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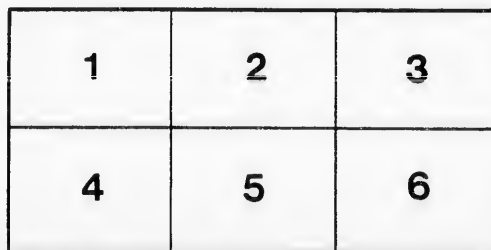
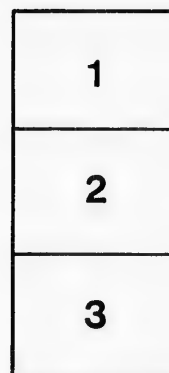
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# English Men of Letters

EDITED BY  
JOHN MORLEY

VIII.

STERNE. BY H. D. TRAILL  
SWIFT. BY LESLIE STEPHEN  
HUME. BY T. H. HUXLEY

**FACULTE DES ARTS  
COLLEGE UNIVERSITAIRE  
SHERBROOKE**

GEORGE N. MORANG & COMPANY  
(Limited)

TORONTO, CANADA

1900

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS.

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY.

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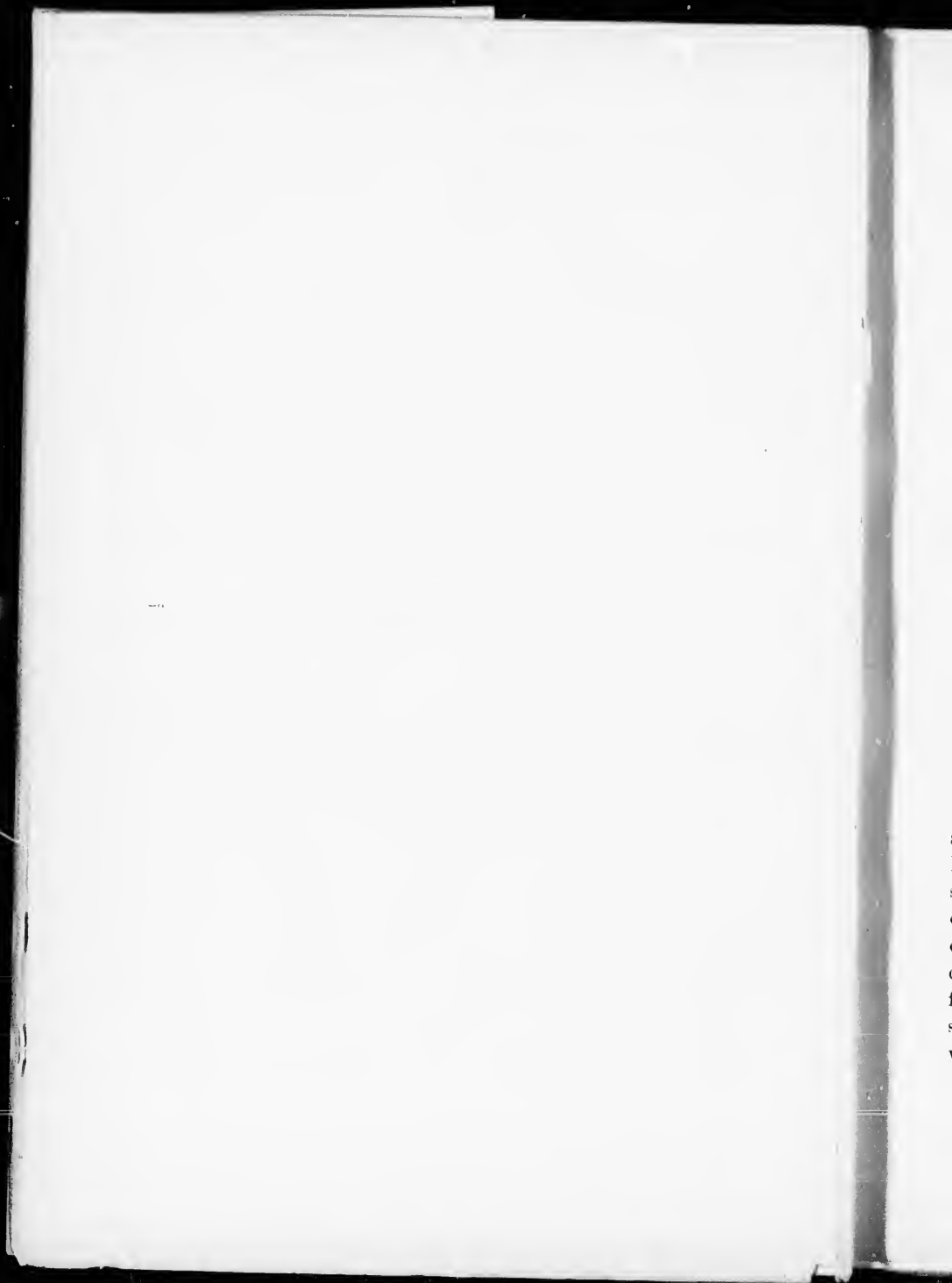
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S T E R N E

BY

H. D. TRAILL





## PREFATORY NOTE.

THE materials for a biography of Sterne are by no means abundant. Of the earlier years of his life the only existing record is that preserved in the brief autobiographical memoir which, a few months before his death, he composed, in the usual quaint *staccato* style of his familiar correspondence, for the benefit of his daughter. Of his childhood; of his school-days; of his life at Cambridge, and in his Yorkshire vicarage; of his whole history, in fact, up to the age of forty-six, we know nothing more than he has there jotted down. He attained that age in the year 1759; and at this date begins that series of his *Letters*, from which, for those who have the patience to sort them out of the chronological confusion in which his daughter and editress involved them, there is, no doubt, a good deal to be learnt. These letters, however, which extend down to 1768, the year of the writer's death, contain pretty nearly all the contemporary material that we have to depend on. Freely as Sterne mixed in the best literary society, there is singularly little to be gathered about him, even in the way of chance allusion and anecdote, from the memoirs and *ana* of his time. Of the many friends who would have been competent to write his biography while the facts were yet fresh, but one, John Wilkes, ever entertained—if he did seriously entertain—the idea of performing this pious work; and he, in spite of the entreaties of Sterne's widow

and daughter, then in straitened circumstances, left unredeemed his promise to do so. The brief memoir by Sir Walter Scott, which is prefixed to many popular editions of *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*, sets out the so-called autobiography in full, but for the rest is mainly critical; Thackeray's well-known lecture-essay is almost wholly so; and nothing, worthy to be dignified by the name of a *Life of Sterne*, seems ever to have been published, until the appearance of Mr. Percy Fitzgerald's two stout volumes, under this title, some eighteen years ago. Of this work it is hardly too much to say that it contains (no doubt with the admixture of a good deal of superfluous matter) nearly all the information as to the facts of Sterne's life that is now ever likely to be recovered. The evidence for certain of its statements of fact is not as thoroughly sifted as it might have been; and with some of its criticism I, at least, am unable to agree. But no one interested in the subject of this memoir can be insensible of his obligations to Mr. Fitzgerald for the fruitful diligence with which he has laboured in a too long neglected field.

H. D. T.

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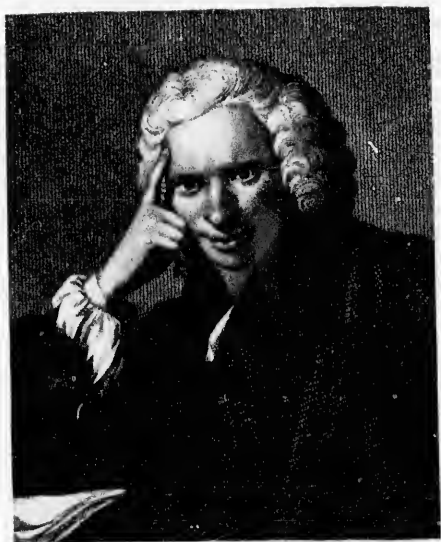
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# STERNE.

## CHAPTER I.

BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND EARLY YEARS.

(1713-1724.)

TOWARDS the close of the month of November, 1713, one of the last of the English regiments which had been detained in Flanders to supervise the execution of the treaty of Utrecht arrived at Clonmel from Dunkirk. The day after its arrival the regiment was disbanded; and yet a few days later, on the 24th of the month, the wife of one of its subalterns gave birth to a son. The child who thus early displayed the perversity of his humour by so inopportune an appearance was LAURENCE STERNE. "My birthday," he says, in the slipshod, loosely-strung notes by which he has been somewhat grandiloquently said to have "anticipated the labours" of the biographer—"my birthday was ominous to my poor father, who was the day after our arrival, with many other brave officers, broke and sent adrift into the wide world with a wife and two children."

Roger Sterne, however, now late ensign of the 34th, or Chudleigh's regiment of foot, was after all in less evil case than were many, probably, of his comrades. He had kins-



men to whom he could look for, at any rate, temporary assistance, and his mother was a wealthy widow. The Sternes, originally of a Suffolk stock, had passed from that county to Nottinghamshire, and thence into Yorkshire, and were at this time a family of position and substance in the last-named county. Roger's grandfather had been Archbishop of York, and a man of more note, if only through the accident of the times upon which he fell, than most of the incumbents of that see. He had played an exceptionally energetic part even for a Cavalier prelate in the great political struggle of the seventeenth century, and had suffered with fortitude and dignity in the royal cause. He had, moreover, a further claim to distinction in having been treated with common gratitude at the Restoration by the son of the monarch whom he had served. As Master of Jesus College, Cambridge, he had "been active in sending the University plate to his Majesty," and for this offence he was seized by Cromwell and carried in military custody to London, whence, after undergoing imprisonment in various gaols, and experiencing other forms of hardship, he was at length permitted to retire to an obscure retreat in the country, there to commune with himself until that tyranny should be overpast. On the return of the exiled Stuarts Dr. Sterne was made Bishop of Carlisle, and a few years later was translated to the see of York. He lived to the age of eighty-six, and so far justified Burnet's accusation against him of "minding chiefly enriching himself," that he seems to have divided no fewer than four landed estates among his children. One of these, Simon Sterne, a younger son of the Archbishop, himself married an heiress, the daughter of Sir Roger Jaques of Elvington; and Roger, the father of Laurence Sterne, was the seventh and youngest of the issue of this marriage. At the time when

the double misfortune above recorded befell him at the hands of Lucina and the War Office, his father had been some years dead; but Simon Sterne's widow was still mistress of the property which she had brought with her at her marriage, and to Elvington, accordingly, "as soon," writes Sterne, "as I was able to be carried," the compulsorily retired ensign betook himself with his wife and his two children. He was not, however, compelled to remain long dependent on his mother. The ways of the military authorities were as inscrutable to the army of that day as they are in our day to our own. Before a year had passed the regiment was ordered to be re-established, and "our household decamped with bag and baggage for Dublin." This was in the autumn of 1714, and from that time onward, for some eleven years, the movements and fortunes of the Sterne family, as detailed in the narrative of its most famous member, form a history in which the ludicrous struggles strangely with the pathetic.

A husband, condemned to be the Ulysses-like plaything of adverse gods at the War Office; an indefatigably prolific wife; a succession of weak and ailing children; misfortune in the seasons of journeying; misfortune in the moods of the weather by sea and land—under all this combination of hostile chances and conditions was the struggle to be carried on. The little household was perpetually "on the move"—a little household which was always becoming and never remaining bigger—continually increased by births, only to be again reduced by deaths—until the contest between the deadly hardships of travel and the fatal feendity of Mrs. Sterne was brought by events to a natural close. Almost might the unfortunate lady have exclaimed, *Quæ regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?* She passes from Ireland to England, and from

England to Ireland, from inland garrison to sea-port town and back again, incessantly bearing and incessantly burying children—until even her son in his narrative begins to speak of losing one infant at this place, and “leaving another behind” on that journey, almost as if they were so many overlooked or misdirected articles of luggage. The tragic side of the history, however, overshadows the grotesque. When we think how hard a business was travel even under the most favourable conditions in those days, and how serious even in our own times, when travel is easy, are the discomforts of the women and children of a regiment on the march—we may well pity these unresting followers of the drum. As to Mrs. Sterne herself, she seems to have been a woman of a pretty tough fibre, and she came moreover of a campaigning stock. Her father was a “noted suttler” of the name of Nuttle, and her first husband—for she was a widow when Roger Sterne married her—had been a soldier also. She had, therefore, served some years’ apprenticeship to the military life before these wanderings began; and she herself was destined to live to a good old age. But somehow or other she failed to endow her offspring with her own robust constitution and powers of endurance. “My father’s children were,” as Laurence Sterne grimly puts it, “not made to last long;” but one cannot help suspecting that it was the hardships of those early years which carried them off in their infancy with such painful regularity and despatch, and that it was to the same cause that their surviving brother owed the beginnings of that fatal malady by which his own life was cut short.

The diary of their travels—for the early part of Sterne’s memoirs amounts to scarcely more—is the more effective for its very brevity and abruptness. Save for one interval

of somewhat longer sojourn than usual at Dublin, the reader has throughout it all the feeling of the traveller who never finds time to unpack his portmanteau. On the enrolment of the regiment in 1714, "our household," says the narrative, "decamped from York with bag and baggage for Dublin. Within a month my father left us, being ordered to Exeter; where, in a sad winter, my mother and her two children followed him, travelling from Liverpool, by land, to Plymouth." At Plymouth Mrs. Sterne gave birth to a son, christened Joram; and, "in twelve months' time we were all sent back to Dublin. My mother," with her three children, "took ship at Bristol for Ireland, and had a narrow escape from being cast away by a leak springing up in the vessel. At length, after many perils and struggles, we got to Dublin." Here intervenes the short breathing-space, of which mention has been made—an interval employed by Roger Sterne in "spending a great deal of money" on a "large house," which he hired and furnished; and then "in the year one thousand seven hundred and nineteen, all unhinged again." The regiment had been ordered off to the Isle of Wight, thence to embark for Spain, on "the Vigo Expedition," and "we," who accompanied it, "were driven into Milford Haven, but afterwards landed at Bristol, and thence by land to Plymouth again, and to the Isle of Wight;" losing on this expedition "poor Joram, a pretty boy, who died of the small-pox." In the Isle of Wight, Mrs. Sterne and her family remained till the Vigo Expedition returned home; and during her stay there "poor Joram's loss was supplied by the birth of a girl, Anne," a "pretty blossom," but destined to fall "at the age of three years." On the return of the regiment to Wicklow, Roger Sterne again sent to collect his family around him. "We embarked for Dublin, and

had all been cast away by a most violent storm; but, through the intercession of my mother, the captain was prevailed upon to turn back into Wales, where we stayed a month, and at length got into Dublin, and travelled by land to Wicklow, where my father had, for some weeks, given us over for lost." Here a year passed, and another child, Devijeher—so called after the colonel of the regiment—was born. "From thence we decamped to stay half a year with Mr. Fetherston, a clergyman, about seven miles from Wicklow, who, being a relative of my mother's, invited us to his parsonage at Animo.<sup>1</sup> From thence, again, "we followed the regiment to Dublin," where again "we lay in the barraeks a year." In 1722 the regiment was ordered to Carrickfergus. "We all decamped, but got no further than Drogheda; thence ordered to Mullingar, forty miles west, where, by Providence, we stumbled upon a kind relation, a collateral descendant from Archbishop Sterne, who took us all to his castle, and kindly entertained us for a year." Thence, by "a most rueful journey," to Carrickfergus, where "we arrived in six or seven

<sup>1</sup> "It was in this parish," says Sterne, "that I had that wonderful escape in falling through a mill race while the mill was going, and being taken up unhurt; the story is incredible, but known to all that part of Ireland, where hundreds of the common people flocked to see me." More incredible still does it seem that Thoresby should relate the occurrence of an accident of precisely the same kind to Sterne's great-grandfather, the Archbishop. "Playing near a mill, he fell within a claw; there was but one board or bucket wanting in the whole wheel, but a gracious Providence so ordered it that the void place came down at that moment, else he had been crushed to death; but was reserved to be a grand benefactor afterwards." (Thoresby, ii. 15.) But what will probably strike the reader as more extraordinary even than this coincidence is that Sterne should have been either unaware of it, or should have omitted mention of it in the above passage.

days." Here, at the age of three, little Devijeher obtained a happy release from his name; and "another child, Susan, was sent to fill his place, who also left us behind in this weary journey." In the "autumn of this year, or the spring of the next"—Sterne's memory failing in exactitude at the very point where we should have expected it to be most precise—"my father obtained permission of his colonel to fix me at school;" and henceforth the boy's share in the family wanderings was at an end. But his father had yet to be ordered from Carriekfergus to Londonderry, where at last a permanent child, Catherine, was born; and thence to Gibraltar, to take part in the Defence of that famous Rock, where the much-enduring campaigner was run through the body in a duel, "about a goose" (a thoroughly Shandian catastrophe); and thence to Jamaica, where, "with a constitution impaired" by the sword-thrust earned in his anserine quarrel, he was defeated in a more deadly duel with the "country fever," and died. "His malady," writes his son, with a touch of feeling struggling through his dislocated grammar, "took away his senses first, and made a child of him; and then in a month or two walking about continually without complaining, till the moment he sat down in an arm-chair and breathed his last."

There is, as has been observed, a certain mixture of the comic and the pathetic in the life-history of this obscure father of a famous son. His life was clearly not a fortunate one, so far as external circumstances go; but its misfortunes had no sort of consoling dignity about them. Roger Sterne's lot in the world was not so much an unhappy as an uncomfortable one; and discomfort earns little sympathy, and absolutely no admiration, for its sufferers. He somehow reminds us of one of those Irish heroes

—good-natured, peppery, debt-loaded, light-hearted, shiftless—whose fortunes we follow with mirthful and half-contemptuous sympathy in the pages of Thackeray. He was obviously a typical specimen of that class of men who are destitute alike of the virtues and failings of the “respectable” and successful; whom many people love and no one respects; whom everybody pities in their struggles and difficulties, but whom few pity without a smile.

It is evident, however, that he succeeded in winning the affection of one who had not too much affection of the deeper kind to spare for any one. The figure of Roger Sterne alone stands out with any clearness by the side of the ceaselessly flitting mother and phantasmal children of Laurence Sterne's Memoir; and it is touched in with strokes so vivid and characteristic that critics have been tempted to find in it the original of the most famous portrait in the Shandy gallery. “My father,” says Sterne, “was a little, smart man, active to the last degree in all exercises, most patient of fatigue and disappointments, of which it pleased God to give him full measure. He was, in his temper, somewhat rapid and hasty, but of a kindly, sweet disposition, void of all design, and so innocent in his own intentions, that he suspected no one; so that you might have cheated him ten times a day, if nine had not been sufficient for your purpose.” This is a captivating little picture; and it no doubt presents traits which may have impressed themselves early and deeply on the imagination which was afterwards to give birth to “My Uncle Toby.” The simplicity of nature and the “kindly, sweet disposition” are common to both the ensign of real life and to the immortal Captain Shandy of fiction; but the criticism which professes to find traces of Roger Sterne's “rapid and hasty temper” in my Uncle Toby is compelled to strain

itself considerably. And, on the whole, there seems no reason to believe that Sterne borrowed more from the character of his father than any writer must necessarily, and perhaps unconsciously, borrow from his observation of the moral and mental qualities of those with whom he has come into most frequent contact.

That Laurence Sterne passed the first eleven years of his life with such an exemplar of these simple virtues of kindness, guilelessness, and courage ever before him, is perhaps the best that can be said for the lot in which his early days were cast. In almost all other respects there could hardly have been—for a quick-witted, precocious, imitative boy—a worse bringing-up. No one, I should imagine, ever more needed discipline in his youth than Sterne; and the camp is a place of discipline for the soldier only. To all others whom necessity attaches to it, and to the young especially, it is rather a school of license and irregularity. It is fair to remember these disadvantages of Sterne's early training, in judging of the many defects as a man, and laxities as a writer, which marked his later life; though, on the other hand, there is no denying the reality and value of some of the countervailing advantages which came to him from his boyish surroundings. The conception of my Uncle Toby need not have been taken whole from Roger Sterne, or from any one actual captain of a marching regiment; but the constant sight of, and converse with, many captains and many corporals may undoubtedly have contributed much to the vigour and vitality of Toby Shandy and Corporal Trim. So far as the externals of portraiture were concerned, there can be no doubt that his art benefited much from his early military life. His soldiers have the true stamp of the soldier about them in air and language; and when his captain and



corporal fight their Flemish battles over again we are thoroughly conscious that we are listening, under the dramatic form, to one who must himself have heard many a chapter of the same splendid story from the lips of the very men who had helped to break the pride of the Grand Monarque under Marlborough and Eugene.

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## CHAPTER II.

SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY.—HALIFAX AND CAMBRIDGE.

(1723-1738.)

It was not—as we have seen from the Memoir—till the autumn of 1723, “or the spring of the following year,” that Roger Sterne obtained leave of his colonel to “fix” his son at school; and this would bring Laurence to the tolerably advanced age of ten before beginning his education in any systematic way. He records, under date of 1721, that “in this year I learned to write, &c.,” but it is not probable that the “&c.”—that indolent symbol of which Sterne makes such irritating use in all his familiar writing—covers, in this case, any wide extent of educational advance. The boy, most likely, could just read and write, and no more, at the time when he was fixed at school, “near Halifax, with an able master:” a judicious selection, no doubt, both of place as well as teacher. Mr. Fitzgerald, to whose researches we owe as much light as is ever likely to be thrown upon this obscure and probably not very interesting period of Sterne’s life, has pointed out that Richard Sterne, eldest son of the late Simon Sterne, and uncle, therefore, of Laurence, was one of the governors of Halifax Grammar School, and that he may have used his interest to obtain his nephew’s admission to the foundation as the grandson of a Halifax man, and so, constructively, a child of the parish. But, be this as it

may, it is more than probable that from the time when he was sent to Halifax School the whole care and cost of the boy's education was borne by his Yorkshire relatives. The Memoir says that, "by God's care of me, my cousin Sterne, of Elvington, became a father to me, and sent me to the University, &c., &c.;" and it is to be inferred from this that the benevolent guardianship of Sterne's uncle Richard (who died in 1732, the year before Laurence was admitted of Jesus College, Cambridge) must have been taken up by his son. Of his school course—though it lasted for over seven years—the autobiographer has little to say; nothing, indeed, except that he "cannot omit mentioning" that anecdote with which everybody, I suppose, who has ever come across the briefest notice of Sterne's life is familiar. The schoolmaster "had the ceiling of the schoolroom new-whitewashed, and the ladder remained there. I, one unlucky day, mounted it, and wrote with a brush, in large capital letters, LAU. STERNE, for which the usher severely whipped me. My master was very much hurt at this, and said before me that never should that name be effaced, for I was a boy of genius, and he was sure I should come to preferment. This expression made me forget the blows I had received." It is hardly to be supposed, of course, that this story is pure romance; but it is difficult, on the other hand, to believe that the incident has been related by Sterne exactly as it happened. That the recorded prediction may have been made in jest—or even in earnest (for penetrating teachers have these prophetic moments sometimes)—is, of course, possible; but that Sterne's master was "very much hurt" at the boy's having been justly punished for an act of wanton mischief, or that he recognized it as the natural privilege of nascent genius to deface newly-whitewashed ceilings,

must have been a delusion of the humourist's later years. The extreme fatuity which it would compel us to attribute to the schoolmaster seems inconsistent with the power of detecting intellectual capacity in any one else. On the whole, one inclines to suspect that the remark belonged to that order of half sardonic, half kindly jest which a certain sort of pedagogue sometimes throws off, for the consolation of a recently-eared boy; and that Sterne's vanity, either then or afterwards (for it remained juvenile all his life), translated it into a serious prophecy. In itself, however, the urelin's freak was only too unhappily characteristic of the man. The trick of befouling what was clean (and because it was clean) clung to him most tenaciously all his days; and many a fair white surface—of humour, of fancy, or of sentiment—was to be disfigured by him in after-years with stains and splotches in which we can all too plainly decipher the literary signature of Laurence Sterne.

At Halifax School the boy, as has been said, remained for about eight years; that is, until he was nearly nineteen, and for some months after his father's death at Port Antonio, which occurred in March, 1731. "In the year '32," says the Memoir, "my cousin sent me to the University, where I stayed some time." In the course of his first year he read for and obtained a sizarship, to which the college records show that he was duly admitted on the 6th of July, 1733. The selection of Jesus College was a natural one: Sterne's great-grandfather, the afterwards Archbishop, had been its Master, and had founded scholarships there, to one of which the young sizar was, a year after his admission, elected. No inference can, of course, be drawn from this as to Sterne's proficiency, or even industry, in his academical studies: it is scarcely more than a testimony to the

fact of decent and regular behaviour. He was *bene natus*, in the sense of being related to the right man, the founder; and in those days he need be only very *modicè doctus* indeed in order to qualify himself for admission to the enjoyment of his kinsman's benefactions. Still he must have been orderly and well-conducted in his ways; and this he would also seem to have been, from the fact of his having passed through his University course without any apparent break or hitch, and having been admitted to his Bachelor's degree after no more than the normal period of residence. The only remark which, in the Memoir, he vouchsafes to bestow upon his academical career is, that "'twas there that I commenced a friendship with Mr. H——, which has been lasting on both sides;" and it may, perhaps, be said that this *was*, from one point of view, the most important event of his Cambridge life. For Mr. H—— was John Hall, afterwards John Hall Stevenson, the "Eugenius" of *Tristram Shandy*, the master of Skelton Castle, at which Sterne was, throughout life, to be a frequent and most familiar visitor; and, unfortunately, also a person whose later reputation, both as a man and a writer, became such as seriously to compromise the not very robust respectability of his clerical comrade. Sterne and Hall were distant cousins, and it may have been the tie of consanguinity which first drew them together. But there was evidently a thorough congeniality of the most unlucky sort between them; and from their first meeting, as undergraduates at Jesus, until the premature death of the elder, they continued to supply each other's minds with precisely that sort of occupation and stimulus of which each by the grace of nature stood least in need. That their close intimacy was ill-calculated to raise Sterne's reputation in later years may be inferred from the fact that Hall Stevenson afterwards

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obtained literary notoriety by the publication of *Crazy Tales*, a collection of comic but extremely broad ballads, in which his clerical friend was quite unjustly suspected of having had a hand. Mr. Hall was also reported, whether truly or falsely, to have been a member of Wilkes's famous confraternity of Medmenham Abbey; and from this it was an easy step for gossip to advance to the assertion that the Rev. Mr. Sterne had himself been admitted to that unholy order.

Among acquaintances which the young sizar of Jesus might have more profitably made at Cambridge, but did not, was that of a student destined, like himself, to leave behind him a name famous in English letters. Gray, born three years later than Sterne, had entered a year after him at Cambridge as a pensioner of Peterhouse, and the two students went through their terms together, though the poet at the time took no degree. There was probably little enough in common between the shy, fastidious, slightly effeminate pensioner of Peterhouse, and a scholar of Jesus, whose chief friend and comrade was a man like Hall; and no close intimacy between the two men, if they had come across each other, would have been very likely to arise. But it does not appear that they could have ever met or heard of each other, for Gray writes of Sterne, after *Tristram Shandy* had made him famous, in terms which clearly show that he did not recall his fellow-undergraduate.

In January, 1736, Sterne took his B.A. degree, and quitted Cambridge for York, where another of his father's brothers now makes his appearance as his patron. Dr. Jacques Sterne was the second son of Simon Sterne, of Elvington, and a man apparently of more marked and vigorous character than any of his brothers. What induced him now to take notice of the nephew, whom in boyhood

and early youth he had left to the unshared guardianship of his brother, and brother's son, does not appear; but the personal history of this energetic pluralist—Prebendary of Durham, Archdeacon of Cleveland, Canon Residentiary, Precentor, Prebendary, and Archdeacon of York, Rector of Rise, and Rector of Hornsey-cum-Riston—suggests the surmise that he detected qualities in the young Cambridge graduate which would make him useful. For Dr. Sterne was a typical specimen of the Churchman-politician, in days when both components of the compound word meant a good deal more than they do now. The Archdeacon was a devoted Whig, a Hanoverian to the backbone; and he held it his duty to support the Protestant succession, not only by the spiritual but by the secular arm. He was a great electioneerer, as befitted times when the claims of two rival dynasties virtually met upon the hustings, and he took a prominent part in the great Yorkshire contest of the year 1734. His most vigorous display of energy, however, was made, as was natural, in "the '45." The Whig Archdeacon, not then Archdeacon of the East Riding, nor as yet quite buried under the mass of preferments which he afterwards accumulated, seems to have thought that this indeed was the crisis of his fortunes, and that, unless he was prepared to die a mere prebendary, canon, and rector of one or two benefices, now was the time to strike a blow for his advancement in the Church. His bustling activity at this trying time was indeed portentous, and at last took the form of arresting the unfortunate Dr. Burton (the original of Dr. Slop), on suspicion of holding communication with the invading army of the Pretender, then on its march southward from Edinburgh. The suspect, who was wholly innocent, was taken to London and kept in custody for nearly a year before being

discharged, after which, by way of a slight redress, a letter of reprimand for his *trop de zèle* was sent by direction of Lord Carteret to the militant dignitary. But the desired end was nevertheless attained, and Dr. Sterne succeeded in crowning the edifice of his ecclesiastical honours.<sup>1</sup>

There can be little doubt that patronage extended by such an uncle to such a nephew received its full equivalent in some way or other, and indeed the Memoir gives us a clue to the mode in which payment was made. "My uncle," writes Sterne, describing their subsequent rupture, "quarrelled with me because I would not write paragraphs in the newspapers; though he was a party-man, I was not, and detested such dirty work, thinking it beneath me. From that time he became my bitterest enemy." The date of this quarrel cannot be precisely fixed; but we gather from an autograph letter (now in the British Museum) from Sterne to Archdeacon Blackburne that by the year 1750 the two men had for some time ceased to be on friendly terms. Probably, however, the breach occurred subsequently to the rebellion of '45, and it may be that it arose out of the excess of partisan zeal which Dr. Sterne developed in that year, and which his nephew very likely

<sup>1</sup> A once-familiar piece of humorous verse describes the upset of a coach containing a clerical pluralist:

"When struggling on the ground was seen  
A Rector, Vicar, Canon, Dean;  
You might have thought the coach was full,  
But no! 'twas only Dr. Bull."

Dr. Jacques Sterne, however, might have been thrown out of one of the more spacious vehicles of the London General Omnibus Company, with almost the same misleading effect upon those who only heard of the mishap.



did not, in his opinion, sufficiently share. But this is quite consistent with the younger man's having up to that time assisted the elder in his party polemics. He certainly speaks in his "Letters" of his having "employed his brains for an ungrateful person," and the remark is made in a way and in a connexion which seems to imply that the services rendered to his uncle were mainly *literary*. If so, his declaration that he "would not write paragraphs in the newspapers" can only mean that he would not go on writing them. Be this as it may, however, it is certain that the Archdeacon for some time found his account in maintaining friendly relations with his nephew, and that during that period he undoubtedly did a good deal for his advancement. Sterne was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Lincoln in March, 1736, only three months after taking his B.A. degree, and took priest's orders in August, 1738; whereupon his uncle immediately obtained for him the living of Sutton-on-the-Forest, into which he was inducted a few days afterwards. Other preferments followed, to be noted hereafter; and it must be admitted that until the quarrel occurred about the "party paragraphs" the Archdeacon did his duty by his nephew after the peculiar fashion of that time. When that quarrel came, however, it seems to have snapped more ties than one, for in the Memoir Sterne speaks of his youngest sister Catherine as "still living, but most unhappily estranged from me by my uncle's wickedness and her own folly." Of his elder sister Mary, who was born at Lille a year before himself, he records that "she married one Weemans in Dublin, who used her most unmercifully, spent his substance, became a bankrupt, and left my poor sister to shift for herself, which she was able to do but for a few months, for she went to a friend's house in the country and died of a broken heart." Truly

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an unlucky family.<sup>1</sup> Only three to survive the hardships among which the years of their infancy were passed, and this to be the history of two out of the three survivors!

<sup>1</sup> The mother, Mrs. Sterne, makes her appearancee once more for a moment in or about the year 1758. Horace Walpole, and after him Byron, accused Sterne of having "preferred w<sup>l</sup> ining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother," and the former went so far as to declare "on indubitable authority" that Mrs. Sterne, "who kept a school (in Ireland), having run in debt on account of an extravagant daughter, would have rotted in a gaol if the parents of her scholars had not raised a subscription for her." Even "the indubitable authority," however, does not positively assert—whatever may be meant to be insinuated—that Sterne himself did nothing to assist his mother, and Mr. Fitzgerald justly points out that to pay the *whole* debts of a bankrupt school might well have been beyond a Yorkshire elergyman's means. Anyhow there is evidence that Sterne at a later date than this was actively concerning himself about his mother's interests. She afterwards came to York, whither he went to meet her; and he then writes to a friend: "I trust my poor mother's affair is by this time ended to *our* comfort and hers."

### CHAPTER III.

LIFE AT SUTTON.—MARRIAGE.—THE PARISH PRIEST.

(1738-1759.)

GREAT writers who spring late and suddenly from obscurity into fame and yet die early, must always form more or less perplexing subjects of literary biography. The processes of their intellectual and artistic growth lie hidden in nameless years; their genius is not revealed to the world until it has reached its full maturity, and many aspects of it, which, perhaps, would have easily explained themselves if the gradual development had gone on before men's eyes, remain often unexplained to the last. By few, if any, of the more celebrated English men of letters is this observation so forcibly illustrated as it is in the case of Sterne: the obscure period of his life so greatly exceeded in duration the brief season of his fame, and its obscurity was so exceptionally profound. He was forty-seven years of age when, at a bound, he achieved celebrity; he was not five-and-fifty when he died. And though it might be too much to say that the artist sprang, like the reputation, full-grown into being, it is nevertheless true that there are no marks of positive immaturity to be detected even in the earliest public displays of his art. His work grows, indeed, most marvellously in vividness and symmetry as he proceeds, but there are no visible signs of growth in the workman's skill.

Even when the highest point of finish is attained we cannot say that the hand is any more cunning than it was from the first. As well might we say that the last light touches of the sculptor's chisel upon the perfected statue are more skilful than its first vigorous strokes upon the shapeless block.

It is certain, however, that Sterne must have been storing up his material of observation, secreting his reflections on life and character, and consciously or unconsciously maturing his powers of expression, during the whole of those silent twenty years which have now to be passed under brief review. With one exception, to be noted presently, the only known writings of his which belong to this period are sermons, and these—a mere “scratch” collection of pulpit discourses, which, as soon as he had gained the public ear, he hastened in characteristic fashion to rummage from his desk and carry to the book-market—throw no light upon the problem before us. There are sermons of Sterne which alike in manner and matter disclose the author of *Tristram Shandy*; but they are not among those which he preached or wrote before that work was given to the world. They are not its ancestors but its descendants. They belong to the post-Shandian period, and are in obvious imitation of the Shandian style; while in none of the earlier ones—not even in that famous homily on a Good Conscience, which did not succeed till Corporal Trim preached it before the brothers Shandy and Dr. Slop—can we trace either the trick of style or the turn of thought that give piquaney to the novel. Yet the peculiar qualities of mind, and the special faculty of workmanship of which this turn of thought and trick of style were the product, must of course have been potentially present from the beginning. Men do not blossom forth as wits, hu-

mourists, masterly delineators of character, and skilful performers on a highly-strung and carefully-tuned sentimental instrument all at once, after entering their "forties;" and the only wonder is that a possessor of these powers—some of them of the kind which, as a rule, and in most men, seeks almost as irresistibly for exercise as even the poetic instinct itself—should have been held so long unemployed.

There is, however, one very common stimulus to literary exertions which in Sterne's case was undoubtedly wanting—a superabundance of unoccupied time. We have little reason, it is true, to suppose that this light-minded and valetudinarian Yorkshire parson was at any period of his life an industrious "parish priest;" but it is probable, nevertheless, that time never hung very heavily upon his hands. In addition to the favourite amusements which he enumerates in the Memoir, he was all his days addicted to one which is, perhaps, the most absorbing of all—flirtation. Philandering, and especially philandering of the Platonic and ultra-sentimental order, is almost the one human pastime of which its votaries never seem to tire; and its constant ministrations to human vanity may serve, perhaps, to account for their unwearied absorption in its pursuit. Sterne's first love affair—an affair of which, unfortunately, the consequences were more lasting than the passion—took place immediately upon his leaving Cambridge. To relate it as he relates it to his daughter: "At York I became acquainted with your mother, and courted her for two years. She owned she liked me, but thought herself not rich enough or me too poor to be joined together. She went to her sister's in S[taffordshire], and I wrote to her often. I believe then she was partly determined to have me, but would not say so. At her return she fell into a consumption, and one evening that I was sitting by her, with

an almost broken heart to see her so ill, she said: 'My dear Laury, I never can be yours, for I verily believe I have not long to live! but I have left you every shilling of my fortune.' Upon that she showed me her will. This generosity overpowered me. It pleased God that she recovered, and we were married in 1741." The name of this lady was Elizabeth Lumley, and it was to her that Sterne addressed those earliest letters which his daughter included in the collection published by her some eight years after her father's death. They were added, the preface tells us, "in justice to Mr. Sterne's delicate feelings;" and in our modern usage of the word "delicate," as equivalent to infirm of health and probably short of life, they no doubt do full justice to the passion which they are supposed to express. It would be unfair, of course, to judge any love-letters of that period by the standard of sincerity applied in our own less artificial age. All such compositions seem frigid and formal enough to us of to-day; yet in most cases of genuine attachment we usually find at least a sentence here and there in which the natural accents of the heart make themselves heard above the affected modulations of the style. But the letters of Sterne's courtship maintain the pseudo-poetic, shepherd-and-shepherdess strain throughout; or, if the lover ever abandons it, it is only to make somewhat maudlin record of those "tears" which flowed a little too easily at all times throughout his life. These letters, however, have a certain critical interest in their bearing upon those sensibilities which Sterne afterwards learned to cultivate in a foreign-frame, with a view to the application of their produce to the purposes of an art of pathetic writing which simulates nature with such admirable fidelity at its best, and descends to such singular bathos at its worst.

The marriage precluded by this courtship did not take place till Sterne had already been three years Vicar of Sutton-on-the-Forest, the benefice which had been procured for him by his uncle the Archdeacon; through whose interest also he was appointed successively to two prebends—preferments which were less valuable to him for their emolument than for the ecclesiastical status which they conferred upon him, for the excuse which they gave him for periodical visits to the cathedral city to fulfil the residential conditions of his offices, and for the opportunity thus afforded him of mixing in and studying the society of the Close. Upon his union with Miss Lumley, and, in a somewhat curious fashion, by her means, he obtained in addition the living of Stillington. “A friend of hers in the South had promised her that if she married a clergyman in Yorkshire, when the living became vacant he would make her a compliment of it;” and made accordingly this singular “compliment” was. At Sutton Sterne remained nearly twenty years, doing duty at both places, during which time “books, painting, fiddling, and shooting were,” he says, “my chief amusements.” With what success he shot, and with what skill he fiddled, we know not. His writings contain not a few musical metaphors and allusions to music, which seem to indicate a competent acquaintance with its technicalities; but the specimen of his powers as an artist, which Mr. Fitzgerald has reproduced from his illustrations of a volume of poems by Mr. Woodhull, does not dispose one to rate highly his proficiency in this accomplishment. We may expect that, after all, it was the first-mentioned of his amusements in which he took the greatest delight, and that neither the brush, the bow, nor the fowling-piece was nearly so often in his hand as the book. Within a few miles of Sutton,

at Skelton Castle, an almost unique Roman stronghold, since modernized by Gothic hands, dwelt his college-friend John Hall Stevenson, whose well-stocked library contained a choice but heterogeneous collection of books—old French “ana,” and the learning of mediæval doctors—books intentionally and books unintentionally comic, the former of which Sterne read with an only too retentive a memory for their jests, and the latter with an acutely humorous appreciation of their solemn trifling. Later on it will be time to note the extent to which he utilized these results of his widely discursive reading, and to examine the legitimacy of the mode in which he used them: here it is enough to say generally that the materials for many a burlesque chapter of *Tristram Shandy* must have been unconsciously storing themselves in his mind in many an amused hour passed by Sterne in the library of Skelton Castle.

But before finally quitting this part of my subject it may be as well, perhaps, to deal somewhat at length with a matter which will doubtless have to be many times incidentally referred to in the course of this study, but which I now hope to relieve myself from the necessity of doing more than touch upon hereafter. I refer of course to Sterne's perpetually recurring flirtations. This is a matter almost as impossible to omit from any biography of Sterne as it would be to omit it from any biography of Goethe. The English humourist did not, it is true, engage in the pastime in the serious, not to say scientific, spirit of the German philosopher-poet; it was not deliberately made by the former as by the latter to contribute to his artistic development; but it is nevertheless hardly open to doubt that Sterne's philandering propensities did exercise an influence upon his literary character and work in more ways than one. That his marriage was an ill-assorted and un-



happy union was hardly so much the cause of his inconstancy as its effect. It may well be, of course, that the "dear L.," whose moral and mental graces her lover had celebrated in such superfine, sentimental fashion, was a commonplace person enough. That she was really a woman of the exquisite stolidity of Mrs. Shandy, and that her exasperating feats as an *assentatrix* did, as has been suggested, supply the model for the irresistibly ludicrous colloquies between the philosopher and his wife, there is no sufficient warrant for believing. But it is quite possible that the daily companion of one of the most indefatigable jesters that ever lived may have been unable to see a joke; that she regarded her husband's wilder drolleries as mere horse-collar grimacing, and that the point of his subtler humour escaped her altogether. But even if it were so, it is, to say the least of it, doubtful whether Sterne suffered at all on this ground from the wounded feelings of the *mari incompris*, while it is next to certain that it does not need the sting of any such disappointment to account for his alienation. He must have had plenty of time and opportunity to discover Miss Lumley's intellectual limitations during the two years of his courtship; and it is not likely that, even if they were as well marked as Mrs. Shandy's own, they would have done much of themselves to estrange the couple. Sympathy is not the necessity to the humourist which the poet finds, or imagines, it to be to himself: the humourist, indeed, will sometimes contrive to extract from the very absence of sympathy in those about him a keener relish for his reflections. With sentiment, indeed, and still more with sentimentalism, the case would of course be different; but as for Mr. Sterne's demands for sympathy in that department of his life and art, one may say without the least hesitation that they would have been be-

yond the power of any one woman, however distinguished a disciple of the "Laura Matilda" school, to satisfy. "I must ever," he frankly says in one of the "Yorick to Eliza" letters, "I must ever have some Dulcinea in my head: it harmonizes the soul;" and he might have added that he found it impossible to sustain the harmony without frequently changing the Dulcinea. One may suspect that Mrs. Sterne soon had cause for jealousy, and it is at least certain that several years before Sterne's emergence into notoriety their estrangement was complete. One daughter was born to them in 1745, but lived scarcely more than long enough to be rescued from the *limbus infantium* by the prompt rites of the Church. The child was christened Lydia, and died on the following day. Its place was filled in 1747 by a second daughter, also christened Lydia, who lived to become the wife of M. de Medalle, and the not very judicious editress of the posthumous "Letters." For her as she grew up Sterne conceived a genuine and truly fatherly affection, and it is in writing to her and of her that we see him at his best; or rather one might say it is almost only then that we can distinguish the true notes of the heart through that habitual falsetto of sentimentalism which distinguishes most of Sterne's communications with the other sex. There was no subsequent issue of the marriage, and, from one of the letters most indiscreetly included in Madame de Medalle's collection, it is to be ascertained that some four years or so after Lydia's birth the relations between Sterne and Mrs. Sterne ceased to be conjugal, and never again resumed that character.

It is, however, probable, upon the husband's own confessions, that he had given his wife earlier cause for jealousy, and certainly from the time when he begins to reveal himself in correspondence there seems to be hardly

a moment when some such cause was not in existence—in the person of this, that, or the other lackadaisical damsel or coquettish matron. From Miss Fourmantelle, the “dear, dear Kitty,” to whom Sterne was making violent love in 1759, the year of the York publication of *Tristram Shandy*, down to Mrs. Draper, the heroine of the famous “Yoriek to Eliza” letters, the list of ladies who seem to have kindled flames in that susceptible breast is almost as long and more real than the roll of mistresses immortalized by Horace. How Mrs. Sterne at first bore herself under her husband’s ostentatious neglect there is no direct evidence to show. That she ultimately took refuge in indifference we can perceive, but it is to be feared that she was not always able to maintain the attitude of contemptuous composure. So, at least, we may suspect from the evidence of that Frenchman who met “le bon et agréable Tristram,” and his wife, at Montpellier, and who, characteristically sympathizing with the inconstant husband, declared that his wife’s incessant pursuit of him made him pass “d’assez mauvais moments,” which he bore “with the patience of an angel.” But, on the whole, Mrs. Sterne’s conduct seems by her husband’s own admissions to have been not wanting in dignity.

As to the nature of Sterne’s love-affairs I have come, though not without hesitation, to the conclusion that they were most, if not all of them, what is called, somewhat absurdly, Platonic. In saying this, however, I am by no means prepared to assert that they would all of them have passed muster before a prosaic and unsentimental British jury as mere indiscretions, and nothing worse. Sterne’s relations with Miss Fourmantelle, for instance, assumed at last a profoundly compromising character, and it is far from improbable that the worst construction would have

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been put upon them by one of the plain-dealing tribunals aforesaid. Certainly a young woman who leaves her mother at York, and comes up to London to reside alone in lodgings, where she is constantly being visited by a lover who is himself living *en garçon* in the metropolis, can hardly complain if her imprudence is fatal to her reputation; neither can he if his own suffers in the same way. But, as I am not of those who hold that the conventionally "innocent" is the equivalent of the morally harmless in this matter, I cannot regard the question as worth any very minute investigation. I am not sure that the habitual male flirt, who neglects his wife to sit continually languishing at the feet of some other woman, gives much less pain and scandal to others, or does much less mischief to himself and the objects of his adoration, than the thorough-going profligate; and I even feel tempted to risk the apparent paradox that, from the artistic point of view, Sterne lost rather than gained by the generally Platonic character of his amours. For, as it was, the restraint of one instinct of his nature implied the over-indulgence of another which stood in at least as much need of chastenment. If his love-affairs stopped short of the gratification of the senses, they involved a perpetual fondling and caressing of those effeminate sensibilities of his into that condition of hyper-aesthesia which, though Sterne regarded it as the strength, was in reality the weakness, of his art.

Injurious, however, as was the effect which Sterne's philanderings exercised upon his personal and literary character, it is not likely that, at least at this period of his life at Sutton, they had in any degree compromised his reputation. For this he had provided in other ways, and principally by his exceedingly injudicious choice of associates.

“As to the squire of the parish,” he remarks in the Memoir, “I cannot say we were on a very friendly footing, but at Stillington the family of the C[roft]s showed us every kindness: ’twas most agreeable to be within a mile and a half of an amiable family who were ever cordial friends;” and who, it may be added, appear to have been Sterne’s only reputable acquaintances. For the satisfaction of all other social needs he seems to have resorted to a companionship which it was hardly possible for a clergyman to frequent without scandal—that, namely, of John Hall Stevenson and the kindred spirits whom he delighted to collect around him at Skelton—familiarily known as “Crazy” Castle. The club of the “Demoniacs,” of which Sterne makes mention in his letters, may have had nothing very diabolical about it except the name; but, headed as it was by the suspected ex-comrade of Wilkes and his brother monks of Medmenham, and recruited by gay militaires like Colonels Hall and Lee, and “fast” parsons like the Rev. “Panty” Lascelles (mock godson of Pantagruel), it was certainly a society in which the Vicar of Sutton could not expect to enroll himself without offence. We may fairly suppose, therefore, that it was to his association with these somewhat too “jolly companions” that Sterne owed that disfavour among decorous country circles, of which he shows resentful consciousness in the earlier chapters of *Tristram Shandy*.

But before we finally cross the line which separates the life of the obscure country parson from the life of the famous author, a word or two must be said of that piece of writing which was alluded to a few pages back as the only known exception to the generally “professional” character of all Sterne’s compositions of the pre-Shandian era. This was a piece in the allegoric-satirical style, which,

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though not very remarkable in itself, may not improbably have helped to determine its author's thoughts in the direction of more elaborate literary efforts. In the year 1758 a dispute had arisen between a certain Dr. Topham, an ecclesiastical lawyer in large local practice, and Dr. Fountayne, the then Dean of York. This dispute had originated in an attempt on the part of the learned civilian, who appears to have been a pluralist of an exceptionally insatiable order, to obtain the reversion of one of his numerous offices for his son, alleging a promise made to him on that behalf by the Archbishop. This promise—which had, in fact, been given—was legally impossible of performance, and upon the failure of his attempt the disappointed Topham turned upon the Dean, and maintained that by *him*, at any rate, he had been promised another place of the value of five guineas per annum, and appropriately known as the "Commissaryship of Pickering and Poeklington." This the Dean denied, and thereupon Dr. Topham fired off a pamphlet setting forth the circumstances of the alleged promise, and protesting against the wrong inflicted upon him by its non-performance. At this point Sterne came to Dr. Fountayne's assistance with a sarcastic apologue entitled the "History of a good Warm Watchcoat," which had "hung up many years in the parish vestry," and showing how this garment had so excited the cupidity of Trim, the sexton, that "nothing would serve him but he must take it home, to have it converted into a warm under-petticoat for his wife and a jerkin for himself against the winter." The symbolization of Dr. Topham's snug "patent place," which he wished to make hereditary, under the image of the good warm watchcoat, is of course plain enough; and there is some humour in the way in which the parson (the Archbishop) discovers

that his incautions assent to Trim's request had been given *ultra vires*. Looking through the parish register, at the request of a laborer who wished to ascertain his age, the parson finds express words of bequest leaving the watch-coat "for the sole use of the sextons of the church for ever, to be worn by them respectively on winterly cold nights," and at the moment when he is exclaiming, "Just Heaven! what an escape have I had! Give this for a petticoat to Trim's wife!" he is interrupted by Trim himself entering the vestry with "the coat actually ript and cut out" ready for conversion into a petticoat for his wife. And we get a foretaste of the familiar Shandian impertinence in the remark which follows, that "there are many good similes subsisting in the world, but which I have neither time to recollect nor look for, which would give you an idea of the parson's astonishment at Trim's impudence." The emoluments of "Pickering and Pocklington" appear under the figure of a "pair of black velvet plush breeches" which ultimately "got into the possession of one Lorry Slim (Sterne himself, of course), an unlucky wight, by whom they are still worn: in truth, as you will guess, they are very thin by this time."

The whole thing is the very slightest of "skits;" and the quarrel having been accommodated before it could be published, it was not given to the world until after its author's death. But it is interesting, as his first known attempt in this line of composition, and the grasping sexton deserves remembrance, if only as having handed down his name to a far more famous descendant.

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## CHAPTER IV.

"TRISTRAM SHANDY," VOLS. I. AND II.

(1759-1760.)

HITHERTO we have had to construct our conception of Sterne out of materials of more or less plausible conjecture. We are now at last approaching the region of positive evidence, and henceforward, down almost to the last scene of all, Sterne's doings will be chronicled, and his character revealed, by one who happens, in this case, to be the best of all possible biographers—the man himself. Not that such records are by any means always the most trustworthy of evidence. There are some men whose real character is never more effectually concealed than in their correspondence. But it is not so with Sterne. The careless, slipshod letters which Madame de Medalle "pitchforked" into the book-market, rather than edited, are highly valuable as pieces of autobiography. They are easy, naïve, and natural, rich in simple self-disclosure in almost every page; and if they have more to tell us about the man than the writer, they are yet not wanting in instructive hints as to Sterne's methods of composition and his theories of art.

It was in the year 1759 that the Vicar of Sutton and Prebendary of York—already, no doubt, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to many worthy people in the



county—conceived the idea of astonishing and scandalizing them still further after a new and original fashion. His impulses to literary production were probably various, and not all of them, or perhaps the strongest of them, of the artistic order. The first and most urgent was, it may be suspected, the simplest and most common of all such motive forces. Sterne, in all likelihood, was in want of money. He was not, perhaps, under the actual instruction of that *magister artium* whom the Roman satirist has celebrated; for he declared, indeed, afterwards, that “he wrote not to be fed, but to be famous.” But the context of the passage shows that he only meant to deny any absolute compulsion to write for mere subsistence. Between this sort of constraint and that gentler form of pressure which arises from the wish to increase an income sufficient for one’s needs, but inadequate to one’s desires, there is a considerable difference; and to repudiate the one is not to disclaim the other. It is, at any rate, certain that Sterne engaged at one time of his life in a rather speculative sort of farming, and we have it from himself in a passage in one of his letters, which may be jest, but reads more like earnest, that it was his losses in this business that first turned his attention to literature.<sup>1</sup> His thoughts once set in that direction, his peculiar choice of subject and method of treatment are easily comprehensible. Pantagruelic burlesque came to him, if not naturally, at any rate by “second nature.” He had a strong and sedulously cultivated taste for Rabelaisian humour; his head was crammed with all sorts of

<sup>1</sup> “I was once such a puppy myself,” he writes to a certain baronet whom he is attempting to discourage from speculative farming of this sort, “and had my labour for my pains and two hundred pounds out of pocket. Curse on farming! (I said). Let us see if the pen will not succeed better than the spade.”

out-of-the-way learning constantly tickling his comic sense by its very uselessness; he relished more keenly than any man the solemn futilities of mediæval doctors, and the pedantic indecencies of casuist fathers; and, along with all these temptations to an enterprise of the kind upon which he entered, he had been experiencing a steady relaxation of deterrent restraints. He had fallen out with his uncle some years since,<sup>1</sup> and the quarrel had freed him from at least one influence making for clerical propriety of behaviour. His incorrigible levities had probably lost him the countenance of most of his more serious acquaintances; his satirical humour had as probably gained him personal enemies not a few, and it may be that he had gradually contracted something of that "naughty-boy" temper, as we may call it, for which the deliberate and ostentatious repetition of offences has an inexplicable charm. It seems clear, too, that, growth for growth with this spirit of bravado, there had sprung up—in somewhat incongruous companionship, perhaps—a certain sense of wrong. Along with the impulse to give an additional shock to the prejudices he had already offended, Sterne felt impelled to vindicate what he considered the genuine moral worth underlying the indiscretions of the offender. What, then, could better suit him than to compose a novel in which he might give full play to his simious humour, startle more hideously than ever his straighter-laced neighbours, defiantly defend his own character, and caricature whatever eccentric figure

<sup>1</sup> He himself, indeed, makes a particular point of this in explaining his literary venture. "Now for your desire," he writes to a correspondent in 1759, "of knowing the reason of my turning author? why, truly I am tired of employing my brains for other people's advantage. 'Tis a foolish sacrifice I have made for some years for an ungrateful person."—*Letters*, i. 82.

in the society around him might offer the most tempting butt for ridicule?

All the world knows how far he ultimately advanced beyond the simplicity of the conception, and into what far higher regions of art its execution led him. But I find no convincing reason for believing that *Tristram Shandy* had at the outset any more seriously artistic purpose than this; and much indirect evidence that this, in fact, it was.

The humorous figure of Mr. Shandy is, of course, the Cervantic centre of the whole; and it was out of him and his erotehets that Sterne, no doubt, intended from the first to draw the materials of that often unsavoury fun which was to amuse the light-minded and scandalize the demure. But it can hardly escape notice that the two most elaborate portraits in Vol. I.—the admirable but very flatteringly idealized sketch of the author himself in Yorick, and the Gilrayesque caricature of Dr. Slop—are drawn with a distinctly polemical purpose, defensive in the former case and offensive in the latter. On the other hand, with the disappearance of Dr. Slop caricature of living persons disappears also; while, after the famous description of Yorick's death-bed, we meet with no more attempts at self-vindication. It seems probable, therefore, that long before the first two volumes were completed Sterne had discovered the artistic possibilities of "My Uncle Toby" and "Corporal Trim," and had realized the full potentialities of humour contained in the contrast between the two brothers Shandy. The very work of sharpening and deepening the outlines of this humorous antithesis, while it made the crack-brained philosopher more and more of a burlesque unreality, continually added new touches of life and nature to the lineaments of the simple-minded soldier; and it was by this curious and half-accidental process that there came

to be added to the gallery of English fiction one of the most perfect and delightful portraits that it possesses.

We know from internal evidence that *Tristram Shandy* was begun in the early days of 1759; and the first two volumes were probably completed by about the middle of the year. "In the year 1760," writes Sterne, "I went up to London to publish my two first volumes of *Shandy*." And it is stated in a note to this passage, as cited in Scott's memoir, that the first edition was published "the year before" in York. There is, however, no direct proof that it was in the hands of the public before the beginning of 1760, though it is possible that the date of its publication may just have fallen within the year. But, at all events, on the 1st of January, 1760, an advertisement in the *Public Advertiser* informed the world that "this day" was "published, printed on superfine writing-paper, &c., *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. York. Printed for and sold by John Hinxham, Bookseller in Stonegate." The great London publisher, Dodsley, to whom the book had been offered, and who had declined the venture, figures in the advertisement as the principal London bookseller from whom it was to be obtained. It seems that only a few copies were in the first instance sent up to the London market; but they fell into good hands, for there is evidence that *Tristram Shandy* had attracted the notice of at least one competent critic in the capital before the month of January was out. But though the metropolitan success of the book was destined to be delayed for still a month or two, in York it had already created a *furor* in more senses than one. For, in fact, and no wonder, it had in many quarters given the deepest offence. Its Rabelaisian license of incident and allusion was calculated to offend the proprieties—the provincial proprieties especially—

even in that free-spoken age; and there was that in the book, moreover, which a provincial society may be counted on to abominate, with a keener if less disinterested abhorrence than any sins against decency. It contained, or was supposed to contain, a broadly ludicrous caricature of one well-known local physician; and an allusion, brief, indeed, and covert, but highly scandalous, to a certain "droll foible" attributed to another personage of much wider celebrity in the scientific world. The victim in the latter case was no longer living; and this circumstance brought upon Sterne a remonstrance from a correspondent, to which he replied in a letter so characteristic in many respects as to be worth quoting. His correspondent was a Dr. \* \* \* \* \* (asterisks for which it is now impossible to substitute letters); and the burden of what seem to have been several communications in speech and writing on the subject was the maxim, "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*" With such seriousness and severity had his correspondent dwelt upon this adage, that "at length," writes Sterne, "you have made me as serious and as severe as yourself; but, that the humours you have stirred up might not work too potently within me, I have waited four days to cool myself before I could set pen to paper to answer you." And thus he sets forth the results of his four days' deliberation:

"*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*' I declare I have considered the wisdom and foundation of it over and over again as dispassionately and charitably as a good Christian can, and, after all, I can find nothing in it, or make more of it than a nonsensical lullaby of some nurse, put into Latin by some pedant, to be chanted by some hypocrite to the end of the world for the consolation of departing lechers. 'Tis, I own, Latin, and I think that is all the weight it has, for, in plain English, 'tis a loose and futile position below a dispute. 'You are not to speak anything of the dead but what is good.' Why so?

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Who says so? Neither reason nor Scripture. Inspired authors have done otherwise, and reason and common sense tell me that, if the characters of past ages and men are to be drawn at all, they are to be drawn like themselves, that is, with their excellences and their foibles; and it as much a piece of justice to the world, and to virtue, too, to do the one as the other. The ruling passion, *et les égarements du cœur*, are the very things which mark and distinguish a man's character, in which I would as soon leave out a man's head as his hobby-horse. However, if, like the poor devil of a painter, we must conform to the pious canon, 'De mortuis,' &c., which I own has a spice of piety in the *sound* of it, and be obliged to paint both our angels and our devils out of the same pot, I then infer that our Sydenhams and our Sangrados, our Lucretias and our Messalinas, our Somersets and our Bolingbrokes, are alike entitled to statues, and all the historians or satirists who have said otherwise since they departed this life, from Sallust to S—e, are guilty of the crimes you charge me with, 'cowardice and injustice.' But why cowardice? 'Because 'tis not courage to attack a dead man who can't defend himself.' But why do you docters attack such a one with your incision knife? Oh! for the good of the living. 'Tis my plea."

And, having given this humorous twist to his argument, he glides off into extenuatory matter. He had not even, he protests, made as much as a surgical incision into his victim (Dr. Richard Mead, the friend of Bentley and of Newton, and a physician and physiologist of high repute in his day); he had but just scratched him, and that scarce skin-deep. As to the "droll foible" of Dr. Mead, which he had made merry with, "it was not first reported (even to the few who can understand the hint) by me, but known before by every chambermaid and footman within the bills of mortality"—a somewhat daring assertion, one would imagine, considering what the droll foible was; and Dr. Mead, continues Sterne, great man as he was, had, after all, not fared worse than "a man of twice his wisdom"—to wit Solomon, of whom the same remark had

been made, that "they were both great men, and, like all mortal men, had each their ruling passion."

The mixture of banter and sound reasoning in this reply is, no doubt, very skilful. But, unfortunately, neither the reasoning nor the banter happens to meet the case of this particular defiance of the "De mortuis" maxim, and as a serious defence against a serious charge (which was what the occasion required) Sterne's answer is altogether futile. For the plea of "the good of the living," upon which, after all, the whole defence, considered seriously, rests, was quite inapplicable as an excuse for the incriminated passage. The only living persons who could possibly be affected by it, for good or evil, were those surviving friends of the dead man, to whom Sterne's allusion to what he called Dr. Mead's "droll foible" was calculated to cause the deepest pain and shame.

The other matter of offence to Sterne's Yorkshire readers was of a much more elaborate kind. In the person of Dr. Slop, the grotesque man-midwife, who was to have assisted, but missed assisting, at Tristram's entry into the world, the good people of York were not slow to recognize the physical peculiarities and professional antecedents of Dr. Burton, the local accoucheur, whom Archdeacon Sterne had arrested as a Jacobite. That the portrait was faithful to anything but the external traits of the original, or was intended to reproduce anything more than these, Sterne afterwards denied; and we have certainly no ground for thinking that Burton had invited ridicule on any other than the somewhat unworthy ground of the curious ugliness of his face and figure. It is most unlikely that his success as a practitioner in a branch of the medical art in which imposture is the most easily detected, could have been earned by mere quackery; and he seems,

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moreover, to have been a man of learning in more kinds than one. The probability is that the worst that could be alleged against him was a tendency to scientific pedantry in his published writings, which was pretty sure to tickle the fancy of Mr. Sterne. Unscrupulously, however, as he was caricatured, the sensation which appears to have been excited in the county by the burlesque portrait could hardly have been due to any strong public sympathy with the involuntary sitter. Dr. Burton seems, as a suspected Jacobite, to have been no special favourite with the Yorkshire squirearchy in general, but rather the reverse thereof. Ucalegon, however, does not need to be popular to arouse his neighbour's interest in his misfortunes; and the caricature of Burton was doubtless resented on the *proximus ardet* principle by many who feared that their turn was coming next.

To all the complaints and protests which reached him on the subject Sterne would in any case, probably, have been indifferent; but he was soon to receive encouragement which would have more than repaid a man of his temper for twice the number of rebukes. For London cared nothing for Yorkshire susceptibilities and Yorkshire fears. Provincial notables might be libelled, and their friends might go in fear of similar treatment, but all that was nothing to "the town," and *Tristram Shandy* had taken the town by storm. We gather from a passage in the letter above quoted that as early as January 30 the book had "gained the very favourable opinion" of Mr. Garrick, afterwards to become the author's intimate friend; and it is certain that by the time of Sterne's arrival in London, in March, 1760, *Tristram Shandy* had become the rage.

To say of this extraordinary work that it defies analysis



would be the merest inadequacy of commonplace. It was meant to defy analysis; it is of the very essence of its scheme and purpose that it should do so; and the mere attempt to subject it systematically to any such process would argue an altogether mistaken conception of the author's intent. Its full "official" style and title is *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, and it is difficult to say which it contains the less about—the opinions of Tristram Shandy or the events of his life. As a matter of fact, its proper description would be "The Opinions of Tristram Shandy's Father, with some Passages from the Life of his Uncle." Its claim to be regarded as a biography of its nominal hero is best illustrated by the fact that Tristram is not born till the third volume, and not breeched till the sixth; that it is not till the seventh that he begins to play any active part in the narrative, appearing then only as a completely colourless and unindividualized figure, a mere vehicle for the conveyance of Sterne's own Continental *impressions de voyage*; and that in the last two volumes, which are entirely taken up with the incident of his uncle's courtship, he disappears from the story altogether. It is to be presumed, perhaps, though not very confidently, that the reader would have seen more of him if the tale had been continued; but how much or how little is quite uncertain. The real hero of the book is at the outset Mr. Shandy, senior, who is, later on, succeeded in this place of dignity by my Uncle Toby. It not only served Sterne's purpose to confine himself mainly to these two characters, as the best whereon to display his powers, but it was part of his studied eccentricity to do so. It was a "point" to give as little as possible about Tristram Shandy in a life of Tristram Shandy; just as it was a point to keep the reader waiting throughout the year

1760 for their hero to be so much as born. In the first volume, therefore, the author does literally everything but make the slightest progress with his story. Starting off abruptly with a mock physiologic disquisition upon the importance of a proper ordering of their mental states on the part of the intending progenitors of children, he philosophizes gravely on this theme for two or three chapters; and then wanders away into an account of the local midwife, upon whose sole services Mrs. Shandy, in opposition to her husband, was inclined to rely. From the midwife it is an easy transition to her patron and protector, the incumbent of the parish, and this, in its turn, suggests a long excursus on the character, habits, appearance, home, friends, enemies, and finally death, burial, and epitaph of the Rev. Mr. Yorick. Thence we return to Mr. and Mrs. Shandy, and are made acquainted, in absurdly minute detail, with an agreement entered into between them with reference to the place of sojourn to be selected for the lady's accouchement, the burlesque deed which records this compact being actually set out at full length. Thence, again, we are beckoned away by the jester to join him in elaborate and not very edifying ridicule of the Catholic doctrine of ante-natal baptism; and thence—but it would be useless to follow further the windings and doublings of this literary hare.

Yet though the book, as one thus summarizes it, may appear a mere farrago of digressions, it nevertheless, after its peculiar fashion, advances. Such definite purpose underlies the tricks and grimaces of its author is by degrees accomplished; and before we reach the end of the first volume the highly humorous, if extravagantly idealized, figure of Mr. Shandy takes bodily shape and consistency before our eyes. It is a mistake, I think, of Sir Wal-

ter Scott's to regard the portrait of this eccentric philosopher as intended for a satire upon perverted and deranged erudition—as the study of a man “whom too much and too miscellaneous learning had brought within a step or two of madness.” Sterne's conception seems to me a little more subtle and less commonplace than that. Mr. Shandy, I imagine, is designed to personify not “crack-brained learning” so much as “theory run mad.” He is possessed by a sort of Demon of the Deductive, ever impelling him to push his premises to new conclusions without ever allowing him time to compare them with the facts. No doubt we are meant to regard him as a learned man; but his son gives us to understand distinctly and very early in the book that his erotehets were by no means those of a weak receptive mind, overladen with more knowledge than it could digest, but rather those of an over-active intelligence, far more deeply and constantly concerned with its own processes than with the thoughts of others. Tristram, indeed, dwells pointedly on the fact that his father's dialectical skill was not the result of training, and that he owed nothing to the logic of the schools. “He was certainly,” says his son, “irresistible both in his orations and disputations,” but that was because “he was born an orator (*Θεοδιδάκτος*). Persnasion hung upon his lips, and the elements of logic and rhetoric were so blended in him, and withal he had so shrewd a guess at the weaknesses and passions of his respondent, that Nature might have stood up and said, ‘This man is eloquent.’ And yet,” continues the filial panegyric,

“He had never read Cicero nor Quintilian de Oratore, nor Aristotle, nor Longinus among the ancients, nor Vossius, nor Skioppius, nor Ramus, nor Farnaby among the moderns: and what is more astonishing he had never in his whole life the least light or spark of subtilty

struck into his mind by one single lecture upon Crackenthorpe or Burgersdicius or any Dutch commentator: he knew not so much as in what the difference of an argument *ad ignorantiam* and an argument *ad hominem* consisted; and when he went up along with me to enter my name at Jesus College, in \* \* \* \*, it was a matter of just wonder with my worthy tutor and two or three Fellows of that learned society that a man who knew not so much as the names of his tools should be able to work after that fashion with them."

Surely we all know men of this kind, and the consternation—comparable only to that of M. Jourdain under the impromptu *carte-and-tieree* of his servant-maid—which their sturdy if informal dialectic will often spread among many kinds of "learned societies." But such men are certainly not of the class which Scott supposed to have been ridiculed in the character of Walter Shandy.

Among the crotchets of this born dialectician was a theory as to the importance of Christian names in determining the future behaviour and destiny of the children to whom they are given; and, whatever admixture of jest there might have been in some of his other fancies, in this his son affirms he was absolutely serious. He solemnly maintained the opinion "that there was a strange kind of magic bias which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impressed upon our character and conduct." How many Casars and Pompeys, he would say, by mere inspiration of their names have been rendered worthy of them! And how many, he would add, are there who might have done exceeding well in the world had not their characters and spirits been totally depressed and Niodemus'd into nothing! He was astonished at parents failing to perceive that "when once a vile name was wrongfully or injudiciously given, 'twas not like a case of a man's character, which, when wronged, might afterwards be cleared;

and possibly some time or other, if not in the man's life, at least after his death, be somehow or other set to rights with the world." This name-giving injury, he would say, "could never be undone; nay, he doubted whether an Act of Parliament could reach it; he knew, as well as you, that the Legislature assumed a power over surnames; but for very strong reasons, which he could give, it had never yet adventured, he would say, to go a step further."

With all this extravagance, however, there was combined an admirable affectation of sobriety. Mr. Shandy would have us believe that he was no blind slave to his theory. He was quite willing to admit the existence of names which could not affect the character either for good or evil—Jack, Dick, and Tom, for instance; and such the philosopher styled "neutral names," affirming of them, "without a satire, that there had been as many knaves and fools at least as wise and good men since the world began, who had indifferently borne them, so that, like equal forces acting against each other in contrary directions, he thought they mutually destroyed each other's effects; for which reason he would often declare he would not give a cherry-stone to choose among them. Bob, which was my brother's name, was another of these neutral kinds of Christian names which operated very little either way; and as my father happened to be at Epsom when it was given him, he would oftentimes thank Heaven it was no worse." Forewarned of this peculiarity of Mr. Shandy's, the reader is, of course, prepared to hear that of all the names in the universe the philosopher had the most unconquerable aversion for Tristram, "the lowest and most contemptible opinion of it of anything in the world." He would break off in the midst of one of his frequent disputes on the subject of names, and "in a spirited epiphono-

nema, or rather erotesis," demand of his antagonist "whether he would take upon him to say he had ever remembered, whether he had ever read, or whether he had ever heard tell of a man called Tristram performing anything great or worth recording. No, he would say. Tristram! the thing is impossible." It only remained that he should have published a book in defence of the belief, and sure enough "in the year sixteen," two years before the birth of his second son, "he was at the pains of writing an express dissertation simply upon the word Tristram, showing the world with great candour and modesty the grounds of his great abhorrence to the name." And with this idea Sterne continues to amuse himself at intervals till the end of the chapter.

That he does not so persistently amuse the reader it is, of course, scarcely necessary to say. The jest has not substance enough—few of Sterne's jests have—to stand the process of continual attrition to which he subjects it. But the mere historic gravity with which the various turns of this monomania are recorded—to say nothing of the seldom failing charm of the easy, gossiping style—prevents the thing from ever becoming utterly tiresome. On the whole, however, one begins to grow impatient for more of the same sort as the three admirable chapters on the Rev. Mr. Yorick, and is not sorry to get to the opening of the second volume, with its half-tender, half-humorous, and wholly delightful account of Uncle Toby's difficulties in describing the siege operations before Namur, and of the happy chance by which these difficulties made him ultimately the fortunate possessor of a "hobby."

Throughout this volume there are manifest signs of Sterne's unceasing interest in his own creations, and of his increasing consciousness of creative power. Captain Toby

Shandy is but just lightly sketched-in in the first volume, while Corporal Trim has not made his appearance on the scene at all; but before the end of the second we know both of them thoroughly, within and without. Indeed, one might almost say that in the first half-dozen chapters which so excellently recount the origin of the corporal's fortification scheme, and the wounded officer's delighted acceptance of it, every trait in the simple characters—alike yet so different in their simplicity—of master and of man becomes definitely fixed in the reader's mind. And the total difference between the second and the first volume in point of fulness, variety, and colour is most marked. The artist, the inventor, the master of dialogue, the comic dramatist, in fact, as distinct from the humorous essayist, would almost seem to have started into being as we pass from the one volume to the other. There is nothing in the drolleries of the first volume—in the broad jests upon Mr. Shandy's crotchets, or even in the subtler humour of the intellectual collision between these crotchets and his brother's plain sense—to indicate the kind of power displayed in that remarkable colloquy *à quatre*, which begins with the arrival of Dr. Slop and ends with Corporal Trim's recital of the Sermon on Conscience. Wit, humour, irony, quaint learning, shrewd judgment of men and things, of these Sterne had displayed abundance already; but it is not in the earlier but in the later half of the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy* that we first become conscious that he is something more than the possessor of all these things; that he is gifted with the genius of creation, and has sent forth new beings into that world of immortal shadows which to many of us is more real than our own.

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## CHAPTER V.

LONDON TRIUMPHS.—FIRST SET OF SERMONS.—“TRISTRAM SHANDY,” VOLS. III. AND IV.—COXWOLD.—VOLS. V. AND VI.—FIRST VISIT TO THE CONTINENT.—PARIS.—TOULOUSE.

(1760-1762.)

STERNE alighted from the York mail, just as Byron “awoke one morning,” to “find himself famous.” Seldom indeed has any lion so suddenly discovered been pursued so eagerly and by such a distinguished crowd of hunters. The chase was remarkable enough to have left a lasting impression on the spectators; for it was several years after (in 1773) that Dr. Johnson, by way of fortifying his very just remark that “any man who has a name or who has the power of pleasing will be generally invited in London,” observed gruffly that “the man Sterne,” he was told, “had had engagements for three months.” And truly it would appear from abundant evidence that “the man Sterne” gained such a social triumph as might well have turned a stronger head than his. Within twenty-four hours after his arrival his lodgings in Pall Mall were besieged by a crowd of fashionable visitors; and in a few weeks he had probably made the acquaintance of “everybody who was anybody” in the London society of that day.

How thoroughly he relished the delights of celebrity is



revealed, with a simple vanity which almost disarms criticism, in many a passage of his correspondence. In one of his earliest letters to Miss Fourmantelle we find him proudly relating to her how already he "was engaged to ten noblemen and men of fashion." Of Garrick, who had warmly welcomed the humourist whose merits he had been the first to discover, Sterne says that he had "promised him at dinner to numbers of great people." Amongst these great people who sought him out for themselves was that discerning patron of ability in every shape, Lord Rockingham. In one of the many letters which Madame de Medalle flung dateless upon the world, but which from internal evidence we can assign to the early months of 1760, Sterne writes that he is about to "set off with a grand retinue of Lord Rockingham's (in whose suite I move) for Windsor" to witness, it should seem, an installation of a Knight of the Garter. It is in his letters to Miss Fourmantelle, however, that his almost boyish exultation at his London triumph discloses itself most frankly. "My rooms," he writes, "are filling every hour with great people of the first rank, who strive who shall most honour me." Never, he believes, had such homage been rendered to any man by devotees so distinguished. "The honours paid me were the greatest that were ever known from the great."

The self-painted portrait is not, it must be confessed, altogether an attractive one. It is somewhat wanting in dignity, and its air of over-inflated complacency is at times slightly ridiculous. But we must not judge Sterne in this matter by too severe a standard. He was by nature neither a dignified nor a self-contained man: he had a head particularly unfitted to stand sudden elevation; and it must be allowed that few men's power of resisting giddiness at

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previously unexplored altitudes was ever so severely tried. It was not only "the great" in the sense of the high in rank and social distinction by whom he was courted; he was welcomed also by the eminent in genius and learning; and it would be no very difficult task for him to flatter himself that it was the latter form of recognition which he really valued most. Much, at any rate, in the way of undue elation may be forgiven to a country clergyman who suddenly found himself the centre of a court, which was regularly attended by statesmen, wits, and leaders of fashion, and with whom even bishops condescended to open gracious diplomatic communication. "Even all the bishops," he writes, "have sent their compliments;" and though this can hardly have been true of the whole Episcopal Bench, it is certain that Sterne received something more than a compliment from one bishop, who was a host in himself. He was introduced by Garrick to Warburton, and received high encouragement from that formidable prelate.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1760, however, was to bring to Sterne more solid gains than that of mere celebrity, or even than the somewhat precarious money profits which depend on literary vogue. Only a few weeks after his arrival in town he was presented by Lord Falconberg with the curacy of Coxwold, "a sweet retirement," as he describes it, "in comparison of Sutton," at which he was in future to pass most of the time spent by him in Yorkshire. What obtained him this piece of preferment is unknown. It may be that *Tristram Shandy* drew the Yorkshire peer's atten-

<sup>1</sup> It is admitted, moreover, in the correspondence with Miss Fourmantelle that Sterne received something more substantial from the Bishop, in the shape of a purse of gold; and this strange present gave rise to a scandal on which something will be said hereafter.

tion to the fact that there was a Yorkshireman of genius living within a few miles of a then vacant benefice in his lordship's gift, and that this was enough for him. But Sterne himself says—in writing a year or so afterwards to a lady of his acquaintance—"I hope I have been of some service to his lordship, and he has sufficiently requited me;" and in the face of this plain assertion, confirmed as it is by the fact that Lord Falconberg was on terms of friendly intimacy with the Vicar of Coxwold at a much later date than this, we may dismiss idle tales about Sterne's having "black-mailed" the patron out of a presentation to a benefice worth no more, after all, than some 70*l.* a year net.

There is somewhat more substance, however, in the scandal which got abroad with reference to a certain alleged transaction between Sterne and Warburton. Before Sterne had been many days in London, and while yet his person and doings were the natural subjects of the newest gossip, a story found its way into currency to the effect that the new-made Bishop of Gloucester had found it advisable to protect himself against the satiric humour of the author of the *Tristram Shandy* by a substantial present of money. Coming to Garrick's ears, it was repeated by him—whether seriously or in jest—to Sterne, from whom it evoked a curious letter, which in Madame de Medalle's collection has been studiously hidden away amongst the correspondence of seven years later. "Twas for all the world," he began, "like a cut across my finger with a sharp pen-knife. I saw the blood—gave it a suck, wrapt it up, and thought no more about it. . . . The story you told me of Tristram's pretended tutor this morning"—(the scandal was, that Warburton had been threatened with caricature in the next volume of the novel, under the guise of the hero's tutor)—"this vile story, I say, though

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I then saw both how and where it wounded, I felt little from it at first, or, to speak more honestly (though it ruins my simile), I felt a great deal of pain from it, but affected an air, usual in such accidents, of feeling less than I had." And he goes on to repudiate, it will be observed, not so much the moral offence of corruption, in receiving money to spare Warburton, as the intellectual solecism of selecting him for ridicule. "What the devil!" he exclaims, "is there no one learned blockhead throughout the schools of misapplied science in the Christian world to make a tutor of for my Tristram—are we so run out of stock that there is no one lumber-headed, muddle-headed, mortar-headed, pudding-head chap amongst our doctors . . . but I must disable my judgment by choosing a Warburton?" Later on, in a letter to his friend, Mr. Croft, at Stillington, whom the scandal had reached through a "society journal" of the time, he asks whether people would suppose he would be "such a fool as to fall foul of Dr. Warburton, my best friend, by representing him so weak a man; or by telling such a lie of him as his using me a purse to buy off the tutorship of Tristram—or that I should be fool enough to own that I had taken a purse for that purpose?" It will be remarked that Sterne does not here deny having received a purse from Warburton, but only his having received it by way of black-mail: and the most mysterious part of the affair is that Sterne did actually receive the strange present of a "purse of gold" from Warburton (whom at that time he did not know nor had ever seen); and that he admits as much in one of his letters to Miss Fourmantelle. "I had a purse of guineas given me yesterday by a Bishop," he writes, triumphantly, but without volunteering any explanation of this extraordinary gift. Sterne's letter to Garrick was forwarded, it would seem, to

Warburton; and the Bishop thanks Garrick for having procured for him "the confutation of an impertinent story the first moment I heard of it." This, however, can hardly count for much. If Warburton had really wished Sterne to abstain from caricaturing him, he would be as anxious—and for much the same reasons—to conceal the fact as to suppress the caricature. He would naturally have the disclosure of it reported to Sterne for formal contradiction, as in fulfilment of a virtual term in the bargain between them. The epithet of "irrevocable scoundrel," which he afterwards applied to Sterne, is of less importance, as proceeding from Warburton, than it would have been had it come from any one not habitually employing Warburton's peculiar vocabulary; but it at least argues no very cordial feeling on the Bishop's side. And, on the whole, one regrets to feel, as I must honestly confess that I do feel, far less confident of the groundlessness of this rather unpleasant story than could be wished. It is impossible to forget, however, that while the ethics of this matter were undoubtedly less strict in those days than they are—or, at any rate, are recognized as being—in our own, there is nothing in Sterne's character to make us suppose him to have been at all in advance of the morality of his time.

The incumbent-designate did not go down at once to take possession of his temporalities. His London triumph had not yet run its course. The first edition of Vols. I. and II. of *Tristram Shandy* was exhausted in some three months. In April, Dodsley brought out a second; and, concurrently with the advertisement of its issue, there appeared—in somewhat incongruous companionship—the announcement, "Speedily will be published, The Sermons of Mr. Yorick." The judicious Dodsley, or possibly the judicious Sterne himself (acute enough in matters of this

kind), had perceived that now was the time to publish a series of sermons by the very unclerical lion of the day. There would—they, no doubt, thought—be an undeniable piquaney, a distinct flavour of semi-scandalous incongruity in listening to the Word of Life from the lips of this loose-tongued droll; and the more staid and serious the sermon, the more effective the contrast. There need not have been much trouble in finding the kind of article required; and we may be tolerably sure that, even if Sterne did not perceive that fact for himself, his publisher hastened to inform him that “anything would do.” Two of his pulpit discourses, the Assize Sermon and the Charity Sermon, had already been thought worthy of publication by their author in a separate form; and the latter of these found a place in the series; while the rest seem to have been simply the chance sweepings of the parson’s sermon-drawer. The critics who find wit, eccentricity, flashes of Shandyism, and what not else of the same sort in these discourses, must be able—or so it seems to me—to discover these phenomena anywhere. To the best of my own judgment the Sermons are—with but few and partial exceptions—of the most commonplace character; platitudinous with the platitudes of a thousand pulpits, and insipid with the *crambe repetita* of a hundred thousand homilies. A single extract will fully suffice for a specimen of Sterne’s pre-Shandian homiletic style; his post-Shandian manner was very different, as we shall see. The preacher is discoursing upon the well-worn subject of the inconsistencies of human character:

“If such a contrast was only observable in the different stages of a man’s life, it would cease to be either a matter of wonder or of just reproach. Age, experience, and much reflection may naturally enough be supposed to alter a man’s sense of things, and so entirely

to transform him that, not only in outward appearance but in the very cast and turn of his mind, he may be as unlike and different from the man he was twenty or thirty years ago as he ever was from anything of his own species. This, I say, is naturally to be accounted for, and in some cases might be praiseworthy too; but the observation is to be made of men in the same period of their lives that in the same day, sometimes on the very same action, they are utterly inconsistent and irreconcilable with themselves. Look at the man in one light, and he shall seem wise, penetrating, discreet, and brave; behold him in another point of view, and you see a creature all over folly and indiscretion, weak and timorous as cowardice and indiscretion can make him. A man shall appear gentle, courteous, and benevolent to all mankind; follow him into his own house, maybe you see a tyrant morose and savage to all whose happiness depends upon his kindness. A third, in his general behaviour, is found to be generous, disinterested, humane, and friendly. Hear but the sad story of the friendless orphans too credulously trusting all their whole substance into his hands, and he shall appear more sordid, more pitiless and unjust than the injured themselves have bitterness to paint him. Another shall be charitable to the poor, uncharitable in his censures and opinions of all the rest of the world besides: temperate in his appetites, intemperate in his tongue; shall have too much conscience and religion to cheat the man who trusts him, and perhaps as far as the business of debtor and creditor extends shall be just and scrupulous to the uttermost mite; yet in matters of full or great concern, where he is to have the handling of the party's reputation and good name, the dearest, the tenderest property the man has, he will do him irreparable damage, and rob him there without measure or pity."—Sermon XI.—*On Evil Speaking.*

There is clearly nothing particularly striking in all that, even conveyed as it is in Sterne's effective, if loose and careless, style; and it is no unfair sample of the whole. The calculation, however, of the author and his shrewd publisher was that, whatever the intrinsic merits or demerits of these sermons, they would "take" on the strength of the author's name; nor, it would seem, was their calculation disappointed. The edition of this series of sermons,

now lying before me is numbered the sixth, and its date is 1764; which represents a demand for a new edition every nine months or so, over a space of four years. They may, perhaps, have succeeded, too, in partially reconciling a certain serious-minded portion of the public to the author. Sterne evidently hoped that they might; for we find him sending a copy to Warburton, in the month of June, immediately after the publication of the book, and receiving in return a letter of courteous thanks, and full of excellent advice as to the expediency of avoiding scandal by too hazardous a style of writing in the future. Sterne, in reply, protests that he would "willingly give no offence to mortal by anything which could look like the least violation of either decency or good manners;" but—and it is an important "but"—he cannot promise to "mutilate everything" in *Tristram* "down to the pindish humour of every particular" (individual), though he will do his best; but, in any case, "laugh, my Lord, I will, and as loudly as I can." And laugh he did, and in such Rabelaisian fashion that the Bishop (somewhat inconsistently for a critic who had welcomed Sterne on the appearance of the first two volumes expressly as the "English Rabelais") remarked of him afterwards with characteristic vigour, in a letter to a friend, that he fears the fellow is an "irrevocable scoundrel."

