely; and the criticism was taken in good part by all concerned. When Ellis wrote a sort of treatise to Scott in epistolary form, and complained of the poet's monotonous use of the eight-syllable line, Scott replied with equanimity, and took as much pains to convince his friend as though he were discussing a thesis for some valuable prize. On one occasion a few of the really great men found themselves in the midst of a society where the practice of mutual admiration was beginning to creep in. The way in which two of the most eminent guests snubbed the mutual admirers was at once delightful and effective. One gentleman had been extravagantly extolling Coleridge, until many present felt a little uncomfortable. Scott said, "Well, I have lately read in a provincial paper some verses which I think better than most of their sort." He then recited the lines "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter" which are now so famous. The eulogist of Coleridge refused to allow the verses any merit. To Scott he addressed a series of questions—"Surely you must own that this is bad?" "Surely you cannot call this anything but poor?" At length Coleridge quietly broke in, "For Heaven's sake, leave Mr. Scott alone! I wrote the poem." This cruel blow put an end to mutual admiration in that quarter for some time.

Byron, Southey, Wordsworth, Jeffrey—all in their several fashions—regarded literature as a serious pursuit, and they were followed by the "illustrious obscure" ones whose names are now sunk in the night. How the whirligig of time sweeps us through change after change! Any of us can buy for shillings books which would have cost our predecessors pounds; we can have access to all the wit, poetry, and learning of our generation at a cost of three guineas a year. For little more than a shilling per week any reader who lives far away in the country can have relays of books sent



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him at the rate of fifteen volumes per relay. Very satisfactory. Most satisfactory too are the Board-school libraries, from which a million children obtain the best and noblest of literature without money and without price. Still there remains the fact that any man who sat down and wrote long letters on literary subjects would be looked upon as light-headed. We are too clever to be in earnest, and the expenditure of earnestness on such a subject as literature is regarded as evidence of pedantry or folly, or both. Those men of former days knew their few books thoroughly and loved them wisely; we know our many books only in a smattering way, and we do not love them at all. When Mr. Mark Pattison suggested that a well-to-do man reasonably expend 10 per cent. of his income on books, he roused a burst of kindly laughter, and it was suggested that solitary confinement would do him a great deal of good. That was a fine trenchant mode of looking at the matter. When, in meditative hours, I compare the two generations of readers, I think that the mental health of the old school and the new school may be compared respectively with the bodily health of sober sturdy countrymen and effete satiated gourmands of the town. The countrymen has no great variety of good cheer, but he assimilates all that is best of his fare, and he grows powerful, calm, able to endure heavy tasks. The jaded creature of the clubs and the race-courses and the ball-room has swift incessant variety until all things pall upon him. In time he must begin with damaging stimulants before he can go on with the interesting pursuits of each day. Every device is tried to tickle his dead palate; but the succession of dainties is of no avail, for the man cannot assimilate what is set before him, and he becomes soft of muscle, devoid of nerve—a weed of civilisation. Are not the cases analogous to those of the sound reverent student and the weary *blase* skimmer of books? So, in sum, I say that, even if our enormous output of printed matter goes on increasing, and if the number of readers increases by millions, yet, so long as men read the thoughts of other men not to search for instruction and high pleasure, but to search for distraction and vain delirious excitement, then we are justified in talking of the decline of literature. Far be it from me to say that people should neglect the study of men and women and devote themselves to the strained study of books alone. The mere bookman is always more or less a dolt; but the wise reader who learns from the living voice and visible actions of his fellow-creatures as well as from the dead printed pages is on the way to placidity and strength and true wisdom. Thus much I will say—the flippant devourer of books can neither be wise nor strong nor useful; and it is his tribe who have discredited a pursuit which once was noble and of good report.

### IV.

#### COLOUR-BLINDNESS IN LITERATURE.



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The singular phrase at the head of this Essay came to me from a correspondent who wrote in great perplexity. This unhappy man was quite miserable because he found that his own views of the masterpieces of literature differed from those generally expressed; his modesty prevented him from setting himself up in opposition to the opinions of others, and he frankly asked, "Is there anything answering to colour-blindness which may exist in the mind as regards literature?" The absurd but felicitous inquiry took my fancy greatly, and I resolved to examine the problem with care. In particular my perturbed friend alluded to certain movements in modern criticism. He cannot admire Shelley, yet he finds Shelley placed above Byron and next to Shakspeare; he reads a political poem by a modern master, and discovers to his horror that he fails to understand what it is all about. Moreover, this very free critic cannot abide Browning and the later works of Tennyson; nor can he admire Mr. Swinburne. This is dreadful; but worse remains behind. With grief and terror this penitent declares that he cannot tolerate "The Pilgrim's Progress" or "Don Quixote"; and he goes on to say, "How much of Milton seems trash, also Butler, very much of Wordsworth, and all Southey's Epics!" Then, with a wail of despair, he says, "These works have stood the test of time. Am I colour-blind?" Now this gentleman's state of mind is far more common than he supposes; only few people care to confess even to their bosom-friends that they do not accept public opinion—or rather the opinions of authority. The age has grown contemptible from cant, and traditions which are perhaps highly respectable in their place are thrust upon us in season and out of season. Regarding matters of fact there is no room for differences of opinion when once the fact is established; and regarding problems in elementary morality we perceive the same surety. No one in his senses thinks of denying that America exists; no one would think of saying that it is wrong to do unto others as we would they should do unto us; but, when we come to questions of taste, we have to deal with subtleties so complex that we are forced to deny any one's right to dogmatise. If a man says, "I enjoy this book," that is well; but if he adds, "You are a fool if you do not enjoy it too," he is guilty of folly and impertinence. These dogmatists have given rise to much hypocrisy. By all means let them hold their opinions; but at the same time let them make no claims upon us. Our beloved old friend Doctor Johnson had many views about literature which now appear to us cramped and strange, but we should examine his sayings with respect. When however it is found that the old man used to foam and bellow at persons who did not approve of his paradoxes, one is slightly inclined—in spite of reverence for his moral strength—to set him down as a nuisance, and to wonder how people managed to put up with him at times. In reading the conversations and essays of the moralist we constantly meet with passages which we should think over temperately were it not that we are informed by the critic or his biographer that only fools would venture to question Johnson's wisdom and insight.



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Take the famous article on Milton. Speaking of “Lycidas,” Johnson coolly observes, “In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral—easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are easily exhausted, and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour.” Now this is blunt, positive speech, and no one would mind it much if it were left alone by ignorant persons; but it is a trifle exasperating when Johnson’s authority is brought forward at second hand in order to convince us that a poem in which many people delight is disgusting. Again, the dictator said that a passage in Congreve’s “Morning Bride” was finer than anything in Shakspeare. Very good; let Johnson’s opinion stand so far as he is concerned, but let us also consider the passage—

“How reverend is the face of this tall pile,  
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads  
To bear aloft its arched and ponderous roof,  
By its own weight made steadfast and immovable,  
Looking tranquillity! It strikes an awe  
And terror on my aching sight.”

This is the stuff which is called “noble” and “magnificent” and “impressive” by people who fail to see that Johnson was merely amusing himself, as he often did, by upholding a fallacy. The lines from Congreve are bald and utterly commonplace; they have no positive quality; and when some of us think of such gems as “When daisies pied and violets blue,” or “To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,” or even the description of the Dover cliff, not to mention the thousands of other gems in Shakspeare’s great dramas, we feel inclined to be angry when we are asked to admire Congreve’s stilted nonsense. There is much to be objected to in Shakspeare. I hold that a man who wrote such a dull play as “Pericles” would nowadays be scouted; but the incomparable poet should not be belittled by even a momentary comparison with Congreve.

I can readily imagine a man of real good sense and cultured taste objecting to “The Pilgrim’s Progress.” Why should he not? Millions of people have read the book, but millions have not; and the fact that many of the best judges of style love Bunyan offers no reason why the good tinker should be loved by everybody. As for “Don Quixote,” a fine critic once remarked that he would choose that book if he were to be imprisoned for life, and if he were also allowed to choose one volume. Doubtless this gentleman has thrust his dictum concerning the value of Cervantes’s work down the throats of many people who would have liked to contradict him. If his example were followed by critics universally, it would doubtless be hard to find in Britain a man pretending to culture who durst assert that he did not care for “Don Quixote.” In spite of this, the grave terror with which my correspondent regards his own inability to appreciate a famous book is more than funny.

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Regarding Browning I can only say that, although his worshippers are aggressive enough, one readily pardons any person who flies from his poems in disgust. A learned and enthusiastic editor actually gave "Sordello" up in despair; and even the late Dean Church averred that he did not understand the poem, though he wrote lengthy studies on it. To my own knowledge there are men and women who do derive intense pleasure from Browning, and they are quite right in expressing their feelings; but they are wrong in attempting to bully the general public into acquiescence. Certain members of the public say, "Your poet capers round us in a sort of war-dance; he flicks off our hats with some muddled paradox, he leaves a line unfinished and hurts us with a projecting conjunction. We want him to stop capering and grimacing, and then we shall tell him whether he is good-looking or not." I hold that the dissenters are right. People with the necessary metaphysical faculty may understand and passionately enjoy their Browning, but only too many simple souls have inflicted miserable suffering on themselves by trying to unravel the meaning of verses at which they never should have looked.

The fact is that we persistently neglect all true educational principles in our treatment of literature. Young minds have to be directed; but in literature, as in mechanics, the tendency of the force is to move along the lines of least resistance. A dexterous tutor should watch carefully the slightest tendencies and endeavour to find out what kind of discipline his charge can best receive. As the mind gains power it is certain to exhibit particular aptitudes, and these must be fostered. In the case of a student who is self-taught the same method must be observed, and a clever reader will soon find out what is most likely to improve him.

To my thinking some of the attempts made to force certain books on young folk are shocking and deplorable; for it must be remembered that in literature, as in the case of bodily nutriment, different foods are required at different times of life. I have known boys and girls who were forced to read "Rasselas." Now that allegorical production came from the mind of a mature, powerful, most melancholy man, and it is intended to show the barren vanity of human wishes. What an absurd thing to put in the hands of a buoyant youth! The parents however had heard that "Rasselas" was a great and moral book, whereupon the children must be subjected to unavailing torture. It maybe said, "Would not your hints tend to make people frivolous?" Certainly not, if my hints are wisely used. Let it be observed that I merely wish to do away with hypocritical conventions whereby timid men like my correspondent are subjected to extreme misery and a vast waste of intellectual power is inflicted on the world. Suppose that some ridiculous guardian had taken up the modern notions about scientific culture, and had forced Macaulay to read science alone; should we not have lost the Essays and the History?



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That one consideration alone vividly illustrates my correspondent's quaint and pregnant inquiry. Macaulay was "colour-blind" to science, and the most painful times in his happy life were the hours devoted at Cambridge to mathematical and mechanical formulae. The genuinely cultured person is the one who thinks nothing of fashion and yields to his natural bent as directed by his unerring instinct. A certain modern celebrity has told us how his early days were wasted; he was first of all forced to learn Latin and Greek, though his powers fitted him to be a scientific student, and he was next forced to impart his own fatal facility to others. Thus his fame came to him late, and the most precious years of his life were thrown away. He was colour-blind to certain departments of literature which have gained a mighty reputation, yet he was obliged by sacred use and wont to act as though he relished things which he really abhorred. In a minor degree the same process of lavish waste is going on all around us. The most utterly incompetent persons of both sexes are those who, in obedience to convention, have tried to read everything that was sufficiently bepraised instead of choosing for themselves; in conversation they are objectionable bores, and it would puzzle the best of thinkers to discover their precise use in life. Take it once and for all for granted that no human creature attains fruitful culture unless he learns his own powers and then resolves to apply them only in the directions where they tell best; without so much of self-knowledge he is no more a complete man than he would be were he deficient in self-reverence and self-control. He must dare to think for himself, or he will assuredly become a mediocrity, and probably more or less offensive. All his possible influence on his fellow-creatures must depart unless he thinks for himself; and he cannot think for himself unless he is released from insincerity—the insincerity imposed by usage.

### V.

#### THE SURFEIT OF BOOKS.

Sir John Lubbock once spoke to a company of working-men, and gave them some advice on the subject of reading. Sir John is the very type of the modern cultured man; he has managed to learn something of everything. Finance is of course his strong point; but he stands in the first rank of scientific workers; he is a profound political student; and his knowledge of literature would suffice to make a great reputation for any one who chose to stand before the world as a mere literary specialist alone. This consummate all-round scholar picked out one hundred books which he thought might be read with profit, and, after reciting his appalling list, he cheerfully remarked that any reader who got through the whole set might consider himself a well-read man. I most fervently agree with this opinion. If any student in the known world contrived to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Sir John's hundred works, he would be equipped at all points;



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but the trouble is that so few of us have time in the course of our brief pilgrimage to master even a dozen of the greatest books that the mind of man has put forth. Moreover, if we could swallow the whole hundred prescribed by our gracious philosopher, we should really be very little the better after performing the feat. A sort of literary indigestion would ensue, and the mind of the learned sufferer would rest under a perpetual nightmare until charitable oblivion dulled the memory of the enormous mass of talk. Sir John thinks we should read Confucius, the Hindoo religious poetry, some Persian poetry, Thucydides, Tacitus, Cicero, Homer, Virgil, a little—a very little—Voltaire, Moliere, Sheridan, Locke, Berkeley, George Lewes, Hume, Shakspeare, Bunyan, Spenser, Pope, Fielding, Macaulay, Marivaux—Alas, is there any need to pursue the catalogue to the bitter end? Need I mention Gibbon, or Froude, or Lingard, or Freeman, or the novelists? To my mind the terrific task shadowed forth by the genial orator was enough to scare the last remnant of resolution from the souls of his toil-worn audience. A man of leisure might skim the series of books recommended; but what about the striving citizens whose scanty leisure leaves hardly enough time for the bare recreation of the body? Is it not a little cruel to tell them that such and such books are necessary to perfect culture, when we know all the while that, even if they went without sleep, they could hardly cover such an immense range of study? Many men and women yearn after the higher mental life and are eager for guidance; but their yearnings are apt to be frozen into the stupor of despair if we raise before them a standard which is hopelessly unattainable by them. I should not dream of approving the saying of Lord Beaconsfield: “Books are fatal; they are the curse of the human race. Nine-tenths of existing books are nonsense, and the clever books are the refutation of that nonsense.” Lord Beaconsfield did not believe in the slap-dash words which he put into the mouth of Mr. Phoebus, nor did he believe that the greatness of the English aristocracy arises from the facts that “they don’t read books, and they live in the open air.” The great scoffer once read for twelve hours every day during an entire year, and his general knowledge of useful literature was quite remarkable. But, while rejecting epigrammatic fireworks, I am bound to say that the habit of reading has become harmful in many cases; it is a sort of intellectual dram-drinking, and it enervates the mind as alcohol enervates the body. If a man’s function in life is to learn, then by all means let him be learned. When Macaulay took the trouble to master thousands of rubbishy pamphlets, poems, plays, and fictions, in order that he might steep his mind in the atmosphere of a particular period in history, he was quite justified. The results of his research were boiled down into a few vivid emphatic pages, and we had the benefit of his labour. When Carlyle

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spent thirteen mortal years in grubbing among musty German histories that nearly drove him mad with their dulness, the world reaped the fruit of his dreary toil, and we rejoiced in the witty, incomparable life of Frederick II. When poor Emanuel Deutsch gave up his brilliant life to the study of the obscurest chapters in the Talmud, he did good service to the human race, for he placed before us in the most lucid way a summary of the entire learning of a wondrous people. It was good that these men should fulfil their function; it was right on their part to read widely, because reading was their trade. But there must be division of labour in the vast society of human beings, and any man who endeavours to neglect this principle, and who tries to fill two places in the social economy, does so at his peril.

Living cheek by jowl with us, there are hundreds and thousands of persons who are ruining their minds by a kind of literary debauch. They endeavour to follow on the footsteps of the specialists; they struggle to learn a little of everything, and they end by knowing nothing. They commit mental suicide: and, although no disgrace attaches to this species of self-murder, yet disgrace is not the only thing we have to fear in the course of our brief pilgrimage. We emerge from eternity, we plunge into eternity; we have but a brief space to poise ourselves in the light ere we drop into the gulf of doom, and our duty is to be miserly over every moment and every faculty that is vouchsafed to us. The essentials of thought and knowledge are contained in a very few books, and the most toilsome drudge who ever preached a sermon, drove a rivet, or swept a floor may become perfectly educated by exercising a wise self-restraint, by resolutely refusing to be guided by the ambitious advice of airy cultured persons, and by mastering a few good books to the last syllable. Mr. Ruskin is one of our greatest masters of English, and his supremacy as a thinker is sufficiently indicated by Mazzini's phrase—"Ruskin has the most analytic mind in Europe." No truer word was ever spoken than this last, for, in spite of his dogmatic disposition, Mr. Ruskin does utter the very transcendencies of wisdom. Now this glorious writer of English, this subtlest of thinkers, was rigidly kept to a very few books until he reached manhood. Under the eye of his mother he went six times through the Bible, and learned most of the Book by heart. This in itself was a discipline of the most perfect kind, for the translators of the Bible had command of the English tongue at the time when it was at its noblest. Then Mr. Ruskin read Pope again and again, thus unconsciously acquiring the art of expressing meaning with a complete economy of words. In the evening he heard the Waverley Novels read aloud until he knew the plot, the motive, the ultimate lesson of all those beautiful books. When he was fourteen years old, he read one or two second-rate novels over and over again; and even this was good training, in that it showed



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him the faults to be avoided. Before his boyhood was over, he read his Byron with minute attention, and once more he was introduced to a master of expression. Byron is a little out of fashion now, alas! and yet what a thinker the man was! His lightning eye pierced to the very heart of things, and his intense grip on the facts of life makes his style seem alive. No wonder that the young Ruskin learned to think daringly under such a master! Now many people fancy that our great critic must be a man of universal knowledge. What do they think of this narrow early training? The use and purport of it all are plain enough to us, for we see that the gentle student's intellect was kept clear of lumber; his thoughts were not batted down under mountains of other men's, and, when he wanted to fix an idea, he was not obliged to grope for it in a rubbish heap of second-hand notions. Of course he read many other authors by slow degrees; but, until his manhood came, his range was restricted. The flawless perfection of his work is due mainly to his mother's sedulous insistence on perfection within strict bounds. Again, and keeping still to authors, Charles Dickens knew very little about books. His keen business-like intellect perceived that the study of life and of the world's forces is worth more than the study of letters, and he also kept himself clear of scholarly lumber. He read Fielding, Smollett, Gibbon, and, in his later life, he was passionately fond of Tennyson's poetry; but his greatest charm as a writer and his success as a social reformer were both gained through his simple power of looking at things for himself without interposing the dimness that falls like a darkening shadow on a mind that is crammed with the conceptions of other folk. Look at the practical men! Nasmyth scarcely read at all; Napoleon always spoke of literary persons as "ideologists;" Stephenson was nineteen before he mastered his Bible; Mahomet was totally uneducated; Gordon was content with the Bible, "Pilgrim's Progress," and Thomas a Kempis; Hugh Miller became an admirable editor without having read twoscore books in his lifetime. Go right through the names on the roll of history, and it will be found that in all walks of life the men who most influenced their generation despised superfluous knowledge. They learned thoroughly all that they thought it necessary to learn within a very limited compass; they learned, above all, to think; and they then were ready to speak or act without reference to any authority save their own intellect. If we turn to the great book-men, we find mostly a deplorable record of failure and futility. Their lives were passed in making useless comments on the works of others. Look at the one hundred and eighty volumes of the huge catalogue in which are inscribed the names of Shakspeare's commentators. Most of these poor laborious creatures were learned in the extreme, and yet their work is humiliating to read, so gross is its pettiness, so foolish is its wire-drawn scholarship.



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Over all the crowd of his interpreters the royal figure of the poet towers in grand unlearned simplicity. He knew Plutarch, and he thought for himself; his commentators knew everything, and did not think at all. Compare the supreme poet's ignorance with the other men's extravagant erudition! Think of the men whom I may call book-eaters! Dr. Parr was a driveller; Porson was a sort of learned pig who routed up truffles in the classic garden; poor Buckle became, through stress of books, a shallow thinker; Mezzofanti, with his sixty-four languages and dialects, was perilously like a fool; and more than one modern professor may be counted as nothing else but a vain, over-educated boor.

Another word, which may seem like heresy. I contend that the main object of reading—after a basis of solid culture has been acquired—is to gain amusement. No one was ever the worse for reading good novels, for human fortunes will always interest human beings. I would say keep clear of Sir John Lubbock's terrific library, and seek a little for pleasure. You have authoritative examples before you. Prince Bismarck, once the arbiter of the world, reads Miss Braddon and Gaboriau; Professor Huxley, the greatest living biologist, reads novels wholesale; the grim Moltke read French and English romances; Macaulay used fairly to revel in the hundreds of stories that he read till he knew them by heart. With these and a hundred other examples before us, the humblest and most laborious in the community may without scruple read the harmless tales of fictitious joys and sorrows, after they have secured that narrow minute training which alone gives grasp and security to the intellect.

## VI.

### PEOPLE WHO ARE "DOWN"

If any one happens to feel ashamed when he notices the far-off resemblances between the lower animals and man's august self, he will probably feel the most acute humiliation should he take an occasional walk through a great rookery, such as that in Richmond Park. The black cloud of birds sweeps round and round, casting a shadow as it goes; the air is full of a solemn bass music softened by distance, and the twirling fleets of strange creatures sail about in answer to obvious signals. They are an orderly community, subject to recognised law, and we might take them for the mildest and most amusing of all birds; but wait, and we shall see something fit to make us think. Far off on the clear gray sky appears a wavering speck which rises and falls and sways from side to side in an extraordinary way. Nearer and nearer the speck comes, until at last we find ourselves standing under a rook which flies with great difficulty. The poor rascal looks most disreputable, for his tail has evidently been shot away, and he is wounded. He drops on to a perch, but not before he has run the gauntlet of several lines of sharp eyes. The poor bird sits on his branch swinging weakly to and fro,



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humping up his shoulders in woebegone style. There is a rustle among the flock, a sharp exchange of caws, and one may almost imagine the questions and answers which pass. Circumstances prevent us from knowing the rookish system of nomenclature; but we may suppose the wounded fellow to be called Ishmael. Caw number one says, "Did you notice anything queer about Ishmael as he passed?" "Yes. Why, he's got no tail!" "He'll be rather a disgrace to the family if he tries to go with us into Sussex on Tuesday." "Frightful! He's been fooling about within range of some farming lout's gun. The lazy, useless wretch never did know the difference between a gun and a broom!" "Serves him right! Let's speak to the chief about him." The chief considers the matter solemnly and sorrowfully, and then may be understood to say, "Sorry Ishmael's in trouble, but we can't acknowledge him. There's an end of the matter. You Surrey crow, take a dozen of our mates, and drive that Ishmael away." The wounded bird knows his doom. He fumbles his way through the branches, and flies off zig-zag and low; but the flight soon mob him. They laugh at him, and one can positively tell that they are chattering in derision. Presently one of them buffets him; and that is the signal for a general assault. Quick as lightning, one of the black cowards makes a vicious drive with his iron beak, and flies off with a triumphant caw; another and another squawk at the wretch, and then stab him, until at last, like a draggled kite, Ishmael sinks among the ferns and passes away, while the assassins fly back and tell how they settled the fool who could not keep the shot out of his carcass. If the observer sees this often, his disposition to moralise may become very importunate, for he sees an allegory of human life written in black specks on that sky that broods so softly, like a benediction, over the fair world. One may easily bring forward half a score of similar instances from the animal kingdom. A buffalo falls sick, and his companions soon gore and trample him to death; the herds of deer act in the same way; and even domestic cattle will ill-treat one of their number that seems ailing. The terrible "rogue" elephant is always one that has been driven from his herd; the injury rankles in him, and he ends by killing any weaker living creature that may cross his path. Again, watch a poor crow that is blown out to sea. So long as his flight is strong and even, he is unmolested; but let him show signs of wavering, or, above all, let him try to catch up with a steamship that is going in the teeth of the wind, and the fierce gulls slay him at once.



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Do we not observe something analogous taking place in the terrible crush of civilised human life? To thoughtful minds there is no surer sign of the progress that humanity is slowly making than the fact that among our race the weak are succoured. Were it not for the sights of helpfulness and pity that we can always see, many of us would give way to despair, and think that man is indeed no more than a two-legged brute without feathers. The savage even now kills aged people without remorse, just as the Sardinian islanders did in the ancient days; and there are certain tribes which think nothing of destroying an unfortunate being who may have grown weakly. Among us, the merest lazar that crawls is sure of some succour if he can only contrive to let his evil case be known; and even the criminal, let him be never so vile, may always be taken up and aided by kindly friends for the bare trouble of asking.

But there are still symptoms of the animal disposition to be seen, and only too many people conspire to show that human nature is much the same as it was in the days when Job called in his agony for comfort and found none. Wonderful and disquieting it is to see how the noblest of minds have been driven in all ages to mourn over the disposition of men to strike at the unfortunate! The Book of Job is the finest piece of literary work known to the world, and it is mainly taken up with a picture of the treatment which the Arabian patriarch met with at the hands of his friends. People do not look for sarcasm in the Bible, but the unconscious lofty sarcasm of Job is so terrible, that it shows how a mighty intellect may be driven by bitter wrong into transcendencies of wrath and scorn. "Ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you." The old desert-prince will not succumb even in his worst extremity, and he lashes his tormentors with wild but strong bursts of withering satire. But Job was down, and his cool friends went on imperturbably, probing his weakness, sneering at his excuses, and, I suspect, rejoicing not a little in his wild outbreaks of pain and despair. The book is one of the world's monuments, and it has been placed there to remind all people that dwell on earth of their own innate meanness; it has been placed before us as a lesson against cruelty, treachery, ingratitude. Have we gone very far in the direction since Job raged and mourned? Those who look around them may answer the question in their own way.

The world had not progressed much in Shakspeare's time, at any rate. Like all of us, Shakspeare was able to look on the work of beautiful and kind souls—no one has ever spoken more nobly of the benefactions conferred on their brethren by the righteous; but that calm immortal soul had in it depths of awful scorn and anger, which bubbled up only a very few times. Few people read "Timon of Athens"; and I do not blame the neglect, for it is a spirit-crushing play, and a man must be bold if he cares to look at it twice. But in it



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it is plain to me that Shakspeare lets us see a gleam from the boiling flood of scorn that raged far under his serene exterior. The words bite; the abandonment of the satirist is complete. He puts into the mouth of the man who is down a whole acrid and scurrilous philosophy of success and failure; and there is not a passage in Swift which can equal for venom and emphasis the ferocious words of the Athenian misanthrope. We know nothing of Shakspeare's mood while he was writing this cruel piece, but I should imagine he must have been ready to quit the world in a veritable ecstasy of wild passion and contempt.

If we take away the literature of love and the literature of fear, we have but little left save the endless works that harp on one theme—the remorseless savagery of civilised men toward those who fail, or are supposed to fail, in life's grim warfare.

“Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,  
That dost not bite so nigh  
As benefits forgot!  
Though thou the waters warp,  
Thy tooth is not so sharp  
As friend remembered not!”

Those lines are hackneyed until every poetaster can quote them or parody them at will; but very few readers consider that the bitter verse summarises a whole literature. From Homer to Tennyson the ugly tune has been played on all strings; and mankind have such a vivid perception of the truth uttered by the satirists, that they read the whole story with gusto whenever it is put into a fresh form—and each man thinks that he at least is not one of those for whom the poet's lash is meant. Novel, essay, poem, play, and sermon—all recur with steady persistence to one ancient topic; and yet men try their best to bring themselves low, as they might if Job, Shakspeare, Congreve, and Tennyson had never written at all, and as though no warnings were being actually enacted all round, as on a stage.

Sometimes I wonder whether the majority of men ever really try to conceive what it is to be down until their fate is upon them. I can hardly think it. It has been well said that all of us know we shall die, but none of us believe it. The idea of the dark plunge is unfamiliar to the healthy imagination; and the majority of our race go on as if the great change were only a fable devised by foolish poets to scare children. I believe that, if all men were vouchsafed a sudden comprehension of the real meaning of death, sin would cease. Furthermore, I am persuaded that if every man could see in a flash the burning history of the one who is down, the whole of our reasonable population would take thought for the morrow—drink-shops would be closed, the dice-box would rattle no more, and the sight of a genuine idler would be unknown. Not a few of us have seen tragedies enough in the course of our pilgrimage, and have learned to regard the

doomed weaklings—the wreckage of civilisation, the folk who are down—with mingled compassion and dismay. I have found in such cases that the



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miserable mortals never knew to what they were coming; and the most notable feature in their attitude was the wild and almost tearful surprise with which they regarded the conduct of their friends. The pictures of these forlorn wretches people a certain corner of the mind, and one can make the ragged brigade start out in lines of deadly and lurid fire at a moment's warning, until there is a whole Inferno before one. But I shall speak no more at present of the degraded ones; I wish to gain a thought of pity for those who are blameless; and I want to stir up the blameless ones, who are generally ignorant creatures, so that they may exercise a little of the wisdom of the serpent in time. Be it remembered that, although the ruined and blameless man is not subjected to such moral scorn as falls to the lot of the wretch, the practical consequences of being down are much the same for him as for the victim of sloth or sin. He feels the pinch of physical misery, and, however lofty his spirit may be, it can never be lofty enough to relieve the gnawing pains of bodily privation. Moreover, he will meet with persecution just as if he were a villain or a cheat, and that too from men who know that he is honest. The hard lawyer will pursue him as a stoat pursues a hare; and, if he asks for time or mercy, the iron answer will be, "We have nothing to do with your private affairs; business is business, and our client's interests must not suffer merely because you are a well-meaning man." Even our dear Walter Scott, the soul of honour, one of the purest and brightest of all the spirits that make our joy, the gallant struggler—even that delight of the world was hounded to death by a firm of bill-discounters at the very time when he was breaking his gallant heart in the effort to retrieve disaster. No! The world is pitiful so far as its kindest hearts are concerned, but the army of commonplace people are all pitiless. See what follows when a man goes "down." Suppose that he invests in bank shares. The directors are all men of substance, and most of them are even lights of religion; the leading spirit attends the same church as our investor, and he is a light of sanctity—so pure of heart is he, that he will not so much as look at Monday's newspapers, because their production entailed Sabbath labour. Indeed, one wonders how such a man could bring himself to eat or sleep on Sunday, because his food must be carried up for him, and, I presume, his bed must be made. All the directors are free in their gifts to churches and chapels—for that is part of a wise director's policy—and all of them live sumptuously. But surely our investor should guess that all this lavish expenditure must come out of somebody's pocket; and surely he has skill enough to analyse a balance-sheet! The good soul goes on trusting, until one fine morning he wakes up and finds that his means of subsistence are gone. Then comes the bitter ordeal; his friends are grieved, the public are enraged, the sanctified men go to gaol, and the



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investor faces an altered world. His oldest friend says, "Well, Tom, it's a bitter bad business, and if a hundred is of any use to you, it is at your service; but you know, with my family," &c. The unhappy defrauded fellow finds it hard to get work of any sort; begins to show those pathetic signs of privation which are so easily read by the careful observer; hat, boots, coat, grow shabby; the knees seem to have a pathetic bend. Friends are not unkind, but they have their own burdens to bear, and if he inflicts his company and his sorrows too much on any one of them, he is apt to receive a hint—probably from a woman—that his presence can be spared; so the downward road trends towards utter deprivation, and then to extinction. A young man may recover from almost any blow that does not affect his character; and this was strikingly proved in the case of that brilliant man of science, R.A. Proctor, who was afterwards stricken out of life untimely. He lost his fortune in the crash of Overend and Gurney's company, and he immediately forgot his luxurious habits and turned to work with blithe courage. How he worked only those who knew him can tell, for no four men of merely ordinary power could have achieved such bewildering success as he did. But a man who is on the downward slope of life cannot fare like the lamented Proctor; he must endure the pangs of neglect, until death comes and relieves him of the dire torture of being down.