The volumes, however, which earned "the fellow" this Episcopal benediction were not given to the world till the next year. At the end of May or beginning of June, 1760, Sterne went to his new home at Coxwold, and his letters soon begin to show him to us at work upon further records of Mr. Shandy's philosophical theory-spinning and the simpler pursuits of his excellent brother. It is probable that this year, 1760, was, on the whole, the happiest year



of Sterne's life. His health, though always feeble, had not yet finally given way; and though the "vile cough" which was to bring him more than once to death's door, and at last to force it open, was already troubling him, he had that within him which made it easy to bear up against all such physical ills. His spirits, in fact, were at their highest. His worldly affairs were going at least as smoothly as they ever went. He was basking in that sunshine of fame which was so delightful to a temperament differing from that of the average Englishman, as does the physique of the Southern races from that of the hardier children of the North; and lastly, he was exulting in a new-born sense of creative power which no doubt made the composition of the earlier volumes of *Tristram* a veritable labour of love.

But the witty division of literary spinners into silk-worms and spiders—those who spin because they are full, and those who do so because they are empty—is not exhaustive. There are human silk-worms who become gradually transformed into spiders—men who begin writing in order to unburden a full imagination, and who, long after that process has been completely performed, continue writing in order to fill an empty belly; and though Sterne did not live long enough to "write himself out," there are certain indications that he would not have left off writing if and when he felt that this stage of exhaustion had arrived. His artistic impulses were curiously combined with a distinct admixture of the "pot-boiler" spirit; and it was with something of the complacency of an annuitant that he looked forward to giving the public a couple of volumes of *Tristram Shandy* every year as long as they would stand it. In these early days, however, there was no necessity even to discuss the prob-

able period either of the writer's inspiration or of the reader's appetite. At present the public were as eager to consume more Shandyism as Sterne was ready to produce it: the demand was as active as the supply was easy. By the end of the year Vols. III. and IV. were in the press, and on January 27, 1761, they made their appearance. They had been disposed of in advance to Dodsley for 380*l.*—no bad terms of remuneration in those days; but it is still likely enough that the publisher made a profitable bargain. The new volumes sold freely, and the public laughed at them as heartily as their two predecessors. Their author's vogue in London, whither he went in December, 1760, to superintend publication, was as great during the next spring as it had been in the last. The tide of visitors again set in in all its former force and volume towards the "genteel lodgings." His dinner list was once more full, and he was feasted and flattered by wits, beaux, courtiers, politicians, and titled-lady lion-hunters as sedulously as ever. His letters, especially those to his friends the Crofts, of Stihington, abound, as before, in touches of the same amusing vanity. With how delicious a sense of self-importance must he have written these words: "You made me and my friends very merry with the accounts current at York of my being forbid the Court, but they do not consider what a considerable person they make of me when they suppose either my going or not going there is a point that ever enters the K.'s head; and for those about him, I have the honour either to stand so personally well-known to them, or to be so well represented by those of the first rank, as to fear no accident of the kind." Amusing, too, is it to note the familiarity, as of an old *habitué* of Ministerial ante-chambers, with which this country parson discusses the

political changes of that interesting year; though scarcely more amusing, perhaps, than the solemnity with which his daughter disguises the identity of the new Premier under the title B—e; and by a similar use of initials attempts to conceal the momentous state secret that the D. of R. had been removed from the place of Groom of the Chambers, and that Sir F. D. had succeeded T. as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Occasionally, however, the interest of his letters changes from personal to public, and we get a glimpse of scenes and personages that have become historical. He was present in the House of Commons at the first grand debate on the German war after the Great Commoner's retirement from office—"the pitched battle," as Sterne calls it, "wherein Mr. P. was to have entered and thrown down the gauntlet" in defence of his military policy. Thus he describes it:

There never was so full a House—the gallery full to the top—I was there all the day: when lo! a political fit of the gout seized the great combatant—he entered not the lists. Beekford got up and begged the House, as he saw not his right honourable friend there, to put off the debate—it could not be done: so Beekford rose up and made a most long, passionate, incoherent speech in defence of the German war, but very severe upon the unfrugal manner it was carried on, in which he addressed himself principally to the C[hancellor] of the E[xchequer], and laid on him terribly. . . . Legge answered Beekford very rationally and coolly. Lord N. spoke long. Sir F. D[ashwood] maintained the German war was most pernicious. . . . Lord B[arrington] at last got up and spoke half an hour with great plainness and temper, explained many hidden things relating to these accounts in favour of the late K., and told two or three conversations which had passed between the K. and himself relative to these expenses, which cast great honour upon the K.'s character. This was with regard to the money the K. had secretly furnished out of his own pocket to lessen the account of the Hanover-score brought us to discharge. Beekford and Barrington

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abused all who fought for peace and joined in the cry for it, and Beckford added that the reasons of wishing a peace now were the same as at the Peace of Utrecht—that the people behind the curtain could not both maintain the war and their places too, so were for making another sacrifice of the nation to their own interests. After all, the cry for a peace is so general that it will certainly end in one.”

And then the letter, recurring to personal matters towards the close, records the success of Vols. III. and IV. : “One half of the town abuse my book as bitterly as the other half cry it up to the skies—the best is they abuse and buy it, and at such a rate that we are going on with a second edition as fast as possible.” This was written only in the first week of March, so that the edition must have been exhausted in little more than a month. It was, indeed, another triumph; and all through this spring up to mid-summer did Sterne remain in London to enjoy it. But, with three distinct flocks awaiting a renewal of his pastoral ministrations in Yorkshire, it would scarcely have done for him, even in those easy-going days of the Establishment, to take up his permanent abode at the capital; and early in July he returned to Coxwold.

From the middle of this year, 1761, the scene begins to darken, and from the beginning of the next year onward Sterne's life was little better than a truceless struggle with the disease to which he was destined, prematurely, to succumb. The wretched constitution which, in common with his short-lived brothers and sisters, he had inherited probably from his father, already began to show signs of breaking up. Invalid from the first, it had doubtless been weakened by the hardships of Sterne's early years, and yet further, perhaps, by the excitements and dissipations of his London life; nor was the change from the gaieties of

the capital to hard literary labour in a country parsonage calculated to benefit him as much as it might others. Shandy Hall, as he christened his pretty parsonage at Coxwold, and as the house, still standing, is called to this day, soon became irksome to him. The very reaction begotten of unwonted quietude acted on his temperament with a dispiriting rather than a soothing effect. The change from his full and stimulating life in London to the dull round of clerical duties in a Yorkshire village might well have been depressing to a mind better balanced and balanced than his. To him, with his light, pleasure-loving nature, it was as the return of the schoolboy from pantomimes and pony-riding to the more sober delights of Dr. Swisltail's; and, in a letter to Hall Stevenson, Sterne reveals his feelings with all the juvenile frankness of one of the Doctor's pupils:

"I rejoice you are in London—rest you there in peace; here 'tis the devil. You were a good prophet. I wish myself back again, as you told me I should, but not because a thin, death-doing, pestiferous north-east wind blows in a line directly from Crazy Castle turret fresh upon me in this cuckoldly retreat (for I value the north-east wind and all its powers not a straw), but the transition from rapid motion to absolute rest was too violent. I should have walked about the streets of York ten days, as a proper medium to have passed through before I entered upon my rest; I stayed but a moment, and I have been here but a few, to satisfy me. I have not managed my miseries like a wise man, and if God for my consolation had not poured forth the spirit of Shandyism unto me, which will not suffer me to think two moments upon any grave subject, I would else just now lay down and die."

It is true he adds, in the next sentence, that in half an hour's time "I'll lay a guinea I shall be as merry as a monkey, and forget it all," but such sudden revulsions of high spirits can hardly be allowed to count for much

against the prevailing tone of discontented *ennui* which pervades this letter.

Apart, moreover, from Sterne's regrets of London, his country home was becoming from other causes a less pleasant place of abode. His relations with his wife were getting less and less cordial every year. With a perversity sometimes noticeable in the wives of distinguished men, Mrs. Sterne had failed to accept with enthusiasm the rôle of distant and humbly admiring spectator of her brilliant husband's triumphs. Accept it, of course, she did, being unable, indeed, to help herself; but it is clear that when Sterne returned home after one of his six months' revels in the gaieties of London, his wife, who had been vegetating the while in the retirement of Yorkshire, was not in the habit of welcoming him with effusion. Perceiving so clearly that her husband preferred the world's society to hers, she naturally, perhaps, refused to disguise her preference of her own society to his. Their estrangement, in short, had grown apace, and had already brought them to that stage of mutual indifference which is at once so comfortable and so hopeless—scene alike against the risk of "scenes" and the hope of reconciliation, shut fast in its exemption from *amantium ira* against all possibility of *redintegratio amoris*. To such perfection, indeed, had the feeling been cultivated on both sides, that Sterne, in the letter above quoted, can write of his conjugal relations in this philosophic strain:

"As to matrimony I should be a beast to rail at it, for my wife is easy, but the world is not, and had I stayed from her a second longer it would have been a burning shame—else she declares herself happier without me. But not in anger is this declaration made (the most fatal point, of course, about it), but in pure, sober, good sense, built on sound experience. She hopes you will be able to strike a

bargain for me before this twelvemonth to lead a bear round Europe, and from this hope from you I verily believe it is that you are so high in her favour at present. She swears you are a fellow of wit, though humorous;<sup>1</sup> a funny, jolly soul, though somewhat splenetic, and (bating the love of women) as honest as gold. How do you like the simile?"

There is, perhaps, a touch of affected cynicism in the suggestion that Mr. Sterne's liking for one of her husband's friends was wholly based upon the expectation that he would rid her of her husband; but mutual indifference must, it is clear, have reached a pretty advanced stage before such a remark could, even half in jest, be possible. And with one *eye* lingering, lingering look at the scenes which he had quitted for a lot like that of the Duke of Buckingham's dog, upon whom his master pronounced the maledictory wish that "he were married and lived in the country," this characteristic letter concludes:

"Oh, Lord! now are you going to Ranelagh to-night, and I am sitting sorrowful as the prophet was when the voice cried out to him and said, 'What do'st thou here, Elijah?' 'Tis well that the spirit does not make the same at Coxwold, for unless for the few sheep left me to take care of in the wilderness, I might as well, nay, better, be at Mecca. When we find we can, by a shifting of places, run away from ourselves, what think you of a jaunt there before we finally pay a visit to the Vale of Jehoshaphat? As ill a fame as we have, I trust I shall one day or other see you face to face, so tell the two colonels if they love good company to live righteously and soberly, *as you do*, and then they will have no doubts or dangers within

<sup>1</sup> It is curious to note, as a point in the chronology of language, how exclusive is Sterne's employment of the words "humour," "humourists," in their older sense of "whimsicality," "an eccentric." The later change in its meaning gives to the word "though" in the above passage an almost comic effect.

or without them. Present my best and warmest wishes to them, and advise the eldest to prop up his shoulders, and get a rich dowager before the conclusion of the peace. Will not the advice suit both, *par nobile fratrum?*"

In conclusion, he tells his friend that the next morning, if Heaven permit, he begins the fifth volume of *Shandy*, and adds, defiantly, that he "cares not a curse for the critics," but "will load my vehicle with what goods He sends me, and they may take 'em off my hands or let 'em alone."

The allusions to foreign travel in this letter were made with something more than a jesting intent. Sterne had already begun to be seriously alarmed, and not without reason, about the condition of his health. He shrank from facing another English winter, and meditated a southward flight so soon as he should have finished his fifth and sixth volumes, and seen them safe in the printer's hands. His publisher had changed, for what reason is not known, and the firm of Becket & De Hondt had taken the place of Dodsley. Sterne hoped by the end of the year to be free to depart from England, and already he had made all arrangements with his ecclesiastical superiors for the necessary leave of absence. He seems to have been treated with all consideration in the matter. His Archbishop, on being applied to, at once excused him from parochial work for a year, and promised, if it should be necessary, to double that term. Fortified with this permission, Sterne bade farewell to his wife and daughter, and took himself to London, with his now completed volumes, at the setting in of the winter. On the 21st of December they made their appearance, and in about three weeks from that date their author left England, with the intention of wintering in the South of France. There



were difficulties, however, of more kinds than one which had first to be faced—a pecuniary difficulty, which Garrick met by a loan of 20*l.*, and a political difficulty, for the removal of which Sterne had to employ the good offices of new acquaintance later on. He reached Paris about the 17th of January, 1762, and there met with a reception which interposed, as might have been expected, the most effectual of obstacles to his further progress southward. He was received in Paris with open arms, and stepped at once within the charmed circle of the philosophic *salons*. Again was the old intoxicating cup presented to his lips—this time, too, with more dexterous than English hands—and again did he drink deeply of it. “My head is turned,” he writes to Garrick, “with what I see, and the unexpected honour I have met with here. *Tristram* was almost as much known here as in London, at least among your men of condition and learning, and has got me introduced into so many circles (*tis comme à Londres*) I have just now a fortnight’s dinners and suppers on my hands.” We may venture to doubt whether French politeness had not been in one respect taken somewhat too seriously by the flattered Englishman, and whether it was much more than the name and general reputation of *Tristram*, which was “almost as much known” in Paris as in London. The dinners and suppers, however, were, at any rate, no figures of speech, but very liberal entertainments, at which Sterne appears to have disported himself with all his usual unclerical *abandon*. “I Shandy it away,” he writes in his boyish fashion to Garrick, “fifty times more than I was ever wont, talk more nonsense than ever you heard me talk in all your days, and to all sorts of people. ‘*Qui le diable est cet homme-là?*’ said Choiseul, t’other day, ‘*ce Chevalier Shandy?*’” [We might be lis-

teuing to one of Thackeray's Irish heroes.] "You'll think me as vain as a devil was I to tell you the rest of the dialogue." But there were distinguished Frenchmen who were ready to render to the English author more important services than that of offering him hospitality and flattery. Peace had not been formally concluded between France and England, and the passport with which Sterne had been graciously furnished by Pitt was not of force enough to dispense him from making special application to the French Government for permission to remain in the country. In this request he was influentially backed. "My application," he writes, "to the Count de Choiseul goes on swimmingly, for not only M. Pelletière (who by-the-by sends ten thousand civilities to you and Mrs. G.) has undertaken my affair, but the Count de Limbourg. The Baron d'Holbach has offered any security for the inoffensiveness of my behaviour in France—'tis more, you rogne! than you will do." And then the orthodox, or professedly orthodox, English divine, goes on to describe the character and habits of his strange new friend: "This Baron is one of the most learned noblemen here, the great protector of wits and of the *savans* who are no wits; keeps open house three days a week—his house is now, as yours was to me, my own—he lives at great expense." Equally communicative is he as to his other great acquaintances. Among these were the Count de Bissie, whom by an "odd incident" (as it seemed to his unsuspecting vanity) "I found reading *Tristram* when I was introduced to him, which I was," he adds (without perceiving the connexion between this fact and the "incident"), "at his desire;" Mr. Fox and Mr. Maartney (afterwards the Lord Maartney of Chinese celebrity), and the Duke of Orleans (not yet *Égalité*) himself, "who has suffered my portrait to be

added to the number of some odd men in his collection, and has had it taken most expressively at full length by a gentleman who lives with him." Nor was it only in the delights of society that Sterne was now revelling. He was passionately fond of the theatre, and his letters to Garrick are full of eager criticism of the great French performers, intermingled with flatteries, sometimes rather full-bodied than delicate, of their famous English rival. Of Clairon, in *Iphigénie*, he says "she is extremely great. Would to God you had one or two like her. What a luxury to see you with one of such power in the same interesting scene! But 'tis too much." Again he writes: "The French comedy I seldom visit; they act scarce anything but tragedies; and the Clairon is great, and Mdlle. Dumesnil in some parts still greater than her. Yet I cannot bear preaching—I fancy I got a surfeit of it in my younger days." And in a later letter:

"After a vile suspension of three weeks, we are beginning with our comedies and operas. Yours I hear never flourished more; here the comic actors were never so low; the tragedians hold up their heads in all senses. I have known *one little man* support the theatrical world like a David Atlas upon his shoulders, but Préville can't do half as much here, though Mad. Clairon stands by him and sets her back to his. She is very great, however, and highly improved since you saw her. She also supports her dignity at table, and has her public day every Thursday, when she gives to eat (as they say here) to all that are hungry and dry. You are much talked of here, and much expected, as soon as the peace will let you. These two last days you have happened to engross the whole conversation at the great houses where I was at dinner. 'Tis the greatest problem in nature in this meridian that one and the same man should possess such tragie and comic powers, and in such an *equilibrio* as to divide the world for which of the two Nature intended him."

And while on this subject of the stage let us pause for

a moment to glance at an incident which connects Sterne with one of the most famous of his French contemporaries. He has been asked "by a lady of talent," he tells Garrick, "to read a tragedy, and conjecture if it would do for you. 'Tis from the plan of Diderot; and, possibly, half a translation of it: *The Natural Son, or the Triumph of Virtue*, in five acts. It has too much sentiment in it (at least for me); the speeches too long, and savour too much of preaching. This may be a second reason it is not to my taste—'tis all love, love, love throughout, without much separation in the characters. So I fear it would not do for your stage, and perhaps for the very reason which recommends it to a French one." It is curious to see the "adaptator cerebrosus" at work in those days as in these; though not, in this instance, as it seems, with as successful results. *The Natural Son, or the Triumph of Virtue*, is not known to have reached either English readers or English theatrical audiences. The French original, as we know, fared scarcely better. "It was not until 1771," says Diderot's latest English biographer, "that the directors of the French Comedy could be induced to place *Le Fils Naturel* on the stage. The actors detested their task, and, as we can well believe, went sulkily through parts which they had not taken the trouble to master. The public felt as little interest in the piece as the actors had done, and after one or two representations, it was put aside."<sup>1</sup>

Another, and it is to be guessed a too congenial, acquaintance formed by Sterne in Paris was that of Crébillon; and with him he concluded "a convention," unedifying enough, whether in jest or earnest: "As soon as I get to Toulouse he has agreed to write me an expostulatory letter upon the indecorums of *T. Shandy*, which is

<sup>1</sup> Morley: *Diderot and the Encyclopædists*, ii. 305.

to be answered by recrimination upon the liberties in his own works. These are to be printed together—Crébillon against Sterne, Sterne against Crébillon—the copy to be sold, and the money equally divided. This is good Swiss-policy," he adds; and the idea (which was never carried out) had certainly the merit of ingenuity, if no other.

The words "as soon as I get to Toulouse," in a letter written from Paris on the 10th of April, might well have reminded Sterne of the strange way in which he had carried out his intention of "wintering in the South." He insists, however, upon the curative effects of his winter of gaiety in Paris. "I am recovered greatly," he says; "and if I could spend one whole winter at Toulouse, I should be fortified in my inner man beyond all danger of relapsing." There was another, too, for whom this change of climate had become imperatively necessary. For three winters past his daughter Lydia, now fourteen years old, had been suffering severely from asthma, and needed to try "the last remedy of a warmer and softer air." Her father, therefore, was about to solicit passports for his wife and daughter, with a view to their joining him at once in Paris, whence, after a month's stay, they were to depart together for the South. This application for passports he intended, he said, to make "this week:" and it would seem that the intention was carried out; but, for reasons explained in a letter which Mr. Fitzgerald was the first to publish, it was not till the middle of the next month that he was able to make preparation for their joining him. From this letter—written to his Archbishop, to request an extension of his leave—we learn that while applying for the passports he was attacked with a fever, "which has ended the worst way it could for me, in a *défluxion (de) poitrine*, as the French physicians call it. It is generally fatal to weak lungs, so

that I have lost in ten days all I have gained since I came here; and from a relaxation of my lungs have lost my voice entirely, that 'twill be much if I ever quite recover it. This evil sends me directly to Toulouse, for which I set out from this place directly my family arrives." Evidently there was no time to be lost, and a week after the date of this letter we find him in communication with Mrs. and Miss Sterne, and making arrangements for what was, in those days, a somewhat formidable undertaking—the journey of two ladies from the North of England to the centre of France. The correspondence which ensued may be said to give us the last pleasant glimpse of Sterne's relations with his wife. One can hardly help suspecting, of course, that it was his solicitude for the safety and comfort of his much-loved daughter that mainly inspired the affectionate anxiety which pervades these letters to Mrs. Sterne; but their writer is, at the very least, entitled to credit for allowing no difference of tone to reveal itself in the terms in which he speaks of wife and child. And, whichever of the two he was mainly thinking of, there is something very engaging in the thoughtful minuteness of his instructions to the two women travellers, the earnestness of his attempts to inspire them with courage for their enterprise, and the sincere fervour of his many commendations of them to the Divine keeping. The mixture of "canny" counsel and pious invocation has frequently a droll effect: as when the advice to "give the custom-house officers what I told you, and at Calais more, if you have much Scotch snuff;" and "to drink small Rhenish to keep you cool, that is, if you like it," is rounded off by the ejaculation, "So God in Heaven prosper and go along with you!" Letter after letter did he send them, full of such reminders as that "they have bad pins and vile needles

here," that it would be advisable to bring with them a strong bottle-screw, and a good stout copper tea-kettle; till at last, in the final words of preparation, his language assumes something of the solemnity of a general addressing his army on the eve of a well-nigh desperate enterprise: "Pluck up your spirits—trust in God, in me, and yourselves; with this, was you put to it, you would encounter all these difficulties ten times told. Write instantly, and tell me you triumph over all fears—tell me Lydia is better, and a help-mate to you. You say she grows like me: let her show me she does so in her contempt of small dangers, and fighting against the apprehensions of them, which is better still."

At last this anxiously awaited journey was taken; and, on Thursday, July 7, Mrs. Sterne and her daughter arrived in Paris. Their stay there was not long—not much extended, probably, beyond the proposed week. For Sterne's health had, some ten days before the arrival of his family, again given him warning to depart quickly. He had but a few weeks recovered from the fever of which he spoke in his letter to the Archbishop, when he again broke a blood-vessel in his lungs. It happened in the night, and "finding in the morning that I was likely to bleed to death, I sent immediately," he says, in a sentence which quaintly brings out the paradox of contemporary medical treatment, "for a surgeon to bleed me at both arms. This saved me"—*i. e.* did not kill me—"and, with lying speechless three days, I recovered upon my back in bed: the breach healed, and in a week after I got out." But the weakness which ensued, and the subsequent "hurrying about," no doubt as Cicero of Parisian sights to his wife and daughter, "made me think it high time to haste to Toulouse." Accordingly, about the 20th of the month,

and "in the midst of such heats that the oldest Frenchman never remembers the like," the party set off by way of Lyons and Montpellier for their Pyrenean destination. Their journey seems to have been a journey of many mischances, extraordinary discomfort, and incredible length; and it is not till the second week in August that we again take up the broken thread of his correspondence. Writing to Mr. Foley, his banker in Paris, on the 14th of that month, he speaks of its having taken him three weeks to reach Toulouse; and adds that "in our journey we suffered so much from the heats, it gives me pain to remember it. I never saw a cloud from Paris to Nismes half as broad as a twenty-four sols piece. Good God! we were toasted, roasted, grilled, stewed, carbonaded, on one side or other, all the way: and being all done through (*assez cuits*) in the day, we were eat up at night by bugs and other unswept-out vermin, the legal inhabitants, if length of possession give right, at every inn on the way." A few miles from Beaucaire he broke a hind wheel of his carriage, and was obliged in consequence "to sit five hours on a gravelly road without one drop of water, or possibility of getting any;" and here, to mend the matter, he was cursed with "two dough-hearted fools" for postilions, who "fell a-erying 'nothing was to be done!'" and could only be recalled to a worthier and more helpful mood by Sterne's "pulling off his coat and waistcoat," and "threatening to thrash them both within an inch of their lives."

The longest journey, however, must come to an end; and the party found much to console them at Toulouse for the miseries of travel. They were fortunate enough to secure one of those large, old comfortable houses which were and, here and there, perhaps, still are to be hired on the outskirts of provincial towns, at a rent which would now



be thought absurdly small; and Sterne writes in terms of high complacency of his temporary abode. "Excellent," "well furnished," "elegant beyond anything I ever looked for," are some of the expressions of praise which it draws from him. He observes with pride that the "very great *salle à compagnie* is as large as Baron d'Holbach's;" and he records with great satisfaction—as well he might—that for the use of this and a country house two miles out of town, "besides the enjoyment of gardens, which the landlord engaged to keep in order," he was to pay no more than thirty pounds a year. "All things," he adds, "are cheap in proportion: so we shall live here for a very, very little."

And this, no doubt, was to Sterne a matter of some moment at this time. The expenses of his long and tedious journey must have been heavy; and the gold-yielding vein of literary popularity, which he had for three years been working, had already begun to show signs of exhaustion. *Tristram Shandy* had lost its first vogue; and the fifth and sixth volumes, the copyright of which he does not seem to have disposed of, were "going off" but slowly.

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## CHAPTER VI.

LIFE IN THE SOUTH.—RETURN TO ENGLAND.—VOLS. VII.  
 AND VIII.—SECOND SET OF SERMONS.

(1762-1765.)

THE diminished appetite of the public for the humours of Mr. Shandy and his brother is, perhaps, not very difficult to understand. Time was simply doing its usual wholesome work in sifting the false from the true—in ridding Sterne's audience of its contingent of sham admirers. This is not to say, of course, that there might not have been other and better grounds for a partial withdrawal of popular favour. A writer who systematically employs Sterne's peculiar methods must lay his account with undeserved loss as well as with unmerited gain. The fifth and sixth volumes deal quite largely enough in mere eccentricity to justify the distaste of any reader upon whom mere eccentricity had begun to pall. But if this were the sole explanation of the book's declining popularity, we should have to admit that the adverse judgment of the public had been delayed too long for justice, and had passed over the worst to light upon the less heinous offences. For the third volume, though its earlier pages contain some good touches, drifts away into mere dull, uncleanly equivocal in its concluding chapters; and the fifth and sixth volumes may, at any rate, quite safely challenge favourable compar-

ison with the fourth—the poorest, I venture to think, of the whole series. There is nothing in these two later volumes to compare, for instance, with that most wearisome exercise in *double entendre*, Slawkenbergins's Tale; nothing to match that painfully elaborate piece of low comedy, the consultation of philosophers and its episode of Plintatorius's mishap with the hot chestnut; no such persistent resort, in short, to those mechanical methods of mirth-making upon which Sterne, throughout a great part of the fourth volume, almost exclusively relies. The humour of the fifth is, to a far larger extent, of the creative and dramatic order; the ever-delightful collision of intellectual incongruities in the persons of the two brothers Shandy gives animation to the volume almost from beginning to end. The arrival of the news of Bobby Shandy's death, and the contrast of its reception by the philosophic father and the simple-minded uncle, form a scene of inimitable absurdity, and the "Tristrapædia," with its ingenious project for opening up innumerable "tracks of inquiry" before the mind of the pupil by sheer skill in the manipulation of the auxiliary verbs, is in the author's happiest vein. The sixth volume, again, which contains the irresistible dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Shandy on the great question of the "breeching of Tristram," and the much-admired, if not wholly admirable, episode of Le Fevre's death, is fully entitled to rank beside its predecessors. On the whole, therefore, it must be said that the colder reception accorded to this instalment of the novel, as compared with the previous one, can hardly be justified on sound critical grounds. But that literary shortcomings were not, in fact, the cause of *Tristram's* declining popularity may be confidently inferred from the fact that the seventh volume, with its admirably vivid and spirited scenes of Continental travel, and

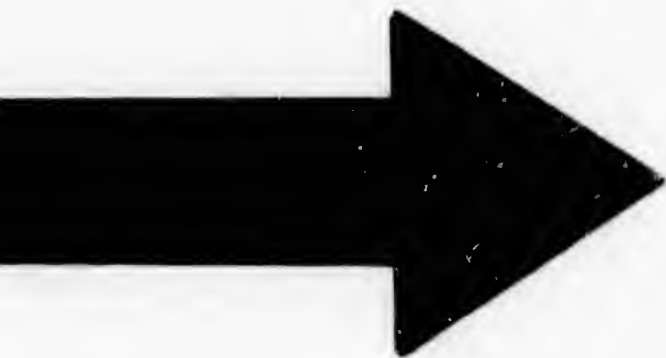
the eighth and ninth, with their charming narrative of Captain Shandy's love affair, were but slightly more successful. The readers whom this, the third instalment of the novel, had begun to repel, were mainly, I imagine, those who had never felt any intelligent admiration for the former; who had been caught by the writer's eccentricity, without appreciating his insight into character and his graphic power, and who had seen no other aspects of his humour than those buffooneries and puerilities which, after first amusing, had begun, in the natural course of things, to weary them.

Meanwhile, however, and with spirits restored by the Southern warmth to that buoyancy which never long deserted them, Sterne had begun to set to work upon a new volume. His letters show that this was not the seventh but the eighth; and Mr. Fitzgerald's conjecture, that the materials ultimately given to the world in the former volume were originally designed for another work, appears exceedingly probable. But for some time after his arrival at Toulouse he was unable, it would seem, to resume his literary labours in any form. Ever liable, through his weakly constitution, to whatever local maladies might anywhere prevail, he had fallen ill, he writes to Hall Stevenson, "of an epidemic vile fever which killed hundreds about me. The physicians here," he adds, "are the arrantest charlatans in Europe, or the most ignorant of all pretending fools. I withdrew what was left of me out of their hands, and recommended my affairs entirely to Dame Nature. She (dear goddess) has saved me in fifty different pinching bouts, and I begin to have a kind of enthusiasm now in her favour and my own, so that one or two more escapes will make me believe I shall leave you all at last by translation, and not by fair death." Having now become "stout and foolish again as a man can wish

to be, I am," he says, "busy playing the fool with my Uncle Toby, whom I have got soused over head and ears in love." Now, it is not till the eighth volume that the Widow Wadman begins to weave her spells around Captain Shandy's ingenuous heart; while the seventh volume is mainly composed of that series of travel-pictures in which Sterne has manifestly recorded his own impressions of Northern France in the person of the youthful Tristram. It is scarcely doubtful, therefore, that it is these sketches, and the use which he then proposed to make of them, that he refers to, when speaking in this letter of "hints and projects for other works." Originally intended to form a part of the volume afterwards published as the *Sentimental Journey*, it was found necessary—under pressure, it is to be supposed, of insufficient matter—to work them up instead into an interpolated seventh volume of *Tristram Shandy*. At the moment, however, he no doubt as little foresaw this as he did the delay which was to take place before any continuation of the novel appeared. He clearly contemplated no very long absence from England. "When I have reaped the benefit of the winter at Toulouse, I cannot see I have anything more to do with it. Therefore, after having gone with my wife and girl to Bagnères, I shall return from whence I came." Already, however, one can perceive signs of his having too presumptuously marked out his future. "My wife wants to stay another year, to save money; and this opposition of wishes, though it will not be as sour as lemon, yet 'twill not be as sweet as sugar." And again: "If the snows will suffer me, I propose to spend two or three months at Barège or Bagnères; but my dear wife is against all schemes of additional expense, which wicked propensity (though not of despotic power) yet I cannot suffer—though, by-the-by, laudable

enough. But she may talk; I will go my own way, and she will acquiesce without a word of debate on the subject. Who can say so much in praise of his wife? Few, I trow." The tone of contemptuous amiability shows pretty clearly what the relations between husband and wife had in nowise improved. But wives do not always lose all their influence over husbands' wills along with the power over their affections; and it will be seen that Sterne did *not* make his projected winter trip to Bagnères, and that he did remain at Toulouse for a considerable part of the second year for which Mrs. Sterne desired to prolong their stay. The place, however, was not to his taste; and he was not the first traveller in France who, delighted with the gaiety of Paris, has been disappointed at finding that French provincial towns can be as dull as business itself could require. It is in the somewhat unjust world which is commonly begotten of disillusion that Sterne discovers the cause of his *ennui* in "the eternal platitude of the French character," with its "little variety and no originality at all." "They are very civil," he admits, "but civility itself so thus uniform wearies and bothers me to death. If I do not mind I shall grow most stupid and sententious." With such apprehensions it is not surprising that he should have eagerly welcomed any distraction that chance might offer, and in December we find him joyfully informing his chief correspondent of the period, Mr. Foley—who to his services as Sterne's banker seems to have added those of a most helpful and trusted friend—that "there are a company of English strollers arrived here who are to act comedies all the Christmas, and are now busy in making dresses and preparing some of our best comedies." These so-called strollers were, in fact, certain members of the English colony in Toulouse, and their performances were







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among the first of those "amateur theatrical" entertainments which now-a-days may be said to rival the famous "morning drum-beat" of Daniel Webster's oration, in marking the ubiquity of British boredom, as the *reveil* does that of British power over all the terrestrial globe. "The next week," writes Sterne, "with a grand orchestra, we play *The Busybody*, and the *Journey to London* the week after; but I have some thought of adapting it to our situation, and making it the *Journey to Toulouse*, which, with the change of half-a-dozen scenes, may be easily done. Thus, my dear Foley, for want of something better we have recourse to ourselves, and strike out the best amusements we can from such materials." "Recourse to ourselves," however, means, in strict acenraey, "recourse to each other;" and when the amateur players had played themselves out, and exhausted their powers of contributing to each others' amusement, it is probable that "recourse to ourselves," in the exact sense of the phrase, was found ineffective—in Sterne's case, at any rate—to stave off *ennui*. To him, with his copiously if somewhat oddly furnished mind, and his natural activity of imagination, one could hardly apply the line of Persius,

"Tecum habita et noris quam sit tibi curta supellex;"

but it is yet evident enough that Sterne's was one of that numerous order of intellects which are the convivial associates, rather than the fireside companions, of their owners, and which, when deprived of the stimulus of external excitement, are apt to become very dull company indeed. Nor does he seem to have obtained much diversion of mind from his literary work—a form of intellectual enjoyment which, indeed, more often presupposes than begets good spirits in such temperaments as his. He de-

declares, it is true, that he "sports much with my Uncle Toby" in the volume which he is now "fabricating for the laughing part of the world;" but if so he must have sported only after a very desultory and dilatory fashion. On the whole one cannot escape a very strong impression that Sterne was heartily bored by his sojourn in Toulonse, and that he eagerly longed for the day of his return to "the dalliance and the wit, the flattery and the strife," which he had left behind him in the two great capitals in which he had shone.

His stay, however, was destined to be very prolonged. The winter of 1762 went by, and the succeeding year had run nearly half its course, before he changed his quarters. "The first week in June," he writes in April to Mr. Foley, "I decamp like a patriarch, with all my household, to pitch our tents for three months at the foot of the Pyrenean hills at Bagnères, where I expect much health and much amusement from all corners of the earth." He talked too at this time of spending the winter at Florence, and, after a visit to Leghorn, returning home the following April by way of Paris; "but this," he adds, "is a sketch only," and it remained only a sketch. Toulouse, however, he was in any case resolved to quit. He should not, he said, be tempted to spend another winter there. It did not suit his health, as he had hoped: he complained that it was too moist, and that he could not keep clear of ague. In June, 1763, he quitted it finally for Bagnères; whence after a short, and, as we subsequently learn, a disappointed, sojourn, he passed on to Marseilles, and later to Aix, for both of which places he expressed dislike; and by October he had gone again into winter quarters at Montpellier, where "my wife and daughter," he writes, "purpose to stay at least a year behind me." His own intention was

to set out in February for England, "where my heart has been fled these six months." Here again, however, there are traces of that periodic, or rather, perhaps, that chronic conflict of inclination between himself and Mrs. Sterne, of which he speaks with such a tell-tale affectation of philosophy. "My wife," he writes in January, "returns to Toulouse, and proposes to spend the summer at Bagnères. I, on the contrary, go to visit my wife the church in Yorkshire. We all live the longer, at least the happier, for having things our own way. This is my conjugal maxim. I own 'tis not the best of maxims, but I maintain 'tis not the worst." It was natural enough that Sterne, at any rate, should wish to turn his back on Montpellier. Again had the unlucky invalid been attacked by a dangerous illness; the "sharp air" of the place disagreed with him, and his physicians, after having him under their hands more than a month, informed him coolly that if he stayed any longer in Montpellier it would be fatal to him. How soon after that somewhat late warning he took his departure there is no record to show; but it is not till the middle of May that we find him writing from Paris to his daughter. And since he there announces his intention of leaving for England in a few days, it is a probable conjecture that he had arrived at the French capital some fortnight or so before.

His short stay in Paris was marked by two incidents—trifling in themselves, but too characteristic of the man to be omitted. Lord Hertford, the British Ambassador, had just taken a magnificent hotel in Paris, and Sterne was asked to preach the first sermon in its chapel. The message was brought him, he writes, "when I was playing a sober game of whist with Mr. Thornhill; and whether I was called abruptly from my afternoon amusement to prepare myself for the business on the next day, or from what

other cause, I do not pretend to determine; but that unlucky kind of fit seized me which you know I am never able to resist, and a very unlucky text did come into my head." The text referred to was 2 Kings xx. 15—Hezekiah's admission of that ostentatious display of the treasures of his palace to the ambassadors of Babylon for which Isaiah rebuked him by prophesying the Babylonian captivity of Judah. Nothing, indeed, as Sterne protests, could have been more innocent than the discourse which he founded upon the *mal-à-propos* text; but still it was unquestionably a fair subject for "chaff," and the preacher was rallied upon it by no less a person than David Hume. Gossip having magnified this into a dispute between the parson and the philosopher, Sterne disposes of the idle story in a passage deriving an additional interest from its tribute to that sweet disposition which had an equal charm for two men so utterly unlike as the author of *Tristram Shandy* and the author of the *Wealth of Nations*. "I should," he writes, "be exceedingly surprised to hear that David ever had an unpleasant contention with any man; and if I should ever be made to believe that such an event had happened, nothing would persuade me that his opponent was not in the wrong, for in my life did I never meet with a being of a more placid and gentle nature; and it is this amiable turn of his character which has given more consequence and force to his scepticism than all the arguments of his sophistry." The real truth of the matter was that, meeting Sterne at Lord Hertford's table on the day when he had preached at the Embassy Chapel, "David was disposed to make a little merry with the parson, and in return the parson was equally disposed to make a little merry with the infidel. We laughed at one another, and the company laughed with us both." It would be absurd,

of course, to identify Sterne's latitudinarian *bonhomie* with the higher order of tolerance; but many a more confirmed and notorious Gallio than the clerical humorist would have assumed prudish airs of orthodoxy in such a presence, and the incident, if it does not raise one's estimate of Sterne's dignity, displays him to us as laudably free from hypoerisy.

But the long holiday of somewhat dull travel, with its short last act of social gaiety, was drawing to a close. In the third or fourth week of May Sterne quitted Paris; and after a stay of a few weeks in London he returned to the Yorkshire parsonage, from which he had been absent some thirty months.

Unusually long as was the interval which had elapsed since the publication of the last instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, the new one was far from ready; and even in the "sweet retirement" of Coxwold he seems to have made but slow progress with it. Indeed, the "sweet retirement" itself became soon a little tedious to him. The month of September found him already bored with work and solitude; and the fine autumn weather of 1764 set him longing for a few days' pleasure-making at what was even then the fashionable Yorkshire watering-place. "I do not think," he writes, with characteristic incoherence, to Hall Stevenson—"I do not think a week or ten days' playing the good fellow (at this very time) so abominable a thing; but if a man could get there cleverly, and every soul in his house in the mind to try what could be done in furtherance thereof, I have no one to consult in these affairs. Therefore, as a man may do worse things, the plain English of all which is, that I am going to leave a few poor sheep in the wilderness for fourteen days, and from pride and naughtiness of heart to go see what is

doing at Scarborough, steadfastly meaning afterwards to lead a new life and strengthen my faith. Now, some folks say there is much company there, and some say not; and I believe there is neither the one nor the other, but will be both if the world will have patience for a month or so." Of his work he has not much to say: "I go on not rapidly but well enough with my Uncle Toby's amours. There is no sitting and cudgelling one's brains whilst the sun shines bright. 'Twill be all over in six or seven weeks; and there are dismal weeks enow for to endure suffocation by a brimstone fireside." He was anxious that his boon companion should join him at Scarborough; but that additional pleasure was denied him, and he had to content himself with the usual gay society of the place. Three weeks, it seems, were passed by him in this most doubtfully judicious form of bodily and mental relaxation—weeks which he spent, he afterwards writes, in "drinking the waters, and receiving from them marvellous strength, had I not debilitated it as fast as I got it by playing the good fellow with Lord Granby and Co. too much." By the end of the month he was back again at Coxwold, "returned to my Philosophical Hut to finish *Tristram*, which I calculate will be ready for the world about Christmas, at which time I decamp from hence and fix my headquarters at London for the winter, unless my cough pushes me forward to your metropolis" (he is writing to Foley, in Paris), "or that I can persuade some *gros milord* to make a trip to you." Again, too, in this letter we get another glimpse at that thoroughly desentimentalized "domestic interior" which the sentimentalist's household had long presented to the view. Writing to request a remittance of money to Mrs. Sterne at Montauban—a duty which, to do him justice, he seems to have very watchfully

observed—Sterne adds his solicitation to Mr. Foley to “do something equally essential to rectify a mistake in the mind of your correspondent there, who, it seems, gave her a hint not long ago ‘that she was separated from me for life.’ Now, as this is not true, in the first place, and may fix a disadvantageous impression of her to those she lives amongst, ’twould be unmerciful to let her or my daughter suffer by it. So do be so good as to undeceive him; for in a year or two she purposes (and I expect it with impatience from her) to rejoin me.”

Early in November the two new volumes of *Shandy* began to approach completion; for by this time Sterne had already made up his mind to interpolate these notes of his French travels, which now do duty as Vol. VII. “You will read,” he tells Foley, “as odd a tour through France as was ever projected or executed by traveller or traveller since the world began. ’Tis a laughing, good-tempered satire upon travelling—as *puppies* travel.” By the 16th of the month he had “finished my two volumes of *Tristram*,” and looked to be in London at Christmas, “whence I have some thoughts of going to Italy this year. At least I shall not defer it above another.” On the 26th of January, 1765, the two new volumes were given to the world.

Shorter in length than any of the preceding instalments, and filled out as it was, even so, by a process of what would now be called “bock-making,” this issue will yet bear comparison, I think, with the best of its predecessors. Its sketches of travel, though destined to be surpassed in vigour and freedom of draftsmanship by the *Sentimental Journey*, are yet excellent, and their very obvious want of connexion with the story—if story it can be called—is so little felt that we almost resent the head-and-ears introdne-



tion of Mr. Shandy and his brother, and the Corporal, in apparent concession to the popular prejudice in favour of some sort of coherence between the various parts of a narrative. The first seventeen chapters are, perhaps, as freshly delightful reading as anything in Sterne. They are literally filled and brimming over with the exhilaration of travel: written, or at least prepared for writing, we can clearly see, under the full intoxicant effect which a bewildering succession of new sights and sounds will produce, in a certain measure, upon the coolest of us, and which would set a head like Sterne's in an absolute whirl. The contagion of his high spirits is, however, irresistible; and, putting aside all other and more solid qualities in them, these chapters are, for mere fun—for that kind of clever nonsense which only wins by perfect spontaneity, and which so promptly makes ashamed the moment spontaneity fails—unsurpassed by anything of the same kind from the same hand. How strange, then, that, with so keen an eye for the humorous, so sound and true a judgment in the highest qualities of humour, Sterne should think it possible for any one who has outgrown what may be called the dirty stage of boyhood to smile at the story which begins a few chapters afterwards—that of the Abbess and Novice of the Convent of Andouilletts! The adult male person is not so much shocked at the coarseness of this story as astonished at the bathos of its introduction. It is as though some matchless connoisseur in wine, after having a hundred times demonstrated the unerring discrimination of his palate for the finest brands, should then produce some vile and loaded compound, and invite us to drink it with all the relish with which he seems to be swallowing it himself. This story of the Abbess and Novice almost impels us to turn back to certain

earlier chapters, or former volumes, and re-examine some of the subtler passages of humour to be found there—in downright apprehension lest we should turn out to have read these “good things,” not “in,” but “into,” our author. The bad wine is so very bad, that we catch ourselves wondering whether the finer brands were genuine, when we see the same palate equally satisfied with both. But one should, of course, add that it is only in respect of its supposed humour that this story shakes its readers’ faith in the gifts of the narrator. As a mere piece of story-telling, and even as a study in landscape and figure-painting, it is quite perversely skilful. There is something almost irritating, as a waste of powers on unworthy material, in the prettiness of the picture which Sterne draws of the preparations for the departure of the two *religieuses*—the stir in the simple village, the co-operating labours of the gardener and the tailor, the carpenter and the smith, and all those other little details which bring the whole scene before the eye so vividly that Sterne may, perhaps, in all seriousness, and not merely as a piece of his characteristic persiflage, have thrown in the exclamation, “I declare I am interested in this story, and wish I had been there.” Nothing, again, could be better done than the sketch of the little good-natured, “broad-set” gardener, who acted as the ladies’ muleteer, and the recital of the indiscretions by which he was betrayed into temporary desertion of his duties. The whole scene is Chaucerian in its sharpness of outline and transluency of atmosphere: though there, unfortunately, the resemblance ends. Sterne’s manner of saying what we now leave unsaid is as unlike Chaucer’s, and as unlike for the worse, as it can possibly be.

Still, a certain amount of this element of the *non nomi-*

*nandum* must be compounded for, one regrets to say, in nearly every chapter that Sterne ever wrote; and there is certainly less than the average amount of it in the seventh volume. Then, again, this volume contains the famous scene with the ass—the live and genuinely touching, and not the dead and fictitiously pathetic, animal; and that perfect piece of comic dialogue—the interview between the puzzled English traveller and the French commissary of the posts. To have suggested this scene is, perhaps, the sole claim of the absurd fiscal system of the *Ancien régime* upon the grateful remembrance of the world. A scheme of taxation which exacted posting-charges from a traveller who proposed to continue his journey by water, possesses a natural ingredient of drollery infused into its mere vexatiousness; but a whole volume of satire could hardly put its essential absurdity in a stronger light than is thrown upon it in the short conversation between the astonished Tristram and the officer of the fisc, who had just handed him a little bill for six livres four sous:

“‘Upon what account?’ said I.

“‘Tis upon the part of the King,’ said the commissary, heaving up his shoulders.

“‘My good friend,’ quoth I, ‘as sure as I am I, and you are you—’

“‘And who are you?’ he said.

“‘Don’t puzzle me,’ said I. ‘But it is an indubitable verity,’ I continued, addressing myself to the commissary, changing only the form of my asseveration, ‘that I owe the King of France nothing but my good-will, for he is a very honest man, and I wish him all the health and pastime in the world.’

“‘Pardonnez-moi,’ replied the commissary. ‘You are indebted to him six livres four sous for the next post from hence to St. Fons, on your route to Avignon, which being a post royal, you pay double for the horses and postilion, otherwise ’twould have amounted to no more than three livres two sous.’

“‘But I don’t go by land,’ said I.

“‘You may if you please,’ replied the commissary.

“‘Your most obedient servant,’ said I, making him a low bow.

“The commissary, with all the sincerity of grave good-breeding, made me one as low again. I never was more disconcerted by a bow in my life. ‘The devil take the serious character of these people,’ said I, aside; ‘they understand no more of irony than this.’ The comparison was standing close by with her panniers, but something sealed up my lips. I could not pronounce the name.

“‘Sir,’ said I, collecting myself, ‘it is not my intention to take post.’

“‘But you may,’ said he, persisting in his first reply. ‘You may if you choose.’

“‘And I may take salt to my pickled herring if I choose.’ But I do not choose.’

“‘But you must pay for it, whether you do or no.’

“‘Ay, for the salt,’ said I, ‘I know.’

“‘And for the post, too,’ added he.

“‘Defend me!’ cried I. ‘I travel by water. I am going down the Rhone this very afternoon; my baggage is in the boat, and I have actually paid nine livres for my passage.’

“‘C’est tout égal—’tis all one,’ said he.

“‘Bon Dieu! What! pay for the way I go and for the way I do not go?’

“‘C’est tout égal,’ replied the commissary.

“‘The devil it is!’ said I. ‘But I will go to ten thousand Bastilles first. O, England! England! thou land of liberty and climate of good-sense! thou tenderest of mothers and gentlest of nurses!’ cried

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<sup>1</sup> It is the penalty—I suppose the just penalty—paid by habitually extravagant humourists, that *meaning* not being always expected of them, it is not always sought by their readers with sufficient care. Anyhow, it may be suspected that this retort of Tristram’s is too often passed over as a mere random absurdity designed for his interlocutor’s mystification, and that its extremely felicitous pertinence to the question in dispute is thus overlooked. The point of it, of course, is that the business in which the commissary was then engaged was precisely analogous to that of exacting salt dues from perverse persons who were impoverishing the revenue by possessing herrings already pickled.

I, kneeling upon one knee as I was beginning my apostrophe—when the director of Madame L. Blane's conscience coming in at that instant, and seeing a person in black, with a face as pale as ashes, at his devotions, asked if I stood in want of the aids of the Church.

"I go by water," said I, "and here's another will be for making me pay for going by oil."

The commissary, of course, remains obdurate, and Tristram protests that the treatment to which he is being subjected is "contrary to the law of nature, contrary to reason, contrary to the Gospel:"

"But not to this," said he, putting a printed paper into my hand.

"De par le Roi." 'Tis a pithy prolegomenon,' quoth I, and so read on. . . . 'By all which it appears,' quoth I, having read it over a little too rapidly, 'that if a man sets out in a post-chaise for Paris, he must go on travelling in one all the days of his life, or pay for it.'

"Excuse me," said the commissary, 'the spirit of the ordinance is this, that if you set out with an intention of running post from Paris to Avignon, &c., you shall not change that intention or mode of travelling without first satisfying the fermiers for two posts further than the place you repent at; and 'tis founded,' continued he, 'upon this, that the revenues are not to fall short through your fickleness.'

"O, by heavens!" cried I, 'if fickleness is taxable in France, we have nothing to do but to make the best peace we can.'

"And so the peace was made."

And the volume ends with the dance of villagers on "the road between Nismes and Lunel, where is the best Muscatto wine in all France"—that charming little idyll which won the unwilling admiration of the least friendly of Sterne's critics.<sup>1</sup>

With the close of this volume the shadowy Tristram disappears altogether from the scene; and even the clearly-sketched figures of Mr. and Mrs. Shandy recede somewhat into the background. The courtship of my Uwele

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray: *English Humourists*, vol. x. p. 568, ed. 1879.

Toby forms the whole *motif*, and indeed almost the entire substance, of the next volume. Of this famous episode in the novel a great deal has been said and written, and much of the praise bestowed upon it is certainly deserved. The artful coquetries of the fascinating widow, and the gradual capitulation of the Captain, are studied with admirable power of humorous insight, and described with infinite grace and skill. But there is, perhaps, no episode in the novel which brings out what may be called the perversity of Sterne's animalism in a more exasperating way. It is not so much the amount of this element as the time, place, and manner in which it makes its presence felt. The senses must, of course, play their part in all love affairs, except those of the angels—or the triangles; and such writers as Byron, for instance, are quite free from the charge of over-spiritualizing their description of the passion. Yet one might safely say that there is far less to repel a healthy mind in the poet's account of the amour of Juan and Haidee than is to be found in many a passage in this volume. It is not merely that one is the poetry and the other the prose of the sexual passion: the distinction goes deeper, and points to a fundamental difference of attitude towards their subject in the two writers' minds.

The success of this instalment of *Tristram Shandy* appears to have been slightly greater than that of the preceding one. Writing from London, where he was once more basking in the sunshine of social popularity, to Garrick, then in Paris, he says (March 16, 1765): "I have had a lucrative campaign here. *Shandy* sells well," and "I am taxing the public with two more volumes of sermons, which will more than double the gains of *Shandy*. It goes into the world with a prancing list *de toute la noblesse*, which will bring me in three hundred pounds, exclusive of the

sale of the copy." The list was, indeed, extensive and distinguished enough to justify the curious epithet which he applies to it; but the cavalcade of noble names continued to "prance" for some considerable time without advancing. Yet he had good reasons, according to his own account, for wishing to push on their publication. His parsonage-house at Sutton had just been burnt down through the carelessness of one of his curate's household, with a loss to Sterne of some 350*l.* "As soon as I can," he says, "I must rebuild it, but I lack the means at present." Nevertheless, the new sermons continued to hang fire. Again, in April he describes the subscription list as "the most splendid list which ever pranced before a book since subscription came into fashion;" but though the volumes which it was to usher into the world were then spoken of as about to be printed "very soon," he has again in July to write of them only as "forthcoming in September, though I fear not in time to bring them with me" to Paris. And, as a matter of fact, they do not seem to have made their appearance until after Sterne had quitted England on his second and last Continental journey. The full subscription list may have had the effect of relaxing his energies; but the subscribers had no reason to complain when, in 1766, the volumes at last appeared.

The reception given to the first batch of sermons which Sterne had published was quite favourable enough to encourage a repetition of the experiment. He was shrewd enough, however, to perceive that on this second occasion a somewhat different sort of article would be required. In the first flush of *Tristram Shandy's* success, and in the first piquaney of the contrast between the grave profession of the writer and the unbounded license of the book, he could safely reckon on as large and curious a public for *any*

sermons whatever from the pen of Mr. Yorick. There was no need that the humourist in his pulpit should at all resemble the humourist at his desk, or, indeed, that he should be in any way an impressive or commanding figure. The great desire of the world was to know what he *did* resemble in this new and incongruous position. Men wished to see what the queer, sly face looked like over a velvet cushion, in the assurance that the sight would be a strange and interesting one, at any rate. Five years afterwards, however, the case was different. The public then had already had one set of sermons, and had discovered that the humorous Mr. Sterne was not a very different man in the pulpit from the dullest and most decorous of his brethren. Such discoveries as these are instructive to make, but not attractive to dwell upon; and Sterne was fully alive to the probability that there would be no great demand for a volume of sermons which should only illustrate for the second time the fact that he could be as commonplace as his neighbour. He saw that in future the Rev. Mr. Yorick must a little more resemble the author of *Tristram Shandy*, and it is not improbable that from 1760 onwards he composed his parochial sermons with especial attention to this mode of qualifying them for republication. There is, at any rate, no slight critical difficulty in believing that the bulk of the sermons of 1766 can be assigned to the same literary period as the sermons of 1761. The one set seems as manifestly to belong to the post-Shandian as the other does to the pre-Shandian era; and in some, indeed, of the apparently later productions the daring quaintness of style and illustration is carried so far that, except for the fact that Sterne had no time to spare for the composition of sermons not intended for professional use, one would have been disposed to believe that they



neither were nor were meant to be delivered from the pulpit at all.<sup>1</sup> Throughout all of them, however, Sterne's new-found literary power displays itself in a vigour of expression and vivacity of illustration which at least serve to make the sermons of 1766 considerably more entertaining reading than those of 1761. In the first of the latter series, for instance—the sermon on Shimei—a discourse in which there are no very noticeable sallies of unclerical humour, the quality of liveliness is very conspicuously present. The preacher's view of the character of Shimei, and of his behaviour to David, is hardly that, perhaps, of a competent historical critic, and in treating of the Benjamite's insults to the King of Israel he appears to take no account of the blood-feud between the house of David and the clan to which the railer belonged; just as in commenting on Shimei's subsequent and most abject submission to the victorious monarch, Sterne lays altogether too much stress upon conduct which is indicative, not so much of any exceptional meanness of disposition, as of the ordinary suppleness of the Oriental put in fear of his life. However, it makes a more piquant and dramatic picture to represent Shimei as a type of the wretch of insolence and servility compact, with a tongue ever ready to be loosed against the unfortunate, and a knee ever ready to be bent to the strong. And thus he moralizes on his conception:

“There is not a character in the world which has so bad an influence upon it as this of Shimei. While power meets with honest checks, and the evils of life with honest refuge, the world will never be undone; but thou, Shimei, hast sapped it at both extremes: for thou corruptest prosperity, and 'tis thou who hast broken the heart

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fitzgerald, indeed, asserts as a fact that some at least of these sermons were actually composed in the capacity of *littérateur* and not of divine—for the press and not for the pulpit.

of poverty. And so long as worthless spirits can be ambitious ones 'tis a character we never shall want. Oh! it infests the court, the camp, the cabinet; it infests the Church. Go where you will, in every quarter, in every profession, you see a Shimei following the wheels of the fortunate through thick mire and clay. Haste, Shimei, haste! or thou wilt be undone forever. Shimei girdeth up his loins and speedeth after him. Behold the hand which governs everything takes the wheel from his chariot, so that he who driveth, driveth on heavily. Shimei doubles his speed; but 'tis the contrary way: he flies like the wind over a sandy desert. . . . Stay, Shimei! 'tis your patron, your friend, your benefactor, the man who has saved you from the daughill. 'Tis all one to Shimei. Shimei is the barometer of every man's fortune; marks the rise and fall of it, with all the variations from scorching hot to freezing cold upon his countenance that the simile will admit of.<sup>1</sup> Is a cloud upon thy affairs? See, it hangs over Shimei's brow! Hast thou been spoken for to the king or the captain of the host without success? Look not into the Court Calendar, the vacancy is filled in Shimei's face. Art thou in debt, though not to Shimei? No matter. The worst officer of the law shall not be more insolent. What, then, Shimei, is the fault of poverty so black? is it of so general concern that thou and all thy family must rise up as one man to reproach it? When it lost everything, did it lose the right to pity too? Or did he who maketh poor as well as maketh rich strip it of its natural powers to mollify the heart and supple the temper of your race? Trust me you have much to answer for. It is this treatment which it has ever met with from spirits like yours which has gradually taught the world to look upon it as the greatest of evils, and sham it as the worst disgrace. And what is it, I beseech you—what is it that men will not do to keep clear of so sore an imputation and punishment? Is it not to fly from this that he rises early, late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness? that he plots, contrives, swears, lies, shuffles, puts on all shapes, tries all garments, wears them with this or that side outward, just as it may favour his escape?"

And though the sermon ends in orthodox fashion, with an assurance that, in spite of the Shimeis by whom we

<sup>1</sup> Which are not many in the case of a *barometer*.

are surrounded, it is in our power to "lay the foundation of our peace (where it ought to be) within our own hearts," yet the preacher can, in the midst of his earlier reflections, permit himself the quaintly pessimistic outburst: "O Shimei! would to Heaven, when thou wast slain, that all thy family had been slain with thee, and not one of thy resemblance left! But ye have multiplied exceedingly, and replenished the earth; and if I prophesy rightly, ye will in the end subdue it."

Nowhere, however, does the man of the world reveal himself with more strangely comical effect under the gown of the divine than in the sermon on "The Prodigal Son." The repentant spendthrift has returned to his father's house, and is about to confess his follies. But—

"Alas! How shall he tell his story?

"Ye who have trod this round, tell me in what words he shall give in to his father the sad items of his extravagance and folly: the feasts and banquets which he gave to whole cities in the East; the costs of Asiatic rarities, and of Asiatic cooks to dress them; the expenses of singing men and singing women; the flute, the harp, the sackbut, and all kinds of music; the dress of the Persian Court how magnificent! their slaves how numerous! their chariots, their homes, their pictures, their furniture, what immense sums they had devoured! what expectations from strangers of condition! what exactions! How shall the youth make his father comprehend that he was cheated at Damascus by one of the best men in the world; that he had lent a part of his substance to a friend at Nineveh, who had fled off with it to the Ganges; that a whore of Babylon had swallowed his best pearl, and anointed the whole city with his balm of Gilead; that he had been sold by a man of honour for twenty shekels of silver to a worker in graven images; that the images he had purchased produced him nothing, that they could not be transported across the wilderness, and had been burnt with fire at Shnsan; that the apes and peacocks which he had sent for from Tharsis lay dead upon his

hands; that the mummies had not been dead long enough which he had brought from Egypt; that all had gone wrong from the day he forsook his father's house?"

All this, it must be admitted, is pretty lively for a sermon. But hear the reverend gentleman once more, in the same discourse, and observe the characteristic coolness with which he touches, only to drop, what may be called the "professional" moral of the parable, and glides off into a train of interesting, but thoroughly mundane, reflections, suggested—or rather, supposed in courtesy to have been suggested—by the text. "I know not," he says, "whether it would be a subject of much edification to convince you here that our Saviour, by the Prodigal Son, particularly pointed out those who were sinners of the Gentiles, and were recovered by divine grace to repentance; and that by the elder brother he intended manifestly the more froward of the Jews," &c. But, whether it would edify you or not, he goes on, in effect, to say, I do not propose to provide you with edification in that kind. "These uses have been so ably set forth in so many good sermons upon the Prodigal Son that I shall turn aside from them at present, and content myself with some reflections upon that fatal passion which led him—and so many thousands after the example—to gather all he had together and take his journey into a far country." In other words, "I propose to make the parable a peg whereon to hang a few observations on (what does the reader suppose?) the practice of sending young men upon the Grand Tour, accompanied by a 'bear-leader,' and herein of the various kinds of bear-leaders, and the services which they de, and do not, render to their charges; with a few words on society in Continental cities, and a true view of 'letters of introduction.'" That is literally the substance of the

remainder of the sermon. And thus pleasantly does the preacher play with his serious subject :

“But you will send an able pilot with your son—a scholar. If wisdom can speak in no other tongue but Greek or Latin, you do well; or if mathematics will make a man a gentleman, or natural philosophy but teach him to make a bow, he may be of some service in introducing your son into good societies, and supporting him in them when he had done. But the upshot will be generally this, that on the most pressing occasions of addresses, if he is not a mere man of reading, the unhappy youth will have the tutor to carry, and not the tutor to carry him. But (let us say) you will avoid this extreme; he shall be escorted by one who knows the world, not only from books but from his own experience; a man who has been employed on such services, and thrice ‘made the tour of Europe with success’—that is, without breaking his own or his pupil’s neck; for if he is such as my eyes have seen, some broken Swiss *valet de chambre*, some general undertaker, who will perform the journey in so many months, ‘if God permit,’ much knowledge will not accrue. Some profit, at least: he will learn the amount to a halfpenny of every stage from Calais to Rome; he will be carried to the best inns, instructed where there is the best wine, and sup a livre cheaper than if the youth had been left to make the tour and the bargain himself. Look at our governor, I beseech you! See, he is an inch taller as he relates the advantages. And here endeth his pride, his knowledge, and his use. But when your son gets abroad he will be taken out of his hand by his society with men of rank and letters, with whom he will pass the greatest part of his time.”

So much for the bear-leader; and now a remark or two on the young man’s chances of getting into good foreign society; and then—the benediction :

“Let me observe, in the first place, that company which is really good is very rare and very shy. But you have surmounted this difficulty, and procured him the best letters of recommendation to the most eminent and respectable in every capital. And I answer that he will obtain all by them which courtesy strictly stands obliged to

pay on such occasions, but no more. There is nothing in which we are so much deceived as in the advantages proposed from our connexions and discourse with the literati, &c., in foreign parts, especially if the experiment is made before we are matured by years or study. Conversation is a traffic; and if you enter it without some stock of knowledge to balance the account perpetually betwixt you, the trade drops at once; and this is the reason, however it may be boasted to the contrary, why travellers have so little (especially good) conversation with the natives, owing to their suspicion, or perhaps conviction, that there is nothing to be extracted from the conversation of young itinerants worth the trouble of their bad language, or the interruption of their visits."

Very true, no doubt, and excellently well put; but we seem to have got some distance, in spirit at any rate, from Luke xv. 13; and it is with somewhat too visible effect, perhaps, that Sterne forces his way back into the orthodox routes of pulpit disquisition. The youth, disappointed with his reception by "the literati," &c., seeks "an easier society; and as bad company is always ready, and ever lying in wait, the career is soon finished, and the poor prodigal returns—the same object of pity with the prodigal in the Gospel." Hardly a good enough "tag," perhaps, to reconcile the ear to the "And now to," &c., as a fitting close to this pointed little essay in the style of the Chesterfield Letters. There is much internal evidence to show that this so-called sermon was written either after Sterne's visit to or during his stay in France; and there is strong reason, I think, to suppose that it was in reality neither intended for a sermon nor actually delivered from the pulpit.

No other of his sermons has quite so much vivacity as this. But in the famous discourse upon an unlucky text—the sermon preached at the chapel of the English Embassy, in Paris—there are touches of unclerical raillery not

a few. Thus: "What a noise," he exclaims, "among the simulants of the various virtues! . . . Behold Humility, become so out of mere pride; Chastity, never once in harm's way; and Courage, like a Spanish soldier upon an Italian stage—a bladder full of wind. Hush! the sound of that trumpet! Let not my soldier run! 'tis some good Christian giving alms. O Pity, thou gentlest of human passions! soft and tender are thy notes, and ill accord they with so loud an instrument."

Here, again, is a somewhat bold saying for a divine: "But, to avoid all commonplace cant as much as I can on this head, I will forbear to say, because I do not think, that 'tis a breach of Christian charity to think or speak ill of our neighbour. We cannot avoid it: our opinion must follow the evidence," &c. And a little later on, commenting on the insinuation conveyed in Satan's question, "Does Job serve God for nought?" he says: "It is a bad picture, and done by a terrible master; and yet we are always copying it. Does a man from real conviction of heart forsake his vices? The position is not to be allowed. No; his vices have forsaken him. Does a pure virgin fear God, and say her prayers? She is in her climacteric? Does humility clothe and educate the unknown orphan? Poverty, thou hast no genealogies. See! is he not the father of the child?" In another sermon he launches out into quaintly contemptuous criticism of a religious movement which he was certainly the last person in the world to understand—to wit, Methodism. He asks whether, "when a poor, disconsolated, drooping creature is terrified from all enjoyment, prays without ceasing till his imagination is heated, fasts and mortifies and mopes till his body is in as bad a plight as his mind, it is a wonder that the mechanical disturbances and conflicts of an

empty belly, interpreted by an empty head, should be mistook for workings of a different kind from what they are?" Other sermons reflect the singularly bitter anti-Catholic feeling which was characteristic even of indifference in those days—at any rate amongst Whig divines. But in most of them one is liable to come at any moment across one of those strange sallies to which Gray alluded, when he said of the effect of Sterne's sermons upon a reader that "you often see him tottering on the verge of laughter, and ready to throw his periwig in the face of the audience."



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## CHAPTER VII.

FRANCE AND ITALY.—MEETING WITH WIFE AND DAUGHTER.  
—RETURN TO ENGLAND.—“TRISTRAM SHANDY,” VOL. IX.  
—“THE SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY.”

(1765–1768.)

IN the first week of October, 1765, or a few days later, Sterne set out on what was afterwards to become famous as the “Sentimental Journey through France and Italy.” Not, of course, that all the materials for that celebrated piece of literary travel were collected on this occasion. From London as far as Lyons his way lay by a route which he had already traversed three years before, and there is reason to believe that at least some of the scenes in the *Sentimental Journey* were drawn from observation made on his former visit. His stay in Paris was shorter this year than it had been on the previous occasion. A month after leaving England he was at Pont Beauvoisin, and by the middle of November he had reached Turin. From this city he writes, with his characteristic simplicity: “I am very happy, and have found my way into a dozen houses already. To-morrow I am to be presented to the King, and when that ceremony is over I shall have my hands full of engagements.” From Turin he went on, by way of Milan, Parma, Piacenza, and Bologna, to Florence, where, after three days’ stay, “to dine with our Plenipo.,” he continued his journey to Rome. Here, and

at Naples, he passed the winter of 1765-'66,<sup>1</sup> and prolonged his stay in Italy until the ensuing spring was well advanced. In the month of May he was again on his way home, through France, and had had a meeting, after two years' separation from them, with his wife and daughter. His account of it to Hall Stevenson is curious: "Never man," he writes, "has been such a wild-goose chase after his wife as I have been. After having sought her in five or six different towns, I found her at last in Franche Comté. Poor woman!" he adds, "she was very cordial, &c." The &c. is charming. But her cordiality had evidently no tendency to deepen into any more impassioned sentiment, for she "begged to stay another year or so." As to "my Lydia"—the real cause, we must suspect, of Sterne's having turned out of his road—she, he says, "pleases me much. I found her greatly improved in everything I wished her." As to himself: "I am most unaccountably well, and most accountably nonsensical. 'Tis at least a proof of good spirits, which is a sign and token, in these latter days, that I must take up my pen. In faith, I think I shall die with it in my hand; but I shall live these ten years, my Antony, notwithstanding the fears of my wife, whom I left most melancholy on that account." The "fears" and the melancholy were, alas! to be justified, rather than the "good spirits;" and the shears of Atropos were to close, not in ten years, but in little more than twenty months, upon that fragile thread of life.

<sup>1</sup> It was on this tour that Sterne picked up the French valet Lafleur, whom he introduced as a character into the *Sentimental Journey*, but whose subsequently published recollections of the tour (if, indeed, the veritable Lafleur was the author of the notes from which Scott quotes so freely) appear, as Mr. Fitzgerald has pointed out, from internal evidence to be mostly fictitious.

By the end of June he was back again in his Yorkshire home, and very soon after had settled down to work upon the ninth and last volume of *Tristram Shandy*. He was writing, however, as it should seem, under something more than the usual distractions of a man with two establishments. Mrs. Sterne was just then ill at Marseilles, and her husband—who, to do him justice, was always properly solicitous for her material comfort—was busy making provision for her to change her quarters to Chalons. He writes to M. Panchaud, at Paris, sending fifty pounds, and begging him to make her all further advances that might be necessary. "I have," he says, "such entire confidence in my wife that she spends as little as she can, though she is confined to no particular sum . . . and you may rely—in case she should draw for fifty or a hundred pounds extraordinary—that it and every demand shall be punctually paid, and with proper thanks; and for this the whole Shandian family are ready to stand security." Later on, too, he writes that "a young nobleman is now inaugurating a jaunt with me for six weeks, about Christmas, to the Faubourg St. Germain;" and he adds—in a tone the sincerity of which he would himself have probably found a difficulty in gauging—"if my wife should grow worse (having had a very poor account of her in my daughter's last), I cannot think of her being without me; and, however expensive the journey would be, I would fly to Avignon to administer consolation to her and my poor girl."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There can be few admirers of Sterne's genius who would not gladly incline, whenever they find it possible, to Mr. Fitzgerald's very indulgent estimate of his disposition. But this is only one of many instances in which the charity of the biographer appears to me to be, if the expression may be permitted, unconscionable. I can, at any rate, find no warrant whatever in the above passage for the too

The necessity for this flight, however, did not arise. Better accounts of Mrs. Sterne arrived a few weeks later, and the husband's consolations were not required.

Meanwhile the idyll of Captain Shandy's love-making was gradually approaching completion; and there are signs to be met with—in the author's correspondence, that is to say, and not in the work itself—that he was somewhat impatient to be done with it, at any rate for the time. "I shall publish," he says, "late in this year; and the next I shall begin a new work of four volumes, which, when finished, I shall continue *Tristram* with fresh spirit." The new work in four volumes (not destined to get beyond one) was, of course, the *Sentimental Journey*. His ninth volume of *Tristram Shandy* was finished by the end of the year, and at Christmas he came up to London, after his usual practice, to see to its publication and enjoy the honours of its reception. The book passed duly through the press, and in the last days of January was issued the announcement of its immediate appearance. Of the character of its welcome I can find no other evidence than that of Sterne himself, in a letter addressed to M. Pauchand some fortnight after the book appeared. "Tis liked the best of all here;" but, with whatever accuracy this may have expressed the complimentary opinion of friends, or even the well-considered judgment of critics, one can hardly believe that it enjoyed anything like the vogue of the former volumes. Sterne, however, would be the less concerned for this, that his head was at the moment full of his new venture. "I am going," he

kindly suggestion that "Sterne was actually negotiating a journey to Paris as 'bear-leader' to a young nobleman (an odious office, to which he had special aversion), in order that he might with economy fly over to Avignon."

writes, "to publish *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. The undertaking is protected and highly encouraged by all our noblesse. 'Tis subscribed for at a great rate; 'twill be an original, in large quarto, the subscription half a guinea. If you (Panchand) can procure me the honour of a few names of men of science or fashion, I shall thank you: they will appear in good company, as all the nobility here have honoured me with their names." As was usual with him, however, he postponed commencing it until he should have returned to Coxwold; and, as was equally usual with him, he found it difficult to tear himself away from the delights of London. Moreover, there was in the present instance a special difficulty, arising out of an affair upon which, as it has relations with the history of Sterne's literary work, it would be impossible, even in the most strictly critical and least general of biographies, to observe complete silence. I refer, of course, to the famous and furious flirtation with Mrs. Draper—the Eliza of the *Yorick* and *Eliza Letters*. Of the affair itself but little need be said. I have already stated my own views on the general subject of Sterne's love affairs; and I feel no inducement to discuss the question of their innocence or otherwise in relation to this particular amourette. I will only say that were it technically as innocent as you please, the mean which must be found between Thackeray's somewhat too harsh and Mr. Fitzgerald's considerably too indulgent judgment on it will lie, it seems to me, decidedly nearer to the former than to the latter's extreme. This episode of violently sentimental philandering with an Indian "grass widow" was, in any case, an extremely unlovely passage in Sterne's life. On the best and most charitable view of it, the flirtation, pursued in the way it was, and to the lengths to which it was carried, must be

held to convict the elderly lover of the most deplorable levity, vanity, indiscretion, and sickly sentimentalism. It was, to say the least of it, most unbecoming in a man of Sterne's age and profession; and when it is added that Yorick's attentions to Eliza were paid in so open a fashion as to be brought by gossip to the ears of his neglected wife, then living many hundred miles away from him, its highly reprehensible character seems manifest enough in all ways.

No sooner, however, had the fascinating widow set sail, than the sentimental lover began to feel so strongly the need of a female consoler, that his heart seems to have softened, insensibly, even towards his wife. "I am unhappy," he writes plaintively to Lydia Sterne. "Thy mother and thyself at a distance from me—and what can compensate for such a destitution? For God's sake persuade her to come and fix in England! for life is too short to waste in separation; and while she lives in one country and I in another, many people will suppose it proceeds from choice"—a supposition, he seems to imply, which even my scrupulously discreet conduct in her absence scarcely suffices to refute. "Besides"—a word in which there is here almost as much virtue as in an "if"—"I want thee near me, thou child and darling of my heart. I am in a melancholy mood, and my Lydia's eyes will smart with weeping when I tell her the cause that just now affects me." And then his sensibilities brim over, and into his daughter's ear he pours forth his lamentations over the loss of her mother's rival. "I am apprehensive the dear friend I mentioned in my last letter is going into a decline. I was with her two days ago, and I never beheld a being so altered. She has a tender frame, and looks like a drooping lily, for the roses are fled from her cheeks.

I can never see or talk to this incomparable woman without bursting into tears. I have a thousand obligations to her, and I love her more than her whole sex, if not all the world put together. She has a delicacy," &c., &c. And after reciting a frigid epitaph which he had written, "expressive of her modest worth," he winds up with—"Say all that is kind of me to thy mother; and believe me, my Lydia, that I love thee most truly." My excuse for quoting thus fully from this most characteristic letter, and, indeed, for dwelling at all upon these closing incidents of the Yorick and Eliza episode, is, that in their striking illustration of the soft, weak, spiritually self-indulgent nature of the man, they assist us, far more than many pages of criticism would do, to understand one particular aspect of his literary idiosyncrasy. The sentimentalist of real life explains the sentimentalist in art.

In the early days of May Sterne managed at last to tear himself away from London and its joys, and with painful slowness, for he was now in a wretched state of health, to make his way back to Yorkshire. "I have got conveyed," he says in a distressing letter from Newark to Hall Stevenson—"I have got conveyed thus far like a bale of cadaverous goods consigned to Pluto and Company, lying in the bottom of my chaise most of the route, upon a large pillow which I had the *prévoyance* to purchase before I set out. I am worn out, but pass on to Barnby Moor to-night, and if possible to York the next. I know not what the matter with me, but some derangement presses hard upon this machine. Still, I think it will not be upset this bout"—another of those utterances of a cheerful courage under the prostration of pain which reveal to us the manliest side of Sterne's nature. On reaching Coxwold his health appears to have temporarily mended, and in June

we find him giving a far better account of himself to another of his friends. The fresh Yorkshire air seems to have temporarily revived him, and to his friend, Arthur Lee, a young American, he writes thus: "I am as happy as a prince at Coxwold, and I wish you could see in how princely a manner I live. 'Tis a land of plenty. I sit down alone to dinner—fish and wild-fowl, or a couple of fowls or ducks, with cream and all the simple plenty which a rich valley under Hamilton Hills can produce, with a clean cloth on my table, and a bottle of wine on my right hand to drink your health. I have a hundred hens and chickens about my yard; and not a parishioner catches a hare, a rabbit, or a trout but he brings it as an offering to me." Another of his correspondents at this period was the Mrs. H. of his letters, whose identity I have been unable to trace, but who is addressed in a manner which seems to show Sterne's anxiety to expel the old flame of Eliza's kindling by a new one. There is little, indeed, of the sentimentalizing strain in which he was wont to sigh at the feet of Mrs. Draper, but in its place there is a freedom of a very prominent, and here and there of a highly unpleasant, kind. To his friends, Mr. and Mrs. James, too, he writes frequently during this year, chiefly to pour out his soul on the subject of Eliza; and Mrs. James, who is always addressed in company with her husband, enjoys the almost unique distinction of being the only woman outside his own family circle whom Sterne never approaches in the language of artificial gallantry, but always in that of simple friendship and respect.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile,

<sup>1</sup> To this point of Sterne's life, it may here be remarked, is to be assigned the letter to Mrs. Draper ("and very sad dog-Latin too") so justly animadverted upon by Thackeray, and containing a passage of which Madame de Medalle, it is to be charitably hoped, had no



however, the *Sentimental Journey* was advancing at a reasonable rate of speed towards completion. In July he writes of himself as "now beginning to be truly busy" on it, "the pain and sorrows of this life having retarded its progress."

His wife and daughter were about to rejoin him in the autumn, and he looked forward to settling them at a hired house in York before going up to town to publish his new volumes. On the 1st of October the two ladies arrived at York, and the next day the reunited family went on to Coxwold. The meeting with the daughter gave Sterne one of the few quite innocent pleasures which he was capable of feeling; and he writes next day to Mr. and Mrs. James in terms of high pride and satisfaction of his recovered child. "My girl has returned," he writes, in the language of playful affection, "an elegant, accomplished little slut. My wife — but I hate," he adds, with remarkable presence of mind, "to praise my wife. 'Tis as much as decency will allow to praise my daughter. I suppose," he concludes, "they will return next summer to France. They leave me in a month to reside at York for the winter, and I stay at Coxwold till the 1st of January." This seems to indicate a little longer delay in the publication of the *Sentimental Journey* than he had at first intended; for it seems that the book was finished by the end of November. On

suspicion of the meaning. Mr. Fitzgerald, through an oversight in translation, and understanding Sterne to say that he himself, and not his correspondent, Hall Stevenson, was "quadraginta et plus annos natus," has referred it to an earlier date. The point, however, is of no great importance, as the untranslatable passage in the letter would be little less unseemly in 1754 or 1755 than in 1768, at the beginning of which year, since the letter is addressed from London to Hall Stevenson, then in Yorkshire, it must, in fact, have been written.

the 28th of that month he writes to the Earl of — (as his daughter's foolish mysteriousness has headed the letter), to thank him for his letter of inquiry about Yorick, and to say that Yorick "has worn out both his spirits and body with the *Sentimental Journey*. 'Tis true that an author must feel himself, or his reader will not" (how mistaken a devotion Sterne showed to this Horatian canon will be noted hereafter), "but I have torn my whole frame into pieces by my feelings. I believe the brain stands as much in need of recruiting as the body; therefore I shall set out for town the 20th of next month, after having recruited myself at York." Then he adds the strange observation, "I might, indeed, solace myself with my wife (who is come from France), but, in fact, I have long been a sentimental being, whatever your Lordship may think to the contrary. The world has imagined because I wrote *Tristram Shandy* that I was myself more Shandian than I really ever was. 'Tis a good-natured world we live in, and we are often painted in divers colours, according to the ideas each one frames in his head." It would, perhaps, have been scarcely possible for Sterne to state his essentially unhealthy philosophy of life so concisely as in this naïve passage. The connubial affections are here, in all seriousness and good faith apparently, opposed to the sentimental emotions—as the lower to the higher. To indulge the former is to be "Shandian," that is to say, coarse and carnal; to devote oneself to the latter, or, in other words, to spend one's days in semi-erotic languishings over the whole female sex indiscriminately, is to show spirituality and taste.

Meanwhile, however, that fragile abode of sentimentalism—that frame which had just been "torn to pieces" by the feelings—was becoming weaker than its owner

supposed. Much of the exhaustion which Sterne had attributed to the violence of his literary emotions was no doubt due to the rapid decline of bodily powers which, unknown to him, were already within a few months of their final collapse. He did not set out for London on the 20th of December, as he had promised himself, for on that day he was only just recovering from "an attack of fever and bleeding at the lungs," which had confined him to his room for nearly three weeks. "I am worn down to a shadow," he writes on the 23rd, "but as my fever has left me, I set off the latter end of next week with my friend, Mr. Hall, for town." His home affairs had already been settled. Early in December it had been arranged that his wife and daughter should only remain at York during the winter, and should return to the Continent in the spring. "Mrs. Sterne's health," he writes, "is insupportable in England. She must return to France, and justice and humanity forbid me to oppose it." But separation from his wife meant separation from his daughter; it was this, of course, which was the really painful parting, and it is to the credit of Sterne's disinterestedness of affection for Lydia, that in his then state of health he brought himself to consent to her leaving him. But he recognized that it was for the advantage of her prospect of settling herself in life that she should go with her mother, who seemed "inclined to establish her in France, where she has had many advantageous offers." Nevertheless "his heart bled," as he wrote to Lee, when he thought of parting with his child. "'Twill be like the separation of soul and body, and equal to nothing but what passes at that tremendous moment; and like it in one respect, for she will be in one kingdom while I am in another." Thus was this matter settled, and by the 1st of January Sterne

had arrived in London for the last time, with the two volumes of the *Sentimental Journey*. He took up his quarters at the lodgings in Bond Street (No. 41), which he had occupied during his stay in town the previous year, and entered at once upon the arrangements for publication. These occupied two full months, and on the 27th of February the last work, as it was destined to be, of the Rev. Mr. Yorick was issued to the world.

Its success would seem to have been immediate, and was certainly great and lasting. In one sense, indeed, it was far greater than had been, or than has since been, attained by *Tristram Shandy*. The compliments which courteous Frenchmen had paid the author upon his former work, and which his simple vanity had swallowed whole and unseasoned, without the much-needed grain of salt, might, no doubt, have been repeated to him with far greater sincerity as regards the *Sentimental Journey*, had he lived to receive them. Had any Frenchman told him a year or two afterwards that the latter work was "almost as much known in Paris as in London, at least among men of condition and learning," he would very likely have been telling him no more than the truth. The *Sentimental Journey* certainly acquired what *Tristram Shandy* never did—a European reputation. It has been translated into Italian, German, Dutch, and even Polish; and into French again and again. The French, indeed, have no doubt whatever of its being Sterne's *chef-d'œuvre*; and one has only to compare a French translation of it with a rendering of *Tristram Shandy* into the same language to understand, and from our neighbours' point of view even to admit, the justice of their preference. The charms of the *Journey*, its grace, wit, and urbanity, are thoroughly congenial to that most graceful of languages, and reproduce themselves

readily enough therein; while, on the other hand, the fantastic digressions, the elaborate mystifications, the farcical interludes of the earlier work, appear intolerably awkward and *bizarre* in their French dress; and, what is much more strange, even the point of the *double entendres* is sometimes unaccountably lost. Were it not that the genuine humour of *Tristram Shandy* in a great measure evaporates in translation, one would be forced to admit that the work which is the more catholic in its appeal to appreciation is the better of the two. But, having regard to this disappearance of genuine and unquestionable excellences in the process of translation, I see no good reason why those Englishmen—the great majority, I imagine—who prefer *Tristram Shandy* to the *Sentimental Journey* should feel any misgivings as to the soundness of their taste. The humour which goes the deepest down beneath the surface of things is the most likely to become inextricably interwoven with those deeper fibres of associations which lie at the roots of a language; and it may well happen, therefore, though from the cosmopolitan point of view it is a melancholy reflection, that the merit of a book, to those who use the language in which it is written, bears a direct ratio to the persistence of its refusal to yield up its charm to men of another tongue.

The favour, however, with which the *Sentimental Journey* was received abroad, and which it still enjoys (the last French translation is very recent), is, as Mr. Fitzgerald says, "worthily merited, if grace, nature, true sentiment, and exquisite dramatic power be qualities that are to find a welcome. And apart," he adds, "from these attractions it has a unique charm of its own, a flavour, so to speak, a fragrance that belongs to that one book alone. Never was there such a charming series of complete little pict-

ures, which for delicacy seem like the series of medallions done on Sèvres china which we sometimes see in old French cabinets. . . . The figures stand out brightly, and in what number and variety! Old Calais, with its old inn; M. Dessein, the monk, one of the most artistic figures on literary canvas; the charming French lady whom M. Dessein shut into the carriage with the traveller; the *débonnaire* French captain, and the English travellers returning, touched in with only a couple of strokes; La Fleur, the valet; the pretty French glove-seller, whose pulse the Sentimental one felt; her husband, who passed through the shop and pulled off his hat to Monsieur for the honour he was doing him; the little maid in the bookseller's shop, who put her little present *à part*; the charming Grenze 'grisset,' who sold him the ruffles; the reduced chevalier selling *patés*; the groups of beggars at Montreuil; the *faide* Count de Bissie, who read Shakspeare; and the crowd of minor *croquis*—postillions, landlords, notaries, soldiers, abbés, *précieuses*, maids—merely touched, but touched with wonderful art, make up a surprising collection of distinct and graphic characters."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

LAST DAYS AND DEATH.

(1768.)

THE end was now fast approaching. Months before, Sterne had written doubtfully of his being able to stand another winter in England, and his doubts were to be fatally justified. One can easily see, however, how the unhappy experiment came to be tried. It is possible that he might have delayed the publication of his book for a while, and taken refuge abroad from the rigours of the two remaining winter months, had it not been in the nature of his malady to conceal its deadly approaches. Consumption sported with its victim in the cruel fashion that is its wont. "I continue to mend," Sterne writes from Bond Street on the first day of the new year, "and doubt not but this with all other evils and uncertainties of life will end for the best." And for the best perhaps it did end, in the sense in which the resigned Christian uses these pious words; but this, one fears, was not the sense intended by the dying man. All through January and February he was occupied not only with business, but as it would seem with a fair amount, though less, no doubt, than his usual share, of pleasure also. Vastly active was he, it seems, in the great undertaking of obtaining tickets for one of Mrs. Cornely's entertainments—the "thing" to go to at that particular time—for his

friends the Jameses. He writes them on Monday that he has not been a moment at rest since writing the previous day about the Soho ticket. "I have been at a Secretary of State to get one, have been upon one knee to my friend Sir George Macartney, Mr. Lascelles, and Mr. Fitzmaurice, without mentioning five more. I believe I could as soon get you a place at Court, for everybody is going; but I will go out and try a new circle, and if you do not hear from me by a quarter to three, you may conclude I have been unfortunate in my supplications." Whether he was or was not unfortunate history does not record. A week or two later the old round of dissipation had apparently set in. "I am now tied down neck and heels by engagements every night this week, or most joyfully would have trod the old pleasing road from Bond to Gerrard Street. . . . I am quite well, but exhausted with a roomful of company every morning till dinner." A little later, and this momentary flash of health had died out; and we find him writing what was his last letter to his daughter, full, evidently, of uneasy forebodings as to his approaching end. He speaks of "this vile influenza—be not alarmed. I think I shall get the better of it, and shall be with you both the 1st of May;" though, he adds, "if I escape, 'twill not be for a long period, my child—unless a quiet retreat and peace of mind can restore me." But the occasion of this letter was a curious one, and a little more must be extracted from it. Lydia Sterne's letter to her father had, he said, astonished him. "She (Mrs. Sterne) could know but little of my feelings to tell thee that under the supposition I should survive thy mother I should bequeath thee as a legacy to Mrs. Draper. No, my Lydia, 'tis a lady whose virtues I wish thee to imitate"—Mrs. James, in fact, whom he proceeds to praise with much and



probably well-deserved warmth. "But," he adds, sadly, "I think, my Lydia, thy mother will survive me; do not deject her spirit with thy apprehensions on my account. I have sent you a necklace and buckles, and the same to your mother. My girl cannot form a wish that is in the power of her father that he will not gratify her in; and I cannot in justice be less kind to thy mother. I am never alone. The kindness of my friends is ever the same. I wish though I had thee to nurse me, but I am denied that. Write to me twice a week at least. God bless thee, my child, and believe me ever, ever, thy affectionate father." The despondent tone of this letter was to be only too soon justified. The "vile influenza" proved to be or became a pleurisy. On Thursday, March 10, he was bled three times, and blistered on the day after. And on the Tuesday following, in evident consciousness that his end was near, he penned that cry "for pity and pardon," as Thackeray calls it—the first as well as the last, and which sounds almost as strange as it does piteous from those mocking lips:

"The physician says I am better. . . . God knows, for I feel myself sadly wrong, and shall, if I recover, be a long while of gaining strength. Before I have gone through half the letter I must stop to rest my weak hand a dozen times. Mr. James was so good as to call upon me yesterday. I felt emotions not to be described at the sight of him, and he overjoyed me by talking a great deal of you. Do, dear Mrs. James, entreat him to come to-morrow or next day, for perhaps I have not many days or hours to live. I want to ask a favour of him, if I find myself worse, that I shall beg of you if in this wrestling I come off conqueror. My spirits are fled. It is a bad omen; do not weep, my dear lady. Your tears are too precious to be shed for me. Bottle them up, and may the cork never be drawn. Dearest, kindest, gentlest, and best of women! may health, peace, and happiness prove your handmaids. If I die, cherish the remembrance of

me, and forget the follies which you so often condemned, which my heart, not my head, betrayed me into. Should my child, my Lydia, want a mother, may I hope you will (if she is left parentless) take her to your bosom? You are the only woman on earth I can depend upon for such a benevolent action. I wrote to her a fortnight ago, and told her what, I trust, she will find in you. Mr. James will be a father to her. . . . Commend me to him, as I now commend you to that Being who takes under his care the good and kind part of the world. Adieu, all grateful thanks to you and Mr. James.

“From your affectionate friend,  
L. STERNE.”

This pathetic death-bed letter is superscribed “Tuesday.” It seems to have been written on Tuesday, the 15th of March, and three days later the writer breathed his last. But two persons, strangers both, were present at his death-bed, and it is by a singularly fortunate chance, therefore, that one of these—and he not belonging to the class of people who usually leave behind them published records of the events of their lives—should have preserved for us an account of the closing scene. This, however, is to be found in the Memoirs of John Macdonald, “a cadet of the house of Keppoch,” at that time footman to Mr. Crawford, a fashionable friend of Sterne’s. His master had taken a house in Clifford Street in the spring of 1768; and “about this time,” he writes, “Mr. Sterne, the celebrated author, was taken ill at the silk-bag shop in Old Bond Street. He was sometimes called Tristram Shandy and sometimes Yorick, a very great favourite of the gentlemen. One day”—namely, on the aforesaid 18th of March—“my master had company to dinner who were speaking about him—the Duke of Roxburghe, the Earl of March, the Earl of Ossory, the Duke of Grafton, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Hume, and a Mr. James.” Many, if not most, of the party, therefore, were personal friends of the man who lay dying in the street hard by, and naturally enough the conversation

turned on his condition. "John," said my master," the narrative continues, "go and inquire how Mr. Sterne is to-day." Maedonald did so; and, in language which seems to bear the stamp of truth upon it, he thus records the grim story which he had to report to the assembled guests on his return: "I went to Mr. Sterne's lodgings; the mistress opened the door. I enquired how he did; she told me to go up to the nurse. I went into the room, and he was just a-dying. I waited ten minutes; but in five he said, 'Now it is come.' He put up his hand as if to stop a blow, and died in a minute. The gentlemen were all very sorry, and lamented him very much."

Thus, supported by a hired nurse, and under the curious eyes of a stranger, Sterne breathed his last. His wife and daughter were far away; the convivial associates "who were all very sorry and lamented him very much," were for the moment represented only by "John;" and the shocking tradition goes that the alien hands by which the "dying eyes were closed," and the "decent limbs composed," remunerated themselves for the pious office by abstracting the gold sleeve-links from the dead man's wrists. One may hope, indeed, that this last circumstance is to be rejected as sensational legend, but even without it the story of Sterne's death seems sad enough, no doubt. Yet it is, after all, only by contrast with the excited gaiety of his daily life in London that his end appears so forlorn. From many a "set of residential chambers," from many of the old and silent inns of the lawyers, departures as lonely, or lonelier, are being made around us in London every year: the departures of men not necessarily kinless or friendless, but living solitary lives, and dying before their friends or kindred can be summoned to their bedsides. Such deaths, no doubt, are often contrasted in conventional pathos with that

of the husband and father surrounded by a weeping wife and children; but the more sensible among us construct no tragedy out of a mode of exit which must have many times entered as at least a possibility into the previous contemplation of the dying man. And except, as has been said, that Sterne associates himself in our minds with the perpetual excitements of lively companionship, there would be nothing particularly melancholy in his end. This is subject, of course, to the assumption that the story of his landlady having stolen the gold sleeve-links from his dead body may be treated as mythical; and, rejecting this story, there seems no good reason for making much ado about the manner of his death. Of friends, as distinguished from mere dinner-table acquaintances, he seems to have had but few in London: with the exception of the Jameses, one knows not with certainty of any; and the Jameses do not appear to have neglected him in the illness which neither they nor he suspected to be his last. Mr. James had paid him a visit but a day or two before the end came; and it may very likely have been upon his report of his friend's condition that the message of inquiry was sent from the dinner table at which he was a guest. No doubt Sterne's flourish in *Tristram Shandy* about his preferring to die at an inn, untroubled by the spectacle of "the concern of my friends, and the last services of wiping my brows and smoothing my pillow," was a mere piece of bravado; and the more probably so because the reflection is appropriated almost bodily from Bishop Burnet, who quotes it as a frequent observation of Archbishop Leighton. But, considering that Sterne was in the habit of passing nearly half of each year alone in London lodgings, the realization of his wish does not strike me, I confess, as so dramatically impressive a coincidence as it is sometimes represented.

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According, however, to one strange story the dramatic element gives place after Sterne's very burial to melodrama of the darkest kind. The funeral, which pointed, after all, a far sadder moral than the death, took place on Tuesday, March 22, attended by only two mourners, one of whom is said to have been his publisher Becket, and the other probably Mr. James; and, thus duly neglected by the whole crowd of boon companions, the remains of Yorick were consigned to the "new burying-ground near Tyburn" of the parish of St. George's, Hanover Square. In that now squalid and long-decayed grave-yard, within sight of the Marble Arch and over against the broad expanse of Hyde Park, is still to be found a tombstone inscribed with some inferior lines to the memory of the departed humourist, and with a statement, inaccurate by eight months, of the date of his death, and a year out as to his age. Dying, as has been seen, on the 18th of March, 1768, at the age of fifty-four, he is declared on this slab to have died on the 13th of November, aged fifty-three years. There is more excuse, however, for this want of veracity than sepulchral inscriptions can usually plead. The stone was erected by the pious hands of "two brother Masons," many years, it is said, after the event which it purports to record; and from the wording of the epitaph which commences, "Near this place lyes the body," &c., it obviously does not profess to indicate—what, doubtless, there was no longer any means of tracing—the exact spot in which Sterne's remains were laid. But, wherever the grave really was, the body interred in it, according to the strange story to which I have referred, is no longer there. That story goes: that two days after the burial, on the night of the 24th of March, the corpse was stolen by body-snatchers, and by them disposed of to M. Collignon, Professor of Anatomy

at Cambridge; that the Professor invited a few scientific friends to witness a demonstration, and that among these was one who had been acquainted with Sterne, and who fainted with horror on recognizing in the already partially dissected "subject" the features of his friend. So, at least, this very gruesome and Poe-like legend runs; but it must be confessed that all the evidence which Mr. Fitzgerald has been able to collect in its favour is of the very loosest and vaguest description. On the other hand, it is, of course, only fair to recollect that, in days when respectable surgeons and grave scientific professors had to depend upon the assistance of law-breakers for the prosecution of their studies and teachings, every effort would naturally be made to hush up any such unfortunate affair. There is, moreover, independent evidence to the fact that similar desecrations of this grave-yard had of late been very common; and that at least one previous attempt to check the operations of the "resurrection-men" had been attended with peculiarly infelicitous results. In the *St. James's Chronicle* for November 26, 1767, we find it recorded that "the Burying Ground in Oxford Road, belonging to the Parish of St. George's, Hanover Square, having been lately robbed of several dead bodies, a Watcher was placed there, attended by a large mastiff Dog; notwithstanding which, on Sunday night last, some Villains found means to steal out another dead Body, and carried off the very Dog." Body-snatchers so adroit and determined as to contrive to make additional profit out of the actual means taken to prevent their depredations, would certainly not have been deterred by any considerations of prudence from attempting the theft of Sterne's corpse. There was no such ceremony about his funeral as would lead them to suppose that the deceased was a person of any importance,

or one whose body could not be stolen without a risk of creating undesirable excitement. On the whole, therefore, it is impossible to reject the body-snatching story as certainly fabulous, though its truth is far from being proved; and though I can scarcely myself subscribe to Mr. Fitzgerald's view, that there is a "grim and lurid Shandyism" about the scene of dissection, yet if others discover an appeal to their sense of humour in the idea of Sterne's body being dissected after death, I see nothing to prevent them from holding that hypothesis as a "pious opinion."

## CHAPTER IX.

STERNE AS A WRITER.—THE CHARGE OF PLAGIARISM.—  
DR. FERRIAR'S "ILLUSTRATIONS."

EVERYDAY experience suffices to show that the qualities which win enduring fame for books and for their authors are not always those to which they owe their first popularity. It may with the utmost probability be affirmed that this was the case with *Tristram Shandy* and with Sterne. We cannot, it is true, altogether dissociate the permanent attractions of the novel from those characteristics of it which have long since ceased to attract at all; the two are united in a greater or less degree throughout the work; and this being so, it is, of course, impossible to prove to demonstration that it was the latter qualities, and not the former, which procured it its immediate vogue. But, as it happens, it is possible to show that what may be called its spurious attractions varied directly, and its real merits inversely, as its popularity with the public of its day. In the higher qualities of humour, in dramatic vigour, in skilful and subtle delineation of character, the novel showed no deterioration, but, in some instances, a marked improvement, as it proceeded; yet the second instalment was not more popular, and most of the succeeding ones were distinctly less popular, than the first. They had gained in many qualities, while they had lost in only the single one of novelty; and we may infer, therefore,



with approximate certainty, that what "took the town" in the first instance was, that quality of the book which was strangest at its first appearance. The mass of the public read, and enjoyed, or thought they enjoyed, when they were really only puzzled and perplexed. The wild digressions, the audacious impertinences, the burlesque philosophizing, the broad jests, the air of recondite learning, all combined to make the book a nine days' wonder; and a majority of its readers would probably have been prepared to pronounce *Tristram Shandy* a work as original in scheme and conception as it was eccentric. Some there were, no doubt, who perceived the influence of Rabelais in the incessant digressions and the burlesque of philosophy; others, it may be, found a reminder of Burton in the parade of learning; and yet a few others, the scattered students of French facetiæ of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, may have read the broad jests with a feeling that they had "seen something like it before." But no single reader, no single critic of the time, appears to have combined the knowledge necessary for tracing these three characteristics of the novel to their respective sources; and none certainly had any suspicion of the extent to which the books and authors from whom they were imitated had been laid under contribution. No one suspected that Sterne, not content with borrowing his trick of rambling from Rabelais, and his airs of erudition from Burton, and his fooleries from Bruscambille, had coolly transferred whole passages from the second of these writers, not only without acknowledgment, but with the intention, obviously indicated by his mode of procedure, of passing them off as his own. Nay, it was not till full fifty years afterwards that these daring robberies were detected, or, at any rate, revealed to the world; and, with an irony which Sterne

himself would have appreciated, it was reserved for a sincere admirer of the humourist to play the part of detective. In 1812 Dr. John Ferriar published his *Illustrations of Sterne*, and the prefatory sonnet, in which he solicits pardon for his too minute investigations, is sufficient proof of the curiously reverent spirit in which he set about his damaging task :

"Sterne, for whose sake I plod through miry ways  
Of antic wit, and quibbling mazes drear,  
Let not thy shade malignant censure fear,  
If aught of inward mirth my search betrays,  
Long slept that mirth in dust of ancient days,  
Erewhile to Guise or wanton Valois dear," &c.

Thus commences Dr. Ferriar's apology, which, however, can hardly be held to cover his offence; for, as a matter of fact, Sterne's borrowings extend to a good deal besides "mirth;" and some of the most unscrupulous of these forced loans are raised from passages of a perfectly serious import in the originals from which they are taken.

Here, however, is the list of authors to whom Dr. Ferriar holds Sterne to have been more or less indebted: Rabelais, Beroalde de Verville, Bonchet, Bruseambille, Searron, Swift, an author of the name or pseudonym of "Gabriel John," Burton, Bacon, Blount, Montaigne, Bishop Hall. The catalogue is a reasonably long one; but it is not, of course, to be supposed that Sterne helped himself equally freely from every author named in it. His obligations to some of them are, as Dr. Ferriar admits, but slight. From Rabelais, besides his vagaries of narrative, Sterne took, no doubt, the idea of the *Tristram-padia* (by descent from the "education of Pantagruel," through "Martinus Scriblerus"); but though he has appropriated bodily the passage in which Friar John attributes the beauty of his nose to

the pectoral conformation of his nurse, he may be said to have constructively acknowledged the debt in a reference to one of the characters in the Rabelaisian dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

Upon Beroalde, again, upon D'Aubigné, and upon Bouchet he has made no direct and *verbatim* deprecations. From Bruscaville he seems to have taken little or nothing but the not very valuable idea of the tedious buffoonery of vol. iii. c. 30, *et seq.*; and to Scarron he, perhaps, owed the incident of the dwarf at the theatre in the *Sentimental Journey*, an incident which, it must be owned, he vastly improved in the taking. All this, however, does not amount to very much, and it is only when we come to Dr. Ferriar's collations of *Tristram Shandy* with the *Anatomy of Melancholy* that we begin to understand what feats Sterne was capable of as a plagiarist. He must, to begin with, have relied with cynical confidence on the conviction that famous writers are talked about and not read, for he sets to work with the scissors upon Burton's first page: "Man, the most excellent and noble creature of the world, the principal and mighty work of God; wonder of nature, as Zoroaster calls him; *audacis nature miraculum*, the marvel of marvels, as Plato; the abridgment and epitome of the world, as Pliny," &c. Thus Burton; and, with a

<sup>1</sup> "There is no cause but one," said my Uncle Toby, "why one man's nose is longer than another, but because that God pleases to have it so." "That is Grangousier's solution," said my father. "'Tis He," continued my Uncle Toby, "who makes us all, and frames and puts us together in such forms . . . and for such ends as is agreeable to His infinite wisdom."—*Tristram Shandy*, vol. iii. c. 41. "Par ce, repondit Grangousier, qu'ainsi Dieu l'a voulu, lequel nous fait en cette forme et cette fin selon divin arbitre."—*Rabelais*, book i. c. 41. In another place, however (vol. viii. c. 3), Sterne has borrowed a whole passage from this French humourist without any acknowledgment at all.

few additions of his own, and the substitution of Aristotle for Plato as the author of one of the descriptions, thus Sterne: "Who made MAN with powers which dart him from heaven to earth in a moment—that great, that most excellent and noble creature of the world, the miracle of nature, as Zoroaster, in his book *περὶ φύσεως*, called him—the Shekinah of the Divine Presence, as Chrysostom—the image of God, as Moses—the ray of Divinity, as Plato—the marvel of marvels, as Aristotle," &c.<sup>1</sup> And in the same chapter, in the "Fragmen upon Whiskers," Sterne relates how a "decayed kinsman" of the Lady Baussiere "ran begging, bareheaded, on one side of her palfrey, conjuring her by the former bonds of friendship, alliance, consanguinity, &c.—consin, aunt, sister, mother—for virtue's sake, for your own sake, for mine, for Christ's sake, remember me! pity me!" And again he tells how a "devout, venerable, hoary-headed man" thus beseeched her: "I beg for the unfortunate. Good my lady, 'tis for a prison—for an hospital; 'tis for an old man—a poor man undone by shipwreck, by suretyship, by fire. I call God and all His angels to witness, 'tis to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry—'tis to comfort the sick and the broken-hearted.' The Lady Baussiere rode on."<sup>2</sup>

But now compare this passage from the *Anatomy of Melancholy*:

"A poor decayed kinsman of his sets upon him by the way, in all his jollity, and runs begging, bareheaded, by him, conjuring him by those former bonds of friendship, alliance, consanguinity, &c., 'uncle, cousin, brother, father, show some pity for Christ's sake, pity a sick man, an old man,' &c.; he cares not—ride on: pretend sickness, inevitable loss of limbs, plead suretyship or shipwreck, fire, common calamities, show thy wants and imperfections, take God

<sup>1</sup> *Tristram Shandy*, vol. v. c. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

and all His angels to witness . . . put up a supplication to him in the name of a thousand orphans, an hospital, a spittle, a prison, as he goes by . . . ride on.<sup>1</sup>

Hardly a casual coincidence this. But it is yet more unpleasant to find that the mock philosophic reflections with which Mr. Shandy consoles himself on Bobby's death, in those delightful chapters on that event, are not taken, as they profess to be, direct from the sages of antiquity, but have been conveyed through, and "conveyed" from, Burton.

"When Agrippina was told of her son's death," says Sterne, "Tacitus informs us that, not being able to moderate her passions, she abruptly broke off her work." Tacitus does, it is true, inform us of this. But it was undoubtedly Burton (*Anat. Mel.*, p. 213) who informed Sterne of it. So, too, when Mr. Shandy goes on to remark upon death that "'Tis an inevitable chance—the first statute in Magna Charta—it is an everlasting Act of Parliament, my dear brother—all must die," the agreement of his views with those of Burton, who had himself said of death, "'Tis an inevitable chance—the first statute in Magna Charta—an everlasting Act of Parliament—all must die,"<sup>2</sup> is even textually exact.

In the next passage, however, the humourist gets the better of the plagiarist, and we are ready to forgive the theft for the happily comic turn which he gives to it.

Burton:

"Tully was much grieved for his daughter Tulliola's death at first, until such time that he had confirmed his mind by philosophical precepts; then he began to triumph over fortune and grief, and for her reception into heaven to be much more joyed than before he was troubled for her loss."

<sup>1</sup> Burton: *Anat. Mel.*, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

Sterne :

“When Tully was bereft of his daughter, at first he laid it to his heart, he listened to the voice of nature, and modulated his own unto it. O my Tullia ! my daughter ! my child !—Still, still, still—’twas O my Tullia, my Tullia ! Methinks I see my Tullia, I hear my Tullia, I talk with my Tullia. But as soon as he began to look into the stores of philosophy, and *consider how many excellent things might be said upon the occasion*, nobody on earth can conceive, says the great orator, how happy, how joyful it made me.”

“Kingdoms and provinces, cities and towns,” continues Burton, “have their periods, and are consumed.” “Kingdoms and provinces, and towns and cities,” exclaims Mr. Shandy, throwing the sentence, like the “born orator” his son considered him, into the rhetorical interrogative, “have they not their periods?” “Where,” he proceeds, “is Troy, and Mycenæ, and Thebes, and Delos, and Persepolis, and Agrigentum ? What is become, brother Toby, of Nineveh and Babylon, of Cyzicum and Mytilene ? The fairest towns that ever the sun rose upon” (and all, with the curious exception of Mytilene, enumerated by Burton) “are now no more.” And then the famous consolatory letter from Servius Sulpicius to Cicero on the death of Tullia is laid under contribution—Burton’s rendering of the Latin being followed almost word for word. “Returning out of Asia,” declaims Mr. Shandy, “when I sailed from Ægina towards Megara” (when can this have been ? thought my Unele Toby), “I began to view the country round about. Ægina was behind me, Megara before,” &c., and so on, down to the final reflection of the philosopher, “Remember that thou art but a man ;” at which point Sterne remarks coolly, “Now, my Unele Toby knew not that this last paragraph was an extract of Servius Sulpicius’s consolatory letter to Tully”—the thing to be really

known being that the paragraph was, in fact, Servius Sulpicius filtered through Burton. Again, and still quoting from the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Mr. Shandy remarks how "the Thracians wept when a child was born, and feasted and made merry when a man went out of the world; and with reason." He then goes on to lay predatory hands on that fine, sad passage in Lucian, which Burton had quoted before him: "Is it not better not to hunger at all, than to eat? not to thirst, than to take physic to cure it?" (why not "than to drink to satisfy thirst?" as Lucian wrote and Burton translated). "Is it not better to be freed from cares and agues, love and melancholy, and the other hot and cold fits of life, than, like a galled traveller who comes weary to his inn, to be bound to begin his journey afresh?" Then, closing his Burton and opening his Bacon at the *Essay on Death*, he adds: "There is no terror, brother Toby, in its (Death's) looks but what it borrows from groans and convulsions, and" (here parody forces its way in) "the blowing of noses, and the wiping away of tears with the bottoms of curtains in a sick man's bed-room;" and with one more theft from Burton, after Seneca: "Consider, brother Toby, when we are, death is not; and when death is, we: not," this extraordinary cento of plagiarisms concludes.

Not that this is Sterne's only raid upon the quaint old writer of whom he has here made such free use. Several other instances of word for word appropriation might be quoted from this and the succeeding volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. The apostrophe to "blessed health," in c. xxxiii. of vol. v. is taken direct from the *Anatomy of Melancholy*; so is the phrase, "He has a gourd for his head and a pip-pin for his heart," in c. ix.; so is the jest about Franciscus Ribera's computation of the amount of cubic space required

by the souls of the lost; so is Hilarion the hermit's comparison of his body with its unruly passions to a kicking ass. And there is a passage in the *Sentimental Journey*, the "Fragment in the Abderitans," which shows, Dr. Ferriar thinks—though it does not seem to me to show conclusively—that Sterne was unaware that what he was taking from Burton had been previously taken by Burton from Lucian.

There is more excuse, in the opinion of the author of the *Illustrations*, for the literary thefts of the preacher than for those of the novelist; since in sermons, Dr. Ferriar observes drily, "the principal matter must consist of repetitions." But it can hardly, I think, be admitted that the kind of "repetitions" to which Sterne had recourse in the pulpit—or, at any rate, in compositions ostensibly prepared for the pulpit—are quite justifiable. Professor Jebb has pointed out, in a recent volume of this series, that the description of the tortures of the Inquisition, which so deeply moved Corporal Trim in the famous Sermon on Conscience, was really the work of Bentley; but Sterne has pilfered more freely from a divine more famous as a preacher than the great scholar whose words he appropriated on that occasion. "Then shame and grief go with her," he exclaims in his singular sermon on "The Levite and his Concubine;" "and wherever she seeks a shelter may the hand of Justice shut the door against her!" an exclamation which is taken, as, no doubt, indeed, was the whole suggestion of the somewhat strange subject, from the *Contemplations* of Bishop Hall. And so, again, we find in Sterne's sermon the following:

"Mercy well becomes the heart of all Thy creatures! but most of Thy servant, a Levite, who offers up so many daily sacrifices to Thee for the transgressions of Thy people. But to little purpose, he would

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add, have I served at Thy altar, where my business was to sue for mercy, had I not learned to practise it."

And in Hall's *Contemplations* the following :

"Merely becomes well the heart of any man, but most of a Levite. He that had helped to offer so many sacrifices to God for the multitude of every Israelite's sins saw how proportionable it was that man should not hold one sin unpardonable. He had served at the altar to no purpose, if he (whose trade was to sue for mercy) had not at all learned to practise it."

Sterne's twelfth sermon, on the Forgiveness of Injuries, is merely a diluted commentary on the conclusion of Hall's "Contemplation of Joseph." In the sixteenth sermon, the one on Shimei, we find :

"There is no small degree of malicious craft in fixing upon a season to give a mark of enmity and ill will: a word, a look, which at one time would make no impression, at another time wounds the heart, and, like a shaft flying with the wind, pierces deep, which, with its own natural force, would scarce have reached the object aimed at."

This, it is evident, is but slightly altered, and by no means for the better, from the more terse and vigorous language of the Bishop :

"There is no small cruelty in the picking out of a time for mischief: that word would scarce gall at one season which at another killeth. The same shaft flying with the wind pierces deep, which against it can hardly find strength to stick upright."

But enough of these *pièces de conviction*. Indictments for plagiarism are often too hastily laid; but there can be no doubt, I should imagine, in the mind of any reasonable being upon the evidence here cited, that the offence in this case is clearly proved. Nor, I think, can there be much question as to its moral complexion. For the pilferings

from Bishop Hall, at any rate, no shadow of excuse can, so far as I can see, be alleged. Sterne could not possibly plead any better justification for borrowing Hall's thoughts and phrases and passing them off upon his hearers or readers as original, than he could plead for claiming the authorship of one of the Bishop's benevolent actions and representing himself to the world as the doer of the good deed. In the actual as in the hypothetical case there is a dishonest appropriation by one man of the credit—in the former case the intellectual, in the latter the moral credit—belonging to another: the offence in the actual case being aggravated by the fact that it involves a fraud upon the purchaser of the sermon, who pays money for what he may already have in his library. The plagiarisms from Burton stand upon a slightly different though not, I think, a much more defensible footing. For in this case it has been urged that Sterne, being desirous of satirizing pedantry, was justified in resorting to the actually existent writings of an antique pedant of real life; and that since Mr. Shandy could not be made to talk more like himself than Burton talked like *him*, it was artistically lawful to put Burton's exact words into Mr. Shandy's mouth. It makes a difference, it may be said, that Sterne is not here speaking in his own person, as he is in his *Sermons*, but in the person of one of his characters. This casuistry, however, does not seem to me to be sound. Even as regards the passages from ancient authors, which, while quoting them from Burton, he tacitly represents to his readers as taken from his own stores of knowledge, the excuse is hardly sufficient; while as regards the original reflections of the author of the *Anatomy of Melancholy* it obviously fails to apply at all. And in any case there could be no necessity for the omission to acknowledge the

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debt. Even admitting that no more characteristic reflections could have been composed for Mr. Shandy than were actually to be found in Burton, art is not so exacting a mistress as to compel the artist to plagiarize against his will. A scrupulous writer, being also as ingenious as Sterne, could have found some means of indicating the source from which he was borrowing without destroying the dramatic illusion of the scene.

But it seems clear enough that Sterne himself was troubled by no conscientious qualms on this subject. Perhaps the most extraordinary instance of literary effrontery which was ever met with is the passage in vol. v. c. 1, which even that seasoned detective Dr. Ferriar is startled into pronouncing "singular." Burton had complained that writers were like apothecaries, who "make new mixtures every day," by "pouring out of one vessel into another." "We weave," he said, "the same web still, twist the same rope again and again." And Sterne *incolumi gravitate* asks: "Shall we forever make new books as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another? Are we forever to be twisting and untwisting the same rope, forever on the same track, forever at the same pace?" And this he writes with the scissors actually opened in his hand for the almost bodily abstraction of the passage beginning, "Man, the most excellent and noble creature of the world!" Surely this denunciation of plagiarism by a plagiarist on the point of setting to work could only have been written by a man who looked upon plagiarism as a good joke.

Apart, however, from the moralities of the matter, it must in fairness be admitted that in most cases Sterne is no servile copyist. He appropriates other men's thoughts and phrases, and with them, of course, the credit for the wit,

the truth, the vigour, or the learning which characterizes them; but he is seldom found, in *Tristram Shandy*, at any rate, to have transferred them to his own pages out of a mere indolent inclination to save himself the trouble of composition. He takes them less as substitutes than as groundwork for his own invention—as so much material for his own inventive powers to work upon; and those powers do generally work upon them with conspicuous skill of elaboration. The series of cuttings, for instance, which he makes from Burton, on the occasion of Bobby Shandy's death, are woven into the main tissue of the dialogue with remarkable ingenuity and naturalness; and the bright strands of his own unborrowed humour fly flashing across the fabric at every transit of the shuttle. Or, to change the metaphor, we may say that in almost every instance the jewels that so glitter in their stolen setting were cut and set by Sterne himself. Let us allow that the most expert of lapidaries is not justified in stealing his settings; but let us still not forget that the *jewels* are his, or permit our disapproval of his laxity of principle to make us unjust to his consummate skill.

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## CHAPTER X.

## STYLE AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.—HUMOUR AND SENTIMENT.

To talk of "the style" of Sterne is almost to play one of those tricks with language of which he himself was so fond. For there is hardly any definition of the word which can make it possible to describe him as having any style at all. It is not only that he manifestly recognized no external canons whereto to conform the expression of his thoughts, but he had, apparently, no inclination to invent and observe—except, indeed, in the most negative of senses—any style of his own. The "style of Sterne," in short, is as though one should say "the form of Proteus." He was determined to be uniformly eccentric, regularly irregular, and that was all. His digressions, his asides, and his fooleries in general would, of course, have in any case necessitated a certain general jerkiness of manner; but this need hardly have extended itself habitually to the structure of individual sentences, and as a matter of fact he can at times write, as he does for the most part in his *Sermons*, in a style which is not the less vigorous for being fairly correct. But as a rule his mode of expressing himself is destitute of any pretensions to precision; and in many instances it is a perfect marvel of literary slipshod. Nor is there any ground for believing that the

slovenliness was invariably intentional. Sterne's truly hideous French—French at which even Stratford-atte-Bowe would have stood aghast—is in itself sufficient evidence of a natural insensibility to grammatical accuracy. Here there can be no suspicion of designed defiance of rules; and more than one solecism of rather a serious kind in his use of English words and phrases affords confirmatory testimony to the same point. His punctuation is fearful and wonderful, even for an age in which the *rationale* of punctuation was more imperfectly understood than it is at present; and this, though an apparently slight matter, is not without value as an indication of ways of thought. But if we can hardly describe Sterne's style as being in the literary sense a style at all, it has a very distinct *colloquial* character of its own, and as such it is nearly as much deserving of praise as from the literary point of view it is open to exception. Chaotic as it is in the syntactical sense, it is a perfectly clear vehicle for the conveyance of thought: we are as rarely at a loss for the meaning of one of Sterne's sentences as we are, for very different reasons, for the meaning of one of Macaulay's. And his language is so full of life and colour, his tone so animated and vivacious, that we forget we are reading and not *listening*, and we are as little disposed to be exacting in respect to form as though we were listeners in actual fact. Sterne's manner, in short, may be that of a bad and careless writer, but it is the manner of a first-rate talker; and this, of course, enhances rather than detracts from the unwearying charm of his wit and humour.

To attempt a precise and final distinction between these two last-named qualities in Sterne or any one else would be no very hopeful task, perhaps; but those who have a keen perception of either find no great difficulty in dis-

criminating, as a matter of feeling, between the two. And what is true of the qualities themselves is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the men by whom they have been most conspicuously displayed. Some wits have been humourists also; nearly all humourists have been also wits; yet the two fall, on the whole, into tolerably well-marked classes, and the ordinary unneritical judgment would, probably, enable most men to state with sufficient certainty the class to which each famous name in the world's literature belongs. Aristophanes, Shakspeare, Cervantes, Molière, Swift, Fielding, Lamb, Richter, Carlyle: widely as these writers differ from each other in style and genius, the least skilled reader would hardly need to be told that the list which includes them all is a catalogue of humourists. And Cicero, Lucian, Pascal, Voltaire, Congreve, Pope, Sheridan, Courier, Sydney Smith—this, I suppose, would be recognized at once as an enumeration of wits. Some of these humourists, like Fielding, like Richter, like Carlyle, are always, or almost always, humourists alone. Some of these wits, like Pascal, like Pope, like Courier, are wits with no, or but slight, admixture of humour; and in the classification of these there is of course no difficulty at all. But even with the wits who very often give us humour also, and with the humourists who as often delight us with their wit, we seldom find ourselves in any doubt as to the real and more essential affinities of each. It is not by the wit which he has infused into his talk, so much as by the humour with which he has delineated the character, that Shakspeare has given his Falstaff an abiding place in our memories. It is not the repartees of Benedick and Beatrice, but the immortal fatuity of Dogberry, that the name of *Much Ado About Nothing* recalls. None of the verbal quips of Touchstone tickle us like his exquisite patronage of William and

the fascination which he exercises over the melancholy Jaques. And it is the same throughout all Shakspeare. It is of the humours of Bottom, and LANCELOT, and Shallow, and Sly, and Aguecheek; it is of the laughter that treads upon the heels of horror and pity and awe, as we listen to the Porter in *Macbeth*, to the Grave-digger in *Hamlet*, to the Fool in *Lear*—it is of these that we think when we think of Shakspeare in any other but his purely poetic mood. Whenever, that is to say, we think of him as anything but a poet, we think of him, not as a wit, but as a humourist. So, too, it is not the dagger-thrusts of the *Drapier's Letters*, but the broad ridicule of the *Voyage to Laputa*, the savage irony of the *Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*, that we associate with the name of Swift. And, conversely, it is the cold, epigrammatic glitter of Congreve's dialogue, the fizz and crackle of the fireworks which Sheridan serves out with indiscriminating hand to the most insignificant of his characters—it is this which stamps the work of these dramatists with characteristics far more marked than any which belong to them in right of humorous portraiture of human foibles or ingenious invention of comic incident.

The place of Sterne is unmistakably among writers of the former class. It is by his humour—his humour of character, his dramatic as distinct from his critical descriptive *personal* humour—though, of course, he possesses this also, as all humourists must—that he lives and will live. In *Tristram Shandy*, as in the *Sermons*, there is a sufficiency of wit, and considerably more than a sufficiency of humorous reflection, innuendo, and persiflage; but it is the actors in his almost plotless drama who have established their creator in his niche in the Temple of Fame. We cannot, indeed, be sure that what has given him his hold upon posterity is what gave him his popularity with his



contemporaries. On the contrary, it is, perhaps, more probable that he owed his first success with the public of his day to those eccentricities which are for us a little too consciously eccentric—those artifices which fail a little too conspicuously in the *ars celandi artem*. But however these tricks may have pleased in days when such tricks were new, they much more often weary than divert us now; and I suspect that many a man whose delight in the Corporal and his master, in Bridget and her mistress, is as fresh as ever, declines to accompany their creator in those perpetual digressions into nonsense or semi-nonsense the fashion of which Sterne borrowed from Rabelais, without Rabelais's excuse for adopting it. To us of this day the real charm and distinction of the book is due to the marvellous combination of vigour and subtlety in its portrayal of character, and in the purity and delicacy of its humour. Those last two apparently paradoxical substantives are chosen advisedly, and employed as the most convenient way of introducing that disagreeable question which no commentator on Sterne can possibly shirk, but which every admirer of Sterne must approach with reluctance. There is, of course, a sense in which Sterne's humour—if, indeed, we may bestow that name on the form of jocularity to which I refer—is the very reverse of pure and delicate: a sense in which it is impure and indelicate in the highest degree. On this it is necessary, however briefly, to touch; and to the weighty and many-counted indictment which may be framed against Sterne on this head there is, of course, but one possible plea—the plea of guilty. Nay, the plea must go further than a mere admission of the offence; it must include an admission of the worst motive, the worst spirit as animating the offender. It is not necessary to my purpose, nor doubtless

congenial to the taste of the reader, that I should enter upon any critical analysis of this quality in the author's work, or compare him in this respect with the two other great humourists who have been the worst offenders in the same way. In one of those highly interesting criticisms of English literature which, even when they most conspicuously miss the mark, are so instructive to Englishmen, M. Taine has instituted an elaborate comparison—very much, I need hardly say, to the advantage of the latter—between the indecency of Swift and that of Rabelais—that “good giant,” as his countryman calls him, “who rolls himself joyously about on his dunghill, thinking no evil.” And no doubt the world of literary moralists will always be divided upon the question—one mainly of national temperament—whether mere animal spirits or serious satiric purpose is the best justification for offences against cleanliness. It is, of course, only the former theory, if either, which could possibly avail Sterne, and it would need an unpleasantly minute analysis of this characteristic in his writings to ascertain how far M. Taine's eloquent defence of Rabelais could be made applicable to his case. But the inquiry, one is glad to think, is as unnecessary as it would be disagreeable; for, unfortunately for Sterne, he must be condemned on a *quantitative* comparison of indecency, whatever may be his fate when compared with these other two great writers as regards the quality of their respective transgressions. There can be no denying, I mean, that Sterne is of all writers the most permeated and penetrated with impurity of thought and suggestion; that in no other writer is its latent presence more constantly felt, even if there be any in whom it is more often openly obtruded. The nuclean spirit pursues him everywhere, disfiguring his scenes of humour, demoralizing his

passages of serious reflection, debasing even his sentimental interludes. His coarseness is very often as great a blot on his art as on his morality—a thing which can very rarely be said of either Swift or Rabelais; and it is sometimes so distinctly fatal a blemish from the purely literary point of view, that one is amazed at the critical faculty which could have tolerated its presence.

But when all this has been said of Sterne's humour it still remains true that, in another sense of the words "purity" and "delicacy," he possesses humour more pure and delicate than, perhaps, any other writer in the world can show. For if that humour is the purest and most delicate which is the freest from any admixture of farce, and produces its effects with the lightest touch, and the least obligations to ridiculous incident, or what may be called the "physical grotesque," in any shape—then one can point to passages from Sterne's pen which, for fulfilment of these conditions, it would be difficult to match elsewhere. Strange as it may seem to say this of the literary Gilray who drew the portrait of Dr. Slop, and of the literary Grimaldi who tormented Phutatorius with the hot chocolate, it is nevertheless the fact that scene after scene may be cited from *Tristram Shandy*, and those the most delightful in the book, which are not only free from even the momentary intrusion of either the clown or the caricaturist, but even from the presence of "comic properties" (as actors would call them) of any kind: scenes of which the external setting is of the simplest possible character, while the humour is of that deepest and most penetrative kind which springs from the eternal incongruities of human nature, the ever-recurring cross-purposes of human lives.

Carlyle classes Sterne with Cervantes among the great

humourists of the world; and from one, and that the most important, point of view the praise is not extravagant. By no other writer besides Sterne, perhaps, since the days of the Spanish humourist, have the vast incongruities of human character been set forth with so masterly a hand. It is in virtue of the new insight which his humour opens to us of the immensity and variety of man's life that Cervantes makes us feel that he is *great*: not delightful merely—not even eternally delightful only, and secure of immortality through the perennial human need of joy—but *great*, but immortal, in right of that which makes Shakspeare and the Greek dramatists immortal, namely, the power, not alone over the pleasure-loving part of man's nature, but over that equally universal but more enduring element in it, his emotions of wonder and of awe. It is to this greater power—this control over a greater instinct than the human love of joy, that Cervantes owes his greatness; and it will be found, though it may seem at first a hard saying, that Sterne shares this power with Cervantes. To pass from Quixote and Sancho to Walter and Toby Shandy involves, of course, a startling change of dramatic key—a notable lowering of dramatic tone. It is almost like passing from poetry to prose: it is certainly passing from the poetic in spirit and surroundings to the profoundly prosaic in fundamental conception and in every individual detail. But those who do not allow accidental and external dissimilarities to obscure for them the inward and essential resemblances of things, must often, I think, have experienced from one of the Shandy dialogues the same *sort* of impression that they derive from some of the most nobly humorous colloquies between the knight and his squire, and must have been conscious through all outward differences of key and tone

of a common element in each. It is, of course, a resemblance of *relations* and not of personalities; for though there is something of the Knight of La Mancha in Mr. Shandy, there is nothing of Sancho about his brother. But the serio-comic game of cross-purposes is the same between both couples; and what one may call the irony of human intercourse is equally profound, and pointed with equal subtlety, in each. In the Spanish romance, of course, it is not likely to be missed. It is enough in itself that the deranged brain which takes windmills for giants, and carriers for knights, and Rosinante for a Bucephalus, has fixed upon Sancho Panza—the crowning proof of its mania—as the fitting squire of a knight-errant. To him—to this compound of somnolence, shrewdness, and good nature—to this creature with no more tincture of romantic idealism than a wine-skin, the knight addresses, without misgiving, his lofty dissertations on the glories and the duties of envalry.—the squire responding after his fashion. And thus these two hold converse, contentedly incomprehensible to each other, and with no suspicion that they are as incapable of interchanging ideas as the inhabitants of two different planets. With what heart-stirring mirth, and yet with what strangely deeper feeling of the infinite variety of human nature, do we follow their converse throughout! Yet Quixote and Sancho are not more life-like and human, nor nearer together at one point and farther apart at another, than are Walter Shandy and his brother. The squat little Spanish peasant is not more gloriously incapable of following the chivalric vagaries of his master than the simple soldier is of grasping the philosophic crotchets of his brother. Both couples are in sympathetic contact absolute and complete at one point; at another they are “poles asunder” both of them.

And in both contrasts there is that sense of futility and failure, of alienation and misunderstanding—that element of underlying pathos, in short, which so strangely gives its keenest salt to humour. In both alike there is the same suggestion of the Infinite of disparity bounding the finite of resemblance—of the Incommensurable in man and nature, beside which all minor uniformities sink into insignificance.

The pathetic element which underlies and deepens the humour is, of course, produced in the two cases in two exactly opposite ways. In both cases it is a picture of human simplicity—of a noble and artless nature out of harmony with its surroundings—which moves us; but whereas in the Spanish romance the simplicity is that of the *incompris*, in the English novel it is that of the man with whom the *incompris* consorts. If there is pathos as well as humour, and deepening the humour, in the figure of the distraught knight-errant talking so hopelessly over the head of his attached squire's morality, so too there is pathos, giving depth to the humour of the eccentric philosopher, shooting so hopelessly wide of the intellectual appreciation of the most affectionate of brothers. One's sympathy, perhaps, is even more strongly appealed to in the latter than in the former case, because the effort of the good Captain to understand is far greater than that of the Don to make himself understood, and the concern of the former at his failure is proportionately more marked than that of the latter at *his*. And the general *rapport* between one of the two ill-assorted pairs is much closer than that of the other. It is, indeed, the tantalizing approach to a mutual understanding which gives so much more subtle a zest to the humour of the relations between the two brothers Shandy than to that which arises out of the re-

lations between the philosopher and his wife. The broad comedy of the dialogues between Mr. and Mrs. Shandy is irresistible in its way: but it *is* broad comedy. The philosopher knows that his wife does not comprehend him: she knows that she never will; and neither of them much cares. The husband snubs her openly for her mental defects, and she with perfect placidity accepts his rebukes. "Master," as he once complains, "of one of the finest chains of reasoning in the world, he is unable for the soul of him to get a single link of it into the head of his wife;" but we never hear him lamenting in this serio-comic fashion over his brother's inability to follow his processes of reasoning. That is too serious a matter with both of them; their mutual desire to share each other's ideas and tastes is too strong; and each time that the philosopher shows his impatience with the soldier's fortification-hobby, or the soldier breaks his honest shins over one of the philosopher's erotehets, the regret and remorse on either side is equally acute and sincere. It must be admitted, however, that Captain Shandy is the one who the more frequently subjects himself to pangs of this sort, and who is the more innocent sufferer of the two.

From the broad and deep humour of this central conception of contrast flow as from a head-water innumerable rills of comedy through many and many a page of dialogue; but not, of course, from this source alone. Uncle Toby is ever delightful, even when his brother is not near him as his foil; the faithful Corporal brings out another side of his character, upon which we linger with equal pleasure of contemplation; the allurements of the Widow Wadman reveal him to us in yet another—but always in a captivating aspect. There is, too, one need hardly say, an abundance of humour, of a high, though not the highest,

order in the minor characters of the story—in Mrs. Shandy, in the fascinating widow, and even, under the coarse lines of the physical caricature, in the keen little Catholic, Slop himself. But it is in Toby Shandy alone that humour reaches that supreme level which it is only capable of attaining when the collision of contrasted qualities in a human character produces a corresponding conflict of the emotions of mirth and tenderness in the minds of those who contemplate it.

This, however, belongs more rightfully to the consideration of the creative and dramatic element in Sterne's genius; and an earlier place in the analysis is claimed by that power over the emotion of pity upon which Sterne, beyond question, prided himself more highly than upon any other of his gifts. He preferred, we can plainly see, to think of himself, not as the great humourist, but as the great sentimentalist; and though the word "sentiment" had something even in *his* day of the depreciatory meaning which distinguishes it nowadays from "pathos," there can be little doubt that the thing appeared to Sterne to be, on the whole, and both in life and literature, rather admirable than the reverse.

What, then, were his notions of true "sentiment" in literature? We have seen elsewhere that he repeats—it would appear unconsciously—and commends the canon which Horace propounds to the tragic poet in the words:

"Si vis me flere, dolendum  
Primum ipsi tibi: tunc tua me infortunia lædent."

And that canon is sound enough, no doubt, in the sense in which it was meant, and in its relation to the person to whom it was addressed. A tragic drama, peopled with heroes who set forth their woes in frigid and unimpas-



sioned verse, will unquestionably leave its audience as cold as itself. Nor is this true of drama alone. All *poetry*, indeed, whether dramatic or other, presupposes a sympathetic unity of emotion between the poet and those whom he addresses; and to this extent it is obviously true that *he* must feel before they can. Horace, who was (what every literary critic is not) a man of the world and an observer of human nature, did not, of course, mean that this capacity for feeling was all, or even the chief part, of the poetic faculty. He must have seen many an "intense" young Roman make that pathetic error of the young in all countries and of all periods—the error of mistaking the capacity of emotion for the gift of expression. He did, however, undoubtedly mean that a poet's power of affecting others presupposes passion in himself; and, as regards the poet, he was right. But his criticism takes no account whatever of one form of appeal to the emotions which has been brought by later art to a high pitch of perfection, but with which the personal feeling of the artist has not much more to do than the "passions" of an auctioneer's clerk have to do with the compilation of his inventory. A poet himself, Horace wrote for poets; to him the pathetic implied the ideal, the imaginative, the rhetorical; he lived before the age of Realism and the Realists, and would scarcely have comprehended either the men or the method if he could have come across them. Had he done so, however, he would have been astonished to find his canon reversed, and to have perceived that the primary condition of the realist's success, and the distinctive note of those writers who have pressed genius into the service of realism, is that they do *not* share—that they are unalterably and ostentatiously free from—the emotions to which they appeal in their readers. A fortunate accident has enabled

us to compare the treatment which the world's greatest tragic poet and its greatest master of realistic tragedy have respectively applied to virtually the same subject; and the two methods are never likely to be again so impressively contrasted as in *King Lear* and *Le Père Goriot*. But, in truth, it must be impossible for any one who feels Balzac's power not to feel also how it is heightened by Balzac's absolute calm—a calm entirely different from that stern composure which was merely a point of style and not an attitude of the heart with the old Greek tragedians—a calm which, unlike theirs, insulates, so to speak, and is intended to insulate, the writer, to the end that his individuality, of which only the electric current of sympathy ever makes a reader conscious, may disappear, and the characters of the drama stand forth the more life-like from the complete concealment of the hand that moves them.

Of this kind of art Horace, as has been said, knew nothing, and his canon only applies to it by the rule of contraries. Undoubtedly, and in spite of the marvels which one great genius has wrought with it, it is a form lower than the poetic—essentially a prosaic, and in many or most hands an unimaginative, form of art; but for this very reason, that it demands nothing of its average practitioner but a keen eye for facts, great and small, and a knack of graphically recording them, it has become a far more commonly and successfully cultivated form of art than any other. As to the question who *are* its practitioners, it would, of course, be the merest dogmatism to commit one's self to any attempt at rigid classification in such a matter. There are few if any writers who can be described without qualification either as realists or as idealists. Nearly all of them, probably, are realists at one moment and in one mood, and idealists at other moments and in

other moods. All that need be insisted on is that the methods of the two forms of art are essentially distinct, and that artistic failure must result from any attempt to combine them; for, whereas the primary condition of success in the one case is that the reader should feel the sympathetic presence of the writer, the primary condition of success in the other is that the writer should efface himself from the reader's consciousness altogether. And it is, I think, the defiance of these conditions which explains why so much of Sterne's deliberately pathetic writing is, from the artistic point of view, a failure. It is this which makes one feel so much of it to be strained and unnatural, and which brings it to pass that some of his most ambitious efforts leave the reader indifferent, or even now and then contemptuous. In those passages of pathos in which the effect is distinctly sought by realistic means Sterne is perpetually ignoring the "self-denying ordinance" of his adopted method—perpetually obtruding his own individuality, and begging us, as it were, to turn from the picture to the artist, to cease gazing for a moment at his touching creation, and to admire the fine feeling, the exquisitely sympathetic nature of the man who created it. No doubt, as we must in fairness remember, it was part of his "humour"—in Ancient Pistol's sense of the word—to do this; it is true, no doubt (and a truth which Sterne's most famous critic was too prone to ignore), that his sentiment is not always *meant* for serious;<sup>1</sup> nay, the very word "senti-

<sup>1</sup> Surely it was not so meant, for instance, in the passage about the *désobéissante*, which had been "standing so many months unpitied in the corner of Monsieur Dessen's coach-yard. Much, indeed, was not to be said for it, but something might; and, when a few words will rescue Misery out of her distress, I hate the man who can be a churl of them." "Does anybody," asks Thackeray in strangely nat-

mental" itself, though in Sterne's day, of course, it had acquired but a part of its present disparaging significance, is a sufficient proof of that. But there are, nevertheless, plenty of passages, both in *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*, where the intention is wholly and un-mixedly pathetic—where the smile is not for a moment meant to compete with the tear—which are, nevertheless, it must be owned, complete failures, and failures traceable with much certainty, or so it seems to me, to the artistic error above-mentioned.

In one famous case, indeed, the failure can hardly be described as other than ludicrous. The figure of the distraught Maria of Moulines is tenderly drawn; the accessories of the picture—her goat, her dog, her pipe, her song to the Virgin—though a little theatrical, perhaps, are skilfully touched in; and so long as the Sentimental Traveller keeps our attention fixed upon her and then the scene prospers well enough. But, after having bidden us duly note how "the tears trickled down her cheeks," the Traveller continues: "I sat down close by her, and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell with my handkerchief. I then steeped it in my own—and then in hers—and then in mine—and then I wiped hers again; and as I did it I felt such undescribable emotions within me as, I am sure, could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion." The reader of this may well ask himself in wonderment whether he is really expected to make

ter-of-fact fashion, "believe that this is a real sentiment? that this luxury of generosity, this gallant rescue of Misery—out of an old cab—is genuine feeling?" Nobody, we should say. But, on the other hand, does anybody—or did anybody before Thackeray—suggest that it was meant to pass for genuine feeling? Is it not an obvious piece of moek pathetic?

a third in the lachrymose group. We look at the passage again, and more carefully, to see if, after all, we may not be intended to laugh, and not to cry at it; but on finding, as clearly appears, that we actually *are* intended to cry at it the temptation to laugh becomes almost irresistible. We proceed, however, to the account of Maria's wanderings to Rome and back, and we come to the pretty passage which follows:

"How she had borne it, and how she had got supported, she could not tell; but God tempers the wind, said Maria, to the shorn lamb. Shorn indeed! and to the quick, said I; and wast thou in my own land, where I have a cottage, I would take thee to it, and shelter thee; thou shouldst eat of my own bread and drink of my own cup; I would be kind to thy Sylvio; in all thy weaknesses and wanderings I would seek after thee, and bring thee back. When the sun went down I would say my prayers; and when I had done thou shouldst play thy evening-song upon thy pipe; nor would the incense of my sacrifice be worse accepted for entering heaven along with that of a broken heart."

But then follows more whimpering:

"Nature melted within me [continues Sterne] as I said this; and Maria observing, as I took out my handkerchief, that it was steeped too much already to be of use, would needs go wash it in the stream. And where will you dry it, Maria? said I. I'll dry it in my bosom, said she; 'twill do me good. And is your heart still so warm, Maria? said I. I touched upon the string on which hung all her sorrows. She looked with wistful disorder for some time in my face; and then, without saying anything, took her pipe and played her service to the Virgin."

Which are we meant to look at—the sorrows of Maria? or the sensibilities of the Sentimental Traveller? or the condition of the pocket-handkerchief? I think it doubtful whether any writer of the first rank has ever perpetrated so disastrous a literary failure as this scene; but the

main cause of that failure appears to me not doubtful at all. The artist has no business within the frame of the picture, and his intrusion into it has spoilt it. The method adopted from the commencement is ostentatiously objective: we are taken straight into Maria's presence, and bidden to look at and to pity the unhappy maiden as *described* by the Traveller who met her. No attempt is made to place us at the outset in sympathy with *him*; he, until he thrusts himself before us, with his streaming eyes, and his drenched pocket-handkerchief, is a mere reporter of the scene before him, and he and his tears are as much out of place as if he were the compositor who set up the type. It is not merely that we don't want to know how the scene affected him, and that we resent as an impertinence the elaborate account of his tender emotions; we don't wish to be reminded of his presence at all. For, as we can know nothing (effectively) of Maria's sorrows except as given in her appearance—the historical recital of them and their cause being too curt and bald to be able to move us—the best chance for moving our compassion for her is to make the illusion of her presence as dramatically real as possible; a chance which is, therefore, completely destroyed when the author of the illusion insists on thrusting himself between ourselves and the scene.

But, in truth, this whole episode of Maria of Moulines was, like more than one of Sterne's efforts after the pathetic, condemned to failure from the very conditions of its birth. These abortive efforts are no natural growth of his artistic genius; they proceed rather from certain morbidly stimulated impulses of his moral nature which he forced his artistic genius to subserve. He had true pathetic power, simple yet subtle, at his command; but it visited him unsought, and by inspiration from without.

It came when he was in the dramatic and not in the introspective mood; when he was thinking honestly of his characters, and not of himself. But he was, unfortunately, too prone—and a long course of moral self-indulgence had confirmed him in it—to the habit of caressing his own sensibilities; and the result of this was always to set him upon one of those attempts to be pathetic of *malice prepense* of which Maria of Moulines is one example, and the too celebrated dead donkey of Nampont another. “It is agreeably and skilfully done, that dead jackass,” writes Thackeray; “like M. de Soubise’s cook on the campaign, Sterne dresses it, and serves it up quite tender, and with a very piquante sauce. But tears, and fine feelings, and a white pocket-handkerchief, and a funeral sermon, and horses and feathers, and a procession of mutes, and a hearse with a dead donkey inside! Psha! Mountebank! I’ll not give thee one penny-piece for that trick, donkey and all.” That is vigorous ridicule, and not wholly undeserved; but, on the other hand, not entirely deserved. There is less of artistic trick, it seems to me, and more of natural foible, about Sterne’s literary sentiment than Thackeray was ever willing to believe; and I can find nothing worse, though nothing better, in the dead ass of Nampont than in Maria of Moulines. I do not think there is any conscious simulation of feeling in this Nampont scene; it is that the feeling itself is overstrained—that Sterne, hugging, as usual, his own sensibilities, mistook their value in expression for the purposes of art. The Sentimental Traveller does not obtrude himself to the same extent as in the scene at Moulines; but a little consideration of the scene will show how much Sterne relied on the mere presentment of the fact that here was an unfortunate peasant who had lost his dumb companion,

and here a tender-hearted gentleman looking on and pitying him. As for any attempts to bring out, by objective dramatic touches, either the grievousness of the bereavement or the grief of the mourner, such attempts as are made to do this are either commonplace or "one step in advance" of the sublime. Take this, for instance: "The mourner was sitting upon a stone bench at the door, with the ass's pannell and its bridle on one side, which he took up from time to time, then laid them down, looked at them, and shook his head. He then took the crust of bread out of his wallet again, as if to eat it; held it some time in his hand, then laid it upon the bit of his ass's bridle—looked wistfully at the little arrangement he had made—and then gave a sigh. The simplicity of his grief drew numbers about him," &c. Simplicity, indeed, of a marvellous sort which could show itself by so extraordinary a piece of acting as this! Is there any critic who candidly thinks it natural—I do not mean in the sense of mere every-day probability, but of conformity to the laws of human character? Is it true that in any country, among any people, however emotional, grief—real, unaffected, unself-conscious grief—ever did or ever could display itself by such a trick as that of laying a piece of bread on the bit of a dead ass's bridle? Do we not feel that if we had been on the point of offering comfort or alms to the mourner, and saw him go through this extraordinary piece of pantomime, we should have buttoned up our hearts and pockets forthwith? Sentiment, again, sails very near the wind of the ludicrous in the reply to the Traveller's remark that the mourner had been a merciful master to the dead ass. "Alas!" the latter says, "I thought so when he was alive, but now that he is dead I think otherwise. I bear the weight of *myself* and *my afflictions* have been



too much for him." And the scene ends flatly enough with the seraph of morality: "'Shame on the world!' said I to myself. Did we love each other as this poor soul loved his ass, 'twould be something.'"

The whole incident, in short, is one of those examples of the deliberate-pathetic with which Sterne's highly natural art had least, and his highly artificial nature most, to do. He is never so unsuccessful as when, after formally announcing, as it were, that he means to be touching, he proceeds to select his subject, to marshal his characters, to group his accessories, and with painful and painfully apparent elaboration to work up his scene to the weeping point. There is no obviousness of suggestion, no spontaneity of treatment about this "Dead Ass" episode; indeed, there is some reason to believe that it was one of those most hopeless of efforts—the attempt at the mechanical repetition of a former triumph. It is by no means improbable, at any rate, that the dead ass of Nampont owes its presence in the *Sentimental Journey* to the reception met with by the live ass of Lyons in the seventh volume of *Tristram Shandy*. And yet what an astonishing difference between the two sketches!

"'Twas a poor ass, who had just turned in, with a couple of large panniers upon his back, to collect eleemosynary turnip-tops and cabbage-leaves, and stood dubious with his two fore-feet on the inside of the threshold, and with his two hinder feet towards the street, as not knowing very well whether he would go in or no. Now, 'tis an animal (be in what hurry I may) I cannot bear to strike. There is a patient endurance of sufferings wrote so unaffectedly in his looks and carriage, which pleads so mightily for him that it always disarms me, and to that degree that I do not like to speak unkindly to him; on the contrary, meet him where I will, in town or country, in cart or under panniers, whether in liberty or bondage, I have ever something civil to say to him on my part; and, as one word begets another (if he has as little to do as I), I generally fall into conversation with him;

and surely never is my imagination so busy as in framing his responses from the etchings of his countenance—and where those carry me not deep enough, in flying from my own heart into his, and feeling what is natural for an ass to think, as well as a man, upon the occasion. . . . Come, Honesty! said I, seeing it was impracticable to pass betwixt him and the gate, art thou for coming in or going out? The ass twisted his head round, to look up the street. Well, replied I, we'll wait a minute for thy driver. He turned his head thoughtfully about, and looked wistfully the opposite way. I understand thee perfectly, answered I: if thou takest a wrong step in this affair he will cudgel thee to death. Well, a minute is but a minute, and if it saves a fellow-creature a drubbing, it shall not be set down as ill spent. He was eating the stem of an artichoke as this discourse went on, and, in the little peevish contentions of nature betwixt hunger and unsavouriness, had dropped it out of his mouth half a dozen times, and picked it up again. God help thee, Jack! said I, thou hast a bitter breakfast on't, and many a bitter blow, I fear, for its wages—'tis all, all bitterness to thee, whatever life is to others. And now thy mouth, if one knew the truth of it, is as bitter, I dare say, as soot (for he had cast aside the stem), and thou hast not a friend, perhaps, in all this world that will give thee a macaroon. In saying this I pulled out a paper of 'em, which I had just purchased, and gave him one; and, at this moment that I am telling it, my heart smites me that there was more of pleasantry in the conceit of seeing how an ass would eat a macaroon, than of benevolence in giving him one, which presided in the act. When the ass had eaten his macaroon I pressed him to come in. The poor beast was heavy loaded, his legs seemed to tremble under him, he hung rather backwards, and as I pulled at his halter it broke short in my hand. He looked up pensive in my face. 'Don't thrash me with it; but if you will, you may.' 'If I do,' said I, 'I'll be d——d.'

Well might Thackeray say of this passage that, "the critic who refuses to see in it wit, humour, pathos, a kind nature speaking, and a real sentiment, must be hard indeed to move and to please." It is, in truth, excellent; and its excellence is due to its possessing nearly every one of those qualities, positive and negative, which the two

other scenes above quoted are without. The author does not here obtrude himself, does not importune us to admire his exquisitely compassionate nature; on the contrary, he at once amuses us and enlists our sympathies by that subtly humorous piece of self-analysis, in which he shows how large an admixture of curiosity was contained in his benevolence. The incident, too, is well chosen. No forced concurrence of circumstances brings it about: it is such as any man might have met with anywhere in his travels, and it is handled in a simple and manly fashion. The reader is *with* the writer throughout; and their common mood of half-humorous pity is sustained, unforced, but unbroken, from first to last.

One can hardly say as much for another of the much-quoted pieces from the *Sentimental Journey*—the description of the caged starling. The passage is ingeniously worked into its context; and if we were to consider it as only intended to serve the purpose of a sudden and dramatic discomfiture of the Traveller's somewhat inconsiderate moralizings on captivity, it would be well enough. But, regarded as a substantive appeal to one's emotions, it is open to the criticisms which apply to most other of Sterne's too deliberate attempts at the pathetic. The details of the picture are too much insisted on, and there is too much of self-consciousness in the artist. Even at the very close of the story of Le Fevre's death—finely told though, as a whole, it is—there is a jarring note. Even while the dying man is breathing his last our sleeve is twitched as we stand at his bedside, and our attention forcibly diverted from the departing soldier to the literary ingenuities of the man who is describing his end:

“There was a frankness in my Uncle Toby, not the effect of familiarity, but the cause of it, which let you at once into his soul, and

showed you the goodness of his nature. To this there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, superadded, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him; so that before my Uncle Toby had half finished the kind offers he was making to the father had the son insensibly pressed up close to his knees, and had taken hold of the breast of his coat, and was pulling it towards him. The blood and spirits of Le Fevre, which were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart, rallied back; the film forsook his eyes for a moment; he looked up wishfully in my Uncle Toby's face, then cast a look upon his boy—and that liganent, fine as it was, was never broken."

How excellent all that is! and how perfectly would the scene have ended had it closed with the tender and poetic image which thus describes the dying soldier's commendation of his orphan boy to the care of his brother-in-arms! But what of this, which closes the scene, in fact?

"Nature instantly ebbed again; the film returned to its place; the pulse fluttered—stopped—went on—throbbed—stopped again—moved, stopped. Shall I go on? No."

Let those admire this who can. To me I confess it seems to spoil a touching and simple death-bed scene by a piece of theatrical trickery.

The sum, in fact, of the whole matter appears to be, that the sentiment on which Sterne so prided himself—the acute sensibilities which he regarded with such extraordinary complacency, were, as has been before observed, the weakness, and not the strength, of his pathetic style. When Sterne the artist is uppermost, when he is surveying his characters with that penetrating eye of his, and above all when he is allowing his subtle and tender humour to play upon them unrestrained, he can touch the springs of compassionate emotion in us with a potent and merring hand. But when Sterne the man is uppermost—

when he is looking inward and not outward, contemplating his own feelings instead of those of his personages, his cunning fails him altogether. He is at his best in pathos when he is most the humourist; or rather, we may almost say, his pathos is never good unless when it is closely interwoven with his humour. In this, of course, there is nothing at all surprising. The only marvel is, that a man who was such a master of the humors, in its highest and deepest sense, should seem to have so little understood how near together lie the sources of tears and laughter on the very way-side of man's mysterious life.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CREATIVE AND DRAMATIC POWER.—PLACE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

Subtle as is Sterne's humour, and true as, in its proper moods, is his pathos, it is not to these but to the parent gift from which they sprang, and perhaps to only one special display of that gift, that he owes his immortality. We are accustomed to bestow so lightly this last hyperbolic honour—hyperbolic always, even when we are speaking of a Homer or a Shakspeare, if only we project the vision far enough forward through time—that the comparative ease with which it is to be earned has itself come to be exaggerated. There are so many "deathless ones" about—if I may put the matter familiarly—in conversation and in literature, that we get into the way of thinking that they are really a considerable body in actual fact, and that the works which have triumphed over death are far more numerous still. The real truth, however, is, that not only are "those who reach posterity a very select company indeed," but most of them have come much nearer missing their destiny than is popularly supposed. Of the dozen or score of writers in one century whom their own contemporaries fondly decree immortal, one-half, perhaps, may be remembered in the next; while of the creations which were honoured with the diploma of immortality a very

much smaller proportion as a rule survive. Only some fifty per cent. of the prematurely laurel-crowned reach the goal; and often even upon *their* brows there flutter but a few stray leaves of the bay. A single poem, a solitary drama—nay, perhaps one isolated figure, poetic or dramatic—avails, and but barely avails, to keep the immortal from putting on mortality. Hence we need think it no disparagement to Sterne to say that he lives not so much in virtue of his creative power as of one great individual creation. His imaginative insight into character in general was, no doubt, considerable; his draughtsmanship, whether as exhibited in the rough sketch or in the finished portrait, is unquestionably most vigorous; but an artist may put a hundred striking figures upon his canvas for one that will linger in the memory of those who have gazed upon it; and it is, after all, I think, the one figure of Captain Tobias Shandy which has graven itself indelibly on the memory of mankind. To have made this single addition to the imperishable types of human character embodied in the world's literature may seem, as has been said, but a light matter to those who talk with light exaggeration of the achievements of the literary artist; but if we exclude that one creative prodigy among men, who has peopled a whole gallery with imaginary beings more real than those of flesh and blood, we shall find that very few archetypal creations have sprung from any single hand. Now, *My Uncle Toby* is as much the archetype of guileless good nature, of affectionate simplicity, as *Hamlet* is of irresolution, or *Iago* of cunning, or *Shylock* of race-hatred; and he contrives to preserve all the characteristics of an ideal type amid surroundings of intensely prosaic realism, with which he himself, moreover, considered as an individual character in a specific story, is in complete accord. If

any one be disposed to underrate the creative and dramatic power to which this testifies, let him consider how it has commonly fared with those writers of prose fiction who have attempted to personify a virtue in a man. Take the work of another famous English humourist and sentimentalist, and compare Uncle Toby's manly and dignified gentleness of heart with the unreal "gnsh" of the Brothers Cheeryble, or the fatuous benevolence of Mr. Pickwick. We do not believe in the former, and we cannot but despise the latter. But Captain Shandy is reality itself, within and without; and though we smile at his naïveté, and may even laugh outright at his boyish enthusiasm for his military hobby, we never cease to respect him for a moment. There is no shirking or softening of the comic aspects of his character; there could not be, of course, for Sterne needed him more, and used him more, for his purposes as a humourist than for his purposes as a sentimentalist. Nay, it is on the rare occasions when he deliberately sentimentalizes with Captain Shandy that the Captain is the least delightful; it is then that the hand loses its cunning, and the stroke strays; it is then, and only then, that the benevolence of the good soldier seems to verge, though ever so little, upon affectation. It is a pity, for instance, that Sterne should, in illustration of Captain Shandy's kindness of heart, have plagiarized (as he is said to have done) the incident of the tormenting fly, caught and put out of the window with the words "Get thee gone, poor devil! Why should I harm thee? The world is surely large enough for thee and me." There is something too much of self-conscious virtue in the apostrophe. This, we feel, is not the real Uncle Toby of Sterne's objective mood; it is the Uncle Toby of the subjectifying sentimentalist, surveying his character through the false me-



dium of his own hypertrophied sensibilities. These lapses, however, are, fortunately, rare. As a rule we see the worthy Captain only as he appeared to his creator's keen dramatic eye, and as he is set before us in a thousand exquisite touches of dialogue—the man of simple mind and soul, profoundly unimaginative and unphilosophical, but lacking not in a certain shrewd common-sense; exquisitely *naïf*, and delightfully *mal-à-propos* in his observations, but always pardonably, never foolishly, so; inexhaustibly amiable, but with no weak amiability; homely in his ways, but a perfect gentleman withal; in a word, the most winning and lovable personality that is to be met with, surely, in the whole range of fiction.

It is, in fact, with Sterne's general delineations of character as it is, I have attempted to show, with his particular passages of sentiment. He is never at his best and truest—as, indeed, no writer of fiction ever is or can be—save when he is allowing his dramatic imagination to play the most freely upon his characters, and thinking least about himself. This is curiously illustrated in his handling of what is, perhaps, the next most successful of the uncaricatured portraits in the Shandy gallery—the presentment of the Rev. Mr. Yorick. Nothing can be more perfect in its way than the picture of the “lively, witty, sensitive, and heedless parson,” in chapter x. of the first volume of *Tristram Shandy*. We seem to see the thin, melancholy figure on the rawboned horse—the apparition which could “never present itself in the village but it caught the attention of old and young,” so that “labour stood still as he passed, the bucket hung suspended in the middle of the well, the spinning-wheel forgot its round; even chuck-farthing and shuffle-cap themselves stood gaping till he was out of sight.” Throughout this chapter Sterne, though describ-

ing himself, is projecting his personality to a distance, as it were, and contemplating it dramatically; and the result is excellent. When in the next chapter he becomes "lyrical," so to speak; when the reflection upon his (largely imaginary) wrongs impels him to look inward, the invariable consequence follows; and though Yorick's much praised death-scene, with Eugenius at his bed-side, is redeemed from entire failure by an admixture of the humorous with its attempted pathos, we ask ourselves with some wonder what the unhappiness—or the death itself, for that matter—is "all about." The wrongs which were supposed to have broken Yorick's heart are most imperfectly specified (a comic proof, by the way, of Sterne's entire absorption in himself, to the confusion of his own personal knowledge with that of the reader), and the first conditions of enlisting the reader's sympathies are left unfulfilled.

But it is comparatively seldom that this foible of Sterne obtrudes itself upon the strictly narrative and dramatic parts of his work; and, next to the abiding charm and interest of his principal figure, it is by the admirable life and colour of his scenes that he exercises his strongest powers of fascination over a reader. Perpetual as are Sterne's affectations, and tiresome as is his eternal self-consciousness when he is speaking in his own person, yet when once the dramatic instinct fairly lays hold of him there is no writer who ever makes us more completely forget him in the presence of his characters—none who can bring them and their surroundings, their looks and words, before us with such convincing force of reality. One wonders sometimes whether Sterne himself was aware of the high dramatic excellence of many of what actors would call his "carpenter's scenes"—the mere interludes

introduced to amuse us while the stage is being prepared for one of those more elaborate and deliberate displays of pathos or humour, which do not always turn out to be unmixed successes when they come. Sterne prided himself vastly upon the incident of *Le Fevre's* death; but I dare say that there is many a modern reader who would rather have lost this highly-wrought piece of domestic drama, than that other exquisite little scene in the kitchen of the inn, when Corporal Trim toasts the bread which the sick lieutenant's son is preparing for his father's posset, while "Mr. Yorick's curate was smoking a pipe by the fire, but said not a word, good or bad, to comfort the youth." The whole scene is absolute life; and the dialogue between the Corporal and the parson, as related by the former to his master, with Captain Shandy's comments thereon, is almost Shakspearian in its excellence. Says the Corporal:

"When the lieutenant had taken his glass of sack and toast he felt himself a little revived, and sent down into the kitchen to let me know that in about ten minutes he should be glad if I would step upstairs. I believe, said the landlord, he is going to say his prayers, for there was a book laid on the chair by the bed-side, and as I shut the door I saw him take up a cushion. I thought, said the curate, that you gentlemen of the army, Mr. Trim, never said your prayers at all. I heard the poor gentleman say his prayers last night, said the landlady, very devoutly, and with my own ears, or I could not have believed it. Are you sure of it? replied the curate. A soldier, an' please your reverence, said I, prays as often (of his own accord) as a parson; and when he is fighting for his king, and for his own life, and for his honour too, he has the most reason to pray to God of any one in the whole world. 'Twas well said of thee, Trim, said my Uncle Toby. But when a soldier, said I, an' please your reverence, has been standing for twelve hours together in the trenches, up to his knees in cold water—or engag'd, said I, for months together in long and dangerous marches; harassed, perhaps, in his rear to-day; harassing others to-morrow; detached here; countermanded

there; resting this night out upon his arms; beat up in his shirt the next; benumbed in his joints; perhaps without straw in his tent to kneel on, [he] must say his prayers how nud when he can. I believe, said I—for I was piqued, quoth the Corporal, for the reputation of the army—I believe, an't please your reverence, said I, that when a soldier gets time to pray, he prays as heartily as a parson—though not with all his fuss and hypocrisy. Thou shouldst not have said that, Trim, said my Uncle Toby; for God only knows who is a hypocrite and who is not. At the great and general review of us all, corporal, at the day of judgment (and not till then) it will be seen who have done their duties in this world and who have not, and we shall be advanced, Trim, accordingly. I hope we shall, said Trim. It is in the Scripture, said my Uncle Toby, and I will show it thee in the morning. In the meantime, we may depend upon it, Trim, for our comfort, said my Uncle Toby, that God Almighty is so good and just a governor of the world, that if we have but done our duties in it, it will never be inquired into whether we have done them in a red coat or a black one. I hope not, said the Corporal. But go on, said my Uncle Toby, with thy story."

We might almost fancy ourselves listening to that noble prose colloquy between the disguised king and his soldiers on the night before Agincourt, in *Henry V*. And though Sterne does not, of course, often reach this level of dramatic dignity, there are passages in abundance in which his dialogue assumes, through sheer force of individualized character, if not all the dignity, at any rate all the impressive force and simplicity, of the "grand style."

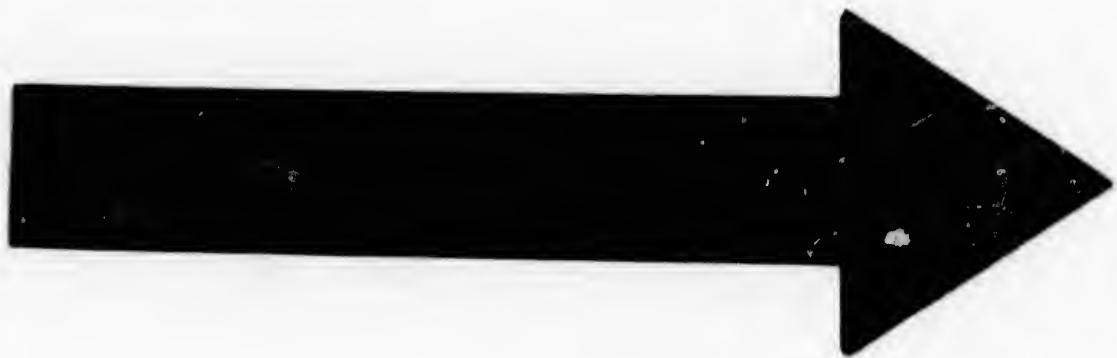
Taken altogether, however, his place in English letters is hard to fix, and his tenure in human memory hard to determine. Hitherto he has held his own, with the great writers of his era, but it has been in virtue, as I have attempted to show, of a contribution to the literary possessions of mankind which is as uniquely limited in amount as it is exceptionally perfect in quality. One cannot but feel that, as regards the sum of his titles to recollection, his

name stands far below either of those other two which in the course of the last century added themselves to the highest rank among the classics of English humour. Sterne has not the abounding life and the varied human interest of Fielding; and, to say nothing of his vast intellectual inferiority to Swift, he never so much as approaches those problems of everlasting concernment to man which Swift handles with so terrible a fascination. Certainly no enthusiastic Gibbon of the future is ever likely to say of Sterne's "pictures of human manners" that they will outlive the palace of the Escorial and the Imperial Eagle of the House of Austria. Assuredly no one will ever find in *this* so-called English antitype of the Curé of Meudon any of the deeper qualities of that gloomy and commanding spirit which has been finely compared to the "soul of Rabelais *habitans in sicco*." Nay, to descend even to minor aptitudes, Sterne cannot tell a story as Swift and Fielding can tell one; and his work is not assured of life as *Tom Jones* and *Gulliver's Travels*, considered as stories alone, would be assured of it, even if the one were stripped of its cheerful humour, and the other disarmed of its savage allegory. And hence it might be rash to predict that Sterne's days will be as long in the land of literary memory as the two great writers aforesaid. Ranked, as he still is, among "English classics," he undergoes, I suspect, even more than an English classic's ordinary share of reverential neglect. Among those who talk about him he has, I should imagine, fewer readers than Fielding, and very much fewer than Swift. Nor is he likely to increase their number as time goes on, but rather, perhaps, the contrary. Indeed, the only question is whether with the lapse of years he will not, like other writers as famous in their day, become yet more of a mere name. For there is still,

of course, a further stage to which he may decline. That object of so much empty mouth-honour, the English classic of the last and earlier centuries, presents himself for classification under three distinct categories. There is the class who are still read in a certain measure, though in a much smaller measure than is pretended, by the great body of ordinarily well-educated men. Of this class, the two authors whose names I have already cited, Swift and Fielding, are typical examples; and it may be taken to include Goldsmith also. Then comes the class of those whom the ordinarily well-educated public, whatever they may pretend, read really very little or not at all; and in this class we may couple Sterne with Addison, with Smollett, and, except, of course, as to *Robinson Crusoe*—unless, indeed, our *blasé* boys have outgrown him among other pleasures of boyhood—with Defoe. But below this there is yet a third class of writers, who are not only read by none but the critic, the connoisseur, or the historian of literature, but are scarcely read even by them, except from curiosity, or “in the way of business.” The type of this class is Richardson; and one cannot, I say, help asking whether he will hereafter have Sterne as a companion of his dusty solitude. Are *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey* destined to descend from the second class into the third—from the region of partial into that of total neglect, and to have their portion with *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Sir Charles Grandison*? The unbounded vogue which they enjoyed in their time will not save them; for sane and sober critics compared Richardson in his day to Shakspeare, and Diderot broke forth into prophetic rhapsodies upon the immortality of his works which to us in these days have become absolutely pathetic in their felicity of falsified prediction. Seeing, too, that a good three-fourths of the attractions

which won Sterne his contemporary popularity are now so much dead weight of dead matter, and that the vital residuum is in amount so small, the fate of Richardson might seem to be but too close behind him. Yet it is difficult to believe that this fate will quite overtake him. His sentiment may have mostly ceased—it probably has ceased—to stir any emotion at all in these days; but there is an imperishable element in his humour. And though the circle of his readers may have no tendency to increase, one can hardly suppose that a charm, which those who still feel it feel so keenly, will ever entirely cease to captivate; or that time can have any power over a perfume which so wonderfully retains the pungent freshness of its fragrance after the lapse of a hundred years.