And the harmless widows who are suddenly robbed of their protector. Ah, how some of them are made to suffer! Little Amelia Sedley, in "Vanity Fair," has her sufferings and indignities painted by a master-hand, and there is not a line thickened or darkened overmuch. The miserable tale of the cheap lodgings, and the insults which the poor girl had flung at her because, in the passion of her love, she spent trifling sums on her boy—how actual it all seems! The widow who may have held her head high in her days of prosperity, soon receives lessons from women: they call it teaching her what is her proper place. Those good and discreet ladies have a notion that their conduct is full of propriety and discretion and sound sense; but how they make their sisters suffer—ah, how they make the poor things suffer! I believe that, if any improvident man could see, in a keenly vivid dream, a vision of his wife's future after his death, he would stint himself of anything rather than run the risk of having to reflect on his death-bed that he had failed to do his best for those who loved him. Women sometimes out of pure wantonness try to exasperate a man so that he falls into courses which bring his end swiftly. Could those foolish ones only see their own fate when the doom of being down in the world came upon them, they would strain every nerve in their bodies so that their husband's life and powers of work might be spared to the last possible hour.



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What can the man do who is down? Frankly, nothing, unless his strength holds. I advise such a one never to seek for help from any one but himself, and never to try for any of the employments which are supposed to be “easy.” Cool neglect, insulting compassion, lying promises, evasive and complimentary nothings—these will be his portion. If he cannot perform any skilled labour, let him run the risk of seeming degraded; and, if he has to push a trade in matches or flowers, let him rather do that than bear the more or less kindly flouts which meet the supplicant. To all who are young and strong I would say, “Live to-day as though to-morrow you might be ruined—or dead.”

### VII.

#### ILL-ASSORTED MARRIAGES.

The people who joke and talk lightly about marriage do not seem to have the faintest rational conception of the awful nature of the subject. Awful it is; and, as serious men go through life, they become more and more impressed with the momentous results which depend on the choice made by a man or woman. A lad of nineteen lightly engages himself; he knows nothing of the gloom, the terror, the sordid horror of the fate that lies before him; and the unhappy girl is equally ignorant. In fourteen years the actual substance of that young fellow's very body is twice completely changed; he is a man utterly different from the boy who contracted the marriage; there is not a muscle or a thought in common between the boy and the man—yet the man takes all the consequences of the boy's act. Supposing that the pair are well matched, life goes on happily enough for them; but, alas, if the man or the woman has to wake up and face the ghastly results of a mistake, then there is a tragedy of the direst order! Let us suppose that the lad is cultured and ambitious, and that he is attracted at first by a rosy face or pretty figure only; supposing that he is thus early bound to a vulgar commonplace woman, the consequences when the woman happens to have a powerful will and an unscrupulous tongue are almost too dreadful to be pictured in words.

Let no young folk fancy that mind counts for nothing in marriage. A man must have congenial company, or he will fly to company that is uncongenial; he must have joy of some kind, or he will fall into despair. The company and the joy can best be supplied by the wife to the husband, and by the husband to the wife. If the woman is dull and trivial, then her husband soon begins to neglect her; if she is meek and submissive, the neglect does not rouse her, and there are no violent consequences; but it is awful to think of the poor creature who sits at home and dimly wonders in the depth of her simple soul what can have happened to change the man who loved her. She has no resources—she can only love; she is perhaps kindly enough—yet she is punished only because she and her lad made a blundering choice before their judgments were formed.

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But, if the woman is spirited and aggressive, then the lookers-on see part of a hideous game which might well frighten the bravest into celibacy. She is self-assertive, she desires—very rightly—to be first, and at the first symptom of a slight from her husband she begins the process of nagging. The man is refined, and the coarseness which he did not perceive before marriage strikes him like a venomous point now; he replies fiercely, and perhaps shows contempt; then the woman tries the effect of weeping. Unhappily the tears are more exasperating than the scolding, and the quarrel ends by the man rushing from the house. Then for the first time the pair find that they have to deal with the whole forces of society; in their rage they would gladly part and meet no more—or they think so—but inexorable society steps in and declares that the alliance is fixed until death or rascality looses it. For a little while the estrangement lasts, and then there is a reconciliation, after which all goes well for a time. But the shocking thing about the ill-assorted marriage is that the estrangements grow longer and longer and the quarrels ever more bitter. Even children do but little to reconcile the jarring claims of man and wife, for they are a sign of the lasting shackle which each of the miserable beings wants to break.

Worst of all in the whole terrible affair is the fact that it matters not who gets the mastery—both are made more wretched. If the man has an indomitable will and conquers the woman, he becomes a morose and sarcastic tyrant, who makes her tremble at his scowl, while she becomes a beaten drudge who makes up for long spells of submission by shrill outbursts of casual defiance. If the woman gains the mastery, I honestly believe that the cause of strict morality is better served; but the sight of the man's gradual degradation is so sickening that most people prefer keeping out of the house where a henpecked individual lives. As time goes by, it matters not which wins in the odious contest: both undergo a subtle loss of self-respect. In an ordinary quarrel between men reason may possibly come in to some degree; but in a quarrel between man and wife reason is utterly excluded. The man becomes feminine, the woman grows masculine, and the effect of this change of nature is disgusting and ludicrous to an outsider, but serious in the extreme to the parties principally concerned. By degrees indifference and rage give way to sullen, secret hatred, which finds a vent usually in poisonous sarcasm.

Matters are not much better when the superiority is on the woman's side. It is delightful to see a husband who is proud of his wife's cleverness, and good-natured men are pleased by his innocent boasting. The most pleasant of households may be found in cases where a clever, good-humoured, dexterous woman rules over a sweet-tempered but somewhat stupid man. She respects his manhood, he adores her as a superior being, and they live a life of pure happiness.



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But, sad to say, the husband is not usually good-humouredly willing to acknowledge his partner's superiority, and in that case the girl's doom is a cruel one. She may marry a gross, stupid lout, who begins by yawning away his time in leisure hours, and ends by going out to meet companions of his own sort. By and by comes the time when the ruffian grows aggressive, and then the proud girl has to bear brutalities which rack her very soul. Steadily the work of degradation goes on, and at last the brutal man becomes a capricious bully, while the refined lady sinks into a careless draggletail.

I have traversed many lands and seen men and cities, and know that the cruel work which I have described goes on in too many quarters. The ill-assorted marriage is made more wretched by the occasional glimpses which the man and woman get of happy homes. The loveliest sight that can be watched on earth is the daily life of a well-matched couple. They need not be even in intellect, but each must have some quality which gives superiority; such people, even if they have to struggle hard, lead a life which is almost ideally happy. The great thing which gives happiness is mutual confidence, and, when we see man and wife exhibiting quiet and mutually respectful familiarity, we may be fairly certain that they are to be looked on as most fortunate in the world. By an exquisite natural law it happens that mentally a woman is the exact complement of the man who is her proper mate, and her intellect has qualities far finer and more subtle than the man's. Among hard City men it is a common saying that no one would ever make a bad debt if he took his customer home to dinner first. That means that the wife would instantly measure the guest's character with that lightning-footed tact which women possess. No man ever yet was completely successful in life unless he took women's counsel in great affairs; and, when a man has a wife with whom he can consult, his chance is bettered a thousandfold.

To see a household where love and unity reign drives ill-matched folk to madness. The man declares that his friend's wife makes the felicity; the woman praises the other husband; and the unhappy souls grow jealous together, and hate each other more cordially by reason of the joy which they have seen. All sorts of evil ends come to these wretched unions—in every workhouse, asylum, and prison the traces of the social catastrophe may be seen; and, even when the misery is hidden from general view, the tragedy is shocking to those who can peep behind the scenes and look at the bad play. A very wise man has said that "success is a constitutional trait." The phrase is a profound one. A man who is born with "constitutional" power of choosing the right mate is all but assured of success, and a woman has the same fortune; but, in addition to the power of choosing, both man and woman need training; and we cannot call a civilised being properly trained unless he has some idea of the way to set about his choice.



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The cases in which idleness, or pique, or dulness drives a man or woman to take alcohol are numerous and loathsome. Women who start married life as bright, merry, hopeful creatures become mere degraded animals; and the odd thing about the matter is that the husband is always the last to see the turn that his affairs are taking. A woman's name may be in the mouths of scores of people before the party most concerned wakes up to a sense of his position and is faced by a picture of helpless and lost womanhood. If the man falls into the alcoholic death-trap, we have once more a spectacle of dull misery which may be indicated but which cannot be accurately described. The victim grows hateful—his symptoms have been scientifically described by one of the finest of modern physiologists—he is uncertain in mind, and vengeful and revengeful. His wife is obliged to live with him, under his rule and power, but she finds it hopeless to meet his wishes, desires, fancies, and fantasies, however much she may study and do her best to oblige, conciliate, and concede. To persons of this class everything must be conceded, and yet they are neither pacified nor satisfied; they cannot agree even with themselves, and their homes are, literally speaking, hells on earth.

Then we have the cases wherein a poetic and artistic spirit is allied to a gross and worldly soul of the lowest type. One of the most brilliant artists and poets of his generation was informed by his wife that she did not care for art and poetry and that sort of stuff. "It's all high-falutin' nonsense," remarked this gifted and confident dame; and the shock of surprise which thrilled her husband will be transmitted to generations of readers. Hitherto we have dwelt upon mere brutalities; but those who know the world best know that the most acute forms of agony may be inflicted without any outward show of brutality being visible. A generous high-souled girl with a passion for truth and justice is often tied to a fellow whose "company" manners are polished, but who is at heart a cruel boor. He can stab her with a sneer which only she can understand; he can delicately hint to her that she is in subjection, and he can assume an air of cool triumph as he watches her writhe. I have often observed passages of domestic drama which looked very like comedy at first sight, but which were really quivering, torturing tragedy.

It is strange that the jars of married life have been so constantly made the subject for joking. The attitude of the ordinary witling is well known; but even great men have made fun out of a subject which is the most momentous of all that can engage the attention of the children of men. In running through Thackeray's works lately I was struck by the flippancy with which some of the most heartbreaking stories in literature are treated. Thackeray was one of the sweetest and tenderest beings that ever lived, and no doubt his jocularly was assumed; but minor men take him seriously, and imitate him. Look at the stories of Frank Berry, of Rawdon Crawley, of Clive and Rosie Newcome, and of General Baynes—they are sad indeed, but the tragic element in them is only shadowed forth by the great master. There is nothing droll in the history of mistaken marriages. At the very best each error leads to the ruin or deterioration of one soul, and that is no laughing matter.



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### VIII.

#### HAPPY MARRIAGES.

Although a strong modern school of writers care only to talk of misery and gloom and frustration, I retain a taste for joy and sweetness and kindness. Life has so many sharp crosses, so many inexplicable sorrows for us all, that I hold it good to snatch at every moment of gladness, and to keep my eyes on beautiful things whenever they can be seen. During the days when I was pondering the subject of tragic marriages, I read the letters of the great Lord Chatham. The mighty statesman was not distinguished as a letter-writer; like Themistocles, he might have boasted that, though he was inapt where small accomplishments were concerned, he converted a small state into a great empire. John Wilkes called our great man "the worst letter-writer of his age." Yet to my mind the correspondence of Chatham with his wife is among the most charming work that we know. Here is one fragment which is delightful enough in its way. He had been out riding with his son William, who afterwards ruled England, becoming Prime Minister at an age when other lads are leaving the University. His elder son stayed at home to study, and this is the fashion in which Chatham writes about his boys—"It is a delight to let William see nature in her free and wild compositions, and I tell myself, as we go, that the General Mother is not ashamed of her child. The particular loved mother of our promising tribe has sent the sweetest and most encouraging of letters to the young Vauban. His assiduous application to his profession did not allow him to accompany us in learning to defend the happy land we were enjoying. Indeed, my life, the promise of our dear children does me more good than the purest of pure air." Observe how this pompous and formal statement is framed so as to please the mother. The writer does not say much about himself; but he knows that his wife is longing to hear of her darlings, and he tells her the news in his high-flown manner. He was not often apart from the lady whom he loved so well; but I am glad that they were sometimes separated, since the separations give us the delicate and tender letters every phrase of which tells a long story of love and confidence and mutual pride. That unequalled man who had made England practically the mistress of the world, the man who gained for us Canada and India, the man whom the King of Prussia regarded as our strongest and noblest, could spend his time in writing pretty babble about a couple of youngsters in order to delight their mother. If he had gone to London, the people would have taken the horses out of his carriage, and dragged him to his destination. He was far more powerful than the king, and he was almost worshipped by every officer and man in the Army and Navy. Excepting the Duke of Wellington, it is probable that no subject ever was the object of such fervent enthusiasm; and many men would have lived amidst the whirl of adulation. But Chatham liked best to remain in the sweet quiet country; and the story of his life at Lyme Regis is in reality a beautiful poem.



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Why did this imperial, overbearing, all-powerful man love to stay in retirement when all Europe was waiting for his word? Why did he spend days in sauntering in country lanes, and chatting during quiet evenings with one loved friend alone? That question goes to the root of my subject. Chatham was happily married; when he was torn by bitter rage and disappointment, when his sovereign repulsed him, and when not even the passionate love of an entire nation availed to further the ends on which the Titan had set his heart, he carried his sorrow with him, and drew comfort from the goodness of the sweet soul who was his true mate. It is a very sweet picture; and we see in history how the softening home influence finally converted the, awful, imposing, tyrannical Chatham into a yielding, fascinating man.

From the world's arbiter to the bricklayer's labourer, the same general law holds; the man who makes a happy marriage lives out his life at its best—he may fail in some things, but in the essential direction he is successful. The woman who makes a happy marriage may have trials and suffering to bear, but she also gains the best of life; and some of the purest and most joyous creatures I have known were women who had suffered in their day. When I think of some marriages whereof I know the full history, I am tempted to believe in human perfectibility; and at chance times there come to me vague dreams of a day when the majority of human beings will find life joyous and tranquil. What one wise and well-matched couple achieve in life may be achieved by others as the days go on. Surely jarring and misery are not necessary in the great world of nations or in the little world of the family? Confidence, generosity, and complete unselfishness on both sides are needed to make the life of a married pair serene and happy. I know that the demand is a heavy one; but, ah, when it is adequately met, is not the gain worth all the sacrifices a thousand times over? There may be petty and amusing differences of opinion, quiet banter, and an occasional grave conflict of judgment; but, so long as three central requirements—confidence, generosity, and unselfishness—are met, there can be no serious break in the procession of placid, happy days. I abhor the gushing talk sometimes heard about “married lovers;” the people who dignify life and honour the community are those who are lovers and something more. Of course we can all feel sympathy with Fanny Kemble when she says that the poetry of “Romeo and Juliet” went into her blood as she spoke on the stage; but there is something needed beyond wild Italian raptures before the ideal match is secured. Some of us are almost glad that Juliet passed away in swift fashion when the cup of life foamed most exquisitely at her lips. How would she have fared had that changeable firebrand Romeo taken to wandering once more? It is a grievously flippant question to ask when the most glorious of all love-poems is in question; yet



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I ask it very seriously, and merely in a symbolic way. Romeo is a shadow, the adored Juliet is a shadow; but the two immortal shades represent for all time the mad lovers whose lives end in bitterness. I say again that only reasonable and calm love brings happy marriages. It is as true as any other law of nature that "he never loved who loved not at first sight;" but the frantic, dissolute man of genius who wrote that line did not care to go further and speak of matters which wise men of the world cannot disregard. The first blinding shock of the supreme passion comes in the course of nature; but wise people live through the unspeakable tumult of the soul, and use their reason after they have resisted and subdued into calm strength the fierce impulse which has wrecked so many human creatures. When writing on "Ill-Assorted Marriages," I urged that men and women who are about to take the terribly momentous steps towards marriage must be guided by reason, and I repeat my adjuration here. When Lord Beaconsfield said, "I observe those of my friends who married for love—some of them beat their wives, and the remainder are divorced," he knew that he was uttering a piece of mockery which would have been blasphemous had it been set down in all seriousness. He meant to say that headlong marriages—marriages contracted in purblind passion—always end in misery. No marriage can bring a spark of happiness unless cool reason guides the choice of the contracting parties. A hot-headed stripling marries a handsome termagant—her brilliant face, her grace, and rude health attract him, and he does not quietly notice the ebullitions of her temper. She is divine to him; and, though she snarls at her younger brother, insults her mother, and to outsiders plainly exhibits all sorts of petty selfishness, yet the stripling rushes on to his fate; and at the end of a few miserable years he is either a broken and hen-pecked creature or a mean and ferocious squabbler.

How different is the case of those who are not precipitate! Take the case of the splendid cynic whose words we have quoted. With his usual sagacity, Lord Beaconsfield waited, watched, and finally succeeded in making an ideally happy marriage in circumstances which would have affrighted an ordinary person. All the world knows the story now. The brilliant young statesman dared not risk the imputation of fortune-hunting; but the lady knew his worth; she knew that she could aid him, and she frankly threw over all the traditions of her sex and of society and offered herself to him. No one in England who is interested in this matter can fail to know every detail of a bargain which makes one proud of one's species, for Lord Ronald Gower has told us about the married life of the brilliant Hebrew who mastered England. The two kindred souls were bound up in each other. The lady was not learned or clever, and indeed her husband said, "She was the best of creatures; but she never could tell which came first—the Greeks



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or the Romans.” But she had something more than cleverness—she had the confidence, generosity, and unselfishness which I have set forth as the main conditions of happiness. I must repeat an old story; for it cannot too often be repeated. Think of the woman who gathered all her resolution and uttered no sound, although the end of her finger was smashed by the closing of the carriage-door! Mr. D’Israeli was about to make a great speech; so his wife would not disturb him on his way to Westminster, though flesh and bone of her finger were crushed. She fainted when the orator had gone to his task; but her fortitude did not forsake her until her beloved was out of danger of being perturbed. That one authentic story is worth a hundred dramatic tales of stagey heroism. And we must remember how the statesman repaid the simple devotion of his wife. All his spare time was passed in her company, and the quaint pair wandered in the woods like happy boy and girl. Then, when the indomitable man had raised himself to be head of the State, and was offered a peerage, he declined; but he begged that his wife might be created countess in her own right. Could anything be more graceful and courtly? “You are the superior,” the first man in England seemed to say; “and I am content to rejoice in your honours without rivalling them.” All the fanciful rhymes of the troubadours cannot furnish anything prettier than that.

If we leave the Beaconsfields and the Chathams and come among less exalted folk, we find that the same laws regulate happy marriages. Confidence, generosity, unselfishness—that is all. In this beautiful England of ours there are happy households which are almost numberless. The good folk do not care for fame or power; their happiness is rounded off and completed within their own walls, and they live as the lordly Chatham lived when he was free from the ties of place and Parliament. On summer days, when the quiet evening is closing, the wayfarer may obtain chance glimpses of such happy homes here and there. Some are inhabited by wealthy men, some by poor workmen; but the essential happiness of both classes is arrived at in the same way.

A young man wisely waits until his judgment is matured, and then proceeds to choose his mate; he does not blunder into heroic fooleries in the way of self-abnegation; for, if his choice is judicious, the lady will prevent him from hurting his own prospects. Whether he be aristocrat or plebeian, he knows the worth of money, and he knows how to despise the foolish beings who talk of “dross” and “filthy lucre” and the rest. Mere craving for money he despises; but he knows that the amount of “dross” in a man’s possession roughly indicates his resources in the way of energy, ability, and self-control. When he marries, his wife is reasonably free from sordid cares. It may be that he has only seventy pounds in a building society, it may be that his cheque for fifty thousand pounds would be honoured; but the



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principle is the same. When the woman settles in her new home, she is free from sordid anxieties, and she can give the graces of her mind play. How beautiful some such households are! An old railway-guard once said to me—"Ah, there's no talk like your own wife's when she understands you, and you sit one side of the fire, and she the other! It don't matter what kind of day you've had, she puts all right." The man was right—the most delightful conversation that can be held is between a rational man and woman who love each other, who understand each other, and who have sufficient worldly keenness to keep clear of lowering cares. A man rightly mated feels it an absolute delight to confide the innermost secrets of life to his wife; and the woman would feel almost criminal if she kept the pettiest of petty secrets from her partner. They are friends, gloriously mated, and all the glories of birth and state ever imagined cannot equal their simple but perfect joy. When the tired mechanic comes home at night and meets one whom he has wisely chosen, he forgets his sharp day of labour as soon as his overalls are off. No snappish word greets him; and he is incapable of being ill-natured with the kind soul whom he worships in his rough way. I have always found that the merriest and most profitable evenings were passed in houses where neither of the principal parties strove for mastery, and where the woman had the art of coaxing imperceptibly and discreetly. I reject the suggestion made by cynic men that no married pair can live without quarrelling. No married pair who were fools before marriage can avoid dissension; but, when man and wife make their choice wisely and cautiously, the notion of a quarrel is too horrible to dream of.

### IX.

#### SHREWS.

The greatest masters who ever made studies of the shrew in fiction or in history have never, after all, given us a strictly scientific definition of the creature. They let her exhibit herself in all her drollery or her hatefulness, but they act in somewhat lordly fashion by leaving us to frame our definition from the picturesque data which they supply. Mrs. Mackenzie, in "The Newcomes," is repulsive to an awful degree, but the figure is as true as true can be, and most of us, no doubt, have seen the type in all its loathsomeness only too many times. Mrs. Mackenzie is a shrew of one sort, but we could not take her vile personality as the basis of a classification. Mrs. Raddle is one of that lower middle-class which Dickens knew so well, still she is not hateful or vile, or anything but droll. I know how maddening that kind of woman can be in real life to those immediately about her, but onlookers find her purely funny; they never think of poor Bob Sawyer's cruel humiliation; they only laugh themselves helpless over the screeching little woman on the stairs, who humbles her wretched consort and routs the party with such consummate strategy.



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Mrs. Raddle and Mrs. Mackenzie are as far apart as two creatures may be; nevertheless they are veritable specimens of the British shrew, and it should be within the resources of civilisation to find a definition capable of fitting both of them. As for Queen Elizabeth—that splendid, false, able, cruel, and inexorable shrew—she requires the space of volumes to give even the shadow of her personality and powers. She has puzzled some of the wisest and most learned of men. She was truly royal, and wholly deceitful; self-controlled at times, and madly passionate at others; a lover of pure literature, and yet terribly free in her own writings; kind to her dependants, yet capable of aiming a violent blow at some courtier whom she had caressed a moment before the blow came; an icy virgin, and a confirmed and audacious flirt; a generous mistress, and an odious miser; a free giver to those near her, and a skinflint who let the sailors who saved her country lie rotting to death in the open streets of Ramsgate because she could not find in her heart to give them either medical attendance or shelter. Was there ever such another being known beneath the glimpses of the moon? Some might call her superhuman; I am more inclined to regard her as inhuman, for her blending of characteristics is not like anything ever seen before or since among the children of men. She was a shrew—a magnificent, enigmatic shrew, who was perhaps the more fitted to rule a kingdom which was in a state of transition in that she was lacking in all sense of pity, shame, or remorse. She was the apotheosis of the shrew, and no one of the tribe can ever be like unto her again. Carlyle's Termagant of Spain is a shadowy figure that flits through all the note-books on Frederick, but we never get so near to her as we do to Elizabeth, and she remains to us as a vast shape that gibbers and threatens and gesticulates in the realms of the dead. Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, must have been a terrible shrew, and I should think that Heber was not master in the house where Sisera died. The calm deliberation, the preliminary coaxing, the quick, cool determination, and the final shrill exultation which was reflected in Deborah's song all speak of the shrew. Thackeray had a morbid delight in dwelling on the species, and we know that all of his portraits were taken from real life. If he really was intimate with all of the cruel figures that he draws, then I could pardon him for manifesting the most ferocious of cynicisms even if he had been a cynic—which he was not. The Campaigner, Mrs. Clapp, the landlady in "Vanity Fair," Mrs. Baynes, and all the rest of the deplorable bevy rest like nightmares upon our memory. Dickens always made the shrew laughable, so that we can hardly spare pity for the poor Snagsbys and Raddles and Crupps, or any of her victims in that wonderful gallery; but Thackeray's, Trollope's, Charles Reade's, Mrs. Oliphant's, and even Miss Broughton's shrews are always odious, and they all seem to start from the page alive.



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But I am not minded to deal with the special instances of shrewism which have been pronounced enough to claim attention from powerful masters of fiction and history; I am rather interested in the swarms of totally commonplace shrews who live around us, and who do their very best—or worst—to make the earth a miserable place. I can laugh as heartily as anybody at Dickens's "scolds" and female bullies; none the less however am I ready in all seriousness to reckon the shrew as an evil influence, as bad as some of the most subtle and malevolent scourges inflicted by physical nature. All of us have but a little span on earth, and we should be able to economise every minute, so as to extract the maximum of joy from existence; yet how many frail lives are embittered by the shrew! How many men, women, and children has she not forced to wish almost for death as a relief from morbid pain and keen humiliation! Our social conditions tend to foster shrewish temperament, for we are gradually changing the subjection of woman to the enslavement of man; gentle chivalry is developing into maudlin self-advertising self-abnegation on the part of the males who favour the new movement. The sweet and equable lady remains the same in all ages; Imogen and Desdemona and Rosalind and the Roaring Girl have their modern counterparts. The lady never takes advantage of the just homage bestowed on her; she never asserts herself; her good breeding is so absolute that she would not be uncontrolledly familiar with her nearest and dearest, and her thoughts are all for others. But the shrew must always be thrusting herself forward; her cankered nature turns kindness into poison; she resents a benefit conferred as though it were an insult; and yet, if she is not constantly noticed and made, at the least, the recipient of kindly offers, she contrives to cause every one within reach of her to feel the sting of her enraged vanity. When I think of some women who are to be met with in various quarters, from the "slum" to the drawing-room, I am driven to wonder—shocking as it may seem—that crimes of violence are not more frequent than they are. It is most melancholy to notice how well the shrew fares compared with some poor creatures of gentler nature. In the lower classes a meek, toil-worn, obliging woman is most foully ill-used by a vagabond of a husband in only too many cases; while a screaming selfish wretch who, in trying to madden her miserable husband, succeeds in maddening all within earshot, escapes unhurt, and continues to lead her odious life, setting a bad example to impressionable young girls, and perhaps corrupting a neighbourhood. England is the happy hunting-ground for the shrew at present; for in America the average social relation between the sexes has come to be so frank and even that a shrew would be as severely treated as a discourteous man. In England a sham sentiment reigns which gives license to the vilest of women without protecting the martyrs, who, in all conscience,



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need protection. The scoundrel who maltreats a woman receives far less punishment than is inflicted on a teacher who gives a young Clerkenwell ruffian a stripe with a switch; while the howling shrew who spends a man's money in drink, empties his house, screeches at him by the hour together, is not censured at all—nay, the ordinary “gusher” would say that “the agonised woman vents the feelings of her overcharged heart.”

Now let us glance at the various sorts of these awful scourges who dwell in our midst. It may be well to classify them at once, because, unless I mistake many symptoms, the stubborn English may shortly snuff out the sentimentalists who have raised up a plague among us. I may say as a preliminary that in my opinion a shrew may be fairly defined as “a female who takes advantage of the noblest impulses of men and the kindest laws of nations in order that she may claim the social privileges of both sexes and vent her most wicked temper with freedom.” First, consider the doleful shrew. This is a person not usually found among the classes which lack leisure; she is an exasperating and most entirely selfish woman, and she cannot very well invent her refinements of whining cruelty unless she has a little time on hand; her speciality is to moan incessantly over the ingratitude of people for whom she has done some trivial service; and, as she always moans by choice in presence of the person whom she has afflicted by her generosity, the result is merely distracting. If the victim says, “I allow that you have been very kind, and I am grateful,” he commits an error in tactics, for the torturer is upon him at once. “Oh, you do own it then, and yet see how you behave!”—and then the torrent flows on with swift persistence. If, on the contrary, the sufferer cries, “Why on earth do you go on repeating what you have done? I owned your kindness once, and I do not intend to talk any more about it!” he is still more clearly delivered into the enemy's hands. He lays himself open to a charge of ingratitude, and the charge is pressed home with relentless fluency. Then, as to the doleful one's influence on children—the general modern tendency is towards making children happy, but the doleful one is a survival from some bad type, and takes a secret malign delight in wantonly inflicting pain on the minds or bodies of the young. Some dense people perhaps imagine that children cannot suffer mental agony; yet the merest mite may carry a whole tragedy in its innocent soul. We all know the wheedling ways of children; we know how they will coax little luxuries and privileges out of “papa” and “mamma,” and most of us rather like to submit with simulated reluctance to the harmless extortion. If I had heard a certain tiny youth say, “Papa, when I'm a big man, and you're a little boy, I shall ask you to have some jam,” I should have failed entirely to smother my laughter. Do you think the doleful one would have seen the fun of the remark if she had any power over the body or



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soul of that devoted child? Nay. She would have whined about slyness, and cunning hints, and greediness, and the probabilities of utter ruin and disgrace overtaking underhand schemers, until that child would have been stunned, puzzled, deprived of self-respect, and rendered entirely wretched. Long ago I heard of a doleful one who turned suddenly on a merry boy who was playing on the floor. "You're going straight to perdition!" observed the dolorous one; and the light went out of that boy's life for a time. A gladsome party of young folk may be instantly wrecked by the doleful shrew's entrance; and, if she cannot attract attention to herself amid a gathering even of sensible, cheerful adults, she will probably break up the evening by dint of a well-timed fit of spasms or something similar. Dickens made Mrs. Gummidge very funny; but the Gummidge of real life is not merely a limp, "lorn" creature—she is a woman who began by being unhealthily vain, and ends by being venomously malignant. I do not think that many people have passed through life very far without meeting with a specimen of the dolorous shrew, and I hope in all charity that the creature is not in the immediate circle of any one who reads this. In impassioned moments, when I have reckoned up all the misery caused by this species, I have been inclined to wish that every peculiarly malign specimen could be secured at the public expense in a safe asylum.