THE END.





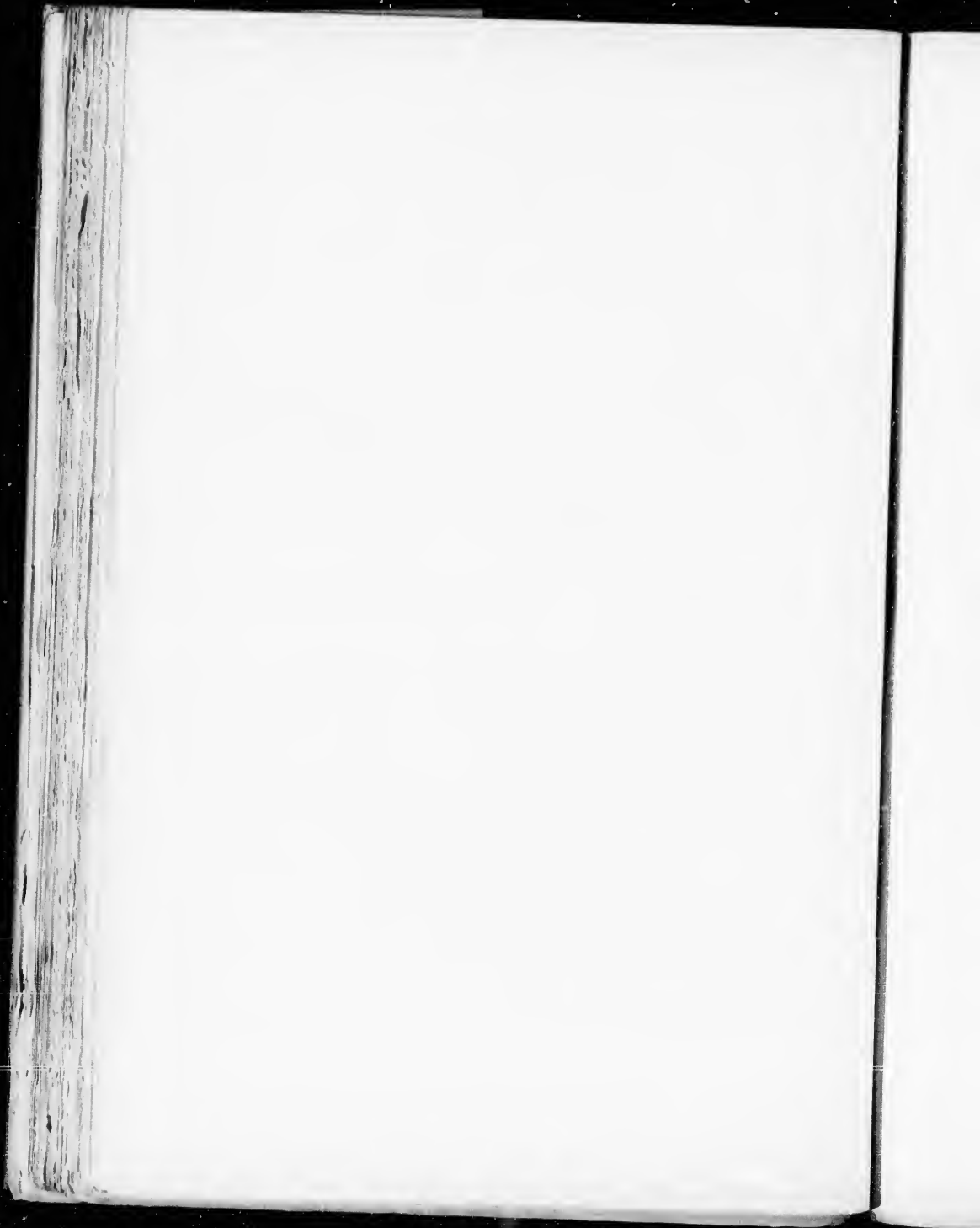
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## PREFACE.

THE chief materials for a life of Swift are to be found in his writings and correspondence. The best edition is the second of the two edited by Scott (1814 and 1824).

In 1751 Lord Orrery published *Remarks upon the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift*. Orrery, born 1707, had known Swift from about 1732. His remarks give the views of a person of quality of more ambition than capacity, and more anxious to exhibit his own taste than to give full or accurate information.

In 1754 Dr. Delany published *Observations upon Lord Orrery's Remarks*, intended to vindicate Swift against some of Orrery's severe judgments. Delany, born about 1685, became intimate with Swift soon after the Dean's final settlement in Ireland. He was then one of the authorities of Trinity College, Dublin. He is the best contemporary authority, so far as he goes.

In 1756 Deane Swift, grandson of Swift's uncle, Godwin, and son-in-law to Swift's cousin and faithful guardian, Mrs. Whiteway, published an *Essay upon the Life, Writings, and Character of Dr. Jonathan Swift*, in which he attacks both his predecessors. Deane Swift, born about 1708, had seen little or nothing of his cousin till the year 1738, when the Dean's faculties were decaying.

His book is foolish and discursive. Deane Swift's son, Theophilus, communicated a good deal of doubtful matter to Scott, on the authority of family tradition.

In 1765 Hawkesworth, who had no personal knowledge, prefixed a life of Swift to an edition of the works which adds nothing to our information. In 1781 Johnson, when publishing a very perfunctory life of Swift as one of the poets, excused its shortcomings on the ground of having already communicated his thoughts to Hawkesworth. The life is not only meagre but injured by one of Johnson's strong prejudices.

In 1785 Thomas Sheridan produced a pompous and dull life of Swift. He was the son of Swift's most intimate companion during the whole period subsequent to the final settlement in Ireland. The elder Sheridan, however, died in 1738; and the younger, born in 1721, was still a boy when Swift was becoming imbecile.

Contemporary writers, except Delany, have thus little authority; and a number of more or less palpably fictitious anecdotes accumulated round their hero. Scott's life, originally published in 1814, is defective in point of accuracy. Scott did not investigate the evidence minutely, and liked a good story too well to be very particular about its authenticity. The book, however, shows his strong sense and genial appreciation of character; and remains, till this day, by far the best account of Swift's career.

A life which supplies Scott's defects in great measure was given by William Monck Mason, in 1819, in his *History and Antiquities of the Church of St. Patrick*. Monck Mason was an indiscriminate admirer, and has a provoking method of expanding undigested information into monstrous notes, after the precedent of Bayle. But he

examined facts with the utmost care, and every biographer must respect his authority.

In 1875 Mr. Forster published the first instalment of a *Life of Swift*. This book, which contains the results of patient and thorough inquiry, was unfortunately interrupted by Mr. Forster's death, and ends at the beginning of 1711. A complete *Life* by Mr. Henry Craik is announced as about to appear.

Besides these books, I ought to mention an *Essay upon the Earlier Part of the Life of Swift*, by the Rev. John Barrett, B.D. and Vice-Provost of Trinity College, Dublin (London, 1808); and *The Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life*, by W. R. Wilde, M.R.I.A., F.R.C.S. (Dublin, 1849). This last is a very interesting study of the medical aspects of Swift's life. An essay by Dr. Bucknill, in *Brain* for January, 1882, is a remarkable contribution to the same subject.

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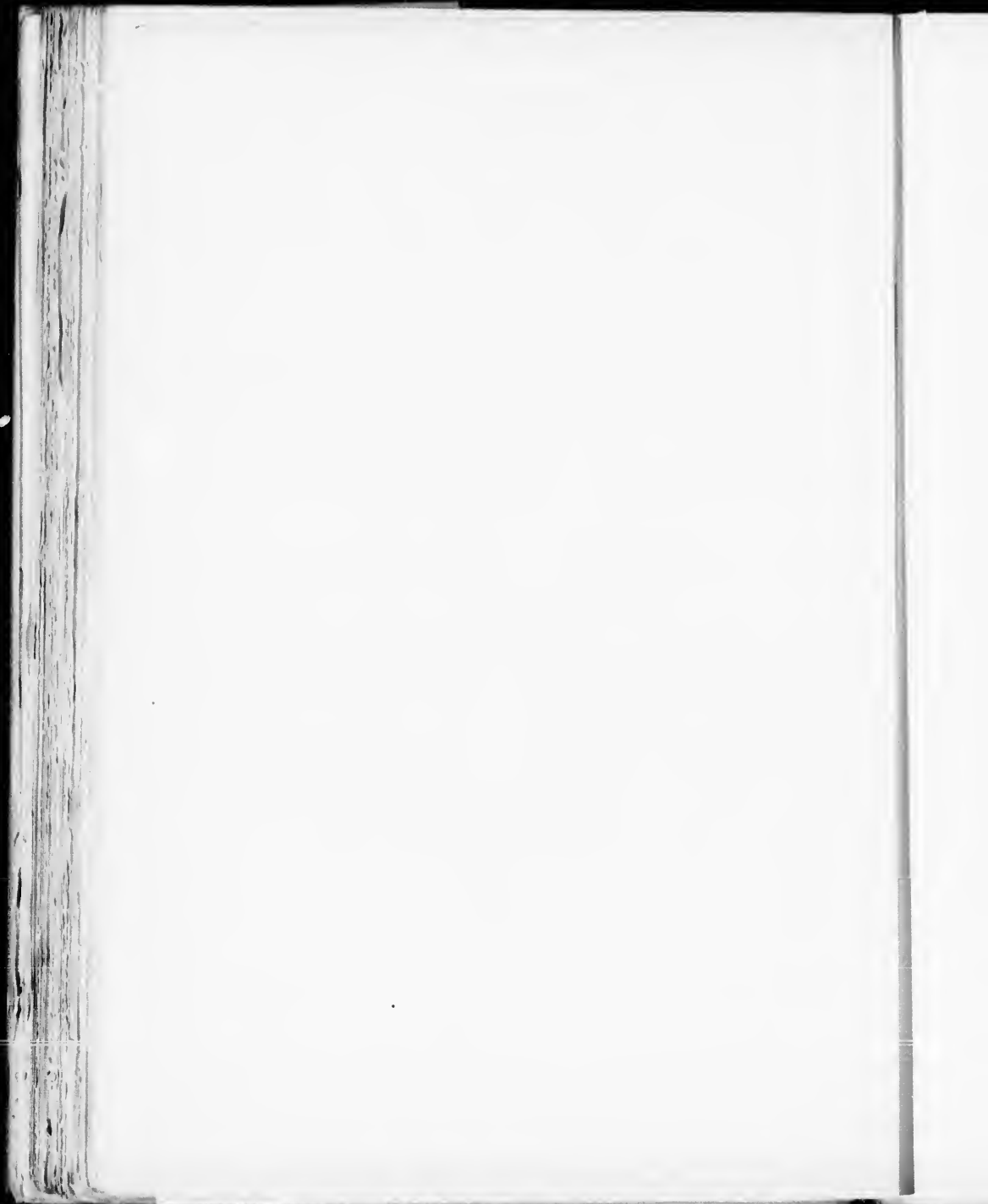
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# SWIFT.

## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY YEARS.

JONATHAN SWIFT, the famous Dean of St. Patrick's, was the descendant of an old Yorkshire family. One branch had migrated southwards, and in the time of Charles I. Thomas Swift, Jonathan's grandfather, was Vicar of Goodrich, near Ross, in Herefordshire, a fact commemorated by the sweetest singer of Queen Anne's reign in the remarkable lines :

“Jonathan Swift  
Had the gift  
By fatherige, motherige,  
And by brotherige,  
To come from Gotheridge.”

Thomas Swift married Elizabeth Dryden, niece of Sir Erasmus, the grandfather of the poet Dryden. By her he became the father of ten sons and four daughters. In the great rebellion he distinguished himself by a loyalty which was the cause of obvious complacency to his descendant. On one occasion he came to the governor of a town held for the King, and being asked what he could do for his Majesty, laid down his coat as an offering. The governor remarked that his coat was worth little.

"Then," said Swift, "take my waistcoat." The waistcoat was lined with three hundred broad pieces—a handsome offering from a poor and plundered clergyman. On another occasion he armed a ford, through which rebel cavalry were to pass, by certain pieces of iron with four spikes, so contrived that one spike must always be uppermost (*caltrops*, in short). Two hundred of the enemy were destroyed by this stratagem. The success of the rebels naturally led to the ruin of this Cavalier clergyman; and the record of his calamities forms a conspicuous article in Walker's *Sufferings of the Clergy*. He died in 1658, before the advent of the better times in which he might have been rewarded for his loyal services. His numerous family had to struggle for a living. The eldest son, Godwin Swift, was a barrister of Gray's Inn at the time of the Restoration: he was married four times, and three times to women of fortune; his first wife had been related to the Ormond family; and this connexion induced him to seek his fortune in Ireland—a kingdom which at that time suffered, amongst other less endurable grievances, from a deficient supply of lawyers.<sup>1</sup> Godwin Swift was made Attorney-General in the palatinate of Tipperary by the Duke of Ormond. He prospered in his profession, in the subtle parts of which, says his nephew, he was "perhaps a little too dexterous;" and he engaged in various speculations, having at one time what was then the very large income of 3000*l.* a year. Four brothers accompanied this successful Godwin, and shared to some extent in his prosperity. In January, 1666, one of these, Jonathan, married to Abigail Erick, of Leicester, was appointed to the stewardship of the King's Inns, Dublin, partly in consideration of the loyalty and suffering of

<sup>1</sup> *Deane Swift*, p. 15.

his family. Some fifteen months later, in April, 1667, he died, leaving his widow with an infant daughter, and seven months after her husband's death, November 30, 1667, she gave birth to Jonathan, the younger, at 7 Hoey's Court, Dublin.

The Dean "hath often been heard to say" (I quote his fragment of autobiography) "that he felt the consequences of that (his parents') marriage, not only through the whole course of his education, but during the greater part of his life." This quaint assumption that a man's parentage is a kind of removable accident to which may be attributed a limited part of his subsequent career, betrays a characteristic sentiment. Swift cherished a vague resentment against the fates which had mixed bitter ingredients in his lot. He felt the place as well as the circumstances of his birth to be a grievance. It gave a plausibility to the offensive imputation that he was of Irish blood. "I happened," he said, with a bitterness born of later sufferings, "by a perfect accident to be born here, and thus I am a Teague, or an Irishman, or what people please." Elsewhere he claims England as properly his own country; "although I happened to be dropped here, and was a year old before I left it (Ireland), and to my sorrow did not die before I came back to it." His infancy brought fresh grievances. He was, it seems, a precocious and delicate child, and his nurse became so much attached to him, that having to return to her native Whitehaven, she kidnapped the year-old infant out of pure affection. When his mother knew her loss she was afraid to hazard a return voyage until the child was stronger; and he thus remained nearly three years at Whitehaven, where the nurse took such care of his education that he could read any chapter in the Bible before he was three years old. His return must have been

speedily followed by his mother's departure for her native Leicester. Her sole dependence, it seems, was an annuity of 20*l.* a year, which had been bought for her by her husband upon their marriage. Some of the Swift family seem also to have helped her; but, for reasons not now discoverable, she found Leicester preferable to Dublin, even at the price of parting from the little Jonathan. Godwin took him off her hands and sent him to Kilkenny School at the age of six, and from that early period the child had to grow up as virtually an orphan. His mother through several years to come can have been little more than a name to him. Kilkenny School, called the "Eton of Ireland," enjoyed a high reputation. Two of Swift's most famous contemporaries were educated there. Congreve, two years his junior, was one of his schoolfellows, and a warm friendship remained when both had become famous. Fourteen years after Swift had left the school it was entered by George Berkeley, destined to win a fame of the purest and highest kind, and to come into a strange relationship to Swift. It would be vain to ask what credit may be claimed by Kilkenny School for thus "producing" (it is the word used on such occasions) the greatest satirist, the most brilliant writer of comedies, and the subtlest metaphysician in the English language. Our knowledge of Swift's experiences at this period is almost confined to a single anecdote. "I remember," he says incidentally in a letter to Lord Bolingbroke, "when I was a little boy, I felt a great fish at the end of my line, which I drew up almost on the ground; but it dropped in, and the disappointment vexes me to this very day, and I believe it was the type of all my future disappointments."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Readers may remember a clever adaptation of this incident in Lord Lytton's *My Novel*.



Swift, indeed, was still in the schoolboy stage, according to modern ideas, when he was entered at Trinity College, Dublin, on the same day, April 24, 1682, with a cousin, Thomas Swift. Swift clearly found Dublin uncongenial; though there is still a wide margin for uncertainty as to precise facts. His own account gives a short summary of his academic history:

“By the ill-treatment of his nearest relations” (he says) “he was so discouraged and sunk in his spirits that he too much neglected his academic studies, for some parts of which he had no great relish by nature, and turned himself to reading history and poetry, so that when the time came for taking his degree of Bachelor of Arts, although he had lived with great regularity and due observance of the statutes, he was stopped of his degree for dulness and insufficiency; and at last hardly admitted in a manner little to his credit, which is called in that college *speciali gratia*.” In a report of one of the college examinations, discovered by Mr. Forster, he receives a *bene* for his Greek and Latin, a *male* for his “philosophy,” and a *negligenter* for his theology. The “philosophy” was still based upon the old scholasticism, and proficiency was tested by skill in the arts of syllogistic argumentation. Sheridan, son of Swift’s intimate friend, was a student at Dublin shortly before the Dean’s loss of intellectual power; the old gentleman would naturally talk to the lad about his university recollections; and, according to his hearer, remembered with singular accuracy the questions upon which he had disputed, and repeated the arguments which had been used, “in syllogistic form.” Swift at the same time declared, if the report be accurate, that he never had the patience to read the pages of Smiglecius, Burgersdicius, and the other old-fashioned logical treatises. When told that they taught the art of

reasoning, he declared that he could reason very well without it. He acted upon this principle in his exercises, and left the Proctor to reduce his argument to the proper form. In this there is probably a substratum of truth. Swift can hardly be credited, as Berkeley might have been, with a precocious perception of the weakness of the accepted system. When young gentlemen are plucked for their degree, it is not generally because they are in advance of their age. But the aversion to metaphysics was characteristic of Swift through life. Like many other people who have no turn for such speculations, he felt for them a contempt which may perhaps be not the less justified because it does not arise from familiarity. The bent of his mind was already sufficiently marked to make him revolt against the kind of mental food which was most in favour at Dublin; though he seems to have obtained a fair knowledge of the classics.

Swift cherished through life a resentment against most of his relations. His uncle Godwin had undertaken his education, and had sent him, as we see, to the best places of education in Ireland. If the supplies became scanty, it must be admitted that poor Godwin had a sufficient excuse. Each of his four wives had brought him a family—the last leaving him seven sons; his fortunes had been dissipated, chiefly, it seems, by means of a speculation in iron-works; and the poor man himself seems to have been failing, for he “fell into a lethargy” in 1688, surviving some five years, like his famous nephew, in a state of imbecility. Decay of mind and fortune coinciding with the demands of a rising family might certainly be some apology for the neglect of one amongst many nephews. Swift did not consider it sufficient. “Was it not your unele Godwin,” he was asked, “who educated you?” “Yes,”

said Swift, after a pause; "he gave me the education of a dog." "Then," answered the intrepid inquirer, "you have not the gratitude of a dog." And perhaps that is our natural impression. Yet we do not know enough of the facts to judge with confidence. Swift, whatever his faults, was always a warm and faithful friend; and perhaps it is the most probable conjecture that Godwin Swift bestowed his charity coldly and in such a way as to hurt the pride of the recipient. In any case, it appears that Swift showed his resentment in a manner more natural than reasonable. The child is tempted to revenge himself by knocking his head against the rock which has broken his shins; and with equal wisdom the youth who fancies that the world is not his friend tries to get satisfaction by defying its laws. Till the time of his degree (February, 1686), Swift had been at least regular in his conduct, and if the neglect of his relations had discouraged his industry, it had not provoked him to rebellion. During the three years which followed he became more reckless. He was still a mere lad, just eighteen at the time of his degree, when he fell into more or less irregular courses. In rather less than two years he was under censure for seventy weeks. The offences consisted chiefly in neglect to attend chapel and in "town-haunting," or absence from the nightly roll-call. Such offences perhaps appear to be more flagrant than they really are in the eyes of college authorities. Twice he got into more serious scrapes. He was censured (March 16, 1687), along with his cousin, Thomas Swift, and several others, for "notorious neglect of duties and frequenting 'the town.'" And on his twenty-first birthday (Nov. 30, 1688) he was punished, along with several others, for ex-

<sup>1</sup> Possibly this was his cousin Thomas, but the probabilities are clearly in favour of Jonathan.

citing domestic dissensions, despising the warnings of the junior Dean, and insulting that official by contemptuous words. The offenders were suspended from their degrees, and inasmuch as Swift and another were the worst offenders (*adhuc intolerabilius se gesserant*), they were sentenced to ask pardon of the Dean upon their knees publicly in the hall. Twenty years later<sup>1</sup> Swift revenged himself upon Owen Lloyd, the junior Dean, by accusing him of infamous servility. For the present Swift was probably reckoned amongst the black sheep of the academic flock.<sup>2</sup>

This censure came at the end of Swift's university career. The three last years had doubtless been years of discouragement and recklessness. That they were also years of vice in the usual sense of the word is not proved; nor, from all that we know of Swift's later history, does it seem to be probable. There is no trace of anything like licentious behaviour in his whole career. It is easier to believe with Scott that Swift's conduct at this period might be fairly described in the words of Johnson when speaking of his own university experience: "Ah, sir, I was mad and violent. It was bitterness that they mistook for frolic. I was miserably poor, and I thought to fight my way by my literature and my wit; so I disregarded all power and all authority." Swift learnt another and a more profitable lesson in these years. It is indicated in an anecdote which rests upon tolerable authority. One

<sup>1</sup> In the *Short Character of Thomas, Earl of Wharton*.

<sup>2</sup> It will be seen that I accept Dr. Barrett's statements, *Earlier Part of the Life of Swift*, pp. 13, 14. His arguments seem to me sufficiently clear and conclusive, and they are accepted by Monck Mason, though treated contemptuously by Mr. Forster, p. 34. On the other hand, I agree with Mr. Forster that Swift's complicity in the *Terræ Filius* oration is not proved, though it is not altogether improbable.

day, as he was gazing in melancholy mood from his window, his pockets at their lowest ebb, he saw a sailor staring about in the college courts. How happy should I be, he thought, if that man was inquiring for me with a present from my cousin Willoughby! The dream came true. The sailor came to his rooms and produced a leather bag, sent by his cousin from Lisbon, with more money than poor Jonathan had ever possessed in his life. The sailor refused to take a part of it for his trouble, and Jonathan hastily crammed the money into his pocket, lest the man should repent of his generosity. From that time forward, he added, he became a better economist.

The Willoughby Swift here mentioned was the eldest son of Godwin, and now settled in the English factory at Lisbon. Swift speaks warmly of his "goodness and generosity" in a letter written to another cousin in 1694. Some help, too, was given by his uncle William, who was settled at Dublin, and whom he calls the "best of his relations." In one way or another he was able to keep his head above water; and he was receiving an impression which grew with his growth. The misery of dependence was burnt into his soul. To secure independence became his most cherished wish; and the first condition of independence was a rigid practice of economy. We shall see hereafter how deeply this principle became rooted in his mind; here I need only notice that it is the lesson which poverty teaches to none but men of strong character.

A catastrophe meanwhile was approaching, which involved the fortunes of Swift along with those of nations. James II. had been on the throne for a year when Swift took his degree. At the time when Swift was ordered to kneel to the junior Dean, William was in England, and James preparing to fly from Whitehall. The revolution

of 1688 meant a breaking up of the very foundations of political and social order in Ireland. At the end of 1688 a stream of fugitives was pouring into England, whilst the English in Ireland were gathering into strong places, abandoning their property to the bands of insurgent peasants.

Swift fled with his fellows. Any prospects which he may have had in Ireland were ruined with the ruin of his race. The loyalty of his grandfather to a king who protected the national Church was no precedent for loyalty to a king who was its deadliest enemy. Swift, a Churchman to the backbone, never shared the leaning of many Anglicans to the exiled Stuarts; and his early experience was a pretty strong dissuasive from Jacobitism. He took refuge with his mother at Leicester. Of that mother we hear less than we could wish; for all that we hear suggests a brisk, wholesome, motherly body. She lived cheerfully and frugally on her pittance; rose early, worked with her needle, read her book, and deemed herself to be "rich and happy"—on twenty pounds a year. A touch of her son's humour appears in the only anecdote about her. She came, it seems, to visit her son in Ireland shortly after he had taken possession of Laracor, and amused herself by persuading the woman with whom she lodged that Jonathan was not her son but her lover. Her son, though separated from her through the years in which filial affection is generally nourished, loved her with the whole strength of his nature; he wrote to her frequently, took pains to pay her visits "rarely less than once a year;" and was deeply affected by her death in 1710. "I have now lost," he wrote in his pocket-book, "the last barrier between me and death. God grant I may be as well prepared for it as I confidently believe her to have been! If

the way to Heaven be through piety, truth, justice, and charity, she is there."

The good lady had, it would seem, some little anxieties of the common kind about her son. She thought him in danger of falling in love with a certain Betty Jones, who, however, escaped the perils of being wife to a man of genius, and married an innkeeper. Some forty years later, Betty Jones, now Perkins, appealed to Swift to help her in some family difficulties, and Swift was ready to "sacrifice five pounds" for old acquaintance' sake. Other vague reports of Swift's attentions to women seem to have been flying about in Leicester. Swift, in noticing them, tells his correspondent that he values "his own entertainment beyond the obloquy of a parcel of wretched fools," which he "solemnly pronounces" to be a fit description of the inhabitants of Leicester. He had, he admits, amused himself with flirtation; but he has learnt enough, "without going half a mile beyond the University," to refrain from thoughts of matrimony. A "cold temper" and the absence of any settled outlook are sufficient dissuasives. Another phrase in the same letter is characteristic: "A person of great honour in Ireland (who was pleased to stoop so low as to look into my mind) used to tell me that my mind was like a conjured spirit, that would do mischief if I did not give it employment." He allowed himself these little liberties, he seems to infer, by way of distraction for his restless nature. But some more serious work was necessary, if he was to win the independence so earnestly desired, and to cease to be a burden upon his mother. Where was he to look for help?

## CHAPTER II.

### MOOR PARK AND KILROOT.

How was this "conjured spirit" to find occupation? The proverbial occupation of such beings is to cultivate despair by weaving ropes of sand. Swift felt himself strong; but he had no task worthy of his strength: nor did he yet know precisely where it lay: he even fancied that it might be in the direction of Pindaric Odes. Hitherto his energy had expended itself in the questionable shape of revolt against constituted authority. But the revolt, whatever its precise nature, had issued in the rooted determination to achieve a genuine independence. The political storm which had for the time crushed the whole social order of Ireland into mere chaotic anarchy had left him an uprooted waif and stray—a loose fragment without any points of attachment, except the little household in Leicester. His mother might give him temporary shelter, but no permanent home. If, as is probable, he already looked forward to a clerical career, the Church to which he belonged was, for the time, hopelessly ruined, and in danger of being a persecuted sect.

In this crisis a refuge was offered to him. Sir William Temple was connected, in more ways than one, with the Swifts. He was the son of Sir John Temple, Master of the Rolls in Ireland, who had been a friend of Godwin Swift. Temple himself had lived in Ireland in early days,



and had known the Swift family. His wife was in some way related to Swift's mother; and he was now in a position to help the young man. Temple is a remarkable figure amongst the statesmen of that generation. There is something more modern about him than belongs to his century. A man of cultivated taste and cosmopolitan training, he had the contempt of enlightened persons for the fanaticisms of his times. He was not the man to suffer persecution, with Baxter, for a creed, or even to lose his head, with Russell, for a party. Yet, if he had not the faith which animates enthusiasts, he sincerely held political theories—a fact sufficient to raise him above the thorough-going cynics of the court of the Restoration. His sense of honour, or the want of robustness in mind and temperament, kept him aloof from the desperate game in which the politicians of the day staked their lives, and threw away their consciences as an incumbrance. Good fortune threw him into the comparatively safe line of diplomacy, for which his natural abilities fitted him. Good fortune, aided by discernment, enabled him to identify himself with the most respectable achievements of our foreign policy. He had become famous as the chief author of the Triple Alliance, and the promoter of the marriage of William and Mary. He had ventured far enough into the more troublous element of domestic politics to invent a highly applauded constitutional device for smoothing the relations between the crown and Parliament. Like other such devices it went to pieces at the first contact with realities. Temple retired to cultivate his garden and write elegant memoirs and essays, and refused all entreaties to join again in the rough struggles of the day. Associates, made of sterner stuff, probably despised him; but from their own, that is, the selfish point of view, he was perhaps entitled to

laugh last. He escaped at least with unblemished honour, and enjoyed the cultivated retirement which statesmen so often profess to desire, and so seldom achieve. In private he had many estimable qualities. He was frank and sensitive; he had won diplomatic triumphs by disregarding the pedantry of official rules; and he had an equal, though not an equally intelligent, contempt for the pedantry of the schools. His style, though often slipshod, often anticipates the pure and simple English of the Addison period, and delighted Charles Lamb by its delicate flavour of aristocratic assumption. He had the vanity of a "person of quality"—a lofty, dignified air, which became his flowing periwig, and showed itself in his distinguished features. But in youth a strong vein of romance displayed itself in his courtship of Lady Temple, and he seems to have been correspondingly worshipped by her and his sister, Lady Giffard.

The personal friendship of William could not induce Temple to return to public life. His only son took office, but soon afterwards killed himself from a morbid sense of responsibility. Temple retired finally to Moor Park, near Farnham, in Surrey; and about the same time received Swift into his family. Long afterwards John Temple, Sir William's nephew, who had quarrelled with Swift, gave an obviously spiteful account of the terms of this engagement. Swift, he said, was hired by Sir William to read to him and be his amanuensis, at the rate of 20*l.* a year and his board; but "Sir William never favoured him with his conversation, nor allowed him to sit down at table with him." The authority is bad, and we must be guided by rather precarious inferences in picturing this important period of Swift's career. The raw Irish student was probably awkward, and may have been disagreeable in

some matters. Forty years later we find, from his correspondence with Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry, that his views as to the distribution of factions between knives and forks were lamentably unsettled; and it is probable that he may in his youth have been still more heretical as to social conventions. There were more serious difficulties. The difference which separated Swift from Temple is not easily measurable. How can we exaggerate the distance at which a lad, fresh from college and a remote provincial society, would look up to the distinguished diplomatist of sixty, who had been intimate with the two last kings, and was still the confidential friend of the reigning king, who had been an actor in the greatest scenes, not only of English but of European history; who had been treated with respect by the ministers of Louis XIV., and in whose honour bells had been rung and banquets set forth as he passed through the great Continental cities? Temple might have spoken to him, without shocking proprieties, in terms which, if I may quote the proverbial phrase, would be offensive "from God Almighty to a black beetle."

"Shall I believe a spirit so divine  
Was cast in the same mould with mine?"

is Swift's phrase about Temple, in one of his first crude poems. We must not infer that circumstances which would now be offensive to an educated man—the seat at the second table, the predestined congeniality to the ladies'—maid of doubtful reputation—would have been equally offensive then. So long as dependence upon patrons was a regular incident of the career of a poor scholar, the corresponding regulations would be taken as a matter of course. Swift was not necessarily more degraded by be-

ing a dependent of Temple's than Locke by a similar position in Shaftesbury's family. But it is true that such a position must always be trying, as many a governess has felt in more modern days. The position of the educated dependent must always have had its specific annoyances. At this period, when the relation of patron and client was being rapidly modified or destroyed, the compact would be more than usually trying to the power of forbearance and mutual kindness of the parties concerned. The relation between Sir Roger de Coverley and the old college friend who became his chaplain meant good feeling on both sides. When poor Parson Supple became chaplain to Squire Western, and was liable to be sent back from London to Basingstoke in search of a forgotten tobacco-box, Supple must have parted with all self-respect. Swift has incidentally given his own view of the case in his *Essay on the Fates of Clergymen*. It is an application of one of his favourite doctrines—the advantage possessed by mediocrity over genius in a world so largely composed of fools. Eugenio, who represents Jonathan Swift, fails in life because as a wit and a poet he has not the art of winning patronage. Corusodes, in whom we have a partial likeness to Tom Swift, Jonathan's college contemporary, and afterwards the chaplain of Temple, succeeds by servile respectability. *He* never neglected chapel or lectures; *he* never looked into a poem: never made a jest himself, or laughed at the jests of others; but he managed to insinuate himself into the favour of the noble family where his sister was a waiting-woman; shook hands with the butler, taught the page his catechism; was sometimes admitted to dine at the steward's table; was admitted to read prayers, at ten shillings a month; and, by winking at his patron's attentions to his sister, gradually crept into better

appointments, married a citizen's widow, and is now fast mounting towards the top of the ladder ecclesiastical.

Temple was not the man to demand or reward services so base as those attributed to Corusodes. Nor does it seem that he would be wanting in the self-respect which prescribes due courtesy to inferiors, though it admits of a strict regard for the ceremonial outworks of social dignity. He would probably neither permit others to take liberties nor take them himself. If Swift's self-esteem suffered, it would not be that he objected to offering up the conventional incense, but that he might possibly think that, after all, the idol was made of rather inferior clay. Temple, whatever his solid merits, was one of the showiest statesmen of the time; but there was no man living with a keener eye for realities and a more piercing insight into shams of all kinds than this raw secretary from Ireland. In later life Swift frequently expressed his scorn for the mysteries and the "refinements" (to use his favourite phrase) by which the great men of the world conceal the low passions and small wisdom actually exerted in affairs of state. At times he felt that Temple was not merely claiming the outward show of respect, but setting too high a value upon his real merits. So when Swift was at the full flood of fortune, when prime ministers and secretaries of state were calling him Jonathan, or listening submissively to his lectures on "whipping-day," he reverts to his early experience. "I often think," he says, when speaking of his own familiarity with St. John, "what a splutter Sir William Temple makes about being Secretary of State." And this is a less respectful version of a sentiment expressed a year before: "I am thinking what a veneration we had for Sir W. Temple because he might have been Secretary of State at fifty, and here is a young fellow hardly

thirty in that employment." In the interval there is another characteristic outburst: "I asked Mr. Secretary (St. John) what the devil ailed him on Sunday," and warned him "that I would never be treated like a schoolboy; that I had felt too much of that in my life already (meaning Sir W. Temple); that I expected every great minister who honoured me with his acquaintance, if he heard and saw anything to my disadvantage, would let me know in plain words, and not put me in pain to guess by the change or coldness of his countenance and behaviour." The day after this effusion he maintains that he was right in what he said: "Don't you remember how I used to be in pain when Sir W. Temple would look cold and out of humour for three or four days, and I used to suspect a hundred reasons? I have plucked up my spirits since then; faith, he spoiled a fine gentleman." And yet, if Swift sometimes thought Temple's authority oppressive, he was ready to admit his substantial merits. Temple, he says, in his rough marginalia to Burnet's *History*, "was a man of sense and virtue;" and the impromptu utterance probably reflects his real feeling.

The year after his first arrival at Temple's, Swift went back to Ireland by advice of physicians, who "weakly imagined that his native air might be of some use to recover his health." It was at this period, we may note in passing, that Swift began to suffer from a disease which tormented him through life. Temple sent with him a letter of introduction to Sir Robert Southwell, Secretary of State in Ireland, which gives an interesting account of their previous relations. Swift, said Temple, had lived in his house, read for him, written for him, and kept his small accounts. He knew Latin and Greek, and a little French; wrote a good hand, and was honest and diligent. His

whole family had long been known to Temple, who would be glad if Southwell would give him a clerkship, or get him a fellowship in Trinity College. The statement of Swift's qualifications has now a rather comic sound. An applicant for a desk in a merchant's office once commended himself, it is said, by the statement that his style of writing combined scathing sarcasm with the wildest flights of humour. Swift might have had a better claim to a place for which such qualities were a recommendation; but there is no reason, beyond the supposed agreement of fools to regard genius as a disadvantage in practical life, to suppose that Swift was deficient in humbler attainments. Before long, however, he was back at Moor Park; and a period followed in which his discontent with the position probably reached its height. Temple, indeed, must have discovered that his young dependent was really a man of capacity. He recommended him to William. In 1692 Swift went to Oxford, to be admitted *ad eundem*, and received the M.A. degree; and Swift, writing to thank his uncle for obtaining the necessary testimonials from Dublin, adds that he has been most civilly received at Oxford, on the strength, presumably, of Temple's recommendation, and that he is not to take orders till the King gives him a prebend. He suspects Temple, however, of being rather backward in the matter, "because (I suppose) he believes I shall leave him, and (upon some accounts) he thinks me a little necessary to him." William, it is said, was so far gracious as to offer to make Swift a captain of horse, and instruct him in the Dutch mode of eating asparagus. By this last phrase hangs an anecdote of later days. Faulkner, the Dublin printer, was dining with Swift, and on asking for a second supply of asparagus was told by the Dean to finish what he had on

his plate. "What, sir, eat my stalks?" "Ay, sir; King William always ate his stalks." "And were you," asked Faulkner's hearer, when he related the story, "were you blockhead enough to obey him?" "Yes," replied Faulkner, "and if you had dined with Dean Swift *tête-à-tête* you would have been obliged to eat your stalks too!" For the present Swift was the recipient not the imposer of stalks; and was to receive the first shock, as he tells us, that helped to cure him of his vanity. The question of the Triennial Bill was agitating political personages in the early months of 1693. William and his favourite minister, the Earl of Portland, found their Dutch experience insufficient to guide them in the mysteries of English constitutionalism. Portland came down to consult Temple at Moor Park; and Swift was sent back to explain to the great men that Charles I. had been ruined, not by consenting to short Parliaments, but by abandoning the right to dissolve Parliament. Swift says that he was "well versed in English history, though he was under twenty-one years old." (He was really twenty-five, but memory naturally exaggerated his youthfulness.) His arguments, however, backed by history, failed to carry conviction, and Swift had to unlearn some of the youthful confidence which assumes that reason is the governing force in this world, and that reason means our own opinions. That so young a man should have been employed on such an errand shows that Temple must have had a good opinion of his capacities; but his want of success, however natural, was felt as a grave discouragement.

That his discontent was growing is clear from other indications. Swift's early poems, whatever their defects, have one merit common to all his writings—the merit of a thorough, sometimes an appalling, sincerity. Two poems



which begin to display his real vigour are dated at the end of 1693. One is an epistle to his schoolfellow, Congreve, expatiating, as some consolation for the cold reception of the *Double Dealer*, upon the contemptible nature of town critics. Swift describes, as a type of the whole race, a Farnham lad who had left school a year before, and had just returned a "finished spark" from London—

"Stock'd with the latest gibberish of the town."

This wretched little fop came in an evil hour to provoke Swift's hate :

"My hate, whose lash just Heaven has long decreed  
Shall on a day make sin and folly bleed."

And he already applies it with vigour enough to show that with some of the satirist's power he has also the indispensable condition of a considerable accumulation of indignant wrath against the self-appointed arbiters of taste. The other poem is more remarkable in its personal revelation. It begins as a congratulation to Temple on his recovery from an illness. It passes into a description of his own fate, marked by singular bitterness. He addresses his musé as

"Malignant goddess! bane to my repose,  
Thou universal cause of all my woes."

She is, it seems, a mere delusive meteor, with no real being of her own. But, if real, why does she persecute him ?

"Wert thou right woman, thou should'st scorn to look  
On an abandon'd wretch by hopes forsook :  
Forsook by hopes, ill fortune's last relief,  
Assign'd for life to unrenitting grief ;  
For let Heaven's wrath enlarge these weary days  
If hope e'er dawns the smallest of its rays."

And he goes on to declare, after some vigorous lines :

“To thee I owe that fatal bent of mind,  
Still to unhappy, restless thoughts inclined :  
To thee what oft I vainly strive to hide,  
That scorn of fools, by fools mistook for pride ;  
From thee, whatever virtue takes its rise,  
Grows a misfortune, or becomes a vice.”

The sudden gush as of bitter waters into the dulcet, insipid current of conventional congratulation gives additional point to the sentiment. Swift expands the last couplet into a sentiment which remained with him through life. It is a blending of pride and remorse ; a regretful admission of the loftiness of spirit which has caused his misfortunes ; and we are puzzled to say whether the pride or the remorse be the most genuine. For Swift always unites pride and remorse in his consciousness of his own virtues.

The “restlessness” avowed in these verses took the practical form of a rupture with Temple. In his autobiographical fragment he says that he had a scruple of entering into the Church merely for support, and Sir William, then being Master of the Rolls in Ireland,<sup>1</sup> offered him an employ of about 120*l.* a year in that office ; whereupon Mr. Swift told him that since he had now an opportunity of living without being driven into the Church for a maintenance, he was resolved to go to Ireland and take holy orders. If the scruple seems rather finely spun for Swift, the sense of the dignity of his profession is thoroughly characteristic. Nothing, however, is more deceptive than our memory of the motives which directed distant actions. In his contemporary letters there is no hint of any scruple against preferment in the Church, but a de-

<sup>1</sup> Temple had the reversion of his father's office.

eided objection to insufficient preferment. It is possible that Swift was confusing dates, and that the scruple was quieted when he failed to take advantage of Temple's interest with Southwell. Having declined, he felt that he had made a free choice of a clerical career. In 1692, as we have seen, he expected a prebend from Temple's influence with William. But his doubts of Temple's desire or power to serve him were confirmed. In June, 1694, he tells a cousin at Lisbon: "I have left Sir W. Temple a month ago, just as I foretold it you; and everything happened exactly as I guessed. He was extremely angry I left him; and yet would not oblige himself any further than upon my good behaviour, nor would promise anything firmly to me at all; so that everybody judged I did best to leave him." He is starting in four days for Dublin, and intends to be ordained in September. The next letter preserved completes the story, and implies a painful change in this cavalier tone of injured pride. Upon going to Dublin, Swift had found that some recommendation from Temple would be required by the authorities. He tried to evade the requirement, but was forced at last to write a letter to Temple, which nothing but necessity could have extorted. After explaining the case, he adds: "The particulars expected of me are what relates to morals and learning, and the reasons of quitting your honour's family; that is, whether the last was occasioned by any ill actions. They are all left entirely to your honour's mercy, though in the past I think I cannot reproach myself any farther than for *infirmities*. This," he adds, "is all I dare beg at present from your honour, under circumstances of life not worth your regard;" and all that is left him to wish ("next to the health and prosperity of your honour's family") is that Heaven will show him some day the op-

portunity of making his acknowledgments at "your honour's" feet. This seems to be the only occasion on which we find Swift confessing to any fault except that of being too virtuous.

The apparent doubt of Temple's magnanimity implied in the letter was, happily, not verified. The testimonial seems to have been sent at once. Swift, in any case, was ordained deacon on the 28th of October, 1694, and priest on the 15th of January, 1695. Probably Swift felt that Temple had behaved with magnanimity, and in any case it was not very long before he returned to Moor Park. He had received from Lord Capel, then Lord Deputy, the small prebend of Kilroot, worth about 100*l.* a year. Little is known of his life as a remote country clergyman, except that he very soon became tired of it.<sup>1</sup> Swift soon resigned his prebend (in March, 1698), and managed to obtain the succession for a friend in the neighbourhood. But before this (in May, 1696) he had returned to Moor Park. He had grown weary of a life in a remote district, and Temple had raised his offers. He was glad to be once more on the edge at least of the great world in which alone could be found employment worthy of his talents. One other incident, indeed, of which a fuller account would be interesting, is connected with this departure. On the eve of his departure he wrote a passionate letter to "Varina," in plain English Miss Waring, sister of an old college chum. He "solemnly offers to forego all" (all his English prospects, that is) "for her sake." He does not want her fortune; she shall live where she pleases,

<sup>1</sup> It may be noticed, in illustration of the growth of the Swift legend, that two demonstrably false anecdotes—one imputing a monstrous crime, the other a romantic piece of benevolence to Swift—refer to this period.

till he has "pushed his advancement" and is in a position to marry her. The letter is full of true lovers' protestations; reproaches for her coldness; hints at possible causes of jealousies; declarations of the worthlessness of ambition as compared with love; and denunciations of her respect for the little disguises and affected contradictions of her sex, infinitely beneath persons of her pride and his own; paltry maxims calculated only for the "rabble of humanity." "By heaven, Varina," he exclaims, "you are more experienced and have less virgin innocence than I." The answer must have been unsatisfactory; though, from expressions in a letter to his successor to the prebend, we see that the affair was still going on in 1699. It will come to light once more.

Swift was thus at Moor Park in the summer of 1696. He remained till Temple's death in January, 1699. We hear no more of any friction between Swift and his patron; and it seems that the last years of their connexion passed in harmony. Temple was growing old; his wife, after forty years of a happy marriage, had died during Swift's absence in the beginning of 1695; and Temple, though he seems to have been vigorous, and in spite of gout a brisk walker, was approaching the grave. He occupied himself in preparing, with Swift's help, memoirs and letters, which were left to Swift for posthumous publication. Swift's various irritations at Moor Park have naturally left a stronger impression upon his history than the quieter hours in which worry and anxiety might be forgotten in the placid occupations of a country life. That Swift enjoyed many such hours is tolerably clear. Moor Park is described by a Swiss traveller who visited it about 1691<sup>1</sup> as the "model of an agreeable retreat."

<sup>1</sup> M. Maralt. See appendix to Courtenay's *Life of Temple*.

Temple's household was free from the coarse convivialities of the boozing fox-hunting squires; whilst the recollection of its modest neatness made the "magnificent palace" of Petworth seem pompons and overpowering. Swift himself remembered the Moor Park gardens, the special pride of Temple's retirement, with affection, and tried to imitate them on a small scale in his own garden at Laracor. Moor Park is on the edge of the great heaths which stretch southward to Hindhead, and northward to Aldershot and Chobham Ridges. Though we can scarcely credit him with a modern taste in scenery, he at least anticipated the modern faith in athletic exercises. According to Deane Swift, he used to run up a hill near Temple's and back again to his study every two hours, doing the distance of half a mile in six minutes. In later life he preached the duty of walking with admirable perseverance to his friends. He joined other exercises occasionally. "My Lord," he says to Archbishop King in 1721, "I row after health like a waterman, and ride after it like a postboy, and with some little success." But he had the characteristic passion of the good and wise for walking. He mentions incidentally a walk from Farnham to London, thirty-eight miles; and has some association with the Golden Farmer<sup>1</sup>—a point on the road from which there is still one of the loveliest views in the southern counties, across undulating breadths of heath and meadow, woodland and down, to Windsor Forest, St. George's Hill, and the chalk range from Guildford to Epsom. Perhaps he might have been a mountaineer in more civilized times; his poem on the Carberry rocks seems to indicate a lover of such scenery; and he ventured so near the edge of the cliff upon

<sup>1</sup> The public-house at the point thus named on the Ordnance map is now (I regret to say) called the Jolly Farmer.

his stomach, that his servants had to drag him back by his heels. We find him proposing to walk to Chester at the rate, I regret to say, of only ten miles a day. In such rambles, we are told, he used to put up at wayside inns, where "lodgings for a penny" were advertised; bribing the maid with a tester to give him clean sheets and a bed to himself. The love of the rough humour of waggoners and hostlers is supposed to have been his inducement to this practice, and the refined Orrery associates his coarseness with this lamentable practice; but amidst the roar of railways we may think more tolerantly of the humours of the road in the good old days, when each village had its humours and traditions and quaint legends, and when homely maxims of unlettered wisdom were to be picked up at rustic firesides.

Recreations of this kind were a relief to serious study. In Temple's library Swift found abundant occupation. "I am often," he says, in the first period of his residence, "two or three months without seeing anybody besides the family." In a later fragment, we find him living alone "in great state," the cook coming for his orders for dinner, and the revolutions in the kingdom of the rooks amusing his leisure. The results of his studies will be considered directly. A list of books read in 1697 gives some hint of their general nature. They are chiefly classical and historical. He read Virgil, Homer, Horace, Lucretius, Cicero's *Epistles*, Petronius Arbiter, Ælian, Lucius Flornus, Herbert's *Henry VIII.*, Sleidan's *Commentaries*, *Council of Trent*, Camden's *Elizabeth*, Burnet's *History of the Reformation*, Voiture, Blackmore's *Prince Arthur*, Sir J. Davis's poem of *The Soul*, and two or three travels, besides Cyprian and Irenæus. We may note the absence of any theological reading, except in the form of

ecclesiastical history; nor does Swift study philosophy, of which he seems to have had a sufficient dose in Dublin. History seems always to have been his favourite study, and it would naturally have a large part in Temple's library.

One matter of no small importance to Swift remains to be mentioned. Temple's family included other dependents besides Swift. The "little parson cousin," Tom Swift, whom his great relation always mentions with contempt, became chaplain to Temple. Jonathan's sister was for some time at Moor Park. But the inmates of the family most interesting to us were a Rebecca Dingley—who was in some way related to the family—and Esther Johnson. Esther Johnson was the daughter of a merchant of respectable family who died young. Her mother was known to Lady Giffard, Temple's attached sister; and after her widowhood went with her two daughters to live with the Temples. Mrs. Johnson lived as servant or companion to Lady Giffard for many years after Temple's death; and little Esther, a remarkably bright and pretty child, was brought up in the family, and received under Temple's will a sufficient legacy for her support. It was, of course, guessed by a charitable world that she was a natural child of Sir William's; but there seems to be no real ground for the hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> She was born, as Swift tells us, on March 13, 1681; and was, therefore, a little over eight when Swift first came to Temple, and fifteen when he returned from Kilroot.<sup>2</sup> About this age, he tells

<sup>1</sup> The most direct statement to this effect was made in an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1757. It professes to speak with authority, but includes such palpable blunders as to carry little weight.

<sup>2</sup> I am not certain whether this means 1681 or 1681-82. I have assumed the former date in mentioning Stella's age; but the other is equally possible.



us, she got over an infantile delicacy, "grew into perfect health, and was looked upon as one of the most beautiful, graceful, and agreeable young women in London. Her hair was blacker than a raven, and every feature of her face in perfection." Her conduct and character were equally remarkable, if we may trust the tutor who taught her to write, guided her education, and came to regard her with an affection which was at once the happiness and the misery of his life.

Temple died January 26, 1699; and "with him," said Swift at the time, "all that was good and amiable among men." The feeling was doubtless sincere, though Swift, when moved very deeply, used less conventional phrases. He was thrown once more upon the world. The expectations of some settlement in life had not been realized. Temple had left him 100*l.*, the advantage of publishing his posthumous works, which might ultimately bring in 200*l.* more, and a promise of preferment from the King. Swift had lived long enough upon the "chameleon's food." His energies were still running to waste; and he suffered the misery of a weakness due, not to want of power, but want of opportunity. His sister writes to a cousin that her brother had lost his best friend, who had induced him to give up his Irish preferment by promising preferment in England, and had died before the promise had been fulfilled. Swift was accused of ingratitude by Lord Palmerston, Temple's nephew, some thirty-five years later. In reply, he acknowledged an obligation to Temple for the recommendation to William and the legacy of his papers; but he adds: "I hope you will not charge my living in his family as an obligation; for I was educated to little purpose if I retired to his house for any other motives than the benefit of his conversation and advice, and the

opportunity of pursuing my studies. For, being born to no fortune, I was at his death as far to seek as ever; and perhaps you will allow that I was of some use to him." Swift seems here to assume that his motives for living with Temple are necessarily to be estimated by the results which he obtained. But, if he expected more than he got, he does not suggest any want of good-will. Temple had done his best; William's neglect and Temple's death had made good-will fruitless. The two might cry quits: and Swift set to work, not exactly with a sense of injury, but probably with a strong feeling that a large portion of his life had been wasted. To Swift, indeed, misfortune and injury seem equally to have meant resentment, whether against the fates or some personal object.

One curious document must be noted before considering the writings which most fully reveal the state of Swift's mind. In the year 1699 he wrote down some resolutions, headed "When I come to be old." They are for the most part pithy and sensible, if it can ever be sensible to make resolutions for behaviour in a distant future. Swift resolves not to marry a young woman, not to keep young company unless they desire it, not to repeat stories, not to listen to knavish, tattling servants, not to be too free of advice, not to brag of former beauty and favour with ladies, to desire some good friends to inform him when he breaks these resolutions, and to reform accordingly; and, finally, not to set up for observing all these rules, for fear he should observe none. These resolutions are not very original in substance (few resolutions are), though they suggest some keen observation of his elders; but one is more remarkable: "Not to be fond of children, or *let them come near me hardly.*" The words in italics are blotted out by a later possessor of the paper,

shocked, doubtless, at the harshness of the sentiment. "We do not fortify ourselves with resolutions against what we dislike," says a friendly commentator, "but against what we feel in our weakness we have reason to believe we are really too much inclined to." Yet it is strange that a man should regard the purest and kindest of feelings as a weakness to which he is too much inclined. No man had stronger affections than Swift; no man suffered more agony when they were wounded; but in his agony he would commit what to most men would seem the treason of cursing the affections instead of simply lamenting the injury, or holding the affection itself to be its own sufficient reward. The intense personality of the man reveals itself alternately as selfishness and as "altruism." He grappled to his heart those whom he really loved "as with hoops of steel;" so firmly that they became a part of himself; and that he considered himself at liberty to regard his love of friends as he might regard a love of wine, as something to be regretted when it was too strong for his own happiness. The attraction was intense, but implied the absorption of the weaker nature into his own. His friendships were rather annexations than alliances. The strongest instance of this characteristic was in his relations to the charming girl who must have been in his mind when he wrote this strange, and unconsciously prophetic, resolution.

### CHAPTER III.

#### EARLY WRITINGS.

SWIFT came to Temple's house as a raw student. He left it as the author of one of the most remarkable satires ever written. His first efforts had been unpromising enough. Certain *Pindaric Odes*, in which the youthful aspirant imitated the still popular model of Cowley, are even comically prosaic. The last of them, dated 1691, is addressed to a queer Athenian Society, promoted by a John Dunton, a speculative bookseller, whose *Life and Errors* is still worth a glance from the curious. The Athenian Society was the name of John Dunton himself, and two or three collaborators who professed in the *Athenian Mercury* to answer queries ranging over the whole field of human knowledge. Temple was one of their patrons, and Swift sent them a panegyric ode, the merits of which are sufficiently summed up by Dryden's pithy criticism: "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet." Swift disliked and abused Dryden ever afterwards, though he may have had better reasons for his enmity than the child's dislike to bitter medicine. Later poems, the *Epistle to Congreve* and that to Temple already quoted, show symptoms of growing power and a clearer self-recognition. In Swift's last residence with Temple he proved unmistakably that he had learnt the secret often so slowly revealed to great writers, the secret of his real strength. The *Tale of a*

*Tub* was written about 1696; part of it appears to have been seen at Kilroot by his friend, Waring, Varina's brother; the *Battle of the Books* was written in 1697. It is a curious proof of Swift's indifference to a literary reputation that both works remained in manuscript till 1704. The "little parson cousin," Tom Swift, ventured some kind of claim to a share in the authorship of the *Tale of a Tub*. Swift treated this claim with the utmost contempt, but never explicitly claimed for himself the authorship of what some readers hold to be his most powerful work.

The *Battle of the Books*, to which we may first attend, sprang out of the famous controversy as to the relative merits of the ancients and moderns, which began in France with Perrault and Fontenelle; which had been set going in England by Sir W. Temple's essay upon ancient and modern learning (1692), and which incidentally led to the warfare between Bentley and Wotton on one side, and Boyle and his Oxford allies on the other. A full account of this celebrated discussion may be found in Professor Jebb's *Bentley*; and, as Swift only took the part of a light skirmisher, nothing more need be said of it in this place. One point alone is worth notice. The eagerness of the discussion is characteristic of a time at which the modern spirit was victoriously revolting against the ancient canons of taste and philosophy. At first sight we might, therefore, expect the defenders of antiquity to be on the side of authority. In fact, however, the argument, as Swift takes it from Temple, is reversed. Temple's theory, so far as he had any consistent theory, is indicated in the statement that the moderns gathered "all their learning from books in the universities." Learning, he suggests, may weaken invention; and people who trust to the

charity of others will always be poor. Swift accepts and enforces this doctrine. The *Battle of the Books* is an expression of that contempt for pedants which he had learnt in Dublin, and which is expressed in the ode to the Athenian Society. Philosophy, he tells us in that precious production, "seems to have borrowed some ungrateful taste of doubts, impertinence, and niceties from every age through which it passed" (this, I may observe, is verse), and is now a "medley of all ages," "her face patched over with modern pedantry." The moral finds a more poetical embodiment in the famous apologue of the Bee and the Spider in the *Battle of the Books*. The bee had got itself entangled in the spider's web in the library, whilst the books were beginning to wrangle. The two have a sharp dispute, which is summed up by Æsop as arbitrator. The spider represents the moderns, who spin their scholastic pedantry out of their own insides; whilst the bee, like the ancients, goes direct to nature. The moderns produce nothing but "wrangling and satire, much of a nature with the spider's poison, which, however they pretend to spit wholly out of themselves, is improved by the same arts, by feeding upon the insects and vermin of the age." We, the ancients, "profess to nothing of our own beyond our wings and our voice: that is to say, our flights and our language. For the rest, whatever we have got has been by infinite labour and research, and ranging through every corner of nature; the difference is that, instead of dirt and poison, we have rather chosen to fill our hives with honey and wax, thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light."

The Homeric battle which follows is described with infinite spirit. Pallas is the patron of the ancients, whilst Momus undertakes the cause of the moderns, and appeals

for help to the malignant deity Criticism, who is found in her den at the top of a snowy mountain, extended upon the spoils of numberless half-devoured volumes. By her, as she exclaims in the regulation soliloquy, children become wiser than their parents, beaux become politicians, and schoolboys judges of philosophy. She flies to her darling Wotton, gathering up her person into an octavo compass; her body grows white and arid, and splits in pieces with dryness; a concoction of gall and soot is strewn in the shape of letters upon her person; and so she joins the moderns, "undistinguishable in shape and dress from the divine Bentley, Wotton's dearest friend." It is needless to follow the fortunes of the fight which follows; it is enough to observe that Virgil is encountered by his translator Dryden in a helmet "nine times too large for the head, which appeared situate far in the hinder part, even like the lady in the lobster, or like a mouse under a canopy of state, or like a shrivelled bean within the penthouse of a modern perwig; and the voice was suited to the visage, sounding weak and remote;" and that the book is concluded by an episode, in which Bentley and Wotton try a diversion and steal the armour of Phalaris and Æsop, but are met by Boyle, clad in a suit of armour given him by all the gods, who transfixes them on his spear like a brace of woodcocks on an iron skewer.

The raillery, if taken in its critical aspect, recoils upon the author. Dryden hardly deserves the scorn of Virgil; and Bentley, as we know, made short work of Phalaris and Boyle. But Swift probably knew and cared little for the merits of the controversy. He expresses his contempt with characteristic vigour and coarseness; and our pleasure in his display of exuberant satirical power is, not in-

jured by his obvious misconception of the merits of the case. The unlagging spirit of the writing, the fertility and ingenuity of the illustrations, do as much as can be done to give lasting vitality to what is radically (to my taste at least) a rather dreary form of wit. The *Battle of the Books* is the best of the travesties. Nor in the brilliant assault upon great names do we at present see anything more than the buoyant consciousness of power, common in the unsparing judgments of youth, nor edged as yet by any real bitterness. Swift has found out that the world is full of humbugs; and goes forth hewing and hacking with superabundant energy, not yet aware that he too may conceivably be a fallible being, and still less that the humbugs may some day prove too strong for him.

The same qualities are more conspicuous in the far greater satire, the *Tale of a Tub*. It is so striking a performance that Johnson, who cherished one of his stubborn prejudices against Swift, doubted whether Swift could have written it. "There is in it," he said, "such a vigour of mind, such a swarm of thoughts, so much of nature, and art, and life." The doubt is clearly without the least foundation, and the estimate upon which it is based is generally disputed. The *Tale of a Tub* has certainly not achieved a reputation equal to that of *Gulliver's Travels*, to the merits of which Johnson was erroneously blind. Yet I think that there is this much to be said in favour of Johnson's theory, namely, that Swift's style reaches its highest point in the earlier work. There is less flagging; a greater fulness and pressure of energetic thought; a power of hitting the nail on the head at the first blow, which has declined in the work of his maturer years, when life was weary and thought intermittent. Swift seems



to have felt this himself. In the twilight of his intellect he was seen turning over the pages and murmuring to himself, "Good God, what a genius I had when I wrote that book!" In an apology (dated 1709) he makes a statement which may help to explain this fact. "The author," he says, "was then (1696) young, his invention at the height, and his reading fresh in his head. By the assistance of some thinking and much conversation, he had endeavoured to strip himself of as many prejudices as he could." He resolved, as he adds, "to proceed in a manner entirely new;" and he afterwards claims in the most positive terms that through the whole book (including both the *Tale* and the *battle* of the books) he has not borrowed one "single hint from any writer in the world."<sup>1</sup> No writer has ever been more thoroughly original than Swift, for his writings are simply himself.

The *Tale of a Tub* is another challenge thrown down to pretensions pedantry. The vigorous, self-confident intellect has found out the emptiness and absurdity of a number of the solemn formulæ which pass current in the world, and tears them to pieces with audacious and rejoicing energy. He makes a mock of the paper chains with which solemn professors tried to fetter his activity, and scatters the fragments to the four winds of Heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Wotton first accused Swift of borrowing the idea of the *battle* from a French book, by one Coutray, called *Histoire Poétique de la Guerre nouvellement déclarée entre les Anciens et Modernes*. Swift declared (I have no doubt truly) that he had never seen or heard of this book. But Coutray, like Swift, uses the scheme of a mock Homeric battle. The book is prose, but begins with a poem. The resemblance is much closer than Mr. Forster's language would imply; but I agree with him that it does not justify Johnson and Scott in regarding it as more than a natural coincidence. Every detail is different.

In one of the first sections he announces the philosophy afterwards expounded by Herr Teufelsdröckh, according to which "man himself is but a micro-coat;" if one of the suits of clothes called animals "be trimmed up with a gold chain, and a red gown, and a white rod, and a pert look, it is called a Lord Mayor; if certain ermines and furs be placed in a certain position, we style them a judge; and so an apt conjunction of lawn and black satin we entitle a bishop." Though Swift does not himself develop this philosophical doctrine, its later form reflects light upon the earlier theory. For, in truth, Swift's teaching comes to this, that the solemn plausibilities of the world are but so many "shams"—elaborate masks used to disguise the passions, for the most part base and earthly, by which mankind is really impelled. The "digressions" which he introduces with the privilege of a humorist bear chiefly upon the literary sham. He falls foul of the whole population of Grub Street at starting, and (as I may note in passing) incidentally gives a curious hint of his authorship. He describes himself as a worn-out pamphleteer who has worn his quill to the pith in the service of the state: "Fourscore and eleven pamphlets have I writ under the reigns and for the service of six-and-thirty patrons." Porson first noticed that the same numbers are repeated in *Gulliver's Travels*; Gulliver is fastened with "fourscore and eleven chains" locked to his left leg "with six-and-thirty padlocks." Swift makes the usual onslaught of a young author upon the critics, with more than the usual vigour, and carries on the war against Bentley and his ally by parodying Wotton's remarks upon the ancients. He has discovered many omissions in Homer, "who seems to have read but very superficially either Sendivogus, Behmen, or *Anthroposophia*

*Magia.*<sup>1</sup> Homer, too, never mentions a saveall; and has a still worse fault—his “gross ignorance in the common laws of this realm, and in the doctrine as well as discipline of the Church of England”—defects, indeed, for which he has been justly censured by Wotton. Perhaps the most vigorous and certainly the most striking of these digressions is that upon “the original use and improvement of madness in a commonwealth.” Just in passing, as it were, Swift gives the pith of a whole system of misanthropy, though he as yet seems to be rather indulging a play of fancy than expressing a settled conviction. Happiness, he says, is a “perpetual possession of being well deceived.” The wisdom which keeps on the surface is better than that which persists in officiously prying into the underlying reality. “Last week I saw a woman flayed,” he observes, “and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse.” It is best to be content with patching up the outside, and so assuring the “serene, peaceful state”—the sublimest point of felicity—“of being a fool amongst knaves.” He goes on to tell us how useful madmen may be made: how Curtius may be regarded equally as a madman and a hero for his leap into the gulf; how the raging, blaspheming, noisy inmate of Bedlam is fit to have a regiment of dragoons; and the bustling, sputtering, bawling madman should be sent to Westminster Hall; and the solemn madman, dreaming dreams and seeing best in the dark, to preside over a congregation of Dissenters; and how elsewhere you may find the raw material of the

<sup>1</sup> This was a treatise by Thomas, twin brother of Henry Vaughan, the “Silyrist.” It led to a controversy with Henry More. Vaughan was a Rosicrucian. Swift’s contempt for mysteries is characteristic. Sendivogus was a famous alchemist (1566—1646).

merchant, the courtier, or the monarch. We are all madmen, and happy so far as mad: delusion and peace of mind go together; and the more truth we know, the more shall we recognize that realities are hideous. Swift only plays with his paradoxes. He laughs without troubling himself to decide whether his irony tells against the theories which he ostensibly espouses, or those which he ostensibly attacks. But he has only to adopt in seriousness the fancy with which he is dallying, in order to graduate as a finished pessimist. These, however, are interruptions to the main thread of the book, which is a daring assault upon that serious kind of pedantry which utters itself in theological systems. The three brothers, Peter, Martin, and Jack, represent, as we all know, the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, and the Puritanical varieties of Christianity. They start with a new coat provided for each by their father, and a will to explain the right mode of wearing it; and after some years of faithful observance they fall in love with the three ladies of wealth, ambition, and pride, get into terribly bad ways, and make wild work of the coats and the will. They excuse themselves for wearing shoulder-knots by picking the separate letters S, H, and so forth, out of separate words in the will, and as K is wanting, discover it to be synonymous with C. They reconcile themselves to gold lace by remembering that when they were boys they heard a fellow say that he had heard their father's man say that he would advise his sons to get gold lace when they had money enough to buy it. Then, as the will becomes troublesome in spite of exegetical ingenuity, the eldest brother finds a convenient codicil which can be tacked to it, and will sanction a new fashion of flame-coloured satin. The will expressly forbids silver fringe on the

coats; but they discover that the word meaning silver fringe may also signify a broomstick. And by such devices they go on merrily for a time, till Peter sets up to be the sole heir and insists upon the obedience of his brethren. His performances in this position are trying to their temper. "Whenever it happened that any rogue of Newgate was condemned to be hanged, Peter would offer him a pardon for a certain sum of money; which, when the poor catiff had made all shifts to scrape up and send, his lordship would return a piece of paper in this form:

"To all mayors, sheriffs, jailors, constables, bailiffs, hangmen, &c.—Whereas we are informed that A. B. remains in the hands of you or some of you, under the sentence of death: We will and command you, upon sight hereof, to let the said prisoner depart to his own habitation, whether he stands condemned for murder, &c., &c., for which this shall be your sufficient warrant; and if you fail hereof, God damn you and yours to all eternity; and so we bid you heartily farewell.—Your most humble man's man, Emperor Peter."

"The wretches, trusting to this, lost their lives and their money too." Peter, however, became outrageously proud. He has been seen to take "three old high-crowned hats and clap them all on his head three-storey high, with a huge bunch of keys at his girdle, and an angling-rod in his hand. In which guise, whoever went to take him by the hand in the way of salutation, Peter, with much grace, like a well-educated spaniel, would present them with his foot; and if they refused his civility, then he would raise it as high as their chops, and give him a damned kick on the mouth, which has ever since been called a salute."

Peter receives his brothers at dinner, and has nothing

served up but a brown loaf. "Come," he says, "fall on and spare not; here is excellent good mutton," and he helps them each to a slice. The brothers remonstrate, and try to point out that they see only bread. They argue for some time, but have to give in to a conclusive argument. "'Look ye, gentlemen,' cries Peter, in a rage, 'to convince you what a couple of blind, positive, ignorant, wilful puppies you are, I will use but this simple argument. By G— it is true, good, natural mutton as any in Leadenhall Market; and G— confound you both eternally if you offer to believe otherwise.' Such a thundering proof as this left no further room for objection; the two unbelievers began to gather and pocket up their mistake as hastily as they could," and have to admit besides that another large dry crust is true juice of the grape.

The brothers Jack and Martin afterwards fall out, and Jack is treated to a storm of ridicule much in the same vein as that directed against Peter; and, if less pointed, certainly not less expressive of contempt. I need not further follow the details of what Johnson calls this "wild book," which is in every page brimful of intense satirical power. I must, however, say a few words upon a matter which is of great importance in forming a clear judgment of Swift's character. The *Tale of a Tub* was universally attributed to Swift, and led to many doubts of his orthodoxy and even of his Christianity. Sharpe, Archbishop of York, injured Swift's chances of preferment by insinuating such doubts to Queen Anne. Swift bitterly resented the imputation. He prefixed an apology to a later edition, in which he admitted that he had said some rash things; but declared that he would forfeit his life if any one opinion contrary to morality or religion could be fairly deduced from the book. He pointed out that he had attacked no

Anglican doctrine. His ridicule spares Martin, and is pointed at Peter and Jack. Like every satirist who ever wrote, he does not attack the use but the abuse; and as the Church of England represents for him the purest embodiment of the truth, an attack upon the abuses of religion meant an attack upon other churches only in so far as they diverged from this model. Critics have accepted this apology, and treated poor Queen Anne and her advisers as representing simply the prudery of the tea-table. The question, to my thinking, does not admit of quite so simple an answer.

If, in fact, we ask what is the true object of Swift's audacious satire, the answer will depend partly upon our own estimate of the truth. Clearly it ridicules "abuses;" but one man's use is another's abuse, and a dogma may appear to us venerable or absurd according to our own creed. One test, however, may be suggested which may guide our decision. Imagine the *Tale of a Tub* to be read by Bishop Butler and by Voltaire, who called Swift a *Rabelais perfectionné*. Can any one doubt that the believer would be scandalized and the scoffer find himself in a thoroughly congenial element? Would not any believer shrink from the use of such weapons even though directed against his enemies? Scott urges that the satire was useful to the High Church party because, as he says, it is important for any institution in Britain (or anywhere else, we may add) to have the laughers on its side. But Scott was too sagacious not to indicate the obvious reply. The condition of having the laughers on your side is to be on the side of the laughers. Advocates of any serious cause feel that there is a danger in accepting such an alliance. The laughers who join you in ridiculing your enemy are by no means pledged to refrain from laughing in turn at the

laughter. When Swift had ridiculed all the Catholic and all the Puritan dogmas in the most unsparing fashion, could he be sure that the Thirty-nine Articles would escape scot-free? The Catholic theory of a Church possessing divine authority, the Puritan theory of a divine voice addressing the individual soul, suggested to him, in their concrete embodiments at least, nothing but a horse-laugh. Could any one be sure that the Anglican embodiment of the same theories might not be turned to equal account by the scoffer? Was the true bearing of Swift's satire in fact limited to the deviations from sound Church of England doctrine, or might it not be directed against the very vital principle of the doctrine itself?

Swift's blindness to such criticisms was thoroughly characteristic. He professes, as we have seen, that he had need to clear his mind of *real* prejudices. He admits that the process might be pushed too far; that is, that in abandoning a prejudice you may be losing a principle. In fact, the prejudices from which Swift had sought to free himself—and no doubt with great success—were the prejudices of other people. For them he felt unlimited contempt. But the prejudice which had grown up in his mind, strengthened with his strength, and become intertwined with all his personal affections and antipathies, was no longer a prejudice in his eyes, but a sacred principle. The intensity of his contempt for the follies of others shut his eyes effectually to any similarity between their tenets and his own. His principles, true or false, were prejudices in the highest degree, if by a prejudice we mean an opinion cherished because it has somehow or other become ours, though the "somehow" may exclude all reference to reason. Swift never troubled himself to assign any philosophical basis for his doctrines; having, indeed, a hearty



contempt for philosophizing in general. He clung to the doctrines of his Church, not because he could give abstract reasons for his belief, but simply because the Church happened to be his. It is equally true of all his creeds, political or theological, that he loved them as he loved his friends, simply because they had become a part of himself, and were, therefore, identified with all his hopes, ambitions, and aspirations, public or private. We shall see hereafter how fiercely he attacked the Dissenters, and how scornfully he repudiated all arguments founded upon the desirability of union amongst Protestants. To a calm outside observer differences might appear to be superficial; but to him no difference could be other than radical and profound which in fact divided him from an antagonist. In attacking the Presbyterians, cried more temperate people, you are attacking your brothers and your own opinions. No, replied Swift, I am attacking the corruption of my principles; hideous caricatures of myself; caricatures the more hateful in proportion to their apparent likeness. And therefore, whether in political or theological warfare, he was sublimely unconscious of the possible reaction of his arguments.

Swift took a characteristic mode of showing that if upon some points he accidentally agreed with the unbeliever, it was not from any covert sympathy. Two of his most vigorous pieces of satire in later days are directed against the deists. In 1708 he published an *Argument to prove that the abolishing of Christianity in England may, as things now stand, be attended with some inconveniences, and perhaps not produce those many good effects proposed thereby*. And in 1713, in the midst of his most eager political warfare, he published *Mr. Collins's Discourse of Freethinking, put into plain English, by way of abstract*

*for use of the poor.* No one who reads these pamphlets can deny that the keenest satire may be directed against infidels as well as against Christians. The last is an admirable parody, in which poor Collins's arguments are turned against himself with ingenious and provoking irony. The first is, perhaps, Swift's cleverest application of the same method. A nominal religion, he urges gravely, is of some use, for if men cannot be allowed a God to revile or renounce, they will speak evil of dignities, and may even come to "reflect upon the ministry." If Christianity were once abolished, the wits would be deprived of their favourite topic. "Who would ever have suspected Asgil for a wit or Toland for a philosopher if the inexhaustible stock of Christianity had not been at hand to provide them with materials?" The abolition of Christianity, moreover, may possibly bring the Church into danger, for atheists, deists, and Socinians have little zeal for the present ecclesiastical establishment; and if they once get rid of Christianity, they may aim at setting up Presbyterianism. Moreover, as long as we keep to any religion, we do not strike at the root of the evil. The freethinkers consider that all the parts hold together, and that if you pull out one nail the whole fabric will fall. Which, he says, was happily expressed by one who heard that a text brought in proof of the Trinity was differently read in some ancient manuscript; whereupon he suddenly leaped through a long *sortes* to the logical conclusion: "Why, if it be as you say, I may safely . . . drink on and defy the parson."

A serious meaning underlies Swift's sarcasms. Collins had argued in defence of the greatest possible freedom of discussion, and tacitly assumed that such discussion would lead to disbelief of Christianity. Opponents of the liberal

school had answered by claiming his first principle as their own. They argued that religion was based upon reason, and would be strengthened instead of weakened by free inquiry. Swift virtually takes a different position. He objects to freethinking because ordinary minds are totally unfit for such inquiries. "The bulk of mankind," as he puts it, is as "well qualified for flying as thinking;" and therefore free-thought would lead to anarchy, atheism, and immorality, as liberty to fly would lead to a breaking of necks.

Collins rails at priests as tyrants upheld by imposture. Swift virtually replies that they are the sole guides to truth and guardians of morality, and that theology should be left to them, as medicine to physicians and law to lawyers. The argument against the abolition of Christianity takes the same ground. Religion, however little regard is paid to it in practice, is, in fact, the one great security for a decent degree of social order; and the rash fools who venture to reject what they do not understand are public enemies as well as ignorant sciolists.

The same view is taken in Swift's sermons. He said of himself that he could only preach political pamphlets. Several of the twelve sermons preserved are in fact directly aimed at some of the political and social grievances which he was habitually denouncing. If not exactly "pamphlets," they are sermons in aid of pamphlets. Others are vigorous and sincere moral discourses. One alone deals with a purely theological topic: the doctrine of the Trinity. His view is simply that "men of wicked lives would be very glad if there were no truth in Christianity at all." They therefore cavil at the mysteries to find some excuse for giving up the whole. He replies in effect that there must be mystery, though not contradiction, every-

where, and that if we do not accept humbly what is taught in the Scriptures, we must give up Christianity, and consequently, as he holds, all moral obligation, at once. The evil is merely the pretext of an evil conscience. Swift's religion thus partook of the directly practical nature of his whole character. He was absolutely indifferent to speculative philosophy. He was even more indifferent to the mystical or imaginative aspects of religion. He loved downright concrete realities, and was not the man to lose himself in an *Oh, altitudo!* or in any train of thought or emotion not directly bearing upon the actual business of the world. Though no man had more pride in his order or love of its privileges, Swift never emphasized his professional character. He wished to be accepted as a man of the world and of business. He despised the unpractical and visionary type, and the kind of religious utterance congenial to men of that type was abhorrent to him. He shrank invariably too from any display of his emotion, and would have felt the heartiest contempt for the sentimentalism of his day. At once the proudest and most sensitive of men, it was his imperative instinct to hide his emotions as much as possible. In cases of great excitement he retired into some secluded corner, where, if he was forced to feel, he could be sure of hiding his feelings. He always masks his strongest passions under some ironical veil, and thus practised what his friends regarded as an inverted hypocrisy. Delany tells us that he stayed for six months in Swift's house before discovering that the Dean always read prayers to his servants at a fixed hour in private. A deep feeling of solemnity showed itself in his manner of performing public religious exercises; but Delany, a man of a very different temperament, blames his friend for carrying his reserve in all such mat-

ters to extremes. In certain respects Swift was ostentatious enough; but this intense dislike to wearing his heart upon his sleeve, to laying bare the secrets of his affections before unsympathetic eyes, is one of his most indelible characteristics. Swift could never have felt the slightest sympathy for the kind of preacher who courts applause by a public exhibition of intimate joys and sorrows; and was less afraid of suppressing some genuine emotion than of showing any in the slightest degree unreal.

Although Swift took in the main what may be called the political view of religion, he did not by any means accept that view in its cynical form. He did not, that is, hold, in Gibbon's famous phrase, that all religions were equally false and equally useful. His religious instincts were as strong and genuine as they were markedly undemonstrative. He came to take (I am anticipating a little) a gloomy view of the world and of human nature. He had the most settled conviction not only of the misery of human life but of the feebleness of the good elements in the world. The bad and the stupid are the best fitted for life as we find it. Virtue is generally a misfortune; the more we sympathize, the more cause we have for wretchedness; our affections give us the purest kind of happiness, and yet our affections expose us to sufferings which more than outweigh the enjoyments. There is no such thing, he said in his decline, as "a fine old gentleman;" if so-and-so had had either a mind or a body worth a farthing, "they would have worn him out long ago." That became a typical sentiment with Swift. His doctrine was, briefly, that: virtue was the one thing which deserved love and admiration; and yet that virtue, in this hideous chaos of a world, involved misery and decay.

What would be the logical result of such a creed I do not presume to say. Certainly, we should guess, something more pessimistic or Manichæan than suits the ordinary interpretation of Christian doctrine. But for Swift this state of mind carried with it the necessity of clinging to some religious creed: not because the creed held out promises of a better hereafter—for Swift was too much absorbed in the present to dwell much upon such beliefs—but rather because it provided him with some sort of fixed convictions in this strange and disastrous muddle. If it did not give a solution in terms intelligible to the human intellect, it encouraged the belief that some solution existed. It justified him to himself for continuing to respect morality, and for going on living, when all the game of life seemed to be decidedly going in favour of the devil, and suicide to be the most reasonable course. At least, it enabled him to associate himself with the causes and principles which he recognized as the most ennobling element in the world's "mad farce;" and to utter himself in formulae consecrated by the use of such wise and good beings as had hitherto shown themselves amongst a wretched race. Placed in another situation, Swift, no doubt, might have put his creed—to speak after the Clothes Philosophy—into a different dress. The substance could not have been altered, unless his whole character as well as his particular opinions had been profoundly modified.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### LARACOR AND LONDON.

SWIFT at the age of thirty-one had gained a small amount of cash and a promise from William. He applied to the King, but the great man in whom he trusted failed to deliver his petition; and, after some delay, he accepted an invitation to become chaplain and secretary to the Earl of Berkeley, just made one of the Lords Justices of Ireland. He acted as secretary on the journey to Ireland; but, upon reaching Dublin, Lord Berkeley gave the post to another man, who had persuaded him that it was unfit for a clergyman. Swift next claimed the deanery of Derry, which soon became vacant. The secretary had been bribed by 1000*l.* from another candidate, upon whom the deanery was bestowed; but Swift was told that he might still have the preference for an equal bribe. Unable or unwilling to comply, he took leave of Berkeley and the secretary, with the pithy remark, "God confound you both for a couple of scoundrels." He was partly pacified, however (February, 1700), by the gift of Laracor, a village near Trim, some twenty miles from Dublin. Two other small livings, and a prebend in the cathedral of St. Patrick, made up a revenue of about 230*l.* a year.<sup>1</sup> The income enabled him to live; but, in spite of the rigid economy which he always practised, did not enable him

<sup>1</sup> See Forster, p. 117.

to save. Marriage under such circumstances would have meant the abandonment of an ambitious career. A wife and family would have anchored him to his country parsonage.

This may help to explain an unpleasant episode which followed. Poor Varina had resisted Swift's entreaties, on the ground of her own ill-health and Swift's want of fortune. She now, it seems, thought that the economical difficulty was removed by Swift's preferment, and wished the marriage to take place. Swift replied in a letter, which contains all our information, and to which I can apply no other epithet than brutal. Some men might feel bound to fulfil a marriage engagement, even when love had grown cold; others might think it better to break it off in the interests of both parties. Swift's plan was to offer to fulfil it on conditions so insulting that no one with a grain of self-respect could accept. In his letter he expresses resentment for Miss Waring's previous treatment of him; he reproaches her bitterly with the company in which she lives—including, as it seems, her mother; no young woman in the world with her income should "dwindle away her health in such a sink and among such family conversation." He explains that he is still poor; he doubts the improvement of her own health; and he then says that if she will submit to be educated so as to be capable of entertaining him: to accept all his likes and dislikes: to soothe his ill-humour, and live cheerfully wherever he pleases, he will take her without inquiring into her looks or her income. "Cleanliness in the first, and competency in the other, is all I look for." Swift could be the most persistent and ardent of friends. But, when any one tried to enforce claims no longer congenial to his feelings, the appeal to the galling obligation



stung him into ferocity, and brought out the most brutal side of his imperious nature.