The aggressive shrew is usually the wife of some phlegmatic man; she insults him at all hours and on all subjects, and she establishes complete domination over him until she happens to touch his conscience fairly, and then he probably crushes her by the sudden exertion of latent moral force. Shall I talk of the drunken shrew? No—not that! My task is unlovely enough already, and I cannot inflict that last horror on those who will read this. Thus much will I say—if ever you know a man tied to a creature whose cheeks are livid purple in the morning and flushed at night, a creature who speaks thick at night and is ready with a villainous word for the most courteous and gentle of all whom she may meet, pray for that man.

The blue-blooded shrew is by no means uncommon. Watch one of this kind yelling on a racecourse in tearful and foul-mouthed rage and you will have a few queer thoughts about human nature. Then there is the ladylike shrew. Ah, that being! What has she to answer for? She is neat, low-spoken, precise; she can purr like a cat, and she has the feline scratch always ready too. Pity the governess, the servant, the poor flunkey whom she has at her mercy, for their bread is earned in bitterness. "My lady" does not raise her voice; she can give orders for the perpetration of the meanest of deeds without varying the silken flow of her acrid tongue; but she is bad—very bad; and I think that, if Dante and Swedenborg were at all near being true prophets, there would be a special quarter in regions dire for the lady-like shrew.



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I must distinctly own that the genuine shrew endeavours to make life more or less unhappy for both sexes. Usually we are apt to think of the shrew as resembling the village scolds who used to be promptly ducked in horse-ponds in the unregenerate days; but the scold was an individual who was usually chastised for making a dead-set at her husband alone. The real shrew is like the puff-adder or the whip-snake—she tries to bite impartially all round; and she is often able to bite in comparative silence, but with a most deadly effect. The vulgar shrieker is a deplorable source of mischief, but she cannot match the reticent stabber who is always ready, out of sheer wickedness, to thrust a venomed point into man, woman, or child. I shall give my readers an extreme instance towards which they may probably find it hard to extend belief. I am right however, and have fullest warrant for my statement. I learn on good authority, and with plenitude of proof, that trained nurses are rather too frequently subjected to the tender mercies of the shrew. Nothing is more grateful to a cankered woman than the chance of humiliating some one who possesses superior gifts of any description, and a well-bred lady who has taken to the profession of nursing is excellent “game.” Thus I find that delicate young women of gentle nurture have been sent away to sleep in damp cellars at the back of great town-houses; they have had to stay their necessarily fastidious appetites with cold broken food—and this too after a weary vigil in the sick-room. Greatest triumph of all, the nurses have been compelled to go as strangers to the servants’ table and make friends as best they could. It is not easy to form any clear notion of a mind capable of devising such useless indignities, because the shrew ought to know that her conduct is contrasted with that of good and considerate people. The nurse bears with composure all that is imposed on her, but she despises the shabby woman, and she compares the behaviour of the acrid tyrant with that of the majority of warm-hearted and generous ladies who think nothing too good for their hired guests. I quote this extreme example just to show how far the shrew is ready to go, and I wish it were not all true.

Next let me deal with the mean shrew, who has one servant or more under her control. The records of the servants’ aid societies will show plainly that there are women against whose names a significant mark must be put, and the reason is that they turn away one girl after another with incredible rapidity, or that despairing girls leave them after finding life unendurable. I know that there are insolent, sluttish, lazy, and incompetent servants, and I certainly wish to be fair toward the mistresses; but I also know that too many of the persons who send wild and whirling words to the newspapers belong without doubt to the class of mean shrews. Whenever I see one of those periodical letters which tell of the writer’s



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lifelong tribulation, I like to refresh my mind by repeating certain golden utterances of the man whom we regard as one of the wisest of living Englishmen—"There is only one way to have good servants—that is, to be worthy of being well served. All nature and all humanity will serve a good master and rebel against an ignoble one. And there is no surer test of the quality of a nation than the quality of its servants, for they are their masters' shadows and distort their faults in a flattened mimicry. A wise nation will have philosophers in its servants'-hall, a knavish nation will have knaves there, and a kindly nation will have friends there. Only let it be remembered that 'kindness' means, as with your child, not indulgence, but care." Substitute "mistress" for "master" in this passage of John Ruskin's, and we have a little lesson which the mean shrew might possibly take to heart—if she had any heart. What is the kind of "care" which the mean one bestows on her dependants? "That's my little woman a-giving it to 'Tilda," pensively observed Mr. Snagsby; and I suspect that a very great many little women employ a trifle too much of their time in "giving it to 'Tilda." That is the "care" which poor 'Tilda gets. Consider the kind of life which a girl leads when she comes for a time under the domination of the mean shrew. Say that her father is a decent cottager; then she has probably been used to plain and sufficient food, dressed in rough country fashion, and she has at all events had a fairly warm place to sleep in. When she enters her situation, she finds herself placed in a bare chill garret; she has not a scrap of carpet on the floor, and very likely she is bitterly cold at nights. She is expected to be astir and alert from six in the morning until ten or later at night; she is required to show almost preternatural activity and intelligence, and she is not supposed to have any of the ordinary human being's desire for recreation or leisure. When her Sunday out comes—ah, that Sunday out, what a tragic farce it is!—she does not know exactly where to go. If she is near a park or heath, she may fall in with other girls and pass a little time in giggling and chattering; but of rational pleasure she knows nothing. Then her home is the bare dismal kitchen, with the inevitable deal table, frowsy cloth, and rickety chairs. The walls of this interesting apartment are possibly decked with a few tradesmen's almanacs, whereon Grace Darling is depicted with magnificent bluish hair, pink cheeks, and fashionable dress; or his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales assumes a heroic attitude, and poses as a field-marshal of the most stern and lofty description. Thus are 'Tilda's aesthetic tastes developed. The mean shrew cannot give servants such expensive company as a cat; but the beetles are there, and a girl of powerful imagination may possibly come to regard them as eligible pets. Then the food—the breakfast of weak tea and scanty bread; the mid-day



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meal of horrid scraps measured out with eager care to the due starvation limit; the tasteless, dreadful “tea” once more at six o’clock, and the bread and water for supper! And the incessant scold, scold, scold, the cunning inquiries after missing morsels of meat or potatoes, the exasperating orders! It is too depressing; and, when I see some of the virtuous letters from ill-used mistresses, I smile a little sardonically, and wish that the servants could air their eloquence in the columns of great newspapers. Some time ago there was a case in which a perfectly rich shrew went away from home from Saturday morning till Monday night, leaving one shilling to provide all food for two young women. This person of course needed fresh servants every month, and was no doubt surprised at the ingratitude of the starvelings who perpetually left her. I call up memories of homes, refuges, emigration-agencies, and so forth, and do most sternly and bitterly blame the mean shrew for mischief which well-nigh passes credence. There is nothing more delightful than to watch the dexterous, healthy, cheerful maids in well-ordered households where the mistress is the mother; but there is very little of the mother about the mean shrew—she is rather more like the slave-driver. “Stinted means,” observes some tender apologist. What ineffable rubbish! If a woman is married to a man of limited means, does that give her any right to starve and bully a fellow-creature? How many brave women have done all necessary housework and despised ignoble “gentility”! No, I cannot quite accept the “stinted means” excuse; the fact is that the mean shrew is hard on her dependants solely because her nature is not good; and we need not beat about the bush any longer for reasons. A domestic servant under a wise, dignified, and kind mistress or housekeeper may live a healthy and happy life; the servant of the mean shrew does not live at all in any true sense of the word. No rational man can blame girls for preferring the freedom of shop or factory to the thralldom of certain kinds of domestic service. If we consider only the case of well-managed houses, then we may wonder why any girl should enter a factory; but, on the other hand, there is that dire vision of the mean shrew with gimlet eye and bitter tongue! What would the mean shrew have made of Margaret Catchpole, the Suffolk girl who was transported about one hundred years ago? There is a problem. That girl’s letters to her mistress are simply throbbing with passionate love and gratitude; and the phrases “My beloved mistress,” “My dear, dear mistress,” recur like sobs. Margaret would have become a fiend under the mean shrew; but the holy influence of a good lady made a noble woman of her, and she became a pattern of goodness long after one rash but blameless freak was forgotten. All Margaret’s race now rise up and call her blessed, and her spirit must have rejoiced when she saw her brilliant descendant appearing in England two years ago as representative of a mighty colony.



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What shall I say about the literary shrew? Let no one be mistaken—we have a good many of them, and we shall have more and more of them. There are kind and charming lady-novelists in plenty, and we all owe them fervent thanks for happy hours; there are deeply-cultured ladies who make the joy of placid English homes; there are hundreds on hundreds of honest literary workers who never set down an impure or ungentle line. I am grateful in reason to all these; but there is another sort of literary woman towards whom I pretend to feel no gratitude whatever, and that is the downright literary shrew, who usually writes, so to speak, in a scream, and whose sentences resemble bursting packets of pins and needles. She is what the Americans would call “death on man,” and she likes to emphasize her invectives by always printing “Men” with a capital “M.” She is however rigidly impartial in her distribution of abuse, and she finds out at frequent intervals that English women and girls are going year by year from bad to worse. That the earth does not hold a daintier, purer, more exquisitely lovable being than the well-educated, well-bred English girl, is an opinion held even by some very cynical males; but the literary shrew rattles out her libels, and, in order to show how very virtuous she is, she usually makes her articles unfit to be brought within the doors of any respectable house. Not that she is ribald—she is merely so slangy, so audacious, and so bitter that no “prudent” man would let his daughters glance at a single article turned out by our emphatic shrew. As to men—well, those ignoble beings fare very badly at her hands. I do not know exactly what she wants to do with the poor things, but on paper and on the platform she insists that they shall practically give up their political power entirely, for women, being in an immense majority, would naturally outvote the inferior sex. Sometimes, when the shrew is more than usually capricious and enraged with her own sex, she may magnanimously propose to disfranchise huge numbers of women; but, as a rule, she is bent on mastering the enemy—Man. If you happen to remark that it would be rather awkward if a majority of women should happen to bring about a war in which myriads of men would destroy each other, we rather pity you; that argument always beats the shrew, and she resorts to the literary equivalent for hysterics. If the controversialist ventures to ask some questions about the share which women have had in bringing about the great wars known to history, he draws on himself more and more hysterical abuse. What a strange being is this! Her life is one long squabble, she is the most reckless and violent of fighters, and yet she is always crying out that Men are brutal and bloodthirsty, and that she and her sisters would introduce the elements of peace and goodwill to political relations. We may have a harmless laugh at the literary shrew so long as she confines herself to haphazard scribbling,



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because no one is forced to read; but it is no laughing matter when she transfers her literary powers to some public body, and inflicts essays on the members. Her life on a School Board may be summarised as consisting of a battle and a screech; she has the bliss of abusing individual Men rudely—nay, even savagely—and she knows that chivalry prevents them from replying. But she is worst when she rises to read an essay; then the affrighted males flee away and rest in corners while the shrew denounces things in general. It is terrible. Among the higher products of civilisation the literary shrew is about the most disconcerting, and, if any man wants to know what the most gloomy possible view of life is like, I advise him to attend some large board-meeting during a whole afternoon while the literary shrew gets through her series of fights and reads her inevitable essay. He will not come away much wiser perhaps, but he will be appreciably sadder.

And so this long procession of shrews passes before us, scolding and gibbering and dispensing miseries. Is there no way of appealing to reason so that they may be led to see that inflicting pain can never bring them anything but a low degree of pleasure? No human creature was ever made better or more useful by a shrew, for the very means by which the acrid woman tries to secure notice or power only serves to belittle her. Take the case of a vulgar schoolmistress who is continually scolding. What happens in her school? She is mocked, hated, tricked, and despised; real discipline is non-existent; the bullied assistants go about their work without heart; and the whole organisation—or rather disorganisation—gradually crumbles, until a place which should be the home of order and happiness becomes an ugly nest of anarchy. But look at one of the lovely high schools which are now so common; read Miss Kingsley's most fervent and accurate description of the scholars, and observe how poorly the scolding teacher fares in the comparison. Who ever heard of a girl being scolded or punished in a good modern high school? Such a catastrophe is hardly conceivable, for one quiet look of reproach from a good teacher is quite sufficient to render the average girl inconsolable until forgiveness is granted. This illustrates my point—the shrew never succeeds in doing anything but intensifying the fault or evil which she pretends to remove. The shrew who shrieks at a drunkard only makes him dive further into the gulf in search of oblivion; the shrew who snaps constantly at a servant makes the girl dull, fierce, and probably wicked; the shrew who tortures a patient man ends by making him desperate and morose; the shrew who weeps continually out of spite, and hopes to earn pity or attention in that fashion, ends by being despised by men and women, abhorred by children, and left in the region of entire neglect. Perhaps if public teachers could only show again and again that the shrew makes herself more unhappy, if possible, than she makes other people, then the selfish instinct which is dominant might answer to the appeal; but, though I make the suggestion I have no great hope of its being very fruitful.



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After all, I fear the odious individual whose existence and attributes we have discussed must be accepted as a scourge sent to punish us for past sins of the race. Certainly women had a very bad time in days gone by—they were slaves; and at odd moments I am tempted to conclude that the slave instinct survives in some of them, and they take their revenge in true servile fashion. This line of thought would carry me back over more ages than I care to traverse; I am content with knowing that the shrews are in a minority, and that the majority of my countrywomen are sweet and benign.

### X.

#### ARE WE WEALTHY?

Among the working-classes shrewd men are now going about putting some very awkward questions which seem paradoxical at first sight, but which are quite understood by many intelligent men to whom they are addressed. The query “Are we wealthy?” seems easy enough to answer; and of course a rapid and superficial observer gives an affirmative in reply. It seems so obvious! Our income is a thousand millions per year; our railways and merchant fleets can hardly be valued without putting a strain on the imagination; and it seems as if the atmosphere were reeking with the very essence of riches. A millionaire gives nearly one thousand pounds for a puppy; he buys seventeen baby horses for about three thousand pounds apiece; he gives four thousand guineas for a foal, and bids twenty thousand pounds for one two-year-old filly; his house costs a million or thereabouts. Minor plutocrats swarm among us, and they all exhibit their wealth with every available kind of ostentation; yet that obstinate question remains to be answered—“Are we wealthy?” We may give the proletarians good advice and recommend them to employ no extreme talk and no extreme measures; but there is the new disposition, and we cannot get away from it. I take no side; the poor have my sympathy, but I endeavour to understand the rich, and also to face facts in a quiet way. Supposing that a ball is being given that costs one thousand pounds, and that within sound of the carriages there are twenty seamstresses working who never in all their lives know what it is to have sufficient food—is not that a rather curious position? The seamstresses are the children of mighty Britain, and it seems that their mother cannot give them sustenance. The excessive luxury of the ball shows that some one has wealth, but does it not also seem to show that some one has too much? The clever lecturers who talk to the populace now will not be content with the old-fashioned answer, and an awkward deadlock is growing more nearly imminent daily. Suppose we take the case of the sporting-man again, and find that he pays three guineas per week for the training of each of his fifty racers, we certainly have a picture of lavish display; but, when we see, on the other hand, that nearly half the children in some London districts never know what it is to have breakfast before they



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go to school, we cannot help thinking of the palaces in which the horses are stabled and the exquisite quality of the animal's food. There is not a good horse that mother England does not care for, and there are half a million children who rarely can satisfy their hunger, and who are quartered in dens which would kill the horses in a week. These crude considerations are not-presented by us as being satisfactory statements in economics; but, when the smart mob orator says, "What kind of parent would keep horses in luxury and leave children to hunger?" "Is this wealthy England?" his audience reply in a fashion of their own. Reasoning does not avail against hunger and privation. I am forced to own that, for my part, the awful problem of poverty seems insoluble by any logical agent; but the man of the mob does not now care for logic than ever he did before, and he has advisers who state to him the problems of life and society with passionate rhetoric which eludes reason.

The whole world hangs together, and Chicago may be called a mere suburb of London. English people did not understand the true history of the genesis of poverty until the developments of society in America showed us with terrific rapidity the historical development of our own poverty. The fearful state of things in American cities was brought about in a very few years, whereas the gradual extension of our poverty-stricken classes has been going on for centuries. To us poverty, besides being a horror, was more or less of a mystery; but America exhibited the development of the gruesome monster with lurid distinctness. In the old countries the men who first were able to seize the land gradually sublet portions either for money or warlike service; the growth of manufactures occupied a thousand years before it reached its present extent; and with the rising of manufacturing centres came enormous new populations which were finally obliged to barter their labour for next to nothing—and thus we have the appalling and desolating spectacle of our slums. All that took place in America with the swiftness of a series of stage-scenes; so that men now living have watched the inception and growth of all the most harrowing forms of poverty and the vices arising from poverty. And now the cry is, "Go back to the Land—the Land for the Nation!" Matters have reached a strange pass when such a political watchword should be chosen by thousands in grave and stolid England, and we shall be obliged to compromise in the end with those by whom the cry is raised. I believe that a compromise may be arranged in time, but the leaders of the poor will have to teach their followers wisdom, self-restraint, and even a little unselfishness, impossible as the teaching of that last may seem to be. We have begun a great labour war, in which battles are being lost and won by opposing sides around us every day. The fighting was very terrible at the beginning; but we shall be forced at last to adopt a system of truces, and then the question "Are we wealthy?" may find its answer. At this moment, however much an optimist may point to our wealth, the logical opponent of established things can always point to the ghastly sights that seem to make the very name of wealth a cynical mockery.



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We have to take up a totally new method of meeting and dealing with the poor; and rich and poor alike must learn to think—which is an accomplishment not possessed by many of either class. In the early part of the century, when the ideas of the Revolution were still very vital, there was hope that a time might come when wealth and power would be shared so as to secure genuine human existence to the whole population. Then came the mad hopes that followed the Reform Bill, when grave Parliamentary men wept and huzzaed like schoolboys on seeing that remarkable measure passed. People thought that the good days had at last come, and even the workers who were still left out in the cold fancied that in some vague way they were to receive benefits worth having. The history of human delusions is a very sad one, as sad almost as the history of human wickedness; and all those poor enthusiasts had a sad awakening, for they found that the barren fights of placemen would still go on, that the people would continue to be shorn, and that the condition of the poor was uncommonly likely to be worse than ever. The hour of hopefulness passed away, and there succeeded bitter years of savage despair. The unhappy Chartists struggled hard; and there is something pathetic in thinking how good men were treated for preaching political commonplaces which are now deemed almost Conservative. The wild time in which every crown in Europe tottered was followed by another period of optimism; for the great religious revival had begun, and the Church resumed her ancient power over the people, despite the shock given by Newman's secession. Then once again the query "Are we wealthy?" was answered with enthusiasm; and even the poor were told that they were wealthy, for had they not the reversion of complete felicity to crown their entry into a future world? We must believe that there is some compensation for this life's ills, or else existence would become no longer bearable; but it was hard for people in general to think that everything was for the best on this earth. Soon came the day of doubt and bitterness, which assailed eager philanthropists and mere ordinary people as well. The poor folk did not feel the effects of Darwin's work, but those effects were terrible in certain quarters, for many precipitate thinkers became convinced that we must perish like the dumb beasts. Wherefore came the question, "Why should the poor go without their share of the good things of this world, since there is nothing for them in the next?" A very ugly query it is too, because, when the question of number arises, rash spirits may say, as it was said long ago, "Are we not many, and are you not few?"



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I have not any fine theories, and I do not want to stir up enmities; and I therefore say to the instructors of the poor, "Instead of egging your men on to warfare, why not teach them how to use the laws which they already have? No new laws are wanted; every rational and necessary reform may be achieved by dint of measures now on the statute-book—measures which seem to slumber as soon as the agitation raised in passing them has glorified a certain number of placemen." Every year we have the outcry, to which we have so often alluded, about disgraceful dwellings; yet there is not a bad case in London or elsewhere which could not be cured if the law were quietly set in motion by men of business. As a matter of fact, a very great portion of the wealth of the country is now at the service of the poor; but they do not choose to take it—or, at any rate, they know nothing about it. Look at the School Board elections, and see how many exercise the right to vote. Yet, if the majority elected their own School Board, they could divert enough charities to educate our whole population, and they could do as they chose in their own schools. Again, the Local Government Act renders it possible for the populace to secure any public institutions that they may want, and in the main they can order their own social life to their liking. What is the use of incessant declamation? Organisation would be a thousand times better. Let quiet men who do not want mere self-advertisement tell the people what is their property and how to get it, and there will be no need of the outcry of one class against another. It is a bitter grief for all thinking men to observe the inequalities that continue to make life positively accursed in many quarters, and the sights of shame that abound ought to be seen no more; but rage can do nothing, while wise teaching can do everything. The population question must be dealt with by the people themselves; they must resolve to crush their masses no more into slums; they must choose for themselves a nobler and a purer life—and that can be accomplished by the laws which they may set in action at once. Then they will be able to say, "England is wealthy, and we have our share."

Some excellent articles have been turned out by the brilliant professor of biology who inspects our fisheries for us. He has done rare service for the people in his own way—no one better, for he was one of the first who eagerly advocated the education of the masses; but I fear he is now becoming "disillusionised." He talked once about erecting a Jacob's Ladder from the gutter to the university; and he has found that the ladder—such as it is—has merely been used to connect the tradesman's shop and the artisan's dwelling with the exalted place of education. The poor gutter-child cannot climb the ladder; he is too hungry, too thin, too weak for the feat, and hence the professor's famous epigram has become one of the things at which scientific students of the human race smile sadly and



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kindly. And now the professor grows savage and so wildly Conservative that we fear he may denounce Magna Charta next as a gross error. I know very well that all men are not equal, and the professor's keenest logic cannot make me see that point any more clearly than at present. But suppose that one fine day some awkward leader of the people says, "You tell us, professor, that we are wealthy, and that it is right that some men should be gorged while we are bitten with famine. If Britain is so wealthy, how is it that eleven million acres of good agricultural land are now out of cultivation, while the people whom the land used to feed are crushed in the slums of the towns in the case of labourers, or gone beyond the sea in the case of the farmers?" I want to be impartial, but freely own that I should not like to answer that question, and I do not believe the professor could. The men who used to supply our fighting force are now becoming extinct. If they go into the town and pick up some kind of work, then the second generation are weaklings and a burden to us; while, if they go abroad, they are still removed from the Mother of Nations, who needs her sons of the soil, even though she may feel proud of the gallant new States which they are rearing. And, while rats and mice and obscure vermin are gradually taking possession of the land on which Britons were bred, the signs of bursting wealth are thick among us. Is a nation rich that cannot afford even to keep the kind of men who once defended her? To me the gradual return of the land to its primitive wildness is more than depressing. There are districts on the borders of Hertford and Essex which might make a sentimental traveller sit down and cry. It all seems strange; it looks so poverty-stricken, so filthy, so sordid, so like the site of a slum after all the houses have been levelled for a dozen years; and this in the midst of our England! I say nothing about land-laws and so forth, but I will say that those who fancy the towns can survive when the farms are deserted are much mistaken. "Are we wealthy?" "Yes," and "No." We are wealthy in the wrong places, and we are poor in the wrong places; and the combination will end in mischief unless we are very soon prepared to make an alteration in most of our ways of living. In many respects it is a good world; but it might be made better, nobler, finer in every quarter, if the poor would only recognise wise and silent leaders, and use the laws which men have made in order to repair the havoc which other men have also made.

## XI.

### THE VALUES OF LABOUR.



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Only about a quarter-century ago unlearned men of ability would often sigh and say, "Ah, if I was only a scholar!" Admirers of a clever and illiterate workman often said, "Why, if he was a scholar, he would make a fortune in business for himself!" Women mourned the lack of learning in the same way, and I have heard good dames deplore the fact that they could not read. I pity most profoundly those on whom the light of knowledge has never shone kindly; and yet I have a comic sort of misgiving lest in a short time a common cry may be, "Ah, if I was only not a scholar!" The matchless topsyturvydom which has marked the passage of the last ten years, the tremendously accelerated velocity with which labour is moving towards emancipation from all control, have so confused things in general that an observer must stand back and get a new focus before he can allow his mind to dwell on the things that he sees. One day's issue of any good newspaper is enough to show what a revolution is upon us, for we merely need to run the eye down columns at random to pick out suggestive little scraps. At present we cannot get that "larger view" about which Dr. W.B. Carpenter used to talk; he was wont to study hundreds and thousands of soundings and measurements piecemeal, and the chaos of figures gradually took form until at length the doctor had in his mind a complete picture of enormous ocean depths. In somewhat the same way we can by slow degrees form a picture of a changed state of society, and we find that the faculties of body or mind which used to bring their possessor gain are now nearly worthless. In one column of a journal I find that a trained schoolmistress is required to take charge of a village school. The salary is sixteen pounds per annum; but, if the lady is fortunate enough to have a husband, work can be procured for him daily on the farm. This is just a little disconcerting. The teacher must see to the mental and moral training of fifty children; she must have spent at least seven years in learning before she was allowed to take charge of a school; then she remained two more years on probation, and all the time her expenses were not light. As the final reward of her exertions, she is offered six shillings per week, out of which she must dress neatly—for a slatternly schoolmistress would be a dreadful object—buy sufficient food, and hold her own in rural society! The reverend man who advertises this delectable situation must have a peculiar idea regarding the class into which an educated lady like the teacher whom he requires would likely to marry. An agricultural labourer may be an honest fellow enough, but, as the husband of an educated woman, he might be out of place; and I fancy that a schoolmistress whose husband pulled turnips and wore corduroys might not secure the maximum of deference from her scholars. In contrast to this grotesque advertisement I run down a list of cooks required, and I find that the average wage of the cook

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is not far from three times that of the teacher, while the domestic has her food provided for liberality. The village schoolmistress in the old days was never well paid; but then she was a private speculator; we never expected to see the specialised product of training and time reckoned at the same value as the old dame's, who was able to read and knit, but who could do little more. While we are comparing the wages of teachers and cooks, I may point out that the *chef*, whose training lasts seven years, earns, as we calculate, one hundred and thirty pounds per year more than the average English schoolmaster. This is perhaps as it should be, for the value of a good *chef* is hardly to be reckoned in money; and yet the figures look funny when we first study them. And now we may turn to the wages of dustmen, who are, it must be admitted, a most estimable class of men and most useful. I find that the London dustman earns more than an assistant master under the Salford School Board, and, besides his wages, he picks up many trifles. The dustman may dwell with his family in two rooms at three-and-sixpence per week; his equipment consists of a slop, corduroys, and a sou'-wester hat, which are sufficient to last many a day with little washing. But the assistant, whose education alone cost the nation one hundred pounds cash down, not to speak of his own private expenditure, must live in a respectable locality, dress neatly, and keep clear of that ugly soul-killing worry which is inflicted by trouble about money. Decidedly the dustman has the best of the bargain all round, for, to say the least, he does not need to labour very much harder than the professional man. This instance tends to throw a very sinister and significant flash on the way things are tending. Again, some of the gangs of Shipping Federation men have full board and lodging, two changes of clothes free, beer and rum in moderate quantities, and thirty shillings per week. Does anybody in England know a curate who has a salary like that? I do not think it would be possible to find one on the Clergy List. No one grudges the labourers their extra food and high wages; I am only taking note of a significant social circumstance. The curate earns nothing until he is about three-and-twenty; if he goes through one of the older universities, his education costs, up to the time of his going out into the world, something very like two thousand pounds; yet, with all his mental equipment, such as it is, he cannot earn so much as a labourer of his own age. Certainly the humbler classes had their day of bondage when the middleman bore heavily on them; they got clear by a mighty effort which dislocated commerce, but we hardly expected to find them claiming, and obtaining, payments higher than many made to the most refined products of the universities! It is the way of the world; we are bound for change, change, and yet more change; and no man may say how the cycles will widen. Luxury has grown on us since the thousands



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of wealthy idlers who draw their money from trade began to make the stream of lavish expenditure turn into a series of rushing rapids. The flow of wasted wealth is no longer like the equable gliding of the full Thames; it is like the long deadly flurry of the waters that bears toward Niagara. These newly-enriched people cause the rise of the usual crop of parasites, and it is the study of the parasites which forces on the mind hundreds of reflections concerning the values of different kinds of labour. A little while ago, for example, an exquisitely comic paragraph was printed with all innocence in many journals. It appeared that two of the revived species of parasites known as professional pugilists were unable to dress properly before they began knocking each other about, "because their valets were not on the spot." I hope that the foul old days of the villainous "ring" may never be recalled by anything seen in our day, for there never were any "palmy days," though there were some ruffians who could not be bought. Yet the worst things that happened in the bygone times were not so much fitted to make a man think solemnly as that one delicious phrase—"their valets were not on the spot." In the noble days, when England was so very merry, it often happened that a man who has been battered out of all resemblance to humanity was left to dress himself as best he could on a bleak marsh, and his chivalrous friends made the best of their way home, while the defeated gladiator was reckoned at a dog's value. Now-a-days those sorely-entreated creatures would have their valets. In one department of industry assuredly the value of labour has altered. The very best of the brutal old school once fought desperately for four hours, though it was thought that he must be killed, and his reason was that, if he lost, he would have to beg his bread. Now-a-days he would have a valet, a secretary, a manager, and a crowd of plutocratic admirers who would load him with money and luxuries. I was tickled to the verge of laughter by finding that one of these gentry was paid thirty pounds per night for exhibiting his skill, and my amusement was increased when it turned out that one of those who paid him thirty pounds strongly objected on learning that the hero appeared at two other places, from each of which he received the same sum. Thus for thirty-six minutes of exertion per day the man was drawing five hundred and forty pounds per week. All these things appeared in the public prints; but no public writer took any serious notice of a symptom which is as significant as any ever observed in the history of mankind. It is almost awe-striking to contemplate these parasites, and think what their rank luxurious existence portends. Here we see a man of vast wealth, whereof every pound was squeezed from the blood and toil of working-men; he passes his time now in the company of these fellows who have earned a reputation by pounding each other. The wealthy bully and his hangers-on are dangerous



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to the public peace; their language is too foul for even men of the world to endure it, and the whole crew lord it in utter contempt of law and decency. That is the kind of spectacle to be seen in our central city almost every night. Consider a story which accidentally came out a few weeks ago owing to legal proceedings and kept pleasure-seeking and scandalmongering London laughing for a while, and say whether any revelation ever gave us a picture of a more unspeakable society. A rich man, A., keeps a prizefighter, B., to “mind” him, as the quaint phrase goes. Mr. A. is offended by another prizefighter, C., and he offers B. the sum of five hundred pounds if he will give C. a beating in public. B. goes to C., and says, “I will give you ten pounds if you will let me thrash you, and I won’t hurt you much.” C. gladly consents, so B. pockets four hundred and ninety pounds for himself, and the noble patron’s revenge is satisfied. There is a true tale of rogues and a fool—a tale to make one brood and brood until the sense of fun passes into black melancholy. Five hundred men worked for sixty hours per week before that money was earned—and think of the value received for the whole sum when it was spent! Truly the parasite’s exertions are lucrative to himself!

As for the market-price of book-learning or clerkly skill, it is not worth so much as naming. The clerk was held to be a wondrous person in times when the “neck-verse” would save a man from the gallows; but “clerk” has far altered its meaning, and the modern being of that name is in sorrowful case. So contemptibly cheap are his poor services that he in person is not looked upon as a man, but rather as a lump of raw material which is at present on sale in a glutted market. All the walks of life wherein men proceed as though they belonged to the leisured class are becoming no fit places for self-respecting people. Gradually the ornamental sort of workers are being displaced; the idle rich are too plentiful, but I question whether even the idle rich have done, so much harm as the genteel poor who are ashamed of labour. I do not like to see wages going downward, but there are exceptions, and I am almost disposed to feel glad that the searchers after “genteel” employment are now very much like the birds during a long frost. The enormous lounging class who earn nothing do not offer an agreeable subject for contemplation, and their parasites are horrible—there is no other word. Yet we may gather a little consolation when we think that the tendency is to raise the earnings of those who do something or produce something. It is not good to know that a dustman makes more money than hundreds of hard-worked and well-educated men, for this is a grotesque state of things brought about by imbecile Government officials. Neither do I quite like to know that a lady whose education occupied nine years of her life is offered less wages than a good housemaid. But I do assuredly like to hear



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how the higher class of manual labourers flourish; they are the salt of the earth, and I rejoice that they are no longer held down and regarded as in some way inferior to men who do nothing for two hundred pounds a year, except try to look as if they had two thousand pounds. The quiet man who does the delicate work on the monster engines of a great ocean steamer is worthy of his hire, costly as his hire may be. On his eye, his judgment of materials, his nerve, and his dexterity of hand depend precious lives. For three thousand miles those vast masses of machinery must force a huge hull through huge seas; the mighty and shapely fabrics of metal must work with the ease of a child's toy locomotive, and they must bear a strain that is never relaxed though all the most tremendous forces of Nature may threaten. What a charge for a man! His earnings could hardly be raised high enough if we consider the momentous nature of the duty he fulfils; he is an aristocrat of labour, and we do not know that there is not something grotesque in measuring and arguing over the money-payment made to him. Then there are the specially skilled hands who in their monkish seclusion work at the instruments wherewith scientific wonders are wrought. The rewards of their toil would have seemed fabulous to such men as Harrison the watchmaker; but they also form an aristocracy, and they win the aristocrat's guerdon without practising his idleness. The mathematician who makes the calculations for a machine is not so well paid as the man who finishes it; the observatory calculator who calculates the time of occultation for a planet cannot earn so much as the one who grinds a reflector. In all our life the same tendency is to be seen: the work of the hand outdoes in value the work of the brain.

## XII.

### THE HOPELESS POOR.

By fits and starts the public wake up and own with much clamour that there is a great deal of poverty in our midst. While each new fit lasts the enthusiasm of good people is quite impressive in its intensity; all the old hackneyed signatures appear by scores in the newspapers, and "Pro Bono Publico," "Audi Alteram Partem," "X.Y.Z.," "Paterfamilias," "An Inquirer," have their theories quite pat and ready. Picturesque writers pile horror on horror, and strive, with the delightful emulation of their class, to outdo each other; far-fetched accounts of oppression, robbery, injustice, are framed, and the more drastic reformers invariably conclude that "Somebody" must be hanged. We never find out which "Somebody" we should suspend from the dismal tree; but none the less the virtuous reformers go on claiming victims for the sacrifice, while, as each discoverer solemnly proclaims his bloodthirsty remedy, he looks round for applause, and seems to say, "Did you ever hear of stern and audacious statesmanship like mine? Was there ever such a practical man?"



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The farce is supremely funny in essentials, and yet I cannot laugh at it, for I know that the drolleries are played out amid sombre surroundings that should make the heart quake. While the hysterical newspaper people are venting abuse and coining theories, there are quiet workers in thousands who go on in uncomplaining steadfastness striving to remove a deadly shame from our civilisation, and smiling softly at the furious cries of folk who know so little and vociferate so much. After each whirlwind of sympathy has reached its full strength, there is generally a strong disposition among the sentimentalists to do something. No mere words for the genuine sentimentalist; he packs his sentimental self into a cab, he engages the services of a policeman, and he plunges into the nasty deeps of the City's misery. He treats each court and alley as a department of a menagerie, and he gazes with mild interest on the animals that he views. To the sentimentalist they are only animals; and he is kind to them as he would be to an ailing dog at home. If the sentimentalist's womenfolk go with him, the tour is made still more pleasing. The ladies shudder with terror as they trail their dainty skirts up noisome stairs; but their genteel cackle never ceases. "And you earn six shillings per week? How very surprising! And the landlord takes four shillings for your one room? How very mean! And you have—let me see—four from six leaves two—yes—you have two shillings a week to keep you and your three children? How charmingly shocking!" The honest poor go out to work; the wastrels stay at home and invent tales of woe; then, when the dusk falls on the foul court and all the sentimentalists have gone home to dinner, the woe-stricken tellers of harrowing tales creep out to the grimy little public-house at the top of the row; they spend the gifts of the sentimentalist; and, when the landlord draws out his brimming tills at midnight, he blesses the kind people who help to earn a snug income for him. I have seen forty-eight drunken people come out of a tavern between half-past eleven and half-past twelve in one night during the time when sentiment ran mad; there never were such roaring times for lazy and dissolute scoundrels; and nearly all the money given by the sentimentalists was spent in sowing crops of liver complaint or *delirium tremens*, and in filling the workhouses and the police-cells. Then the fit of charity died out; the clergyman and the "sisters" went on as usual in their sacredly secret fashion until a new outburst came. It seems strange to talk of Charity "raging"—it reminds us of Mr. Mantalini's savage lamb—but I can use no other word but "rage" to express these frantic gushes of affection for the poor. During one October month I carefully preserved and collated all the suggestions which were so liberally put forth in various London and provincial newspapers; and I observed that something like four hundred of these suggestions resolve themselves into a very few definite classes. The most sensible of these follow the lines laid down by Charles Dickens, and the writers say, "If you do not want the poor to behave like hogs, why do you house them like hogs? Clear away the rookeries; buy up the sites; pay reasonable compensation to those now interested in the miserable buildings, and then erect decent dwellings."



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Now I do not want to confuse my readers by taking first a bead-roll of proposals, and then a bead-roll of arguments for and against, so I shall deal with each reformer's idea in the order of its importance. Before beginning, I must say that I differ from all the purveyors of the cheaper sort of sentiment; I differ from many ladies and gentlemen who talk about abstractions; and I differ most of all from the feather-brained persons who set up as authorities after they have paid flying visits in cabs to ugly neighbourhoods. When a specialist like Miss Octavia Hill speaks, we hear her with respect; but Miss Hill is not a sentimentalist; she is a keen, cool woman who has put her emotions aside, and who has gone to work in the dark regions in a kind of Napoleonic fashion. No fine phrases for her—nothing but fact, fact, fact. Miss Hill feels quite as keenly as the gushing persons; but she has regulated her feelings according to the environment in which her energies had to be exercised, and she has done more good than all the poetic creatures that ever raked up "cases" or made pretty phrases. I leave Miss Hill out of my reckoning, and I deal with the others. My conclusions may seem hard, and even cruel, but they are based on what I believe to be the best kindness, and they are supported by a somewhat varied experience. I shall waive the charge of cruelty in advance, and proceed to plain downright business.

You want to clear away rookeries and erect decent dwellings in their place? Good and beautiful! I sympathise with the intention, and I wish that it could be carried into effect instantly. Unhappily reforms of that sort cannot by any means be arranged on the instant, and certainly they cannot be arranged so as to suit the case of the Hopeless Poor. Shall I tell you, dear sentimentalist, that the Hopeless brigade would not accept your kindness if they could? I shall stagger many people when I say that the Hopeless division like the free abominable life of the rookery, and that any kind of restraint would only send them swarming off to some other centre from which they would have to be dislodged by degrees according to the means and the time of the authorities. Hard, is it not? But it is true. Certain kinds of cultured men like the life which they call "Bohemian." The Hopeless class like their peculiar Bohemianism, and they like it with all the gusto and content of their cultured brethren. Suppose you uproot a circle of rookeries. The inhabitants are scattered here and there, and they proceed to gain their living by means which may or may not be lawful. The decent law-abiding citizens who are turned out of house and home during the progress of reform suffer most. They are not inclined to become predatory animals; and, although they may have been used to live according to a very low human standard, they cannot all at once begin to live merely up to the standard of pigs. No writer dare tell in our English tongue the consequences of evicting the denizens of a genuine



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rookery for the purpose of substituting improvements; and I know only one French writer who would be bold enough to furnish cogent details to any civilised community. But, for argument's sake, let me suppose that your "rooks" are transferred from their nests to your model dwellings. I shall allow you to do all that philanthropy can dictate; I shall grant you the utmost powers that a government can bestow; and I shall give six months for your experiment. What will be found at the end of that time? Alas, your fine model dwellings will be in worse condition than the wigwam that the Apache and his squaw inhabit! Let a colony of "rooks" take possession of a sound, well-fitted building, and it will be found that not even the most stringent daily visitation will prevent utter wreck from being wrought. The pipes needed for all sanitary purposes will be cut and sold; the handles of doors and the brass-work of taps will be cut away; every scrap of wood-work available for fire-wood will be stolen sooner or later, and the people will relapse steadily into a state of filth and recklessness to be paralleled only among Australian and North American aborigines. Which of the sentimentalists has ever travelled to America with a few hundreds of Russian and Polish Jews, Saxon peasants, and Irish peasants from the West? That is the only experience capable of giving an idea of what happens when a fairly-fitted house is handed over to the tender mercies of a selection from the British "residuum." I shall be accused of talking the language of despair. I have never done that. I should like to see the time come when the poor may no more dwell in hovels like swine, and when a poverty-stricken inhabitant of London may not be brought up with ideas and habits coarser than those of a pig; I merely say that shrieking, impetuous sentimentalists go to work in the wrong way. They are the kind of people who would provide pigeon-cotes and dog-collars for the use of ferrets. I grant that the condition of many London streets is appalling; but make a house-to-house visitation, and see how the desolation is caused. Wanton, brutish destructiveness has been at work everywhere. The cistern which should supply a building cannot be fed because the spring, the hinge, and the last few yards of pipe have been chopped away and carried to a marine-store dealer; the landings and the floors are strewn with dirt which a smart, cleanly countrywoman would have cleared away without ten minutes' trouble. The very windows are robbed; and the whole set of inhabitants rests in contented, unspeakable squalor. No—something more is required than delicate, silky-handed reform; something more is required than ready-made blocks of neat dwellings; and something more is required than sighing sentimentalism, which looks at miserable effects without scrutinising causes. Let the sentimentalist mark this. If you transplant a colony of "rooks" into good quarters, you will have another rookery on your hands; if you



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remove a drove of brutes into reasonable human dwelling-places, you will soon have a set of homes fit for brutes and for brutes alone. Bricks and mortar and whitewash will not change the nature of human vermin; phrases about beauty and duty and loveliness will not affect the maker of slums, any more than perfumes or pretty colours would affect the rats that squirm under the foundations of the city. Does the sentimentalist imagine that the brick-and-mortar structures about which he wails were always centres of festering ugliness? If he has that fancy, let him take a glance at some of the quaint old houses of Southwark. They were clean and beautiful in their day, but the healthy human plant can no longer flourish in them, and the weed creeps in, the crawling parasite befouls their walls, and the structures which were lovely when Chaucer's pilgrims started from the "Tabard" are abominable now. If English folk of gentle and cleanly breeding had lived on in those ancient places, they would have been wholesome and sound like many another house erected in days gone by; but the weed gradually took root, and now the ugliest dens in London are found in the places where knights and trim clerks and gracious dames once lived. In the face of all these things, how strangely unwise it is to fancy that ever the Forlorn Army can be saved by bricks and mortar!

Education? Ah, there comes a pinch—and a very severe pinch it is! About five or six years since some of the most important thoroughfares in London, Liverpool, and many great towns have been rendered totally impassable by the savage proceedings of gangs of young roughs. Certain districts in Liverpool could not be traversed after dark, and the reason was simply this—any man or woman of decent appearance was liable to be first of all surrounded by a carefully-picked company of blackguards; then came the clever trip-up from behind; then the victim was left to be robbed; and then the authorities wrung their hands and said that it was a pity, and that everything should be done. The Liverpool youths went a little too far, and one peculiarly obnoxious set of rascals were sent to penal servitude, while the leader of a gang of murderers went to the gallows. But in London we have such sights every night as never were matched in the most turbulent Italian cities at times when the hot Southern blood was up; our great English capital can match Venice, Rome, Palermo, Turin, or Milan in the matter of stabbing; and, for mere wanton cruelty and thievishness, I imagine that Hackney Road or Gray's Inn Road may equal any thoroughfare of Francois Villon's Paris. These turbulent London mobs that make night hideous are made up of youths who have tasted the full blessings of our educational system; they were mostly mere infants when the great measure was passed which was to regenerate all things, and yet the London of Swift's time was not much worse than the Southwark or Hackney of our own day. I never for an instant dispute the general advance



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which our modern society has made, and I dislike the gruesome rubbish talked of the good old times; but I must nevertheless point out that “fancy” building and education are not the main factors which have aided in making us better and more seemly. The brutal rough remains, and the gangs of scamps who infest London in various spots are quite as bad as the beings whom Hogarth drew. They have all been forced into the Government schools; all of them have learned to read and write, and not one was suffered to leave school until he had reached the age of fourteen years or passed a moderately high standard according to the Code. Still, we have this monstrous army of the Hopeless Poor, and they are usually massed with the Hopeful Poor—the poor who attend the People’s Palaces, and institutes, and so forth. Alas, the Hopeless Poor are not to be dismissed with a light phrase—they are not to be dealt with by mere pretty words! They are creatures who remain poor and villainous because they choose to be poor and villainous; so pity and nice theories will not cure them. The best of us yearn toward the good poor folk, and we find a healthful joy in aiding them; but we have a set of very different feelings towards the Evil Brigade.

### XIII.

#### WAIFS AND STRAYS.

When I talked<sup>[2]</sup> of the hopeless poor and of degraded men, I had in my mind only the feeble or detestable adults who degrade our civilisation; but I have by no means forgotten the unhappy little souls who develop into wastrels unless they are taken away from hideous surroundings which cramp vitality, destroy all childish happiness, and turn into brutes poor young creatures who bear the human image. Lately I heard one or two little stories which are amongst the most pathetic that ever came before me in the course of some small experience of life among the forsaken classes—or rather let me say, the classes that used to be forsaken. These little stories have prompted me to endeavour to deal carefully with a matter which has cost me many sad thoughts.

[2] Essay XII.

A stray child was rescued from the streets by a society which is extending its operations very rapidly, and the little creature was placed as a boarder with a cottager in the country. To the utter amazement of the good rustic folk, their queer little guest showed complete ignorance of the commonest plants and animals; she had never seen any pretty thing, and she was quite used to being hungry and to satisfying her appetite with scraps of garbage. When she first saw a daisy on the green, she gazed longingly, and then asked plaintively, “Please, might I touch that?” When she was told that she might pluck a few daisies she was much delighted. After her first experiences in the botanising line she formally asked permission to pluck many wild flowers; but she

always seemed to have a dread of transgressing against some dim law which had been hitherto represented to her mind

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by the man in blue who used to watch over her miserable alley. Before she became accustomed to receiving food at regular intervals, she fairly touched the hearts of her foster-parents by one queer request. The housewife was washing some Brussels sprouts, when the little stray said timidly, "Please, may I eat a bit of that stalk?" Of course the stringy mass was uneatable; but it turned out that the forlorn child had been very glad to worry at the stalks from the gutter as a dog does at an unclean bone. Another little girl was taken from the den which she knew as home, after her parents had been sent to prison for treating her with unspeakable cruelty. The matron of the country home found that the child's body was scarred from neck to ankle in a fashion which no lapse of years could efface. The explanation of the disfigurement was very simple. "If I didn't bring in any money mother beat me first; and then, when father came in drunk, she tied my hands behind my back and told him to give me the buckle. Then they strapped me on the bed and fastened my feet, and he whacked me with the buckle-end of his strap." It sounds very horrible, does it not? Nevertheless, the facts remain that the wretched parents were caught in the act and convicted, and that the child must carry her scars to her grave. No one who has not seen these lost children can form an idea of their darkness and helplessness of mind. We all know the story of the South Sea islanders, who said, "What a big pig!" when they first saw a horse; one little London savage quite equalled this by remarking, "What a little cow!" when she saw a tiny Maltese terrier brought by a lady missionary. The child had some vague conception regarding a cow; but, like others of her class, her notions of size, form, and colour, were quite cloudy. Another of these city phenomena did not know how to blow out a candle; and in many cases it is most difficult to persuade those newly reclaimed to go to bed without keeping their boots on. We cannot call such beings barbarians, because "barbarian" implies something wild, strong, and even noble; yet, to our shame, we must call them savages, and we must own that they are born and bred within easy gunshot distance of our centres of culture, enlightenment, and luxury. They swarm, do these children of suffering: and easy-going people have no idea of the density of the savagery amid which such scions of our noble English race are reared. A gentleman once offered sixpence to a little girl who appeared before him dressed in a single garment which seemed to have been roughly made from some sort of sacking. He expected to see her snatch at the coin with all the eagerness of the ordinary hardy street-arab; but she showed her jagged brown teeth, and said huskily, "No! Big money!" A lady, divining with the rapid feminine instinct what was meant by the enigmatic muttering, explained, "She does not know the sixpence. She has had coppers to spend before." And so it turned out to be.

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Perhaps comfortable, satisfied readers may be startled, or even offended, if I say that there are young creatures in our great cities who rarely see even the light of day, save when the beams are filtered through the reek of a court; and these same infants resemble the black fellows of Western Australia or the Troglodytes of Africa in general intelligence. I have little heart to speak of the parents who are answerable for such horrors of crass neglect and cruelty. By laying a set of dry police reports before any sensitive person I could make that person shudder without adding a word of rhetoric; for it would be seen that the popular picture of a fiend represents rather a mild and harmless entity if we compare it with the foul-souled human beings who dwell in our benighted places. What is to be done? It is best to grapple swiftly with an ugly question; and I do not hesitate to attack deliberately one of the most delicate puzzles that ever came before the world. Wise emotionless men may say, and do say, "Are you going to relieve male and female idlers and drunkards of all anxiety regarding their offspring? Do you mean to discourage the honest but poverty-stricken parents who do their best for their children? What kind of world will you make for us all if you give your aid to the worst and neglect the good folk?" Those are very awkward questions, and I can answer them only by a sort of expedient which must not be mistaken for intellectual conjuring; I drop ordinary logic and theories of probability and go at once to facts. At first sight it seems like rank folly for any man or body of men to take charge of a child which has been neglected by shameless parents; but, on the other hand, let us consider our own self-interest, and leave sentiment alone for a while. We cannot put the benighted starvelings into a lethal chamber and dispose of their brief lives in that fashion; we are bound to maintain them in some way or other—and the ratepayers of St. George's-in-the-East know to some trifling extent what that means. If the waifs grow up to be predatory animals, we must maintain them first of all in reformatories, and afterwards, at intervals during their lives, in prisons. If they grow up without shaking off the terrible mental darkness of their starveling childhood, we must provide for them in asylums. A thoroughly neglected waif costs this happy country something like fifteen pounds per year for the term of his natural life. Very good. At this point some hard-headed person says, "What about the workhouses?" This brings us face to face with another astounding problem to solve which at all satisfactorily requires no little research and thought. I know that there are good workhouses; but I happen to know that there are also bad ones. In many a ship and fishing-vessel fine fellows may be met with who were sent out early from workhouse-schools and wrought their way onward until they became brave and useful seamen; there are also many industrious



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well-conducted girls who came originally from the great Union schools. But, when I take another side of the picture, I am inclined to say very fervently, "Anything rather than the workhouse system for children! Anything short of complete neglect!" Observe that in one of the overgrown schools the young folk are scarcely treated as human; their individuality—if they have any to begin with—is soon lost; they are known only by a number, and they are passed into the outer world like bundles of shot rubbish. There are seamen who have never cast off the peculiar workhouse taint—and no worse shipmates ever afflicted any capable and honourable soul: for these Union weeds carry the vices of Rob the Grinder and Noah Claypole on to blue water, and show themselves to be hounds who would fawn or snarl, steal or talk saintliness, lie or sneak just as interest suited them. Then the workhouse girls: I have said sharp words about cruel mistresses; but I frankly own that the average lady who is saddled with the average workhouse servant has some slight reasons for showing acerbity, though she has none for practising cruelty. How could anybody expect a girl to turn out well after the usual course of workhouse training? The life of the soul is too often quenched; the flame of life in the poor body is dim and low; and the mechanical morality, the dull, meaningless round of useless lessons, the habit of herding in unhealthy rooms with unhealthy companions, all tend to develop a creature which can be regarded only as one of Nature's failures, if I may parody a phrase of the superlative Beau Brummel's.

There is another and darker side to the workhouse question, but I shall skim it lightly. The women whose conversation the young girls hear are often wicked, and thus a dull, under-fed, inept child may have a great deal too much knowledge of evil. Can we expect such a collection to contain a large percentage of seemly and useful children? Is it a fact that the Unions usually supply domestics worth keeping? Ask the mistresses, and the answer will not be encouraging. No; the workhouse will not quite suffice. What we want to do is to take the waifs and strays into places where they may lead a natural and healthy life. Get them clear of the horror of the slums, let them breathe pure air and learn pure and simple habits, and then, instead of odious and costly human weeds, we may have wholesome, useful fellow-citizens, who not only will cost us nothing, but who will be a distinct source of solid profit to the empire. The thing has been and is being done steadily by good men and women who defy prejudice and go to work in a vigorous practical way. The most miserable and apparently hopeless little creatures from the filthy purlieus of great towns become gradually bright and healthy and intelligent when they are taken to their natural home—the country—and cut adrift from the congested centres of population. The cost of their maintenance is at first a little over the workhouse figure; but



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then the article produced for the money is far and away superior to anything turned out by any workhouse. The rescued children are eagerly sought after in the Colonies; and I am not aware of any case in which one of the young emigrants has expressed discontent. How much better it is to see these poor waifs changed into useful, profitable colonists than to have them sullenly, uselessly starving in the dens of London and Liverpool and Manchester! The work of rescuing and training the lost children has not been fully developed yet; but enough has been done to show that in a few years we shall have a large number of prosperous Colonial farmers who will indirectly contribute to the wealth of mighty Britain. Had the trained emigrants never been snatched away from the verge of the pit, we should have been obliged to maintain them until their wretched lives ended with sordid deaths, and the very cost of their burial would have come from the pockets of pinched workers. I fancy that I have shown the advisability of neglecting strict economic canons in this instance. I abhor the pestilent beings who swarm in certain quarters, and I should never dream of removing any burden from their shoulders if I thought that it would only leave the rascals with more money to expend on brutish pleasures; but I desire to look far ahead, and I can see that, when the present generation of adult wastrels dies out, it will be a very good thing for all of us if there are few or none of the same stamp ready to take their places. By resolutely removing the children of vice and sorrow, we clear the road for a better race. Let it be understood that I have a truly orthodox dread of "pauperisation," and I watch very jealously the doings of those who are anxious to feed all sorts and conditions of men; but pauperising men by maintaining them in laziness is very different from rearing useful subjects of the empire, whose trained labour is a source of profit and whose developed morality is a fund of security. We cannot take Chinese methods of lessening the pressure of population, and we must at once decide on the wisest way of dealing with our waifs and strays; if we do not, then the chances are that they will deal unpleasantly with us. The locust, the lemming, the phylloxera, are all very insignificant creatures; but, when they act together in numbers, they can very soon devastate a district. The parable is not by any means inapt.

### XIV.

#### STAGE-CHILDREN.

The Modern Legislator is a most terrible creature. When he is not engaged in obstructing public business, he must needs be meddling with other people's private affairs—and some of us want to know where he is going to stop. The Legislator has decreed that no children who are less than ten years of age shall henceforth be allowed to perform on the stage. Much of the talk which came from those who carried the measure was kindly and sensible; but



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some of the acrid party foisted mere misleading rubbish on the public. Henceforth the infantile player will be seen no more. Mr. Crummles will wave a stern hand from the shades where the children of dreams dwell, and the Phenomenon will be glad that she has passed from a prosaic earth. Had the stern law-makers had their way thirty years ago, how many pretty sights should we have missed! Little Marie Wilton would not have romped about the stage in her childish glee (she enjoyed the work from the first, and even liked playing in a draughty booth when the company of roaming “artists” could get no better accommodation). Little Ellen Terry, too, would not have played in the Castle scene in “King John,” and crowds of worthy matrons would have missed having that “good cry” which they enjoy so keenly. We are happy who saw all the Terrys, and Marie the witty who charmed Charles Dickens, and all the pretty mites who did so delight us when *Mme. Katti Lanner* marshalled them. Does any reader wish to have a perfectly pleasant half-hour? Let that reader get the number of “*Fors Clavigera*” which contains Mr. Ruskin’s description of the children who performed in the Drury Lane pantomime. The kind critic was in ecstasies—as well he might be—and he talked with enthusiasm about the cleanliness, the grace, the perfectly happy discipline of the tiny folk. Then, again, in “Time and Tide,” the great writer gives us the following exquisite passage about a little dancer who especially pleased him—“She did it beautifully and simply, as a child ought to dance. She was not an infant prodigy; there was no evidence in the finish and strength of her motion that she had been put to continual torture during half of her eight or nine years. She did nothing more than any child—well taught, but painlessly—might do; she caricatured no older person, attempted no curious or fantastic skill; she was dressed decently, she moved decently, she looked and behaved innocently, and she danced her joyful dance with perfect grace, spirit, sweetness, and self-forgetfulness.” How perfect! There is not much suggestion of torture or premature wickedness in all this; and I wish that the wise and good man’s opinion might have been considered for a little while by some of the reformers. For my part, I venture to offer a few remarks about the whole matter; for there are several considerations which were neglected by the debaters on both sides during the discussion.

First, then, I must solemnly say that I cannot advise any grown girl or young man to go upon the stage; and yet I see no harm in teaching little children to perform concerted movements in graceful ways. This sounds like a paradox; but it is not paradoxical at all to those who have studied the question from the inside. If a girl waits until she is eighteen before going on the stage, she has a good chance of being thrown into the company of women who do not dream of respecting her. If she enters a provincial



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travelling company, she has constant discomfort and constant danger; some of her companions are certain to be coarse—and a brutal actor whose professional vanity prevents him from understanding his own brutality is among the most horrible of living creatures. After a lady has made her mark as an actress, she can secure admirable lodging at good hotels; but a poor girl with a pound per week must put up with such squalor as only actors can fittingly describe. Amid all this the girl is left to take care of herself—observe that point. A little child is taken care of; whereas the adolescent or adult must fight her way through a grimy and repulsive environment as best she can. There is not a man in the world who would dare to introduce himself informally to any lady who is employed under Mr. W.S. Gilbert's superintendence; but what can we say about the thousands who travel from town to town unguided save by the curt directions of the stage manager? Let it be understood that when I speak of the theatre I have not in mind the beautiful refined places in central London where cultured people in the audience are entertained by cultured people on the stage; I am thinking grimly of the squalor, the degradation, the wretched hand-to-mouth existence of poor souls who work in the casual companies that spend the better part of their existence in railway carriages. Not long ago a young actress who can now command two thousand pounds per year was obliged to remain dinnerless on Christmas Day because she could not afford to pay a shilling for a hamper which was sent her from home. Her success in the lottery arrived by a strange chance; but how many bear all the poverty and trouble without even having one gleam of success in their miserable dangerous lives? There are theatres and theatres—there are managers and managers; but in some places the common conversation of the women is not edifying—and a good girl must insensibly lose her finer nature if she has to associate with such persons.

In the case of the little children there are none, or few, at any rate, of the drawbacks. Not one in fifty goes on the stage; the mites are engaged only at certain seasons; and their harvest-time enables poor people to obtain many little comforts and necessaries. Further, there is one curious thing which may not be known to the highly particular sect—no manager, actor, or actress would use a profane or coarse word among the children; such an offender would be scouted by the roughest member of any company and condemned by the very stage-carpenters. I own that I have sometimes wished that a child here and there could be warm asleep on a chilly night, especially when the young creature was perilously suspended from a wire; but that is very nearly the furthest extent of my pity. So long as the youngsters are not required to perform dangerous or unnatural feats, they need no pity. Instead of being inured to brutalities, they are actually taken away from brutality—for



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no man or woman would sully their minds. We have heard it said that the stage-children who return to school after their spell of pantomime corrupt the others. This is a gross and stupid falsehood which is calculated to injure a cause that has many good points. I earnestly sympathise with the well-meaning people who desire to succour the little ones; but I beseech them not to be led away by misstatements which are concocted for sensational purposes. So far from corrupting other children, the young actors invariably act as a good influence in a school. The experienced observer can almost make certain of picking out the boys and girls who have had a stage-training. They like to be smart and cleanly, their deportment and general manners are improved, and they are almost invariably superior in intelligence to the ordinary school-trained child. Imagine *Mme. Katti Lanner* having a corrupt influence! Imagine those delightful beings who play "Alice in Wonderland" corrupting anybody or anything! I have always been struck by the pretty manners of the trained children—and the advance in refinement is especially noticeable among those who have been speaking or singing parts. The most pleasing set of youths that I ever met were the members of a comic-opera troupe. Some of them, without an approach to freedom of manner, would converse with good sense on many topics, and their drill had been so extended as to include a knowledge of polite salutes. Not one of the boys or girls would have been ill at ease in a drawing-room; and I found their educational standard quite up to that of any Board school known to me. These nice little folk were certainly in no wise pallid or distraught; and, when they danced on the stage, the performance was a beautiful and delightful romp which suggested no idea of pain. To see the "prima donna" of the company trundling her hoop on a bright morning was as pretty a sight as one would care to see. The little lady was neither forward nor unhealthy, nor anything else that is objectionable—and it was plain that she enjoyed her life. Is it in the least likely that any sane manager would ill-treat a little child that was required to be pleasing? One or two acrobats have been known to be stern with their apprentices; but the rudest circus-man would not venture to exhibit a pupil who looked unhappy. The rascally "Arabs" who entrapped so many boys in years gone by were fiends who met with very appropriate retribution; but such villains are not common.