It was in the course of the next year that Swift took a step which has sometimes been associated with this. The death of Temple had left Esther Johnson homeless. The small fortune left to her by Temple consisted of an Irish farm. Swift suggested to her that she and her friend Mrs. Dingley would get better interest for their money, and live more cheaply, in Ireland than in England. This change of abode naturally made people talk. The little parson cousin asked (in 1706) whether Jonathan had been able to resist the charms of the two ladies who had marched from Moor Park to Dublin "with full resolution to engage him." Swift was now (1701) in his thirty-fourth year, and Stella a singularly beautiful and attractive girl of twenty. The anomalous connexion was close, and yet most carefully guarded against scandal. In Swift's absence, the ladies occupied his apartments at Dublin. When he and they were in the same place they took separate lodgings. Twice, it seems, they accompanied him on visits to England. But Swift never saw Esther Johnson except in presence of a third person; and he incidentally declares in 1726—near the end of her life—that he had not seen her in a morning "these dozen years, except once or twice in a journey." The relations thus regulated remained unaltered for several years to come. Swift's duties at Laracor were not excessive. He reckons his congregation at fifteen persons, "most of them gentle and all simple." He gave notice, says Orrery, that he would read prayers every Wednesday and Friday. The congregation on the first Wednesday consisted of himself and his clerk, and Swift began the service, "Dearly beloved Roger, the Scripture moveth you and me," and so forth. This being

attributed to Swift is supposed to be an exquisite piece of facetiousness; but we may hope that, as Scott gives us reason to think, it was really one of the drifting jests that stuck for a time to the skirts of the famous humorist. What is certain is, that Swift did his best, with narrow means, to improve the living—rebuilt the house, laid out the garden, increased the glebe from one acre to twenty, and endowed the living with tithes bought by himself. He left the tithes on the remarkable condition (suggested, probably, by his fears of Presbyterian ascendancy) that, if another form of Christian religion should become the established faith in this kingdom, they should go to the poor—excluding Jews, atheists, and infidels. Swift became attached to Laracor, and the gardens which he planted in humble imitation of Moor Park; he made friends of some of the neighbours; though he detested Trim, where “the people were as great rascals as the gentlemen;” but Laracor was rather an occasional retreat than a centre of his interests. During the following years Swift was often at the Castle at Dublin, and passed considerable periods in London, leaving a curate in charge of the minute congregation at Laracor.

He kept upon friendly terms with successive Viceroyals. He had, as we have seen, extorted a partial concession of his claims from Lord Berkeley. For Lord Berkeley, if we may argue from a very gross lampoon, he can have felt nothing but contempt. But he had a high respect for Lady Berkeley; and one of the daughters, afterwards Lady Betty Germaine, a very sensible and kindly woman, retained his friendship through life, and in letters written long afterwards refers with evident fondness to the old days of familiarity. He was intimate, again, with the family of the Duke of Ormond, who became Lord Lieu-

tenant in 1703, and, again, was the close friend of one of the daughters. He was deeply grieved by her death a few years later, soon after her marriage to Lord Ashburnham. "I hate life," he says characteristically, "when I think it exposed to such accidents; and to see so many thousand wretches burdening the earth when such as her die, makes me think God did never intend life for a blessing." When Lord Pembroke succeeded Ormond, Swift still continued chaplain, and carried on a queer commerce of punning with Pembroke. It is the first indication of a habit which lasted, as we shall see, through life. One might be tempted to say, were it not for the conclusive evidence to the contrary, that this love of the most mechanical variety of factionsness implied an absence of any true sense of humour. Swift, indeed, was giving proofs that he possessed a full share of that ambiguous talent. It would be difficult to find a more perfect performance of its kind than the poem by which he amused the Berkeley family in 1700. It is the *Petition of Mrs. Frances Harris*, a chambermaid, who had lost her purse, and whose peculiar style of language, as well as the unsympathetic comments of her various fellow-servants, are preserved with extraordinary felicity in a peculiar doggerel invented for the purpose by Swift. One fancies that the famous Mrs. Harris of Mrs. Gamp's reminiscences was a phantasmal descendant of Swift's heroine. He lays bare the workings of the menial intellect with the clearness of a master.

Neither Laracor nor Dublin could keep Swift from London.<sup>1</sup> During the ten years succeeding 1700 he must

<sup>1</sup> He was in England from April to September in 1701, from April to November in 1702, from November, 1703, till May, 1704, for an uncertain part of 1705, and again for over fifteen months from the end of 1707 till the beginning of 1709.

have passed over four in England. In the last period mentioned he was acting as an agent for the Church of Ireland. In the others he was attracted by pleasure or ambition. He had already many introductions to London society, through Temple, through the Irish Viceroy, and through Congreve, the most famous of then living wits.

A successful pamphlet, to be presently mentioned, helped his rise to fame. London society was easy of access for a man of Swift's qualities. The divisions of rank were doubtless more strongly marked than now. Yet society was relatively so small, and concentrated in so small a space, that admission into the upper circle meant an easy introduction to every one worth knowing. Any noticeable person became, as it were, member of a club which had a tacit existence, though there was no single place of meeting or recognized organization. Swift soon became known at the coffee-houses, which have been superseded by the clubs of modern times. At one time, according to a story vague as to dates, he got the name of the "mad parson" from Addison and others, by his habit of taking half-an-hour's smart walk to and fro in the coffee-house, and then departing in silence. At last he abruptly accosted a stranger from the country: "Pray, sir, do you remember any good weather in the world?" "Yes, sir," was the reply, "I thank God I remember a great deal of good weather in my time." "That," said Swift, "is more than I can say. I never remember any weather that was not too hot or too cold, or too wet or too dry; but, however God Almighty contrives it, at the end of the year 'tis all very well;" with which sentiment he vanished. Whatever his introduction, Swift would soon make himself felt. The *Tale of a Tub* appeared—with a very complimentary

dedication to Somers—in 1704, and revealed powers beyond the rivalry of any living author.

In the year 1705 Swift became intimate with Addison, who wrote, in a copy of his *Travels in Italy*: “To Jonathan Swift, the most agreeable companion, the truest friend, and the greatest genius of his age, this work is presented by his most humble servant the author.” Though the word “genius” had scarcely its present strength of meaning, the phrase certainly implies that Addison knew Swift’s authorship of the *Tale*, and with all his decorum was not repelled by its audacious satire. The pair formed a close friendship, which is honourable to both. For it proves that if Swift was imperious, and Addison a little too fond of the adulation of “wits and Templars,” each could enjoy the society of an intellectual equal. They met, we may fancy, like absolute kings, accustomed to the incense of courtiers, and not inaccessible to its charms; and yet glad at times to throw aside state and associate with each other without jealousy. Addison, we know, was most charming when talking to a single companion, and Delany repeats Swift’s statement that, often as they spent their evenings together, they never wished for a third. Steele, for a time, was joined in what Swift calls a triumvirate; and though political strife led to a complete breach with Steele and a temporary eclipse of familiarity with Addison, it never diminished Swift’s affection for his great rival. “That man,” he said once, “has virtue enough to give reputation to an age,” and the phrase expresses his settled opinion. Swift, however, had a low opinion of the society of the average “wit.” “The worst conversation I ever heard in my life,” he says, “was that at Will’s coffee-house, where the wits (as they were called) used formerly to assemble;” and he speaks with a contempt recalling Pope’s satire

upon the "little senate" of the absurd self-importance and the foolish adulation of the students and Templars who listened to these oracles. Others have suspected that many famous coteries of which literary people are accustomed to speak with unction probably fell as far short in reality of their traditional pleasantness. Swift's friendship with Addison was partly due, we may fancy, to difference in temper and talent, which fitted each to be the complement of the other. A curious proof of the mutual good-will is given by the history of Swift's *Baucis and Philemon*. It is a humorous and agreeable enough travesty of Ovid; a bit of good-humoured pleasantry, which we may take as it was intended. The performance was in the spirit of the time; and if Swift had not the lightness of touch of his contemporaries, Prior, Gay, Parnell, and Pope, he perhaps makes up for it by greater force and directness. But the piece is mainly remarkable because, as he tells us, Addison made him "blot out four score lines, add four score, and alter four score," though the whole consisted of only 178 verses.<sup>1</sup> Swift showed a complete absence of the ordinary touchiness of authors. His indifference to literary fame as to its pecuniary rewards was conspicuous. He was too proud, as he truly said, to be vain. His sense of dignity restrained him from petty sensibility. When a clergyman regretted some emendations which had been hastily suggested by himself and accepted by Swift, Swift replied that it mattered little, and that he would not give grounds, by adhering to his own opinion, for an imputation of vanity. If Swift was egotistical, there was nothing petty even in his egotism.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Forster found the original MS., and gives us the exact numbers: 96 omitted, 44 added, 22 altered. The whole was 178 lines after the omissions.

A piece of faecionsness started by Swift in the last of his visits to London has become famous. A cobbler called Partridge had set up as an astrologer, and published predictions in the style of *Zadkiel's Almanac*. Swift amused himself in the beginning of 1708 by publishing a rival prediction under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff. Bickerstaff professed that he would give verifiable and definite predictions, instead of the vague oracular utterances of his rival. The first of these predictions announced the approaching death, at 11 p.m., on March 29, of Partridge himself. Directly after that day appeared a letter "to a person of honour," announcing the fulfilment of the prediction by the death of Partridge within four hours of the date assigned. Partridge took up the matter seriously, and indignantly declared himself, in a new almanac, to be alive. Bickerstaff retorted in a humorous Vindication, arguing that Partridge was really dead; that his continuing to write almanacs was no proof to the contrary, and so forth. All the wits, great and small, took part in the joke: the Portuguese Inquisition, so it is said, were sufficiently taken in to condemn Bickerstaff to the flames; and Steele, who started the *Tatler* whilst the joke was afoot, adopted the name of Bickerstaff for the imaginary author. Dutiful biographers agree to admire this as a wonderful piece of fun. The joke does not strike me, I will confess, as of very exquisite flavour; but it is a curious illustration of a peculiarity to which Swift owed some of his power, and which seems to have suggested many of the mythical anecdotes about him. His humour very easily took the form of practical joking. In those days the mutual understanding of the little clique of wits made it easy to get a hoax taken up by the whole body. They joined to persecute poor Partridge, as the undergraduates at a

modern college might join to tease some obnoxious tradesman. Swift's peculiar irony fitted him to take the lead; for it implied a singular pleasure in realizing the minute consequences of some given hypothesis, and working out in detail some grotesque or striking theory. The love of practical jokes, which seems to have accompanied him through life, is one of the less edifying manifestations of the tendency. It seems as if he could not quite enjoy a jest till it was translated into actual tangible fact. The fancy does not suffice him till it is realized. If the story about "dearly beloved Roger" be true, it is a case in point. Sydney Smith would have been content with suggesting that such a thing might be done. Swift was not satisfied till he had done it. And even if it be not true, it has been accepted because it is like the truth. We could almost fancy that if Swift had thought of Charles Lamb's famous quibble about walking on an empty stomach ("on whose empty stomach?") he would have liked to carry it out by an actual promenade on real human flesh and blood.

Swift became intimate with Irish Viceroy's, and with the most famous wits and statesmen of London. But he received none of the good things bestowed so freely upon contemporary men of letters. In 1705 Addison, his intimate friend, and his junior by five years, had sprung from a garret to a comfortable office. Other men passed Swift in the race. He notes significantly, in 1708, that "a young fellow," a friend of his, had just received a sinecure of 400*l.* a year, as an addition to another of 300*l.* Towards the end of 1704 he had already complained that he got "nothing but the good words and wishes of a decayed ministry, whose lives and mine will probably wear out before they can serve either my little



hopes, or their own ambition." Swift still remained in his own district, "a hedge-parson," flattered, caressed, and neglected. And yet he held,<sup>1</sup> that it was easier to provide for ten men in the Church than for one in a civil employment. To understand his claims, and the modes by which he used to enforce them, we must advert briefly to the state of English politics. A clear apprehension of Swift's relation to the ministers of the day is essential to any satisfactory estimate of his career.

The reign of Queen Anne was a period of violent party spirit. At the end of 1703 Swift humorously declares that even the cats and dogs were infected with the Whig and Tory animosity. The "very ladies" were divided into High Church and Low, and, "out of zeal for religion, had hardly time to say their prayers." The gentle satire of Addison and Steele, in the *Spectator*, confirms Swift's contemporary lamentations as to the baneful effects of party zeal upon private friendship. And yet it has been often said that the party issues were hopelessly confounded. Lord Stanhope argues—and he is only repeating what Swift frequently said—that Whigs and Tories had exchanged principles.<sup>2</sup> In later years Swift constantly asserted that he attacked the Whigs in defence of the true Whig faith. He belonged, indeed, to a party almost limited to himself: for he avowed himself to be the anomalous hybrid, a High-church Whig. We, must therefore, inquire a little further into the true meaning of the accepted shibboleths.

Swift had come from Ireland saturated with the preju-

<sup>1</sup> See letter to Peterborough, May 6, 1711.

<sup>2</sup> In most of their principles the two parties seem to have shifted opinions since their institution in the reign of Charles II.—*Examiner*, No. 43, May 31, 1711.

dices of his caste. The highest Tory in Ireland, as he told William, would make a tolerable Whig in England. For the English colonists in Ireland the expulsion of James was a condition, not of party success but of existence. Swift, whose personal and family interests were identified with those of the English in Ireland, could repudiate James with his whole heart, and heartily accepted the Revolution; he was, therefore, a Whig, so far as attachment to "Revolution principles" was the distinctive badge of Whiggism. Swift despised James, and he hated Popery from first to last. Contempt and hatred with him were never equivocal, and in this case they sprang as much from his energetic sense as from his early prejudices. Jacobitism was becoming a sham, and therefore offensive to men of insight into facts. Its ghost walked the earth for some time longer, and at times aped reality; but it meant mere sentimentalism or vague discontent. Swift, when asked to explain its persistence, said that when he was in pain and lying on his right side, he naturally turned to his left, though he might have no prospect of benefit from the change.<sup>1</sup> The country squire, who drank healths to the king over the water, was tired of the Georges, and shared the fears of the typical Western, that his lands were in danger of being sent to Hanover. The Stuarts had been in exile long enough to win the love of some of their subjects. Sufficient time had elapsed to erase from short memories the true cause of their fall. Squires and parsons did not cherish less warmly the privileges in defence of which they had sent the last Stuart king about his business. Rather the privileges had become so much a matter of course that the very fear of any assault seemed visionary. The Jacobitism of later days

<sup>1</sup> Delany, p. 211.

did not mean any discontent with Revolution principles, but dislike to the Revolution dynasty. The Whig, indeed, argued with true party logic that every Tory must be a Jacobite, and every Jacobite a lover of arbitrary rule. In truth, a man might wish to restore the Stuarts without wishing to restore the principles for which the Stuarts had been expelled: he might be a Jacobite without being a lover of arbitrary rule; and still more easily might he be a Tory without being a Jacobite. Swift constantly asserted—and in a sense with perfect truth—that the revolution had been carried out in defence of the Church of England, and chiefly by attached members of the Church. To be a sound Churchman was, so far, to be pledged against the family which had assailed the Church.

Swift's Whiggism would naturally be strengthened by his personal relation with Temple, and with various Whigs whom he came to know through Temple. But Swift, I have said, was a Churchman as well as a Whig; as staunch a Churchman as Laud, and as ready, I imagine, to have gone to the block or to prison in defence of his Church as any one from the days of Laud to those of Mr. Green. For a time his zeal was not called into play; the war absorbed all interests. Marlborough and Godolphin, the great heads of the family clique which dominated poor Queen Anne, had begun as Tories and Churchmen, supported by a Tory majority. The war had been dictated by a national sentiment; but from the beginning it was really a Whig war: for it was a war against Louis, Popery, and the Pretender. And thus the great men who were identified with the war began slowly to edge over to the party whose principles were the war principles; who hated the Pope, the Pretender, and the King of France, as their ancestors had hated Philip of Spain, or as

their descendants hated Napoleon. The war meant alliance with the Dutch, who had been the martyrs and were the enthusiastic defenders of toleration and free-thought; and it forced English ministers, almost in spite of themselves, into the most successful piece of statesmanship of the century, the Union with Scotland. Now, Swift hated the Dutch and hated the Scotch with a vehemence that becomes almost ludicrous. The margin of his *Burnet* was scribbled over with execrations against the Scots. "Most damnable Scots," "Scots hell-hounds," "Scotch dogs," "cursed Scots still," "hellish Scottish dogs," are a few of his spontaneous flowers of speech. His prejudices are the prejudices of his class intensified as all passions were intensified in him. Swift regarded Scotchmen as the most virulent and dangerous of all Dissenters; they were represented to him by the Irish Presbyterians, the natural rivals of his Church. He reviled the Union, because it implied the recognition by the State of a sect which regarded the Church of England as little better than a manifestation of Antichrist. And, in this sense, Swift's sympathies were with the Tories. For, in truth, the real contrast between Whigs and Tories, in respect of which there is a perfect continuity of principle, depended upon the fact that the Whigs reflected the sentiments of the middle classes, the "monied men" and the Dissenters; whilst the Tories reflected the sentiments of the land and the Church. Each party might occasionally adopt the commonplaces or accept the measures generally associated with its antagonists; but at bottom the distinction was between squire and parson on one side, tradesman and banker on the other.

The domestic politics of the reign of Anne turned upon this difference. The history is a history of the gradual

shifting of government to the Whig side, and the growing alienation of the clergy and squires, accelerated by a system which caused the fiscal burden of the war to fall chiefly upon the land. Bearing this in mind, Swift's conduct is perfectly intelligible. His first plunge into politics was in 1701. Poor King William was in the thick of the perplexities caused by the mysterious perverseness of English politicians. The King's ministers, supported by the House of Lords, had lost the command of the House of Commons. It had not yet come to be understood that the Cabinet was to be a mere committee of the House of Commons. The personal wishes of the sovereign, and the alliances and jealousies of great courtiers, were still highly important factors in the political situation; as, indeed, both the composition and the subsequent behaviour of the Commons could be controlled to a considerable extent by legitimate and other influences of the Crown. The Commons, unable to make their will obeyed, proceeded to impeach Somers and other ministers. A bitter struggle took place between the two Houses, which was suspended by the summer recess. At this crisis Swift published his *Discourse on the Dissensions in Athens and Rome*. The abstract political argument is as good or as bad as nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand political treatises—that is to say, a repetition of familiar commonplaces; and the mode of applying precedents from ancient politics would now strike us as pedantic. The pamphlet, however, is dignified and well-written, and the application to the immediate difficulty is pointed. His argument is, briefly, that the House of Commons is showing a factions, tyrannical temper, identical in its nature with that of a single tyrant and as dangerous in its consequences; that

it has, therefore, ceased to reflect the opinions of its constituents, and has endangered the sacred balance between the three primary elements of our constitution, upon which its safe working depends.

The pamphlet was from beginning to end a remonstrance against the impeachments, and therefore a defence, of the Whig lords, for whom sufficiently satisfactory parallels are vaguely indicated in Pericles, Aristides, and so forth. It was "greedily bought;" it was attributed to Somers and to the great Whig bishop, Burnet, who had to disown it for fear of an impeachment. An Irish bishop, it is said, called Swift a "very positive young man" for doubting Burnet's authorship; whereupon Swift had to claim it for himself. Youthful vanity, according to his own account, induced him to make the admission, which would certainly not have been withheld by adult discretion. For the result was that Somers, Halifax, and Sunderland, three of the great Whig junto, took him up, often admitted him to their intimacy, and were liberal in promising him "the greatest preferments" should they come into power. Before long Swift had another opportunity which was also a temptation. The Tory House of Commons had passed the bill against occasional conformity. Ardent partisans generally approved this bill, as it was clearly annoying to Dissenters. It was directed against the practice of qualifying for office by taking the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England without permanently conforming. It might be fairly argued—as Defoe argued, though with questionable sincerity—that such a temporary compliance would be really injurious to Dissent. The Church would profit by such an exhibition of the flexibility of its opponents' principles. Passions were too much heated for such arguments; and

in the winter of 1703-'04, people, says Swift, talked of nothing else. He was "mightily urged by some great people" to publish his opinion. An argument from a powerful writer, and a clergyman, against the bill would be very useful to his Whig friends. But Swift's High Church prejudices made him hesitate. The Whig leaders assured him that nothing should induce them to vote against the bill if they expected its rejection to hurt the Church or "do kindness to the Dissenters." But it is precarious to argue from the professed intentions of statesmen to their real motives, and yet more precarious to argue to the consequences of their actions. Swift knew not what to think. He resolved to think no more. At last he made up his mind to write against the bill, but he made it up too late. The bill failed to pass, and Swift felt a relief in dismissing this delicate subject. He might still call himself a Whig, and exult in the growth of Whiggism. Meanwhile he persuaded himself that the Dissenters and their troubles were beneath his notice.

They were soon to come again to the front. Swift came to London at the end of 1707, charged with a mission on behalf of his Church. Queen Anne's Bounty was founded in 1704. The Crown restored to the Church the first-fruits and tenths which Henry VIII. had diverted from the papal into his own treasury, and appropriated them to the augmentation of small livings. It was proposed to get the same boon for the Church of Ireland. The whole sum amounted to about 1000*l.* a year, with a possibility of an additional 2000*l.* Swift, who had spoken of this to King, the Archbishop of Dublin, was now to act as solicitor on behalf of the Irish clergy, and hoped to make use of his influence with Somers and Sunderland.

The negotiation was to give him more trouble than he foresaw, and initiate him, before he had done with it, into certain secrets of cabinets and councils which he as yet very imperfectly appreciated. His letters to King, continued over a long period, throw much light on his motives. Swift was in England from November, 1707, till March, 1709. The year 1708 was for him, as he says, a year of suspense, a year of vast importance to his career, and marked by some characteristic utterances. He hoped to use his influence with Somers. Somers, though still out of office, was the great oracle of the Whigs, whilst Sunderland was already Secretary of State. In January, 1708, the bishopric of Waterford was vacant, and Somers tried to obtain the see for Swift. The attempt failed, but the political catastrophe of the next month gave hopes that the influence of Somers would soon be paramount. Harley, the prince of wire-pulling and back-stair intrigue, had exploded the famous Masham plot. Though this project failed, it was "reckoned," says Swift, "the greatest piece of court skill that has been acted many years." Queen Anne was to take advantage of the growing alienation of the Church party to break her bondage to the Marlboroughs, and change her ministers. But the attempt was premature, and discomfited its devisers. Harley was turned out of office; Marlborough and Godolphin came into alliance with the Whig junto; and the Queen's bondage seemed more complete than ever. A cabinet crisis in those days, however, took a long time. It was not till October, 1708, that the Whigs, backed by a new Parliament and strengthened by the victory of Oudenarde, were in full enjoyment of power. Somers at last became President of the Council and Wharton Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Wharton's appointment was specially significant



for Swift. He was, as even Whigs admitted, a man of infamous character, redeemed only by energy and unflinching fidelity to his party. He was licentious and a free-thinker; his infidelity showed itself in the grossest outrages against common decency. If he had any religious principle it was a preference of Presbyterians, as sharing his antipathy to the Church. No man could be more radically antipathetic to Swift. Meanwhile, the success of the Whigs meant, in the first instance, the success of the men from whom Swift had promises of preferment. He tried to use his influence as he had proposed. In June he had an interview about the first-fruits with Godolphin, to whom he had been recommended by Somers and Sunderland. Godolphin replied in vague officialisms, suggesting with studied vagueness that the Irish clergy must show themselves more grateful than the English. His meaning, as Swift thought, was that the Irish clergy should consent to a repeal of the Test Act, regarded by them and by him as the essential bulwark of the Church. Nothing definite, however, was said; and meanwhile Swift, though he gave no signs of compliance, continued to hope for his own preferment. When the final triumph of the Whigs came he was still hoping, though with obvious qualms as to his position. He begged King (in November, 1708) to believe in his fidelity to the Church. Offers might be made to him, but "no prospect of making my fortune shall ever prevail on me to go against what becomes a man of conscience and truth, and an entire friend to the Established Church." He hoped that he might be appointed secretary to a projected embassy to Vienna, a mission which would put him beyond the region of domestic politics.

Meanwhile he had published certain tracts which may

be taken as the manifesto of his faith at the time when his principles were being most severely tested. Would he or would he not sacrifice his Churchmanship to the interests of the party with which he was still allied? There can be no doubt that by an open declaration of Whig principles in Church matters—such a declaration, say, as would have satisfied Burnet—he would have qualified himself for preferment, and have been in a position to command the fulfilment of the promises made by Somers and Sunderland.

The writings in question were the *Argument to prove the Inconvenience of Abolishing Christianity*; a *Project for the Advancement of Religion*; and the *Sentiments of a Church of England Man*. The first, as I have said, was meant to show that the satirical powers which had given offence in the *Tale of a Tub* could be applied without equivocation in defence of Christianity. The *Project* is a very forcible exposition of a text which is common enough in all ages—namely, that the particular age of the writer is one of unprecedented corruption. It shares, however, with Swift's other writings, the merit of downright sincerity, which convinces us that the author is not repeating platitudes, but giving his own experience and speaking from conviction. His proposals for a reform, though he must have felt them to be chimerical, are conceived in the spirit common in the days before people had begun to talk about the state and the individual. He assumes throughout that a vigorous action of the court and the government will reform the nation. He does not contemplate the now commonplace objection that such a revival of the Puritanical system might simply stimulate hypocrisy. He expressly declares that religion may be brought into fashion "by the power of the administration," and assumes

that to bring religion into fashion is the same thing as to make men religious. This view—suitable enough to Swift's imperious temper—was also the general assumption of the time. A suggestion thrown out in his pamphlet is generally said to have led to the scheme soon afterwards carried out under Harley's administration for building fifty new churches in London. A more personal touch is Swift's complaint that the clergy sacrifice their influence by "sequestering themselves" too much, and forming a separate caste. This reads a little like an implied defence of himself for frequenting London coffee-houses, when cavillers might have argued that he should be at Laracor. But, like all Swift's utterances, it covered a settled principle. I have already noticed this peculiarity, which he shows elsewhere when describing himself as

"A clergyman of special note  
For slumming others of his coat;  
Which made his brethren of the gown  
Take care betimes to run him down."

The *Sentiments of a Church of England Man* is more significant. It is a summary of his unvarying creed. In politics he is a good Whig. He interprets the theory of passive obedience as meaning obedience to the "legislative power;" not therefore to the King specially; and he deliberately accepts the Revolution on the plain ground of the *salus populi*. His leading maxim is that the "administration cannot be placed in too few hands nor the Legislature in too many." But this political liberality is associated with unhesitating Churchmanship. Sects are mischievous: to say that they are mischievous is to say that they ought to be checked in their beginning; where they exist they should be tolerated, but not to the injury of the Church.

And hence he reaches his leading principle that a "government cannot give them (seets) too much ease, nor trust them with too little power." Such doctrines clearly and tersely laid down were little to the taste of the Whigs, who were more anxious than ever to conciliate the Dissenters. But it was not till the end of the year that Swift applied his abstract theory to a special case. There had been various symptoms of a disposition to relax the Test Acts in Ireland. The appointment of Wharton to be Lord Lieutenant was enough to alarm Swift, even though his friend Addison was to be Wharton's secretary. In December, 1708, he published a pamphlet, ostensibly a letter from a member of the Irish to a member of the English House of Commons, in which the necessity of keeping up the Test was vigorously enforced. It is the first of Swift's political writings in which we see his true power. In those just noticed he is forced to take an impartial tone. He is trying to reconcile himself to his alliance with the Whigs, or to reconcile the Whigs to their protection of himself. He speaks as a moderator, and poses as the dignified moralist above all party feeling. But in this letter he throws the reins upon his humour, and strikes his opponents full in the face. From his own point of view the pamphlet is admirable. He quotes Cowley's verse :

"Forbid it, Heaven, my life should be  
Weighed by thy least conveniency."

The Irish, by which he means the English, and the English exclusively of the Scotch, in Ireland, represent this enthusiastic lover, and are called upon to sacrifice themselves to the political conveniency of the Whig party. Swift expresses his usual wrath against the Scots, who are eating up the land, boasts of the loyalty of the Irish

Church, and taunts the Presbyterians with their tyranny in former days. Am I to be forced, he asks, "to keep my chaplain disguised like my butler, and steal to prayers in a back room, as my grandfather used in those times when the Church of England was malignant?" Is not this a ripping up of old quarrels? Ought not all Protestants to unite against Papists? No, the enemy is the same as ever. "It is agreed among naturalists that a lion is a larger, a stronger, and more dangerous enemy than a cat; yet if a man were to have his choice, either a lion at his foot fast bound with three or four chains, his teeth drawn out, and his claws pared to the quick, or an angry cat in full liberty at his throat, he would take no long time to determine." The bound lion means the Catholic natives, whom Swift declares to be as "inconsiderable as the women and children."

Meanwhile the long first-fruits negotiation was languidly proceeding. At last it seemed to be achieved. Lord Pembroke, the outgoing Lord Lieutenant, sent Swift word that the grant had been made. Swift reported his success to Archbishop King with a very pardonable touch of complacency at his "very little" merit in the matter. But a bitter disappointment followed. The promise made had never been fulfilled. In March, 1709, Swift had again to write to the Archbishop, recounting his failure, his attempt to remonstrate with Wharton, the new Lord Lieutenant, and the too certain collapse of the whole business. The failure was complete; the promised boon was not granted, and Swift's chance of a bishopric had pretty well vanished. Halifax, the great Whig Mæcenas, and the Bafo of Pope, wrote to him in his retirement at Dublin, declaring that he had "entered into a confederacy with Mr. Addison" to urge Swift's claims upon Government, and

speaking of the declining health of South, then a prebendary of Westminster. Swift endorsed this: "I look up this letter as a true original of courtiers and court promises," and wrote in a volume he had begged from the same person that it was the only favour "he ever received from him or his party." In the last months of his stay he had suffered cruelly from his old giddiness, and he went to Ireland, after a visit to his mother in Leicester, in sufficiently gloomy mood; retired to Laracor, and avoided any intercourse with the authorities at the Castle, excepting always Addison.

To this it is necessary to add one remark. Swift's version of the story is substantially that which I have given, and it is everywhere confirmed by contemporary letters. It shows that he separated from the Whig party when at the height of their power, and separated because he thought them opposed to the Church principles which he advocated from first to last. It is most unjust, therefore, to speak of Swift as a deserter from the Whigs, because he afterwards joined the Church party, which shared all his strongest prejudices. I am so far from seeing any ground for such a charge, that I believe that few men have ever adhered more strictly to the principles with which they have started. But such charges have generally an element of truth; and it is easy here to point out what was the really weak point in Swift's position.

Swift's writings, with one or two trifling exceptions, were originally anonymous. As they were very apt to produce warrants for the apprehension of publisher and author, the precaution was natural enough in later years. The mask was often merely ostensible; a sufficient protection against legal prosecution, but in reality covering an open secret. When in the *Sentiments of a Church of*

*England Man* Swift professes to conceal his name carefully, it may be doubted how far this is to be taken seriously. But he went much further in the letter on the Test Act. He inserted a passage intended really to blind his adversaries by a suggestion that Dr. Swift was likely to write in favour of abolishing the Test; and he even complains to King of the unfairness of this treatment. His assault, therefore, upon the supposed Whig policy was clandestine. This may possibly be justified; he might even urge that he was still a Whig, and was warning ministers against measures which they had not yet adopted, and from which, as he thinks, they may still be deterred by an alteration of the real Irish feeling.<sup>1</sup> He complained afterwards that he was ruined—that is, as to his chances of preferment from the party—by the suspicion of his authorship of this tract. That is to say, he was “ruined” by the discovery of his true sentiments. This is to admit that he was still ready to accept preferment from the men whose supposed policy he was bitterly attacking, and that he resented their alienation as a grievance. The resentment, indeed, was most bitter and pertinacious. He turned savagely upon his old friends because they would not make him a bishop. The answer from their point of view was conclusive. He had made a bitter and covert attack, and he could not at once claim a merit from Churchmen for defending the Church against the Whigs, and revile the Whigs for not rewarding him. But inconsistency of this kind is characteristic of Swift. He thought the Whigs scoundrels for not patronizing him, and not the less scoundrels because their conduct was consistent with their own scoundrelly principles. People who differ from me must be wicked, argued this consistent egotist,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King, January 6, 1709.

and their refusal to reward me is only an additional wickedness. The case appeared to him as though he had been a Nathan sternly warning a David of his sins, and for that reason deprived of honour. David could not have urged his sinful desires as an excuse for ill-treatment of Nathan. And Swift was inclined to class indifference to the welfare of the Church as a sin even in an avowed Whig. Yet he had to ordinary minds forfeited any right to make non-fulfilment a grievance, when he ought to have regarded performance as a disgrace.



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## CHAPTER V.

### THE HARLEY ADMINISTRATION.

IN the autumn of 1710 Swift was approaching the end of his forty-third year. A man may well feel at forty-two that it is high time that a post should have been assigned to him. Should an opportunity be then, and not till then, put in his way, he feels that he is throwing for heavy stakes; and that failure, if failure should follow, would be irretrievable. Swift had been longing vainly for an opening. In the remarkable letter (of April, 1722) from which I have quoted the anecdote of the lost fish, he says that "all my endeavours from a boy to distinguish myself were only for want of a great title and fortune, that I might be used like a lord by those who have an opinion of my parts; whether right or wrong is no great matter; and so the reputation of wit or great learning does the office of a blue riband or of a coach and six horses." The phrase betrays Swift's scornful self-mockery; that inverted hypocrisy which led him to call his motives by their worst names, and to disavow what he might have been sorry to see denied by others. But, like all that Swift says of himself, it also expresses a genuine conviction. Swift was ambitious, and his ambition meant an absolute need of imposing his will upon others. He was a man born to rule; not to affect thought, but to control

conduct. He was, therefore, unable to find full occupation, though he might seek occasional distraction, in literary pursuits. Archbishop King, who had a strange knack of irritating his correspondent—not, it seems, without intention—annoyed Swift intensely in 1711 by advising him (most superfluously) to get preferment, and with that view to write a serious treatise upon some theological question. Swift, who was in the thick of his great political struggle, answered that it was absurd to ask a man floating at sea what he meant to do when he got ashore. “Let him get there first and rest and dry himself, and then look about him.” To find firm footing amidst the welter of political intrigues was Swift’s first object. Once landed in a deanery he might begin to think about writing; but he never attempted, like many men in his position, to win preferment through literary achievements. To a man of such a temperament his career must so far have been cruelly vexations. We are generally forced to judge of a man’s life by a few leading incidents; and we may be disposed to infer too hastily that the passions roused on those critical occasions coloured the whole tenor of every-day existence. Doubtless Swift was not always fretting over fruitless prospects. He was often eating his dinner in peace and quiet, and even amusing himself with watching the Moor Park rooks or the Laracor trout. Yet it is true that, so far as a man’s happiness depends upon the consciousness of a satisfactory employment of his faculties, whether with a view to glory or solid comfort, Swift had abundant causes of discontent. The “conjured spirit” was still weaving ropes of sand. For ten years he had been dependent upon Temple, and his struggles to get upon his own legs had been fruitless. On Temple’s death he managed when past thirty to wring

from fortune a position of bare independence, not of satisfying activity—he had not gained a fulcrum from which to move the world—but only a bare starting-point whence he might continue to work. The promises from great men had come to nothing. He might perhaps have realized them, could he have consented to be faithless to his dearest convictions; the consciousness that he had so far sacrificed his position to his principles gave him no comfort, though it nourished his pride. His enforced reticence produced an irritation against the ministers whom it had been intended to conciliate, which deepened into bitter resentment for their neglect. The year and a half passed in Ireland during 1709–'10 was a period in which his day-dreams must have had a background of disappointed hopes. "I stayed above half the time," he says, "in one scurvy acre of ground, and I always left it with regret." He shut himself up at Laracor, and nourished a growing indignation against the party represented by Wharton.

Yet events were moving rapidly in England, and opening a new path for his ambition. The Whigs were in full possession of power, though at the price of a growing alienation of all who were weary of a never-ending war, or hostile to the Whig policy in Church and State. The leaders, though warned by Souers, fancied that they would strengthen their position by attacking the defeated enemy. The prosecution of Sacheverell in the winter of 1709–'10, if not directed by personal spite, was meant to intimidate the high-flying Tories. It enabled the Whig leaders to indulge in a vast quantity of admirable constitutional rhetoric; but it supplied the High Church party with a martyr and a cry, and gave the needed impetus to the growing discontent. The Queen took heart to revolt

against the Marlboroughs; the Whig Ministry were turned out of office; Harley became Chancellor of the Exchequer in August; and the Parliament was dissolved in September, 1710, to be replaced in November by one in which the Tories had an overwhelming majority.

We are left to guess at the feelings with which Swift contemplated these changes. Their effect upon his personal prospects was still problematical. In spite of his wrathful retirement, there was no open breach between him and the Whigs. He had no personal relations with the new possessors of power. Harley and St. John, the two chiefs, were unknown to him. And, according to his own statement, he started for England once more with great reluctance in order again to take up the weary first-fruits negociation. Wharton, whose hostility had intercepted the proposed bounty, went with his party, and was succeeded by the High Church Duke of Ormond. The political aspects were propitious for a renewed application, and Swift's previous employment pointed him out as the most desirable agent.

And now Swift suddenly comes into full light. For two or three years we can trace his movements day by day; follow the development of his hopes and fears; and see him more clearly than he could be seen by almost any of his contemporaries. The famous *Journal to Stella*—a series of letters written to Esther Johnson and Mrs. Dingley, from September, 1710, till April, 1713—is the main and central source of information. Before telling the story a word or two may be said of the nature of this document, one of the most interesting that ever threw light upon the history of a man of genius. The *Journal* is one of the very few that were clearly written without the faintest thought of publication. There is no

indication of any such intention in the *Journal to Stella*. It never occurred to Swift that it could ever be seen by any but the persons primarily interested. The journal rather shuns politics; they will not interest his correspondent, and he is afraid of the post-office clerks—then and long afterwards often employed as spies. Interviews with ministers have scarcely more prominence than the petty incidents of his daily life. We are told that he discussed business, but the discussion is not reported. Much more is omitted which might have been of the highest interest. We hear of meetings with Addison; not a phrase of Addison's is vouchsafed to us; we go to the door of Harley or St. John; we get no distinct vision of the men who were the centres of all observation. Nor, again, are there any of those introspective passages which give to some journals the interest of a confession. What, then, is the interest of the *Journal to Stella*? One element of strange and singular fascination, to be considered hereafter, is the prattle with his correspondent. For the rest, our interest depends in great measure upon the reflections with which we must ourselves clothe the bare skeleton of facts. In reading the *Journal to Stella* we may fancy ourselves waiting in a parliamentary lobby during an excited debate. One of the chief actors hurries out at intervals; pours out a kind of hasty bulletin; tells of some thrilling incident, or indicates some threatening symptom; more frequently he seeks to relieve his anxieties by indulging in a little personal gossip, and only interjects such comments upon politics as can be compressed into a hasty ejaculation, often, as may be supposed, of the imprecatory kind. Yet he unconsciously betrays his hopes and fears; he is fresh from the thick of the fight, and we perceive that his nerves are still quivering, and

that his phrases are glowing with the ardour of the struggle. Hopes and fears are long since faded, and the struggle itself is now but a war of phantoms. Yet, with the help of the *Journal* and contemporary documents, we can revive for the moment the decaying images, and cheat ourselves into the momentary persuasion that the fate of the world depends upon Harley's success, as we now hold it to depend upon Mr. Gladstone's.

Swift reached London on September 7, 1719; the political revolution was in full action, though Parliament was not yet dissolved. The Whigs were "ravished to see him;" they clutched at him, he says, like drowning men at a twig, and the great men made him their "clumsy apologies." Godolphin was "short, dry, and morose;" Somers tried to make explanations, which Swift received with studied coldness. The ever-courteous Halifax gave him dinners, and asked him to drink to the resurrection of the Whigs, which Swift refused unless he would add "to their reformation." Halifax persevered in his attentions, and was always entreating him to go down to Hampton Court; "which will cost me a guinea to his servants, and twelve shillings coach hire, and I will see him hanged first." Swift, however, retained his old friendship with the wits of the party; dined with Addison at his retreat in Chelsea, and sent a trifle or two to the *Tatler*. The elections began in October; Swift had to drive through a rabble of Westminster electors, judiciously agreeing with their sentiments to avoid dead cats and broken glasses; and though Addison was elected ("I believe," says Swift, "if he had a mind to be chosen king, he would hardly be refused"), the Tories were triumphant in every direction. And, meanwhile, the Tory leaders were delightfully civil.

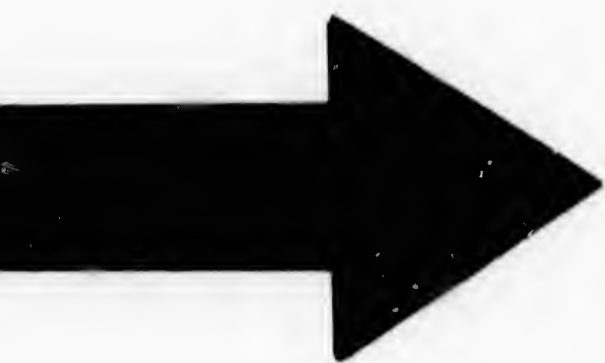
On the 4th of October Swift was introduced to Harley, getting himself described (with undeniably truth) "as a discontented person, who was ill used for not being Whig enough." The poor Whigs lamentably confess, he says, their ill usage of him, "but I mind them not." Their confession came too late. Harley had received him with open arms, and won, not only Swift's adherence, but his warm personal attachment. The fact is indisputable, though rather curious. Harley appears to us as a shifty and feeble politician, an inarticulate orator, wanting in principles and resolution, who made it his avowed and almost only rule of conduct that a politician should live from hand to mouth.<sup>1</sup> Yet his prolonged influence in Parliament seems to indicate some personal attraction, which was perceptible to his contemporaries, though rather puzzling to us. All Swift's panegyrics have the secret in obscurity. Harley seems, indeed, to have been eminently respectable and decorously religious, capable in personal intercourse, and able to say nothing in such a way as to suggest profundity instead of emptiness. His reputation as a party manager was immense; and is partly justified by his quick recognition of Swift's extraordinary qualifications. He had inferior scribblers in his pay, including, as we remember with regret, the shifty Defoe. But he wanted a man of genuine ability and character. Some months later the ministers told Swift that they had been afraid of none but him, and resolved to have him.

They got him. Harley had received him "with the greatest kindness and respect imaginable." Three days later (October 7) the first-fruits business is discussed, and Harley received the proposals as warmly as became a friend of the Church, besides overwhelming Swift with

<sup>1</sup> Swift to King, July 12, 1711.

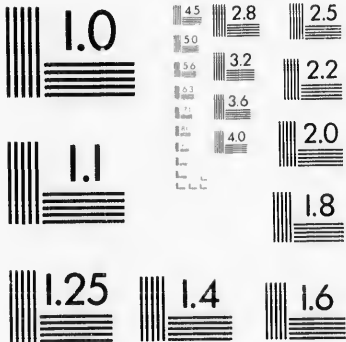






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civilities. Swift is to be introduced to St. John; to dine with Harley next Tuesday; and, after an interview of four hours, the minister sets him down at St. James's Coffee-house in a hackney coach. "All this is odd and comical!" exclaims Swift; "he knew my Christian name very well," and, as we hear next day, begged Swift to come to him often, but not to his levée: "that was not a place for friends to meet." On the 10th of October, within a week from the first introduction, Harley promises to get the first-fruits business, over which the Whigs had haggled for years, settled by the following Sunday. Swift's exultation breaks out. On the 14th he declares that he stands ten times better with the new people than ever he did with the old, and is forty times more caressed. The triumph is sharpened by revenge. Nothing, he says, of the sort was ever compassed so soon; "and purely done by my personal credit with Mr. Harley, who is so excessively obliging that I know not what to make of it, unless to show the rascals of the other side that they used a man unworthily who deserved better." A passage on November 8 sums up his sentiments. "Why," he says in answer to something from Stella, "should the Whigs think I came from Ireland to leave them? Sure my journey was no secret! I protest sincerely, I did all I could to hinder it, as the Dean can tell you, though now I do not repent it. But who the devil cares what they think? Am I under obligations in the least to any of them all? Rot them for ungrateful dogs; I will make them repent their usage before I leave this place." The thirst for vengeance may not be edifying; the political zeal was clearly not of the purest; but, in truth, Swift's party prejudices and his personal resentments are fused into indissoluble unity. Hatred of Whig principles and resentment of Whig "ill usage" of himself,

are one and the same thing. Meanwhile, Swift was able (on November 4) to announce his triumph to the Archbishop. He was greatly annoyed by an incident of which he must also have seen the humorous side. The Irish bishops had bethought themselves after Swift's departure that he was too much of a Whig to be an effective solicitor. They proposed, therefore, to take the matter out of his hands and apply to Ormond, the new Lord Lieutenant. Swift replied indignantly; the thing was done, however, and he took care to let it be known that the whole credit belonged to Harley, and of course, in a subordinate sense, to himself. Official formalities were protracted for months longer, and formed one excuse for Swift's continued absence from Ireland; but we need not trouble ourselves with the matter further.

Swift's unprecedented leap into favour meant more than a temporary success. The intimacy with Harley and with St. John rapidly developed. Within a few months Swift had forced his way into the very innermost circle of official authority. A notable quarrel seems to have given the final impulse to his career. In February, 1711, Harley offered him a fifty-pound note. This was virtually to treat him as a hireling instead of an ally. Swift resented the offer as an intolerable affront. He refused to be reconciled without ample apology and after long entreaties. His pride was not appeased for ten days, when the reconciliation was sealed by an invitation from Harley to a Saturday dinner.<sup>1</sup> On Saturdays the Lord Keeper (Harcourt) and the Secretary of State (St. John) dined

<sup>1</sup> These dinners, it may be noticed, seem to have been held on Thursdays when Harley had to attend the court at Windsor. This may lead to some confusion with the Brothers' Club, which met on Thursdays during the parliamentary session.

alone with Harley; "and at last," says Swift, in reporting the event, "they have consented to let me among them on that day." He goes next day, and already chides Lord Rivers for presuming to intrude into the sacred circle. "They call me nothing but Jonathan," he adds; "and I said I believed they would leave me Jonathan, as they found me." These dinners were continued, though they became less select. Harley called Saturday his "whipping-day," and Swift was the heartiest wielder of the lash. From the same February, Swift began to dine regularly with St. John every Sunday; and we may note it as some indication of the causes of his later preference of Harley, that on one occasion he has to leave St. John early. The company, he says, were in constraint, because he would suffer no man to swear or talk indecently in his presence.

Swift had thus conquered the ministry at a blow. What services did he render in exchange? His extraordinary influence seems to have been due in a measure to sheer force of personal ascendancy. No man could come into contact with Swift without feeling that magnetic influence. But he was also doing a more tangible service. In thus admitting Swift to their intimacy Harley and St. John were, in fact, paying homage to the rising power of the pen. Political writers had hitherto been hirelings, and often little better than spies. No preceding, and, we may add, no succeeding, writer ever achieved such a position by such means. The press has become more powerful as a whole, but no particular representative of the press has made such a leap into power. Swift came at the time when the influence of political writing was already great, and when the personal favour of a prominent minister could still work miracles. Harley made him a favourite of the old

stamp, to reward his supremacy in the use of the new weapon.

Swift had begun in October by avenging himself upon Godolphin's coldness, in a copy of Hudibrastic verses about the virtues of Sid Hamet the magician's rod—that is, the Treasurer's staff of office—which had a wonderful success. He fell savagely upon the hated Wharton not long after, in what he calls "a damned libellous pamphlet," of which 2000 copies were sold in two days. Libellous, indeed, is a faint epithet to describe a production which, if its statements be true, proves that Wharton deserved to be hunted from society. Charges of lying, treachery, atheism, Presbyterianism, debauchery, indecency, shameless indifference to his own reputation and his wife's, the vilest corruption and tyranny in his government, are piled upon his victim as thickly as they will stand. Swift does not expect to sting Wharton. "I neither love nor hate him," he says. "If I see him after this is published he will tell me 'that he is damnably mauled;' and then, with the easiest transition in the world, ask about the weather or the time of day." Wharton might possibly think that abuse of this kind might almost defeat itself by its own virulence. But Swift had already begun writings of a more statesmanlike and effective kind.

A paper war was already raging when Swift came to London. The *Examiner* had been started by St. John, with the help of Atterbury, Prior, and others; and opposed for a short time by Addison, in the *Whig Examiner*. Harley, after granting the first-fruits, had told Swift that the great want of the ministry was "some good pen," to keep up the spirits of the party. The *Examiner*, however, was in need of a firmer and more regular manager; and Swift took it in hand, his first weekly article appear-

ing November 2, 1710, his last on June 14, 1711. His *Examiners* achieved an immediate and unprecedented success. And yet, to say the truth, a modern reader is apt to find them decidedly heavy. No one, indeed, can fail to perceive the masculine sense, the terseness and precision of the utterance. And yet many writings which produced less effect are far more readable now. The explanation is simple, and applies to most of Swift's political writings. They are all rather acts than words. They are blows struck in a party contest, and their merit is to be gauged by their effect. Swift cares nothing for eloquence, or logic, or invective—and little, it must be added, for veracity—so long as he hits his mark. To judge him by a merely literary standard is to judge a fencer by the grace of his attitudes. Some high literary merits are implied in efficiency, as real grace is necessary to efficient fencing; but, in either case, a clumsy blow which reaches the heart is better than the most dexterous flourish in the air. Swift's eye is always on the end, as a good marksman looks at nothing but the target.

What, then, is Swift's aim in the *Examiner*? Mr. Kinglake has told us how a great journal throve by discovering what was the remark that was on every one's lips, and making the remark its own. Swift had the more dignified task of really striking the keynote for his party. He was to put the ministerial theory into that form in which it might seem to be the inevitable utterance of strong common-sense. Harley's supporters were to see in Swift's phrases just what they would themselves have said—if they had been able. The shrewd, sturdy, narrow prejudices of the average Englishman were to be pressed into the service of the ministry, by showing how admirably they could be clothed in the ministerial formulas.

The real question, again, as Swift saw, was the question of peace. Whig and Tory, as he said afterwards,<sup>1</sup> were really obsolete words. The true point at issue was peace or war. The purpose, therefore, was to take up his ground so that peace might be represented as the natural policy of the Church or Tory party, and war as the natural fruit of the selfish Whigs. It was necessary, at the same time, to show that this was not the utterance of high-flying Toryism or downright Jacobitism, but the plain dictate of a cool and impartial judgment. He was not to prove but to ta<sup>l</sup> or granted that the war had become intolerably burdensome; and to express the growing wish for peace in terms likely to conciliate the greatest number of supporters. He was to lay down the platform which could attract as many as possible, both of the zealous Tories and of the lukewarm Whigs.

Measured by their fitness for this end, the *Examiners* are admirable. Their very fitness for the end implies the absence of some qualities which would have been more attractive to posterity. Stirring appeals to patriotic sentiment may suit a Chatham rousing a nation to action; but Swift's aim is to check the extravagance in the name of selfish prosaic prudence. The philosophic reflections of Burke, had Swift been capable of such reflection, would have flown above the heads of his hearers. Even the polished and elaborate invective of Junius would have been out of place. No man, indeed, was a greater master of invective than Swift. He shows it in the *Examiners* by onslaughts upon the detested Wharton. He shows, too, that he is not restrained by any scruples when it comes in his way to attack his old patrons, and he adopts the current imputations upon their private character. He

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to a Whig Lord*, 1712.



could roundly accuse Cowper of bigamy, and Somers—the Somers whom he had elaborately praised some years before in the dedication to the *Tale of a Tub*—of the most abominable perversion of justice. But these are taunts thrown out by the way. The substance of the articles is not invective, but profession of political faith. One great name, indeed, is of necessity assailed. Marlborough's fame was a tower of strength for the Whigs. His duchess and his colleagues had fallen; but whilst war was still raging it seemed impossible to dismiss the greatest living commander. Yet whilst Marlborough was still in power his influence might be used to bring back his party. Swift's treatment of this great adversary is significant. He constantly took credit for having suppressed many attacks<sup>1</sup> upon Marlborough. He was convinced that it would be dangerous for the country to dismiss a general whose very name carried victory.<sup>2</sup> He felt that it was dangerous for the party to make an unreserved attack upon the popular hero. Lord Rivers, he says, cursed the *Examiner* to him for speaking civilly of Marlborough; and St. John, upon hearing of this, replied that if the counsels of such men as Rivers were taken, the ministry "would be blown up in twenty-four hours." Yet Marlborough was the war personified, and the way to victory lay over Marlborough's body. Nor had Swift any regard for the man himself, who, he says,<sup>3</sup> is certainly a vile man, and has no sort of merit except the military—as "covetous as hell, and as ambitious as the prince of it."<sup>4</sup> The whole case of the ministry implied the condemnation of Marlborough. Most modern historians would admit that continuance of the war could at this time be desired only

<sup>1</sup> *Journal to Stella*, Feb. 6, 1712, and Jan. 8 and 25, 1712.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, Jan. 7, 1711.    <sup>3</sup> *Ib.*, Jan. 21, 1712.    <sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, Dec. 31, 1710.

by fanatics or interested persons. A psychologist might amuse himself by inquiring what were the actual motives of its advocates; in what degrees personal ambition, a misguided patriotism, or some more sordid passions were blended. But in the ordinary dialect of political warfare there is no room for such refinements. The theory of Swift and Swift's patrons was simple. The war was the creation of the Whig "ring;" it was carried on for their own purposes by the stock-jobbers and "monied men," whose rise was a new political phenomenon, and who had introduced the diabolical contrivance of public debts. The landed interest and the Church had been hoodwinked too long by the union of corrupt interests supported by Dutchmen, Scotchmen, Dissenters, freethinkers, and other manifestations of the evil principle. Marlborough was the head and patron of the whole. And what was Marlborough's motive? The answer was simple. It was that which has been assigned, with even more emphasis, by Macaulay—avarice. The 27th *Examiner* (February 8, 1711) probably contains the compliments to which Rivers objected. Swift, in fact, admits that Marlborough had all the great qualities generally attributed to him; but all are spoilt by this fatal blemish. How far the accusation was true matters little. It is not at least with force and dignity, and it expressed in the pithiest shape Swift's genuine conviction, that the war now meant corrupt self-interest. Invective, as Swift knew well enough in his cooler moments, is a dangerous weapon, apt to recoil on the assailant unless it carries conviction. The attack on Marlborough does not betray personal animosity, but the deliberation and the highly plausible judgment of a man determined to call things by their right names, and not to be blinded by military glory.

This, indeed, is one of the points upon which Swift's Toryism was unlike that of some later periods. He always disliked and despised soldiers and their trade. "It will no doubt be a mighty comfort to our grandchildren," he says in another pamphlet,<sup>1</sup> "when they see a few rags hung up in Westminster Hall which cost a hundred millions, whereof they are paying the arrears, to boast as beggars do that their grandfathers were rich and great." And in other respects he has some right to claim the adhesion of thorough Whigs. His personal attacks, indeed, upon the party have a questionable sound. In his zeal he constantly forgets that the corrupt ring which he denounces were the very men from whom he expected preferment. "I well remember," he says<sup>2</sup> elsewhere, "the clamours often raised during the late reign of that party (the Whigs) against the leaders by those who thought their merits were not rewarded; and they had, no doubt, reason on their side, because it is, no doubt, a misfortune to forfeit honour and conscience for nothing"—rather an awkward remark from a man who was calling Somers "a false, deceitful rascal" for not giving him a bishopric! His eager desire to make the "ungrateful dogs" repent their ill usage of him prompts attacks which injure his own character with that of his former associates. But he has some ground for saying that Whigs have changed their principles, in the sense that their dislike of prerogative and of standing armies had curiously declined when the Crown and the army came to be on their side. Their enjoyment of power had made them soften some of the prejudices learnt in days of depression. Swift's dislike of what we now call

<sup>1</sup> *Conduct of the Allies.*

<sup>2</sup> *Advice to October Club.*

"militarism" really went deeper than any party sentiment; and in that sense, as we shall hereafter see, it had really most affinity with a Radicalism which would have shocked Whigs and Tories alike. But in this particular case it fell in with the Tory sentiment. The masculine vigour of the *Examiners* served the ministry, who were scarcely less in danger from the excessive zeal of their more bigoted followers than from the resistance of the Whig minority. The pig-headed country squires had formed an October Club, to muddle themselves with beer and politics, and hoped—good, honest souls—to drive ministers into a genuine attack on the corrupt practices of their predecessors. All Harley's skill in intriguing and wire-pulling would be needed. The ministry, said Swift (on March 4), "stood like an isthmus" between Whigs and violent Tories. He trembled for the result. They are able seamen, but the tempest "is too great, the ship too rotten, and the crew all against them." Somers had been twice in the Queen's closet. The Duchess of Somerset, who had succeeded the Duchess of Marlborough, might be trying to play Mrs. Masham's game. Harley, "though the most fearless man alive," seemed to be nervous, and was far from well. "Pray God preserve his health," says Swift; "everything depends upon it." Four days later Swift is in an agony. "My heart," he exclaims, "is almost broken." Harley had been stabbed by Guiscard (March 8, 1711) at the council-board. Swift's letters and journals show an agitation in which personal affection seems to be even stronger than political anxiety. "Pray pardon my distraction," he says to Stella, in broken sentences. "I now think of all his kindness to me. The poor creature now lies stabbed in his bed by a desperate French Popish villain. Good

night, and God bless you both, and pity me; I want it." He wrote to King under the same excitement. Harley, he says, "has always treated me with the tenderness of a parent, and never refused me any favour I asked for a friend; therefore I hope your Grace will excuse the character of this letter." He apologizes again in a postscript for his confusion; it must be imputed to the "violent pain of mind I am in—greater than ever I felt in my life." The danger was not over for three weeks. The chief effect seems to have been that Harley became popular as the intended victim of an hypothetical Popish conspiracy; he introduced an applauded financial scheme in Parliament after his recovery, and was soon afterwards made Earl of Oxford by way of consolation. "This man," exclaimed Swift, "has grown by persecutions, turnings out, and stabbings. What waiting and crowding and bowing there will be at his levée!"

Swift had meanwhile (April 26) retired to Chelsea "for the air," and to have the advantage of a compulsory walk into town (two miles, or 5748 steps, each way, he calculates). He was liable, indeed, to disappointment on a rainy day, when "all the three stage-coaches" were taken up by the "cunning natives of Chelsea;" but he got a lift to town in a gentleman's coach for a shilling. He bathed in the river on the hot nights, with his Irish servant, Patrick, standing on the bank to warn off passing boats. The said Patrick, who is always getting drunk, whom Swift cannot find it in his heart to dismiss in England, who atones for his general carelessness and lying by buying a linnet for Dingley, making it wilder than ever in his attempts to tame it, is a characteristic figure in the journal. In June Swift gets ten days' holiday at Wycombe, and in the summer he goes down pretty

often with the ministers to Windsor. He came to town in two hours and forty minutes on one occasion: "twenty miles are nothing here." The journeys are described in one of the happiest of his occasional poems:

"'Tis (let me see) three years or more  
 (October next it will be four)  
 Since Harley bid me first attend,  
 And chose me for an humble friend;  
 Would take me in his coach to chat,  
 And question me of this or that:  
 As 'What's o'clock?' and 'How's the wind?'  
 'Whose chariot's that we left behind?'  
 Or gravely try to read the lines  
 Writ underneath the country signs.  
 Or, 'Have you nothing new to-day  
 From Pope, from Parnell, or from Gay?'  
 Such tattle often entertains  
 My lord and me as far as Staines,  
 As once a week we travel down  
 To Windsor, and again to town,  
 Where all that passes *inter nos*  
 Might be proclaimed at Charing Cross."

And when, it is said, St. John was disgusted by the frivolous amusements of his companions, and his political discourses might be interrupted by Harley's exclamation, "Swift, I am up; there's a cat"—the first who saw a cat or an old woman winning the game.

Swift and Harley were soon playing a more exciting game. Prior had been sent to France, to renew peace negotiations, with elaborate mystery. Even Swift was kept in ignorance. On his return Prior was arrested by officious custom-house officers, and the fact of his journey became public. Swift took advantage of the general interest by a pamphlet intended to "bite the town." Its

political purpose, according to Swift, was to "furnish fools with something to talk of;" to draw a false scent across the trail of the angry and suspicious Whigs. It seems difficult to believe that any such effect could be produced or anticipated; but the pamphlet, which purports to be an account of Prior's journey given by a French valet, desirous of passing himself off as a secretary, is an amusing example of Swift's power of grave simulation of realities. The peace negotiations brought on a decisive political struggle. Parliament was to meet in September. The Whigs resolved to make a desperate effort. They had lost the House of Commons, but were still strong in the Peers. The Lords were not affected by the rapid oscillations of public opinion. They were free from some of the narrower prejudices of country squires, and true to a revolution which gave the chief power for more than a century to the aristocracy; while the recent creations had ennobled the great Whig leaders, and filled the Bench with Low Churchmen. Marlborough and Godolphin had come over to the Whig junto, and an additional alliance was now made. Nottingham had been passed over by Harley, as it seems, for his extreme Tory principles. In his wrath he made an agreement with the other extreme. By one of the most disgraceful bargains of party history Nottingham was to join the Whigs in attacking the peace, whilst the Whigs were to buy his support by accepting the Occasional Conformity Bill—the favourite High Church measure. A majority in the House of Lords could not, indeed, determine the victory. The Government of England, says Swift in 1715,<sup>1</sup> "cannot move a step whilst the House of Commons continues to dislike proceedings or persons employed." But the plot went further. The House of Lords might bring

<sup>1</sup> *Behaviour of Queen's Ministry.*

about a deadlock, as it had done before. The Queen, having thrown off the rule of the Duchess of Marlborough, had sought safety in the rule of two mistresses, Mrs. Masham and the Duchess of Somerset. The Duchess of Somerset was in the Whig interest, and her influence with the Queen caused the gravest anxiety to Swift and the ministry. She might induce Anne to call back the Whigs, and in a new House of Commons, elected under a Whig ministry wielding the crown influence and appealing to the dread of a discreditable peace, the majority might be reversed. Meanwhile Prince Eugene was expected to pay a visit to England, bringing fresh proposals for war, and stimulating by his presence the enthusiasm of the Whigs.

Towards the end of September the Whigs began to pour in a heavy fire of pamphlets, and Swift rather meanly begs the help of St. John and the law. But he is confident of victory. Peace is certain, and a peace "very much to the honour and advantage of England." The Whigs are furious; "but we'll wherret them, I warrant, boys." Yet he has misgivings. The news comes of the failure of the Tory expedition against Quebec, which was to have anticipated the policy and the triumphs of Chatham. Harley only laughs as usual; but St. John is cruelly vexed, and begins to suspect his colleagues of suspecting him. Swift listens to both, and tries to smooth matters; but he is growing serious. "I am half weary of them all," he exclaims, and begins to talk of retiring to Ireland. Harley has a slight illness, and Swift is at once in a fright. "We are all undone without him," he says, "so pray for him, sirrals!" Meanwhile, as the parliamentary struggle comes nearer, Swift launches the pamphlet which has been his summer's work. The *Conduct of the Allies* is intended to prove what he had taken for



granted in the *Examiners*. It is to show, that is, that the war has ceased to be demanded by national interests. We ought always to have been auxiliaries; we chose to become principals; and have yet so conducted the war that all the advantages have gone to the Dutch. The explanation, of course, is the selfishness or corruption of the great Whig junto. The pamphlet, forcible and terse in the highest degree, had a success due in part to other circumstances. It was as much a state paper as a pamphlet; a manifesto obviously inspired by the ministry, and containing the facts and papers which were to serve in the coming debates. It was published on November 27; on December 1 the second edition was sold in five hours; and by the end of January 11,000 copies had been sold. The parliamentary struggle began on December 7; and the amendment to the address, declaring that no peace could be safe which left Spain to the Bourbons, was moved by Nottingham, and carried by a small majority. Swift had foreseen this danger; he had begged ministers to work up the majority; and the defeat was due to Harley's carelessness. It was Swift's temper to anticipate though not to yield to the worst. He could see nothing but ruin. Every rumour increased his fears. The Queen had taken the hand of the Duke of Somerset on leaving the House of Lords, and refused Shrewsbury's. She must be going over. Swift, in his despair, asked St. John to find him some foreign post, where he might be out of harm's way if the Whigs should triumph. St. John laughed and affected courage, but Swift refused to be comforted. Harley told him that "all would be well;" but Harley for the moment had lost his confidence. A week after the vote he looks upon the ministry as certainly ruined; and "God knows," he adds, "what may be the consequences." By degrees a little

hope began to appear; though the ministry, as Swift still held, could expect nothing till the Duchess of Somerset was turned out. By way of accelerating this event, he hit upon a plan, which he had reason to repent, and which nothing but his excitement could explain. He composed and printed one of his favourite squibs, the *Windsor Prophecy*, and though Mrs. Masham persuaded him not to publish it, distributed too many copies for secrecy to be possible. In this production, now dull enough, he calls the duchess "Carrots," as a delicate hint at her red hair, and says that she murdered her second husband.<sup>1</sup> These statements, even if true, were not conciliatory; and it was folly to irritate without injuring. Meanwhile reports of ministerial plans gave him a little courage; and in a day or two the secret was out. He was on his way to the post on Saturday, December 28, when the great news came. The ministry had resolved on something like a *coup d'état*, to be long mentioned with horror by all orthodox Whigs and Tories. "I have broke open my letter," scribbled Swift in a coffee-house, "and tore it into the bargain, to let you know that we are all safe. The Queen has made no less than twelve new peers . . . and has turned out the Duke of Somerset. She is awaked at last, and so is Lord Treasurer. I want nothing now but to see the Duchess out. But we shall do without her. We are all extremely happy. Give me joy, sirrahs!" The Duke of Somerset was not out; but a greater event happened

<sup>1</sup> There was enough plausibility in this scandal to give it a sting. The duchess had left her second husband, a Mr. Thynne, immediately after the marriage ceremony, and fled to Holland. There Count Coningsmark paid her his addresses, and, coming to England, had Mr. Thynne shot by ruffians in Pall Mall. See the curious case in the *State Trials*, vol. ix.

within three days: the Duke of Marlborough was removed from all his employments. The Tory victory was for the time complete.

Here, too, was the culminating point of Swift's career. Fifteen months of energetic effort had been crowned with success. He was the intimate of the greatest men in the country, and the most powerful exponent of their policy. No man in England, outside the ministry, enjoyed a wider reputation. The ball was at his feet, and no position open to a clergyman beyond his hopes. Yet from this period begins a decline. He continued to write, publishing numerous squibs, of which many have been lost, and occasionally firing a gun of heavier metal. But nothing came from him having the authoritative and masterly tone of the *Conduct of the Allies*. His health broke down. At the beginning of April, 1712, he was attacked by a distressing complaint; and his old enemy, giddiness, gave him frequent alarms. The daily journal ceased, and was not fairly resumed till December, though its place is partly supplied by occasional letters. The political contest had changed its character. The centre of interest was transferred to Utrecht, where negotiations began in January, to be protracted over fifteen months: the ministry had to satisfy the demand for peace, without shocking the national self-esteem. Meanwhile jealousies were rapidly developing themselves, which Swift watched with ever-growing anxiety.

Swift's personal influence remained or increased. He drew closer to Oxford, but was still friendly with St. John; and to the public his position seemed more imposing than ever. Swift was not the man to bear his honours meekly. In the early period of his acquaintance with St. John (February 12, 1711) he sends the Prime

Minister into the House of Commons, to tell the Secretary of State that "I would not dine with him if he dined late." He is still a novice at the Saturday dinners when the Duke of Shrewsbury appears: Swift whispers that he does not like to see a stranger among them; and St. John has to explain that the Duke has written for leave. St. John then tells Swift that the Duke of Buckingham desires his acquaintance. The Duke, replied Swift, has not made sufficient advances: and he always expects greater advances from men in proportion to their rank. Dukes and great men yielded, if only to humour the pride of this audacious parson: and Swift soon came to be pestered by innumerable applicants, attracted by his ostentation of influence. Even ministers applied through him. "There is not one of them," he says, in January, 1713, "but what will employ me as gravely to speak for them to Lord Treasurer as if I were their brother or his." He is proud of the burden of influence with the great, though he affects to complain. The most vivid picture of Swift in all his glory is in a familiar passage from Bishop Kennett's diary:

"Swift," says Kennett, in 1713, "came into the coffee-house, and had a bow from everybody but me. When I came to the antechamber to wait before prayers Dr. Swift was the principal man of talk and business, and acted as Minister of Requests. He was soliciting the Earl of Arran to speak to his brother, the Duke of Ormond, to get a chaplain's place established in the garrison of Hull for Mr. Fiddes, a clergyman in that neighbourhood, who had lately been in jail, and published sermons to pay fees. He was promising Mr. Thorold to undertake with my Lord Treasurer that according to his petition he should obtain a salary of 200*l.* per annum, as minister of the English Church at Rotterdam. He stopped F. Gwyne, Esq., going in with the red bag to the Queen, and told him aloud he had something to say to him from my Lord Treasurer. He talked with

the son of Dr. Davenant to be sent abroad, and took out his pocket-book and wrote down several things as *memoranda* to do for him. He turned to the fire, and took out his gold watch, and telling him the time of day, complained it was very late. A gentleman said, 'it was too fast.' 'How can I help it,' says the Doctor, 'if the courtiers give me a watch that won't go right?' Then he instructed a young nobleman that the best poet in England was Mr. Pope (a Papist), who had begun a translation of Homer into English verse, for which, he said, he must have them all subscribe. 'For,' says he, 'the auther *shall not begin to print till I have a thousand guineas for him.*' Lord Treasurer, after leaving the Queen, came through the room, beckoning Dr. Swift to follow him; both went off just before prayers."

There is undoubtedly something offensive in this blustering self-assertion. "No man," says Johnson, with his usual force, "can pay a more servile tribute to the great than by suffering his liberty in their presence to aggrandize him in his own esteem." Delicacy was not Swift's strong point; his compliments are as clumsy as his invectives are forcible; and he shows a certain taint of vulgarity in his intercourse with social dignitaries. He is, perhaps, avenging himself for the humiliations received at Moor Park. He has a Napoleonic absence of magnanimity. He likes to relish his triumph; to accept the pettiest as well as the greatest rewards; to flaunt his splendours in the eyes of the servile as well as to enjoy the consciousness of real power. But it would be a great mistake to infer that this ostentatiousness of authority concealed real servility. Swift preferred to take the bull by the horns. He forced himself upon ministers by self-assertion; and he held them in awe of him as the lion-tamer keeps down the latent ferocity of the wild beast. He never takes his eye off his subjects, nor lowers his imperious demeanour. He retained his influence, as Johnson observes, long after his

services had ceased to be useful. And all this demonstrative patronage meant real and energetic work. We may note, for example, and it incidentally confirms Kennett's acenraey, that he was really serviceable to Davenant,<sup>1</sup> and that Fiddes got the chaplaincy at Hull. No man ever threw himself with more energy into the service of his friends. He declared afterwards that in the days of his credit he had done fifty times more for fifty people, from whom he had received no obligations, than Temple had done for him.<sup>2</sup> The journal abounds in proofs that this was not overstated. There is "Mr. Harrison," for example, who has written "some mighty pretty things." Swift takes him up; rescues him from the fine friends who are carelessly tempting him to extravagance; tries to start him in a continuation of the *Tuller*; exults in getting him a secretaryship abroad, which he declares to be "the prettiest post in Europe for a young gentleman;" and is most unaffectedly and deeply grieved when the poor lad dies of a fever. He is carrying 100*l.* to his young friend, when he hears of his death. "I told Parnell I was afraid to knock at the door—my mind misgave me," he says. On his way to bring help to Harrison he goes to see a "poor poet, one Mr. Diaper, in a nasty garret, very sick," and consoles him with twenty guineas from Lord Bolingbroke. A few days before he has managed to introduce Parnell to Harley, or rather to contrive it so that "the ministry desire to be acquainted with Parnell, and not Parnell with the ministry." His old schoolfellow Congreve was in alarm about his appointments. Swift spoke at once to Harley, and went off immediately to report his success to Congreve: "so," he says, "I have made a worthy man

<sup>1</sup> Letters from Smalridge and Dr. Davenant in 1713.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Palmerston, January 29, 1726.

easy, and that is a good day's work." One of the latest letters in his journal refers to his attempt to serve his other schoolfellow, Berkeley. "I will favour him as much as I can," he says; "this I think I am bound to in honour and conscience, to use all my little credit towards helping forward men of worth in the world." He was always helping less conspicuous men; and he prided himself, with justice, that he had been as helpful to Whigs as to Tories. The ministry complained that he never came to them "without a Whig in his sleeve." Besides his friend Congreve, he recommended Rowe for preferment, and did his best to protect Steele and Addison. No man of letters ever laboured more heartily to promote the interests of his fellow-craftsmen, as few have ever had similar opportunities.

Swift, it is plain, desired to use his influence magnificently. He hoped to make his reign memorable by splendid patronage of literature. The great organ of munificence was the famous Brothers' Club, of which he was the animating spirit. It was founded in June, 1711, during Swift's absence at Wycombe; it was intended to "advance conversation and friendship," and obtain patronage for deserving persons. It was to include none but wits and men able to help wits, and, "if we go on as we began," says Swift, "no other club in this town will be worth talking of." In March, 1712, it consisted, as Swift tells us, of nine lords and ten commoners.<sup>2</sup> It excluded

<sup>1</sup> June 22, 1711.

<sup>2</sup> The list, so far as I can make it out from references in the journal, appears to include more names. One or two had probably retired. The peers are as follows: The Dukes of Shrewsbury (perhaps only suggested), Ormond, and Beaufort; Lords Orrery, Rivers, Dartmouth, Dupplin, Masham, Bathurst, and Lansdowne (the last three

Harley and the Lord Keeper (Harcourt), apparently as they were to be the distributors of the patronage; but it included St. John and several leading ministers, Harley's son and son-in-law, and Harcourt's son; whilst literature was represented by Swift, Arbuthnot, Prior, and Friend, all of whom were more or less actively employed by the ministry. The club was, therefore, composed of the ministry and their dependents, though it had not avowedly a political colouring. It dined on Thursday during the parliamentary session, when the political squibs of the day were often laid on the table, including Swift's famous *Windsor Prophecy*, and subscriptions were sometimes collected for such men as Diaper and Harrison. It flourished, however, for little more than the first season. In the winter of 1712-'13 it began to suffer from the common disease of such institutions. Swift began to complain bitterly of the extravagance of the charges. He gets the club to leave a tavern in which the bill "for four dishes and four, first and second course, without wine and drink," had been 21*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* The number of guests, it seems, was fourteen. Next winter the charges are divided. "It cost me nineteen shillings to-day for my club dinner," notes Swift, December 18, 1712. "I don't like it." Swift had a high value for every one of the nineteen shillings. The meetings became irregular: Harley was ready to give promises, but no patronage; and Swift's attendance falls off. Indeed, it may be noted that he found dinners and suppers full of danger to his health. He constantly complains of their

were of the famous twelve); and the commoners are Swift, Sir R. Raymond, Jack Hill, Disney, Sir W. Wyndham, St. John, Prior, Friend, Arbuthnot, Harley (son of Lord Oxford), and Harcourt (son of Lord Harcourt).

<sup>1</sup> February, 28, 1712.



after-effects; and partly, perhaps, for that reason he early ceases to frequent coffee-houses. Perhaps, too, his contempt for coffee-house society, and the increasing dignity which made it desirable to keep possible applicants at a distance, had much to do with this. The Brothers' Club, however, was long remembered by its members, and in later years they often address each other by the old fraternal title.

One design which was to have signalized Swift's period of power suggested the only paper which he had ever published with his name. It was a "proposal for correcting, improving, and ascertaining the English language," published in May, 1712, in the form of a letter to Harley. The letter itself, written offhand in six hours (February 21, 1712), is not of much value; but Swift recurs to the subject frequently enough to show that he really hoped to be the founder of an English Academy. Had Swift been his own minister instead of the driver of a minister, the project might have been started. The rapid development of the political struggle sent Swift's academy to the limbo provided for such things; and few English authors will regret the failure of a scheme unsuited to our natural idiosyncrasy, and calculated, as I fancy, to end in nothing but an organization of pedantry.

One remark, meanwhile, recurs which certainly struck Swift himself. He says (March 17, 1712) that Sacheverell, the Tory martyr, has come to him for patronage, and observes that when he left Ireland neither of them could have anticipated such a relationship. "This," he adds, "is the seventh I have now provided for since I came, and can do nothing for myself." Hints at a desire for preferment do not appear for some time; but as he is constantly speaking of an early return to Ireland, and is as regularly

held back by the entreaties of the ministry, there must have been at least an implied promise. A hint had been given that he might be made chaplain to Harley, when the minister became Earl of Oxford. "I will be no man's chaplain alive," he says. He remarks about the same time (May 23, 1711) that it "would look extremely little" if he returned without some distinction; but he will not beg for preferment. The ministry, he says in the following August, only want him for one bit of business (the *Conduct of the Allies*, presumably). When that is done he will take his leave of them. "I never got a penny from them nor expect it." The only post for which he made a direct application was that of historiographer. He had made considerable preparations for his so-called *History of the Last Four Years of Queen Anne*, which appeared posthumously, and which may be described as one of his political pamphlets without the vigour<sup>1</sup>—a dull statement of facts put together by a partisan affecting the historical character. This application, however, was not made till April, 1714, when Swift was possessed of all the preferment that he was destined to receive. He considered in his haughty way that he should be entreated rather than entreat; and ministers were, perhaps, slow to give him anything which could take him away from them. A secret influence was at work against him. The *Tale of a Tub* was brought up against him; and imputations upon his orthodoxy were common. Nottingham even revenged himself by describing Swift in the House of Lords as a divine "who is hardly suspected of being a Christian."

<sup>1</sup> Its authenticity was doubted, but, as I think, quite gratuitously, by Johnson, by Lord Stanhope, and, as Stanhope says, by Macaulay. The dullness is easily explicable by the circumstances of the composition.

Such insinuations were also turned to account by the Duchess of Somerset, who retained her influence over Anne in spite of Swift's attacks. His journal in the winter of 1712-'13 shows growing discontent. In December, 1712, he resolves to write no more till something is done for him. He will get under shelter before he makes more enemies. He declares that he is "soliciting nothing" (February 4, 1713), but he is growing impatient. Harley is kinder than ever. "Mighty kind!" exclaims Swift, "with a —; less of civility and more of interest;" or, as he puts it in one of his favourite "proverbs" soon afterwards, "my grandmother used to say:

'More of your lining,  
And less of your dining.'

At last Swift, hearing that he was again to be passed over, gave a positive intimation that he would retire if nothing was done; adding that he should complain of Harley for nothing but neglecting to inform him sooner of the hopelessness of his position.<sup>1</sup> The Dean of St. Patrick's was at last promoted to a bishopric, and Swift appointed to the vacant deanery. The warrant was signed on April 23, and in June Swift set out to take possession of his deanery. It was no great prize; he would have to pay 1000*l.* for the house and fees, and thus, he says, it would be three years before he would be the richer for it; and, moreover, it involved what he already described as "banishment" to a country which he hated.

His state of mind when entering upon his preferment was painfully depressed. "At my first coming," he writes to Miss Vanhomrigh, "I thought I should have died with discontent; and was horribly melancholy while they were

<sup>1</sup> April 13, 1713.

installing me; but it begins to wear off and change to dulness." This depression is singular, when we remember that Swift was returning to the woman for whom he had the strongest affection, and from whom he had been separated for nearly three years; and, moreover, that he was returning as a famous and a successful man. He seems to have been received with some disfavour by a society of Whig proclivities. He was suffering from a fresh return of ill-health; and, besides the absence from the political struggles in which he was so keenly interested, he could not think of them without deep anxiety. He returned to London in October at the earnest request of political friends. Matters were looking serious; and though the journal to Stella was not again taken up, we can pretty well trace the events of the following period.

There can rarely have been a less congenial pair of colleagues than Harley and St. John. Their union was that of a still more brilliant, daring, and self-confident Disraeli with a very inferior edition of Sir Robert Peel, with smaller intellect and exaggerated infirmities. The timidity, procrastination, and "refinement" of the Treasurer were calculated to exasperate his audacious colleague. From the earliest period Swift had declared that everything depended upon the good mutual understanding of the two; he was frightened by every symptom of discord, and declares (in August, 1711) that he has ventured all his credit with the ministers to remove their differences. He knew, as he afterwards said (October 20, 1711), that this was the way to be sent back to his willows at Laracor, but everything must be risked in such a case. When difficulties revived next year he hoped that he had made a reconciliation. But the discord was too vital. The victory of the Tories brought on a serious danger. They

had come into power to make peace. They had made it. The next question was that of the succession of the crown. Here they neither reflected the general opinion of the nation nor were agreed amongst themselves. Harley, as we now know, had flirted with the Jacobites; and Bolingbroke was deep in treasonable plots. The existence of such plots was a secret to Swift, who indignantly denied their existence. When King hinted at a possible danger to Swift from the discovery of St. John's treason, he indignantly replied that he must have been "a most false and vile man" to join in anything of the kind.<sup>1</sup> He professes elsewhere his conviction that there were not at this period five hundred Jacobites in England; and "amongst these not six of any quality or consequence."<sup>2</sup> Swift's sincerity, here as everywhere, is beyond all suspicion; but his conviction proves incidentally that he was in the dark as to the "wheels within wheels"—the backstairs plots, by which the administration of his friends was hampered and distracted. With so many causes for jealousy and discord, it is no wonder that the political world became a mass of complex intrigue and dispute. The Queen, meanwhile, might die at any moment, and some decided course of action become imperatively necessary. Whenever the Queen was ill, said Harley, people were at their wits' end; as soon as she recovered they acted as if she were immortal. Yet, though he complained of the general indecision, his own conduct was most hopelessly undecided.

It was in the hopes of pacifying these intrigues that Swift was recalled from Ireland. He plunged into the fight, but not with his old success. Two pamphlets which he published at the end of 1713 are indications of his

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King, December 16, 1716.

<sup>2</sup> *Inquiry into the Behaviour of the Queen's last Ministry.*

state of mind. One was an attack upon a wild no-popery shriek emitted by Bishop Burnet, whom he treats, says Johnson, "like one whom he is glad of an opportunity to insult." A man who, like Burnet, is on friendly terms with those who assail the privileges of his order must often expect such treatment from its zealous adherents. Yet the scornful assault, which finds out weak places enough in Burnet's mental rhetoric, is in painful contrast to the dignified argument of earlier pamphlets. The other pamphlet was an incident in a more painful contest. Swift had tried to keep on good terms with Addison and Steele. He had prevented Steele's dismissal from a Commissionership of Stamps. Steele, however, had lost his place of Gazetteer for an attack upon Harley. Swift persuaded Harley to be reconciled to Steele, on condition that Steele should apologize. Addison prevented Steele from making the required submission, "out of mere spite," says Swift, at the thought that Steele should require other help—rather, we guess, because Addison thought that the submission would savour of party infidelity. A coldness followed. "All our friendship is over," said Swift of Addison (March 6, 1711); and though good feeling revived between the principals, their intimacy ceased. Swift, swept into the ministerial vortex, pretty well lost sight of Addison; though they now and then met on civil terms. Addison dined with Swift and St. John upon April 3, 1713, and Swift attended a rehearsal of *Cato*—the only time when we see him at a theatre. Meanwhile the ill feeling to Steele remained, and bore bitter fruit.

Steele and Addison had to a great extent retired from politics, and during the eventful years 1711-'12 were chiefly occupied in the politically harmless *Spectator*. But Steele was always ready to find vent for his zeal;

and in 1713 he fell foul of the *Examiner* in the *Guardian*. Swift had long ceased to write *Examiners* or to be responsible for the conduct of the paper, though he still occasionally inspired the writers. Steele, naturally enough, supposed Swift to be still at work; and in defending a daughter of Steele's enemy, Nottingham, not only suggested that Swift was her assailant, but added an insinuation that Swift was an infidel. The imputation stung Swift to the quick. He had a sensibility to personal attacks, not rare with those who most freely indulge in them, which was ridiculed by the easy-going Harley. An attack from an old friend—from a friend whose good opinion he still valued, though their intimacy had ceased; from a friend, moreover, whom in spite of their separation he had tried to protect; and, finally, an attack upon the tenderest part of his character, irritated him beyond measure. Some angry letters passed, Steele evidently regarding Swift as a traitor, and disbelieving his professions of innocence and his claims to active kindness; whilst Swift felt Steele's ingratitude the more deeply from the apparent plausibility of the accusation. If Steele was really unjust and ungenerous, we may admit as a partial excuse that in such cases the less prosperous combatant has a kind of right to bitterness. The quarrel broke out at the time of Swift's appointment to the deanery. Soon after the new Dean's return to England, Steele was elected member for Stockbridge, and rushed into political controversy. His most conspicuous performance was a frothy and pompous pamphlet called the *Crisis*, intended to rouse alarms as to French invasion and Jacobite intrigues. Swift took the opportunity to revenge himself upon Steele. Two pamphlets—*The importance of the "Guardian" considered*, and *The Public Spirit of the Whigs* (the latter in answer to the *Crisis*)—are fierce

attacks upon Steele personally and politically. Swift's feeling comes out sufficiently in a remark in the first. He reverses the saying about Cranmer, and says that he may affirm of Steele, "Do him a good turn, and he is your enemy for ever." There is vigorous writing enough, and effective ridicule of Steele's literary style and political alarmism. But it is painfully obvious, as in the attack upon Burnet, that personal animosity is now the predominant instead of an auxiliary feeling. Swift is anxious beyond all things to mortify and humiliate an antagonist. And he is in proportion less efficient as a partisan, though more amusing. He has, moreover, the disadvantage of being politically on the defensive. He is no longer proclaiming a policy, but endeavouring to disavow the policy attributed to his party. The wrath which breaks forth, and the bitter personality with which it is edged, were far more calculated to irritate his opponents than to disarm the lookers-on of their suspicious.

Part of the fury was no doubt due to the growing unsoundness of his political position. Steele in the beginning of 1714 was expelled from the House for the *Crisis*; and an attack made upon Swift in the House of Lords for an incidental outburst against the hated Scots, in his reply to the *Crisis*, was only staved off by a manœuvre of the ministry. Meanwhile Swift was urging the necessity of union upon men who hated each other more than they regarded any public cause whatever. Swift at last brought his two patrons together in Lady Masham's lodgings, and entreated them to be reconciled. If, he said, they wou<sup>l</sup> agree, all existing mischiefs could be remedied in two minutes. If they would not, the ministry would be ruined in two months. Bolingbroke assented; Oxford characteristically shuffled, said "all would be well," and asked Swift to dine



with him next day. Swift, however, said that he would not stay to see the inevitable catastrophe. It was his natural instinct to hide his head in such moments; his intensely proud and sensitive nature could not bear to witness the triumph of his enemies, and he accordingly retired at the end of May, 1714, to the quiet parsonage of Upper Letcombe, in Berkshire. The public wondered and speculated; friends wrote letters describing the scenes which followed, and desiring Swift's help; and he read, and walked, and chewed the end of melancholy reflection, and thought of stealing away to Ireland. He wrote, however, a very remarkable pamphlet, giving his view of the situation, which was not published at the time; events went too fast.

Swift's conduct at this critical point is most noteworthy. The pamphlet (*Free Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs*) exactly coincides with all his private and public utterances. His theory was simple and straightforward. The existing situation was the culminating result of Harley's policy of refinement and procrastination. Swift two years before had written a very able remonstrance with the October Club, who had sought to push Harley into decisive measures; but though he preached patience he really sympathized with their motives. Instead of making a clean sweep of his opponents, Harley had left many of them in office, either from "refinement"—that over-subtlety of calculation which Swift thought inferior to plain common sense, and which, to use his favourite illustration, is like the sharp knife that mangles the paper, when a plain, blunt paper-knife cuts it properly—or else from inability to move the Queen, which he had foolishly allowed to pass for unwillingness, in order to keep up the appearance of power. Two things were now to be done:

first, a clean sweep should be made of all Whigs and Dissenters from office and from the army; secondly, the Court of Hanover should be required to break off all intercourse with the Opposition, on which condition the heir-presumptive (the infant Prince Frederick) might be sent over to reside in England. Briefly, Swift's policy was a policy of "thorough." Oxford's vacillations were the great obstacle, and Oxford was falling before the alliance of Bolingbroke with Lady Masham. Bolingbroke might have turned Swift's policy to the account of the Jacobites; but Swift did not take this into account, and in the *Free Thoughts* he declares his utter disbelief in any danger to the succession. What side, then, should he take? He sympathized with Bolingbroke's avowed principles. Bolingbroke was eager for his help, and even hoped to reconcile him to the red-haired duchess. But Swift was bound to Oxford by strong personal affection; by an affection which was not diminished even by the fact that Oxford had procrastinated in the matter of Swift's own preferment; and was, at this very moment, annoying him by delaying to pay the 1000*l.* incurred by his installation in the deanery. To Oxford he had addressed (November 21, 1713) a letter of consolation upon the death of a daughter, possessing the charm which is given to such letters only by the most genuine sympathy with the feelings of the loser, and by a spontaneous selection of the only safe topic—praise of the lost, equally tender and sincere. Every reference to Oxford is affectionate. When, at the beginning of July, Oxford was hastening to his fall, Swift wrote to him another manly and dignified letter, professing an attachment beyond the reach of external accidents of power and rank. The end came soon. Swift heard that Oxford was about to resign. He wrote

at once (July 25, 1714) to propose to accompany him to his country house. Oxford replied two days later in a letter oddly characteristic. He begs Swift to come with him: "If I have not tired you *tête-à-tête*, fling away so much of your time upon one who loves you;" and then rather spoils the pathos by a bit of hopeless doggerel. Swift wrote to Miss Vanhomrigh on August 1. "I have been asked," he says, "to join with those people now in power; but I will not do it. I told Lord Oxford I would go with him, when he was out; and now he begs it of me, and I cannot refuse him. I meddle not with his faults, as he was a Minister of State; but you know his personal kindness to me was excessive; he distinguished and chose me above all other men, while he was great, and his letter to me the other day was the most moving imaginable."

An intimacy which bore such fruit in time of trial was not one founded upon a servility varnished by self-assertion. No stauncher friend than Swift ever lived. But his fidelity was not to be put to further proof. The day of the letter just quoted was the day of Queen Anne's death. The crash which followed ruined the "people now in power" as effectually as Oxford. The party with which Swift had identified himself, in whose success all his hopes and ambitions were bound up, was not so much ruined as annihilated. "The Earl of Oxford," wrote Bolingbroke to Swift, "was removed on Tuesday. The Queen died on Sunday. What a world is this, and how does fortune banter us!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

STELLA AND VANESSA.

THE final crash of the Tory administration found Swift approaching the end of his forty-seventh year. It found him, in his own opinion, prematurely aged both in mind and body. His personal prospects and political hopes were crushed. "I have a letter from Dean Swift," says Arbuthnot in September; "he keeps up his noble spirit, and though like a man knocked down, you may behold him still with a stern countenance and aiming a blow at his adversaries." Yet his adversaries knew, and he knew only too well, that such blows as he could now deliver could at most show his wrath without gratifying his revenge. He was disarmed as well as "knocked down." He writes to Bolingbroke from Dublin in despair. "I live a country life in town," he says, "see nobody and go every day once to prayers, and hope in a few months to grow as stupid as the present situation of affairs will require. Well, after all, parsons are not such bad company, especially when they are under subjection; and I let none but such come near me." Oxford, Bolingbroke, and Ormond were soon in exile or the Tower; and a letter to Pope next year gives a sufficient picture of Swift's feelings. "You know," he said, "how well I loved both Lord Oxford and Bolingbroke, and how dear the Duke of

Ormond is to me; do you imagine I can be easy while their enemies are endeavouring to take off their heads?—*I nunc et versus tecum meditare canoros!*” “You are to understand,” he says in conclusion, “that I live in the corner of a vast unfurnished house; my family consists of a steward, a groom, a helper in the stable, a footman, and an old maid, who are all at board wages, and when I do not dine abroad or make an entertainment (which last is very rare), I eat a mutton pie and drink half a pint of wine; my amusements are defending my small dominions against the archbishop, and endeavouring to reduce my rebellious choir. *Perditur hæc inter misero lux.*” In another of the dignified letters which show the finest side of his nature he offered to join Oxford, whose intrepid behaviour, he says, “has astonished every one but me, who know you so well.” But he could do nothing beyond showing sympathy; and he remained alone asserting his authority in his ecclesiastical domains, brooding over the past, and for the time unable to divert his thoughts into any less distressing channel. Some verses written in October “in sickness” give a remarkable expression of his melancholy:

“’Tis true—then why should I repine  
To see my life so fast decline?  
But why obscurely here alone,  
Where I am neither loved nor known?  
My state of health none care to learn,  
My life is here no soul’s concern,  
And those with whom I now converse  
Without a tear will tend my hearse.”

Yet we might have fancied that his lot would not be so unbearable. After all, a fall which ends in a deanery should break no bones. His friends, though hard pressed,

survived; and, lastly, was any one so likely to shed tears upon his hearse as the woman to whom he was finally returning? The answer to this question brings us to a story imperfectly known to us, but of vital importance in Swift's history.

We have seen in what masterful fashion Swift took possession of great men. The same imperious temper shows itself in his relations to women. He required absolute submission. Entrance into the inner circle of his affections could only be achieved by something like abasement; but all within it became as a part of himself, to be both cherished and protected without stint. His affectation of brutality was part of a system. On first meeting Lady Burlington, at her husband's house, he ordered her to sing. She declined. He replied, "Sing, or I will make you! Why, madam, I suppose you take me for one of your English hedge-parsons; sing when I tell you!" She burst into tears and retired. The next time he met her he began, "Pray, madam, are you as proud and ill-natured as when I saw you last?" She good-humouredly gave in, and Swift became her warm friend. Another lady to whom he was deeply attached was a famous beauty, Anne Long. A whimsical treaty was drawn up, setting forth that "the said Dr. Swift, upon the score of his merit and extraordinary qualities, doth claim the sole and undoubted right that all persons whatever shall make such advance to him as he pleases to demand, any law, claim, custom, privilege of sex, beauty, fortune or quality to the contrary notwithstanding;" and providing that Miss Long shall cease the contumacy in which she has been abetted by the Van-honrighs, but be allowed in return, in consideration of her being "a Lady of the Toast," to give herself the reputation

of being one of Swift's acquaintance. Swift's affection for Miss Long is touchingly expressed in private papers, and in a letter written upon her death in retirement and poverty. He intends to put up a monument to her memory, and wrote a notice of her, "to serve her memory," and also, as he characteristically adds, to spite the brother who had neglected her. Years afterwards he often refers to the "edict" which he annually issued in England, commanding all ladies to make him the first advances. He graciously makes an exception in favour of the Duchess of Queensberry, though he observes incidentally that he now hates all people whom he cannot command. This humorous assumption, like all Swift's humour, has a strong element of downright earnest. He gives whimsical prominence to a genuine feeling. He is always acting the part of despot, and acting it very gravely. When he stays at Sir Arthur Acheson's, Lady Acheson becomes his pupil, and is "severely chid" when she reads wrong. Mrs. Pendarves, afterwards Mrs. Delany, says in the same way that Swift calls himself "her master," and corrects her when she speaks bad English.<sup>1</sup> He behaved in the same way to his servants. Delany tells us that he was "one of the best masters in the world," paid his servants the highest rate of wages known, and took great pains to encourage and help them to save. But, on engaging them, he always tested their humility. One of their duties, he told them, would be to take turns in cleaning the scullion's shoes, and if they objected he sent them about their business. He is said to have tested a curate's docility in the same way by offering him sour wine. His dominion was most easily extended over women; and a long list might be easily made out of the feminine favourites

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, vol. i., p. 407.

who at all periods of his life were in more or less intimate relations with this self-appointed sultan. From the wives of peers and the daughters of lord lieutenants down to Dublin tradeswomen with a taste for rhyming, and even scullery-maids with no tastes at all, a whole hierarchy of female slaves bowed to his rule, and were admitted into higher and lower degrees of favour.

Esther Johnson, or Stella—to give her the name which she did not receive until after the period of the famous journals—was one of the first of these worshippers. As we have seen, he taught her to write, and when he went to Laracor she accepted the peculiar position already described. We have no direct statement of their mutual feelings before the time of the journal; but one remarkable incident must be noticed. During his stay in England in 1703-'04 Swift had some correspondence with a Dublin clergyman named Tisdall. He afterwards regarded Tisdall with a contempt which, for the present, is only half perceptible in some good-humoured raillery. Tisdall's intimacy with "the ladies," Stella and Mrs. Dingley, is one topic, and in the last of Swift's letters we find that Tisdall has actually made an offer for Stella. Swift had replied in a letter (now lost), which Tisdall called unfriendly, unkind, and unaccountable. Swift meets these reproaches coolly, contemptuously, and straightforwardly. He will not affect unconsciousness of Tisdall's meaning. Tisdall obviously takes him for a rival in Stella's affections. Swift replies that he will tell the naked truth. The truth is that "if his fortune and humour served him to think of that state" (marriage) he would prefer Stella to any one on earth. So much, he says, he has declared to Tisdall before. He did not, however, think of his affection as an obstacle to Tisdall's hopes. Tisdall



had been too poor to marry; but the offer of a living has removed that objection; and Swift undertakes to act what he has hitherto acted, a friendly though passive part. He had thought, he declares, that the affair had gone too far to be broken off; he had always spoken of Tisdall in friendly terms; "no consideration of my own misfortune in losing so good a friend and companion as her" shall prevail upon him to oppose the match, "since it is held so necessary and convenient a thing for ladies to marry, and that time takes off from the lustre of virgins in all other eyes but mine."

The letter must have suggested some doubts to Tisdall. Swift alleges as his only reasons for not being a rival in earnest his "humour" and the state of his fortune. The last obstacle might be removed at any moment. Swift's prospects, though deferred, were certainly better than Tisdall's. Unless, therefore, the humour was more insurmountable than is often the case, Swift's coolness was remarkable or ominous. It may be that, as some have held, there was nothing behind. But another possibility undoubtedly suggests itself. Stella had received Tisdall's suit so unfavourably that it was now suspended, and that it finally failed. Stella was corresponding with Swift. It is easy to guess that, between the "unaccountable" letter and the contemptuous letter, Swift had heard something from Stella which put him thoroughly at ease in regard to Tisdall's attentions.

We have no further information until, seven years afterwards, we reach the *Journal to Stella*, and find ourselves overhearing the "little language." The first editors scrupled at a full reproduction of what might strike an unfriendly reader as almost drivelling; and Mr. Forster reprinted for the first time the omitted parts of the still

accessible letters. The little language is a continuation of Stella's infantile prattle. Certain letters are a cipher for pet names which may be conjectured. Swift calls himself Pdfr, or Podefar, meaning, as Mr. Forster guesses, "Poor, dear Foolish Rogue." Stella, or rather Esther Johnson, is Ppt, say "Poppet." MD, "my dear," means Stella, and sometimes includes Mrs. Dingley. FW means "farewell," or "foolish wenches;" Lele is taken by Mr. Forster to mean "truly" or "lazy," or "there, there," or to have "other meanings not wholly discoverable." The phrases come in generally by way of leave-taking. "So I got into bed," he says, "to write to MD, MD, for we must always write to MD, MD, MD, awake or asleep;" and he ends, "Go to bed. Help pdfr. Rove pdfr, MD, MD. Nite darling rogues." Here is another scrap: "I assure oo it im vely late now; but zis goes to-morrow; and I must have time to converse with own deerichar MD. Nite de deer Sollahs." One more leave-taking may be enough: "Farewell, dearest hearts and souls, MD. Farewell, MD, MD, MD. FW, FW, FW. ME, ME. Lele, Lele, Lele, Sollahs, Lele."

The reference to the Golden Farmer already noted is in the words, "I warrant oo don't remember the Golden Farmer neither, Figgarkick Solly," and I will venture to a guess at what Mr. Forster pronounces to be inexplicable.<sup>1</sup> May not Solly be the same as "Sollah," generally interpreted by the editors as "sirrah;" and "Figgarkick" possibly be the same as Pilgarlick, a phrase which he elsewhere applies to Stella,<sup>2</sup> and which the dictionaries say means "poor, deserted creature?"

<sup>1</sup> Forster, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> October 20, 1711. The last use I have observed of this word is in a letter of Carlyle's, November 7, 1824: "Strange pilgarlic-looking figures."—Froude's *Life of Carlyle*, vol. i., p. 247.

Swift says that as he writes his language he "makes up his mouth just as if he was speaking it." It fits the affectionate caresses in which he is always indulging. Nothing, indeed, can be more charming than the playful little prattle which occasionally interrupts the gossip and the sharp utterances of hope or resentment. In the snatches of leisure, late at night or before he has got up in the morning, he delights in an imaginary chat; for a few minutes of little fondling talk help him to forget his worries, and anticipate the happiness of reunion. He caresses her letters, as he cannot touch her hand. "And now let us come and see what this sauey, dear letter of MD says. Come out, letter, come out from between the sheets; here it is underneath, and it will not come out. Come out again, I says; so there. Here it is. What says Pdf to me, pray? says it. Come and let me answer for you to your ladies. Hold up your head then like a good letter." And so he begins a little talk, and prays that they may be never separated again for ten days whilst he lives. Then he follows their movements in Dublin in passages which give some lively little pictures of their old habits. "And where will you go to-day? for I cannot be with you for the ladies." [He is off sight-seeing to the Tower and Bedlam with Lady Kerry and a friend.] "It is a rainy, ugly day; I would have you send for Wales, and go to the Dean's; but do not play small games when you lose. You will be ruined by Manilio, Basto, the queen, and two small trumps in red. I confess it is a good hand against the player. But, then, there are Spadilio, Punto, the king, strong trumps against you, which with one trump more are three trieks ten aee; for suppose you play your Manilio—O, silly, how I prate and cannot get away from MD in a morning. Go, get you

gone, dear naughty girls, and let me rise." He delights, again, in turning to account his queer talent for making impromptu proverbs:

"Be you lords or be you earls,  
You must write to naughty girls."

Or again :

"Mr. White and Mr. Red  
Write to M.D. when a-bed;  
Mr. Black and Mr. Brown  
Write to M.D. when you are down;  
Mr. Oak and Mr. Willow  
Write to M.D. on your pillow."

And here is one more for the end of the year :

"Would you answer M.D.'s letter  
On New Year's Day you will do it better;  
For when the year with M.D. 'gins  
It without M.D. never 'lins."

"These proverbs," he explains, "have always old words in them; *lin* is leave off."

"But if on New Year you write nones  
M.D. then will bang your bones."

Reading these fond triflings we feel even now as though we were unjustifiably prying into the writer's confidence. What are we to say to them? We might simply say that the tender playfulness is charming, and that it is delightful to find the stern gladiator turning from party warfare to soothe his wearied soul with these tender caresses. There is but one drawback. Macaulay imitates some of this prattle in his charming letters to his younger sister, and there we can accept it without difficulty. But Stella was not Swift's younger sister. She was a beautiful and clever woman of thirty, when he was in the prime

of his powers at forty-four. If Tisdall could have seen the journal he would have ceased to call Swift "unaccountable." Did all this caressing suggest nothing to Stella? Swift does not write as an avowed lover; Dingley serves as a chaperone even in these intimate confidences; and yet a word or two escapes which certainly reads like something more than fraternal affection. He apologizes (May 23, 1711) for not returning: "I will say no more, but beg you to be easy till Fortune takes her course, and to believe that MD's felicity is the great goal I aim at in all my pursuits." If such words addressed under such circumstances did not mean "I hope to make you my wife as soon as I get a deanery," there must have been some distinct understanding to limit their force.

But another character enters the drama. Mrs. Vanhomrigh,<sup>1</sup> a widow rich enough to mix in good society, was living in London with two sons and two daughters, and made Swift's acquaintance in 1708. Her eldest daughter, Hester, was then seventeen, or about ten years younger than Stella. When Swift returned to London, in 1710, he took lodgings close to the Vanhomrighs, and became an intimate of the family. In the daily reports of his dinner the name Van occurs more frequently than any other. Dinner, let us observe in passing, had not then so much as now the character of a solemn religious rite, implying a formal invitation. The ordinary hour was three (though Harley with his usual procrastination often failed to sit down till six), and Swift, when not pre-engaged, looked in at Court or elsewhere in search of an invitation. He seldom failed; and when nobody else offered he frequently went to the "Vans." The name of

<sup>1</sup> Lord Orrery instructs us to pronounce this name Vanmmeury.

the daughter is only mentioned two or three times; whilst it is, perhaps, a suspicious circumstance that he very often makes a quasi-apology for his dining-place. "I was so lazy I dined where my new gown was, at Mrs. Vanhomrigh's," he says, in May, 1711; and a day or two later explains that he keeps his "best gown and periwig" there whilst he is lodging at Chelsea, and often dines there "out of mere listlessness." The phrase may not have been consciously insincere; but Swift was drifting into an intimacy which Stella could hardly approve, and, if she desired Swift's love, would regard as ominous. When Swift took possession of his deanery he revealed his depression to Miss Vanhomrigh, who about this time took the title Vanessa; and Vanessa, again, received his confidences from Lctombe. A full account of their relations is given in the remarkable poem called *Cadenus and Vanessa*, less remarkable, indeed, as a poem than as an autobiographical document. It is singularly characteristic of Swift that we can use what, for want of a better classification, must be called a love poem, as though it were an affidavit in a law-suit. Most men would feel some awkwardness in hinting at sentiments conveyed by Swift in the most downright terms; to turn them into a poem would seem preposterous. Swift's poetry, however, is always plain matter of fact, and we may read *Cadenus* (which means of course *Decanus*) and *Vanessa* as Swift's deliberate and palpably sincere account of his own state of mind. Omitting a superfluous framework of mythology in the contemporary taste, we have a plain story of the relations of this new Heloise and Abelard. Vanessa, he tells us, united masculine accomplishments to feminine grace; the fashionable fops (I use Swift's own words as much as possible) who tried to entertain her with the

tattle of the day, stared when she replied by applications of Plutarch's morals. The ladies from the parlicus of St. James's found her reading Montaigne at her toilet, and were amazed by her ignorance of the fashions. Both were scandalized at the waste of such charms and talents due to the want of so called knowledge of the world. Meanwhile, Vanessa, not yet twenty, met and straightway admired Cadenus, though his eyes were dim with study and his health decayed. He had grown old in politics and wit; was caressed by ministers; dreaded and hated by half mankind, and had forgotten the arts by which he had once charmed ladies, though merely for amusement and to show his wit.<sup>1</sup> He did not understand what was love; he behaved to Vanessa as a father might behave to a daughter:

"That innocent delight he took  
To see the virgin mind her book  
Was but the master's secret joy  
In school to hear the finest boy."

Vanessa, once the quickest of learners, grew distracted. He apologized for having bored her by his pedantry, and offered a last adieu. She then startled him by a confession. He had taught her, she said, that virtue should never be afraid of disclosures; that noble minds were above common maxims (just what he had said to Varina), and she therefore told him frankly that his lessons, aimed at her head, had reached her heart. Cadenus was utterly taken aback. Her words were too plain to be in jest. He was conscious of having never for a moment meant to be other than a teacher. Yet every one would suspect him of intentions to win her heart and her five thousand pounds.

<sup>1</sup> This simply repeats what he says in his first published letters about his flirtations at Leicester.

He tried not to take things seriously. Vanessa, however, became eloquent. She said that he had taught her to love great men through their books; why should she not love the living reality? Cadennus was flattered and half converted. He had never heard her talk so well, and admitted that she had a most unfailing judgment and discerning head. He still maintained that his dignity and age put love out of the question, but he offered in return as much friendship as she pleased. She replies that she will now become tutor and teach him the lesson which he is so slow to learn. But—and here the revelation ends—

“But what success Vanessa met  
Is to the world a secret yet.”<sup>1</sup>

Vanessa loved Swift; and Swift, it seems, allowed himself to be loved. One phrase in a letter written to him during his stay at Dublin, in 1713, suggests the only hint of jealousy. If you are happy, she says, “it is ill-natured of you not to tell me so, except ’tis what is inconsistent with mine.” Soon after Swift’s final retirement to Ireland, Mrs. Vanhomrigh died. Her husband had left a small property at Celbridge. One son was dead; the other behaved badly to his sisters; the daughters were for a time in money difficulties, and it became convenient for them to retire to Ireland, where Vanessa ultimately settled at Celbridge. The two women who worshipped Swift were thus almost in presence of each other. The situation almost suggests comedy;

<sup>1</sup> The passage which contains this line was said by Orrery to cast an unmanly insinuation against Vanessa’s virtue. As the accusation has been repeated, it is perhaps right to say that one fact sufficiently disproves its possibility. The poem was intended for Vanessa alone, and would never have appeared had it not been published after her death by her own direction.



but, unfortunately, it was to take a most tragical and still partly mysterious development.

The fragmentary correspondence between Swift and Vanessa establishes certain facts. Their intercourse was subject to restraints. He begs her, when he is starting for Dublin, to get her letters directed by some other hand, and to write nothing that may not be seen, for fear of "ineonveniences." The post-office clerk surely would not be more attracted by Vanessa's hand than by that of such a man as Lewis, a subordinate of Harley's, who had formerly forwarded her letters. He adds that if she comes to Ireland he will see her very seldom. "It is not a place for freedom, but everything is known in a week and magnified a hundred times." Poor Vanessa soon finds the truth of this. She complains that she is amongst "strange, prying, deceitful people;" that he flies her, and will give no reason except that they are amongst fools and must submit. His reproofs are terrible to her. "If you continue to treat me as you do," she says soon after, "you will not be made uneasy by me long." She would rather have borne the rack than those "killing, killing words" of his. She writes instead of speaking, because when she ventures to complain in person "you are angry, and there is something in your look so awful that it shakes me dumb"—a memorable phrase in days soon to come. She protests that she says as little as she can. If he knew what she thought, he must be moved. The letter containing these phrases is dated 1714, and there are but a few scraps till 1720; we gather that Vanessa submitted partly to the necessities of the situation, and that this extreme tension was often relaxed. Yet she plainly could not resign herself or suppress her passion. Two letters in 1720 are painfully vehement. He has not seen her for ten long weeks, she

says in her first, and she has only had one letter and one little note with an excuse. She will sink under his "prodigious neglect." Time or accident cannot lessen her inexpressible passion. "Put my passion under the utmost restraint; send me as distant from you as the earth will allow, yet you cannot banish those charming ideas which will stick by me whilst I have the use of memory. Nor is the love I bear you only seated in my soul, for there is not a single atom of my frame that is not blended with it." She thinks him changed, and entreats him not to suffer her to "live a life like a languishing death, which is the only life I can lead, if you have lost any of your tenderness for me." The following letter is even more passionate. She passes days in sighing and nights in watching and thinking of one who thinks not of her. She was born with "violent passions, which terminate all in one, that inexpressible passion I have for you." If she could guess at his thoughts, which is impossible ("for never any one living thought like you"), she would guess that he wishes her "religious"—that she might pay her devotions to heaven. "But that should not spare you, for was I an enthusiast, still you'd be the deity I should worship." "What marks are there of a deity but what you are to be known by—you are (at?) present everywhere; your dear image is always before my eyes. Sometimes you strike me with that prodigious awe, I tremble with fear; at other times a charming compassion shines through your countenance, which moves my soul. Is it not more reasonable to adore a radiant form one has seen than one only described?"<sup>1</sup>

The man who received such letters from a woman whom

<sup>1</sup> Compare Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, which appeared in 1717. If Vanessa had read it, she might almost be suspected of borrowing; but her phrases seem to be too genuine to justify the hypothesis.

he at least admired and esteemed, who felt that to respond was to administer poison, and to fail to respond was to inflict the severest pangs, must have been in the cruellest of dilemmas. Swift, we cannot doubt, was grieved and perplexed. His letters imply embarrassment; and, for the most part, take a lighter tone; he suggests his universal panacea of exercise; tells her to fly from the spleen instead of courting it; to read diverting books, and so forth: advice more judicious, probably, than comforting. There are, however, some passages of a different tendency. There is a mutual understanding to use certain catch-words which recall the "little language." He wishes that her letters were as hard to read as his, in case of accident. "A stroke thus . . . signifies everything that may be said to *Cad*, at the beginning and conclusion." And she uses this written caress, and signs herself—his own "Skinage." There are certain "questions," to which reference is occasionally made; a kind of catechism, it seems, which he was expected to address to himself at intervals, and the nature of which must be conjectured. He proposes to continue the *Cadenus and Vanessa*—a proposal which makes her happy beyond "expression"—and delights her by recalling a number of available incidents. He recurs to them in his last letter, and bids her "go over the scenes of Windsor, Cleveland Row, Rider Street, St. James's Street, Kensington, the Shrubbery, the Colonel in France, &c. *Cad* thinks often of these, especially on horseback,<sup>1</sup> as I am assured." This prosaic list of names recall, as we find, various old meetings. And, finally, one letter contains an avowal of a singular kind. "Soyez assurée," he says, after advising her "to quit this scoundrel island," "que

<sup>1</sup> Scott appropriately quotes *Hotspur*. The phrase is apparently a hint at Swift's usual recipe of exercise.

jamais personne du monde a été aimée, honorée, estimée, adorée par votre ami que vous." It seems as though he were compelled to throw her just a crumb of comfort here; but, in the same breath, he has begged her to leave him forever.

If Vanessa was ready to accept a "gown of forty-four," to overlook his infirmities in consideration of his fame, why should Swift have refused? Why condemn her to undergo this "languishing death"—a long agony of unrequited passion? One answer is suggested by the report that Swift was secretly married to Stella in 1716. The fact is not proved nor disproved;<sup>1</sup> nor, to my mind, is the question of its truth of much importance. The ceremony, if performed, was nothing but a ceremony. The only rational explanation of the fact, if it be taken for a fact,

<sup>1</sup> I cannot here discuss the evidence. The original statements are in *Orrery*, p. 22, &c.; *Delany*, p. 52; *Dean Swift*, p. 93; *Sheridan*, p. 282; *Monck Berkeley*, p. xxxvi. Scott accepted the marriage, and the evidence upon which he relied was criticised by Monck Mason, p. 297, &c. Monck Mason makes some good points, and especially diminishes the value of the testimony of Bishop Berkeley, showing by dates that he could not have heard the story, as his grandson affirms, from Bishop Ashe, who is said to have performed the ceremony. It probably came, however, from Berkeley, who, we may add, was tutor to Ashe's son, and had special reasons for interest in the story. On the whole, the argument for the marriage comes to this: that it was commonly reported by the end of Swift's life, that it was certainly believed by his ultimate friend Delany, in all probability by the elder Sheridan and by Mrs. Whiteway. Mrs. Sican, who told the story to Sheridan, seems also to be a good witness. On the other hand, Dr. Lyon, a clergyman, who was one of Swift's guardians in his imbecility, says that it was denied by Mrs. Dingley and by Mrs. Brent, Swift's old house-keeper, and by Stella's executors. The evidence seems to me very indecisive. Much of it may be dismissed as mere gossip, but a certain probability remains.

must be that Swift, having resolved not to marry, gave Stella this security, that he would, at least, marry no one else. Though his anxiety to hide the connexion with Vanessa may only mean a dread of idle tongues, it is at least highly probable that Stella was the person from whom he specially desired to keep it. Yet his poetical addresses to Stella upon her birthday (of which the first is dated 1719, and the last 1727) are clearly not the addresses of a lover. Both in form and substance they are even pointedly intended to express friendship instead of love. They read like an expansion of his avowal to Tisdall, that her charms for him, though for no one else, could not be diminished by her growing old without marriage. He addresses her with blunt affection, and tells her plainly of her growing size and waning beauty; comments even upon her defects of temper, and seems expressly to deny that he loved her in the usual way:

“Thou, Stella, wert no longer young  
When first for thee my harp I strung,  
Without one word of Cupid’s darts,  
Of killing eyes and bleeding hearts;  
With friendship and esteem possess’d,  
I ne’er admitted love a guest.”

We may almost say that he harps upon the theme of “friendship and esteem.” His gratitude for her care of him is pathetically expressed; he admires her with the devotion of a brother for the kindest of sisters; his plain, prosaic lines become poetical, or perhaps something better; but there is an absence of the lover’s strain which is only not, if not, ostentatious.

The connexion with Stella, whatever its nature, gives the most intelligible explanation of his keeping Vanessa

at a distance. A collision between his two slaves might be disastrous. And, as the story goes (for we are everywhere upon uncertain ground), it came. In 1721 poor Vanessa had lost her only sister<sup>1</sup> and companion: her brothers were already dead, and, in her solitude, she would naturally be more than ever eager for Swift's kindness. At last, in 1723, she wrote (it is said) a letter to Stella, and asked whether she was Swift's wife.<sup>2</sup> Stella replied that she was, and forwarded Vanessa's letter to Swift. How Swift could consent an attempt to force his wishes has been seen in the letter to Varina. He rode in a fury to Celbridge. His countenance, says Orrery, could be terribly expressive of the sterner passions. Prominent eyes—"azure as the heavens" (says Pope)—arched by bushy black eyebrows, could glare, we can believe from his portraits, with the green fury of a cat's. Vanessa had spoken of the "something awful in his looks," and of his killing words. He now entered her room, silent with rage, threw down her letter on the table, and rode off. He had struck Vanessa's death-blow. She died soon afterwards, but lived long enough to revoke a will made in favour of Swift and leave her money between Judge Marshal and the famous Bishop Berkeley. Berkeley, it seems, had only seen her once in his life.

The story of the last fatal interview has been denied. Vanessa's death, though she was under thirty-five, is less surprising when we remember that her younger sister and both her brothers had died before her; and that her health had always been weak, and her life for some time a languishing death. That there was in any case a terribly

<sup>1</sup> *Monck Mason*, p. 310, note.

<sup>2</sup> This is Sheridan's story. Orrery speaks of the letter as written to Swift himself.

tragic climax to the half-written romance of *Cadenus and Vanessa* is certain. Vanessa requested that the poem and the letters might be published by her executors. Berkeley suppressed the letters for the time, and they were not published in full until Scott's edition of Swift's works.

Whatever the facts, Swift had reasons enough for bitter regret, if not for deep remorse. He retired to hide his head in some unknown retreat; absolute seclusion was the only solace to his gloomy, wounded spirit. After two months he returned, to resume his retired habits. A period followed, as we shall see in the next chapter, of fierce political excitement. For a time, too, he had a vague hope of escaping from his exile. An astonishing literary success increased his reputation. But another misfortune approached, which crushed all hope of happiness in life.

In 1726 Swift at last revisited England. He writes in July that he has for two months been anxious about Stella's health, and as usual feared the worst. He has seen through the disguises of a letter from Mrs. Dingley. His heart is so sunk that he will never be the same man again, but drag on a wretched life till it pleases God to call him away. Then in an agony of distress he contemplates her death; he says that he could not bear to be present; he should be a trouble to her, and the greatest torment to himself. He forces himself to add that her death must not take place at the deanery. He will not return to find her just dead or dying. "Nothing but extremity could make me so familiar with those terrible words applied to so dear a friend." "I think," he says in another letter, "that there is not a greater folly than that of entering into too strict a partnership or friendship with the loss of which a man must be absolutely miserable; but especially [when the loss occurs] at an age when it is too

late to engage in a new friendship." The morbid feeling which could withhold a man from attending a friend's deathbed, or allow him to regret the affection to which his pain was due, is but too characteristic of Swift's egoistic attachments. Yet we forgive the rash phrase, when we read his passionate expressions of agony. Swift returned to Ireland in the autumn, and Stella struggled through the winter. He was again in England in the following summer, and for a time in better spirits. But once more the news comes that Stella is probably on her deathbed; and he replies in letters which we read as we listen to groans of a man in sorest agony. He keeps one letter for an hour before daring to open it. He does not wish to live to see the loss of the person for whose sake alone life was worth preserving. "What have I to do in the world? I never was in such agonies as when I received your letter and had it in my pocket. I am able to hold up my sorry head no longer." In another distracted letter he repeats, in Latin, the desire that Stella shall not die in the deanery, for fear of malignant misinterpretations. If any marriage had taken place, the desire to conceal it had become a rooted passion.

Swift returned to Ireland, to find Stella still living. It is said that in the last period of her life Swift offered to make the marriage public, and that she declined, saying that it was now too late.<sup>1</sup> She lingered till January 28, 1728. He sat down the same night to write a few scattered reminiscences. He breaks down; and writes again

<sup>1</sup> Scott heard this from Mrs. Whiteway's grandson. Sheridan tells the story as though Stella had begged for publicity, and Swift cruelly refused. Delany's statement (p. 56), which agrees with Mrs. Whiteway's, appears to be on good authority, and, if true, proves the reality of the marriage.



during the funeral, which he is too ill to attend. The fragmentary notes give us the most authentic account of Stella, and show, at least, what she appeared in the eyes of her lifelong friend and protector. We may believe that she was intelligent and charming, as we can be certain that Swift loved her in every sense but one. A lock of her hair was preserved in an envelope in which he had written one of those vivid phrases by which he still lives in our memory: "*Only a woman's hair.*" What does it mean? Our interpretation will depend partly upon what we can see ourselves in a lock of hair. But I think that any one who judges Swift fairly will read in those four words the most intense utterance of tender affection, and of pathetic yearning for the irrevocable past, strangely blended with a bitterness springing, not from remorse, but indignation at the cruel tragi-comedy of life. The Destinies laugh at us whilst they torture us; they make cruel scourges of trifles, and extract the bitterest passion from our best affections.

Swift was left alone. Before we pass on we must briefly touch the problems of this strange history. It was a natural guess that some mysterious cause condemned Swift to his loneliness. A story is told by Scott (on poor evidence) that Delany went to Archbishop King's library about the time of the supposed marriage. As he entered Swift rushed out with a distracted countenance. King was in tears, and said to Delany, "You have just met the most unhappy man on earth; but on the subject of his wretchedness you must never ask a question." This has been connected with a guess made by somebody that Swift had discovered Stella to be his natural sister. It can be shown conclusively that this is impossible; and the story must be left as picturesque but too hopelessly

vague to gratify any inference whatever. We know without it that Swift was unhappy, but we know nothing of any definite cause.

Another view is that there is no mystery. Swift, it is said, retained through life the position of Stella's "guide, philosopher, and friend," and was never anything more. Stella's address to Swift (on his birthday, 1721) may be taken to confirm this theory. It says with a plainness like his own that he had taught her to despise beauty and hold her empire by virtue and sense. Yet the theory is in itself strange. The less love entered into Swift's relations to Stella, the more difficult to explain his behaviour to Vanessa. If he regarded Stella only as a daughter or a younger sister, and she returned the same feeling, he had no reason for making any mystery about the woman who would not in that case be a rival. If, again, we accept this view, we naturally ask why Swift "never admitted love a guest." He simply continued, it is suggested, to behave as teacher to pupil. He thought of her when she was a woman as he had thought of her when she was a child of eight years old. But it is singular that a man should be able to preserve such a relation. It is quite true that a connexion of this kind may blind a man to its probable consequences; but it is contrary to ordinary experience that it should render the consequences less probable. The relation might explain why Swift should be off his guard; but could hardly act as a safeguard. An ordinary man who was on such terms with a beautiful girl as are revealed in the *Journal to Stella* would have ended by falling in love with her. Why did not Swift? We can only reply by remembering the "coldness" of temper to which he refers in his first letter, and his assertion that he did not understand love, and that his frequent

flirtations never meant more than a desire for distraction. The affair with Varina is an exception; but there are grounds for holding that Swift was constitutionally indisposed to the passion of love. The absence of any traces of such a passion from writings conspicuous for their amazing sincerity, and (it is added) for their freedom of another kind, has been often noticed as a confirmation of this hypothesis. Yet it must be said that Swift could be strictly reticent about his strongest feelings—and was specially cautious, for whatever reason, in regard to his relation with Stella.<sup>1</sup>

If Swift constitutionally differed from other men, we have some explanation of his strange conduct. But we must take into account other circumstances. Swift had very obvious motives for not marrying. In the first place, he gradually became almost a monomaniac upon the question of money. His hatred of wasting a penny unnecessarily began at Trinity College, and is prominent in all his letters and journals. It coloured even his politics, for a conviction that the nation was hopelessly ruined is one of his strongest prejudices. He kept accounts down to halfpence, and rejoices at every saving of a shilling. The passion was not the vulgar desire for wealth of the ordinary miser. It sprang from the conviction stored up in all his aspirations that money meant independence. "Wealth," he says, "is liberty; and liberty is a blessing fittest for a philosopher—and Gay is a slave just by two thousand pounds too little."<sup>2</sup> Gay was a duchess's lapdog; Swift, with all his troubles, at least a free man. Like all Swift's prejudices, this became a fixed idea which

<sup>1</sup> Besides Scott's remarks (see vol. v. of his life) see Orrery, *Letter* 10; *Deane Swift*, p. 93; *Sheridan*, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter to Pope*, July 16, 1728.

was always gathering strength. He did not love money for its own sake. He was even magnificent in his generosity. He scorned to receive money for his writings; he abandoned the profit to his printers in compensation for the risks they ran, or gave it to his friends. His charity was splendid relatively to his means. In later years he lived on a third of his income, gave away a third, and saved the remaining third for his posthumous charity<sup>1</sup>—and posthumous charity which involves present saving is charity of the most unquestionable kind. His principle was, that by reducing his expenditure to the lowest possible point, he secured his independence, and could then make a generous use of the remainder. Until he had received his deanery, however, he could only make both ends meet. Marriage would, therefore, have meant poverty, probably dependence, and the complete sacrifice of his ambition.

If under these circumstances Swift had become engaged to Stella upon Temple's death, he would have been doing what was regularly done by fellows of colleges under the old system. There is, however, no trace of such an engagement. It would be in keeping with Swift's character, if we should suppose that he shrank from the bondage of an engagement; that he designed to marry Stella as soon as he should achieve a satisfactory position, and meanwhile trusted to his influence over her, and thought that he was doing her justice by leaving her at liberty to marry if she chose. The close connexion must have been injurious to Stella's prospects of a match; but it continued only by her choice. If this were, in fact, the case, it is still easy to understand why Swift did not marry upon becoming Dean. He felt himself, I have said, to be a broken man.

<sup>1</sup> *Sheridan*, p. 23.

His prospects were ruined, and his health precarious. This last fact requires to be remembered in every estimate of Swift's character. His life was passed under a Damocles' sword. He suffered from a distressing illness which he attributed to an indigestion produced by an over-consumption of fruit at Temple's when he was a little over twenty-one. The main symptoms were a giddiness, which frequently attacked him, and was accompanied by deafness. It is quite recently that the true nature of the complaint has been identified. Dr. Bucknill<sup>1</sup> seems to prove that the symptoms are those of "Labyrinthine vertigo," or Ménière's disease, so called because discovered by Ménière in 1861. The references to his sufferings, brought together by Sir William Wilde in 1849,<sup>2</sup> are frequent in all his writings. It tormented him for days, weeks, and months, gradually becoming more permanent in later years. In 1731 he tells Gay that his giddiness attacks him constantly, though it is less violent than of old; and in 1736 he says that it is continual. From a much earlier period it had alarmed and distressed him. Some pathetic entries are given by Mr. Forster from one of his note-books: "December 5 (1708).—Horribly sick. 12th.—Much better, thank God and M.D.'s prayers. . . . April 2d (1709). Small giddy fit and swimming in the head. M.D. and God help me. . . . July, 1710.—Terrible fit. God knows what may be the event. Better towards the end." The terrible anxiety, always in the background, must count for much in Swift's gloomy despondency. Though he seems always to have spoken of the fruit as the cause, he must have had misgivings as to the nature and result. Dr. Bucknill tells us that it was not necessarily connected

<sup>1</sup> *Brain* for January, 1882.

<sup>2</sup> *Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life*.

with the disease of the brain which ultimately came upon him; but he may well have thought that this disorder of the head was prophetic of such an end. It was, probably, in 1717 that he said to Young, of the *Night Thoughts*, "I shall be like that tree: I shall die at the top." A man haunted perpetually by such forebodings might well think that marriage was not for him. In *Cadenus and Vanessa* he insists upon his declining years with an emphasis which seems excessive even from a man of forty-four (in 1713 he was really forty-five) to a girl of twenty. In a singular poem called the *Progress of Marriage* he treats the supposed case of a divine of fifty-two marrying a lively girl of fashion, and speaks with his usual plainness of the probable consequences of such folly. We cannot doubt that here as elsewhere he is thinking of himself. He was fifty-two when receiving the passionate love-letters of Vanessa; and the poem seems to be specially significant.

This is one of those cases in which we feel that even biographers are not omniscient; and I must leave it to my readers to choose their own theory, only suggesting that readers too are fallible. But we may still ask what judgment is to be passed upon Swift's conduct. Both Stella and Vanessa suffered from coming within the sphere of Swift's imperious attraction. Stella enjoyed his friendship through her life at the cost of a partial isolation from ordinary domestic happiness. She might and probably did regard his friendship as a full equivalent for the sacrifice. It is one of the cases in which, if the actors be our contemporaries, we hold that outsiders are incompetent to form a judgment, as none but the principals can really know the facts. Is it better to be the most intimate friend of a man of genius or the wife of a commonplace Tisdall? If Stella chose, and chose freely, it is hard to say

that she was mistaken, or to blame Swift for a fascination which he could not but exercise. The tragedy of Vanessa suggests rather different reflections. Swift's duty was plain. Granting what seems to be probable, that Vanessa's passion took him by surprise, and that he thought himself disqualified for marriage by infirmity and weariness of life, he should have made his decision perfectly plain. He should have forbidden any clandestine relations. Furtive caresses—even on paper—understandings to carry on a private correspondence, fond references to old meetings, were obviously calculated to encourage her passion. He should not only have pronounced it to be hopeless, but made her, at whatever cost, recognize the hopelessness. This is where Swift's strength seems to have failed him. He was not intentionally cruel; he could not foresee the fatal event; he tried to put her aside, and he felt the "shame, disappointment, grief, surprise," of which he speaks on the avowal of her love. He gave her the most judicious advice, and tried to persuade her to accept it. But he did not make it effectual. He shrank from inflicting pain upon her and upon himself. He could not deprive himself of the sympathy which soothed his gloomy melancholy. His affection was never free from the egoistic element which prevented him from acting unequivocally, as an impartial spectator would have advised him to act, or as he would have advised another to act in a similar case. And therefore, when the crisis came, the very strength of his affection produced an explosion of selfish wrath, and he escaped from the intolerable position by striking down the woman whom he loved, and whose love for him had become a burden. The wrath was not the less fatal because it was half composed of remorse, and the energy of the explosion proportioned to the strength of the feeling which had held it in check.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## WOOD'S HALFPENCE.

IN one of Scott's finest novels the old Cameronian preacher, who had been left for dead by Claverhouse's troopers, suddenly rises to confront his conquerors, and spends his last breath in denouncing the oppressors of the saints. Even such an apparition was Jonathan Swift to comfortable Whigs who were flourishing in the place of Harley and St. John, when, after ten years' quiescence, he suddenly stepped into the political arena. After the first crushing fall he had abandoned partial hope, and contented himself with establishing supremacy in his chapter. But undying wrath smouldered in his breast till time came for an outburst.

No man had ever learnt more thoroughly the lesson, "Put not your faith in princes;" or had been impressed with a lower estimate of the wisdom displayed by the rulers of the world. He had been behind the scenes, and knew that the wisdom of great ministers meant just enough cunning to court the ruin which a little common sense would have avoided. Corruption was at the prow and folly at the helm. The selfish ring which he had denounced so fiercely had triumphed. It had triumphed, as he held, by flattering the new dynasty, hoodwinking the nation, and maligning its antagonists. The cynical theory



of politics was not for him, as for some comfortable cynics, an abstract proposition, which mattered very little to a sensible man, but was embodied in the bitter wrath with which he regarded his triumphant adversaries. Pessimism is perfectly compatible with bland enjoyment of the good things in a bad world; but Swift's pessimism was not of this type. It meant energetic hatred of definite things and people who were always before him.

With this feeling he had come to Ireland; and Ireland—I am speaking of a century and a half ago—was the opprobrium of English statesmanship. There Swift had (or thought he had) always before him a concrete example of the basest form of tyranny. By Ireland, I have said, Swift meant, in the first place, the English in Ireland. In the last years of his sanity he protested indignantly against the confusion between the "savage old Irish" and the English gentry, who, he said, were much better bred, spoke better English, and were more civilized than the inhabitants of many English counties.<sup>1</sup> He retained to the end of his life his antipathy to the Scotch colonists. He opposed their demand for political equality as fiercely in the last as in his first political utterances. He contrasted them unfavourably<sup>2</sup> with the Catholics, who had, indeed, been driven to revolt by massacre and confiscation under Puritan rule, but who were now, he declared, "true Whigs, in the best and most proper sense of the word," and thoroughly loyal to the house of Hanover. Had there been a danger of a Catholic revolt, Swift's feelings might have been different; but he always held that they were "as inconsiderable as the women and children," mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water," "out of all

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Pope, July 13, 1737.

<sup>2</sup> *Catholic Reasons for Repealing the Test.*

capacity of doing any mischief, if they were ever so well inclined."<sup>1</sup> Looking at them in this way, he felt a sincere compassion for their misery and a bitter resentment against their oppressors. The English, he said, in a remarkable letter,<sup>2</sup> should be ashamed of their reproaches of Irish dulness, ignorance, and cowardice. Those defects were the products of slavery. He declared that the poor cottagers had "a much better natural taste for good sense, humour, and raillery than ever I observed among people of the like sort in England. But the millions of oppressions they lie under, the tyranny of their landlords, the ridiculous zeal of their priests, and the misery of the whole nation, have been enough to damp the best spirits under the sun." Such a view is now commonplace enough. It was then a heresy to English statesmen, who thought that nobody but a Papist or a Jacobite could object to the tyranny of Whigs.

Swift's diagnosis of the chronic Irish disease was thoroughly political. He considered that Irish misery sprang from the subjection to a government not intentionally cruel, but absolutely selfish; to which the Irish revenue meant so much convenient political plunder, and which acted on the principle quoted from Cowley, that the happiness of Ireland should not weigh against the "least conveniency" of England. He summed up his views in a remarkable letter,<sup>3</sup> to be presently mentioned, the substance of which had been orally communicated to Walpole. He said to Walpole, as he said in every published utterance: first, that the colonists were still Englishmen, and entitled to English rights; secondly, that their trade was delib-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters on Sacramental Test* in 1738.

<sup>2</sup> To Sir Charles Wigan, July, 1732.

<sup>3</sup> To Lord Peterborough, April 21, 1726.

erately crushed, purely for the benefit of the English of England; thirdly, that all valuable preferments were bestowed upon men born in England, as a matter of course; and, finally, that in consequence of this the upper classes, deprived of all other openings, were forced to rack-rent their tenants to such a degree that not one farmer in the kingdom out of a hundred "could afford shoes or stockings to his children, or to eat flesh or drink anything better than sour milk and water twice in a year; so that the whole country, except the Scotch plantation in the north, is a scene of misery and desolation hardly to be matched on this side Lapland." A modern reformer would give the first and chief place to this social misery. It is characteristic that Swift comes to it as a consequence from the injustice to his own class: as, again, that he appeals to Walpole, not on the simple ground that the people are wretched, but on the ground that they will be soon unable to pay the tribute to England, which he reckons at a million a year. But his conclusion might be accepted by any Irish patriot. Whatever, he says, can make a country poor and despicable concurs in the case of Ireland. The nation is controlled by laws to which it does not consent; disowned by its brethren and countrymen; refused the liberty of trading even in its natural commodities; forced to seek for justice many hundred miles by sea and land; rendered in a manner incapable of serving the King and country in any place of honour, trust, or profit; whilst the governors have no sympathy with the governed, except what may occasionally arise from the sense of justice and philanthropy.

I am not to ask how far Swift was right in his judgments. Every line which he wrote shows that he was thoroughly sincere and profoundly stirred by his convic-

tions. A remarkable pamphlet, published in 1720, contained his first utterance upon the subject. It is an exhortation to the Irish to use only Irish manufactures. He applies to Ireland the fable of *Arachne and Pallas*. The goddess, indignant at being equalled in spinning, turned her rival into a spider, to spin forever out of her own bowels in a narrow compass. He always, he says, pitied poor Arachne for so cruel and unjust a sentence, "which, however, is fully executed upon us by England with further additions of rigour and severity; for the greatest part of our bowels and vitals is extracted, without allowing us the liberty of spinning and weaving them." Swift of course accepts the economic fallacy equally taken for granted by his opponents, and fails to see that England and Ireland injured themselves as well as each other by refusing to interchange their productions. But he utters forcibly his righteous indignation against the contemptuous injustice of the English rulers, in consequence of which the "miserable people" are being reduced "to a worse condition than the peasants in France, or the vassals in Germany and Poland." Slaves, he says, have a natural disposition to be tyrants; and he himself, when his betters give him a kick, is apt to revenge it with six upon his footman. That is how the landlords treat their tenantry.

The printer of this pamphlet was prosecuted. The chief justice (Whitshed) sent back the jury nine times and kept them eleven hours before they would consent to bring in a "special verdict." The unpopularity of the prosecution became so great that it was at last dropped. Four years afterwards a more violent agitation broke out. A patent had been given to a certain William Wood for supplying Ireland with a copper coinage. Many com-

plaints had been made, and in September, 1723, addresses were voted by the Irish Houses of Parliament, declaring that the patent had been obtained by clandestine and false representations; that it was mischievous to the country; and that Wood had been guilty of frauds in his coinage. They were pacified by vague promises; but Walpole went on with the scheme on the strength of a favourable report of a committee of the Privy Council; and the excitement was already serious when (in 1724) Swift published the *Drapier's Letters*, which give him his chief title to eminence as a patriotic agitator.

Swift either shared or took advantage of the general belief that the mysteries of the currency are unfathomable to the human intelligence. They have to do with that world of financial magic in which wealth may be made out of paper, and all ordinary relations of cause and effect are suspended. There is, however, no real mystery about the halfpence. The small coins which do not form part of the legal tender may be considered primarily as counters. A penny is a penny, so long as twelve are change for a shilling. It is not in the least necessary for this purpose that the copper contained in the twelve penny pieces should be worth or nearly worth a shilling. A sovereign can never be worth much more than the gold of which it is made. But at the present day bronze worth only twopence is coined into twelve penny pieces.<sup>1</sup> The coined bronze is worth six times as much as the uncoined. The small coins must have some intrinsic value to deter forgery, and must be made of good materials to stand wear and tear. If these conditions be observed, and a proper number be issued, the value of the penny will be

<sup>1</sup> The ton of bronze, I am informed, is coined into 108,000 pence; that is, 450*l.* The metal is worth about 7*l.*

no more affected by the value of the copper than the value of the banknote by that of the paper on which it is written. This opinion assumes that the copper coins cannot be offered or demanded in payment of any but trifling debts. The halfpence coined by Wood seem to have fulfilled these conditions, and as copper worth twopence (on the lowest computation) was coined into ten halfpence, worth fivepence, their intrinsic value was more than double that of modern halfpence.

The halfpence, then, were not objectionable upon this ground. Nay, it would have been wasteful to make them more valuable. It would have been as foolish to use more copper for the pence as to make the works of a watch of gold if brass is equally durable and convenient. But another consequence is equally clear. The effect of Wood's patent was that a mass of copper worth about 30,000*l.*<sup>1</sup> became worth 100,800*l.* in the shape of halfpenny pieces. There was, therefore, a balance of about 40,000*l.* to pay for the expenses of coinage. It would have been waste to get rid of this by putting more copper in the coins; but, if so large a profit arose from the transaction, it would go to somebody. At the present day it would be brought into the national treasury. This was not the way in which business was done in Ireland. Wood was to pay 1000*l.* a year for fourteen years to the Crown.<sup>2</sup> But 14,000*l.* still leaves a large margin for profit. What was to become of

<sup>1</sup> Simon, in his work on the Irish coinage, makes the profit 60,000*l.*; but he reckons the copper at 1*s.* a pound, whereas from the Report of the Privy Council it would seem to be properly 1*s.* 6*d.* a pound. Swift and most later writers say 108,000*l.*, but the right sum is 100,800*l.*—360 tons coined into 2*s.* 6*d.* a pound.

<sup>2</sup> Monek Mason says only 300*l.* a year, but this is the sum mentioned in the Report and by Swift.

it? According to the admiring biographer of Sir R. Walpole the patent had been originally given by Lord Sunderland to the Duchess of Kendal, a lady whom the King delighted to honour. She already received 3000*l.* a year in pensions upon the Irish Establishment, and she sold this patent to Wood for 10,000*l.* Enough was still left to give Wood a handsome profit; as in transactions of this kind every accomplice in a dirty business expects to be well paid. So handsome, indeed, was the profit that Wood received ultimately a pension of 3000*l.* for eight years—24,000*l.*, that is—in consideration of abandoning the patent. It was right and proper that a profit should be made on the transaction, but shameful that it should be divided between the King's mistress and William Wood, and that the bargain should be struck without consulting the Irish representatives, and maintained in spite of their protests. The Duchess of Kendal was to be allowed to take a share of the wretched halfpence in the pocket of every Irish beggar. A more disgraceful transaction could hardly be imagined, or one more calculated to justify Swift's view of the selfishness and corruption of the English rulers.

Swift saw his chance, and went to work in characteristic fashion, with unscrupulous audacity of statement, guided by the keenest strategical instinct. He struck at the heart as vigorously as he had done in the *Examiner*, but with resentment sharpened by ten years of exile. It was not safe to speak of the Duchess of Kendal's share in the transaction, though the story, as poor Archdeacon Coxe pathetically declares, was industriously propagated. But the case against Wood was all the stronger. Is he so wicked, asks Swift, as to suppose that a nation is to be ruined that he may gain three or four score thousand pounds? Hampden went to prison, he says, rather than pay a few shillings

wrongfully; I, says Swift, would rather be hanged than have all my "property taxed at seventeen shillings in the pound at the arbitrary will and pleasure of the venerable Mr. Wood." A simple constitutional precedent might rouse a Hampden; but to stir a popular agitation it is as well to show that the evil actually inflicted is gigantic, independently of possible results. It requires, indeed, some audacity to prove that debasement of the copper currency can amount to a tax of seventeen shillings in the pound on all property. Here, however, Swift might simply throw the reins upon the neck of his fancy. Anybody may make any inferences he pleases in the mysterious regions of currency; and no inferences, it seems, were too audacious for his hearers, though we are left to doubt how far Swift's wrath had generated delusions in his own mind, and how far he perceived that other minds were ready to be deluded. He revels in prophesying the most extravagant consequences. The country will be undone; the tenants will not be able to pay their rents; "the farmers must rob, or beg, or leave the country; the shopkeepers in this and every other town must break or starve; the squire will hoard up all his good money to send to England and keep some poor tailor or weaver in his house, who will be glad to get bread at any rate."<sup>1</sup> Concrete facts are given to help the imagination. Squire Connolly must have 250 horses to bring his half-yearly rents to town; and the poor man will have to pay thirty-six of Wood's halfpence to get a quart of twopenny ale.

How is this proved? One argument is a sufficient specimen. Nobody, according to the patent, was to be forced to take Wood's halfpence; nor could any one be obliged to receive more than fivepence halfpenny in any one pay-

<sup>1</sup> Letter I.



ment. This, of course, meant that the halfpence could only be used as change, and a man must pay his debts in silver or gold whenever it was possible to use a sixpence. It upsets Swift's statement about Squire Connolly's rents. But Swift is equal to the emergency. The rule means, he says, that every man must take fivepence halfpenny in every payment, *if it be offered*; which, on the next page, becomes simply in every payment; therefore, making an easy assumption or two, he reckons that you will receive 160*l.* a year in these halfpence; and therefore (by other assumptions) lose 140*l.* a year.<sup>1</sup> It might have occurred to Swift, one would think, that both parties to the transaction could not possibly be losers. But he calmly assumes that the man who pays will lose in proportion to the increased number of coins; and the man who receives, in proportion to the depreciated value of each coin. He does not see, or think it worth notice, that the two losses obviously counterbalance each other; and he has an easy road to prophesying absolute ruin for everybody. It would be almost as great a compliment to call this sophistry as to dignify with the name of satire a round assertion that an honest man is a cheat or a rogue.

The real grievance, however, shows through the sham argument. "It is no loss of honour," thought Swift, "to submit to the lion; but who, with the figure of a man, can think with patience of being devoured alive by a rat?" Why should Wood have this profit (even if more reasonably estimated) in defiance of the wishes of the nation? It is, says Swift, because he is an Englishman and has great friends. He proposes to meet the attempt by a general agreement not to take the halfpence. Briefly, the halfpence were to be "Boycotted."

<sup>1</sup> Letter II.

Before this second letter was written the English ministers had become alarmed. A report of the Privy Council (July 24, 1724) defended the patent, but ended by recommending that the amount to be coined should be reduced to 40,000*l*. Carteret was sent out as Lord Lieutenant to get this compromise accepted. Swift replied by a third letter, arguing the question of the patent, which he can "never suppose," or, in other words, which everybody knew, to have been granted as a "job for the interest of some particular person." He vigorously asserts that the patent can never make it obligatory to accept the halfpence, and tells a story much to the purpose from old Leicester experience. The justices had reduced the price of ale to three-halfpence a quart. One of them, therefore, requested that they would make another order to appoint who should drink it, "for, by God," said he, "I will not."

The argument thus naturally led to a further and more important question. The discussion as to the patent brought forward the question of right. Wood and his friends, according to Swift, had begun to declare that the resistance meant Jacobitism and rebellion; they asserted that the Irish were ready to shake off their dependence upon the Crown of England. Swift took up the challenge and answered resolutely and eloquently. He took up the broadest ground. Ireland, he declared, depended upon England in no other sense than that in which England depended upon Ireland. Whoever thinks otherwise, he said, "I, M. B. despair, desire to be excepted; for I declare, next under God, I depend only on the King my sovereign, and the laws of my own country. I am so far," he added, "from depending upon the people of England, that, if they should rebel, I would take arms and lose every

drop of my blood to hinder the Pretender from being King of Ireland."

It had been reported that somebody (Walpole presumably) had sworn to thrust the halfpence down the throats of the Irish. The remedy, replied Swift, is totally in your own hands, "and therefore I have digressed a little . . . to let you see that by the laws of God, of nature, of nations, and of your own country, you are and ought to be as free a people as your brethren in England." As Swift had already said in the third letter, no one could believe that any English patent would stand half an hour after an address from the English Houses of Parliament such as that which had been passed against Wood's by the Irish Parliament. Whatever constitutional doubts might be raised, it was, therefore, come to be the plain question whether or not the English ministers should simply override the wishes of the Irish nation.

Carteret, upon landing, began by trying to suppress his adversary. A reward of 300*l.* was offered for the discovery of the author of the fourth letter. A prosecution was ordered against the printer. Swift went to the levée of the Lord Lieutenant, and reproached him bitterly for his severity against a poor tradesman who had published papers for the good of his country. Carteret answered in a happy quotation from Virgil, a feat which always seems to have brought consolation to the statesman of that day:

"Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt  
Moliri."

Another story is more characteristic. Swift's butler had acted as his amanuensis, and absented himself one night whilst the proclamation was running. Swift thought that the butler was either treacherous or presuming upon his

knowledge of the secret. As soon as the man returned he ordered him to strip off his livery and begone. "I am in your power," he said, "and for that very reason I will not stand your insolence." The poor butler departed, but preserved his fidelity; and Swift, when the tempest had blown over, rewarded him by appointing him verger in the cathedral. The grand jury threw out the bill against the printer in spite of all Whitshed's efforts; they were discharged; and the next grand jury presented Wood's halfpence as a nuisance. Carteret gave way, the patent was surrendered, and Swift might congratulate himself upon a complete victory.

The conclusion is in one respect rather absurd. The Irish succeeded in rejecting a real benefit at the cost of paying Wood the profit which he would have made, had he been allowed to confer it. Another point must be admitted. Swift's audacious misstatements were successful for the time in rousing the spirit of the people. They have led, however, to a very erroneous estimate of the whole case. English statesmen and historians<sup>1</sup> have found it so easy to expose his errors that they have thought his whole case absurd. The grievance was not what it was represented; therefore it is argued that there was no grievance. The very essence of the case was that the Irish people were to be plundered by the German mistress; and such plunder was possible because the English people, as Swift says, never thought of Ireland except when there was nothing else to be talked of in the coffee-houses.<sup>2</sup> Owing to the conditions of the controversy this grievance

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Lord Stanhope's account. For the other view see Mr. Lecky's *History of the Eighteenth Century* and Mr. Froude's *English in Ireland*.

<sup>2</sup> Letter IV.

only came out gradually, and could never be fully stated. Swift could never do more than hint at the transaction. His letters (including three which appeared after the last mentioned, enforcing the same case) have often been cited as models of eloquence, and compared to Demosthenes. We must make some deduction from this, as in the case of his former political pamphlets. The intensity of his absorption in the immediate end deprives them of some literary merits; and we, to whom the sophistries are palpable enough, are apt to resent them. Anybody can be effective in a way, if he chooses to lie boldly. Yet, in another sense, it is hard to over-praise the letters. They have in a high degree the peculiar stamp of Swift's genius: the vein of the most nervous common-sense and pithy assertion, with an undercurrent of intense passion, the more impressive because it is never allowed to exhale in mere rhetoric.

Swift's success, the dauntless front which he had shown to the oppressor, made him the idol of his countrymen. A Drapier's Club was formed in his honour, which collected the letters and drank toasts and sang songs to celebrate their hero. In a sad letter to Pope, in 1737, he complains that none of his equals care for him; but adds that as he walks the streets he has "a thousand hats and blessings upon old scores which those we call the gentry have forgot." The people received him as their champion. When he returned from England, in 1726, bells were rung, bonfires lighted, and a guard of honour escorted him to the deanery. Towns voted him their freedom and received him like a prince. When Walpole spoke of arresting him a prudent friend told the minister that the messenger would require a guard of ten thousand soldiers. Corporations asked his advice in elections, and

the weavers appealed to him on questions about their trade. In one of his satires<sup>1</sup> Swift had attacked a certain Serjeant Bettesworth :

"Thus at the bar the booby Bettesworth,  
Though half-a-crown o'er pays his sweat's worth."

Bettesworth called upon him with, as Swift reports, a knife in his pocket, and complained in such terms as to imply some intention of personal violence. The neighbours instantly sent a deputation to the Dean, proposing to take vengeance upon Bettesworth ; and though he induced them to disperse peaceably, they formed a guard to watch the house ; and Bettesworth complained that his attack upon the Dean had lowered his professional income by 1200*l.* a year. A quaint example of his popularity is given by Sheridan. A great crowd had collected to see an eclipse. Swift thereupon sent out the bellman to give notice that the eclipse had been postponed by the Dean's orders, and the crowd dispersed.

Influence with the people, however, could not bring Swift back to power. At one time there seemed to be a gleam of hope. Swift visited England twice in 1726 and 1727. He paid long visits to his old friend Pope, and again met Bolingbroke, now returned from exile, and trying to make a place in English politics. Peterborough introduced the Dean to Walpole, to whom Swift detailed his views upon Irish politics. Walpole was the last man to set about a great reform from mere considerations of justice and philanthropy, and was not likely to trust a confidant of Bolingbroke. He was civil but indifferent. Swift, however, was introduced by his friends to Mrs. Howard, the mistress of the Prince of Wales, soon to be-

<sup>1</sup> "On the words Brother Protestants, &c."

come George II. The Princess, afterwards Queen Caroline, ordered Swift to come and see her, and he complied, as he says, after nine commands. He told her that she had lately seen a wild boy from Germany, and now he supposed she wanted to see a wild Dean from Ireland. Some civilities passed; Swift offered some plaids of Irish manufacture, and the Princess promised some medals in return. When, in the next year, George I. died, the Opposition hoped great things from the change. Pulteney had tried to get Swift's powerful help for the *Craftsman*, the Opposition organ; and the Opposition hoped to upset Walpole. Swift, who had thought of going to France for his health, asked Mrs. Howard's advice. She recommended him to stay; and he took the recommendation as amounting to a promise of support. He had some hopes of obtaining English preferment in exchange for his deanery in what he calls (in the date to one of his letters<sup>1</sup>) "wretched Dublin in miserable Ireland." It soon appeared, however, that the mistress was powerless; and that Walpole was to be as firm as ever in his seat. Swift returned to Ireland, never again to leave it: to lose soon afterwards his beloved Stella, and nurse an additional grudge against courts and favourites.

The bitterness with which he resented Mrs. Howard's supposed faithlessness is painfully illustrative, in truth, of the morbid state of mind which was growing upon him. "You think," he says to Bolingbroke in 1729, "as I ought to think, that it is time for me to have done with the world; and so I would, if I could get into a better before I was called into the best, and not die here in a rage, like a poisoned rat in a hole." That terrible phrase expresses but too vividly the state of mind which was now be-

<sup>1</sup> To Lord Stafford, November 26, 1725.

coming familiar to him. Separated by death and absence from his best friends, and tormented by increasing illness, he looked out upon a state of things in which he could see no ground for hope. The resistance to Wood's halfpence had staved off immediate ruin, but had not cured the fundamental evil. Some tracts upon Irish affairs, written after the *Drapier's Letters*, sufficiently indicate his despairing vein. "I am," he says in 1737, when proposing some remedy for the swarms of beggars in Dublin, "a desponder by nature;" and he has found out that the people will never stir themselves to remove a single grievance. His old prejudices were as keen as ever, and could dictate personal outbursts. He attacked the bishops bitterly for offering certain measures which in his view sacrificed the permanent interests of the Church to that of the actual occupants. He showed his own sincerity by refusing to take fines for leases which would have benefited himself at the expense of his successors. With equal earnestness he still clung to the Test Acts, and assailed the Protestant Dissenters with all his old bitterness, and ridiculed their claims to brotherhood with Churchmen. To the end he was a Churchman before everything. One of the last of his poetical performances was prompted by the sanction given by the Irish Parliament to an opposition to certain "titles of ejectionment." He had defended the right of the Irish Parliament against English rulers; but when it attacked the interests of his Church his fury showed itself in the most savage satire that he ever wrote, the *Legion Club*. It is an explosion of wrath tinged with madness:

"Could I from the building's top  
Hear the rattling thunder drop,  
While the devil upon the roof  
(If the devil be thunder-proof)



Should with poker fiery red  
 Crack the stones and melt the lead,  
 Drive them down on every skull  
 When the den of thieves is full;  
 Quite destroy the harpies' nest,  
 How might this our isle be blest!"

What follows fully keeps up to this level. Swift flings filth like a maniac, plunges into ferocious personalities, and ends fitly with the execration—

"May their God, the devil, confound them!"

He was seized with one of his fits whilst writing the poem, and was never afterwards capable of sustained composition.

Some further pamphlets—especially one on the State of Ireland—repeat and enforce his views. One of them requires special mention. The *Modest Proposal* (written in 1729) for *Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from being a Burden to their Parents or Country*—the proposal being that they should be turned into articles of food—gives the very essence of Swift's feeling, and is one of the most tremendous pieces of satire in existence. It shows the quality already noticed. Swift is burning with a passion the glow of which makes other passions look cold, as it is said that some bright lights cause other illuminating objects to cast a shadow. Yet his face is absolutely grave, and he details his plan as calmly as a modern projector suggesting the importation of Australian meat. The superficial coolness may be revolting to tender-hearted people, and has, indeed, led to condemnation of the supposed ferocity of the author almost as surprising as the criticisms which can see in it nothing but an exquisite piece of humour. It is in truth, fearful to read even now. Yet we can forgive and even sympathize when we take it

for what it really is—the most complete expression of burning indignation against intolerable wrongs. It utters, indeed, a serious conviction. “I confess myself,” says Swift in a remarkable paper,<sup>1</sup> “to be touched with a very sensible pleasure when I hear of a mortality in any country parish or village, where the wretches are forced to pay for a filthy cabin and two ridges of potatoes treble the worth; brought up to steal and beg for want of work; to whom death would be the best thing to be wished for, on account both of themselves and the public.” He remarks in the same place on the lamentable contradiction presented in Ireland to the maxim that the “people are the riches of a nation,” and the *Modest Proposal* is the fullest comment on this melancholy reflection. After many visionary proposals he has at last hit upon the plan, which has at least the advantage that by adopting it “we can incur no danger of disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, the flesh being of too tender a consistence to admit a long continuance in salt, although, perhaps, I could name a country which would be glad to eat up a whole nation without it.”

Swift once asked Delany<sup>2</sup> whether the “corruptions and villanies of men in power did not eat his flesh and exhaust his spirits?” “No,” said Delany. “Why, how can you help it?” said Swift. “Because,” replied Delany, “I am commanded to the contrary—*fret not thyself because of the ungodly.*” That, like other wise maxims, is capable of an ambiguous application. As Delany took it, Swift might perhaps have replied that it was a very comfortable maxim—for the ungodly. His own application of Scripture is different. It tells us, he says, in his proposal for using Irish manufactures, that “oppression makes a

<sup>1</sup> *Mariners Controlled in Ireland.*

<sup>2</sup> Delany, p. 148.

wise man mad." If, therefore, some men are not mad, it must be because they are not wise. In truth, it is characteristic of Swift that he could never learn the great lesson of submission even to the inevitable. He could not, like an easy-going Delany, submit to oppression which might possibly be resisted with success; but as little could he submit when all resistance was hopeless. His rage, which could find no better outlet, burnt inwardly and drove him mad. It is very interesting to compare Swift's wrathful denunciations with Berkeley's treatment of the same before in the *Querist* (1735-'37). Berkeley is full of luminous suggestions upon economical questions which are entirely beyond Swift's mark. He is in a region quite above the sophistries of the *Drapier's Letters*. He sees equally the terrible grievance that no people in the world is so beggarly, wretched, and destitute as the common Irish. But he thinks all complaints against the English rule useless, and therefore foolish. If the English restrain our trade ill-advisedly, is it not, he asks, plainly our interest to accommodate ourselves to them? (No. 136.) Have we not the advantage of English protection without sharing English responsibilities? He asks "whether England doth not really love us and wish well to us as bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh? and whether it be not our part to cultivate this love and affection all manner of ways?" (Nos. 322, 323.) One can fancy how Swift must have received this characteristic suggestion of the admirable Berkeley, who could not bring himself to think ill of any one. Berkeley's main contention is, no doubt, sound in itself, namely, that the welfare of the country really depended on the industry and economy of its inhabitants, and that such qualities would have made the Irish comfortable in spite of all English restrictions and Government abuses. But, then,

Swift might well have answered that such general maxims are idle. It is all very well for divines to tell people to become good, and to find out that then they will be happy. But how are they to be made good? Are the Irish intrinsically worse than other men, or is their laziness and restlessness due to special and removable circumstances? In the latter case is there not more real value in attacking tangible evils than in propounding general maxims and calling upon all men to submit to oppression, and even to believe in the oppressor's good-will, in the name of Christian charity? To answer those questions would be to plunge into interminable and hopeless controversies. Meanwhile, Swift's fierce indignation against English oppression might almost as well have been directed against a law of nature for any immediate result. Whether the rousing of the national spirit was any benefit is a question which I must leave to others. In any case, the work, however darkened by personal feeling or love of class-privilege, expressed as hearty a hatred of oppression as ever animated a human being.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### "GULLIVER'S TRAVELS."

THE winter of 1713-'14 passed by Swift in England was full of anxiety and vexation. He found time, however, to join in a remarkable literary association. The so-called Scriblers Club does not appear, indeed, to have had any definite organization. The rising young wits, Pope and Gay, both of them born in 1688, were already becoming famous, and were taken up by Swift, still in the zenith of his political power. Parnell, a few years their senior, had been introduced by Swift to Oxford as a convert from Whiggism. All three became intimate with Swift and Arbuthnot, the most learned and amiable of the whole circle of Swift's friends. Swift declared him to have every quality that could make a man amiable and useful, with but one defect—he had "a sort of slouch in his walk." He was loved and respected by every one, and was one of the most distinguished of the Brothers. Swift and Arbuthnot and their three juniors discussed literary plans in the midst of the growing political excitement. Even Oxford used, as Pope tells us, to amuse himself during the very crisis of his fate by scribbling verses and talking nonsense with the members of this informal club, and some doggerel lines exchanged with him remain as a specimen—a poor one, it is to be hoped—of their intercourse.

The familiarity thus begun continued through the life of the members. Swift can have seen very little of Pope. He hardly made his acquaintance till the latter part of 1713; they parted in the summer of 1714; and never met again except in Swift's two visits to England in 1726-'27. Yet their correspondence shows an affection which was, no doubt, heightened by the consciousness of each that the friendship of his most famous contemporary author was creditable; but which, upon Swift's side, at least, was thoroughly sincere and cordial, and strengthened with advancing years.

The final cause of the club was supposed to be the composition of a joint-stock satire. We learn from an interesting letter<sup>1</sup> that Pope formed the original design; though Swift thought that Arbuthnot was the only one capable of carrying it out. The scheme was to write the memoirs of an imaginary pedant, who had dabbled with equal wrong-headedness in all kinds of knowledge; and thus recalls Swift's early performances—the *Battle of the Books* and the *Tale of a Tub*. Arbuthnot begs Swift to work upon it during his melancholy retirement at Letcombe. Swift had other things to occupy his mind; and upon the dispersion of the party the club fell into abeyance. Fragments of the original plan were carried out by Pope and Arbuthnot, and form part of the *Miscellanies*, to which Swift contributed a number of poetical scraps, published under Pope's direction in 1726-'27. It seems probable that *Gulliver* originated in Swift's mind in the course of his meditations upon Scriblers. The composition of *Gulliver* was one of the occupations by which he amused himself after recovering from the great shock of

<sup>1</sup> It is in the Forster library, and, I believe, unpublished, in answer to Arbuthnot's letter mentioned in the text.

his "exile." He worked, as he seems always to have done, slowly and intermittently. Part of Brobdingnag at least, as we learn from a letter of Vanessa's, was in existence by 1722. Swift brought the whole manuscript to England in 1726, and it was published anonymously in the following winter. The success was instantaneous and overwhelming. "I will make over all my profits" (in a work then being published) "to you," writes Arbuthnot, "for the property of *Gulliver's Travels*, which, I believe, will have as great a run as *John Bunyan*." The anticipation was amply fulfilled. *Gulliver's Travels* is one of the very few books some knowledge of which may be fairly assumed in any one who reads anything. Yet something must be said of the secret of the astonishing success of this unique performance.

One remark is obvious. *Gulliver's Travels* (omitting certain passages) is almost the most delightful children's book ever written. Yet it has been equally valued as an unrivalled satire. Old Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, was "in raptures with it," says Gay, "and can dream of nothing else." She forgives his bitter attacks upon her party in consideration of his assault upon human nature. He gives, she declares, "the most accurate" (that is, of course the most scornful) "account of kings, ministers, bishops, and courts of justice that is possible to be writ." Another curious testimony may be noticed. Godwin, when tracing all evils to the baneful effects of government, declares that the author of *Gulliver* showed a "more profound insight into the true principles of political justice than any preceding or contemporary author." The playful form was unfortunate, thinks this grave philosopher, as blinding mankind to the "inestimable wisdom" of the work. This double triumph is remarkable. We may not

share the opinions of the cynic. If the day, or of the revolutionists of a later generation, but it is strange that they should be fascinated by a work which is studied with delight, without the faintest suspicion of any ulterior meaning, by the infantile mind.

The charm of *Gulliver* for the young depends upon an obvious quality, which is indicated in Swift's report of the criticism by an Irish bishop, who said that "the book was full of improbable lies, and for his part he hardly believed a word of it." There is something pleasant in the intense gravity of the narrative, which recalls and may have been partly suggested by *Robinson Crusoe*, though it came naturally to Swift. I have already spoken of his delight in mystification, and the detailed realization of pure fiction seems to have been delightful in itself. The Partridge pamphlets and its various practical jokes are illustrations of a tendency which fell in with the spirit of the time, and of which *Gulliver* may be regarded as the highest manifestation. Swift's peculiarity is in the curious sobriety of fancy, which leads him to keep in his most daring flights upon the confines of the possible. In the imaginary travels of Lucian and Rabelais, to which *Gulliver* is generally compared, we frankly take leave of the real world altogether. We are treated with arbitrary and monstrous combinations which may be amusing, but which do not challenge even a semblance of belief. In *Gulliver* this is so little the case that it can hardly be said in strictness that the fundamental assumptions are even impossible. Why should there not be creatures in human form with whom, as in Lilliput, one of our inches represents a foot, or, as in Brobdingnag, one of our feet represents an inch? The assumption is so modest that we are presented—it may be said—with a definite and



soluble problem. We have not, as in other fictitious worlds, to deal with a state of things in which the imagination is bewildered, but with one in which it is agreeably stimulated. We have certainly to consider an extreme and exceptional case, but one to which all the ordinary laws of human nature are still strictly applicable. In Voltaire's trifle, *Micromegas*, we are presented to beings eight leagues in height and endowed with seventy-two senses. For Voltaire's purpose the stupendous exaggeration is necessary, for he wishes to insist upon the minuteness of human capacities. But the assumption, of course, disqualifies us from taking any intelligent interest in a region where no precedent is available for our guidance. We are in the air; anything and everything is possible. But Swift modestly varies only one element in the problem. Imagine giants and dwarfs as tall as a house or as low as a footstool, and let us see what comes of it. That is a plain, almost a mathematical, problem; and we can, therefore, judge his success, and receive pleasure from the ingenuity and verisimilitude of his creations.

"When you have once thought of big men and little men," said Johnson, perversely enough, "it is easy to do the rest." The first step might, perhaps, seem in this case to be the easiest; yet nobody ever thought of it before Swift, and nobody has ever had similar good fortune since. There is no other fictitious world the denizens of which have become so real for us, and which has supplied so many images familiar to every educated mind. But the apparent ease is due to the extreme consistency and sound judgment of Swift's realization. The conclusions follow so inevitably from the primary data that when they are once drawn we agree that they could not have been otherwise; and infer, rashly, that anybody else could

have drawn them. It is as easy as lying; but everybody who has seriously tried the experiment knows that even lying is by no means so easy as it appears at first sight. In fact, Swift's success is something unique. The charming plausibility of every incident, throughout the two first parts, commends itself to children, who enjoy definite concrete images, and are fascinated by a world which is at once full of marvels, surpassing Jack the Giant Killer and the wonders seen by Sindbad, and yet as obviously and undeniably true as the adventures of Robinson Crusoe himself. Nobody who has read the book can ever forget it; and we may add that besides the childlike pleasure which arises from a distinct realization of a strange world of fancy, the two first books are sufficiently good-humoured. Swift seems to be amused, as well as amusing. They were probably written during the least intolerable part of his exile. The period of composition includes the years of the Vanessa tragedy and of the war of Wood's halfpence; it was finished when Stella's illness was becoming constantly more threatening, and published little more than a year before her death. The last books show Swift's most savage temper; but we may hope that, in spite of disease, disappointments, and a growing alienation from mankind, Swift could still enjoy an occasional piece of spontaneous, unadulterated fun. He could still forget his cares, and throw the reins on the neck of his fancy. At times there is a certain charm even in the characters. Every one has a liking for the giant maid-of-all-work, Glumdalelitch, whose affection for her plaything is a quaint inversion of the ordinary relations between Swift and his feminine adorers. The grave, stern, irascible man can relax after a sort, though his strange idiosyncrasy comes out as distinctly in his relaxation as in his passions.

I will not dwell upon this aspect of *Gulliver*, which is obvious to every one. There is another question which we are forced to ask, and which is not very easy to answer. What does *Gulliver* mean? It is clearly a satire—but who and what are its objects? Swift states his own view very unequivocally. “I heartily hate and detest that animal called man,” he says,<sup>1</sup> “although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth.” He declares that man is not an *animal rationale*, but only *rationis capax*; and he then adds, “Upon this great foundation of misanthropy . . . the whole building of my travels is erected.” “If the world had but a dozen Arbutnots in it,” he says in the same letter, “I would burn my travels.” He indulges in a similar reflection to Sheridan.<sup>2</sup> “Expect no more from man,” he says, “than such an animal is capable of, and you will every day find my description of Yahoos more resembling. You should think and deal with every man as a villain, without calling him so, or flying from him or valuing him less. This is an old true lesson.” In spite of these avowals, of a kind which, in Swift, must not be taken too literally, we find it rather hard to admit that the essence of *Gulliver* can be an expression of this doctrine. The tone becomes morose and sombre, and even ferocious; but it has been disputed whether in any case it can be regarded simply as an utterance of misanthropy.