I am always haunted by the argument about late hours—and give it every weight. As aforesaid, I used sometimes to wish that some wee creature could only be wrapped in a night-gown and sent to rest. But, for the benefit of those who cannot well imagine what the horrors of a city slum are like, let me describe the nightly scene in a typical city alley. It is cold in the pantomime season; but the folk in that alley have not much fire. Joe, the costermonger, Bill, the



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market-labourer, Tom, the fish-porter, and the rest come home in a straggling way; and, if they can buy a pennyworth of coal, they boil the little kettle. Then one of the children runs to the chandler's and gets a halfpennyworth of tea, a scrap of bread, and perhaps a penny slice of sausage. The men stint themselves in food and firing; but they always have a little to spare for gin and beer and tobacco. There is no light in the evil-smelling room; but there is a place at the corner of the alley where the gas is burning as cheerily as the foul wreaths of smoke will permit. The men go out and squat on barrels in the hideous bar; then they call for some liquor which may be warranted to take speedy effect; then they smoke, and try to forget.

What is the little child to do? Go to bed? Why, it has no bed! If it were earning a little money, its parents might be able to provide a flock or straw bed with some sort of covering; but the poverty of these people is so gnawing and dire that very few lodgings contain anything which could possibly be pawned for twopence. Usually the child seeks the streets; and in the dim and filthy haze he or she sports at large with other ragged companions. Then the women—the match-box makers, trouser-makers, and such like—begin to troop in—and they gravitate towards the gin-shop. The darkness deepens; the bleared lamps blare in the dirty mist; the hoarse roar from the public-house comes forth accompanied by choking wafts of reek; the abominable tramps move towards the lodging-house and pollute the polluted air further with the foulness of their language; the drink mounts into unstable heads; and presently—especially on Saturday nights—there are hoarse growls as from rough-throated beasts, shrill shrieks, and a running chorus of indescribable grossness. Drunken men are quarrelling in the street, drunken women yell and stagger, and the hideous discord fills the night on all sides. No item of corruption is spared the children; and the vile hurly-burly ceases only at midnight. The children will always try to sneak through the swinging doors of the gin *inferno* when the cold becomes too severe; and they will remain crouched like rats until some capricious guest sends them out with an oath and a kick. There is not one imaginable horror that does not become familiar to these children of despair—and they sometimes have a very good chance of seeing murder. When the last hour comes, and the father and mother return to their dusky den, the child crouches anywhere on the floor; undressing is not practised; and, if any sentimental person will first of all go into a common Board school in a non-theatrical quarter on a wet afternoon, and if he will then drive on and pass through a few hundreds of the theatrical children, his “olfactories” will teach him a lesson which may make him think a good deal.



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Now let me put a question or two in the name of common sense. We must balance good and evil; and, granting that the theatre has a tendency to make children light-minded, is it worse than the horror of the slums and the stench and darkness of the single room where a family herd together? The youngster who is engaged at the theatre can set off home at the very latest as soon as the harlequinade is over. Very well; suppose it is late. Would he or she be early if the night were spent in the alley? Not at all! Then the child from the theatre is bathed, fed, taught, clothed nicely, and it gives its parents a little money which procures food. Some say the extra money goes for extra gin—and that may happen in some cases; but, at any rate, the child's earnings usually purchase a share of food as well as of drink; for the worst blackguard in the world dares not send a starveling to meet the stage-manager. In sum, then, making every possible allowance for the good intentions of those who wish to rescue children from the theatre, I am inclined to fear that they have been hasty. I am not without some knowledge of the various details of the subject; and I have tried to give my judgment as fairly as I could—for I also pity and love the children.

### XV.

#### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MORALITY: PAST AND PRESENT.

Certain enterprising persons have contributed of late years to make English newspapers somewhat unpleasant reading, and mournful men are given to moaning over the growth of national corruption. So persistent have the mournful folk been, that many good simple people are in a state of grievous alarm, for they are persuaded that the nation is bound towards the pit of Doom. When doleful men and women cry out concerning abstract evils, it is always best to meet them with hard facts, and I therefore propose to show that we ought really to be very grateful for the undoubted advance of the nation toward righteousness. Hideous blots there are—ugly cankers amid our civilisation—but we grow better year by year, and the general movement is towards honesty, helpfulness, goodness, purity. Whenever any croaker begins speaking about the golden age that is gone, I advise my readers to try a system of cross-examination. Ask the sorrowful man to fix the precise period of the golden age, and pin him to direct and definite statements. Was it when labourers in East Anglia lived like hogs around the houses of their lords? Was it when the starving and utterly wretched thousands marched on London under Tyler and John Ball? Was it when the press-gangs kidnapped good citizens in broad daylight? Was it when a score of burning ricks might be seen in a night by one observer? Was it when imbecile rulers had set all the world against us—when the French threatened Ireland, and the maddened, hunger-bitten sailors were in wild rebellion, and the Funds were not considered as safe for investors? The croaker is always securely indefinite, and a strict, vigorous series of questions reduces him to rage and impotence.



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Now let us go back, say, one hundred and twenty years, and let us see how the sovereign, the legislators, the aristocracy, and the people fared then; the facts may perchance be instructive. The King had resolved to be absolute, and his main energies were devoted to bribing Parliament. With his own royal hand he was not ashamed to write, enclosing what he called “gold pills,” which were to be used in corrupting his subjects. He was a most moral, industrious, cleanly man in private life; yet when the Duke of Grafton, his Prime Minister, appeared near the royal box of the theatre, accompanied by a woman of disreputable character, his Majesty made no sign. He was satisfied if he could keep the mighty Burke, the high-souled Rockingham, the brilliant Charles James Fox, out of his counsels, and he did not care at all about the morals or the general behaviour of his Ministers. About a quarter of a million was spent by the Crown in buying votes and organising corruption, and King George III. was never ashamed to appear before his Parliament in the character of an insolvent debtor when he needed money to sap the morals of his people. A movement in the direction of purity began even in George III.’s own lifetime; he was obliged to be cautious, and he ended by coming under the iron domination of William Pitt. Thus, instead of being remembered as the dangerous, obstinate, purblind man who made Parliament a sink of foulness, and who lost America, he is mentioned as a comfortable simple gentleman of the farmer sort. Before we can half understand the vast purification that has been wrought, we must study the history of the reign from 1765 to 1784, and then we may feel happy as we compare our gentle, beneficent Sovereign with the unscrupulous blunderer who fought the Colonists and all but lost the Empire.

Then consider the Ministers who carried out the Sovereign’s behest. There was “Jemmy Twitcher,” as Lord Sandwich was called. This man was so utterly bad, that in later life he never cared to conceal his infamies, because he knew that his character could not possibly be worse blackened. Sandwich belonged to the unspeakable Medmenham Abbey set. The lovely ruin had been bought and renovated by a gang of rakes, who converted it into an abode of drunkenness and grossness; they defaced the sacred trees and the grey walls with inscriptions which the indignation of a purer age has caused to be removed; they carried on nightly revels which no historian could describe, and in their wicked buffoonery mocked the Creator with burlesque religious rites. Such an unholy place would be pulled down by the mob nowadays, and the gang of debauchees would figure in the police-court; but in those “good old times” the Prime Minister and the Secretary to the Admiralty were merry members of a crew that disgraced humanity. Just six weeks after Lord Sandwich had joined the Medmenham Abbey gang, he put himself forward for election to the High Stewardship of Cambridge University. Here was a pretty position! The man had been thus described by a poet—



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“Too infamous to have a friend,  
Too bad for bad men to commend  
Or good to name; beneath whose weight  
Earth groans; who hath been spared by fate  
Only to show on mercy’s plan  
How far and long God bears with man”—

and this superb piece of truculence was received with applause by all that was upright and noble in England. This indescribable villain presented himself as worthy to preside over the place where the flower of English youth were educated. A pleasing example he offered to young and ardent souls! Worst of all, he was elected. He adroitly gained the votes of country clergymen; he begged his friends to solicit the votes of their private chaplains; he dodged and manoeuvred until he gained his position. One voter came from a lunatic asylum, another was brought from the Isle of Man, others were bribed in lavish fashion—and Sandwich presided over Cambridge. The students rose in a body and walked out when he came among them; but that mattered little to the brazen fellow. To complete the ghastly comedy, it happened that four years later the Chancellorship fell vacant, and the Duke of Grafton, who was only second to “Jemmy Twitcher” in wickedness, was chosen for the high office.

Now I ask plainly, “Can the croakers declare that England was better under Grafton and ‘Jemmy Twitcher’ than she now is?” It is nonsense! The crew of bacchanals and blackguards who then flaunted in high places would not now be tolerated for a day. I look on our governing class now,<sup>[3]</sup> and I may safely declare that not more than one Cabinet Minister during the past twenty years has been regarded as otherwise than stainless in character. What is the meaning of this transformation? It means that good, pure women have gained their rightful influence, that men have grown purer, and that the elevation of the general body of society has been reflected in the character of the men chosen to rule. Vice is all too powerful, and the dark corners of our cities are awful to see; but the worst of the “fast” men in modern England are not so bad as were the governors of a mighty empire when George III. was king.

[3] 1886.

If we look at the society that dined and drank and squandered health and fortune in the times which we mention, we are more than ever struck with the advance made. It is a literal fact that the correspondence of the young men mainly refers to drink and gaming, the correspondence of the middle-aged men to gout. There were few of the educated classes who reached middle age, and a country squire was reckoned quite a remarkable person if he could still walk and ride when he attained to fifty years. The quiet, steady middle-class certainly lived more temperately; but the intemperance of the aristocracy was indescribable. The leader of the House of Lords imbibed until six every morning, was carried to bed, and came down about two in the afternoon; two noblemen declared that they



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drank a gallon and a half of Champagne and Burgundy at one sitting; in some coffee-houses it was the custom, when the night's drinking ended, for the company to burn their wigs. Some of Horace Walpole's letters prove plainly enough that great gentlemen conducted themselves occasionally very much as wild seamen would do in Shadwell or the Highway. What would be thought if Lord Salisbury reeled into the House in a totally drunken condition? The imagination cannot conceive the situation, and the fact that the very thought is laughable shows how much we have improved in essentials. In bygone days, a man who became a Minister proceeded to secure his own fortune; then he provided for all his relatives, his hangers-on, his very jockeys and footmen. One lord held eight sinecure offices, and was besides colonel of two regiments. A Chancellor of the Exchequer cleared four hundred thousand on a new loan, and the bulk of this large sum remained in his own pocket, for he had but few associates to bribe. When patrols were set to guard the Treasury at night, an epigram ran—

“From the night till the morning 'tis true all is right;  
But who will secure it from morning till night?”

There was a perfect carnival of robbery and corruption, and the people paid for all. Money gathered by public corruption was squandered in private debauchery, while a sullen and helpless nation looked on. Think of the change! A Minister now toils during seventeen hours per day, and receives less than a successful barrister. He must give up all the ordinary pleasures of life; and, in recompense for the sacrifice, he can claim but little patronage. By most of the men in office the work is undertaken on purely patriotic grounds; so that a duke with a quarter of a million per year is content to labour like an attorney's clerk.

If we think about the ladies of the old days, we are more than ever driven to reflection. It is impossible to imagine a more insensate collection of gamblers than the women of Horace Walpole's society. Well-bred harpies won and lost fortunes, and the vice became a raging pest. A young politician could not further his own prospects better than by letting some high-born dame win his money; if the youth won the lady's money, then a discreet forgetfulness of the debt was profitable to him. The rattle of dice and the shuffle of cards sounded wherever two or three fashionable persons were gathered together; men and women quarrelled, and society became a mere jumble of people who suspected and hated and thought to rob each other. It is horrible, even at this distance of time, to think of those rapacious beings who forgot literature, art, friendship, and family affection for the sake of high play. One weary, witty debauchee said, “Play wastes time, health, money, and friendship;” yet he went on pitting his skill against that of unsexed women and polished rogues.



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The morality of the fair gamblers was more than loose. It was taken for granted in the whole set that every female member of it must inevitably be divorced, if the catastrophe had not occurred already; and one man asked Walpole, "Who's your proctor?" just as he would have asked, "Who's your tailor?" An unspeakable society—a hollow, heartless, callous, wicked brood. Compare that crew of furious money-grabbers with our modern gentlemen and ladies! We have our faults—crime and vice flourish; but, from the Court down to the simplest middle-class society in our provincial towns, the spread of seemliness and purity is distinctly marked. Some insatiable grumblers will have it that our girls and women are deteriorating, and we are informed that the taste for objectionable literature is keener than it used to be. It is a distinct libel. No one save a historian would now read the corrupting works of Mrs. Aphra Behn; and yet it is a fact that those novels were read aloud among companies of ladies. A man winces now if he is obliged to turn to them; the girls in the "good old times" heard them with never a blush. Wherever we turn we find the same steady advance. Can any creature be more dainty, more sweet, more pure, than the ordinary English girl of our day? Will any one bring evidence to show that the girls of the last century, or of any other, were superior to our own maidens? No evidence has been produced from literature, from journals, from family correspondence, and I am pretty certain that no evidence exists. Practically speaking, the complaints of the decline of morality are merely uttered as a mode of showing the talker's own superiority.

### XVI.

"RAISING THE LEVEL OF AMUSEMENTS."

It is really most kind on the part of certain good people to reorganise the amusements of the people; but, as each reorganiser fancies himself to be the only man who has the right notion, it follows that matters are becoming more and more complicated. For example, to begin with literature, a simple person who has no taste for profundities likes to read the old sort of stories about love's pretty fever; the simple person wants to hear about the trials and crosses of true lovers, the defeat of villains—to enjoy the kindly finish where faith and virtue are rewarded, and where the unambitious imagination may picture the coming of a long life of homely toil and homely pleasure. Perhaps the simple personage has a taste for dukes—I know of one young person aged thirteen who will not write a romance of her own without putting her hero at the very summit of the peerage—or wicked baronets, or marble halls. These tastes are by no means confined to women; sailors in far-away seas most persistently beguile their scanty leisure by studying tales of sentiment, and soldiers are, if possible, more eager than seamen for that sort of reading. The righteous organiser comes on the scene, and says, "We must



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not let these poor souls fritter away any portion of their lives on frivolities. Let us give them less of light literature and more of the serious work which may lead them to strive toward higher things." The aggressively righteous individual has a most eccentric notion of what constitutes "light" literature; he never thinks that Shakspeare is decidedly "light," and I rather fancy that he would regard Aristophanes as heavy. If one were to suggest, on his proposing to place the Irving Shakspeare on the shelves of a free library, that the poet is often foolish, often a buffoon of a low type, often a mere quibbler, and often ribald, he might perhaps have a fit, or he might inquire if the speaker were mad—assuredly he would do something impressive; but he would not scruple to deliver an oration of the severest type if some sweet and innocent story of love and tenderness and old-fashioned sentiment were proposed. As for the lady who dislikes "light" literature, she is a subject for laughter among the gods. To see such an one present a sensible workman with a pamphlet entitled "Who Paid for the Mangle?—or, Maria's Pennies," is to know what overpowering joy means. Yet the severe and strait-laced censors are not perhaps so much of a nuisance as the sternly-cultured and emotional persons who "yearn" a great deal. The "yearnest" man or woman always has an ideal which is usually the vaguest thing in the cloudland of metaphysics. I fancy it means that one must always be hankering after something which one has not and keeping a look of sorrow when one's hankering is fruitless. The feeling of pity with which a "yearnest" one regards somebody who cares only for pleasant and simple or pathetic books is very creditable; but it weighs on the average human being. Why on earth should a girl leave the tenderness of "The Mill on the Floss" and rise to "Daniel Deronda's" elevated but barren and abhorrent level? There are people capable of advising girls to read such a literary production as "Robert Elsmere"; and this advice reveals a capacity for cruelty worthy of an inquisitor. Then we are bidden to leave the unpolished utterances of frank love and jealousy and fear and anger in order that we may enjoy the peculiar works of art which have come from America of late. In these enthralling fictions all the characters are so exceedingly refined that they can talk only by hints, and sometimes the hints are very long. But the explanations of the reasons for giving the said hints are still longer; and, when once the author starts off to tell why Crespigny Conyers of Conyers Magna, England, stumbled against the music-stool prepared for the reception of Selina Fogg, Bones Co., Mass., one never knows whether the fifth, the twelfth, or the fortieth page of the explanation will bring him up. There is no doubt but that these things are refined in their way. The British peer and the beautiful American girl hint away freely through three volumes; and it is understood that they either go



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through the practical ceremony of getting married at the finish, or decline into the most delicately-finished melancholy that resignation, or more properly, renunciation can produce. Yet the atmosphere in which they dwell is sickly to the sound soul. It is as if one were placed in an orchid house full of dainty and rare plants, and kept there until the quiet air and the light scents overpowered every faculty. In all the doings of these superfine Americans and Frenchmen and Britons and Italians there is something almost inhuman; the record of a strong speech, a blow, a kiss would be a relief, and one young and unorthodox person has been known to express an opinion to the effect that a naughty word would be quite luxurious. The lovers whom we love kiss when they meet or part, they talk plainly—unless the girls play the natural and delightful trick of being coy—and they behave in a manner which human beings understand. Supposing that the duke uses a language which ordinary dukes do not affect save in moments of extreme emotion, it is not tiresome, and, at the worst, it satisfies a convention which has not done very much harm. Now on what logical ground can we expect people who were nourished on a literature which is at all events hearty even when it chances to be stupid—on what grounds can the organisers of improvement expect an English man or woman to take a sudden fancy to the diaphanous ghosts of the new American fiction? I dislike out-of-the-way words, and so perhaps, instead of “diaphanous ghosts,” I had better say “transparent wraiths,” or “marionettes of superfine manufacture,” or anything the reader likes that implies frailty and want of human resemblance. It all comes to the same thing; the individuals who recommend a change of literature as they might recommend a change of air do not know the constitutions of the patients for whom they prescribe. It has occurred to me that a delightful comedy scene might be witnessed if one of the badgered folk who are to be “raised” were to say on a sudden, “In the name of goodness, how do you know that my literature is not better than yours? Why should I not raise you? When you tell me that these nicely-dressed ladies and gentlemen, who only half say anything they want to say and who never half do anything, are polished and delightful, and so on, I grant that they are so to you, and I do not try to upset your judgment. But your judgment and my taste are two very different things; and, when I use my taste, I find your heroes and heroines very consummate bores; so I shall keep to my own old favourites.” Who could blame the person who uttered those very awkward protests? The question to me is—Who need most to be dealt with—those who are asked to learn some new thing, or those who have learned the new thing and show signs that they would be better if they could forget it? I should not have much hesitation in giving an answer.



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Then, as to public amusements, we have to look quite as closely and distrustfully at the action of the reformers as we have at the action of the kind gentlefolk who are going to give us “Daniel Deronda” and the highly entertaining works of Mr. William Deans Howells in place of the dear welcome stories that pass away the long hours. Let it be understood that I do not wish to say one word likely to be construed into a jeer at real culture; but I must, as a matter of mercy, say something in defence of those who cannot understand or win emotions from such things as classical music or the “advanced” drama. Pray, in pity’s name, what is to be said against the commonplace man who hears an accomplished musician play Beethoven, Bach, or Chopin in his—the commonplace one’s—drawing-room, and who says in agony, “Very fine! Very deep! Very profound—profound indeed, sir! Full of breadth and symmetry and that sort of thing! Now do you think we might vary that noble masterpiece with a waltz?” Can we blame the poor fellow? Wagner represents a noise to him, and the awful scorn and despair of the first movement in the “Moonlight Sonata” only lead him to say, “Heavy play with that left hand. Can’t he go faster over the treble, or whatever they call it?” He wants intelligible musical ideas, and we have no right to begin “level-raising” with the unhappy and remonstrant man. The music halls in London are now under strict supervision, and some of them used to need it very much in days gone by. Personally I should suppress the male comic singer who tries to win a laugh from degraded listeners by unseemly means, and I should not scruple to draft a short Act ensuring imprisonment for such as he; but, so long as the entertainment remains inoffensive to the general good sense of the community, we need not weep greatly if it is sometimes just a trifle stupid. No one who does not know the inner life of the working-classes can imagine how restricted are their interests. Moreover, I shall venture on making a somewhat startling statement which may surprise those who look on the surface of things as indicated in the newspapers. The working-classes of a certain grade cherish a certain convention regarding themselves, but they do not understand their own set at all. If they heard a real mechanic or labourer spouting sentiment in the shop or the club, they would silence him very summarily; but the stage working-man, the stage hawker, the stage tinker may utter any claptrap that he likes, and the audience try to believe that they might possibly have been able to talk in the same way but for circumstances. It is not at any time pleasant to see people going on under a delusion; but, supposing the delusion is no worse than that of the man who thinks himself handsome or witty or fascinating while he is really plain or silly or a bore, what can the mistake matter to anybody? We smile at the little vanity, and perhaps pride ourselves a little on our own remarkable superiority, and there



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the business may very well end. The men of the music hall live, as I have said, entirely in a dull convention; and, if a set of thorough artists were to portray them exactly, no one would be more surprised than the folk whose portraits were taken. The gentlemen who are resolved to regenerate the music-hall stage persist in not considering the audience; and yet, when all is said and done, the poor stupid audience should be considered a little. If we played Browning's "Strafford" for them, how much would they be "raised"? They would not laugh, they would not yawn; they would be stupefied, and a trifle insulted. Give them a good silly swinging chorus about some subject connected with the tender affections, and let the refrain run to a waltz rhythm or to a striking drawl, and they are satisfied in mind and rejoice exceedingly. The finer class of people in the East-end of London seem to enjoy the very noblest and even the most abstruse of sacred music at the Sunday concerts; but it will be long before the music-hall audiences are educated up even to the standard of those crowds who come off the Whitechapel pavements to hear Handel. We cannot hurry them: why try? Their lives are very hard, and, when the brief gleam comes on the evening of evenings in the week, we should be content with ensuring them decency, safety, order, and let them enjoy their own entertainment in their own way. A thoroughly prosaic and logical preacher might say to those poor souls with perfect truth, "Why do you waste time in coming here to see things which are done much better in the streets? You roar and cheer and stamp when you see a real cab-horse come across from the wings, and yet in an hour you might watch a hundred cabs pass you in the street and you would not cheer the least bit. You hear a costermonger on the stage say, 'Give me my 'umble fireside, and let my good old missus 'and me my cup o' tea and my 'ard-earned bit o' bread, and all the dooks and lords in Hengland ain't nothin' to me!'—you hear that, and you know quite well that no costermonger on this goodly earth ever talked in that way, and still you cheer. You like only what is unreal, and, when you are shown a character which is supposed in some mysterious way to resemble you, you are more than delighted, and you applaud a thing which is either a silly caricature or an utterly foolish libel." The poor and lowly personage thus hailed with cutting denunciation and logic might say, "Please mind your own business. Do you pay my sixpence for the gallery? No; I find it myself, and I come to have my bit of fun with my own money, in my own place, at my own price. I have enough of workshops and streets and what you call real things; so, when I come out to the play, I want them all unreal, and as unreal as possible. Monday morning's time enough to go back to reality." As often as ever fussy reformers try to do more than ensure propriety in theatres, so often will they be beaten; and I am quite sure that, if any attempt is



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made to go too far, we may have on any day a repetition of the O.P. riots, which almost ended in the wrecking of the patent playhouses. Let us be treated like grown beings, and not as if we were still in short baby-frocks. Men resent many things, but they resent being made ridiculous more than all. The committees before which many theatrical managers were obliged to appear a few years since have done good in a few instances; but they have often played the most ridiculous pranks, and they have roused grave fears in minds unused to know fear of any kind. The peculiar prying questions, the successful attempts made to interfere with concerns which should not on any account be public property, the disposition to treat the people, whose mature wisdom is proclaimed from all political platforms, as little children, all combine to make the aspect of the general question not a little alarming. Would it not be better then, in sum, to abstain from raising levels to such a mighty extent, and to strive after improving all the amusements on a less heroic scale?

### XVII.

#### A LITTLE SERMON ON FAILURES.

If we study the history of men with patience, it becomes evident that no great work has ever been done in the world save by those who have met with bitter rebuffs and severe trials at the beginning of their career. It seems as though the ruling powers imposed an ordeal on every human being, in order to single out the strong and the worthy from the cowardly and worthless. The weakling who meets with trouble uplifts his voice in complaint and ceases to struggle against obstacles; the strong man or woman remains silent and strives on indomitably until success is achieved. It is strange to see how many complaining weaklings are living around us at this day, and how querulous and unjust are the outcries addressed to Fate, Fortune, and Providence. We are the heirs of the ages; we know all about the brave souls that suffered and strove and conquered in days gone by, and yet many who possess this knowledge, and who have the gift of expression at its highest, spend their time in one long tiresome whimper. Half the poetry of our time is rhythmic complaint; young men who have hardly had time to look round on the splendid panorama of life profess to crave for death, and young women who should be thinking only of work and love and brightness prefer to sink into languor. There is no curing a poet when once he takes to being mournful, for he hugs his own woe with positive pleasure, and all his musical pathos is simply self-pity.

When Napoleon said, "You must not fear Death, my lads. Defy him, and you drive him into the enemy's ranks!" he uttered a truth which applies in the moral world as on the battle-field. The sudden panic which causes battalions of troops to hesitate and break up in confusion is paralleled by the numbing despair which seems to seize on the forces of the soul at times. Brave men gaze calmly



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on the trouble and think within themselves, "Now is the hour of trial; it is needful to be strong and audacious;" weak men drop into hopeless lassitude, and the few who happen to be foolish as well as weak rid themselves of life. I dare say that hardly one of those who read these lines has escaped that one awful moment when effort appears vain, when life is one long ache, and when Time is a creeping horror that seems to lag as if to torture the suffering heart. We need only turn to the vivid chapter of modern life to see the utter folly of "giving in." Let us look at the life-history of a statesman who died some years ago in our country, after wielding supreme power and earning the homage of millions. When young Benjamin D'Israeli first entered society in London, he found that the proud aristocrats looked askance at him. He came of a despised race, he had no fortune, his modes of acting and speaking were strange to the cold, self-contained Northerners among whom he cast his lot, and his chances looked far from promising. He waited and worked, but all things seemed to go wrong with him; he published a poem which was laughed at all over the country; he strove to enter Parliament, and failed again and again; middle age crept on him, and the shadows of failure seemed to compass him round. In one terrible passage which he wrote in a flippant novel called "The Young Duke" he speaks about the woful fate of a man who feels himself full of strength and ability, and who is nevertheless compelled to live in obscurity. The bitter sadness of this startling page catches the reader by the throat, for it is a sudden revelation of a strong man's agony. At last the toiler obtained his chance, and rose to make his first speech in the House of Commons. He was then long past thirty years of age; but he had the exuberance and daring of a boy. All the best judges in the Commons admired the opening of the oration; but the coarser members were stimulated to laughter by the speaker's strange appearance. D'Israeli had dressed himself in utter defiance of all conventions; he wore a dark green coat which came closely up to his chin, a gaudy vest festooned with chains, and glittering rings. His ringlets were combed in a heavy mass over his right shoulder; and it is said that he looked like some strange actor. The noise grew as he went on; his finest periods were lost amid howls of derision, and at last he raised his arms above his head, and shouted, "I sit down now; but the time will come when you will hear me!" A few good men consoled him; but most of his friends advised him to get away out of the country that his great failure might be forgotten. Now here was cause for despair in all conscience; the brilliant man had failed disastrously in the very assembly which he had sworn to master, and the sound of mockery pursued him everywhere. His hopes seemed blighted; his future was dim, he was desperately and dangerously in debt, and he had broken down more completely than



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any speaker within living memory. Take heart, all sufferers, when you hear what follows. For eleven long years the gallant orator steadily endeavoured to repair his early failure; he spoke frequently, asserted himself without caring for the jeers of his enemies, and finally he won the leadership of the House by dint of perseverance, tact, and intellect. We cannot tell how often his heart sank within him during those weary years; we know nothing of his forebodings; we only know that outwardly he always appeared alert, vigorous, strenuously hopeful. At last his name was known all over the world, and, after his death, a traveller who rode across Asia Minor was again and again questioned by the wild nomads—"Is your great Sheikh dead?" they asked. The rumour of our statesman's power had traversed the earth. Men of all parties acknowledge the indomitable courage of this man who refused to resign the struggle even when the very Fates seemed to have decreed his ruin.

Take a man of another stamp, and observe how he met the first blows of Fortune. Thomas Carlyle had dwelt on a lonely moorland for six years. He came to London and employed himself with feverish energy on a book which he thought would win him bread, even if it did not gain him fame. Writing was painful to him, and he never set down a sentence without severe labour. With infinite pains he sought out the history of the French Revolution and obtained a clear picture of that tremendous event. Piece by piece he put his first volume together and satisfied himself that he had done something which would live. He handed his precious manuscript to Stuart Mill, and Mill's servant lit the fire with it. Carlyle had exhausted his means, and his great work was really his only capital. Like all men who write at high pressure, he was unable to recall anything that he had once set down, and, so far as his priceless volume went, his mind was a blank. Years of toil were thrown away; time was fleeting, and the world was careless of the matchless historian. The first news of his loss stunned him, and, had he been a weak man, he would have collapsed under the blow. He saw nothing but bitter poverty for himself and his wife, and he had some thoughts of betaking himself to the Far West; but he conquered his weakness, forgot his despair in labour, and doggedly re-wrote the masterpiece which raised him to instant fame and caused him to be regarded as one of the first men in Britain. In the whole wide history of human trials I cannot recall a more shining instance of fortitude and triumphant victory over obstacles. Let those who are cast down by some petty trouble think of the lonely, poverty-stricken student bending himself to his task after the very light of his life had been dimmed for a while.