*Gulliver's Travels* belongs to a literary genus full of grotesque and anomalous forms. Its form is derived from some of the imaginary travels of which Lucian's *True History*—itself a burlesque of some early travellers' tales—is the first example. But it has an affinity also to such books

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Pope, September 29, 1725.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Sheridan, September 11, 1725.

as Bacon's *Atlantis* and More's *Utopiâ*; and, again, to later philosophical romances like *Candide* and *Rasselas*; and not least, perhaps, to the ancient fables, such as *Reynard the Fox*, to which Swift refers in the *Tale of a Tub*. It may be compared, again, to the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the whole family of allegories. The full-blown allegory resembles the game of chess said to have been played by some ancient monarch, in which the pieces were replaced by real human beings. The movements of the actors were not determined by the passions proper to their character, but by the external set of rules imposed upon them by the game. The allegory is a kind of picture-writing, popular, like picture-writing at a certain stage of development, but wearisome at more cultivated periods, when we prefer to have abstract theories conveyed in abstract language, and limit the artist to the intrinsic meaning of the images in which he deals. The whole class of more or less allegorical writing has thus the peculiarity that something more is meant than meets the ear. Part of its meaning depends upon a tacit convention in virtue of which a beautiful woman, for example, is not simply a beautiful woman, but also a representative of Justice and Charity. And as any such convention is more or less arbitrary, we are often in perplexity to interpret the author's meaning, and also to judge of the propriety of the symbols. The allegorical intention, again, may be more or less present, and such a book as *Gulliver* must be regarded as lying somewhere between the allegory and the direct revelation of truth, which is more or less implied in the work of every genuine artist. Its true purpose has thus rather puzzled critics. Hazlitt<sup>1</sup> urges, for example, with his usual brilliancy, that Swift's purpose was to "strip empty pride

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on the English Poets.*

and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them." Swift, accordingly, varies the scale, so as to show the insignificance or the grossness of our self-love. He does this with "mathematical precision;" he tries an experiment upon human nature; and with the result that "nothing solid, nothing valuable is left in his system but wisdom and virtue." So Gulliver's carrying off the fleet of Blefuscu is "a mortifying stroke, aimed at national glory." "After that, we have only to consider which of the contending parties was in the right."

Hazlitt naturally can see nothing misanthropical or innocent in such a conclusion. The mask of imposture is torn off the world, and only imposture can complain. This view, which has no doubt its truth, suggests some obvious doubts. We are not invited, as a matter of fact, to attend to the question of right and wrong, as between Lilliput and Blefuscu. The real sentiment in Swift is that a war between these miserable pygmies is, in itself, contemptible; and therefore, as he infers, war between men six feet high is equally contemptible. The truth is that, although Swift's solution of the problem may be called mathematically precise, the precision does not extend to the supposed argument. If we insist upon treating the question as one of strict logic, the only conclusion which could be drawn from *Gulliver* is the very safe one that the interest of the human drama does not depend upon the size of the actors. A pygmy or a giant endowed with all our functions and thoughts would be exactly as interesting as a being of the normal stature. It does not require a journey to imaginary regions to teach us so much. And if we say that Swift has shown us in his pictures the real essence of human life, we only say for him what might be said with equal force of

Shakspeare or Balzac, or any great artist. The bare proof that the essence is not dependent upon the external condition of size is superfluous and irrelevant; and we must admit that Swift's method is childish, or that it does not adhere to this strict logical canon.

Hazlitt, however, comes nearer the truth, as I think, when he says that Swift takes a view of human nature such as might be taken by a being of a higher sphere. That, at least, is his purpose; only, as I think, he pursues it by a neglect of "scientific reasoning." The use of the machinery is simply to bring us into a congenial frame of mind. He strikes the key-note of contempt by his imagery of dwarfs and giants. We despise the petty quarrels of beings six inches high; and therefore we are prepared to despise the wars carried on by a Marlborough and a Eugene. We transfer the contempt based upon mere size to the motives, which are the same in big men and little. The argument, if argument there be, is a fallacy; but it is equally efficacious for the feelings. You see the pettiness and cruelty of the Lilliputians, who want to conquer an empire defended by toy-ships; and you are tacitly invited to consider whether the bigness of French men-of-war makes an attack upon them more respectable. The force of the satire depends ultimately upon the vigour with which Swift has described the real passions of human beings, big or little. He really means to express a bitter contempt for statesmen and warriors, and seduces us to his side, for the moment, by asking us to look at a diminutive representation of the same beings. The quarrels which depend upon the difference between the high-boots and the low-heeled shoes, or upon breaking eggs at the big or little end; the party intrigues which are settled by cutting capers on the tight-rope, are meant, of course, in ridicule of political and re-

ligious parties; and its force depends upon our previous conviction that the party-quarrels between our fellows are, in fact, equally contemptible. Swift's satire is congenial to the mental attitude of all who have persuaded themselves that men are, in fact, a set of contemptible fools and knaves, in whose quarrels and mutual slaughterings the wise and good could not persuade themselves to take a serious interest. He "proves" nothing, mathematically or otherwise. If you do not share his sentiments there is nothing in the mere alteration of the scale to convince you that they are right; you may say, with Hazlitt, that heroism is as admirable in a Lilliputian as in a Brobdingnagian, and believe that war calls forth patriotism, and often advances civilization. What Swift has really done is to provide for the man who despises his species a number of exceedingly effective symbols for the utterance of his contempt. A child is simply amused with Bigendians and Littleendians; a philosopher thinks that the questions really at the bottom of Church quarrels are in reality of more serious import; but the cynic who has learnt to disbelieve in the nobility or wisdom of the great mass of his species finds a most convenient metaphor for expressing his disbelief. In this way *Gulliver's Travels* contains a whole gallery of caricatures thoroughly congenial to the despisers of humanity.

In Brobdingnag Swift is generally said to be looking, as Scott expresses it, through the other end of the telescope. He wishes to show the grossness of men's passions, as before he has shown their pettiness. Some of the incidents are devised in this sense; but we may notice that in Brobdingnag he recurs to the Lilliput view. He gives such an application to his fable as may be convenient, without bothering himself as to logical consistency. He

points out, indeed, the disgusting appearances which would be presented by a magnified human body; but the King of Brobdingnag looks down upon Gulliver, just as Gulliver looked down upon the Lilliputians. The monarch sums up his view emphatically enough by saying, after listening to Gulliver's version of modern history, that "the bulk of your natives appear to me to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the face of the earth." In Lilliput and Brobdingnag, however, the satire scarcely goes beyond pardonable limits. The details are often simply amusing, such as Gulliver's fear, when he gets home, of trampling upon the pygmies whom he sees around him. And even the severest satire may be taken without offence by every one who believes that petty motives, folly and selfishness, play a large enough part in human life to justify some indignant exaggerations. It is in the later parts that the ferocity of the man utters itself more fully. The ridicule of the inventors in the third book is, as Arbuthnot said at once, the least successful part of the whole; not only because Swift was getting beyond his knowledge, and beyond the range of his strongest antipathies, but also because there is no longer the ingenious plausibility of the earlier books. The voyage to the Houyhnhnms, which forms the best part, is more powerful, but more painful and repulsive.

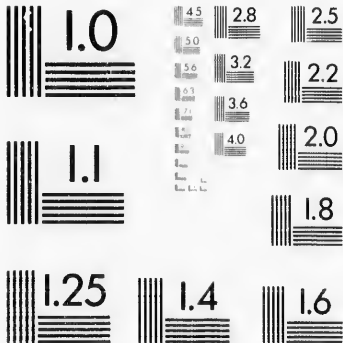
A word must here be said of the most unpleasant part of Swift's character. A morbid interest in the physically disgusting is shown in several of his writings. Some minor pieces, which ought to have been burnt, simply make the gorge rise. Mrs. Pilkington tells us, and we can for once believe her, that one "poem" actually made her mother sick. It is idle to excuse this on the ground of contemporary freedom of speech. His contemporaries were





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heartily disgusted. Indeed, though it is true that they revealed certain propensities more openly, I see no reason to think that such propensities were really stronger in them than in their descendants. The objection to Swift is not that he spoke plainly, but that he brooded over filth unnecessarily. No parallel can be found for his tendency even in writers, for example, like Smollett and Fielding, who can be coarse enough when they please, but whose freedom of speech reveals none of Swift's morbid tendency. His indulgence in revolting images is to some extent an indication of a diseased condition of his mind, perhaps of actual mental decay. Delany says that it grew upon him in his later years, and, very gratuitously, attributes it to Pope's influence. The peculiarity is the more remarkable, because Swift was a man of the most scrupulous personal cleanliness. He was always enforcing this virtue with special emphasis. He was rigorously observant of decency in ordinary conversation. Delany once saw him "fall into a furious resentment" with Stella for "a very small failure of delicacy." So far from being habitually coarse, he pushed fastidiousness to the verge of prudery. It is one of the superficial paradoxes of Swift's character that this very shrinking from filth became perverted into an apparently opposite tendency. In truth, his intense repugnance to certain images led him to use them as the only adequate expression of his savage contempt. Instances might be given in some early satires, and in the attack upon Dissenters in the *Tale of a Tub*. His intensity of loathing leads him to besmear his antagonists with filth. He becomes disgusting in the effort to express his disgust. As his misanthropy deepened he applied the same method to mankind at large. He tears aside the veil of decency to show the bestial elements of human nature; and his

characteristic irony makes him preserve an apparent calmness during the revolting exhibition. His state of mind is strictly analogous to that of some religious ascetics, who stimulate their contempt for the flesh by fixing their gaze upon decaying bodies. They seek to check the love of beauty by showing us beauty in the grave. The cynic in Mr. Tennyson's poem tells us that every face, however full—

" Padded round with flesh and blood,  
Is but moulded on a skull."

Swift—a practised self-tormentor, though not in the ordinary ascetic sense—mortifies any disposition to admire his fellows by dwelling upon the physical necessities which seem to lower and degrade human pride. Beauty is but skin deep; beneath it is a vile carcase. He always sees the "flayed woman" of the *Tale of a Tub*. The thought is hideous, hateful, horrible, and therefore it fascinates him. He loves to dwell upon the hateful, because it justifies his hate. He nurses his misanthropy, as he might tear his flesh to keep his mortality before his eyes.

The Yahoo is the embodiment of the bestial element in man; and Swift in his wrath takes the bestial for the predominating element. The hideous, filthy, lustful monster yet asserts its relationship to him in the most humiliating fashion: and he traces in its conduct the resemblance to all the main activities of the human being. Like the human being, it fights and squabbles for the satisfaction of its lust, or to gain certain shiny yellow stones; it befouls the weak and fawns upon the strong with loathsome compliance; shows a strange love of dirt, and incurs diseases by laziness and gluttony. Gulliver gives an account of his own breed of Yahoos, from which it seems that they differ from the subjects of the

Houyhnhms only by showing the same propensities on a larger scale; and justifies his master's remark, that all their institutions are owing to "gross defects in reason, and by consequence in virtue." The Houyhnhms, meanwhile, represent Swift's Utopia: they prosper and are happy, truthful, and virtuous, and therefore able to dispense with lawyers, physicians, ministers and all the other apparatus of an effete civilization. It is in this doctrine, as I may observe in passing, that Swift falls in with Godwin and the revolutionists, though they believed in human perfectibility, while they traced every existing evil to the impostures and corruptions essential to all systems of government. Swift's view of human nature is too black to admit of any hopes of their millennium.

The full wrath of Swift against his species shows itself in this ghastly caricature. It is lamentable and painful, though even here we recognize the morbid perversion of a noble wrath against oppression. One other portrait in Swift's gallery demands a moment's notice. No poetic picture in Dante or Milton can exceed the strange power of his prose description of the Struldbrugs—those hideous immortals who are damned to an everlasting life of drivelling incompetence. It is a translation of the affecting myth of Tithonus into the repulsive details of downright prose. It is idle to seek for any particular moral from these hideous phantoms of Swift's dismal *Inferno*. They embody the terror which was haunting his imagination as old age was drawing upon him. The sight, he says himself, should reconcile a man to death. The mode of reconciliation is terribly characteristic. Life is but a weary business at best; but, at least, we cannot wish to drain so repulsive a cup to the dregs, when even the illusions which cheered us at moments have been ruthlessly destroyed.

Swift was but too clearly prophesying the melancholy decay into which he was himself to sink.

The later books of *Gulliver* have been in some sense excised from the popular editions of the Travels. The Yahoos, and Houyhnhnms, and Struldbrugs are, indeed, known by name almost as well as the inhabitants of Lilliput and Brobdingnag; but this part of the book is certainly not reading for babes. It was, probably, written during the years when he was attacking public corruption, and when his private happiness was being destroyed—when, therefore, his wrath against mankind and against his own fate was stimulated to the highest pitch. Readers who wish to indulge in a harmless play of fancy will do well to omit the last two voyages, for the strain of misanthropy which breathes in them is simply oppressive. They are, probably, the sources from which the popular impression of Swift's character is often derived. It is important, therefore, to remember that they were wrung from him in later years, after a life tormented by constant disappointment and disease. Most people hate the misanthropist, even if they are forced to admire his power. Yet we must not be carried too far by the words. Swift's misanthropy was not all ignoble. We generally prefer flattery even to sympathy. We like the man who is blind to our faults better than the man who sees them and yet pities our distresses. We have the same kind of feeling for the race as we have in our own case. We are attracted by the kindly optimist who assures us that good predominates in everything and everybody, and believes that a speedy advent of the millennium must reward our manifold excellence. We cannot forgive those who hold men to be "mostly fools," or, as Swift would assert, mere brutes in disguise, and even carry out that disagreeable

opinion in detail. There is something uncomfortable, and therefore repellent of sympathy, in the mood which dwells upon the darker side of society, even though with wrathful indignation against the irremovable evils. Swift's hatred of oppression, burning and genuine as it was, is no apology with most readers for his perseverance in asserting its existence. "Speak comfortable things to us" is the cry of men to the prophet in all ages; and he who would assault abuses must count upon offending many who do not approve them, but who would, therefore, prefer not to believe in them. Swift, too, mixed an amount of egoism with his virtuous indignation which clearly lowers his moral dignity. He really hates wrongs to his race; but his sensitiveness is roused when they are injuries to himself, and committed by his enemies. The indomitable spirit which made him incapable even of yielding to necessity, which makes him beat incessantly against the bars which it was hopeless to break, and therefore waste powers which might have done good service by aiming at the unattainable, and nursing grudges against inexorable necessity, limits our sympathy with his better nature. Yet some of us may take a different view, and rather pity than condemn the wounded spirit so tortured and perverted, in consideration of the real philanthropy which underlies the misanthropy, and the righteous hatred of brutality and oppression which is but the seamy side of a generous sympathy. At least, we should be rather awed than repelled by this spectacle of a nature of magnificent power struck down, bruised and crushed under fortune, and yet fronting all antagonists with increasing pride, and comforting itself with scorn even when it can no longer injure its adversaries.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## DECLINE.

SWIFT survived his final settlement in Ireland for more than thirty years, though during the last five or six it was but the outside shell of him that lived. During every day in all those years Swift must have eaten and drunk, and somehow or other got through the twenty-four hours. The war against Wood's halfpence employed at most a few months in 1724, and all his other political writings would scarcely fill a volume of this size. A modern journalist who could prove that he had written as little in six months would deserve a testimonial. *Gulliver's Travels* appeared in 1727, and ten years were to pass before his intellect became hopelessly clouded. How was the remainder of his time filled?

The death of Stella marks a critical point. Swift told Gay in 1723 that it had taken three years to reconcile him to the country to which he was condemned forever. He came back "with an ill head and an aching heart."<sup>1</sup> He was separated from the friends he had loved, and too old to make new friends. A man, as he says elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> who had been bred in a coal-pit might pass his time in it well enough; but if sent back to it after a few months in upper air he would find content less easy. Swift, in fact,

<sup>1</sup> To Bolingbroke, May, 1719.

<sup>2</sup> To Pope and Gay, October 15, 1726.



never became resigned to the "coal-pit," or, to use another of his phrases, the "wretched, dirty dog-hole and prison," of which he could only say that it was a "place good enough to die in." Yet he became so far acclimatized as to shape a tolerable existence out of the fragments left to him. Intelligent and cultivated men in Dublin, especially amongst the clergy and the Fellows of Trinity College, gathered round their famous countryman. Swift formed a little court; he rubbed up his classics to the academical standard, read a good deal of history, and even amused himself with mathematics. He received on Sundays at the deanery, though his entertainments seem to have been rather too economical for the taste of his guests. "The ladies," Stella and Mrs. Dingley, were recognized as more or less domesticated with him. Stella helped to receive his guests, though not ostensibly as mistress of the household; and, if we may accept Swift's estimate of her social talents, must have been a very charming hostess. If some of Swift's guests were ill at ease in presence of the imperious and moody exile, we may believe that during Stella's life there was more than a mere semblance of agreeable society at the deanery. Her death, as Delany tells us,<sup>1</sup> led to a painful change. Swift's temper became sour and ungovernable; his avarice grew into a monomania; at times he grudged even a single bottle of wine to his friends. The giddiness and deafness which had tormented him by fits now became a part of his life. Reading came to be impossible, because (as Delany thinks) his obstinate refusal to wear spectacles had injured his sight. He still struggled hard against disease; he rode energetically, though two servants had to accompany him, in case of accidents from giddiness; he took regular "constitutionals" up and

<sup>1</sup> Delany, p. 144.

down stairs when he could not go out. His friends thought that he injured himself by over-exercise, and the battle was necessarily a losing one. Gradually the gloom deepened; friends dropped off by death, and were alienated by his moody temper; he was surrounded, as they thought, by designing sycophants. His cousin, Mrs. Whiteway, who took care of him in his last years, seems to have been both kindly and sensible; but he became unconscious of kindness, and in 1741 had to be put under restraint. We may briefly fill up some details in the picture.

Swift at Dublin recalls Napoleon at Elba. The duties of a deanery are not supposed, I believe, to give absorbing employment for all the faculties of the incumbent; but an empire, however small, may be governed; and Swift at an early period set about establishing his supremacy within his small domains. He maintained his prerogatives against the archbishop, and subdued his chapter. His inferiors submitted, and could not fail to recognize his zeal for the honour of the body. But his superiors found him less amenable. He encountered episcopal authority with his old haughtiness. He bade an encroaching bishop remember that he was speaking "to a clergyman, and not to a footman."<sup>1</sup> He fell upon an old friend, Sterne, the Bishop of Clogher, for granting a lease to some "old fanatic knight." He takes the opportunity of reviling the bishops for favouring "two abominable bills for beggaring and enslaving the clergy (which took their birth from hell)," and says that he had thereupon resolved to have "no more commerce with persons of such prodigious grandeur, who, I feared, in a little time, would expect me to kiss their slipper."<sup>2</sup> He would not even look into a coach, lest he

<sup>1</sup> Bishop of Meath, May 22, 1719.

<sup>2</sup> To Bishop of Clogher, July, 1733.

should see such a thing as a bishop—a sight that would strike him with terror. In a bitter satire he describes Satan as the bishop to whom the rest of the Irish Bench are suffragans. His theory was that the English Government always appointed admirable divines, but that unluckily all the new bishops were murdered on Hounslow Heath by highwaymen, who took their robes and patents, and so usurped the Irish sees. It is not surprising that Swift's episcopal acquaintance was limited.

In his deanery Swift discharged his duties with despotic benevolence. He performed the services, carefully criticised young preachers, got his musical friends to help him in regulating his choir, looked carefully after the cathedral repairs, and improved the revenues at the cost of his own interests. His pugnacity broke out repeatedly even in such apparently safe directions. He erected a monument to the Duke of Schomberg after an attempt to make the duke's descendants pay for it themselves. He said that if they tried to avoid the duty by reclaiming the body, he would take up the bones, and put the skeleton "in his register office, to be a memorial of their baseness to all posterity."<sup>1</sup> He finally relieved his feelings by an epitaph, which is a bitter taunt against the duke's relations.

Happily, he gave less equivocal proofs of the energy which he could put into his duties. His charity was unsurpassed both for amount and judicious distribution. Delany declares that in spite of his avarice he would give five pounds more easily than richer men would give as many shillings. "I never," says this good authority, "saw poor so carefully and conscientiously attended to in my life as those of his cathedral." He introduced and carried out within his own domains a plan for distinguishing the

<sup>1</sup> To Carteret, May 10, 1728.

deserving poor by badges—in anticipation of modern schemes for “organization of charity.” With the first five hundred pounds which he possessed he formed a fund for granting loans to industrious tradesmen and citizens, to be repaid by weekly instalments. It was said that by this scheme he had been the means of putting more than two hundred families in a comfortable way of living.<sup>1</sup> He had, says Delany, a whole “seraglio” of distressed old women in Dublin; there was scarcely a lane in the whole city where he had not such a “mistress.” He saluted them kindly, inquired into their affairs, bought trifles from them, and gave them such titles as Pullagowna, Stumpnymph, and so forth. The phrase “seraglio” may remind us of Johnson’s establishment, who has shown his prejudice against Swift in nothing more than in misjudging a charity akin to his own, though apparently directed with more discretion. The “rabble,” it is clear, might be grateful for other than political services. To personal dependents he was equally liberal. He supported his widowed sister, who had married a scapegrace in opposition to his wishes. He allowed an annuity of 5*l.* a year to Stella’s companion, Mrs. Dingley, and made her suppose that the money was not a gift, but the produce of a fund for which he was trustee. He showed the same liberality to Mrs. Ridgway, daughter of his old housekeeper, Mrs. Brent, paying her an annuity of 20*l.*, and giving her a bond to secure the payment in case of accidents. Considering the narrowness of Swift’s income, and that he seems also to have had considerable trouble about obtaining his rents and securing his invested savings, we may say that his so-called “avarice” was not inconsistent with unusual

<sup>1</sup> Substance of a speech to the Mayor of Dublin. Franklin left a sum of money to be employed in a similar way.

munificence. He pared his personal expenditure to the quick, not that he might be rich, but that he might be liberal.

Though for one reason or other Swift was at open war with a good many of the higher classes, his court was not without distinguished favourites. The most conspicuous amongst them were Delany and Sheridan. Delany (1685-1768), when Swift first knew him, was a Fellow of Trinity College. He was a scholar, and a man of much good feeling and intelligence, and eminently agreeable in society; his theological treatises seem to have been fanciful, but he could write pleasant verses, and had great reputation as a college tutor. He married two rich wives, and Swift testifies that his good qualities were not the worse for his wealth, nor his purse generally fuller. He was so much given to hospitality as to be always rather in difficulties. He was a man of too much amiability and social suavity not to be a little shocked at some of Swift's savage outbursts, and scandalized by his occasional improprieties. Yet he appreciated the nobler qualities of the staunch, if rather alarming, friend. It is curious to remember that his second wife, who was one of Swift's later correspondents, survived to be the venerated friend of Fanny Burney (1752-1840), and that many living people may thus remember one who was familiar with the latest of Swift's female favourites. Swift's closest friend and enemy, however, was the elder Sheridan, the ancestor of a race fertile in genius, though unluckily his son, Swift's biographer, seems to have transmitted without possessing any share of it. Thomas Sheridan, the elder, was the typical Irishman—kindly, witty, blundering, full of talents and imprudences, careless of dignity, and a child in the ways of the world. He was a prosperous school-

master in Dublin when Swift first made his acquaintance (about 1718), so prosperous as to decline a less precarious post, of which Swift got him the offer.

After the war of Wood's halfpence Swift became friendly with Carteret, whom he respected as a man of genuine ability, and who had besides the virtue of being thoroughly distrusted by Walpole. When Carteret was asked how he had succeeded in Ireland he replied that he had pleased Dr. Swift. Swift took advantage of the mutual good-will to recommend several promising clergymen to Carteret's notice. He was specially warm in behalf of Sheridan, who received the first vacant living and a chaplaincy. Sheridan characteristically spoilt his own chances by preaching a sermon, upon the day of the accession of the Hanoverian family, from the text, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The sermon was not political, and the selection of the text a pure accident; but Sheridan was accused of Jacobitism, and lost his chaplaincy in consequence. Though generously compensated by the friend in whose pulpit he had committed this "Sheridanism," he got into difficulties. His school fell off; he exchanged his preferments for others less preferable; he failed in a school at Cavan, and ultimately the poor man came back to die at Dublin, in 1738, in distressed circumstances. Swift's relations with him were thoroughly characteristic. He defended his cause energetically; gave him most admirably good advice in rather dictatorial terms; admitted him to the closest familiarity, and sometimes lost his temper when Sheridan took a liberty at the wrong moment, or resented the liberties taken by himself. A queer character of the "Second Solomon," written, it seems, in 1729, shows the severity with which Swift could sometimes judge his shiftless and impulsive

friend, and the irritability with which he could resent occasional assertions of independence. "He is extremely proud and captious," says Swift, and "apt to resent as an affront or indignity what was never intended for either," but what, we must add, had a strong likeness to both. One cause of poor Sheridan's troubles was doubtless that assigned by Swift. Mrs. Sheridan, says this frank critic, is "the most disagreeable beast in Europe," a "most filthy slut, lazy and slothful, luxurious, ill-natured, envious, suspicious," and yet managing to govern Sheridan. This estimate was apparently shared by her husband, who makes various references to her detestation of Swift. In spite of all jars, Swift was not only intimate with Sheridan and energetic in helping him, but to all appearance really loved him. Swift came to Sheridan's house when the workmen were moving the furniture, preparatory to his departure for Cavan. Swift burst into tears, and hid himself in a dark closet before he could regain his self-possession. He paid a visit to his old friend afterwards, but was now in that painful and morbid state in which violent outbreaks of passion made him frequently intolerable. Poor Sheridan rashly ventured to fulfil an old engagement that he would tell Swift frankly of a growing infirmity, and said something about avarice. "Doctor," replied Swift, significantly, "did you never read *Gil Blas*?" When Sheridan soon afterwards sold his school to return to Dublin, Swift received his old friend so inhospitably that Sheridan left him, never again to enter the house. Swift, indeed, had ceased to be Swift, and Sheridan died soon afterwards.

Swift often sought relief from the dreariness of the deanery by retiring to, or rather by taking possession of, his friends' country houses. In 1725 he stayed for some months, together with "the ladies," at Quilea, a small

country house of Sheridan's, and compiled an account of the deficiencies of the establishment—meant to be continued weekly. Broken tables, doors without locks, a chimney stuffed with the Dean's great-coat, a solitary pair of tongs forced to attend all the fireplaces and also to take the meat from the pot, holes in the floor, spikes protruding from the bedsteads, are some of the items; whilst the servants are all thieves, and act upon the proverb, "The worse their sty, the longer they lie." Swift amused himself here and elsewhere by indulging his taste in landscape gardening, without the consent and often to the annoyance of the proprietor. In 1728—the year of Stella's death—he passed eight months at Sir Arthur Acheson's, near Market Hill. He was sickly, languid, and anxious to escape from Dublin, where he had no company but that of his "old Presbyterian housekeeper, Mrs. Brent." He had, however, energy enough to take the household in hand after his usual fashion. He superintended Lady Acheson's studies, made her read to him, gave her plenty of good advice; bullied the butler; looked after the dairy and the garden, and annoyed Sir Arthur by summarily cutting down an old thorn-tree. He liked the place so much that he thought of building a house there, which was to be called Drapier's Hall, but abandoned the project for reasons which, after his fashion, he expressed with great frankness in a poem. Probably the chief reason was the very obvious one which strikes all people who are tempted to build; but that upon which he chiefly dwells is Sir Arthur's defects as an entertainer. The knight used, it seems, to lose himself in metaphysical moonings when he should have been talking to Swift and attending to his gardens and farms. Swift entered a house less as a guest than a conqueror. His dominion, it is clear, must have



become burdensome in his later years, when his temper was becoming savage and his fancies more imperious.

Such a man was the natural prey of sycophants, who would bear his humours for interested motives. Amongst Swift's numerous clients some doubtless belonged to this class. The old need of patronizing and protecting still displays itself; and there is something very touching in the zeal for his friends which survived breaking health and mental decay. His correspondence is full of eager advocacy. Poor Miss Kelly, neglected by an unnatural parent, comes to Swift as her natural adviser. He intercedes on behalf of the prodigal son of a Mr. FitzHerbert in a letter which is a model of judicious and delicate advocacy. His old friend, Barber, had prospered in business; he was Lord Mayor of London in 1733, and looked upon Swift as the founder of his fortunes. To him, "my dear good old friend in the best and worst times," Swift writes a series of letters, full of pathetic utterances of his regrets for old friends amidst increasing infirmities, and full also of appeals on behalf of others. He induced Barber to give a chaplaincy to Pilkington, a young clergyman of whose talent and modesty Swift was thoroughly convinced. Mrs. Pilkington was a small poetess, and the pair had crept into some intimacy at the deanery. Unhappily, Swift had reasons to repent his patronage. The pair were equally worthless. The husband tried to get a divorce, and the wife sank into misery. One of her last experiments was to publish by subscription certain "Memoirs," which contain some interesting but untrustworthy anecdotes of Swift's later years.<sup>1</sup> He had rather better luck with Mrs. Barber, wife of a Dublin woollen-draper, who, as Swift says,

<sup>1</sup> See also the curious letters from Mrs. Pilkington in Richardson's correspondence.

was "poetically given, and, for a woman, had a sort of genius that way." He pressed her claims not only upon her namesake, the Mayor, but upon Lord Carteret, Lady Betty Germaine, and Gay and his Duchess. A forged letter to Queen Caroline in Swift's name on behalf of this poetess naturally raised some suspicions. Swift, however, must have been convinced of her innocence. He continued his interest in her for years, during which we are glad to find that she gave up poetry for selling Irish linens and letting lodgings at Bath; and one of Swift's last acts before his decay was to present her, at her own request, with the copyright of his *Polite Conversations*. Everybody, she said, would subscribe for a work of Swift's, and it would put her in easy circumstances. Mrs. Barber clearly had no delicacy in turning Swift's liberality to account; but she was a respectable and sensible woman, and managed to bring up two sons to professions. Liberality of this kind came naturally to Swift. He provided for a broken-down old officer, Captain Creighton, by compiling his memoirs for him, to be published by subscription. "I never," he says in 1735, "got a farthing by anything I wrote—except once by Pope's prudent management." This probably refers to *Gulliver*, for which he seems to have received 200*l.* He apparently gave his share in the profits of the *Miscellanies* to the widow of a Dublin printer.

A few words may now be said about these last writings. In reading some of them we must remember his later mode of life. He generally dined alone, or with old Mrs. Brent, then sat alone in his closet till he went to bed at eleven. The best company in Dublin, he said, was barely tolerable, and those who had been tolerable were now insupportable. He could no longer read by candle-

light, and his only resource was to write rubbish, most of which he burnt. The merest trifles that he ever wrote, he says in 1731, "are serious philosophical luenbrations in comparison to what I now busy myself about." This, however, was but the development of a lifelong practice. His favourite maxim, *Vive la bagatelle*, is often quoted by Pope and Bolingbroke. As he had pnned in his youth with Lord Berkeley, so he amused himself in later years by a constant interchange of trifles with his friends, and above all with Sheridan. Many of these trifles have been preserved; they range from really good specimens of Swift's rather sardonic humour down to bad riddles and a peculiar kind of playing upon words. A brief specimen of one variety will be amply sufficient. Sheridan writes to Swift: "*Times a re veri de ad nota do it oras hi lingat almi e state.*" The words separately are Latin, and are to be read into the English—"Times are very dead; not a doit or a shilling at all my estate." Swift writes to Sheridan in English, which reads into Latin, "Am I say vain a rabble is," means, *Amice venerabilis*—and so forth. Whole manuscript books are still in existence filled with jargon of this kind. Charles Fox declared that Swift must be a good-natured man to have had such a love of nonsense. We may admit some of it to be a proof of good-humour in the same sense as a love of the backgammon in which he sometimes indulged. It shows, that is, a willingness to kill time in company. But it must be admitted that the impression becomes different when we think of Swift in his solitude wasting the most vigorous intellect in the country upon ingenuities beneath that of the composer of double aerostics. Delany declares that the habit helped to weaken his intellect. Rather it showed that his intellect was preying upon itself. Once

more we have to think of the "conjured spirit" and the ropes of sand. Nothing can well be more lamentable. Books full of this stuff impress us like products of the painful ingenuity by which some prisoner for life has tried to relieve himself of the intolerable burden of solitary confinement. Swift seems to betray the secret when he tells Bolingbroke that at his age "I often thought of death; but now it is never out of my mind." He repeats this more than once. He does not fear death, he says; indeed, he longed for it. His regular farewell to a friend was, "Good-night; I hope I shall never see you again." He had long been in the habit of "lamenting" his birthday, though, in earlier days, Stella and other friends had celebrated the anniversary. Now it became a day of un-mixed gloom, and the chapter in which Job curses the hour of his birth lay open all day on his table. "And yet," he says, "I love *la bagatelle* better than ever." Rather we should say, "and therefore," for in truth the only excuse for such trifling was the impossibility of finding any other escape from settled gloom. Friends, indeed, seem to have adopted at times the theory that a humourist must always be on the broad grin. They called him the "laughter-loving" Dean, and thought *Gulliver* a "merry book." A strange effect is produced when, between two of the letters in which Swift utters the bitterest agonies of his soul during Stella's illness, we have a letter from Bolingbroke to the "three Yahoos of Twickenham" (Pope, Gay, and Swift), referring to Swift's "divine science, *la bagatelle*," and ending with the benediction, "Mirth be with you!" From such mirth we can only say, may Heaven protect us, for it would remind us of nothing but the mirth of Redgauntlet's companions when they sat dead (and damned) at their ghastly revelry, and

their laughter passed into such wild sounds as made the daring piper's "very nails turn blue."

It is not, however, to be inferred that all Swift's recreations were so dreary as this Anglo-Latin, or that his facetiousness always covered an aching heart. There is real humour, and not all of bitter flavour, in some of the trifles which passed between Swift and his friends. The most famous is the poem called *The Grand Question Debated*, the question being whether an old building called Hamilton's Bawn, belonging to Sir A. Acheson, should be turned into a malthouse or a barrack. Swift takes the opportunity of caricaturing the special object of his aversion, the blustering and illiterate soldier, though he indignantly denies that he had said anything disagreeable to his hospitable entertainer. Lady Acheson encouraged him in writing such "lampoons." Her taste cannot have been very delicate,<sup>1</sup> and she, perhaps, did not perceive how a rudeness which affects to be only playful may be really offensive. If the poem shows that Swift took liberties with his friends, it also shows that he still possessed the strange power of reproducing the strain of thought of a vulgar mind which he exhibited in Mr. Harris's petition. Two other works which appeared in these last years are more remarkable proofs of the same power. *The Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation* and the *Directions to Servants* are most singular performances, and curiously illustrative of Swift's habits of thought and composition. He seems to have begun them during some of his early visits to England. He kept them by him and amused himself by working upon them, though they were never quite finished. The *Polite Conversation* was given, as we have seen, to Mrs. Barber in his

<sup>1</sup> Or she would hardly have written the *Panegyric*.

later years, and the *Directions to Servants* came into the printer's hands when he was already imbecile. They show how closely Swift's sarcastic attention was fixed through life upon the ways of his inferiors. They are a mass of materials for a natural history of social absurdities, such as Mr. Darwin was in the habit of bestowing upon the manners and customs of worms. The difference is that Darwin had none but kindly feelings for worms, whereas Swift's inspection of social vermin is always edged with contempt. The *Conversations* are a marvellous collection of the set of cant phrases which at best have supplied the absence of thought in society. Incidentally there are some curious illustrations of the customs of the day; though one cannot suppose that any human beings had ever the marvellous flow of pointless proverbs with which Lord Sparkish, Mr. Neverout, Miss Notable, and the rest manage to keep the ball incessantly rolling. The talk is nonsensical, as most small-talk would be, if taken down by a reporter, and, according to modern standard, hideously vulgar, and yet it flows on with such vivacity that it is perversely amusing:

"*Lady Answerall.* But, Mr. Neverout, I wonder why such a handsome, straight young gentleman as you don't get some rich widow?"

"*Lord Sparkish.* Straight! Ay, straight as my leg, and that's crooked at the knee.

"*Neverout.* Truth, madam, if it had rained rich widows, none would fall upon me. Egad, I was born under a three-penny planet, never to be worth a groat."

And so the talk flows on, and to all appearance might flow forever.

Swift professes in his preface to have sat many hundred times, with his table-book ready, without catching a single phrase for his book in eight hours. Truly he is a kind of

Boswell of inanities, and one is amazed at the quantity of thought which must have gone into this elaborate trifling upon trifles. A similar vein of satire upon the emptiness of writers is given in his *Tritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Human Mind*; but that is a mere skit compared with this strange performance. The *Directions to Servants* shows an equal amount of thought exerted upon the various misdoings of the class assailed. Some one has said that it is painful to read so minute and remorseless an exposure of one variety of human folly. Undoubtedly it suggests that Swift must have appeared to be an omniscient master. Delany, as I have said, testifies to his excellence in that capacity. Many anecdotes attest the close attention which he bestowed upon every detail of his servants' lives, and the humorous reproofs which he administered. "Sweetheart," he said to an ugly cook-maid who had overdone a joint, "take this down to the kitchen and do it less." "That is impossible," she replied. "Then," he said, "if you must commit faults, commit faults that can be mended." Another story tells how, when a servant had excused himself for not cleaning boots on the ground that they would soon be dirty again, Swift made him apply the same principle to eating breakfast, which would be only a temporary remedy for hunger. In this, as in every relation of life, Swift was under a kind of necessity of imposing himself upon every one in contact with him, and followed out his commands into the minutest details. In the *Directions to Servants* he has accumulated the results of his experience in one department; and the reading may not be without edification to the people who every now and then announce as a new discovery that servants are apt to be selfish, indolent, and slatternly, and to prefer their own interests to their mas-

ters'. Probably no fault could be found with the modern successors of eighteenth-century servants which has not already been exemplified in Swift's presentation of that golden age of domestic comfort. The details are not altogether pleasant; but, admitting such satire to be legitimate, Swift's performance is a masterpiece.

Swift, however, left work of a more dignified kind. Many of the letters in his correspondence are admirable specimens of a perishing art. The most interesting are those which passed between him, Pope, and Bolingbroke, and which were published by Pope's contrivance during Swift's last period. "I look upon us three," says Swift, "as a peculiar triumvirate, who have nothing to expect or fear, and so far fittest to converse with one another." We may, perhaps, believe Swift when he says that he "never leaned on his elbow to consider what he should write" (except to fools, lawyers, and ministers), though we certainly cannot say the same of his friends. Pope and Bolingbroke are full of affectations, now transparent enough; but Swift in a few trenchant, outspoken phrases dashes out a portrait of himself as impressive as it is in some ways painful. We must, indeed, remember, in reading his inverse hypocrisy, his tendency to call his own motives by their ugliest names—a tendency which is specially pronounced in writing letters to the old friends whose very names recall the memories of past happiness, and lead him to dwell upon the gloomiest side of the present. There is, too, a characteristic reserve upon some points. In his last visit to Pope, Swift left his friend's house after hearing the bad accounts of Stella's health, and hid himself in London lodgings. He never mentioned his anxieties to his friend, who heard of them first from Sheridan; and in writing afterwards from Dublin, Swift excuses himself for the



desertion by referring to his own ill-health—doubtless a true cause (“two sick friends never did well together”)—and his anxiety about his affairs, without a word about Stella. A phrase of Bolingbroke’s in the previous year about “the present Stella, whoever she may be,” seems to prove that he too had no knowledge of Stella except from the poems addressed to the name. There were depths of feeling which Swift could not lay bare to the friend in whose affection he seems most thoroughly to have trusted. Meanwhile he gives full vent to the scorn of mankind and himself, the bitter and unavailing hatred of oppression, and above all for that strange mingling of pride and remorse, which is always characteristic of his turn of mind. When he leaves Arbuthnot and Pope he expresses the warmth of his feelings by declaring that he will try to forget them. He is deeply grieved by the death of Congreve, and the grief makes him almost regret that he ever had a friend. He would give half his fortune for the temper of an easy-going acquaintance who could take up or lose a friend as easily as a cat. “Is not this the true happy man?” The loss of Gay cuts him to the heart; he notes on the letter announcing it that he had kept the letter by him five days “by an impulse foreboding some misfortune.” He cannot speak of it except to say that he regrets that long living has not hardened him, and that he expects to die poor and friendless. Pope’s ill-health “hangs on his spirits.” His moral is that if he were to begin the world again he would never run the risk of a friendship with a poor or sickly man—for he cannot harden himself. “Therefore I argue that avarice and hardness of heart are the two happiest qualities a man can acquire who is late in his life, because by living long we must lessen our friends or may increase our fortunes.” This bitterness is

equally apparent in regard to the virtues on which he most prided himself. His patriotism was owing to "perfect rage and resentment, and the mortifying sight of slavery, folly, and baseness;" in which, as he says, he is the direct contrary of Pope, who can despise folly and hate vice without losing his temper or thinking the worse of individuals. "Oppression tortures him," and means bitter hatred of the concrete oppressor. He tells Barber in 1738 that for three years he has been but the shadow of his former self, and has entirely lost his memory, "except when it is roused by perpetual subjects of vexation." Commentators have been at pains to show that such sentiments are not philanthropic; yet they are the morbid utterance of a noble and affectionate nature soured by long misery and disappointment. They brought their own punishment. The unhappy man was fretting himself into melancholy, and was losing all sources of consolation. "I have nobody now left but you," he writes to Pope in 1736. His invention is gone; he makes projects which end in the manufacture of waste paper; and what vexes him most is that his "female friends have now forsaken him." "Years and infirmities," he says in the end of the same year (about the date of the *Legion Club*), "have quite broke me; I can neither read, nor write, nor remember, nor converse. All I have left is to walk and ride." A few letters are preserved in the next two years—melancholy wails over his loss of health and spirit—pathetic expressions of continual affection for his "dearest and almost only constant friend," and a warm request or two for services to some of his acquaintance.

The last stage was rapidly approaching. Swift, who had always been thinking of death in these later years, had anticipated the end in the remarkable verses *On the*

*Death of Dr. Swift.* This and two or three other performances of about the same period, especially the *Rhapsody on Poetry* (1733) and the *Verses to a Lady*, are Swift's chief title to be called a poet. How far that name can be conceded to him is a question of classification. Swift's originality appears in the very fact that he requires a new class to be made for him. He justified Dryden's remark in so far as he was never a poet in the sense in which Milton or Wordsworth or Shelley or even Dryden himself were poets. His poetry may be called rhymed prose, and should, perhaps, be put at about the same level in the scale of poetry as *Hudibras*. It differs from prose, not simply in being rhymed, but in that the metrical form seems to be the natural and appropriate mode of utterance. Some of the purely sarcastic and humorous phrases recall *Hudibras* more nearly than anything else; as, for example, the often quoted verses upon small critics in the *Rhapsody* .

"The vermin only tease and pinch  
Their foes superior by an inch.  
So naturalists observe a flea  
Has smaller fleas that on him prey,  
And these have smaller still to bite 'em,  
And so proceed *ad infinitum*."

In the verses on his own death the suppressed passion, the glow and force of feeling which we perceive behind the merely moral and prosaic phrases, seem to elevate the work to a higher level. It is a mere running of every-day language into easy-going verse; and yet the strangely mingled pathos and bitterness, the peculiar irony of which he was the great master, affect us with a sentiment which may be called poetical in substance more forcibly than

far more dignified and in some sense imaginative performances. Whatever name we may please to give such work, Swift has certainly struck home, and makes an impression which it is difficult to compress into a few phrases. It is the essence of all that is given at great length in the correspondence, and starts from a comment upon Rochefoucauld's congenial maxim about the misfortunes of our friends. He tells how his acquaintance watch his decay, tacitly congratulating themselves that "it is not yet so bad with us;" how, when he dies, they laugh at the absurdity of his will:

"To public uses! There's a whim!  
What had the public done for him?  
Mere envy, avarice, and pride,  
He gave it all—but first he died."

Then we have the comments of Queen Caroline and Sir Robert, and the rejoicings of Grub Street at the chance of passing off rubbish by calling it his. His friends are really touched:

"Poor Pope will grieve a month, and Gay  
A week, and Arbuthnot a day;  
St. John himself will scarce forbear  
To bite his pen and drop a tear;  
The rest will give a shrug and cry,  
'Tis pity, but we all must die!"

The ladies talk over it at their cards. They have learnt to show their tenderness, and

"Receive the news in doleful dumps.  
The Dean is dead (pray what is trumps?);  
Then Lord have mercy on his soul!  
(Ladies, I'll venture for the *vole*.)"

The poem concludes, as usual, with an impartial char-

acter of the Dean. He claims, with a pride not unjustifiable, the power of independence, love of his friends, hatred of corruption, and so forth; admits that he may have had "too much satire in his vein," though adding the very questionable assertion that he "lashed the vice but spared the name." Marlborough, Wharton, Burnet, Steele, Walpole, and a good many more, might have had something to say upon that head. The last phrase is significant:

"He gave the little wealth he had  
To build a house for fools and mad;  
And showed by one satiric touch  
No nation needed it so much—  
That kingdom he hath left his debtor,  
I wish it soon may have a better!"

For some years, in fact, Swift had spent much thought and time in arranging the details of this bequest. He ultimately left about 12,000*l.*, with which, and some other contributions, St. Patrick's Hospital was opened for fifty patients in the year 1757.

The last few years of Swift's life were passed in an almost total eclipse of intellect. One pathetic letter to Mrs. Whiteway gives almost the last touch: "I have been very miserable all night, and to-day extremely deaf and full of pain. I am so stupid and confounded that I cannot express the mortification I am under both of body and mind. All I can say is that I am not in torture; but I daily and hourly expect it. Pray let me know how your health is and your family. I hardly understand one word I write. I am sure my days will be very few, for miserable they must be. If I do not blunder, it is Saturday, July 26, 1740. If I live till Monday, I shall hope to see you, perhaps for the last time." Even after this he occasionally

showed gleams of his former intelligence, and is said to have written a well-known epigram during an outing with his attendants :

“Behold a proof of Irish sense!  
Here Irish wit is seen!  
When nothing's left that's worth defence  
They build a magazine.”

Occasionally he gave way to furious outbursts of violent temper, and once suffered great torture from a swelling in the eye. But his general state seems to have been apathetic; sometimes he tried to speak, but was unable to find words. A few sentences have been recorded. On hearing that preparations were being made for celebrating his birthday he said, “It is all folly; they had better let it alone.” Another time he was heard to mutter, “I am what I am; I am what I am.” Few details have been given of this sad period of mental eclipse; nor can we regret their absence. It is enough to say that he suffered occasional tortures from the development of the brain-disease; though as a rule he enjoyed the painlessness of torpor. The unhappy man lingered till the 19th of October, 1745, when he died quietly at three in the afternoon, after a night of convulsions. He was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral, and over his grave was placed an epitaph, containing the last of those terrible phrases which cling to our memory whenever his name is mentioned. Swift lies, in his own words,

“Ubi sæva indignatio  
Cor ulterius lacerare nequit.”

What more can be added?

THE END.

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HUME

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Portrait of a man in 18th-century attire, likely a historical figure, shown in an oval frame. The image is a black and white engraving.

# H U M E.

## PART I.

### *H U M E'S L I F E.*

#### CHAPTER I.

##### EARLY LIFE: LITERARY AND POLITICAL WRITINGS.

DAVID HUME was born in Edinburgh on the 26th of April (O.S.), 1711. His parents were then residing in the parish of the Tron Church, apparently on a visit to the Scottish capital, as the small estate which his father, Joseph Hume, or Home, inherited, lay in Berwickshire, on the banks of the Whitadder, or Whitewater, a few miles from the border, and within sight of English ground. The paternal mansion was little more than a very modest farmhouse,<sup>1</sup> and the property derived its name of Ninewells from a

<sup>1</sup> A picture of the house, taken from Drummond's *History of Noble British Families*, is to be seen in Chambers's *Book of Days* (April 26th); and if, as Drummond says, "It is a favourable specimen of the best Scotch lairds' houses," all that can be said is that the worst Scotch lairds must have been poorly lodged indeed.

considerable spring, which breaks out on the slope in front of the house, and falls into the Whitadder.

Both mother and father came of good Scottish families—the paternal line running back to Lord Home of Douglas, who went over to France with the Douglas during the French wars of Henry V. and VI., and was killed at the battle of Verneuil. Joseph Hume died when David was an infant, leaving himself and two elder children, a brother and a sister, to the care of their mother, who is described by David Hume in *My Own Life* as “a woman of singular merit, who, though young and handsome, devoted herself entirely to the rearing and education of her children.” Mr. Burton says: “Her portrait, which I have seen, represents a thin but pleasing countenance, expressive of great intellectual acuteness;” and as Hume told Dr. Black that she had “precisely the same constitution with himself” and died of the disorder which proved fatal to him, it is probable that the qualities inherited from his mother had much to do with the future philosopher’s eminence. It is curious, however, that her estimate of her son in her only recorded, and perhaps slightly apocryphal utterance, is of a somewhat unexpected character. “Our Davie’s a fine, good-natured crater, but uncommon wake-minded.” The first part of the judgment was indeed verified by “Davie’s” whole life; but one might seek in vain for signs of what is commonly understood as “weakness of mind” in a man who not only showed himself to be an intellectual athlete, but who had an eminent share of practical wisdom and tenacity of purpose. One would like to know, however, when it was that Mrs. Hume committed herself to this not too flattering judgment of her younger son. For as Hume reached the mature age of four-and-thirty before he obtained any

employment of sufficient importance to convert the meagre pittance of a middling laird's younger brother into a decent maintenance, it is not improbable that a shrewd Scot's wife may have thought his devotion to philosophy and poverty to be due to mere infirmity of purpose. But she lived till 1749, long enough to see more than the dawn of her son's literary fame and official importance, and probably changed her mind about "Davie's" force of character.

David Hume appears to have owed little to schools or universities. There is some evidence that he entered the Greek class in the University of Edinburgh in 1723—when he was a boy of twelve years of age—but it is not known how long his studies were continued, and he did not graduate. In 1727, at any rate, he was living at Ninewells, and already possessed by that love of learning and thirst for literary fame, which, as *My Own Life* tells us, was the ruling passion of his life and the chief source of his enjoyments. A letter of this date, addressed to his friend Michael Ramsay, is certainly a most singular production for a boy of sixteen. After sundry quotations from Virgil, the letter proceeds:—

"The perfectly wise man that outbraves fortune, is much greater than the husbandman who slips by her; and, indeed, this pastoral and saturnian happiness I have in a great measure come at just now. I live like a king, pretty much by myself, neither full of action nor perturbation—*molles somnos*. This state, however, I can foresee, is not to be relied on. My peace of mind is not sufficiently confirmed by philosophy to withstand the blows of fortune. This greatness and elevation of soul is to be found only in study and contemplation. This alone can teach us to look down on human accidents. You must allow [me] to talk thus like a philoso-



pher: 'tis a subject I think much on, and could talk all day long of."

If David talked in this strain to his mother, her tongue probably gave utterance to "Bless the bairn!" and, in her private soul, the epithet "wake-minded" may then have recorded itself. But, though few lonely, thoughtful, studious boys of sixteen give vent to their thoughts in such stately periods, it is probable that the brooding over an ideal is commoner at this age than fathers and mothers, busy with the cares of practical life, are apt to imagine.

About a year later, Hume's family tried to launch him into the profession of the law; but, as he tells us, "while they fancied I was poring upon Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the authors which I was secretly devouring," and the attempt seems to have come to an abrupt termination. Nevertheless, as a very competent authority<sup>1</sup> wisely remarks:—

"There appear to have been in Hume all the elements of which a good lawyer is made: clearness of judgment, power of rapidly acquiring knowledge, untiring industry, and dialectic skill: and if his mind had not been preoccupied, he might have fallen into the gulf in which many of the world's greatest geniuses lie buried—professional eminence; and might have left behind him a reputation limited to the traditional recollections of the Parliament-house, or associated with important decisions. He was through life an able, clear-headed man of business, and I have seen several legal

---

<sup>1</sup> Mr. John Hill Burton, in his valuable *Life of Hume*, on which, I need hardly say, I have drawn freely for the materials of the present biographical sketch.

documents, written in his own hand and evidently drawn by himself. They stand the test of general professional observation; and their writer, by preparing documents of facts of such a character on his own responsibility, showed that he had considerable confidence in his ability to adhere to the forms adequate for the occasion. He talked of it as 'an ancient prejudice industriously propagated by the dunces in all countries, that *a man of genius is unfit for business*,' and he showed, in his general conduct through life, that he did not choose to come voluntarily under this proscription."

Six years longer Hume remained at Ninewells before he made another attempt to embark in a practical career—this time commerce—and with a like result. For a few months' trial proved that kind of life, also, to be hopelessly against the grain.

It was while in London, on his way to Bristol, where he proposed to commence his mercantile life, that Hume addressed to some eminent London physician (probably, as Mr. Burton suggests, Dr. George Cheyne) a remarkable letter. Whether it was ever sent seems doubtful; but it shows that philosophers as well as poets have their Werterian crises, and it presents an interesting parallel to John Stuart Mill's record of the corresponding period of his youth. The letter is too long to be given in full, but a few quotations may suffice to indicate its importance to those who desire to comprehend the man.

"You must know then that from my earliest infancy I found always a strong inclination to books and letters. As our college education in Scotland, extending little further than the languages, ends commonly when we are about fourteen or fifteen years of age, I was after that left to my own choice in my reading, and found it incline me almost equally to books of reasoning and philosophy, and to poetry and

the polite authors. Every one who is acquainted either with the philosophers or critics, knows that there is nothing yet established in either of these two sciences, and that they contain little more than endless disputes, even in the most fundamental articles. Upon examination of these, I found a certain boldness of temper growing on me, which was not inclined to submit to any authority in these subjects, but led me to seek out some new medium, by which truth might be established. After much study and reflection on this, at last, when I was about eighteen years of age, there seemed to be opened up to me a new scene of thought, which transported me beyond measure, and made me, with an ardour natural to young men, throw up every other pleasure or business to apply entirely to it. The law, which was the business I designed to follow, appeared nauseous to me, and I could think of no other way of pushing my fortune in the world but that of a scholar and philosopher. I was infinitely happy in this course of life for some months; till at last, about the beginning of September, 1729, all my ardour seemed in a moment to be extinguished, and I could no longer raise my mind to that pitch which formerly gave me such excessive pleasure."

This "decline of soul" Hume attributes, in part, to his being smitten with the beautiful representations of virtue in the works of Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch, and being thereby led to discipline his temper and his will along with his reason and understanding.

"I was continually fortifying myself with reflections against death, and poverty, and shame, and pain, and all the other calamities of life."

And he adds, very characteristically:—

"These, no doubt, are exceeding useful when joined with an active life, because the occasion being presented along with the reflection, works it into the soul, and makes it take

a deep impression; but, in solitude, they serve to little other purpose than to waste the spirits, the force of the mind meeting no resistance, but wasting itself in the air, like our arm when it misses its aim."

Along with all this mental perturbation, symptoms of scurvy, a disease now almost unknown among landsmen, but which, in the days of winter, salt meat, before root crops flourished in the Lothians, greatly plagued our forefathers, made their appearance. And, indeed, it may be suspected that physical conditions were, at first, at the bottom of the whole business; for, in 1731, a ravenous appetite set in, and in six weeks, from being tall, lean, and raw-boned, Hume says he became sturdy and robust, with a ruddy complexion and a cheerful countenance—eating, sleeping, and feeling well, except that the capacity for intense mental application seemed to be gone. He, therefore, determined to seek out a more active life; and, though he could not and would not "quit his pretensions to learning but with his last breath," he resolved "to lay them aside for some time, in order the more effectually to resume them."

The careers open to a poor Scottish gentleman in those days were very few; and, as Hume's option lay between a travelling tutorship and a stool in a merchant's office, he chose the latter.

"And having got recommendation to a considerable trader in Bristol, I am just now hastening thither, with a resolution to forget myself, and everything that is past, to engage myself, as far as is possible, in that course of life, and to toss about the world from one pole to the other, till I leave this distemper behind me."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One cannot but be reminded of young Descartes' renunciation of study for soldiering.

But it was all of no use—Nature would have her way—and in the middle of 1736, David Hume, aged twenty-three, without a profession or any assured means of earning a guinea; and having doubtless, by his apparent vacillation, but real tenacity of purpose, once more earned the title of “wake-minded” at home; betook himself to a foreign country.

“I went over to France, with a view of prosecuting my studies in a country retreat: and there I laid that plan of life which I have steadily and successfully pursued. I resolved to make a very rigid frugality supply my deficiency of fortune, to maintain unimpaired my independency, and to regard every object as contemptible except the improvement of my talents in literature.”<sup>1</sup>

Hume passed through Paris on his way to Rheims, where he resided for some time; though the greater part of his three years' stay was spent at La Flèche, in frequent intercourse with the Jesuits of the famous college in which Descartes was educated. Here he composed his first work, the *Treatise of Human Nature*; though it would appear, from the following passage in the letter to Cheyne, that he had been accumulating materials to that end for some years before he left Scotland.

“I found that the moral philosophy transmitted to us by antiquity laboured under the same inconvenience that has been found in their natural philosophy, of being entirely hypothetical, and depending more upon invention than experience: every one consulted his fancy in erecting schemes of virtue and happiness, without regarding human nature, upon which every moral conclusion must depend.”

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<sup>1</sup> *My Own Life.*

This is the key-note of the *Treatise*; of which Hume himself says apologetically, in one of his letters, that it was planned before he was twenty-one and composed before he had reached the age of twenty-five.<sup>1</sup>

Under these circumstances, it is probably the most remarkable philosophical work, both intrinsically and in its effects upon the course of thought, that has ever been written. Berkeley, indeed, published the *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, the *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, and the *Three Dialogues*, between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-eight; and thus comes very near to Hume, both in precocity and in influence; but his investigations are more limited in their scope than those of his Scottish contemporary.

The first and second volumes of the *Treatise*, containing Book I, "Of the Understanding," and Book II, "Of the Passions," were published in January, 1739.<sup>2</sup> The publisher gave fifty pounds for the copyright; which is probably more than an unknown writer of twenty-seven years of age would get for a similar work at the present time. But, in other respects, its success fell far short of Hume's expectations. In a letter dated the 1st of June, 1739, he writes:—

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 1751. "So vast an undertaking, planned before I was one-and-twenty, and composed before twenty-five, must necessarily be very defective. I have repented my haste a hundred and a hundred times."

<sup>2</sup> So says Mr. Burton, and that he is right is proved by a letter of Hume's, dated February 13, 1739, in which he writes, "Tis now a fortnight since my book was published." But it is a curious illustration of the value of testimony, that Hume, in *My Own Life*, states: "In the end of 1738 I published my *Treatise*, and immediately went down to my mother and my brother."

"I am not much in the humour of such compositions at present, having received news from London of the success of my *Philosophy*, which is but indifferent, if I may judge by the sale of the book, and if I may believe my bookseller."

This, however, indicates a very different reception from that which Hume, looking through the inverted telescope of old age, ascribes to the *Treatise in My Own Life*.

"Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my *Treatise of Human Nature*. It fell *deadborn from the press* without reaching such a distinction as even to excite a murmur among the zealots."

As a matter of fact, it was fully, and, on the whole, respectfully and appreciatively, reviewed in the *History of the Works of the Learned* for November, 1739.<sup>1</sup> Whoever the reviewer may have been, he was a man of discernment, for he says that the work bears "incontestable marks of a great capacity, of a soaring genius, but young, and not yet thoroughly practised;" and he adds, that we shall probably have reason to consider "this, compared with the later productions, in the same light as we view the juvenile works of a Milton, or the first manner of a Raphael or other celebrated painter." In a letter to Hutcheson, Hume merely speaks of this article as "somewhat abusive;" so that his vanity, being young and callow, seems to have been correspondingly wide-mouthed and hard to satiate.

It must be confessed that, on this occasion, no less than on that of his other publications, Hume exhibits no small share of the craving after mere notoriety and vulgar success, as distinct from the pardonable, if not honourable,

<sup>1</sup> Burton, *Life*, vol. i. p. 109.

ambition for solid and enduring fame, which would have harmonised better with his philosophy. Indeed, it appears to be by no means improbable that this peculiarity of Hume's moral constitution was the cause of his gradually forsaking philosophical studies, after the publication of the third part (*On Morals*) of the *Treatise*, in 1740, and turning to those political and historical topics which were likely to yield, and did in fact yield, a much better return of that sort of success which his soul loved. The *Philosophical Essays Concerning the Human Understanding*, which afterwards became the *Inquiry*, is not much more than an abridgment and recast, for popular use, of parts of the *Treatise*, with the addition of the essays on Miracles and on Necessity. In style, it exhibits a great improvement on the *Treatise*; but the substance, if not deteriorated, is certainly not improved. Hume does not really bring his mature powers to bear upon his early speculations, in the later work. The crude fruits have not been ripened, but they have been ruthlessly pruned away, along with the branches which bore them. The result is a pretty shrub enough; but not the tree of knowledge, with its roots firmly fixed in fact, its branches perennially budding forth into new truths, which Hume might have reared. Perhaps, after all, worthy Mrs. Hume was, in the highest sense, right. Davie was "wake-minded," not to see that the world of philosophy was his to overrun and subdue, if he would but persevere in the work he had begun. But no—he must needs turn aside for "success"; and verily he had his reward; but not the crown he might have won.

In 1740, Hume seems to have made an acquaintance which rapidly ripened into a life-long friendship. Adam Smith was at that time a boy student of seventeen at the



University of Glasgow; and Hume sends a copy of the *Treatise* to "Mr. Smith," apparently on the recommendation of the well-known Hutcheson, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the university. It is a remarkable evidence of Adam Smith's early intellectual development, that a youth of his age should be thought worthy of such a present.

In 1741 Hume published anonymously, at Edinburgh, the first volume of *Essays Moral and Political*, which was followed in 1742 by the second volume.

These pieces are written in an admirable style, and, though arranged without apparent method, a system of political philosophy may be gathered from their contents. Thus the third essay, *That Politics may be reduced to a Science*, defends that thesis, and dwells on the importance of forms of government.

"So great is the force of laws and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them as any which the mathematical sciences afford us."—(III. 15.) (See p. 45.)

Hume proceeds to exemplify the evils which inevitably flow from universal suffrage, from aristocratic privilege, and from elective monarchy, by historical examples, and concludes:—

"That an hereditary prince, a nobility without vassals, and a people voting by their representatives, form the best monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy."—(III. 18.)

If we reflect that the following passage of the same essay was written nearly a century and a half ago, it would

seem that whatever other changes may have taken place, political warfare remains *in statu quo*:—

“Those who either attack or defend a minister in such a government as ours, where the utmost liberty is allowed, always carry matters to an extreme, and exaggerate his merit or demerit with regard to the public. His enemies are sure to charge him with the greatest enormities, both in domestic and foreign management; and there is no meanness or crime of which, in their judgment, he is not capable. Unnecessary wars, scandalous treaties, profusion of public treasure, oppressive taxes, every kind of maladministration is ascribed to him. To aggravate the charge, his pernicious conduct, it is said, will extend its baneful influence even to posterity, by undermining the best constitution in the world, and disordering that wise system of laws, institutions, and customs, by which our ancestors, during so many centuries, have been so happily governed. He is not only a wicked minister in himself, but has removed every security provided against wicked ministers for the future.

“On the other hand, the partisans of the minister make his panegyric rise as high as the accusation against him, and celebrate his wise, steady, and moderate conduct in every part of his administration. The honour and interest of the nation supported abroad, public credit maintained at home, persecution restrained, faction subdued: the merit of all these blessings is ascribed solely to the minister. At the same time, he crowns all his other merits by a religious care of the best government in the world, which he has preserved in all its parts, and has transmitted entire, to be the happiness and security of the latest posterity.”—(III. 26.)

Hume sagely remarks that the panegyric and the accusation cannot both be true; and, that what truth there may be in either, rather tends to show that our much-vaunted constitution does not fulfil its chief object, which

is to provide a remedy against maladministration. And if it does not—

“we are rather beholden to any minister who undermines it and affords us the opportunity of erecting a better in its place.”—(III. 28.)

The fifth Essay discusses the *Origin of Government*:—

“Man, born in a family, is compelled to maintain society from necessity, from natural inclination, and from habit. The same creature, in his farther progress, is engaged to establish political society, in order to administer justice, without which there can be no peace among them, nor safety, nor mutual intercourse. We are therefore to look upon all the vast apparatus of our government as having ultimately no other object or purpose but the distribution of justice, or, in other words, the support of the twelve judges. Kings and parliaments, fleets and armies, officers of the court and revenue, ambassadors, ministers and privy councillors, are all subordinate in the end to this part of administration. Even the clergy, as their duty leads them to inculcate morality, may justly be thought, so far as regards this world, to have no other useful object of their institution.”—(III. 37.)

The police theory of government has never been stated more tersely: and, if there were only one state in the world; and if we could be certain by intuition, or by the aid of revelation, that it is wrong for society, as a corporate body, to do anything for the improvement of its members, and thereby indirectly support the twelve judges, no objection could be raised to it.

Unfortunately the existence of rival or inimical nations furnishes “kings and parliaments, fleets and armies,” with a good deal of occupation beyond the support of the twelve judges; and, though the proposition that the State

has no business to meddle with anything but the administration of justice, seems sometimes to be regarded as an axiom, it can hardly be said to be intuitively certain, inasmuch as a great many people absolutely repudiate it; while, as yet, the attempt to give it the authority of a revelation has not been made.

As Hume says with profound truth in the fourth essay, *On the First Principles of Government*:—

“As force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is, therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and the most popular.”—(III. 31.)

But if the whole fabric of social organisation rests on opinion, it may surely be fairly argued that, in the interests of self-preservation, if for no better reason, society has a right to see that the means of forming just opinions are placed within the reach of every one of its members; and, therefore, that due provision for education, at any rate, is a right and, indeed, a duty, of the state.

The three opinions upon which all government, or the authority of the few over the many, is founded, says Hume, are public interest, right to power, and right to property. No government can permanently exist unless the majority of the citizens, who are the ultimate depository of Force, are convinced that it serves the general interest, that it has lawful authority, and that it respects individual rights:—

“A government may endure for several ages, though the balance of power and the balance of property do not coincide. . . . But where the original constitution allows any

share of power, though small, to an order of men who possess a large share of property, it is easy for them gradually to stretch their authority, and bring the balance of power to coincide with that of property. This has been the case with the House of Commons in England."—(III. 34.)

Hume then points out that, in his time, the authority of the Commons was by no means equivalent to the property and power it represented, and proceeds:—

"Were the members obliged to receive instructions from their constituents, like the Dutch deputies, this would entirely alter the case; and if such immense power and riches as those of all the Commons of Great Britain were brought into the scale, it is not easy to conceive that the crown could either influence that multitude of people, or withstand that balance of property. It is true, the crown has great influence over the collective body in the elections of members; but were this influence, which at present is only exerted once in seven years, to be employed in bringing over the people to every vote, it would soon be wasted, and no skill, popularity, or revenue could support it. I must, therefore, be of opinion that an alteration in this particular would introduce a total alteration in our government, would soon reduce it to a pure republic; and, perhaps, to a republic of no inconvenient form."—(III. 35.)

Viewed by the light of subsequent events, this is surely a very remarkable example of political sagacity. The members of the House of Commons are not yet delegates; but, with the widening of the suffrage and the rapidly increasing tendency to drill and organise the electorate, and to exact definite pledges from candidates, they are rapidly becoming, if not delegates, at least attorneys for committees of electors. The same causes are constantly tending to exclude men, who combine a keen sense of self

respect with large intellectual capacity, from a position in which the one is as constantly offended as the other is neutralised. Notwithstanding the attempt of George the Third to resuscitate the royal authority, Hume's foresight has been so completely justified that no one now dreams of the crown exerting the slightest influence upon elections.

In the seventh essay, Hume raises a very interesting discussion as to the probable ultimate result of the forces which were at work in the British Constitution in the first part of the eighteenth century:—

“There has been a sudden and sensible change in the opinions of men, within these last fifty years, by the progress of learning and of liberty. Most people in this island have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority; the clergy have much lost their credit; their pretensions and doctrines have been much ridiculed; and even religion can scarcely support itself in the world. The mere name of *king* commands little respect; and to talk of a king as God's vicegerent on earth, or to give him any of those magnificent titles which formerly dazzled mankind, would but excite laughter in every one.”  
—(III. 54.)

In fact, at the present day, the danger to monarchy in Britain would appear to lie, not in increasing love for equality, for which, except as regards the law, Englishmen have never cared, but rather entertain an aversion; nor in any abstract democratic theories, upon which the mass of Englishmen pour the contempt with which they view theories in general; but in the constantly increasing tendency of monarchy to become slightly absurd, from the ever-widening discrepancy between modern political ideas and the theory of kingship. As Hume ob-

serves, even in his time, people had left off making believe that a king was a different species of man from other men; and, since his day, more and more such make-believes have become impossible; until the maintenance of kingship in coming generations seems likely to depend entirely upon whether it is the general opinion that a hereditary president of our virtual republic will serve the general interest better than an elective one or not. The tendency of public feeling in this direction is patent, but it does not follow that a republic is to be the final stage of our government. In fact, Hume thinks not:—

“It is well known that every government must come to a period, and that death is unavoidable to the political, as well as to the animal body. But, as one kind of death may be preferable to another, it may be inquired, whether it be more desirable for the British constitution to terminate in a popular government, or in an absolute monarchy? Here, I would frankly declare, that though liberty be preferable to slavery, in almost every case; yet I should rather wish to see an absolute monarch than a republic in this island. For let us consider what kind of republic we have reason to expect. The question is not concerning any fine imaginary republic of which a man forms a plan in his closet. There is no doubt but a popular government may be imagined more perfect than an absolute monarchy, or even than our present constitution. But what reason have we to expect that any such government will ever be established in Great Britain, upon the dissolution of our monarchy? If any single person acquire power enough to take our constitution to pieces, and put it up anew, he is really an absolute monarch; and we have already had an instance of this kind, sufficient to convince us that such a person will never resign his power, or establish any free government. Matters, therefore, must be trusted to their natural progress and operation; and the House of Commons, according to its present

constitution, must be the only legislature in such a popular government. The inconveniences attending such a situation of affairs present themselves by thousands. If the House of Commons, in such a case, ever dissolve itself, which is not to be expected, we may look for a civil war every election. If it continue itself, we shall suffer all the tyranny of a faction subdivided into new factions. And, as such a violent government cannot long subsist, we shall at last, after many convulsions and civil wars, find repose in absolute monarchy, which it would have been happier for us to have established peaceably from the beginning. Absolute monarchy, therefore, is the easiest death, the true *Euthanasia* of the British constitution.

“Thus if we have more reason to be jealous of monarchy, because the danger is more imminent from that quarter, we have also reason to be more jealous of popular government, because that danger is more terrible. This may teach us a lesson of moderation in all our political controversies.”  
—(III. 55.)

One may admire the sagacity of these speculations, and the force and clearness with which they are expressed, without altogether agreeing with them. That an analogy between the social and bodily organism exists, and is, in many respects, clear and full of instructive suggestion, is undeniable. Yet a state answers, not to an individual, but to a generic type; and there is no reason, in the nature of things, why any generic type should die out. The type of the pearly *Nautilus*, highly organised as it is, has persisted with but little change from the Silurian epoch till now; and, so long as terrestrial conditions remain approximately similar to what they are at present, there is no more reason why it should cease to exist in the next, than in the past, hundred million years or so. The true ground for doubting the possibility of the establishment



of absolute monarchy in Britain is, that opinion seems to have passed through, and left far behind, the stage at which such a change would be possible; and the true reason for doubting the permanency of a republic, if it is ever established, lies in the fact, that a republic requires for its maintenance a far higher standard of morality and of intelligence in the members of the state than any other form of government. Samuel gave the Israelites a king because they were not righteous enough to do without one, with a pretty plain warning of what they were to expect from the gift. And, up to this time, the progress of such republics as have been established in the world has not been such as to lead to any confident expectation that their foundation is laid on a sufficiently secure subsoil of public spirit, morality, and intelligence. On the contrary, they exhibit examples of personal corruption and of political profligacy as fine as any hotbed of despotism has ever produced; while they fail in the primary duty of the administration of justice, as none but an effete despotism has ever failed.

Hume has been accused of departing, in his old age, from the liberal principles of his youth; and, no doubt, he was careful, in the later editions of the *Essays*, to expunge everything that savoured of democratic tendencies. But the passage just quoted shows that this was no recantation, but simply a confirmation, by his experience of one of the most debased periods of English history, of those evil tendencies attendant on popular government, of which, from the first, he was fully aware.

In the ninth essay, *On the Parties of Great Britain*, there occurs a passage which, while it affords evidence of the marvellous change which has taken place in the social condition of Scotland since 1741, contains an assertion re-

specting the state of the Jacobite party at that time, which at first seems surprising:—

“As violent things have not commonly so long a duration as moderate, we actually find that the Jacobite party is almost entirely vanished from among us, and that the distinction of *Court* and *Country*, which is but creeping in at London, is the only one that is ever mentioned in this kingdom. Beside the violence and openness of the Jacobite party, another reason has perhaps contributed to produce so sudden and so visible an alteration in this part of Britain. There are only two ranks of men among us; gentlemen who have some fortune and education, and the meanest slaving poor; without any considerable number of that middling rank of men which abound more in England, both in cities and in the country, than in any other part of the world. The slaving poor are incapable of any principles; gentlemen may be converted to true principles by time and experience. The middling rank of men have curiosity and knowledge enough to form principles, but not enough to form true ones, or correct any prejudices that they may have imbibed. And it is among the middling rank of people that Tory principles do at present prevail most in England.”—(III. 80, *note*.)

Considering that the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 broke out only four years after this essay was published, the assertion that the Jacobite party had “almost entirely vanished in 1741” sounds strange enough; and the passage which contains it is omitted in the third edition of the *Essays*, published in 1748. Nevertheless, Hume was probably right, as the outbreak of '45 was little better than a Highland raid, and the Pretender obtained no important following in the Lowlands.

No less curious, in comparison with what would be said nowadays, is Hume's remark in the *Essay on the Rise of the Arts and Sciences* that—

“The English are become sensible of the scandalous licentiousness of their stage from the example of the French decency and morals.”—(III. 135.)

And it is perhaps as surprising to be told, by a man of Hume's literary power, that the first polite prose in the English language was written by Swift. Loeki and Temple (with whom Sprat is astoundingly conjoined) “knew too little of the rules of art to be esteemed elegant writers,” and the prose of Bacon, Harrington, and Milton is “altogether stiff and pedantic.” Hobbes, who, whether he should be called a “polite” writer or not, is a master of vigorous English; Clarendon, Addison, and Steele (the last two, surely, were “polite” writers, in all conscience) are not mentioned.

On the subject of *National Character*, about which more nonsense, and often very mischievous nonsense, has been and is talked than upon any other topic, Hume's observations are full of sense and shrewdness. He distinguishes between the *moral* and the *physical* causes of national character, enumerating under the former—

“The nature of the government, the revolutions of public affairs, the plenty or penury in which people live, the situation of the nation with regard to its neighbours, and such like circumstances.”—(III. 225.)

and under the latter:—

“Those qualities of the air and climate, which are supposed to work insensibly on the temper, by altering the tone and habit of the body, and giving a particular complexion, which, though reflexion and reason may sometimes overcome it, will yet prevail among the generality of mankind, and have an influence on their manners.”—(III. 225.)

While admitting and exemplifying the great influence of moral causes, Hume remarks—

1.]

"As to physical causes, I am inclined to doubt altogether of their operation in this particular; nor do I think that men owe anything of their temper or genius to the air, food, or climate."—(III. 227.)

Hume certainly would not have accepted the "rice theory" in explanation of the social state of the Hindoos; and, it may be safely assumed, that he would not have had recourse to the circumambience of the "melancholy main" to account for the troublous history of Ireland. He supports his views by a variety of strong arguments, among which, at the present conjuncture, it is worth noting that the following occurs—

"Where any accident, as a difference in language or religion, keeps two nations, inhabiting the same country, from mixing with one another, they will preserve during several centuries a distinct and even opposite set of manners. The integrity, gravity, and bravery of the Turks form an exact contrast to the deceit, levity, and cowardice of the modern Greeks."—(III. 233.)

The question of the influence of race, which plays so great a part in modern political speculations, was hardly broached in Hume's time, but he had an inkling of its importance:—

"I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilised nation of that complexion, nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. . . . Such a uniform and constant difference [between the negroes and the whites] could not happen in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. . . . In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly."—(III. 236.)

The *Essays* met with the success they deserved. Hume wrote to Henry Home in June, 1742:—

“The *Essays* are all sold in London, as I am informed by two letters from English gentlemen of my acquaintance. There is a demand for them; and, as one of them tells me, Innys, the great bookseller in Paul’s Churchyard, wonders there is not a new edition, for he cannot find copies for his customers. I am also told that Dr. Butler has everywhere recommended them; so that I hope that they will have some success.”

Hume had sent Butler a copy of the *Treatise*, and had called upon him in London, but he was out of town; and being shortly afterwards made Bishop of Bristol, Hume seems to have thought that further advances on his part might not be well received.

Greatly comforted by this measure of success, Hume remained at Ninewells, rubbing up his Greek, until 1745; when, at the mature age of thirty-four, he made his entry into practical life, by becoming bear-leader to the Marquis of Annandale, a young nobleman of feeble body and feeble mind. As might have been predicted, this venture was not more fortunate than his previous ones; and, after a year’s endurance, diversified latterly with pecuniary squabbles, in which Hume’s tenacity about a somewhat small claim is remarkable, the engagement came to an end.

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## CHAPTER II.

## LATER YEARS: THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

IN 1744, Hume's friends had endeavoured to procure his nomination to the Chair of "Ethics and pneumatic philosophy"<sup>1</sup> in the University of Edinburgh. About this matter he writes to his friend William Mure:—

"The accusation of heresy, deism, scepticism, atheism, &c., &c., &c., was started against me; but never took, being bore down by the contrary authority of all the good company in town."

If the "good company in town" bore down the first three of these charges, it is to be hoped, for the sake of their veracity, that they knew their candidate chiefly as the very good company that he always was; and had paid as little attention, as good company usually does, to so solid a work as the *Treatise*. Hume expresses a naïve surprise, not unmingled with indignation, that Hutcheson and Lecchman, both clergymen and sincere, though liberal, professors of orthodoxy, should have expressed doubts as

<sup>1</sup> "Pneumatic philosophy" must not be confounded with the theory of elastic fluids; though, as Scottish chairs have, before now, combined natural with civil history, the mistake would be pardonable.

to his fitness for becoming a professedly Presbyterian teacher of Presbyterian youth. The town council, however, would not have him, and filled up the place with a safe nobody.

In May, 1746, a new prospect opened. General St. Clair was appointed to the command of an expedition to Canada, and he invited Hume, at a week's notice, to be his secretary; to which office that of judge-advocate was afterwards added.

Hume writes to a friend: "The office is very genteel, 10s. a day, perquisites, and no expenses;" and, to another, he speculates on the chance of procuring a company in an American regiment. "But this I build not on, nor indeed am I very fond of it," he adds; and this was fortunate, for the expedition, after dawdling away the summer in port, was suddenly diverted to an attack on L'Orient, where it achieved a huge failure and returned ignominiously to England.

A letter to Henry Home, written when this unlucky expedition was recalled, shows that Hume had already seriously turned his attention to history. Referring to an invitation to go over to Flanders with the General, he says:

"Had I any fortune which would give me a prospect of leisure and opportunity to prosecute my *historical projects*, nothing could be more useful to me, and I should pick up more literary knowledge in one campaign by being in the General's family, and being introduced frequently to the Duke's, than most officers could do after many years' service. But to what can all this serve? I am a philosopher, and so I suppose must continue."

But this vaticination was shortly to prove erroneous. Hume seems to have made a very favourable impression on

General St. Clair, as he did upon every one with whom he came into personal contact; for, being charged with a mission to the court of Turin, in 1748, the General insisted upon the appointment of Hume as his secretary. He further made him one of his aides-de-camp; so that the philosopher was obliged to encase his more than portly, and by no means elegant, figure in a military uniform. Lord Charlemont, who met him at Turin, says he was "disguised in scarlet," and that he wore his uniform "like a grocer of the train-bands." Hume, always ready for a joke at his own expense, tells of the considerate kindness with which, at a reception at Vienna, the Empress-dowager released him and his friends from the necessity of walking backwards. "We esteemed ourselves very much obliged to her for this attention, especially my companions, who were desperately afraid of my falling on them and crushing them."

Notwithstanding the many attractions of this appointment, Hume writes that he leaves home "with infinite regret, where I had treasured up stores of study and plans of thinking for many years;" and his only consolation is that the opportunity of becoming conversant with state affairs may be profitable:—

"I shall have an opportunity of seeing courts and camps; and if I can afterward be so happy as to attain leisure and other opportunities, this knowledge may even turn to account to me as a man of letters, which I confess was always been the sole object of my ambition. I have long had an intention, in my riper years, of composing some history; and I question not but some greater experience in the operations of the field and the intrigues of the cabinet will be requisite, in order to enable me to speak with judgment on these subjects."



Hume returned to London in 1749, and, during his stay there, his mother died, to his heartfelt sorrow. A serious story in connection with this event is told by Dr. Carlyle, who knew Hume well, and whose authority is perfectly trustworthy.

“ Mr Boyle hearing of it, soon after went to his apartment, for they lodged in the same house, where he found him in the deepest affliction and in a flood of tears. After the usual topics and condolences Mr. Boyle said to him, ‘My friend, you owe this uncommon grief to having thrown off the principles of religion; for if you had not, you would have been consoled with the firm belief that the good lady, who was not only the best of mothers, but the most pious of Christians, was completely happy in the realms of the just.’ To which David replied, ‘Though I throw out my speculations to entertain the learned and metaphysical world, yet in other things I do not think so differently from the rest of the world as you imagine.’ ”

If Hume had told this story to Dr. Carlyle, the latter would have said so; it must therefore have come from Mr. Boyle; and one would like to have the opportunity of cross-examining that gentleman as to Hume's exact words and their context, before implicitly accepting his version of the conversation. Mr. Boyle's experience of mankind must have been small, if he had not seen the firmest of believers overwhelmed with grief by a like loss, and as completely inconsolable. Hume may have thrown off Mr. Boyle's “principles of religion,” but he was none the less a very honest man, perfectly open and candid, and the last person to use ambiguous phraseology, among his friends; unless, indeed, he saw no other way of putting a stop to the intrusion of unmannerly twaddle amongst the

bitter-sweet memories stirred in his affectionate nature by so heavy a blow.

The *Philosophical Essays* or *Inquiry* was published in 1748, while Hume was away with General St. Clair, and on his return to England he had the mortification to find it overlooked in the hubbub caused by Middleton's *Free Inquiry*, and its bold handling of the topic of the *Essay on Miracles*, by which Hume doubtless expected the public to be startled.

Between 1749 and 1751, Hume resided at Ninewells, with his brother and sister, and busied himself with the composition of his most finished, if not his most important works, the *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, the *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and the *Political Discourses*.

The *Dialogues on Natural Religion* were touched and re-touched, at intervals, for a quarter of a century, and were not published till after Hume's death: but the *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* appeared in 1751, and the *Political Discourses* in 1752. Full reference will be made to the two former in the exposition of Hume's philosophical views. The last has been well said to be the "cradle of political economy: and much as that science has been investigated and expounded in later times, these earliest, shortest, and simplest developments of its principles are still read with delight even by those who are masters of all the literature of this great subject."<sup>1</sup>

The *Wealth of Nations*, the masterpiece of Hume's close friend, Adam Smith, it must be remembered, did not appear before 1776, so that, in political economy, no less

<sup>1</sup> Burton's *Life of David Hume*, i. p. 354.

than in philosophy, Hume was an original, a daring, and a fertile innovator.