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There is nothing like an array of instances for driving home an argument, so I mention the case of a man about whom much debate goes on even to this day. Napoleon starved in the streets of Paris; one by one he sold his books to buy bread; he was without light or fire on nights of iron frost, and his clothing was too scanty to keep out the cold. He arrived at that pass which induces some men to end all their woes by one swift plunge into the river; but he was not of the despairful stamp, and he stood his term of misery bravely until the light came for him. Leave his splendid, chequered career of glory and crime out of reckoning, and remember only that he became emperor because he had courage to endure starvation; that lesson at least from his career can harm no one. Choose the example of a woman, for variety's sake. George Eliot was quite content to scrub furniture, make cheese and butter, and sweep carpets until she arrived at ripe womanhood. She felt her own extraordinary power; but she never repined at the prospect of spending her life in what is lightly called domestic drudgery. The Shining Ones oftenest walk in lowly places and utter no sound of mourning. She was nearing middle age before she had an opportunity of gaining that astonishing erudition which amazed professed students, and, had she not chanced to meet Mr. Spencer, our greatest philosopher, she would have lived and died unknown. She never questioned the decrees of the Power that rules us all, and, when she suddenly took her place as one of the first living novelists, she accepted her fame and her wealth humbly and simply. Till her last day she remembered her bitter years of frustration and failure, and the meanest of mortals had a share of her holy sympathy; she gained her unexampled conquest by resolutely treading down despair, and her brave story should cheer the many girls who find life bleak and joyless. George Eliot was prepared to bear the worst that could befall her, and it was her frank and gentle acceptance of the facts of life that brought her joy in the end. We must also remember such people as Arkwright, Stephenson, Thomas Edwards the naturalist, and Heine the poet. Arkwright saw his best machinery smashed again and again; but his bull-dog courage brought him through his trouble, and he surmounted opposition that would have driven a weakling to exile and death. Stephenson feared that he would never conquer the great morass at Chat Moss, and he knew that, if he failed, his reputation would perish. He never allowed himself to show a tremor, and he won. Poor Edwards toiled on, in spite of hunger, poverty, and chill despair; he received one knock-down blow after another with cheery gallantry, and old age had clutched him before his relief from grinding penury came; but nothing could daunt him, and he is now secure. Heine lay for seven years in his "mattress grave;" he was torn from head to foot by the pangs of neuralgia; one of his eyes was closed, and at times the lid of



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the other had to be raised in order that he might see those who visited him. Let those who have ever felt the aching of a single tooth imagine what it must have been to suffer the same kind of pain over the whole body. Surely this poor tortured wretch might have been pardoned had he esteemed his life a failure! His spirit never flagged, and he wrote the brightest, lightest mockeries that ever were framed by the wit of man; his poems will be the delight of Europe for years to come, and his memory can no more perish than that of Shakspeare.

Enough of examples; the main fact is that to men and women who refuse to accept failure all life is open, and there is something to hope for even up to the verge of the grave. When the sullen storm-cloud of misfortune lowers and life seems dim and dreary, that is the hour to summon up courage, and to look persistently beyond the bounds of the mournful present. Why should we uplift our voices in pettish questioning? The blows that cut most cruelly are meant for our better discipline, and, if we steel every nerve against the onset of despair, the battle is half won even before we put forth a conscious effort. There never yet was a misfortune or an array of misfortunes, there never was an entanglement wound by malign chance from which a man could not escape by dint of his own unaided energy. By all means let us pity those who are sore beset amid the keen sorrows that haunt the world, look with tenderness on their pain, soothe them in their perplexities; but, before all things, incite them to struggle against the numbing influence of despondency. The early failures are the raw material of the finest successes; and the general who loses a battle, the mechanic who fails to find work, the writer who pines for the approach of tardy fame, the forsaken lover who looks out on a dark universe, and the servant who meets only censure and coldness, despite her attempts to fulfil her duty, all come under the same law. If they consent to drift away into the limbo of failures, they have only to resign themselves, and their existence will soon end in futility and disaster; but, if they refuse to cringe under the lash of circumstances, if they toil on as though a bright goal were immediately before them, the result is almost assured; and, even if they do succumb, they have the blessed knowledge that they have failed gallantly. Half the misfortunes which crush the children of men into insignificance are more or less magnified by imagination, and the swollen bulk of trouble dwindles before an effort of the human will. Read over the dismal record of a year's suicides, and you will find that in nine cases out of ten the causes which lead unhappy men and women to quench their own light of life are absolutely trivial to the sane and steadfast soul. Let those who are heavy of heart when ill-fortune seems to have mastered them remember that our Master is before all things just. He lays no burden that ought not to be borne on any one



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of His children, and those who give way to despair are guilty of sheer impiety. The same Power that sends the affliction gives also the capability of endurance, and, if we refuse to exert that capability, we are sinful. When once the first inclination toward weakness and doubt is overcome, every effort becomes easier, and the sense of strength waxes keener day by day. Who are the most serene and sympathetic of all people that even the most obscure among us meet? The men and women who have come through the Valley of the Shadow of Tribulation. By a benign ordinance which is uniform in action, it so falls out that the conquerors derive enhanced pleasure from the memory of difficulties beaten down and sorrows vanquished. Where then is the use of craven shrinking? Let us rather welcome our early failures as we would welcome the health-giving rigour of some stern physician. Think of the heroes and heroines who have conquered, and think joyfully also of those who have wrought out their strenuous day in seeming failure. There are four lines of poetry which every English-speaking man and woman should learn by heart, and I shall close this address with them. They were written on the memorial stone of certain Italian martyrs—

“Of all Time’s words, this is the noblest one  
That ever spoke to souls and left them blest;  
Gladly we would have rested had we won  
Freedom. We have lost, and very gladly rest.”

### XVIII.

“VANITY OF VANITIES.”

Those who have leisure to explore the history of the past, to peer into the dark backward and abysm of Time, must of necessity become smitten with a kind of sad and kindly cynicism. When one has travelled over a wide tract of history, and when, above all, he has mused much on the minor matters which dignified historians neglect, he feels much inclined to say to those whom he sees struggling vainly after what they call fame, “Why are you striving thus to make your voice heard amid the derisive silence of eternity? You are fretting and frowning, with your eyes fixed on your own petty fortunes, while all the gigantic ages mock you. Day by day you give pain to your own mind and body; you hope against hope; you trust to be remembered, and you fancy that you may perchance hear what men will say of you when you are gone. All in vain. Be satisfied with the love of those about you; if you can get but a dog to love you during your little life, cherish that portion of affection. Work in your own petty sphere strenuously, bravely, but without thought of what men may say of you. Perhaps you are agonised by the thought of powers that are hidden in you—powers that may never be known while you live. What matters it? So long as you have the love of a faithful few among those dear to you, all the fame that the earth can give counts for nothing. Take that which is

near to you, and value as naught the praises of a vague monstrous world through which  
you pass as



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a shadow. Look at that squirrel who twirls and twirls in his cage. He wears his heart out in his ceaseless efforts at progression, and all the while his mocking prison whirls under him without letting him progress one inch. How much happier he would be if he stayed in his hutch and enjoyed his nuts! You are like the restless squirrel; you make a great show of movement and some noise, but you do not get forward at all. Rest quietly when your necessary labour is done, and be sure that more than half the things men struggle for and fail to attain would not be worth the having even if the strugglers succeeded. Do not waste one moment; do not neglect one duty, for a duty lost is the deadliest loss of all; snatch every rational pleasure that comes within your reach; earn all the love you can, for that is the most precious of all possessions, and leave the search for fame to those who are petty and vain.”

Such a cold and chilling speech would be a very good medicine for uneasy vanity, but the best medicine of all is the contemplation of the history of men who have flourished and loomed large before their fellows, and who now have sunk into the night. How many mighty warriors have made the earth tremble, filling the mouths of men with words of fear or praise! They have passed away, and the only record of their lives is a chance carving on a stone, a brief line written by some curt historian. The glass of the years was brittle wherein they gazed for a span; the glass is broken and all is gone. In the wastes of Asia we find mighty ruins that even now are like symbols of power—vast walls that impose on the imagination by their bulk, enormous statues, temples that seem to mock at time and destruction. The men who built those structures must have had supreme confidence in themselves, they must have possessed incalculable resources, they must have been masters of their world. Where are they now? What were their names? They have sunk like a spent flame, and we have not even the mark on a stone to tell us how they lived or loved or struggled. Far in that moaning desert lie the remains of a city so great that even the men who know the greatest of modern cities can hardly conceive the original appearance and dimensions of the tremendous pile. Travellers from Europe and America go there and stand speechless before works that dwarf all the efforts of modern men. The woman who ruled in that strong city was an imposing figure in her time, but she died in a petty Roman villa as an exile, and Palmyra, after her departure, soon perished from off the face of the earth. One pathetic little record enables us to guess what became of the population over whom the queen Zenobia ruled. A stone was dug up on the northern border of England, and the inscription puzzled all the antiquarians until an Oriental scholar found that the words were Syriac. “Barates of Palmyra erects this stone to the memory of his wife, the Catavallaunian woman who died aged thirty-three.”



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That is a rude translation. Poor Barates was brought to Britain, married a Norfolk woman of the British race, and spent his life on the wild frontier. So the powerful queen passed away as a prisoner, her subjects were scattered over the earth, and her city, which was once renowned, is now haunted by lizard and antelope. Alas for fame! Alas for the stability of earthly things! The conquerors of Zenobia fared but little better. How strong must those emperors have been whose very name kept the world in awe! If a man were proscribed by Rome, he was as good as dead; no fastness could hide him, no place in the known world could give him refuge, and his fate was regarded as so inevitable that no one was foolhardy enough to try at staving off the evil day. How coolly and contemptuously the lordly proconsuls and magistrates regarded the early Christians. Pliny did not so much as deign to notice their existence, and Pontius Pilate, who had to deal with the first twelve, seems to have looked upon them as mere pestilent malefactors who created a disturbance. For many years those scornful Roman lords mocked the new sectarians and refused to take them seriously. One scoffing magistrate asked the Christians who came before him why they gave him the trouble to punish them. Were there no ropes and precipices handy, he asked, for those who wished to commit suicide? Those Romans had great names in their day—names as great as the names of Ellenborough and Wellesley and Gordon and Dalhousie and Bartle Frere, yet one would be puzzled to write down a list of six of the omnipotent sub-emperors. They fought, they made laws, they ruled empires, they fancied themselves only a little less than the gods, and now not a man outside the circle of a dozen scholars knows or cares anything about them. The wise lawgivers, the dread administrators, the unconquerable soldiers have gone with the snows, and their very names seem to have been writ in water.

If we come nearer our own time, we find it partly droll, partly pathetic to see how the bubble reputations have been pricked one by one. “Who now reads Bolingbroke?” asked Burke. Yes—who? The brilliant many-sided man who once held the fortunes of the empire in his hand, the specious philosopher, the unequalled orator is forgotten. How large he loomed while his career lasted! He was one of the men who ruled great England, and now he is away in the dark, and his books rot in the recesses of dusty libraries. Where is the great Mr. Hayley? He was arbiter of taste in literature; he thought himself a very much greater man than Blake, and an admiring public bowed down to him. Probably few living men have ever read a poem of Hayley’s, and certainly we cannot advise anybody to try unless his nerve is good. Go a little farther back, and consider the fate of the distinguished literary persons who were famous during the period which affected writers call the Augustan era of our literature. The great poet who wrote—

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“Behold three thousand gentlemen at least,  
Each safely mounted on his capering beast”—

what has become of that bard’s inspired productions? They have gone the way of Donne and Cowley and Waller and Denham, and nobody cares very much. Take even the great Cham of literature, the good Johnson. His fame is undying, but his works would not have saved his reputation in vigour during so many generations. To all intents and purposes his books are dead; the laboured writings which he turned out during his years of starvation are not looked into, and our most eminent modern novelist declares that, if he were snowed up in a remote inn with “Bradshaw’s Railway Guide” and the “Rambler” as the only books within reach, he would assuredly not read the “Rambler.” Perhaps hardly one hundred students know how admirably good Johnson’s preface to Shakspeare really is, and the “Lives of the Poets” are read only in fragmentary fashion. Strange, is it not, that the man who made his reputation by literature, the man who dominated the literary world of his time with absolute sovereignty, should be saved from sinking out of human memory only by means of the record of his lighter talk which was kept by his faithful henchman? But for the wise pertinacity of poor Boswell, the giant would have been forgotten even by the generation which immediately followed him. His gallant and strenuous efforts to gain fame really failed; his chance gossip and the amusing tale of his eccentricities kept his name alive. Surely the irony of fate was never better shown. Even this Titan would have had only a bubble reputation but for the lucky accident which brought that obscure Scotch laird to London.

Most piteous is the story of the poor souls who have sought to achieve their share of immortality by literature. Go to our noble Museum and look at the appalling expanse of books piled up yard upon yard to the ceiling of the immense dome. Tons upon tons—Pelion on Ossa—of literature meet the eye and stun the imagination. Every book was wrought out by eager labour of some hopeful mortal; joy, anguish, despair, mad ambition, placid assurance, wild conceit, proud courage once possessed the breasts of those myriad writers, according to their several dispositions. The piles rest in stately silence, and the reputations of the authors are entombed.

As for the fighters who sought the bubble reputation even at the cannon’s mouth, who recked of their fierce struggles, their bitter wounds, their brief success? Who knows the leaders of the superb host that poured like a torrent from Torres Vedras to the Pyrenees, and smote Napoleon to the earth? Who can name the leaders of the doomed host that crossed the Beresina, and left their bones under the Russian snows? High of heart the soldiers were when they set out on their wild pilgrimage under their terrible leader, but soon they were lying by thousands on the red field of Borodino, and the sound of their moaning filled the night like the calling of some mighty ocean. And now they are utterly gone, and the reputation for which they strove avails nothing; they are mixed in the dim twilight story of old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago.



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Critics say that our modern poetry is all sad; and so it is, save when the dainty muse of Mr. Austin Dobson smiles upon us. The reason is not far to seek—we know so much, and the sense of the vanity of human effort is more keenly impressed upon us than ever it was on men of more careless and more ignorant ages. We see what toys men set store by, we see what shadows we are and what shadows we pursue, so there is no wonder that we are mournful. The sweetest of our poets, the most humorous of our many writers cannot keep the thought of death and futility away. His loveliest lyric begins—

“Oh, fair maids Maying  
In gardens green,  
Through deep dells straying,  
What end hath been.

Two Mays between  
Of the flow'rs that shone  
And your own sweet queen?  
They are dead and gone.”

There is the burden—“dead and gone.” Another singer chants to us thus—

“Merely a round of shadow shows  
Shadow shapes that are born to die  
Like a light that sinks, like a wind that goes,  
Vanishing on to the By-and-by.

Life, sweet life, as she flutters nigh,  
'Minishing, failing night and day,  
Cries with a loud and bitter cry,  
'Ev'rything passes, passes away.’

\* \* \* \* \*

Who has lived as long as he chose?  
Who so confident as to defy  
Time, the fellest of mortals' foes?  
Joins in his armour who can spy?  
Where's the foot will nor flinch nor fly?  
Where's the heart that aspires the fray?  
His battle wager 'tis vain to try—  
Ev'rything passes, passes away.”

The age is diseased. Why should men be mournful because what they call their aspirations—precious aspirations—are frustrated? They seek the bubble reputation,



and they whimper when the bubble is burst; but how much better would it be to cleave to lowly duties, to do the thing that lies next to hand, to accept cheerfully the bounteous harvest of joys vouchsafed to the humble? Since we all end alike—since the warrior, the statesman, the poet alike leave no name on earth save in the case of the few Titans—what use is there in fretting ourselves into green-sickness simply because we cannot quite get our own way? To the wise man every moment of life may be made fruitful of rich pleasure, and the pleasure can be bought without heartache, without struggling painfully, without risking envy and uncharitableness. Better the immediate love of children and of friends than the hazy respect of generations that must assuredly forget us soon, no matter how prominent we may seem to be for a time. I have read a sermon to my readers, but the sermon is not doleful; it is merely hard truth. Life may be a supreme ironic procession, with laughter of gods in the background, but at any rate much may be made of it by those who refuse to seek the bubble reputation.

## **XIX.**



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### GAMBLERS.

The great English carnival of gamblers is over for a month or two; the bookmakers have retired to winter quarters after having waxed fat during the year on the money risked by arrant simpletons. The bookmaker's habits are peculiar; he cannot do without gambling, and he contrives to indulge himself all the year round in some way or other. When the Newmarket Houghton meeting is over, Mr. Bookmaker bethinks him of billiards, and he goes daily and nightly among interesting gatherings of his brotherhood. Handicaps are arranged day by day and week by week, and the luxurious, loud, vulgar crew contrive to pass away the time pleasantly until the spring race meetings begin. But hundreds of the sporting gentry have souls above the British billiard-room, and for them a veritable paradise is ready. The Mediterranean laps the beautiful shore at Monte Carlo and all along the exquisite Eiviera—the palms and ferns are lovely—the air is soft and exhilarating, and the gambler pursues his pleasing pastime amid the sweetest spots on earth. From every country in the world the flights of restless gamblers come like strange flocks of migrant birds. The Russian gentleman escapes from the desolate plains of his native land and luxuriates in the beautiful garden of Europe; the queer inflections of the American's quiet drawl are heard everywhere as he strolls round the tables; Roumanian boyards, Parisian swindlers, Austrian soldiers, Hungarian plutocrats, flashy and foolish young Englishmen—all gather in a motley crowd; and the British bookmaker's interesting presence is obtrusive. His very accent—strident, coarse, impudent, unspeakably low—gives a kind of ground-note to the hum of talk that rises in all places of public resort, and he recruits his delicate health in anticipation of the time when he will be able to howl once more in English betting-rings.

But I am not so much concerned with the personality of the various sorts of gamblers, and I assuredly have no pity to spare for the gentry who lose their money. A great deal of good useful compassion is wasted on the victims who are fleeced in the gambling places. Victims! What do they go to the rooms for? Is it not to amuse themselves and to pass away time amid false exhilaration? Is it not to gain money without working for it? The dupe has in him all the raw material of a scoundrel; and even when he blows his stupid brains out I cannot pity him so much as I pity the dogged labourer who toils on and starves until his time comes for going to the workhouse. I am rather more inclined to study the general manifestations of the gambling spirit. I have in my mind's eye vivid images of the faces, the figures, the gestures of hundreds of gamblers, and I might make an appalling picture-gallery if I chose; but such a nightmare in prose would not do much good to any one, and I prefer to proceed in a less exciting but more profitable manner. We please ourselves by calling to mind the days when



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“society” gambled openly and constantly; and we like to fancy that we are all very good and spotless now-a-days and free from the desire for unnatural excitement. Well, I grant that most European societies in the last century were sufficiently hideous in many respects. The English aristocrat, male or female, cared only for cards, and no noble lady dreamed of remaining long in an assembly where *piquet* and *ecarte* were not going on. The French seigneur gambled away an estate in an evening; the Russian landowner staked a hundred serfs and their lives and fortunes on the turn of a card; little German princelings would play quite cheerfully for regiments of soldiers. The pictures which we are gradually getting from memoirs and letters are almost too grotesque for belief, and there is some little excuse for the hearty optimists who look back with complacency on the past, and thank their stars that they have escaped from the domain of evil. For my own part, when I see the mode of life now generally followed by most of our European aristocracies, I am quite ready to be grateful for a beneficent change, and I have again and again made light of the wailings of persons who persist in chattering about the good old times. But I am talking now about the spirit of the gambler; and I cannot say that the human propensity to gamble has in any way died out. Its manifestations may in some respects be more decorous than they used to be; but the deep, masterful, subtle tendency is there, and its force is by no means diminished by the advance of a complicated civilisation. Often and often I have mused quietly amid scenes where gamblers of various sorts were disporting themselves—in village inns where solemn yokels played shove-halfpenny with statesmanlike gravity; in sunny Italian streets where lazy loungers played their queer guessing game with beans; in noisy racing-clubs where the tape clicks all day long; on crowded steamboats when Tynesiders and Cockneys yelled and cursed and shouted their offers as the slim skiffs stole over the water and the straining athletes bent to their work; on Atlantic liners when hundreds of pounds depended on the result of the day’s run; on the breezy heath where half a million gazers watched as the sleek Derby horses thundered round. As I have gazed on these spectacles, I have been forced to let the mind wander into regions far away from the chatter of the gamesters. Again and again I have been compelled to think with a kind of melancholy over the fact that man is not content until he is taken out of himself. Our wondrous bodies, our miraculous power of looking before and after, our infinite capacities for enjoyment, are not enough for us, and the poor feeble human creature spends a great part of his life in trying to forget that he is himself. At the best, our days pass as in the dim swiftness of a dream. The young man suddenly thinks, “It is but yesterday that I was a child;” the middle-aged man finds the gray hairs streaking his head before



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he has realised that his youth is gone; the old man lives so completely in the past that he is taken only by a gentle shock of surprise when he finds that the end is upon him. Swiftly, like some wild hunt of shadows, the generations fleet away—nothing stays their frantic speed; and to the true observer no fictitious flight of spirits on the Brocken could be half so weird as the passage of one generation of the children of men. As we grow old, the appalling brevity of time impresses itself more and more on the consciousness of calm and thoughtful men; yet nine-tenths of our race spend the best part of their days in trying to make their ghostly sweeping flight from eternity to eternity seem more rapid than it really is. That hot and fevered youth who stands in the betting-ring and nervously pencils his race-card never thinks that the time of weakness and sadness and weariness is coming on; that gray and tremulous old man who bends over the roulette-table never thinks that he will speedily drop into a profundity deeper than ever plummet sounded. The gliding ball does not swing round in its groove faster than the old man's soul fares towards the darkness; and yet he clenches his jaw and engages in the most trivial of pursuits as if he had an eternity before him. The youth and the dotard have alike succeeded in passing out of themselves, and their very souls will not return to the body until the delirious spell has ceased to act. All men alike seem to have, more or less, this craving for oblivion. Long ago I remember seeing a company of farmers who had come to market in the prosperous times; they were among the wildest of their set, and they settled down to cards when business was done. Day after day those bucolic gentlemen sat on; when one of them lay down on a settle to snatch a nap, his place was taken by another, and at the end of the week some of the original company were still in the parlour, having gambled furiously all the while without ever washing or undressing. Time was non-existent for them, and their consciousness was exercised only in watching the faces of the cards and counting up points. But the dull-witted farmers were quite equalled by the polished scholar, the great orator, the brilliant wit, Charles Fox. It was nothing to Fox if he sat for three days and three nights at a stretch over the board of green cloth. His fortune went; he might lose at the rate of ten thousand pounds in the twenty-four hours; but he had succeeded in forgetting himself, and his loss of time and fortune counted as nothing. The light, careless gipsy shares the disposition of the matchless orator and the dull farmer. You may see a gipsy enter the tossing-ring at a fair; he loses all his money, but he goes on staking everything he possesses, and, if the luck remains adverse, he will continue tossing until his pony, his cart, his lurcher-dog, his very clothes are all gone. The Chinaman will play for his life; the Red Indian recklessly piles all he owns



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in the world upon the rough heap of goods which his tribe wager on the result of a pony race. Look high, look low, and we see that the gamblers actually form the majority of the world's inhabitants; and we must go among the men of abstractions—the men who can achieve oblivion by dint of their own thinking power—before we find any class untouched by the strange taint. Observe that venerable looking man who slowly paces about in one of the luxurious dwelling-places which are sacred to leisure; you may see his type at Bath, Buxton, Leamington, Scarborough, Brighton, Torquay, all places, indeed, whither flock the men whose life-work is done. That venerable gentleman has fulfilled his task in the world, his desires have been gratified so far as fortune would allow, and one would think that most pursuits of the competitive sort must have lost interest for him. Yet he—even he—cannot get rid of the tendency to gamble; and he studies the financial news with the eagerness of a boy who follows the fortunes of Quentin Durward or D'Artagnan or Rebecca. If English railway shares fall, he is exultant or depressed, according to the operations of his broker; he may be roused into almost hysterical delight by a rise in "Nitrates" or "Chilians," or any of the thousands of securities in which stockbrokers deal. What is it to the old man if Death smiles gently on him, and will soon touch his heart with ice? There is no past for him; he has forgotten the raptures of youth, the strength of manhood, the depression of failure, the gladness of success, and he drugs his soul into forgetfulness by dwelling on a gambler's chances. So long as the one doubtful boon of forgetfulness is secured, it seems to matter very little what may be the stake at disposal. The English racing-man picks out a promising colt or filly; he finds that he has a swift and good animal, and he resolves to bring off some vast gambling *coup*. Patiently, cunningly, month after month, the steps in the plan are matured; the horse runs badly until the official handicappers think it is worthless, and the gambler at last finds that he has some great prize almost at his mercy. Then with slow dexterity the horse is backed to win. If the owner shows any eagerness, his purpose is balked once and for all; he may have to employ half-a-dozen agents to bet for him, until at last he succeeds in wagering so much money that he will gain, say, one hundred thousand pounds by winning his race. The fluttering jackets come nearer and nearer to the judge's box; some of the jockeys are using their whips and riding desperately; the horse on which so much depends draws to the front; but the owner never moves a muscle. Of course we have seen men shrieking themselves almost into apoplexy at the close of a race; but the hardened gambler is deadly cool. In the last stride the animal so carefully—and fraudulently—prepared is beaten by a matter of a few inches, and the chance of picking up a hundred thousand pounds is gone; but



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the owner remains impassive, and as soon as settling-day is over, he endeavours to forget the matter. I have seen an old man watching a race on which he had planned to win sixty thousand pounds; his horse was beaten in the last two strides, and the old gentleman never so much as stirred or spoke. No doubt he was really transported out of himself; but nothing in the world seemed capable of altering the composure of his wizened features. On the other hand, there is one man who is known to possess some four millions in cash, besides an immense property; this man never bets more than two pounds at a time, yet from his wild fits of excitement it might be supposed that his colossal wealth was at stake.

So the whole army of the gamblers pass in their mad whirlwind march toward the region of night; they are delirious, they are creatures of contradictions—they are fiercely greedy, lavishly generous, wary in many things, reckless of life, ready to take any advantage, yet possessed by a diseased sense of honour. Some of them think that a man is better and happier when he feels all his faculties working rather than when he goes off into blind transports of excitement or fear or doubt. I think that the man who is conscious to his very finger-tips is better than the wild creature whose senses are all blurred. I hold that the student or thinker who faces life with a calm and calculated desire for true knowledge is better off than the insensate being whose hours are passed in a sordid nightmare. But I see little chance of ever making men care little for the gambler's pleasure, and I humbly own to the existence of an ugly mystery which only adds yet another to the number of dark puzzles whereby we are surrounded. I observe that desperate efforts are made to put down gambling by law rather than by culture, religion, true and gentle morality. As well try to put down the passions of love and fear—as well try to interdict the beat of the pulses! We may deplore the gambler's existence as much as we like; but it is a fact, and we must accept it.

### XX.

#### SCOUNDRELS.

Byron very often flung out profound truths in his easy, careless way, but the theatrical vein in his composition sometimes prompted him to say dashing things, not because he regarded them as true, but because he wanted to make people stare. Speaking of one interesting and homicidal gentleman, the poet observes—

“He knew himself a villain, and he deemed  
The rest no better than the thing he seemed.”

Now I take leave to say that the rawest of fifth-form lads never uttered a more school-boyish sentiment than that; and I wonder how a man of the world came to make such a

blunder. Byron had lived in the degraded London of the Regency, when Europe's rascality flocked towards St. James's as belated birds flock towards a light; and he should have known some villains if any one did. Ephraim Bond, the



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abominable moneylender and sportsman, was swaggering round town in Byron's later days; Crockford, that incarnate fiend, had his nets open; and ruined men—men ruined body and soul—left the gambling palace where the satanic spider sat spinning his webs. Byron must have known Crockford, and he had there a chance of studying a being who was indeed a villain, but who fancied himself to be a highly respectable person. From the time when "Crocky" started money-lending in the back parlour of his little fish-shop up to his last ghastly appearance on earth, he was a cheat and a consummate rascal; and even after death his hideous corpse was made to serve a deception. He was engaged in a Turf swindle, and it was necessary that he should be regarded as alive on the evening of the Derby day; but he died in the morning, and, to deceive the betting-men, the lifeless carcass of the old robber was put upright in a club window, and a daring sharper caused the dead hand to wave as if in greeting to the shouting crowd—a fit end to a bad life. Crockford's delusion was that his character was marked by honesty and general benevolence; and those who wished to please him pretended to accept his own comfortable theory. He regarded himself as a really good fellow, and in his own person he was a living confutation of Byron's dashing paradox. Then there was Renton Nicholson, a specimen of social vermin if ever there was one. This fellow earned a sordid livelihood by presiding over a club where men met nightly in orgies that stagger the power of belief. His huge figure and his raffish face were seen wherever rogues most did congregate; he showed young men "life"—and sometimes his work as cicerone led them to death; his style of conversation would nowadays lead to a speedy prosecution; he was always seen by the ringside when unhappy brutes met to pound each other, and his stock of evil stories entertained the interesting noblemen and gentlemen who patronised the manly British sport. I could not describe this man's baseness in adequate terms, nor could I so much as give an idea of his ordinary round of roguery without arousing some incredulity. This unspeakable creature was fond of describing himself as "Jolly old Renton," or "Good old John Bull Nicholson"; he really fancied himself to be a good, genial fellow, and he appeared to fancy that the crowds who usually collected to hear his abominations were attracted by his *bonhomie* and his estimable intellectual qualities. Byron must have known this striking example of the scoundrel species, but he appears to have forgotten him when he propounded his theory of villainy. Then there was Pea-green Haynes, who was also a fine sample of folly and rascality mingled. Haynes regarded himself as the most injured man on earth; he never performed an unselfish action, it is true, and he flung away a fine patrimony on his own pleasures, yet he whined and held himself up as an example of suffering virtue. Then there was the



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precious Regent. What a creature! Good men and bad men unite in saying that he was absolutely without a virtue; the shrewd, calculating Greville described him in words that burn; the great Duke, his chief subject, uses language of dry scorn—"The king could only act the part of a gentleman for ten minutes at a time"; and we find that the commonest satellites of the Court despised the wicked fribble who wore the crown of England. Faithless to women, faithless to men, a coward, a liar, a mean and grovelling cheat, George IV. nevertheless clung to a belief in his own virtues; and, if we study the account of his farcical progress through Scotland, we find that he imagined himself to be a useful and genuinely kingly personage. No man, except, perhaps, Philippe Egalite, was ever so contemned and hated; and until his death he imagined himself to be a good man. In all that wild set who disgraced England and disgraced human nature in those gay days of Byron's youth, I can discover only one thoroughly manly and estimable individual, and that was Gentleman Jackson, the boxer; yet, with such a marvellously wide range of villainy to study, Byron never seems to have observed one ethical fact of the deepest importance—a villain never knows that he is villainous; if he did, he would cease to be a villain.

Perhaps Byron's own peculiar disposition—his constitution—prevented him from understanding the undoubted truth which I have stated. Like all other men, he possessed a dual nature; there was bad in him and good, and his force was such that the bad was very bad indeed, and the good was as powerful in its way as the evil. During the brief time that Byron employed in behaving as a bad man, his conduct reached almost epic heights—or depths—of misdoing; but he never in his heart seemed to recognise the fact that he had been a bad man. At any rate, he was wrong; and the commonest knowledge of our wild world suffices to show any reasoning man the gravity of the error propounded in my quotation. As we study the history of the frivolous race of men, it sometimes seems hard to disbelieve the theory of Descartes. The great Frenchman held that man and other animals are automata; and, were it not that such a theory strikes at the root of morals, we might almost be tempted to accept it in moments of weakness, when the riddle of the unintelligible earth weighs heavily on the tired spirit. I find that every prominent scoundrel known to us pursued his work of sin with an absolute unconsciousness of all moral law until pain or death drew near; then the scoundrel cringed like a cur under the scourges of remorse. Thackeray, in a fit of spasmodic courage, painted the archetypal scoundrel once and for all in "Barry Lyndon," and he practically said the last word on the subject; for no grave analysis, no reasoning, can ever improve on that immortal and most moving picture of a wicked man. Observe the masterpiece. Lyndon goes on with his narrative from one horror to another;



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he exposes his inmost soul with cool deliberation; and the author's art is so consummate that we never for a moment sympathise with the fiend who talks so mellifluously—the narrative of ill-doing unfolds itself with all the inevitable precision of an operation of nature, and we see the human soul at its worst. But Thackeray did not make Byron's mistake; and throughout the book the Chevalier harps with deadly persistence on his own virtues. He does not exactly whine, but he lets you know that he regards himself as being very much wronged by the envious caprices of his fellow-men. His tongue is the tongue of a saint, and, even when he owns to any doubtful transaction, he takes care to let you know that he was actuated by the sweetest and purest motives. Many people cannot read "Barry Lyndon" a second time; but those who are nervous should screw their courage to the sticking-place, and give grave attention to that awful moral lesson, for all of us have a little of Barry in our composition.

Thackeray's sudden inspiration enabled him to plumb the deeps of the scoundrel nature, and he saw with the eye of genius that the very quality which makes a bad man dangerous is his belief in his own goodness. If you look at the appalling narrative of Lyndon's life in this country, you see, with a shudder, that the man regards his cruelty to his wife, his villainy towards his step-son, as the inevitable outcome of stern virtue; he tells you things that make you long to stamp on the inanimate pages; for he rouses such a passion of wild scorn and wrath as we feel against no other artistic creation. Yet all the while, like a low under-song, goes on his monotonous assertion of his own goodness and his own injuries. No sermon could teach more than that hateful book; if it is read aright, it will supply men or women with an armoury of warnings, and enable them to start away from the semblance of self-deception as they would from a rearing cobra when the hood is up, and the murderous head flattened ready to strike.

Thackeray worked on the same theme in his story of little Stubbs. Lyndon is the Lucifer of rascals; Stubbs—well, Stubbs beggars the English vocabulary; he is too low, too mean for adjectives to describe him, and I could almost find it in my heart to wish that his portraiture had never been placed before the horrified eyes of men. Yet this Stubbs—a being who was drawn from life—has a profound belief in the rectitude of everything that he does. Even when he tells us how he invited his gang of unspeakables home, to drink away his mother's substance, he takes credit to himself for his fine display of British hospitality. How Thackeray contrived to live through the ordeal of composing those two books I cannot tell; he must have had a nerve of steel, with all his softness of heart and benevolence. At all events, he did live to complete his gruesome feat; and he has given us, in a vivid pictorial way, such a picture of scoundrelism as should serve as a beacon to all men. It may



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seem like a paradox; but I am inclined to think that our non-success in putting down actual crime and wickedness which do not come within range of the law arises from the fact that our jurists have not made a proper study of the criminal nature. God made the cobra, the cruel wolverine, and the thrice-cruel tiger; we study the animals and deal with them adequately; but some of us do not study our human cobras and wolverines and tigers. I scarcely ever knew of a case of a convict who would not moan about his own injuries and his own innocence. Even when these men, whose criminality is ingrained, are willing to own their guilt, they will always contrive to blame the world in general and society in particular. It is almost amusing to hear a desperate thief, who seems no more able to prevent himself from rushing on plunder than a greyhound can prevent itself from rushing on a hare, complaining that employers will not trust him. It is useless to say, "What can you expect?" The scoundrel persists in crying out against a hard world which drove him to be what he is.

Some ten years ago the arch-rascal among English thieves was living quietly in a London suburb; he used to solace himself with high-class music, and he was very fond of poetry. This dreadful creature was a curious compound of wild beast and artist. During the day he went about with an innocent air; and the very police who were destined to take him and hang him learned to greet him cordially as he passed them in his walks. They thought he was "a sort of high-class tradesman." Now, when this cheery little man with the decent frock-coat and the clean respectable air was sauntering on the margin of the breezy heath or walking up by-streets with measured sobriety, he was really marking down the places which he intended to plunder. Here his trained pony should stand; here he would make his entrance; that bedroom door should be fastened inside; this lock should be picked. The wild predatory beast drove the police to despair, for it seemed as if no human being could have performed the feats which came easy to the robber. The hard earning of good men went to the rascal's store; the cherished household gods, the valued keepsakes of innocent women were transferred callously to the melting-pot. He went coolly into bedrooms where the inmates were asleep; had any one awaked, there would have been murder, and the murderer would have decamped long before the door could be broken open. Now my point is this—the wretch whom I have described never ceased to inveigh against the wrongs of society. Two unhappy women served him faithfully and followed him like dogs; but he did not apply his theories in his treatment of them, for they were never without the marks of his brutality. In the very presence of his bruised and beaten slaves he talked of his own virtues, of social inequality, of the tyranny of the rich, and he held to his belief in his own innate goodness after he had committed depredations to the extent of thousands of pounds, and even after he was answerable for two murders. That man never knew himself a villain, and it was only when the rope was gradually closing round his neck that the keen sleuth-hound remorse found him out, and he had the grace to save an innocent man from a living death. This monstrous hypocrite was another typical scoundrel, and his like people every prison in the country.



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The scoundrels who are called great do not usually come under the gallows-tree, and their last dying speeches are somewhat rare; but we may be pretty certain, from the little we know, that each one of them fancies himself an estimable person. Ivan of Russia, the ferocious ruler, who had men torn to pieces before his eyes, the being who had forty thousand men, women, and children massacred in cold blood, regarded himself as the deputy of the Supreme Being. The mad Capet, who fired the signal which started the massacre of St. Bartholomew, believed that he was fulfilling the demands of goodness and orthodoxy. The deadly inquisitors who roasted unhappy fellow mortals wholesale believed—or pretended to believe—that they were putting their victims through a benign ordeal. The heretic was a naughty child; roast him, and his sin was purged; while the frosty-blooded old men who murdered him looked to heaven and returned thanks for their own special allowance of virtue. Conqueror and inquisitor, burglar and murderer, forger and wife-beater, brutal sea-captain and prowling thief—all the scoundrels go about their business with a full faith in their own blamelessness. I do not like to class them as automata, though the wise and genial Mr. Huxley would undoubtedly do so. What shall we do with them? Is it fair that a wearied world and a toil-worn society should maintain them? My own idea is that sentiment, softness, regrets for severity should be banished, and we should say to the scoundrel, “Attend, rascal! You say that you are wronged, and that you are driven to harm your fellow-creatures by the force of external circumstances; that may be so, but we have nothing to do with the matter. Take notice that you shall eat bitter bread on earth, no matter how you may whine, when our just grip is on you; if you persist in practising scoundrelism, we shall make your lot harder and harder for you; and, if in the end we find that you will go on working evil, we shall treat you as a dangerous wild beast, and put you out of the world altogether.”

### XXI.

#### QUIET OLD TOWNS.

A rather popular writer, who first came into notice by dint of naming a book of essays, “Is Life worth Living?” gave us not long ago a very sweet description of an English country town; and he worked himself up to quite a moving pitch of rapture as he described the admirable social arrangements which may be perceived on a market-day. This enthusiast tells us how the members of the great county families drive in to do their shopping. The stately great horses paw and champ at their bits, the neat servants bustle about in deft attendance, and the shopkeeper, who has a feudal sort of feeling towards his betters, comes out to do proper homage. The great landowner brings his wealth into the High Street or the market place, and the tradesmen raise their voices to bless him. We have all heard of institutions called



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“stores”; but still it is a pity to carp at a pretty picture drawn by a literary artist. I know that rebellious tradesmen in many of the shires use violent language as they describe the huge packing-cases which are deposited at various mansions by the railway vans. I know also that the regulation saddler who airs his apron at the door of his shop on market-days will inform the stranger that the gentry get saddles, harness, and everything else nowadays from the abominable “stores”; but I must not leave my artist, and shall let the saddler growl to himself for the present. The polished writer goes on to speak of the ruddy farmer who strolls round in elephantine fashion and hooks out sample-bags from his plethoric and prosperous pockets; the dealers drive a brisk trade, the small shopkeepers are encouraged by their neighbours from the country, and everything is extremely idyllic and pure and pretty and representative of England at her best. The old church rears its quaint height above the quainter houses that cluster near. In the churchyard the generations of natives sleep sound; one may trace some families back for hundreds of years, and thus perceive how firmly the love of the true townsman clings to his native place. Perhaps a castle looms over the modest streets and squares—it is converted into a prison in all probability; but the sight of it brings memories of haughty nobles, or of untitled personages whose pride of race would put monarchs to the blush. The river flows sweetly past the sleepy lovely town, and sober citizens walk solemnly beside the rippling watery highway when the day’s toil is over. On Sunday, when the bells chime their invitation, all sorts and conditions of men meet in the dim romantic precincts of the ancient church, and there is much pleasant gossiping when morning and evening worship are ended. Good old solid England is put before us in miniature when we glance at such of the community as choose to show themselves before the artistic observer, and, as we drive away along the sound level roads, we say—if we are very literary and enthusiastic—“Happy little town! Happy little nation!” Now that is all very pretty; and yet the conscientious philosopher is bound to admit that there is another side—nay, several other sides—to the charming picture. I do not want any students of the modern French school to prove that rural life in small towns may be as base and horrible as the life of crowded cities—I do not want any minute analysis of degradation; but I may prick a windbag of conceit and do some little service if I try to show that the state of things in some scores of these delightful old places is base and corrupt enough to warm the heart of the most exacting cynic that ever thought evil of his fellow-creatures.



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Let us go behind the scenes and see what the idyllic prospect looks like from the rear. We must proceed with great deliberation, and we must take our rustic society stratum by stratum. First, then, there are the idle men who have inherited or earned fortunes, and who like to settle in luxurious houses away from great centres of population. Such men are always in great force on the skirts of quiet old towns, and they are much revered by the tradesmen. I cannot help thinking that the fate of the average “retired” man must be not a little dolorous, for I find that the typical member of that class conducts himself in much the same way no matter where he pitches his habitation in broad England. He is saved if he has a hobby; but, without a hobby, he is a very poor creature, and his ways of living on from day to day are the reverse of admirable. If such a revolutionary institution as a club has been established in the town, he may begin his morning’s round there; or, in default of a club, there is the “select” room in the principal hotel. If he is catholic in his tastes and hungry for conversation, he may wander from one house of call to another, and he meets a large and well-chosen assortment of hucksters who come to bind bargains with the inevitable “drink”; he meets the gossip who knows all the secrets of the township, he meets flashy persons who have a manly thirst which requires perpetual assuagement. Then he converses to his heart’s content; and, alas, what conversation it is—what intellectual exertion is expended by these forlorn gossips in the morning round that takes up the time of many men in a quiet town! There is a little slander, a good deal of peeping out of windows, a little discussion of the financial prospects ascribed to various men in the neighbourhood, and an impartial examination of everybody’s private affairs. The regular crew of gossips hold it as a duty to know and talk about the most minute details of each other’s lives, and, when a man leaves any given room where the piquant chatter is going on, he is quite aware that he leaves his character behind him. The state of his banking account is guessed at, the disposition of his will is courageously foretold, the amounts which he paid to various shopkeepers are added up with reverence or scorn according to the amount—and the company revel in their mean babble until it is time to go to another place and pull the character and the financial accounts of somebody else to pieces. By luncheon time most of these useful beings are a little affected in complexion and speech by the trifling potations which wash down the scandal; but no one is intoxicated. To be seen mastered by “drink” in the morning would cause a man to lose caste; and, besides, if he said too much while his tongue was loose, he would not be believed when next he set down a savoury mess for the benefit of the company. Through all the talk of these wretched entities, be it observed that money, money runs as a species of key-note; the



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men may be coarse and servile, but a shrewd eye can detect every sign of purse-pride. Let a gentleman of some standing walk past a window where the grievous crew are wine-bibbing and blabbing, and some one will say, "Carries hisself high enough, don't he? He ain't got a thousand to fly with. I bet a bottle on it! Why, me, or Jimmy there, or even old Billy Spinks, leaving out Harry, and let alone the Doctor—any one on us could buy him out twelve times over, and then have a bit of roast or biled for Sunday's dinner!" This remark is received as a wise and trenchant tribute to the power of the assembly, and they have more "drink" by way of self-gratulation. Those poor "retired" men, and "independent" men, often go deeper and deeper down the incline towards mental and moral degradation until they become surprisingly repulsive specimens of humanity. In all their dreary perambulations they rarely speak or hear an intelligent word; they are amazingly ignorant concerning their country's affairs, and their conceptions of politics are mostly limited to a broad general belief that some particular statesman ought to be hanged.

As to the government of these quiet old places, there is much to be said that is depressing. While men prate about the decay of trade and the advance of poverty, how few people reflect on the snug fortunes which are amassed in out-of-the-way corners! We hear of jobbery in the metropolis, and jobbery in Government departments, but I take it that the corporations of some little towns could give lessons in jobbery to any corrupt official that ever plundered his countrymen. Some town councils may be very briefly and accurately described as nests of thieves. The thieves wear good clothes, go to church, and do not go to prison—at least, the cases of detection are rare—but they are thieves all the same. As a rule, no matter what a man's trade or profession may be, he contrives to gather profit pretty freely when once he joins the happy band who handle the community's purse. In some cases the robbery is so barefaced and open that the particulars might as well be painted on a monster board and hung up at the town cross; but tradesmen, workmen, and others who have their living to make in the town are terrorised, and they preserve a discreet silence in public however much they may speak evil of dignities in private. As a general rule, a show of decorum is kept up; yet I should think it hardly possible for the average vestry or council to meet without an interchange of winks among the members. John favours Tommy's tender when Tommy contracts to horse all the corporation's water-carts, dust-carts, and so forth; then Tommy is friendly when John wants to sell his row of cottages to the municipality. If Tommy employs two horses on a certain work and charges for twenty, then John and some other backers support the transaction. Billy buys land to a heavy extent, and refuses to build on it; houses are risky property, and Billy



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can wait. An astute company meet at William's house and take supper in luxurious Roman style; then James casually suggests that the east end of the town is a disgrace to the council. Until the block of houses in Blank Street is pulled down and a broad road is run straight to join the main street, the place will be the laughingstock of strangers. James is eloquent. How curious it is that the new road which is to redeem the town from shame must run right over Billy's building plots, and how very remarkable it is to think that the corporation pays a swinging price for the precious land! Billy looks more prosperous than ever; he sets up another horse, reduces rivals to silence by driving forth in a new victoria, and becomes more and more the familiar bosom friend of the bank manager. I might go on to give a score of examples showing how innocent rate-payers are fleeced by barefaced robbers, but the catalogue would be only wearisome. Let any man of probity venture to force his way into one of these dens of thieves and see how he will fare! It is a comic thing that the gangs of jobbers consider that they have a prescriptive right to plunder at large, and their air of aggrieved virtue when they are challenged by a person whom they call an "interloper" is among the most droll and humiliating farces that may be seen in life. The whole crew will make a ferocious dead set at the intruder who threatens to pull their quarry away from them; he will be coughed down or interrupted by insulting noises, and he may esteem himself highly fortunate if he is not asked to step outside and engage in single combat. Everything that mean malignity can do to balk him will be done, and, unless he is a very strong man physically and morally, the opposition will tire him out. There is usually one dominant family in such towns—for the possibility of making a heavy fortune by a brewery or tannery or factory in these quiet places is far greater than any outsider might fancy. The members of the ruling family and their henchmen arise in their might to crush the insolent upstart who wants to see accounts and vouchers: the chairman will rise and say, "Let me tell Mr. X. that me and my family were old established inhabitants in this ancient borough long before he came, and we'll be here long after he has gone bankrupt. We don't require no strangers: the people in this borough has always managed their own affairs, and by the help of Providence they'll go on in the good old way in spite of any swell that comes a-sniffin' and a-smellin' and a-pryin' and a-askin' for accounts about this and that and the other; and I tell the gentleman plain, the sooner this council sees his back the better they'll be pleased; so, if he's not too thick in the skin, let him take a friendly hint and take himself off." A withering onslaught like this is received with tumultuous applause, and other speakers follow suit. It is seldom that a man has nerve enough to stand such brutality from his hoggish assailants, and the ring of jobbers



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are too often left to work their will unchecked. Are such people fit for political power? Ask the wretched rich man who indirectly buys the seat, and hear his record of dull misery if he is inclined to be confidential. He does not like to leave Parliament, and yet he knows he is merely a mark for the licensed pickpocket; he is not regarded as a politician—he is a donor of sundry subscriptions, and nothing more. The men in manufacturing centres will return a poor politician and pay his expenses; but the people in some quiet towns have about as much sentiment or loyalty as they have knowledge; and they treat their member of Parliament as a gentleman whose function it is to be bled, and bled copiously. A sorry sight it is!

One very remarkable thing in these homes of quietness is the marvellous power possessed by drink-sellers. These gentry form the main links in a very tough chain, and they hang together with touching fidelity; their houses are turned into scandal-shops, and they prosper so long as they are ready to cringe with due self-abasement before the magistrates. No refined gentleman who keeps himself to his own class and refrains from meddling with politics could ever by any chance imagine the airs of broad-blown impudence which are sometimes assumed by ignorant and stupid boors who have been endowed with a license; and assuredly no one would guess the extent of their political power unless he had something to do with election business. The landlord of fiction hardly exists in the quiet towns; there is seldom a smiling, suave, and fawning Boniface to be seen; the influential drink-seller is often an insolent familiar harpy who will speak of his own member of Parliament as “Old Tom,” and who airily ventures to call gentlemen by their surnames. The man is probably so benighted in mind that he knows nothing positive about the world he lives in; his manners are hideous, his familiarity is loathsome, his assumptions of manly independence are almost comic in their impudence; but he has his uses, and he can influence votes of several descriptions. Thus he asserts himself in detestable fashion; and people who should know better submit to him. One electioneering campaign in a quiet town would give a salutary lesson to any politician who resolutely set himself to penetrate into the secret life of the society whose suffrages he sought; he would learn why it is that the agents of all the factions treat the drink-seller with deference.

So the queer existence of the tranquil place moves on; petty scandal, petty thieving, petty jobbery, petty jealousy employ the energies of the beings who inhabit the “good old town”—the borough is always good and old—and a man with a soul who really tried to dwell in the moral atmosphere of the community would infallibly be asphyxiated. Nowhere are appearances so deceptive; nowhere do the glamour of antiquity and the beauty of natural scenery draw the attention away from so vile a centre.



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I could excuse any man who became a pessimist after a long course of conversations in a sleepy old borough, for he would see that a mildew may attack the human intelligence, and that the manners of a puffy well-clad citizen may be worse than those of a Zulu Kaffir. The indescribable coarseness and rudeness of the social intercourse, the detestable forms of humour which obtain applause, the low distrust and trickery are quite sufficient to make a sensitive man want to hide himself away. If any one thinks I am too hard, he should try spending six whole weeks in any town which is called good and old; if he does not begin to agree with me about the end of the fifth week I am much in error.

### XXII.

#### THE SEA.

Is there anything new to say about it? Alas, have not all the poets done their uttermost; and how should a poor prose-writer fare when he enters a region where the monarchs of rhythm have proudly trodden? It is audacious; and yet I must say that our beloved poets seem somehow to fail in strict accuracy. Tennyson wanders and gazes and thinks; he strikes out some immortal word of love or despair when the awful influence of the ocean touches his soul; and yet he is not the poet that we want. One or two of his phrases are pictorial and decisive—no one can better them—and the only fault which we find with them is that they are perhaps a little too exquisite. When he says, “And white sails flying on the yellow sea,” he startles us; but his picture done in seven words is absolutely accurate. When he writes of “the scream of the maddened beach,” he uses the pathetic fallacy; but his science is quite correct, for the swift whirling of myriads of pebbles does produce a clear shrill note as the backdraught streams from the shore. But, when he writes the glorious passion beginning, “Is that enchanted moan only the swell Of the long waves that roll-in yonder bay?” we feel the note of falsity at once—the swell does not moan, and the poet only wanted to lead up to the expression of a mysterious ecstasy of love. Again, the most magnificent piece of word-weaving in English is an attempted description of the sea by a man whose command of a certain kind of verse is marvellous. Here is the passage—

“The sea shone  
And shivered like spread wings of angels blown  
By the sun’s breath before him, and a low  
Sweet gale shook all the foam-flowers of thin snow  
As into rainfall of sea-roses, shed  
Leaf by wild leaf in the green garden bed  
That tempests still and sea-winds turn and plough;  
For rosy and fiery round the running prow



Fluttered the flakes and feathers of the spray  
And bloomed like blossoms cast by God away  
To waste on the ardent water; the wan moon  
Withered to westward as a face in swoon  
Death-stricken by glad tidings; and the height  
Throbbled and the centre quivered with delight  
And the deep quailed with passion as of love,  
Till, like the heart of a new-mated dove,  
Air, light, and wave seemed full of burning rest"—



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and so on. Superb, is it not? And yet that noble strain of music gives us no true picture of our dear, commonplace, terrible sea; it reminds us rather of some gaudy canvas painted for the theatre. The lines are glorious, the sense of movement and swing is conveyed, and yet—and yet it is not the sea. We fancy that only the prose-poets truly succeed; and the chief of them all—the matchless Mr. Clark Russell—gets his most moving effects by portraying the commonplace aspects of the water in a way that reminds people of things which they noticed but failed to admire promptly. Mr. Russell's gospel is plain enough; he watches minutely, and there is not a flaw of wind or a cross-drift of spray that does not offer some new emotion to his quick and sensitive soul.

I want all those who are now dwelling amid the shrewd sweetness of the sea-air to learn how to gain simple pleasure from gazing on the incessant changes that mark the face of the sea. The entertainment is so cheap, so fruitful of lovely thought, so exhilarating, that I can hardly keep my patience when I see those wretched men who carry a newspaper to the beach on a glad summer morning, and yawn in the face of the Divine spectacle of wave and cloud and limpid sky. Let no one think that I picture the sea as always gladsome. Ah, no! I have seen too much of storm and stress for that. On one awful night long ago, I waited for hours watching waves that reared and thundered as if they would charge headlong through the streets of the town. The white crests nickered like flame, and below the crests the dreadful inky bulge of each monster rolled on like doom—like death. Throughout the mad night of tempest the guns from many distressed vessels rang out, and I could see the violent sweep of the ships' lights as they were hurled in wild arcs from crest to crest. Many and many a corpse lay out on those sands in the morning; the bold, bronzed men stared with awful glassy stare at the lowering sky; the little cabin-boy clasped his fragment of wreckage as though it had been a toy, and smiled—oh, so sweetly!—in spite of the cruel sand that filled his dead eyes. There was turmoil enough out at sea, for the steadily northerly drift was crossed by a violent roll from the east, and these two currents were complicated in their movement by a rush of water that came like a mill-race from the southward. Imagine a great city tossed about by a monstrous earthquake that first dashes the streets against each other, and then flings up the ruins in vast rolls; that may give some idea of that memorable storm. One poor, pretty girl saw her husband gallantly trying to make the harbour. Long, long had she waited for him, and day by day had she tried to track the vessel's course; the smart barque had gone round the Horn, and escaped from the perils of the Western Ocean in dead winter, and now she was heaving convulsively as she strove to run into harbour at home. Right and left the grey billows hit her, and we could see her keel sometimes



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when the wan light of the morning broke. The girl stared steadily, and her face was like that of a corpse. The barque swung southward, and with the speed of a railway engine rushed on to the stones; the pretty girl moaned, "Oh me!—oh me!" She never saw her lad again until his battered body was in the dead-house of the pier. A commonplace red-haired woman was in a dreadful state of mind when she saw a large fishing-boat trying to run for the harbour. Her husband and two sons were aboard, she said, so she had reasons for anxiety. The boat was pitched about like a cork; and presently one fearful sea fairly smashed her. The red-haired woman fell down upon the sand, and lay there moaning.

Assuredly I am not inclined to imitate the Cockney frivolity of Barry Cornwall, who never went to sea in his life, but who nevertheless carolled the most absurdly joyous lays regarding the ocean, which made him ill even when he merely looked at it. No; the true sea-lover knows that there are terror and mystery and horror as well as joyousness in the varied moods of the treacherous, remorseless, magnificent ocean. Those who read this may see the unspeakable beauty of the opaline and ruby tints that flame on the water when the sunset sinks behind the Isle of Thanet. The bay at Westgate will shine like mother-of-pearl, and the glassy rollers at the horizon will be incarnardined. That is a splendid sight! Then those who are in Devon may pass sleepy days in gazing on a vivid piercing blue that is pure and brilliant as the blue of the Bay of Naples. In the lochs to the West of Scotland the swarming tourists watch that riot of colour that marks the times of sunrise and sunset. All these spectacles of suave magnificence are imposing; but, for my own part, I love the grey water on the East Coast, and I like the low level dunes where the bent grass gleams and the sea-wind comes whispering "Forget!" All the gay days of the holiday-places, all the gorgeous sunsets, the imperial noondays, the solemn, glittering midnights are imposing, but the wise traveller learns to see the beauty of all the moods of the wild changing sea. Observe the commonplace man's attitude on a grey cheerless day, when the sky hangs low and the rollers are leaden. "A beast of a day!" he remarks in his elegant fashion; and he goes and grumbles in the vile parlour of his lodging-house, where the stuffy odour of aged chairs and the acrid smell of clumsy cookery contend for mastery. Yet outside on the moaning levels of the dim sea there are mysterious and ghostly sights that might move the heart of the veriest stockbroker if he would but force his mind to consider them. Look at that dark tremulous stream that seems to flow over the sullen sea. It is but a cat's-paw of wind, and yet it looks like a river flowing in silence from some fairy region. The boats start out of the haze and glide away into dimness after having shown their phantom shadows for a few seconds; the cry of the gull rings weirdly; the simulated agony



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of the staunch bird's scream makes one somehow think of tortured souls; you think of dim strange years, you feel the dim strange weather, you remember the still strange land unvexed of sun or stars, "where Lancelot rides clanking through the haze." Ah, who dares talk of a commonplace or disagreeable sea? I used the phrase once, but I well know that the "commonplace" day offers sights of sober grandeur to the eyes of the wise man. Happy those who have royal, serene days, lovely sunsets, quiet gloamings full of stars; happy also those who see but the enormous hurly-burly of mixed grey waves, and hear the harsh song of the wild wind that blows from the fields at night!

Autumn is a great time for the wild Sea Rovers who gather at Cowes and Southampton. The Rover may always be recognised on shore—and, by-the-way, he stays ashore a good deal—for his nautical clothing is spick and span new, the rake of his glossy cap is unspeakably jaunty, and the dignity of his gesture when he scans the offing with a trusty telescope is without parallel in history. When the Rover walks, you observe a slight roll which no doubt is acquired during long experience of tempestuous weather. The tailors and bootmakers gaze on the gallant Rover with joy and admiration, for does he not carry the triumphs of their art on his person? He roughs it, does this bold sea-dog—none of your fine living for him! His saucy barque lies at her moorings amid the wild breakers of Cowes or "the Water," and he sleeps rocked in the cradle of the deep, when he is not tempted to sojourn in his frugal hotel. The hard life on the briny ocean suits him, and he leaves all luxuries to the swabs who stay on shore. If the water is not in a violent humour, the Rover enjoys his humble breakfast about nine. He tries kidneys, bloaters, brawn, and other rude fare; he never uses a gold coffee-pot—humble silver suffices; and even the urn is made of cheap metal. At eleven the hardy fellow recruits his strength with a simple draught of champagne, for which he never pays more than twelve pounds a dozen, and then four stalwart seamen row him to the landing-place. He criticises the mighty ocean from the balcony of the club until the middle of the afternoon, and then he prepares for a desperate deed of daring. The Rover goes to the landing-place and scans the gulf that yawns between him and his vessel. Two hundred yards at least must be covered before the Rover can bound on to the deck of his taut craft. Two hundred yards! And there is a current that might almost sweep a tea-chest out to sea! But the Rover's steady eye takes in the whole view, and his very nautical mind enables him to lay plans with wisdom. He looks sternly at his gig with the four stout oarsmen; his simple carpets are all right; his cushions, his pillows, his cigar-box, his silken rudder-lines are all as they should be. The Rover takes his determination, and a dark look settles on his manly countenance. For one brief instant he thinks of all he leaves behind



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him; his dear home rises before his eyes, the voices of his loved ones thrill in his ear, and his bronzed hand is raised to dash away the tear that starts unbidden. But there must be no weakness. Rovers have their feelings, but they must subdue them when two hundred yards have to be traversed over waves that are nearly two inches high. The Rover steps into his boat, resolved to do or die. Now or never! He puts one cushion behind his athletic back, he lights a Regalia—so cool are genuine heroes in peril—and shoots away over the yeasty billows. For forty seconds the fierce struggle lasts; the bow of the boat is wetted to a height of four inches; but dauntlessness and skill conquer all difficulties, and in forty seconds and a half the unscathed Rover stands on his quarter-deck.

Sometimes when the captain is in a good humour, the Rover goes for a sail, and he takes as many as three ladies with him. This statement may be doubted, but only by those who do not know what British courage is really like. Yes, the Rover sometimes sails as much as ten miles in the course of one trip, and he may be as much as three hours away from his moorings. Moreover, I have known a good-natured skipper who allowed the roving proprietor of a yacht to take as many as six trips in the course of a single season. Observe the cheapness of this amusement, and reflect thankfully on the simplicity of taste which now distinguishes the wealthy Rovers of the South Coast. The yacht costs about two thousand pounds to begin with, and one thousand pounds per year is paid to keep her up. Thus it seems that a Rover may have six sails at the rate of one hundred and sixty-six pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence per sail! So long as the breed of Cowes Rovers exists we need have no fears concerning our naval supremacy. Indeed competent nautical men think that, if any band of enemies, no matter how ferocious they might be, happened to see a thorough-bred Cowes Rover equipped for his perilous afternoon voyage of two hundred yards, they would instantly lose heart and flee in terror. Such is the majesty of a true seaman. I hope that all my readers may respect the Rover when they see him. Remember that his dinner rarely numbers more than six courses, and he cannot always ice his champagne owing to the commotion of the elements. If such privations do not win pity from judicious readers, then, alas, I have written in vain! Those who read this will often be surrounded by strolling Rovers. Treat the reckless daring salts with respect, for they live hard and risk much.

### XXIII.

SORROW.



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I have never been disposed to be niggard of cheerfulness; for it has always seemed to me that one of the duties of a writer is to supply solace in a world where, amid all the beauty, so many things seem to go wrong. But, while I would fain banish cankered melancholy, sour ill-humour, cynicism, and petty complaining, I have never sought to disturb those who are mastered for a time by the sacred sorrow which takes possession of the greatest and purest and gentlest souls at times. There have been great men who were joyous—and they bore their part very bravely on earth; but the greatest of all have gained their strength in Sorrow's service. It matters not which of the kings amongst men we choose, we find that his kingship was only gained and kept after he had passed through the school of grief. It is a glad world for most of us—else indeed we might wish that one cataclysm would overwhelm us all; but our masters, those who teach us and guide us, have all been under the dominion of a nameless something which we can hardly call Melancholy, but which is a kind of divine sad sister to Melancholy. There is no discontent in the sorrow of the great ones; they are not querulous, and none of them ever sought to avenge their subdued grief on the persons of their fellow-creatures. The kings bear their burden with dignity; they love to see their human kindred light of heart; but they cannot be light-hearted in turn; for the burden and mystery of the world are ever with them, and their energy is all needed to help them in conquering pettiness of soul, so that by no weak example may they dishearten those who are weak. I am almost convinced that the man who composed the inscription on the emerald which is said to have reached Tiberius must have seen the Founder of our religion—or, at least, must have known some one who had seen Him. “None hath seen Him smile; but many have seen Him weep.” It is so like what we should have expected! The days of the joyous pagan gods were passing away, the shadows of tedium and of life-weariness were drooping over a world that was once filled with thoughtless merriment—and then came One who preached the Gospel of Sorrow. He preached that gospel, and a faithless world at first refused to hear Him; but the Divine depth of sorrow drew the highest of souls; and soon the world left the religion of pride and vainglory and pleasure to embrace the religion of Pity.

The sorrow of the weary King Ecclesiast has never seemed to me altogether noble; it is piercing in its insight—and I understand how youths who are coming to manhood find in the awful chapters a savage contrast to the joys of existence. Young men who have reached the strange time of discontent through which all of us pass are always profoundly affected by the Preacher; and they are too apt to pervert the most poignant of his words; but men who have really thought and suffered can never help feeling that there is a species of ingratitude in all his splendid lamentations.



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Why should the mighty king have bidden the youth to rejoice after so many awful words had been penned to show the end of all rejoicing? Every pleasure on earth the king had enjoyed, and he had drained life's chalice so far down that he tasted the bitterness of the lees. But had he not savoured joy to the full? Was there one gift showered by the lavish bounty of God which had not fallen on the chosen of fortune? We revere the intellect of the man who chastens our souls with his sombre discourse; but I could wish he had veiled his despair, and had told us of the ravishing delights which he had known. No; the Preacher is great, but his sorrow is not the highest. I give my chief reverence to the men who let their sorrow pass into central fire that blazes into deeds; I revere the men and women who bear their yoke and utter never a word of complaint; on them sorrow falls like a pure soft snow that leaves no stain.

Of late, the nations of the world have been thrilled by the deeds of one humble man who embraced Sorrow and let her claim him for the best part of his life. I cannot bear to think much of the tragedy of Damien's life—and I shall not dream of endeavouring to find excuses, or of declaring that life an essentially happy one. The good Father chose Grief and clave to her as a bride; he chose the sights and sounds of grief as his surroundings and he wrought on silently under his fearful burden of holy sorrow until the release was given. He spoke no boastful words of contentment save when he thought of the rest that was coming for him; he gallantly accepted the crudest and foulest conditions of his dreadful environment, and he uttered no craving for sympathy, no wish for personal aid. If we think of that immortal priest's choice, we understand, perhaps for the first time, what the religion of Sorrow truly means. On the lonely rock the meek, strong soul spent its forces; joy, friendly faces, laughter of sweet children, healthy and kindly companions—there were none of these. The sea moaned round with many voices, and the sky bent over the lonely disciple; the melancholy of the sea, the melancholy of the changeless sky, the monotony of silence, must all have weighed on his heart. In the daytime there were only sights whereat strong men might swoon away—pain, pain, pain all round, and every complication of horror; but the Child of Sorrow bore all. Then came the sentence of death. For ten weary years the hero had to wait in loneliness while the Destroyer slowly enfolded him in its arms. We pity the monster who dies a swift death after his life of wickedness has been forfeited; we are vexed if a criminal endures one minute of suffering; but the noble one on that sad isle watched his doom coming for ten years, and never flinched from his task during that harrowing time. It makes the heart grow chill, despite the pride we feel in our lost brother. The religion of Sorrow has indeed conquered; and Father Damien has set the seal to its triumph.



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But around us there are others who have composedly accepted sorrow as their portion. We have, it may be, felt so much joy in living, we have been so pierced through and through in every nerve and every faculty of the mind with pure rapture during our pilgrimage, that we would fain let all dwellers on earth share the blessedness that we have known. It is not to be; the gospel of pity must needs claim some of its disciples wholly—and sorrow is their portion. Perhaps under all their sadness there lurks a joy that passes all known to slighter souls—I hope so; I hope that they cannot be permitted to endure what Dante endured. In the purlieus of our cities these resigned, resolute spirits expend their forces, and their unostentatious figures, passing from home to home where poor men lie, offer a lesson to the petty souls of some whose riches and worldly powers are by no means petty. Ah, it is lovely to see those merciful sisters of the fallen or falling—good to see the men who help them! Need we pity them? They would say “No”; but we must, for they live hard. A delicate lady quietly sets to work in a filthy tenement; her white hands raise up and cleanse the foulest of the poor little infants who swarm in the slums; she calmly performs menial offices for the basest and most ungrateful of the poor—and no one who has not lived among those degraded folk can tell what ingratitude is really like. Day after day that lady toils; and the only word of thanks she receives is perhaps a whine from some woman who wishes to cajole her into bestowing some gift. These sisters of Sorrow do not need thanks any more than they need pity; they frankly recognise the baseness of ill-reared human nature, and they go on trustfully in the hope that maybe things may grow slowly better. They meet death calmly; they hide their own sorrow, and even their pity is disciplined into usefulness. The men of the good company are the same. They have resigned all the lighter joys of earth, they are calm, and they let the unutterable sadness of the world spur them on only to quiet efforts after righteousness. Think what it must be for a man to leave the warm encompassment of the cheerful day and pass composedly to a gloom which is relieved only by the inner light that shines from the soul! Were not the hearts of the heroes pure, they must grow cynical as they looked on the evil mass of roguery, idleness, foulness, and cunning that seethes around them. But they have passed the portal beyond which peace is found; and the sorrow wherewith they gaze on their hapless fellow-men is tintured neither by scorn nor weariness. If there is no reward for them, then we all of us have cause for bitter disappointment. But the forlorn hope of goodness never trouble themselves about rewards; they face the shadows of doom only as they face the squalor of their daily martyrdom. A certain philosopher said that he could not endure so sombre an existence because his nerves and sinews were frail and the pain would have mastered him; but he gladly owned that the enthusiasts had conquered his admiration and taken it for their permanent possession. The cool keen eye of the scoffer divined the strength of sorrow, and he admired the men whom he durst not imitate.



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There are others who pass through life enwrapped by the veil of a noble sorrow; and, when I see them, I am minded to wonder whether any one was ever the worse for encountering the touch of the chilly Mistress whom most children of earth dread. When I think the matter over I become convinced that no one who has once felt a noble and gentle sorrow can ever become wholly bad; and I fancy that even the bad, when once a real sorrow has pierced them, have a chance of becoming good. So in strange ways the things that seem hard to bear steadily tend to make the world better. When the bell tolls and the brown earth gapes and the form of the loved one is passed from sight for ever, it is bitter—ah, how bitter! But the chastening touch of Time takes away the bitterness, and there is left only an intense gentleness which seeks to soothe those who suffer; and the mother whose babe seemed to take her very heart away when it went into the Darkness can pity the other bereaved ones; so that her soul is exalted through its grief. The poet is thought by some to have uttered a mere aimless whim in words when he said—

“To Sorrow  
I bade good-morrow,  
And thought to leave her far away behind;  
But cheerly, cheerly,  
She loves me dearly—  
She is so constant to me and so kind.  
I would deceive her,  
And so leave her;  
But, ah, she is so constant and so kind!”

It sounds like a whim; but it is more than that to those who have been in the depths of grief; for they know that out of their affliction grew either a solemn scorn of worldly ills or a keen wish to be helpful to others.

I have no desire to utter a paradox when I say that all the world holds of best has sprung from sorrow. Shakspeare smiles and is still. I love the smiles of his wiser years; but they would never have been so calmly content, so cheering with all their inscrutable depth, had not the man been weighed down with some dark sorrow before his soul was rescued and purified. I do not care for him when he is grinning and merry. He could play the buffoon when he willed—and a very unpleasant buffoon he was in his day; but Sorrow claimed him, and he came forth purified to speak to us by Prospero’s lips. He had his struggle to compass resignation, he even seems to have felt himself degraded, and there is almost a weak complaint in that terrible sonnet, “No longer mourn for me when I am dead;” but his heart-strings held; he kept his dignity at the last, and he gave us the splendours of “The Tempest.” I have no manner of superstition about the great poet—indeed I feel sure that at one time of his life he was what we call a bad man, his self-reproaches hinting all too plainly at forms of wickedness, moral wickedness, which pass far beyond the ordinary vice which society condemns—but I am sure that he

became as good as he was serene; and I like to trace the phases of his sorrow up to the time of his triumph.



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Of late it has been the fashion to talk about Byron's theatrical sorrow. One much-advertised critic went so far as to speak of "Byron's vulgar selfishness." It might have been supposed that incontestable evidence had come before him; but a careful perusal of the documents will prove that, though Byron was as selfish as most other men during his mad misguided youth, yet, after sorrow had blanched his noble head, he cast off all that was vile in him and emerged from the fire-discipline as the most helpful and utterly unselfish of men. His last calm gentle letter to the woman who drove him out of England is simply perfect in its dignified humility; and the poorest creature that ever snarled may see from that letter that grief had turned the wayward fierce poet into a gentle and forbearing man who had suffered so much that he could not find it in his heart to inflict suffering on his worst enemy. I call the Byron of the Abbey a bad man; the Byron whose home became the home of pure charity—charity done in secret—was a good man.

Sorrow may appear repulsive and men bid her "Avaunt!" Yet out of sorrow all that is noblest and highest in poesy and art has arisen; and all that is noblest in life has been achieved by the sorrow-stricken. Joy has given us much; and those who have once known what real earthly joy means should be content to pass unrepining to the Shades; but Sorrow's gifts are priceless, and no man can appraise their worth. Even poor Carlyle's sorrow, which was oftentimes aught but noble, if all tales be true, was sufficient to endow us with the most splendid of modern books. It is strange to see how that crabbed man with the passionately-loving heart keeps harping on the beneficence of sorrow. Once he spoke of "Sorrow's fire-whips"; but usually his strain is far, far different. He cleaves to the noble and sorrowful figures that crowd his sombre galleries; and I do not know that he ever gives more than a light and careless word of praise to any but his melancholy heroes. Cromwell, Abbot Sampson, the bold Ziethen, Danton, Mirabeau, Mahomet, Burns, "the great, melancholy Johnson," and even Napoleon and Luther—all are sorrowful, all are beautiful. Peace to them, and peace to the strong soul that made them all live again for the world!

### XXIV.

#### DEATH.

The air of mystery which most of us assume when we speak about the great change that marks the bound of our mortal progress has engendered a kind of paralysing terror which makes ordinary people shudder at the notion of bodily extinction. We are glad enough to enjoy the beautiful things of life, we welcome the rapture of love, the delight of the sun, the promise of spring, the glory of strength; and yet forsooth we must needs tremble at the grand beneficent close which rounds off our earthly strivings and completes one stage in our everlasting progress. Why should we not speak as frankly of Death as we do of love



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and life? If men would only be content to let their minds play freely around all the facts that concern our entrance, our progress, our exit, then existence would be relieved from the presence of terror. The Greeks were more rational than we are; they took the joys of life with serenity and gladness, and they accepted the mighty transformation with the same serenity. On their memorial-stones there is no note of mourning. A young man calmly bids adieu to his friends and prepares to pass with dignity from their presence; a gallant horseman exults in the knowledge that he once rejoiced in life—"Great joy had I on earth, and now I that came from the earth return to the earth." Such are the carvings and inscriptions that show the wise, brave spirit of the ancients. But we, with our civilisation, behave somewhat like those Indian tribes who keep one mysterious word in their minds, and try to avoid mentioning it throughout their lives. Even in familiar conversation it is amusing to hear the desperate attempts made to paraphrase the word which should come naturally to the lips of all steadfast mortals. "If anything should happen to me," says the timid citizen, when he means, "If I should die"; and it would be possible to collect a score more of roundabout phrases with which men try to cheat themselves. It is right that we should be in love with life, for that is the supreme gift; but it is wrong to think with abhorrence of the close of life, for the same Being who gave us the thrilling rapture of consciousness bestows the boon of rest upon the temple of the soul. "He giveth His beloved sleep," and therein He proves His mighty tenderness.

Strange it is to see how inevitably men and women are drawn to think and speak of the great Terror when they are forced to muse in solitude. We flirt with melancholy; we try all kinds of dismal coquetries to avoid dwelling on our inexorable and beneficent doom; yet, if we look over the written thoughts of men, we find that more has been said about Death than even about love. The stone-cold comforter attracts the poets, and most of them, like Keats, are half in love with easeful death. The word that causes a shudder when it is spoken in a drawing-room gives a sombre and satisfying pleasure when we dwell upon it in our hours of solitude. Sometimes the poets are palpably guilty of hypocrisy, for they pretend to crave for the passage into the shades. That is unreal and unhealthy; the wise man neither longs for death nor dreads it, and the fool who begs for extinction before the Omnipotent has willed that it should come is a mere silly blasphemer. But, though the men who put the thoughts of humanity into musical words are sometimes insincere, they are more often grave and consoling. I know of two supreme expressions of dread, and one of these was written by the wisest and calmest man that ever dwelt beneath the sun. Marvellous it is to think that our most sane and contented poet should have condensed all



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the terror of our race into one long and awful sentence. Perhaps Shakspeare was stricken with momentary pity for the cowardice of his fellows, and, out of pure compassion, gave their agony a voice. That may be; at any rate, the fragment of "Measure for Measure" in which the cry of loathing and fear is uttered stands as the most striking and unforgettable saying that ever was conceived in the brain of man. Everybody knows the lines, yet we may once more touch our souls with solemnity by quoting them:

"Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod, and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts  
Imagine howling!—'tis too horrible!  
The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature is a paradise  
To what we fear of death."

There is no more to be said in that particular line of reflection; the speech is flawless in its gruesome power, and every piercing word seems to leap from a shuddering soul. The other utterance which is fit to be matched with Shakspeare's was written by Charles Lamb. "Whatsoever thwarts or puts me out of my way brings death into my mind. All partial evils, like humours, run into that capital plague-sore. I have heard some profess an indifference to life. Such hail the end of their existence as a port of refuge, and speak of the grave as of some soft arms in which they may slumber as on a pillow. Some have wooed death—but 'Out upon thee,' I say, 'thou foul, ugly phantom! I detest, abhor, execrate thee, as in no instance to be excused or tolerated, but shunned as a universal viper, to be branded, proscribed, and spoken evil of! In no way can I be brought to digest thee, thou thin, melancholy *Privation*. Those antidotes prescribed against the fear of thee are altogether frigid and insulting, like thyself."

Poor Charles's wild humour flickers over this page like lambent flame; yet he was serious at heart without a doubt, and his whirling words rouse an echo in many a breast to this day. But both Shakspeare and Lamb had their higher moments. Turn to "Cymbeline," and observe the glorious triumph of the dirge which rings like the magnificent exultation of Beethoven's Funeral March—



“Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,  
Nor the furious winter’s rages;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages;  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o’ the great—  
Thou art past the tyrant’s stroke;  
Care no more to clothe and eat—  
To thee the reed is as the oak;  
The sceptre, learning, physic, must  
All follow this, and come to dust.”



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Here in rhythmic form we have the thought of the mighty apostle—"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?" Shakspeare was too intensely human to be absolved from mortal weakness; but, in the main, he took the one view which I should be glad to see cherished by all. His words sometimes make us pause, as we pause when the violet flashes of summer lightning fleet across the lowering dome of the sky; but, in the end, he always has his words of cheer, and we gather heart from reading the strongest and most perfect writer the earth has known. Turn where we will, we find that all of our race—emperor, warrior, poet, clown, fair lady, innocent child—are given to dwelling on the same thought. It is our business to seek out those who have spoken with resignation and dauntlessness, and to leave aside all those who have only affectations of bravery or affectations of horror to give us. Here is a beautiful word:—

"The ways of Death are soothing and serene,  
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet;  
Approaching ever, soft of hands and feet,  
She beckons us, and strife and song have been.  
A summer night, descending cool and green  
And dark on daytime's dust and stress and heat,  
The ways of Death are soothing and serene,  
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.  
O glad and sorrowful, with triumphant mien  
And hopeful fancies look upon and greet  
This last of all your lovers, and to meet  
Her kiss mysterious all your spirit lean!  
The ways of Death are soothing and serene!"

Even Shakspeare hardly bettered that!

I should not like to see men begin to encourage the recklessness of the desperado, nor should I like to see women affect the brazen abandonment of the Amazon. I only care to see our fellow-creatures rise above pettiness, so that they may accept all God's ordinances with unvarying gratitude. Is it not pitiful to see a grown man trembling and waving his hand with angry disgust when the holy course of Nature is spoken of with gravity and composed resolution? I have seen a stout, strong man who had amassed enormous wealth fly into pettish rage like a spoiled child when a friend spoke to him about the final disposal of his riches. Like a silly girl, this powerful millionaire went into tremors when the inevitable was named in his ear, for he had imbibed all the cowardly conventions that tend to poison our existence. He died a hundred deaths in his time, and much of his life was passed in such misery as only cultivated poltroonery can breed. Wicked wags knew that they could frighten him at any moment; they would greet him cordially, and then suddenly assume an air of deep concern. The poor plutocrat's face changed instantly, and he would ask, "What is the matter?" The joker then made answer, "You are a little flushed. You should rest." This was enough. The truant imagination of the unhappy butt went far afield in search of terrors;



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neither food, nor wine, nor the pleasures of the theatre could tempt him, and he remained in a state of limpness until the natural buoyancy of his spirits asserted itself. What a life! How much better would it have been for this rich man had he trained himself to preserve General Gordon's composure, even if he had bought that composure at the price of his whole colossal fortune! Riches were useless to him, the sun failed to cheer him, and his end was in truth a release from one incessant torture.

Turn from this hare-hearted citizen, and think of our hero, the pride of England, the flower of the human race—Charles Gordon. With his exquisite simplicity, Gordon confesses in one of his letters that he used to feel frightened when he went under fire, for the superstitious dread of death had been grafted on his mind when he was young. But he learned the fear of God and lost all other fear; he accustomed himself to the idea of parting with the world and its hopes and labours, and in all the long series of letters which he sent home from the Soudan during his period of rule we find him constantly speaking quietly, joyously about the event which carries horror to the hearts of weak men—"My Master will lay me aside and use some other instrument when I have fulfilled His purpose. I have no fear of death, for I know I shall exchange much weariness for perfect peace." So spoke the hero, the just and faithful Knight of God. He was simple, with the simplicity of a flawless diamond; he was reverent, he was faithful even to the end, and he was incredibly dauntless. Why? Because he had faced the last great problem with all the force of his noble manhood, and the thought of his translation to another world woke in his gallant soul images of beauty and holiness. Why should the meanest and most unlearned of us all not strive to follow in the footsteps of the hero? Millions on millions have passed away, and they now know all things; the cessation of human life is as common and natural as the drawing of our breath; why then should we invest a natural, blessed, beautiful event with murky lines of wrath and dread? The pitiful wretch who flaunts his braggart defiance before the eyes of men and shrieks his feeble contempt of the inevitable is worthy only of our quiet scorn; but the grateful soul that bows humbly to the stroke of fate and accepts death as thankfully as life is in all ways worthy of admiration and vivid respect. We are prone to talk of our "rights," and some of us have a very exalted idea of the range which those precious "rights" should cover. One of our poets goes so far as to inquire in an amiable way, "What have we done to thee, O Death?" He insinuates that Death is very unkind to ply the abhorred shears over such nice, harmless creatures as we are. Let us, for manhood's sake, have done with puerility; let us recognise that our "rights" have no existence, and that we must perforce accept the burdens of life, labour, and death that are laid upon us.



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We can do no good by nourishing fears, by encouraging silly conventionalities, by shirking the bald facts of life; and we should gently, joyfully, trustfully look our fate in the face and fear nothing. Life will never be the joyous pilgrimage that it ought to be until men have learned to crush their pride, their doubts, their terrors, and have also learned to regard the beautiful sleep as a holy and fitting reward only to be rightly enjoyed by those who live purely, righteously, hopefully in the sight of God and man.

### XXV.

#### JOURNALISM.

When the mystic midnight passes, the bustle of Fleet Street slackens; but on each side of the thoroughfare hundreds of workers with hand and brain are toiling with eager intensity. In tall buildings here and there the lights glitter on every floor, and throw their long shafts through the gloom; not much activity is plainly visible, and yet somehow the merest novice feels that there is a throb in the air, and that some mysterious forces are working around him. Hurrying messengers dash by, stray cabs rush along with a low rumble and sharp clash of hoofs. But it is not in the street that the minds and bodies of men are obviously in action; go inside one of the mighty palatial offices, and you find yourself in the midst of such a hive of marvellous industry as the world has never seen before. On one journal as many as four hundred and fifty or five hundred men are all labouring for dear life; every one is at high pressure, from the silent leader-writer to the fussy swift-footed messenger. In that one building is concentrated a great estate, which yields a revenue that exceeds that of some principalities; it is a large nerve-centre, and myriads of fibres connect it with every part of the globe; or, say, it is like some miraculous eye, which sees in all directions and is indifferent to distance. Go into one quiet, soft-carpeted room, and certain small glittering machines flash in the bright light. "Click, click—click, click!"—long strips of tape are softly unwound and fall in slack twisted piles. One of those machines is printing off a long letter from Berlin, another is registering news from Vienna, and by a third news from Paris comes as easily and rapidly as from Shoreditch; subdued men take the tapes, expand and make fluent the curt, halting phrases of the foreign correspondents, and pass the messages swiftly away to the printers. From America, Australia, India, China, the items of news pour in, and are scrutinised by severe sub-editors; and those experts calculate to a fraction of an inch what space can be judiciously spared for each item. If Parliament is sitting, the relays of messengers arrive with batches of manuscript; and, when an important debate is proceeding, the steady influx of hundreds of scribbled sheets is enormous. A four hours' speech from such an orator as Mr. Gladstone or Mr. Chamberlain contains, say, thirty



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thousand words. Imagine the area of paper covered by the reporters! But such a speech would rarely come in late at night, and the men can usually handle an important oration by an eminent speaker in a way that is leisurely by comparison. The slips are distributed with lightning rapidity; each man puts his little batch into type, the fragments are placed in their queer frame, and presently the readers are poring over the long, damp, and odorous proof-sheets. There is no very great hurry in the early part of the evening; but, as the small hours wear away, the strain is feverish in its poignancy. There is no noise, no confusion; each man knows his office, and fulfils it deftly. But such great issues are involved, that the nervousness of managers, printers, sub-editors—every one—may easily be understood. Suppose that a very important division is to be taken in Parliament; the minutes roll by, and the news is still delayed. Some kind of comment must be made on the result of the debate, and an able, swift writer scrawls off his column of phrases with furious speed. Then that article must be put into type; a model of the type must be taken on a sheet of papier-mache, the melted metal must be poured into the paper mould, the resulting curved block must be clamped on to a cylinder of the waiting machine, and all this must be done with strict regard to the value of seconds. A delay of half a minute might prevent the manager from sending his piles of journals away by the early train, and that would be a calamity too fearful to be dreamed of. In one great newspaper-office ten machines are all set going together, and an eleventh is kept ready in case of accident. The ten whizzing cylinders print off the papers, and an impression of a quarter of a million is soon thrown out, folded, and piled ready for distribution. But imagine what a loss of one minute means! Truly the agitation of the officials at an awkward pinch is singularly excusable, and many a hard word is levelled at pertinacious talkers who insist on thrusting themselves upon the House at a time when the country is waiting with wild eagerness for momentous tidings. The long line of carts waits in the street, the speedy ponies rattle off, and soon the immense building is all but still. Comfortable people who have their journal punctually handed in at a convenient hour in the morning are apt to think lightly of the raging effort, the inconceivably complicated organisation, the colossal expense needed to produce that sheet which is flung away at the close of each day. A blunder of the most trivial kind might throw everything out of gear; but stern discipline and ubiquitous precaution render the blunder almost an impossibility. Sometimes you may observe in a paper like the *Times* one column which bristles with typographical errors. All the slips are clustered in one place, and the reason is that the few minutes necessary for proper revision could not be spared. Good workmen are set on at the last

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moment, and an attempt is made to set up the final scraps of matter with as few errors as possible; but little mistakes will creep in, and people who do not know the startling exigencies of the printer's trade are apt to express scornful wonder. Very comic have been the errors made during the recent furious and prolonged debates, for the frantic conflicts in the House were extended far into the small hours. One excited orator, in closing a debate, dropped into poetry, and remarked that a certain catastrophe came "like a bolt from the blue"; a daily journal of vast circulation described the event as coming "like a bolt from the flue"—which was a very sad instance of bathos. The amazing thing is that such blunders should be so rare as to be memorable.

What a strange population who toil thus at night for our pleasure and instruction, and who reverse the order of ordinary people's lives! They are worth knowing, these swift, dexterous, laborious people. First of all comes the great personage—the editor. In old days simple persons imagined the conductor of the *Times* perched upon a majestic throne, whence he hurled his bolts in the most light-hearted manner. We know better now; yet it must be owned that the editor of a great journal is a very important personage indeed. The true editor is born to his function; if he has not the gift, no amount of drilling will ever make him efficient. Many of the outside public still picture the editor as wielding his pen valiantly, and stabbing enemies or heartening friends with his own hands. As a matter of fact, the editor's function is not to write; the best of the profession never touch a pen, excepting to write a brief note of instruction or to send a private letter. The editor is the brain of the journal; and, in the case of a daily paper, his business is not so much to instruct the public as to find out what the public want to say, and say it for them in the clearest and most forcible way possible. Imagine a general commanding amid the din of a great battle. He must remember the number of his forces, the exact disposition of every battalion, the peculiar capabilities of his principal subordinates, and he must also note every yard of the ground. He hears that a battalion has been repulsed with heavy slaughter at a point one mile away, and the officer in command cannot repeat his assault without reinforcements. He must instantly decide as to whether the foiled battalion is merely to hold its ground or to advance once more. Orderlies reach him from all points of the compass; he must note where the enemy's fire slackens or gains power; he must be ready to use the field-telegraph with unhesitating decision, for a minute's hesitation may lose the battle and ruin his force. In short, the general plays a vast game which makes the complications of chess seem simple. The editor, in his peaceful way, has to perform daily a mental feat almost equal in complexity to that of the warrior. Public



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opinion usually has strong general tendencies; but there are hundreds of cross-currents, and the editor must allow for all. Suppose that a public agitation is begun, and that a great national movement seems to be in progress; then the editor must be able to tell instinctively how far the movement is likely to be strong and lasting. If he errs seriously, and regards an agitation as trivial which is really momentous, then his journal receives a blow which may cripple its influence during months. One great paper was ruined some twenty years ago by a blunder, and about one hundred thousand pounds were deliberately thrown away through obstinate folly. The perfect editor, like the great general, seizes every clue that can guide him, and makes his final movement with alert decision. No wonder that the work of editing wears men out early. The great *Times* editor, Mr. Delane, went about much in society; he always appeared to be calm, untroubled, inscrutable, though the factions were warring fiercely and bitterness had reached its height. He scarcely ever missed his mark; and, when he strolled into his office late in the evening, his plan was ready for the morrow's battle. At five the next morning his well-known figure, wrapped in the queer long coat, was to be seen coming from the square; he might have destroyed a government, or altered a war policy, or ruined a statesman—all was one to him; and he went away ready to lay his plans for the next day's conflict. Delane's power at one time was almost incalculable, and he gained it by unerringly finding out exactly what England wanted. England might be wrong or right—that was none of Delane's business; he cared only to discover what his country wished for from day to day. An amazing function is that of an editor.

Then we have the leader-writer. The British public have decided that their newspaper shall furnish them daily with three or four little addresses on various topics of current interest; and these grave or gay sermons are composed by practised hands who must be ready to write on almost any subject under the sun at a minute's notice. In a certain class of old-fashioned literature the newspaper-writer is represented as a careless, dissipated Bohemian, who lived with racketsy inconsequence. That tribe of writers has long vanished from the face of the earth. The last of the sort that I remember was a miserable old man who haunted the British Museum. No one knew where he lived; but his work, such as it was, usually went in with punctuality, and he drank the proceeds. He died in a stall of a low public-house, and was buried by the parish. No one but his editor and one or two cronies knew his real name, and he appeared to be utterly friendless. But the modern leader-writer must beware of strong liquors. Usually he is a keen, reposeful man who has his brain cool at all hours. The immense drinking-bouts of old times could never be indulged in now; and indeed, if a journalist once begins to take stimulants as stimulants,



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his end is not far off. Let us mention the kind of feats which must be performed. A powerful minister makes a speech after eleven o'clock at night; the leader-writer receives proof-sheets; he must grasp the whole scope of the speech in a flash, and then proceed with the mere mechanical work of writing. Twelve hundred words will take about an hour and twenty minutes to set down, and then the MS. must be rushed piece by piece to the composing-room. Again, supposing that news of some great disaster arrives late. An article must be swiftly done, and the writer must have a theory ready that will hold water. Work like this needs a quick wit, a copious vocabulary, and an absolutely steady hand. Moreover, the leader-writer must unhappily be invariably ready to write "nothings" so that they may look like "somethings." News is scarce, foreign nations show a culpable lack of desire to kill each other, no moving accident has occurred—and the paper must be filled. Then the leader-writer must take some trivial subject and weave round it a web of graceful and amusing phrases. One brilliant scholar once wrote a most charming and learned article about pigs; and I have seen a column of grave nonsense spun out on the subject of an unhappy cat which fixed its head in a salmon-tin!

This hurried writing on trifling matters brings on a certain looseness of style and thought; but the public will have it, and the demand creates the supply of a flimsy, pleasant, literary article. The best leaders are now written by fine scholars. In travelling over the country I have been amused by simple people who imagined that the articles in a journal were produced by one secret and utterly mysterious being. These good folk are mightily surprised on finding that the admired leaders are done by a troop of men who are not exactly commonplace, but who are not much wiser or better than their fellows.

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