The *Political Essays* had a great and rapid success; translated into French in 1753, and again in 1754, they conferred a European reputation upon their author; and, what was more to the purpose, influenced the later French school of economists of the eighteenth century.

By this time, Hume had not only attained a high reputation in the world of letters, but he considered himself a man of independent fortune. His frugal habits had enabled him to accumulate £1,000, and he tells Michael Ramsay in 1751:—

“While interest remains as at present, I have £50 a year, a hundred pounds' worth of books, great store of linens and fine clothes, and near £100 in my pocket; along with order, frugality, a strong spirit of independency, good health, a contented humour, and an unabated love of study. In these circumstances I must esteem myself one of the happy and fortunate; and so far from being willing to draw my ticket over again in the lottery of life, there are very few prizes with which I would make an exchange. After some deliberation, I am resolved to settle in Edinburgh, and hope I shall be able with these revenues to say with Horace:—

‘Est bona librorum et proviſæ frugis in annum  
Copia.’”

It would be difficult to find a better example of the honourable independence and cheerful self-reliance which should distinguish a man of letters, and which characterised Hume throughout his career. By honourable effort, the boy's noble ideal of life became the man's reality; and, at forty, Hume had the happiness of finding that he had not wasted his youth in the pursuit of illusions, but

that "the solid certainty of waking bliss" lay before him, in the free play of his powers in their appropriate sphere.

In 1751 Hume removed to Edinburgh, and took up his abode on a flat in one of those prodigious houses in the Lawnmarket, which still excite the admiration of tourists; afterwards moving to a house in the Canongate. His sister joined him, adding £30 a year to the common stock; and, in one of his charmingly playful letters to Dr. Clephane, he thus describes his establishment, in 1753.

"I shall exult and triumph to you a little that I have now at last—being turned of forty, to my own honour, to that of learning, and to that of the present age—arrived at the dignity of being a householder.

"About seven months ago, I got a house of my own, and completed a regular family, consisting of a head, viz., myself, and two inferior members, a maid and a cat. My sister has since joined me, and keeps me company. With frugality, I can reach, I find, cleanliness, warmth, light, plenty, and contentment. What would you have more? Independence? I have it in a supreme degree. Honour? That is not altogether wanting. Grace? That will come in time. A wife? That is none of the indispensable requisites of life. Books? That is one of them; and I have more than I can use. In short, I cannot find any pleasure of consequence which I am not possessed of in a greater or less degree; and, without any great effort of philosophy, I may be easy and satisfied.

"As there is no happiness without occupation, I have begun a work which will occupy me several years, and which yields me much satisfaction. 'Tis a History of Britain from the Union of the Crowns to the present time. I have already finished the reign of King James. My friends flatter me (by this I mean that they don't flatter me) that I have succeeded."

In 1752, the Faculty of Advocates elected Hume their librarian, an office which, though it yielded little emolument—the salary was only forty pounds a year—was valuable, as it placed the resources of a large library at his disposal. The proposal to give Hume even this paltry place caused a great outcry, on the old score of infidelity. But as Hume writes, in a jubilant letter to Clephane (February 4, 1752):—

“I carried the election by a considerable majority. . . . What is more extraordinary, the cry of religion could not hinder the ladies from being violently my partisans, and I owe my success in a great measure to their solicitations. One has broke off all commerce with her lover because he voted against me! And Mr. Lockhart, in a speech to the Faculty, said there was no walking the streets, nor even enjoying one's own fireside, on account of their importunate zeal. The town says that even his bed was not safe for him, though his wife was cousin-german to my antagonist.

“'Twas vulgarly given out that the contest was between Deists and Christians, and when the news of my success came to the playhouse, the whisper rose that the Christians were defeated. Are you not surprised that we could keep our popularity, notwithstanding this imputation, which my friends could not deny to be well founded?”

It would seem that the “good company” was less enterprising in its asseverations in this canvass than in the last.

The first volume of the *History of Great Britain, containing the reign of James I. and Charles I.*, was published in 1754. At first, the sale was large, especially in Edinburgh, and if notoriety *per se* was Hume's object, he attained it. But he liked applause as well as fame, and, to his bitter disappointment, he says:—

"I was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation: English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, Churchman and Sectary, Freethinker and Religionist, Patriot and Courtier, united in their rage against the man who had presumed to shed a generous tear for the fate of Charles I. and the Earl of Strafford; and after the first ebullitions of their fury were over, what was still more mortifying, the book seemed to fall into oblivion. Mr. Millar told me that in a twelvemonth he sold only forty-five copies of it. I scarcely, indeed, heard of one man in the three kingdoms, considerable for rank or letters, that could endure the book. I must only except the primate of England, Dr. Herring, and the primate of Ireland, Dr. Stone, which seem two odd exceptions. These dignified prelates separately sent me messages not to be discouraged."

It certainly is odd to think of David Hume being comforted in his affliction by the independent and spontaneous sympathy of a pair of archbishops. But the instincts of the dignified prelates guided them rightly; for, as the great painter of English history in Whig pigments has been careful to point out,<sup>1</sup> Hume's historical picture, though a great work drawn by a master hand, has all the lights Tory, and all the shades Whig.

Hume's ecclesiastical enemies seem to have thought that their opportunity had now arrived; and an attempt was made to get the General Assembly of 1756 to appoint a committee to inquire into his writings. But, after a keen debate, the proposal was rejected by fifty votes to seventeen. Hume does not appear to have troubled himself about the matter, and does not even think it worth mention in *My Own Life*.

In 1756 he tells Clephane that he is worth £1,600 ster-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Macaulay, Article on History, *Edinburgh Review*, vol. lxvii.

ling, and consequently master of an income which must have been wealth to a man of his frugal habits. In the same year, he published the second volume of the *History*, which met with a much better reception than the first; and, in 1757, one of his most remarkable works, the *Natural History of Religion*, appeared. In the same year, he resigned his office of librarian to the Faculty of Advocates, and he projected removal to London, probably to superintend the publication of the additional volume of the *History*.

"I shall certainly be in London next summer; and probably to remain there during life: at least, if I can settle myself to my mind, which I beg you to have an eye to. A room in a sober, discreet family, who would not be averse to admit a sober, discreet, virtuous, regular, quiet, good-natured man of a bad character—such a room, I say, would suit me extremely."<sup>1</sup>

The promised visit took place in the latter part of the year 1758, and he remained in the metropolis for the greater part of 1759. The two volumes of the *History of England under the House of Tudor* were published in London, shortly after Hume's return to Edinburgh; and, according to his own account, they raised almost as great a clamour as the first two had done.

Busily occupied with the continuation of his historical labours, Hume remained in Edinburgh until 1763; when, at the request of Lord Hertford, who was going as ambassador to France, he was appointed to the embassy; with the promise of the secretaryship, and, in the meanwhile, performing the duties of that office. At first, Hume declined the offer; but, as it was particularly hon-

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Clephane, 3rd September, 1757.

ourable to so well abused a man, on account of Lord Hertford's high reputation for virtue and piety,<sup>1</sup> and no less advantageous by reason of the increase of fortune which it seemed to him, he eventually accepted it.

In France, Hume's reputation stood far higher than in Britain; several of his works had been translated; he had exchanged letters with Montesquieu and with Helvetius; Rousseau had appealed to him; and the charming Madame de Boufflers had drawn him into a correspondence, marked by almost passionate enthusiasm on her part, and as fair an imitation of enthusiasm as Hume was capable of, on his. In the extraordinary mixture of learning, wit, humanity, frivolity, and profligacy which then characterised the highest French society, a new sensation was worth anything, and it mattered little whether the cause thereof was a philosopher or a poodle; so Hume had a great success in the Parisian world. Great nobles fêted him, and great ladies were not content unless the "gros David" was to be seen at their receptions and in their boxes at the theatre. "At the opera his broad unmeaning face was usually to be seen *entre deux jolis minois*," says Lord Charlemont.<sup>2</sup> Hume's cool head was by no

<sup>1</sup> "You must know that Lord Hertford has so high a character for piety, that his taking me by the hand is a kind of regeneration to me, and all past offences are now wiped off. But all these views are trifling to one of my age and temper."—*Hume to Edmondstone*, 9th January, 1764. Lord Hertford had procured him a pension of £200 a year for life from the King, and the secretaryship was worth £1,000 a year.

<sup>2</sup> Madame d'Épinay gives a ludicrous account of Hume's performance when pressed into a *tableau*, as a Sultan between two slaves, personated for the occasion by two of the prettiest women in Paris:—

"Il les regarde attentivement, *il se frappe le ventre et les genoux*



means turned; but he took the goods the gods provided with much satisfaction, and everywhere won golden opinions by his unaffected good sense and thorough kindness of heart.

Over all this part of Hume's career, as over the surprising episode of the quarrel with Rousseau, if that can be called quarrel which was lunatic malignity on Rousseau's side and thorough generosity and patience on Hume's, I may pass lightly. The story is admirably told by Mr. Burton, to whose volumes I refer the reader. Nor need I dwell upon Hume's short tenure of office in London, as Under-Secretary of State, between 1767 and 1769. Success and wealth are rarely interesting, and Hume's case is no exception to the rule.

According to his own description, the cares of official life were not overwhelming.

"My way of life here is very uniform and by no means disagreeable. I have all the forenoon in the Secretary's house, from ten till three, when there arrive from time to time messengers that bring me all the secrets of the kingdom, and, indeed, of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. I am seldom hurried; but have leisure at intervals to take up a book, or write a private letter, or converse with a friend that may call for me; and from dinner to bed-time is all my own. If you add to this that the person with whom I have the chief, if not only, transactions, is the most reasonable, equal-tempered, and gentleman-like man imaginable, and

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à plusieurs reprises et ne trouve jamais autre chose à leur dire que *Eh bien! mes demoiselles.—Eh bien! vous voilà donc. . . Eh bien! vous voilà. . . vous voilà ici?* Cette phrase dura un quart d'heure sans qu'il pût en sortir. Une d'elles se leva d'impatience: Ah, dit-elle, je m'en étois bien doutée, cet homme n'est bon qu'à manger du veau!"—Burton's *Life of Hume*, vol. ii, p. 224.

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Lady Aylesbury the same, you will certainly think I have no reason to complain; and I am far from complaining. I only shall not regret when my duty is over; because to me the situation can lead to nothing, at least in all probability; and reading, and sauntering, and lounging, and dozing, which I call thinking, is my supreme happiness—I mean my full contentment."

Hume's duty was soon over, and he returned to Edinburgh in 1769, "very opulent" in the possession of £1,000 a year, and determined to take what remained to him of life pleasantly and easily. In October, 1769, he writes to Elliot.—

"I have been settled here two months, and am here body and soul, without casting the least thought of regret to London, or even to Paris. . . . I live still, and must for a twelvemonth, in my old house in James's Court, which is very cheerful and even elegant, but too small to display my great talent for cookery, the science to which I intend to addict the remaining years of my life. I have just now lying on the table before me a receipt for making *soupe à la reine*, copied with my own hand; for beef and cabbage (a charming dish) and old mutton and old claret nobody excels me. I make also sheep's-head broth in a manner that Mr. Keith speaks of for eight days after; and the Duc de Nivernois would bind himself apprentice to my lass to learn it. I have already sent a challenge to David Monereiff: you will see that in a twelvemonth he will take to the writing of history, the field I have deserted; for as to the giving of dinners, he can now have no further pretensions. I should have made a very bad use of my abode in Paris if I could not get the better of a mere provincial like him. All my friends encourage me in this ambition; as thinking it will redound very much to my honour."

In 1770, Hume built himself a house in the New Town

of Edinburgh, which was then springing up. It was the first house in the street, and a frolicsome young lady chalked upon the wall "St. David's Street." Hume's servant complained to her master, who replied, "Never mind, lassie, many a better man has been made a saint of before," and the street retains its title to this day.

In the following six years, the house in St. David's Street was the centre of the accomplished and refined society which then distinguished Edinburgh. Adam Smith, Blair, and Ferguson were within easy reach; and what remains of Hume's correspondence with Sir Gilbert Elliot, Colonel Edmonstone, and Mrs. Cockburn gives pleasant glimpses of his social surroundings, and enables us to understand his contentment with his absence from the more perturbed, if more brilliant, worlds of Paris and London.

Towards London, Londoners, and indeed Englishmen in general, Hume entertained a dislike, mingled with contempt, which was as nearly rancorous as any emotion of his could be. During his residence in Paris, in 1764 and 1765, he writes to Blair:—

"The taste for literature is neither decayed nor depraved here, as with the barbarians who inhabit the banks of the Thames."

And he speaks of the "general regard paid to genius and learning" in France as one of the points in which it most differs from England. Ten years later, he cannot even thank Gibbon for his *History* without the left-handed compliment, that he should never have expected such an excellent work from the pen of an Englishman. Early in 1765, Hume writes to Millar:—

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"The rage and prejudice of parties frighten me, and, above all, this rage against the Scots, which is so dishonourable, and indeed so infamous, to the English nation. We hear that it increases every day without the least appearance of provocation on our part. It has frequently made me resolve never in my life to set foot on English ground. I dread, if I should undertake a more modern history, the impertinence and ill-manners to which it would expose me; and I was willing to know from you whether former prejudices had so far subsided as to ensure me of a good reception."

His fears were kindly appeased by Millar's assurance that the English were not prejudiced against the Scots in general, but against the particular Scot, Lord Bute, who was supposed to be the guide, philosopher, and friend, of both Dowager Queen and King.

To care nothing about literature, to dislike Scotchmen, and to be insensible to the merits of David Hume, was a combination of iniquities on the part of the English nation, which would have been amply sufficient to ruffle the temper of the philosophic historian, who, without being foolishly vain, had certainly no need of what has been said to be the one form of prayer in which his countrymen, torn as they are by theological differences, agree; "Lord! gie us a gude conceit o' oursels." But when, to all this, these same Southrons added a passionate admiration for Lord Chatham, who was in Hume's eyes a charlatan; and filled up the cup of their abominations by cheering for "Wilkes and Liberty," Hume's wrath knew no bounds, and, between 1768 and 1770, he pours a perfect Jeremiad into the bosom of his friend Sir Gilbert Elliot.

"Oh! how I long to see America and the East Indies revolted, totally and finally—the revenue reduced to half—

public credit fully discredited by bankruptcy—the third of London in ruins, and the rascally mob subdued! I think I am not too old to despair of being witness to all these blessings.

“I am delighted to see the daily and hourly progress of madness and folly and wickedness in England. The consummation of these qualities are the true ingredients for making a fine narrative in history, especially if followed by some signal and ruinous convulsion—as I hope will soon be the case with that pernicious people!”

Even from the secure haven of James’s Court, the maledictions continue to pour forth:—

“Nothing but a rebellion and bloodshed will open the eyes of that deluded people; though were they alone concerned, I think it is no matter what becomes of them. . . . Our government has become a chimera, and is too perfect, in point of liberty, for so rude a beast as an Englishman; who is a man, a bad animal too, corrupted by above a century of licentiousness. The misfortune is that this liberty can scarcely be retrenched without danger of being entirely lost; at least the fatal effects of licentiousness must first be made palpable by some extreme mischief resulting from it. I may wish that the catastrophe should rather fall on our posterity, but it hastens on with such large strides as to leave little room for hope.

“I am running over again the last edition of my History, in order to correct it still further. I either soften or expunge many villainous seditious Whig strokes which had crept into it. I wish that my indignation at the present madness, encouraged by lies, calumnies, imposture, and every infamous act usual among popular leaders, may not throw me into the opposite extreme.”

A wise wish, indeed. Posterity respectfully concurs therein; and subjects Hume’s estimate of England and

things English to such modifications as it would probably have undergone had the wish been fulfilled.

In 1775 Hume's health began to fail; and, in the spring of the following year, his disorder, which appears to have been hæmorrhage of the bowels, attained such a height that he knew it must be fatal. So he made his will, and wrote *My Own Life*, the conclusion of which is one of the most cheerful, simple, and dignified leave-takings of life and all its concerns, extant.

"I now reckon upon a speedy dissolution. I have suffered very little pain from my disorder; and, what is more strange, have, notwithstanding the great decline of my person, never suffered a moment's abatement of spirits; inso-much that were I to name the period of my life which I should most choose to pass over again, I might be tempted to point to this later period. I possess the same ardour as ever in study and the same gaiety in company; I consider, besides, that a man of sixty-five, by dying, cuts off only a few years of infirmities; and though I see many symptoms of my literary reputation's breaking out at last with additional lustre, I know that I could have but few years to enjoy it. It is difficult to be more detached from life than I am at present.

"To conclude historically with my own character, I am, or rather was (for that is the style I must now use in speaking of myself, which emboldens me the more to speak my sentiments); I was, I say, a man of mild dispositions, of command of temper, of an open, social, and cheerful humour, capable of attachment, but little susceptible of enmity, and of great moderation in all my passions. Even my love of literary fame, my ruling passion, never soured my temper, notwithstanding my frequent disappointments. My company was not unacceptable to the young and careless, as well as to the studious and literary; and as I took a particular pleasure in the company of modest women, I had no

reason to be displeas'd with the reception I met with from them. In a word, though most men anywise eminent have found reason to complain of calumny, I never was touch'd or even attack'd by her baleful tooth; and though I wantonly expos'd myself to the rage of both civil and religious factions, they seem'd to be disarm'd in my behalf of their wonted fury. My friends never had occasion to vindicate any one circumstance of my character and conduct; not but that the zealots, we may well suppose, would have been glad to invent and propagate any story to my disadvantage, but they could never find any which they thought would wear the face of probability. I cannot say there is no vanity in making this funeral oration of myself, but I hope it is not a misplac'd one; and this is a matter of fact which is easily clear'd and ascertain'd."

Hume died in Edinburgh on the 25th of August, 1776, and, a few days later, his body, attended by a great concourse of people, who seem to have anticipated for it the fate appropriate to the remains of wizards and necromancers, was deposited in a spot selected by himself, in an old burial-ground on the eastern slope of the Calton Hill.

From the summit of this hill, there is a prospect unequalled by any to be seen from the midst of a great city. Westward lies the Forth, and beyond it, dimly blue, the far away Highland hills; eastward, rise the bold contours of Arthur's Seat and the rugged crags of the Castle rock, with the grey Old Town of Edinburgh; while, far below, from a maze of crowded thoroughfares, the hoarse murmur of the toil of a polity of energetic men is borne upon the ear. At times, a man may be as solitary here as in a veritable wilderness; and may meditate undisturbedly upon the epitome of nature and of man—the kingdoms of this world—spread out before him.

Surely, there is a fitness in the choice of this last resting-place by the philosopher and historian, who saw so clearly that these two kingdoms form but one realm, governed by uniform laws and alike based on impenetrable darkness and eternal silence: and, faithful to the last to that profound veracity which was the secret of his philosophic greatness, he ordered that the simple Roman tomb which marks his grave should bear no inscription but

## DAVID HUME

BORN 1711.

DIED 1776.

*Leaving it to posterity to add the rest.*

It was by the desire and at the suggestion of my friend, the Editor of this Series, that I undertook to attempt to help posterity in the difficult business of knowing what to add to Hume's epitaph; and I might, with justice, throw upon him the responsibility of my apparent presumption in occupying a place among the men of letters, who are engaged with him, in their proper function of writing about English Men of Letters.

That to which succeeding generations have made, are making, and will make, continual additions, however, is Hume's fame as a philosopher; and, though I know that my plea will add to my offence in some quarters, I must plead, in extenuation of my audacity, that philosophy lies in the province of science, and not in that of letters.

In dealing with Hume's Life, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to make him speak for himself. If the extracts from his letters and essays which I have given do not sufficiently show what manner of man he was, I am



sure that nothing I could say would make the case plainer. In the exposition of Hume's philosophy which follows, I have pursued the same plan, and I have applied myself to the task of selecting and arranging in systematic order, the passages which appeared to me to contain the clearest statements of Hume's opinions.

I should have been glad to be able to confine myself to this duty, and to limit my own comments to so much as was absolutely necessary to connect my excerpts. Here and there, however, it must be confessed that more is seen of my thread than of Hume's beads. My excuse must be an ineradicable tendency to try to make things clear; while, I may further hope, that there is nothing in what I may have said which is inconsistent with the logical development of Hume's principles.

My authority for the facts of Hume's life is the admirable biography, published in 1846, by Mr. John Hill Burton. The edition of Hume's works from which all citations are made is that published by Black and Tait in Edinburgh, in 1826. In this edition, the Essays are reprinted from the edition of 1777, corrected by the author for the press a short time before his death. It is well printed in four handy volumes; and as my copy has long been in my possession, and bears marks of much reading, it would have been troublesome for me to refer to any other. But, for the convenience of those who possess some other edition, the following table of the contents of the edition of 1826, with the paging of the four volumes, is given:—

#### VOLUME I

#### TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE.

Book I. *Of the Understanding*, p. 5 to the end, p. 347.

## VOLUME II.

TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE.

Book II. *Of the Passions*, p. 3—p. 215.Book III. *Of Morals*, p. 219—p. 415.

DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION, p. 419—p. 548

APPENDIX TO THE TREATISE, p. 551—p. 560.

## VOLUME III.

ESSAYS, MORAL AND POLITICAL, p. 3—p. 282.

POLITICAL DISCOURSES, p. 285—p. 579.

## VOLUME IV.

AN INQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, p. 3—  
p. 233.AN INQUIRY CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS, p.  
237—p. 431.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION, p. 435—p. 513.

ADDITIONAL ESSAYS, p. 517—p. 577.

As the volume and the page of the volume are given in my references, it will be easy, by the help of this table, to learn where to look for any passage cited, in differently arranged editions.

## PART II.

### *HUME'S PHILOSOPHY.*

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE OBJECT AND SCOPE OF PHILOSOPHY.

KANT has said that the business of philosophy is to answer three questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? and For what may I hope? But it is pretty plain that these three resolve themselves, in the long run, into the first. For rational expectation and moral action are alike based upon beliefs; and a belief is void of justification unless its subject-matter lies within the boundaries of possible knowledge, and unless its evidence satisfies the conditions which experience imposes as the guarantee of credibility.

Fundamentally, then, philosophy is the answer to the question, What can I know? and it is by applying itself to this problem, that philosophy is properly distinguished as a special department of scientific research. What is commonly called science, whether mathematical, physical, or biological, consists of the answers which mankind

have been able to give to the inquiry, What do I know? They furnish us with the results of the mental operations which constitute thinking; while philosophy, in the stricter sense of the term, inquires into the foundation of the first principles which those operations assume or imply.

But though, by reason of the special purpose of philosophy, its distinctness from other branches of scientific investigation may be properly vindicated, it is easy to see that, from the nature of its subject-matter, it is intimately and, indeed, inseparably connected with one branch of science. For it is obviously impossible to answer the question, What can we know? unless, in the first place, there is a clear understanding as to what is meant by knowledge; and, having settled this point, the next step is to inquire how we come by that which we allow to be knowledge; for, upon the reply, turns the answer to the further question, whether, from the nature of the case, there are limits to the knowable or not. While, finally, inasmuch as What can I know? not only refers to knowledge of the past or of the present, but to the confident expectation which we call knowledge of the future; it is necessary to ask, further, what justification can be alleged for trusting to the guidance of our expectations in practical conduct.

It surely needs no argumentation to show, that the first problem cannot be approached without the examination of the contents of the mind; and the determination of how much of these contents may be called knowledge. Nor can the second problem be dealt with in any other fashion; for it is only by the observation of the growth of knowledge that we can rationally hope to discover how knowledge grows. But the solution of the third problem

simply involves the discussion of the data obtained by the investigation of the foregoing two.

Thus, in order to answer three out of the four subordinate questions into which *What can I know?* breaks up, we must have recourse to that investigation of mental phenomena, the results of which are embodied in the science of psychology.

Psychology is a part of the science of life or biology, which differs from the other branches of that science, merely in so far as it deals with the psychical, instead of the physical, phenomena of life.

As there is an anatomy of the body, so there is an anatomy of the mind; the psychologist dissects mental phenomena into elementary states of consciousness, as the anatomist resolves limbs into tissues, and tissues into cells. The one traces the development of complex organs from simple rudiments; the other follows the building up of complex conceptions out of simpler constituents of thought. As the physiologist inquires into the way in which the so-called "functions" of the body are performed, so the psychologist studies the so-called "faculties" of the mind. Even a cursory attention to the ways and works of the lower animals suggests a comparative anatomy and physiology of the mind; and the doctrine of evolution presses for application as much in the one field as in the other.

But there is more than a parallel, there is a close and intimate connexion between psychology and physiology. No one doubts that, at any rate, some mental states are dependent for their existence on the performance of the functions of particular bodily organs. There is no seeing without eyes, and no hearing without ears. If the origin of the contents of the mind is truly a philosophical prob-

lem, then the philosopher who attempts to deal with that problem, without acquainting himself with the physiology of sensation, has no more intelligent conception of his business than the physiologist, who thinks he can discuss locomotion, without an acquaintance with the principles of mechanics; or respiration, without some tincture of chemistry.

On whatever ground we term physiology, science, psychology is entitled to the same appellation; and the method of investigation which elucidates the true relations of the one set of phenomena will discover those of the other. Hence, as philosophy is, in great measure, the exponent of the logical consequences of certain data established by psychology; and as psychology itself differs from physical science only in the nature of its subject-matter, and not in its method of investigation, it would seem to be an obvious conclusion, that philosophers are likely to be successful in their inquiries, in proportion as they are familiar with the application of scientific method to less abstruse subjects; just as it seems to require no elaborate demonstration that an astronomer, who wishes to comprehend the solar system, would do well to acquire a preliminary acquaintance with the elements of physics. And it is accordant with this presumption, that the men who have made the most important positive additions to philosophy, such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant, not to mention more recent examples, have been deeply imbued with the spirit of physical science; and, in some cases, such as those of Descartes and Kant, have been largely acquainted with its details. On the other hand, the founder of Positivism no less admirably illustrates the connexion of scientific incapacity with philosophical incompetence. In truth, the laboratory is the fore-court of

the temple of philosophy; and whoso has not offered sacrifices and undergone purification there, has little chance of admission into the sanctuary.

Obvious as these considerations may appear to be, it would be wrong to ignore the fact that their force is by no means universally admitted. On the contrary, the necessity for a proper psychological and physiological training to the student of philosophy is denied, on the one hand, by the "pure metaphysicians," who attempt to base the theory of knowing upon supposed necessary and universal truths, and assert that scientific observation is impossible unless such truths are already known or implied: which, to those who are not "pure metaphysicians," seems very much as if one should say that the fall of a stone cannot be observed, unless the law of gravitation is already in the mind of the observer.

On the other hand, the Positivists, so far as they accept the teachings of their master, roundly assert, at any rate in words, that observation of the mind is a thing inherently impossible in itself, and that psychology is a chimera—a phantasm generated by the fermentation of the dregs of theology. Nevertheless, if M. Comte had been asked what he meant by "physiologie cérébrale," except that which other people call "psychology;" and how he knew anything about the functions of the brain, except by that very "observation intérieure," which he declares to be an absurdity—it seems probable that he would have found it hard to escape the admission that, in vilipending psychology, he had been propounding solemn nonsense.

It is assuredly one of Hume's greatest merits that he clearly recognised the fact that philosophy is based upon psychology; and that the inquiry into the contents and the operations of the mind must be conducted upon the

same principles as a physical investigation, if what he calls the "moral philosopher" would attain results of as firm and definite a character as those which reward the "natural philosopher."<sup>1</sup> The title of his first work, a "*Treatise of Human Nature, being an Attempt to introduce the Experimental method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects,*" sufficiently indicates the point of view from which Hume regarded philosophical problems; and he tells us in the preface, that his object has been to promote the construction of a "science of man."

"Tis evident that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that, however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even *Mathematics, Natural Philosophy,* and *Natural Religion* are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and qualities. 'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and could explain the nature of the ideas we employ and of the operations we perform in our reasonings. . . . To me it seems evident that the essence of mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects which result from its different cir-

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Hutcheson (September 17th, 1739) Hume remarks:—"There are different ways of examining the mind as well as the body. One may consider it either as an anatomist or as a painter: either to discover its most secret springs and principles, or to describe the grace and beauty of its actions;" and he proceeds to justify his own mode of looking at the moral sentiments from the anatomist's point of view.



cumstances and situations. And though we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical. . . .

But if this impossibility of explaining ultimate principles should be esteemed a defect in the science of man, I will venture to affirm, that it is a defect common to it with all the sciences, and all the arts, in which we can employ ourselves, whether they be such as are cultivated in the schools of the philosophers, or practised in the shops of the meanest artisans. None of them can go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority. Moral philosophy has, indeed, this peculiar disadvantage, which is not found in natural, that in collecting its experiments, it cannot make them purposely, with premeditation, and after such a manner as to satisfy itself concerning every particular difficulty which may arise. When I am at a loss to know the effects of one body upon another in any situation, I need only put them in that situation, and observe what results from it. But should I endeavour to clear up in the same manner any<sup>1</sup> doubt in moral philosophy, by placing myself in the same case with that which I consider, 'tis evident this reflection and premeditation would so disturb the operation of my natural principles, as must render it impossible to form any just conclusion from the phenomenon. We must, therefore, glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the

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<sup>1</sup> The manner in which Hume constantly refers to the results of the observation of the contents and the processes of his own mind clearly shows that he has here inadvertently overstated the case.

world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility, to any other of human comprehension."—(I. pp. 7—11.)

All science starts with hypotheses—in other words, with assumptions that are unproved, while they may be, and often are, erroneous; but which are better than nothing to the seeker after order in the maze of phenomena. And the historical progress of every science depends on the criticism of hypotheses—on the gradual stripping off, that is, of their untrue or superfluous parts—until there remains only that exact verbal expression of as much as we know of the fact, and no more, which constitutes a perfect scientific theory.

Philosophy has followed the same course as other branches of scientific investigation. The memorable service rendered to the cause of sound thinking by Descartes consisted in this: that he laid the foundation of modern philosophical criticism by his inquiry into the nature of certainty. It is a clear result of the investigation started by Descartes, that there is one thing of which no doubt can be entertained, for he who should pretend to doubt it would thereby prove its existence; and that is the momentary consciousness we call a present thought or feeling; that is safe, even if all other kinds of certainty are merely more or less probable inferences. Berkeley and Locke, each in his way, applied philosophical criticism in other directions; but they always, at any rate professedly, followed the Cartesian maxim of admitting no propositions to be true but such as are clear, distinct, and evident, even while their arguments stripped off many a layer of

hypothetical assumption which their great predecessor had left untouched. No one has more clearly stated the aims of the critical philosopher than Loeke, in a passage of the famous *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, which, perhaps, I ought to assume to be well known to all English readers, but which so probably is unknown to this full-erammed and much-examined generation that I venture to cite it:

“ If by this inquiry into the nature of the understanding I can discover the powers thereof, how far they reach, to what things they are in any degree proportionate, and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension: to stop when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are proved to be beyond the reach of our capacities. We should not then, perhaps, be so forward, out of an affectation of universal knowledge, to raise questions and perplex ourselves and others with disputes about things to which our understandings are not suited, and of which we cannot frame in our minds any clear and distinct perception, or whereof (as it has, perhaps, too often happened) we have not any notion at all. . . . Men may find matter sufficient to busy their heads and employ their hands with variety, delight, and satisfaction, if they will not boldly quarrel with their own constitution and throw away the blessings their hands are filled with because they are not big enough to grasp everything. We shall not have much reason to complain of the narrowness of our minds, if we will but employ them about what may be of use to us: for of that they are very capable: and it will be an unpardonable, as well as a childish peevishness, if we undervalue the advantages of our knowledge, and neglect to improve it to the ends for which it was given us, because there are some things that are set out of the reach of it. It will

be no excuse to an idle and untoward servant who would not attend to his business by candlelight, to plead that he had not broad sunshine. The candle that is set up in us shines bright enough for all our purposes. . . . Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct."<sup>1</sup>

Hume develops the same fundamental conception in a somewhat different way, and with a more definite indication of the practical benefits which may be expected from a critical philosophy. The first and second parts of the twelfth section of the *Inquiry* are devoted to a condemnation of excessive scepticism, or Pyrrhonism, with which Hume couples a caricature of the Cartesian doubt; but, in the third part, a certain "mitigated scepticism" is recommended and adopted, under the title of "academical philosophy." After pointing out that a knowledge of the infirmities of the human understanding, even in its most perfect state, and when most accurate and cautious in its determinations, is the best check upon the tendency to dogmatism, Hume continues:—

"Another species of *mitigated* scepticism, which may be of advantage to mankind, and which may be the natural result of the PYRRHONIAN doubts and scruples, is the limitation of our inquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding. The *imagination* of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without control, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects which custom has rendered too familiar to it. A correct *judgment* observes a contrary method, and, avoiding all distant and high inquiries, confines itself to common life,

<sup>1</sup> Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book I. chap. i. §§ 4, 5, 6.

and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience; leaving the more sublime topics to the embellishment of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians. To bring us to so salutary a determination, nothing can be more serviceable than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the PYRRHONIAN doubt, and of the impossibility that anything but the strong power of natural instinct could free us from it. Those who have a propensity to philosophy will still continue their researches; because they reflect that, besides the immediate pleasure attending such an occupation, philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodised and corrected. But they will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations. While we cannot give a satisfactory reason why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination which we may form with regard to the origin of worlds and the situation of nature from and to eternity?" —(IV. pp. 189—90.)

But further, it is the business of criticism not only to keep watch over the vagaries of philosophy, but to do the duty of police in the whole world of thought. Wherever it spies sophistry or superstition they are to be bidden to stand; nay, they are to be followed to their very deus and there apprehended and exterminated, as Othello smothered Desdemona, "else she'll betray more men."

Hume warms into eloquence as he sets forth the labours meet for the strength and the courage of the Hercules of "mitigated scepticism."

"Here, indeed, lies the justest and most plausible objection against a considerable part of metaphysics, that they are not properly a science, but arise either from the fruitless efforts

of human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding, or from the craft of popular superstitions, which, being unable to defend themselves on fair ground, raise these entangling brambles to cover and protect their weakness. Chased from the open country, these robbers fly into the forest, and lie in wait to break in upon every unguarded avenue of the mind and overwhelm it with religious fears and prejudices. The stoutest antagonist, if he remits his watch a moment, is oppressed; and many, through cowardice and folly, open the gates to the enemies, and willingly receive them with reverence and submission as their legal sovereigns.

“But is this a sufficient reason why philosophers should desist from such researches and leave superstition still in possession of her retreat? Is it not proper to draw an opposite conclusion, and perceive the necessity of carrying the war into the most secret recesses of the enemy? . . . The only method of freeing learning at once from these abstruse questions is to inquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and show, from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects. We must submit to this fatigue, in order to live at ease ever after; and must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterated.”—(IV. pp. 10, 11.)

Near a century and a half has elapsed since these brave words were shaped by David Hume's pen; and the business of carrying the war into the enemy's camp has gone on but slowly. Like other campaigns, it long languished for want of a good base of operations. But since physical science, in the course of the last fifty years, has brought to the front an inexhaustible supply of heavy artillery of a new pattern, warranted to drive solid bolts of fact through the thickest skulls, things are looking better; though hardly more than the first faint flutterings

of the dawn of the happy day, when superstition and false metaphysics shall be no more and reasonable folks may "live at ease," are as yet discernible by the *enfants perdus* of the outposts.

If, in thus conceiving the object and the limitations of philosophy, Hume shows himself the spiritual child and continuator of the work of Locke, he appears no less plainly as the parent of Kant and as the protagonist of that more modern way of thinking, which has been called "agnosticism," from its profession of an incapacity to discover the indispensable conditions of either positive or negative knowledge, in many propositions, respecting which not only the vulgar, but philosophers of the more sanguine sort, revel in the luxury of unqualified assurance.

The aim of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is essentially the same as that of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, by which, indeed, Kant was led to develop that "critical philosophy" with which his name and fame are indissolubly bound up: and, if the details of Kant's criticism differ from those of Hume, they coincide with them in their main result, which is the limitation of all knowledge of reality to the world of phenomena revealed to us by experience.

The philosopher of Königsberg epitomises the philosopher of Ninewells when he thus sums up the uses of philosophy:—

"The greatest and perhaps the sole use of all philosophy of pure reason is, after all, merely negative, since it serves, not as an organon for the enlargement [of knowledge], but as a discipline for its delimitation; and instead of discovering truth, has only the modest merit of preventing error."

<sup>1</sup> *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Ed. Hartenstein, p. 256.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE CONTENTS OF THE MIND.

In the language of common life, the "mind" is spoken of as an entity, independent of the body, though resident in and closely connected with it, and endowed with numerous "faculties," such as sensibility, understanding, memory, volition, which stand in the same relation to the mind as the organs do to the body, and perform the functions of feeling, reasoning, remembering, and willing. Of these functions, some, such as sensation, are supposed to be merely passive—that is, they are called into existence by impressions made upon the sensitive faculty by a material world of real objects, of which our sensations are supposed to give us pictures; others, such as the memory and the reasoning faculty, are considered to be partly passive and partly active; while volition is held to be potentially, if not always actually, a spontaneous activity.

The popular classification and terminology of the phenomena of consciousness, however, are by no means the first crude conceptions suggested by common sense, but rather a legacy, and, in many respects, a sufficiently *damnosa hereditas*, of ancient philosophy, more or less leavened by theology; which has incorporated itself with the common thought of later times, as the vices of the aristocracy or one age become those of the mob in the next.

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Very little attention to what passes in the mind is sufficient to show that these conceptions involve assumptions of an extremely hypothetical character. And the first business of the student of psychology is to get rid of such prepossessions; to form conceptions of mental phenomena as they are given us by observation, without any hypothetical admixture, or with only so much as is definitely recognised and held subject to confirmation or otherwise; to classify these phenomena according to their clearly recognisable characters; and to adopt a nomenclature which suggests nothing beyond the results of observation. Thus chastened, observation of the mind makes us acquainted with nothing but certain events, facts, or phenomena (whichever name be preferred) which pass over the inward field of view in rapid and, as it may appear on careless inspection, in disorderly succession, like the shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope. To all these mental phenomena, or states of our consciousness,<sup>1</sup> Descartes gave the name of "thoughts,"<sup>2</sup> while Locke and Berkeley termed them "ideas." Hume, regarding this as an improper use of the word "idea," for which he proposes another employment, gives the general name of "perceptions" to all states of consciousness. Thus, whatever other signifi-

<sup>1</sup> "Consciousnesses" would be a better name, but is awkward. I have elsewhere proposed *psychoses* as a substantive name for mental phenomena.

<sup>2</sup> As this has been denied, it may be as well to give Descartes's words: "Par le mot de penser, j'entends tout ce que se fait dans nous de telle sorte que nous l'apercevons immédiatement par nous-mêmes: c'est pourquoi non-seulement entendre, vouloir, imaginer, mais aussi sentir, c'est le même chose ici que penser."—*Principes de Philosophie*. Ed. Cousin. 57.

"Toutes les propriétés que nous trouvons en la chose qui pense ne sont que des façons différentes de penser."—*Ibid.* 96.

ation we may see reason to attach to the word "mind," it is certain that it is a name which is employed to denote a series of perceptions; just as the word "tune," whatever else it may mean, denotes, in the first place, a succession of musical notes. Hume, indeed, goes further than others when he says that—

"What we call a mind is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and supposed, though falsely, to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity."—(I. p. 268.)

With this "nothing but," however, he obviously falls into the primal and perennial error of philosophical speculators—dogmatising from negative arguments. He may be right or wrong; but the most he, or anybody else, can prove in favour of his conclusion is, that we know nothing more of the mind than that it is a series of perceptions. Whether there is something in the mind that lies beyond the reach of observation; or whether perceptions themselves are the products of something which can be observed and which is not mind; are questions which can in nowise be settled by direct observation. Elsewhere, the objectionable hypothetical element of the definition of mind is less prominent:—

"The true idea of the human mind is to consider it as a system of different perceptions, or different existences, which are linked together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other. . . . In this respect I cannot compare the soul more properly to anything than a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts."—(I. p. 331.)

But, leaving the question of the proper definition of mind open for the present, it is further a matter of direct observation that, when we take a general survey of all our perceptions or states of consciousness, they naturally fall into sundry groups or classes. Of these classes, two are distinguished by Hume as of primary importance. All "perceptions," he says, are either "*Impressions*" or "*Ideas*."

Under "impressions" he includes "all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, see, feel, love, or will;" in other words, "all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul."—(I. p. 15.)

"Ideas," on the other hand, are the faint images of impressions in thinking and reasoning, or of antecedent ideas.

Both impressions and ideas may be either *simple*, when they are incapable of further analysis, or *complex*, when they may be resolved into simpler constituents. All simple ideas are exact copies of impressions; but, in complex ideas, the arrangement of simple constituents may be different from that of the impressions of which those simple ideas are copies.

Thus the colours red and blue and the odour of a rose are simple impressions; while the ideas of blue, of red, and of rose-odour are simple copies of these impressions. But a red rose gives us a complex impression, capable of resolution into the simple impressions of red colour, rose-scent, and numerous others; and we may have a complex idea, which is an accurate, though not a copy of this complex impression. Once in possession of the ideas of a red rose and of the colour blue, we may, in imagination, substitute blue for red; and thus obtain a complex idea of a blue rose, which is not an actual copy of

any complex impression, though all its elements are such copies.

Hume has been criticised for making the distinction of impressions and ideas to depend upon their relative strength or vivacity. Yet it would be hard to point out any other character by which the things signified can be distinguished. Any one who has paid attention to the curious subject of what are called "subjective sensations" will be familiar with examples of the extreme difficulty which sometimes attends the discrimination of ideas of sensation from impressions of sensation, when the ideas are very vivid or the impressions are faint. Who has not "fancied" he heard a noise; or has not explained inattention to a real sound by saying, "I thought it was nothing but my fancy?" Even healthy persons are much more liable to both visual and auditory spectra—that is, ideas of vision and sound so vivid that they are taken for new impressions—than is commonly supposed; and, in some diseased states, ideas of sensible objects may assume all the vividness of reality.

If ideas are nothing but copies of impressions, arranged, either in the same order as that of the impressions from which they are derived, or in a different order, it follows that the ultimate analysis of the contents of the mind turns upon that of the impressions. According to Hume, these are of two kinds: either they are impressions of sensation, or they are impressions of reflection. The former are those afforded by the five senses, together with pleasure and pain. The latter are the passions or the emotions (which Hume employs as equivalent terms). Thus the elementary states of consciousness, the raw materials of knowledge, so to speak, are either sensations or emotions; and whatever we discover in the mind, beyond these ele

mentary states of consciousness, results from the combinations and the metamorphoses which they undergo.

It is not a little strange that a thinker of Hume's capacity should have been satisfied with the results of a psychological analysis which regards some obvious compounds as elements, while it omits altogether a most important class of elementary states.

With respect to the former point, Spinoza's masterly examination of the Passions in the third part of the *Ethics* should have been known to Hume.<sup>1</sup> But, if he had been acquainted with that wonderful piece of psychological anatomy, he would have learned that the emotions and passions are all complex states, arising from the close association of ideas of pleasure or pain with other ideas; and, indeed, without going to Spinoza, his own acute discussion of the passions leads to the same result,<sup>2</sup> and is wholly inconsistent with his classification of those mental states among the primary uncompound materials of consciousness.

<sup>1</sup> On the whole, it is pleasant to find satisfactory evidence that Hume knew nothing of the works of Spinoza; for the invariably abusive manner in which he refers to that type of the philosophic hero is only to be excused, if it is to be excused, by sheer ignorance of his life and work.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in discussing pride and humility, Hume says:—"According as our idea of ourselves is more or less advantageous, we feel either of these opposite affections, and are elated by pride or dejected with humility; . . . when self enters not into the consideration there is no room either for pride or humility." That is, pride is pleasure, and humility is pain, associated with certain conceptions of one's self; or, as Spinoza puts it:—"Superbia est de se præ amore sui plus justo sentire" ("amor" being "letitia concomitante idea causæ externæ"); and "Humilitas est tristitia orta ex eo quod homo suam inopotentiam sive imbecillitatem contempletur."

If "Hume's "impressions of reflection" are excluded from among the primary elements of consciousness, nothing is left but the impressions afforded by the five senses, with pleasure and pain. Putting aside the muscular sense, which had not come into view in Hume's time, the questions arise whether these are all the simple undecomposable materials of thought? or whether others exist of which Hume takes no cognizance.

Kant answered the latter question in the affirmative, in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, and thereby made one of the greatest advances ever effected in philosophy; though it must be confessed that the German philosopher's exposition of his views is so perplexed in style, so burdened with the weight of a cumbrous and uncouth scholasticism, that it is easy to confound the unessential parts of his system with those which are of profound importance. His baggage train is bigger than his army, and the student who attacks him is too often led to suspect he has won a position when he has only captured a mob of useless camp-followers.

In his *Principles of Psychology*, Mr. Herbert Spencer appears to me to have brought out the essential truth which underlies Kant's doctrine in a far clearer manner than any one else; but, for the purpose of the present summary view of Hume's philosophy, it must suffice if I state the matter in my own way, giving the broad outlines, without entering into the details of a large and difficult disquisition.

When a red light flashes across the field of vision, there arises in the mind an "impression of sensation"—which we call red. It appears to me that this sensation, red, is a something which may exist altogether independently of any other impression, or idea, as an individual existence.



It is perfectly conceivable that a sentient being should have no sense but vision, and that he should have spent his existence in absolute darkness, with the exception of one solitary flash of red light. That momentary illumination would suffice to give him the impression under consideration; and the whole content of his consciousness might be that impression; and, if he were endowed with memory, its idea.

Such being the state of affairs, suppose a second flash of red light to follow the first. If there were no memory of the latter, the state of the mind on the second occasion would simply be a repetition of that which occurred before. There would be merely another impression.

But suppose memory to exist, and that an idea of the first impression is generated; then, if the supposed sentient being were like ourselves, there might arise in his mind two altogether new impressions. The one is the feeling of the *succession* of the two impressions, the other is the feeling of their *similarity*.

Yet a third case is conceivable. Suppose two flashes of red light to occur together, then a third feeling might arise which is neither succession nor similarity, but that which we call *co-existence*.

These feelings, or their contraries, are the foundation of everything that we call a relation. They are no more capable of being described than sensations are; and, as it appears to me, they are as little susceptible of analysis into simpler elements. Like simple tastes and smells, or feelings of pleasure and pain, they are ultimate irresolvable facts of conscious experience; and, if we follow the principle of Hume's nomenclature, they must be called *impressions of relation*. But it must be remembered that they differ from the other impressions, in requiring the

pre-existence of at least two of the latter. Though devoid of the slightest resemblance to the other impressions, they are, in a manner, generated by them. In fact, we may regard them as a kind of impressions of impressions; or as the sensations of an inner sense, which takes cognizance of the materials furnished to it by the outer senses.

Hume failed as completely as his predecessors had done to recognize the elementary character of impressions of relation; and, when he discusses relations, he falls into a chaos of confusion and self-contradiction.

In the *Treatise*, for example (Book I., § iv.), resemblance, contiguity in time and space, and cause and effect, are said to be the "uniting principles among ideas," "the bond of union" or "associating quality by which one idea naturally introduces another." Hume affirms that—

"These qualities produce an association among ideas, and upon the appearance of one idea naturally introduce another." They are "the principles of union or cohesion among our simple ideas, and, in the imagination, supply the place of that inseparable connection by which they are united in our memory. Here is a kind of *attraction*, which, in the mental world, will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to show itself in as many and as various forms. Its effects are everywhere conspicuous; but as to its causes they are mostly unknown, and must be resolved into *original* qualities of human nature, which I pretend not to explain."—(I. p. 29.)

And at the end of this section Hume goes on to say—

"Amongst the effects of this union or association of ideas, there are none more remarkable than those complex ideas which are the common subjects of our thought and reasoning, and generally arise from some principle of union among

our simple ideas. These complex ideas may be resolved into *relations, modes, and substances.*"—(*Ibid.*)

In the next section, which is devoted to *Relations*, they are spoken of as qualities "by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination," or "which make objects admit of comparison," and seven kinds of relation are enumerated, namely, *resemblance, identity, space and time, quantity or number, degrees of quality, contrariety, and cause and effect.*

To the reader of Hume, whose conceptions are usually so clear, definite, and consistent, it is as unsatisfactory as it is surprising to meet with so much questionable and obscure phraseology in a small space. One and the same thing, for example, resemblance, is first called a "quality of an idea," and secondly, a "complex idea." Surely it cannot be both. Ideas which have the qualities of "resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect," are said to "attract one another" (save the mark!), and so become associated; though, in a subsequent part of the *Treatise*, Hume's great effort is to prove that the relation of cause and effect is a particular case of the process of association; that is to say, is a result of the process of which it is supposed to be the cause. Moreover, since, as Hume is never weary of reminding his readers, there is nothing in ideas save copies of impressions, the qualities of resemblance, contiguity, and so on, in the idea, must have existed in the impression of which that idea is a copy; and therefore they must be either sensations or emotions—from both of which classes they are excluded.

In fact, in one place, Hume himself has an insight into the real nature of relations. Speaking of equality, in the sense of a relation of quantity, he says—

"Since equality is a relation, it is not, strictly speaking, a property in the figures themselves, but arises merely from the comparison which the mind makes between them."—(I. p. 70.)

That is to say, when two impressions of equal figures are present, there arises in the mind a *tertium quid*, which is the perception of equality. On his own principles, Hume should therefore have placed this "perception" among the ideas of reflection. However, as we have seen, he expressly excludes everything but the emotious and the passions from this group.

It is necessary, therefore, to amend Hume's primary "geography of the mind" by the excision of one territory and the addition of another; and the elementary states of consciousness will stand thus:—

#### A. IMPRESSIONS.

##### A. Sensations of

- a. Smell.
- b. Taste.
- c. Hearing.
- d. Sight.
- e. Touch.
- f. Resistance (the muscular sense).

##### B. Pleasure and Pain.

##### C. Relations.

- a. Co-existence.
- b. Succession.
- c. Similarity and dissimilarity.

#### B. IDEAS.

Copies, or reproductions in memory, of the foregoing.

And now the question arises, whether any, and if so, what, portion of these contents of the mind are to be termed "knowledge."

According to Locke, "Knowledge is the perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas;" and Hume, though he does not say so in so many words, tacitly accepts the definition. It follows that neither simple sensation, nor simple emotion, constitutes knowledge; but that, when impressions of relation are added to these impressions, or their ideas, knowledge arises; and that all knowledge is the knowledge of likenesses and unlikenesses, co-existences and successions.

It really matters very little in what sense terms are used, so long as the same meaning is always rigidly attached to them; and, therefore, it is hardly worth while to quarrel with this generally accepted, though very arbitrary, limitation of the signification of "knowledge." But, on the face of the matter, it is not obvious why the impression we call a relation should have a better claim to the title of knowledge than that which we call a sensation or an emotion; and the restriction has this unfortunate result, that it excludes all the most intense states of consciousness from any claim to the title of "knowledge."

For example, on this view, pain, so violent and absorbing as to exclude all other forms of consciousness, is not knowledge; but becomes a part of knowledge the moment we think of it in relation to another pain, or to some other mental phenomenon. Surely this is somewhat inconvenient, for there is only a verbal difference between having a sensation and knowing one has it: they are simply two phrases for the same mental state.

But the "pure metaphysicians" make great capital out of the ambiguity. For, starting with the assumption that all knowledge is the perception of relations, and finding themselves, like mere common-sense folks, very much disposed to call sensation knowledge, they at once gratify

that disposition and save their consistency, by declaring that even the simplest act of sensation contains two terms and a relation—the sensitive subject, the sensigenous object, and that masterful entity, the Ego. From which great triad, as from a gnostic Trinity, emanates an endless procession of other logical shadows and all the *Fata Morgana* of philosophical dreamland.

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## CHAPTER III.

## ORIGIN OF THE IMPRESSIONS.

ADMITTING that the sensations, the feelings of pleasure and pain, and those of relation, are the primary irresolvable states of consciousness, two further lines of investigation present themselves. The one leads us to seek the origin of these "impressions;" the other, to inquire into the nature of the steps by which they become metamorphosed into those compound states of consciousness which so largely enter into our ordinary trains of thought.

With respect to the origin of impressions of sensation, Hume is not quite consistent with himself. In one place (I. p. 117) he says that it is impossible to decide "whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produced by the creative power of the mind, or are derived from the Author of our being," thereby implying that realism and idealism are equally probable hypotheses. But, in fact, after the demonstration by Descartes, that the immediate antecedents of sensations are changes in the nervous system, with which our feelings have no sort of resemblance, the hypothesis that sensations "arise immediately from the object" was out of court; and that Hume fully admitted the Cartesian doctrine is apparent when he says (I. p. 272):—

“All our perceptions are dependent on our organs and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits.”

And again, though in relation to another question, he observes :—

“There are three different kinds of impressions conveyed by the senses. The first are those of the figure, bulk, motion, and solidity of bodies. The second those of colours, tastes, smells, sounds, heat, and cold. The third are the pains and pleasures that arise from the application of objects to our bodies, as by the cutting of our flesh with steel and such like. Both philosophers and the vulgar suppose the first of these to have a distinct continued existence. The vulgar only regard the second as on the same footing. Both philosophers and the vulgar again esteem the third to be merely perceptions, and consequently interrupted and dependent beings.

“Now 'tis evident that, whatever may be our philosophical opinion, colour, sounds, heat, and cold, as far as appears to the senses, exist after the same manner with motion and solidity; and that the difference we make between them, in this respect, arises not from the mere perception. So strong is the prejudice for the distinct continued existence of the former qualities, that when the contrary opinion is advanced by modern philosophers, people imagine they can almost refute it from their reason and experience, and that their very senses contradict this philosophy. 'Tis also evident that colours, sounds, &c., are originally on the same footing with the pain that arises from steel, and pleasure that proceeds from a fire; and that the difference betwixt them is founded neither on perception nor reason, but on the imagination. For as they are confessed to be, both of them, nothing but perceptions arising from the particular configurations and motions of the parts of body, wherein possibly can their difference consist? Upon the whole, then, we may conclude



that, as far as the senses are judges, all perceptions are the same in the manner of their existence."—(I. p. 250, 251.)

The last words of this passage are as much Berkeley's as Hume's. But, instead of following Berkeley in his deductions from the position thus laid down, Hume, as the preceding citation shows, fully adopted the conclusion to which all that we know of psychological physiology tends, that the origin of the elements of consciousness, no less than that of all its other states, is to be sought in bodily changes, the seat of which can only be placed in the brain. And, as Loeké had already done with less effect, he states and refutes the arguments commonly brought against the possibility of a casual connexion between the modes of motion of the cerebral substance and states of consciousness, with great clearness:—

“From these hypotheses concerning the *substance* and *local conjunction* of our perceptions we may pass to another, which is more intelligible than the former, and more important than the latter, viz., concerning the *cause* of our perceptions. Matter and motion, 'tis commonly said in the schools, however varied, are still matter and motion, and produce only a difference in the position and situation of objects. Divide a body as often as you please, 'tis still body. Place it in any figure, nothing ever results but figure, or the relation of parts. Move it in any manner, you still find motion or a change of relation. 'Tis absurd to imagine that motion in a circle, for instance, should be nothing but merely motion in a circle; while motion in another direction, as in an ellipse, should also be a passion or moral reflection; that the shocking of two globular particles should become a sensation of pain, and that the meeting of the triangular ones should afford a pleasure. Now as these different shocks and variations and mixtures are the only changes of which mat-

ter is susceptible, and as these never afford us any idea of thought or perception, 'tis concluded to be impossible that thought can ever be caused by matter.

"Few have been able to withstand the seeming evidence of this argument; and yet nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it. We need only reflect upon what has been proved at large, that we are never sensible of any connexion between causes and effects, and that 'tis only by our experience of their constant conjunction we can arrive at any knowledge of this relation. Now, as all objects which are not contrary are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary, I have inferred from these principles (Part III. § 15) that, to consider the matter *a priori*, anything may produce anything, and that we shall never discover a reason why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little, the resemblance may be betwixt them. This evidently destroys the precedent reasoning concerning the cause of thought or perception. For though there appear no manner of connection betwixt motion and thought, the case is the same with all other causes and effects. Place one body of a pound weight on one end of a lever, and another body of the same weight on the other end; you will never find in these bodies any principle of motion dependent on their distance from the centre, more than of thought and perception. If you pretend, therefore, to prove, *a priori*, that such a position of bodies can never cause thought, because, turn it which way you will, it is nothing but a position of bodies: you must, by the same course of reasoning, conclude that it can never produce motion, since there is no more apparent connection in the one than in the other. But, as this latter conclusion is contrary to evident experience, and as 'tis possible we may have a like experience in the operations of the mind, and may perceive a constant conjunction of thought and motion, you reason too hastily when, from the mere consideration of the ideas, you conclude that 'tis impossible motion can ever produce

thought, or a different position of parts give rise to a different passion or reflection. Nay, 'tis not only possible we may have such an experience, but 'tis certain we have it; since every one may perceive that the different dispositions of his body change his thoughts and sentiments. And should it be said that this depends on the union of soul and body, I would answer, that we must separate the question concerning the substance of the mind from that concerning the cause of its thought; and that, confining ourselves to the latter question, we find, by the comparing their ideas, that thought and motion are different from each other, and by experience, that they are constantly united; which, being all the circumstances that enter into the idea of cause and effect, when applied to the operations of matter, we may certainly conclude that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception."—(I. pp. 314—316.)

The upshot of all this is, that the "collection of perceptions," which constitutes the mind, is really a system of effects, the causes of which are to be sought in antecedent changes of the matter of the brain, just as the "collection of motions," which we call flying, is a system of effects, the causes of which are to be sought in the modes of motion of the matter of the muscles of the wings.

Hume, however, treats of this important topic only incidentally. He seems to have had very little acquaintance even with such physiology as was current in his time. At least, the only passage of his works bearing on this subject, with which I am acquainted, contains nothing but a very odd version of the physiological views of Descartes:—

"When I received the relations of *resemblance*, *contiguity*, and *causation*, as principles of union among ideas, without examining into their causes, 'twas more in prosecution of my first maxim, that we must in the end rest contented with

experience, than for want of something specious and plausible which I might have displayed on that subject. 'Twould have been easy to have made an imaginary dissection of the brain, and have shown why, upon our conception of any idea, the animal spirits run into all the contiguous traces and rouse up the other ideas that are related to it. But though I have neglected any advantage which I might have drawn from this topic in explaining the relations of ideas, I am afraid I must here have recourse to it, in order to account for the mistakes that arise from these relations. I shall therefore observe, that as the mind is endowed with the power of exciting any idea it pleases; whenever it despatches the spirits into that region of the brain in which the idea is placed; these spirits always excite the idea, when they ran precisely into the proper traces and rummage that cell which belongs to the idea. But as their motion is seldom direct, and naturally turns a little to the one side or to the other; for this reason the animal spirits, falling into the contiguous traces, present other related ideas, in lieu of that which the mind desired at first to survey. This change we are not always sensible of; but continuing still the same train of thought, make use of the related idea which is presented to us and employ it in our reasonings, as if it were the same with what we demanded. This is the cause of many mistakes and sophisms in philosophy, as will naturally be imagined, and as it would be easy to show, if there was occasion."—(I. p. 88.)

Perhaps it is as well for Hume's fame that the occasion for further physiological speculations of this sort did not arise. But, while admitting the crudity of his notions and the strangeness of the language in which they are couched, it must in justice be remembered, that what are now known as the elements of the physiology of the nervous system were hardly dreamed of in the first half of the eighteenth century; and, as a further set-off to Hume's credit, it must be noted that he grasped the fundamental

truth, that the key to the comprehension of mental operations lies in the study of the molecular changes of the nervous apparatus by which they are originated.

Surely no one who is cognisant of the facts of the case, nowadays, doubts that the roots of psychology lie in the physiology of the nervous system. What we call the operations of the mind are functions of the brain, and the materials of consciousness are products of cerebral activity. Cabanis may have made use of crude and misleading phraseology when he said that the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile; but the conception which that much-abused phrase embodies is, nevertheless, far more consistent with fact than the popular notion that the mind is a metaphysical entity seated in the head, but as independent of the brain as a telegraph operator is of his instrument.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the doctrine just laid down is what is commonly called materialism. In fact, I am not sure that the adjective "crass," which appears to have a special charm for rhetorical sciolists, would not be applied to it. But it is, nevertheless, true that the doctrine contains nothing inconsistent with the purest idealism. For, as Hume remarks (as indeed Descartes had observed long before):—

"'Tis not our body we perceive when we regard our limbs and members, but certain impressions which enter by the senses; so that the ascribing a real and corporeal existence to these impressions, or to their objects, is an act of the mind as difficult to explain as that [the external existence of objects] which we examine at present."—(I. p. 249.)

Therefore, if we analyse the proposition that all mental phenomena are the effects or products of material phe-

nomena, all that it means amounts to this; that whenever those states of consciousness which we call sensation, or emotion, or thought, come into existence, complete investigation will show good reason for the belief that they are preceded by those other phenomena of consciousness to which we give the names of matter and motion. All material changes appear, in the long run, to be modes of motion; but our knowledge of motion is nothing but that of a change in the place and order of our sensations; just as our knowledge of matter is restricted to those feelings of which we assume it to be the cause.

It has already been pointed out that Hume must have admitted, and in fact does admit, the possibility that the mind is a Leibnitzian monad, or a Fichtean world-generating Ego, the universe of things being merely the picture produced by the evolution of the phenomena of consciousness. For any demonstration that can be given to the contrary effect, the "collection of perceptions" which makes up our consciousness may be an orderly phantasmagoria generated by the Ego, unfolding its successive scenes on the background of the abyss of nothingness; as a firework, which is but cunningly arranged combustibles, grows from a spark into a coruscation, and from a coruscation into figures, and words, and cascades of devouring fire, and then vanishes into the darkness of the night.

On the other hand, it must no less readily be allowed that, for anything that can be proved to the contrary, there may be a real something which is the cause of all our impressions; that sensations, though not likenesses, are symbols of that something; and that the part of that something, which we call the nervous system, is an apparatus for supplying us with a sort of algebra of fact, based on those symbols. A brain may be the machinery by

which the material universe becomes conscious of itself. But it is important to notice that, even if this conception of the universe and of the relation of consciousness to its other components should be true, we should, nevertheless, be still bound by the limits of thought, still unable to refute the arguments of pure idealism. The more completely the materialistic position is admitted, the easier it is to show that the idealistic position is unassailable, if the idealist confines himself within the limits of positive knowledge.

Hume deals with the questions whether all our ideas are derived from experience, or whether, on the contrary, more or fewer of them are innate, which so much exercised the mind of Loëke, after a somewhat summary fashion, in a note to the second section of the *Inquiry*:—

“It is probable that no more was meant by those who denied innate ideas, than that all ideas were copies of our impressions; though it must be confessed that the terms which they employed were not chosen with such caution, nor so exactly defined, as to prevent all mistakes about their doctrine. For what is meant by *innate*? If innate be equivalent to natural, then all the perceptions and ideas of the mind must be allowed to be innate or natural, in whatever sense we take the latter word, whether in opposition to what is uncommon, artificial, or miraculous. If by innate be meant contemporary with our birth, the dispute seems to be frivolous; nor is it worth while to inquire at what time thinking begins, whether before, at, or after our birth. Again, the word *idea* seems to be commonly taken in a very loose sense by Loëke and others, as standing for any of our perceptions, our sensations and passions, as well as thoughts. Now in this sense I should desire to know what can be meant by asserting that self-love, or resentment of injuries, or the passion between the sexes is not innate?

"But admitting these terms, *impressions* and *ideas*, in the sense I have explained, and understanding by *innate* what is original or copied from no precedent perception, then we may assert that all our impressions are innate, and our ideas not innate."

It would seem that Hume did not think it worth while to acquire a comprehension of the real points at issue in the controversy which he thus carelessly dismisses.

Yet Descartes has defined what he means by innate ideas with so much precision, that misconception ought to have been impossible. He says that, when he speaks of an idea being "innate," he means that it exists potentially in the mind, before it is actually called into existence by whatever is its appropriate exciting cause.

"I have never either thought or said," he writes, "that the mind has any need of innate ideas [*idées naturelles*] which are anything distinct from its faculty of thinking. But it is true that observing that there are certain thoughts which arise neither from external objects nor from the determination of my will, but only from my faculty of thinking; in order to mark the difference between the ideas or the notions which are the forms of these thoughts, and to distinguish them from the others, which may be called extraneous or voluntary, I have called them innate. But I have used this term in the same sense as when we say that generosity is innate in certain families; or that certain maladies, such as gout or gravel, are innate in others; not that children born in these families are troubled with such diseases in their mother's womb, but because they are born with the disposition or the faculty of contracting them."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Remarques de René Descartes sur un certain placard imprimé aux Pays Bas vers la fin de l'année, 1647.—Descartes, *Œuvres*. Ed. Cousin, x. p. 71.



His troublesome disciple, Regius, having asserted that all our ideas come from observation or tradition, Descartes remarks :—

“So thoroughly erroneous is this assertion, that whoever has a proper comprehension of the action of our senses, and understands precisely the nature of that which is transmitted by them to our thinking faculty, will rather affirm that no ideas of things, such as are formed in thought, are brought to us by the senses, so that there is nothing in our ideas which is other than innate in the mind (*naturel à l'esprit*), or in the faculty of thinking, if only certain circumstances are excepted, which belong only to experience. For example, it is experience alone which causes us to judge that such and such ideas, now present in our minds, are related to certain things which are external to us; not in truth, that they have been sent into our mind by these things, such as they are, by the organs of the senses; but because these organs have transmitted something which has occasioned the mind, in virtue of its innate power, to form them at this time rather than at another. . . .

“Nothing passes from external objects to the soul except certain motions of matter (*mouvements corporels*), but neither these motions, nor the figures which they produce, are conceived by us as they exist in the sensory organs, as I have fully explained in my ‘Dioptries;’ whence it follows that even the ideas of motion and of figures are innate (*naturellement en nous*). And, *à fortiori*, the ideas of pain, of colours, of sounds, and of all similar things must be innate, in order that the mind may represent them to itself, on the occasion of certain motions of matter with which they have no resemblance.”

Whoever denies what is, in fact, an inconceivable proposition, that sensations pass, as such, from the external world into the mind, must admit the conclusion here laid

down by Descartes, that, strictly speaking, sensations, and, *à fortiori*, all the other contents of the mind, are innate. Or, to state the matter in accordance with the views previously expounded, that they are products of the inherent properties of the thinking organ, in which they lie potentially, before they are called into existence by their appropriate causes.

But if all the contents of the mind are innate, what is meant by experience?

It is the conversion, by unknown causes, of these innate potentialities into actual existences. The organ of thought, prior to experience, may be compared to an untouched piano, in which it may be properly said that music is innate, inasmuch as its mechanism contains, potentially, so many octaves of musical notes. The unknown cause of sensation which Descartes calls the "*je ne sais quoi dans les objets*" or "*choses telles qu'elles sont*;" and Kant the "*Noumenon*" or "*Ding an sich*;" is represented by the musician, who, by touching the keys, converts the potentiality of the mechanism into actual sounds. A note so produced is the equivalent of a single experience.

All the melodies and harmonies that proceed from the piano depend upon the action of the musician upon the keys. There is no internal mechanism which, when certain keys are struck, gives rise to an accompaniment of which the musician is only indirectly the cause. According to Descartes, however—and this is what is generally fixed upon as the essence of his doctrine of innate ideas—the mind possesses such an internal mechanism, by which certain classes of thoughts are generated, on the occasion of certain experiences. Such thoughts are innate, just as sensations are innate; they are not copies of sensations, any more than sensations are copies of motions; they are

invariably generated in the mind, when certain experiences arise in it, just as sensations are invariably generated when certain bodily motions take place; they are universal, inasmuch as they arise under the same conditions in all men; they are necessary, because their genesis under these conditions is invariable. These innate thoughts are what Descartes terms "verités" or truths; that is, beliefs—and his notions respecting them are plainly set forth in a passage of the *Principes*.

"Thus far I have discussed that which we know as things: it remains that I should speak of that which we know as truths. For example, when we think that it is impossible to make anything out of nothing, we do not imagine that this proposition is a thing which exists, or a property of something, but we take it for a certain eternal truth, which has its seat in the mind (*pensée*), and is called a common notion or an axiom. Similarly, when we affirm that it is impossible that one and the same thing should exist and not exist at the same time; that that which has been created should not have been created; that he who thinks must exist while he thinks; and a number of other like propositions—these are only truths, and not things which exist outside our thoughts. And there is such a number of these that it would be wearisome to enumerate them: nor is it necessary to do so, because we cannot fail to know them when the occasion of thinking about them presents itself, and we are not blinded by any prejudices."

It would appear that Locke was not more familiar with Descartes' writings than Hume seems to have been; for, viewed in relation to the passages just cited, the arguments adduced in his famous polemic against innate ideas are totally irrelevant.

It has been shown that Hume practically, if not in so

many words, admits the justice of Descartes' assertion that, strictly speaking, sensations are innate; that is to say, that they are the product of the reaction of the organ of the mind on the stimulus of an "unknown cause," which is Descartes' "je ne sais quoi." Therefore, the difference between Descartes' opinion and that of Hume resolves itself into this: Given sensation-experiences, can all the contents of consciousness be derived from the collocation and metamorphosis of these experiences? Or, are new elements of consciousness, products of an innate potentiality distinct from sensibility, added to these? Hume affirms the former position, Descartes the latter. If the analysis of the phenomena of consciousness given in the preceding pages is correct, Hume is in error; while the father of modern philosophy had a truer insight, though he overstated the case. For want of sufficiently searching psychological investigations, Descartes was led to suppose that innumerable ideas, the evolution of which in the course of experience can be demonstrated, were direct or innate products of the thinking faculty.

As has been already pointed out, it is the great merit of Kant that he started afresh on the track indicated by Descartes, and steadily upheld the doctrine of the existence of elements of consciousness, which are neither sense-experiences nor any modifications of them. We may demur to the expression that space and time are forms of sensory intuition; but it imperfectly represents the great fact that co-existence and succession are mental phenomena not given in the mere sense-experience.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Wir können uns keinen Gegenstand denken, ohne durch Kategorien; wir können keinen gedachten Gegenstand erkennen, ohne durch Anschauungen, die jenen Begriffen entsprechen. Nun sind alle unsere Anschauungen sinnlich, und diese Erkenntniß, so fern

der Gegenstand derselben gegeben ist, ist empirisch. Empirische Erkenntniß aber ist Erfahrung. Folglich ist uns keine Erkenntniß *a priori* möglich, als lediglich von Gegenständen möglicher Erfahrung.

“Aber diese Erkenntniß, die bloss auf Gegenstände der Erfahrung eingeschränkt ist, ist darum nicht alle von der Erfahrung entlehnt, sondern was sowohl die reinen Anschauungen, als die reinen Verstandesbegriffe betrifft, so sind sie Elemente der Erkenntniß die in uns *a priori* angetroffen werden.”—*Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Elementarlehre*, p. 135.

Without a glossary explanatory of Kant's terminology, this passage would be hardly intelligible in a translation; but it may be paraphrased thus: All knowledge is founded upon experiences of sensation, but it is not all derived from those experiences; inasmuch as the impressions of relation (“reine Anschauungen;” “reine Verstandesbegriffe”) have a potential or *a priori* existence in us, and by their addition to sense-experiences, constitute knowledge.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CLASSIFICATION AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF MENTAL OPERATIONS.

IF, as has been set forth in the preceding chapter, all mental states are effects of physical causes, it follows that what are called mental faculties and operations are, properly speaking, cerebral functions, allotted to definite, though not yet precisely assignable, parts of the brain.

These functions appear to be reducible to three groups, namely: Sensation, Correlation, and Ideation.

The organs of the functions of sensation and correlation are those portions of the cerebral substance, the molecular changes of which give rise to impressions of sensation and impressions of relation.

The changes in the nervous matter which bring about the effects which we call its functions, follow upon some kind of stimulus, and rapidly reaching their maximum, as rapidly die away. The effect of the irritation of a nerve-fibre on the cerebral substance with which it is connected may be compared to the pulling of a long bell-wire. The impulse takes a little time to reach the bell; the bell rings and then becomes quiescent, until another pull is given. So, in the brain, every sensation is the ring of a cerebral particle, the effect of a momentary impulse sent along a nerve-fibre.

If there were a complete likeness between the two terms of this very rough and ready comparison, it is obvious that there could be no such thing as memory. A bell records no audible sign of having been rung five minutes ago, and the activity of a sensigenous cerebral particle might similarly leave no trace. Under these circumstances, again, it would seem that the only impressions of relation which could arise would be those of co-existence and of similarity. For succession implies memory of an antecedent state.<sup>1</sup>

But the special peculiarity of the cerebral apparatus is, that any given function which has once been performed is very easily set a-going again, by causes more or less different from those to which it owed its origin. Of the mechanism of this generation of images of impressions or ideas (in Hume's sense), which may be termed *Ideation*, we know nothing at present, though the fact and its results are familiar enough.

During our waking, and many of our sleeping, hours, in fact, the function of ideation is in continual, if not continuous, activity. Trains of thought, as we call them, succeed one another without intermission, even when the starting of new trains by fresh sense-impressions is as far as possible prevented. The rapidity and the intensity of this ideational process are obviously dependent upon physiological conditions. The widest differences in these respects are constitutional in men of different temperaments; and are observable in oneself, under varying conditions of hunger and repletion, fatigue and freshness,

<sup>1</sup> It is not worth while, for the present purpose, to consider whether, as all nervous action occupies a sensible time, the duration of one impression might not overlap that of the impression which follows it, in the case supposed.

calmness and emotional excitement. The influence of diet on dreams; of stimulants upon the fulness and the velocity of the stream of thought; the delirious phantasms generated by disease, by hashish, or by alcohol—will occur to every one as examples of the marvellous sensitiveness of the apparatus of ideation to purely physical influences.

The succession of mental states in ideation is not fortuitous, but follows the law of association, which may be stated thus: that every idea tends to be followed by some other idea which is associated with the first, or its impression, by a relation of succession, of contiguity, or of likeness.

Thus the idea of the word horse just now presented itself to my mind, and was followed in quick succession by the ideas of four legs, hoofs, teeth, rider, saddle, racing, cheating; all of which ideas are connected in my experience with the impression, or the idea, of a horse and with one another, by the relations of contiguity and succession. No great attention to what passes in the mind is needful to prove that our trains of thought are neither to be arrested, nor even permanently controlled, by our desires or emotions. Nevertheless they are largely influenced by them. In the presence of a strong desire, or emotion, the stream of thought no longer flows on in a straight course, but seems, as it were, to eddy round the idea of that which is the object of the emotion. Every one who has "eaten his bread in sorrow" knows how strangely the current of ideas whirls about the conception of the object of regret or remorse as a centre; every now and then, indeed, breaking away into the new tracks suggested by passing associations, but still returning to the central thought. Few can have been so happy as to have escaped the social bore,



whose pet notion is certain to crop up whatever topic is started; while the fixed idea of the monomaniac is but the extreme form of the same phenomenon.

And as, on the one hand, it is so hard to drive away the thought we would fain be rid of; so, upon the other, the pleasant imaginations which we would so gladly retain are, sooner or later, jostled away by the crowd of claimants for birth into the world of consciousness; which hover as a sort of psychical possibilities, or inverse ghosts, the bodily presentments of spiritual phenomena to be, in the limbo of the brain. In that form of desire which is called "attention," the train of thought, held fast, for a time, in the desired direction, seems ever striving to get on to another line—and the junctions and sidings are so multitudinous!

The constituents of trains of ideas may be grouped in various ways.

Hume says:—

"We find, by experience, that when any impression has been present in the mind, it again makes its appearance there as an idea, and this it may do in two different ways: either when, on its new appearance, it retains a considerable degree of its first vivacity, and is somewhat intermediate between an impression and an idea; or when it entirely loses that vivacity, and is a perfect idea. The faculty by which we repeat our impressions in the first manner is called the *memory*, and the other the *imagination*."—(I. p. 23, 24.)

And he considers that the only difference between ideas of imagination and those of memory, except the superior vivacity of the latter, lies in the fact that those of memory preserve the original order of the impressions from which

they are derived, while the imagination "is free to trans-  
pose and change its ideas."

The latter statement of the difference between memory  
and imagination is less open to cavil than the former,  
though by no means unassailable.

The special characteristic of a memory, surely, is not its  
vividness; but that it is a complex idea, in which the idea  
of that which is remembered is related by co-existence  
with other ideas, and by antecedence with present im-  
pressions.

If I say I remember A. B., the chance acquaintance of  
ten years ago, it is not because my idea of A. B. is very  
vivid—on the contrary, it is extremely faint—but because  
that idea is associated with ideas of impressions co-exist-  
ent with those which I call A. B.; and that all these are  
at the end of the long series of ideas, which represent that  
much past time. In truth, I have a much more vivid idea  
of Mr. Pickwick, or of Colonel Newcome, than I have of  
A. B.; but, associated with the ideas of these persons, I  
have no idea of their having ever been derived from the  
world of impressions; and so they are relegated to the  
world of imagination. On the other hand, the character-  
istic of an imagination may properly be said to lie not in  
its intensity, but in the fact that, as Hume puts it, "the  
arrangement," or the relations, of the ideas are different  
from those in which the impressions, whence these ideas  
are derived, occurred; or, in other words, that the thing  
imagined has not happened. In popular usage, however,  
imagination is frequently employed for simple memory—  
"In imagination I was back in the old times."

It is a curious omission on Hume's part that, while  
thus dwelling on two classes of ideas, *Memories* and *Im-  
aginations*, he has not, at the same time, taken notice of

a third group, of no small importance, which are as different from imaginations as memories are; though, like the latter, they are often confounded with pure imaginations in general speech. These are the ideas of expectation, or, as they may be called for the sake of brevity, *Expectations*; which differ from simple imaginations in being associated with the idea of the existence of corresponding impressions, in the future, just as memories contain the idea of the existence of the corresponding impressions in the past.

The ideas belonging to two of the three groups enumerated: namely, memories and expectations, present some features of particular interest. And first, with respect to memories.

In Hume's words, all simple ideas are copies of simple impressions. The idea of a single sensation is a faint, but accurate, image of that sensation; the idea of a relation is a reproduction of the feeling of co-existence, of succession, or of similarity. But, when complex impressions or complex ideas are reproduced as memories, it is probable that the copies never give all the details of the originals with perfect accuracy, and it is certain that they rarely do so. No one possesses a memory so good, that if he has only once observed a natural object, a second inspection does not show him something that he has forgotten. Almost all, if not all, our memories are therefore sketches, rather than portraits, of the originals—the salient features are obvious, while the subordinate characters are obscure or unrepresented.

Now, when several complex impressions which are more or less different from one another—let us say that out of ten impressions in each, six are the same in all, and four are different from all the rest—are successively presented to the mind, it is easy to see what must be the nature of

the result. The repetition of the six similar impressions will strengthen the six corresponding elements of the complex idea, which will therefore acquire greater vividness; while the four differing impressions of each will not only acquire no greater strength than they had at first, but, in accordance with the law of association, they will all tend to appear at once, and will thus neutralise one another.

This mental operation may be rendered comprehensible by considering what takes place in the formation of compound photographs—when the images of the faces of six sitters, for example, are each received on the same photographic plate, for a sixth of the time requisite to take one portrait. The final result is that all those points in which the six faces agree are brought out strongly, while all those in which they differ are left vague; and thus what may be termed a *generic* portrait of the six, in contradistinction to a *specific* portrait of any one, is produced.

Thus our ideas of single complex impressions are incomplete in one way, and those of numerous, more or less similar, complex impressions are incomplete in another way: that is to say, they are *generic*, not *specific*. And hence it follows that our ideas of the impressions in question are not, in the strict sense of the word, copies of those impressions; while, at the same time, they may exist in the mind independently of language.

The generic ideas which are formed from several similar, but not identical, complex experiences are what are commonly called *abstract* or *general* ideas; and Berkeley endeavoured to prove that all general ideas are nothing but particular ideas annexed to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall, upon occasion, other individuals which are similar to them. Hume says that he regards this as “one of the greatest

and the most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in the republic of letters," and endeavours to confirm it in such a manner that it shall be "put beyond all doubt and controversy."

I may venture to express a doubt whether he has succeeded in his object; but the subject is an abstruse one; and I must content myself with the remark, that though Berkeley's view appears to be largely applicable to such general ideas as are formed after language has been acquired, and to all the more abstract sort of conceptions, yet that general ideas of sensible objects may nevertheless be produced in the way indicated, and may exist independently of language. In dreams, one sees houses, trees, and other objects, which are perfectly recognisable as such, but which remind one of the actual objects as seen "out of the corner of the eye," or of the pictures thrown by a badly-foensed magic lantern. A man addresses us who is like a figure seen by twilight; or we travel through countries where every feature of the scenery is vague; the outlines of the hills are ill-marked, and the rivers have no defined banks. They are, in short, generic ideas of many past impressions of men, hills, and rivers. An anatomist who occupies himself intently with the examination of several specimens of some new kind of animal, in course of time acquires so vivid a conception of its form and structure, that the idea may take visible shape and become a sort of waking dream. But the figure which thus presents itself is generic, not specific. It is no copy of any one specimen, but, more or less, a mean of the series; and there seems no reason to doubt that the minds of children before they learn to speak, and of deaf-mutes, are peopled with similarly generated generic ideas of sensible objects.

It has been seen that a memory is a complex idea made up of at least two constituents. In the first place, there is the idea of an object; and, secondly, there is the idea of the relation of antecedence between that object and some present objects.

To say that one has a recollection of a given event and to express the belief that it happened, are two ways of giving an account of one and the same mental fact. But the former mode of stating the fact of memory is preferable, at present, because it certainly does not presuppose the existence of language in the mind of the rememberer; while it may be said that the latter does. It is perfectly possible to have the idea of an event A, and of the events B, C, D, which came between it and the present state E, as mere mental pictures. It is hardly to be doubted that children have very distinct memories long before they can speak; and we believe that such is the case because they act upon their memories. But, if they act upon their memories, they to all intents and purposes believe their memories. In other words, though, being devoid of language, the child cannot frame a proposition expressive of belief; cannot say "sugar-plum was sweet;" yet the psychological operation of which that proposition is merely the verbal expression is perfectly effected. The experience of the co-existence of sweetness with sugar has produced a state of mind which bears the same relation to a verbal proposition as the natural disposition to produce a given idea, assumed to exist by Descartes as an "innate idea" would bear to that idea put into words.

The fact that the beliefs of memory precede the use of language, and therefore are originally purely instinctive, and independent of any rational justification, should have been of great importance to Hume, from its bearing upon

his theory of causation; and it is curious that he has not adverted to it, but always takes the trustworthiness of memories for granted. It may be worth while briefly to make good the omission.

That I was in pain, yesterday, is as certain to me as any matter of fact can be; by no effort of the imagination is it possible for me really to entertain the contrary belief. At the same time, I am bound to admit that the whole foundation for my belief is the fact that the idea of pain is indissolubly associated in my mind with the idea of that much past time. Any one who will be at the trouble may provide himself with hundreds of examples to the same effect.

This and similar observations are important under another aspect. They prove that the idea of even a single strong impression may be so powerfully associated with that of a certain time, as to originate a belief of which the contrary is inconceivable, and which may therefore be properly said to be necessary. A single weak, or moderately strong, impression may not be represented by any memory. But this defect of weak experiences may be compensated by their repetition; and what Hume means by "custom" or "habit" is simply the repetition of experiences—

"wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*. By employing that word, we pretend not to have given the ultimate reason of such a propensity. We only point out a principle of human nature which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects."—(IV. p. 52.)

It has been shown that an expectation is a complex idea which, like a memory, is made up of two constituents. The one is the idea of an object, the other is the idea of a relation of sequence between that object and some present object; and the reasoning which applied to memories applies to expectations. To have an expectation<sup>1</sup> of a given event, and to believe that it will happen, are only two modes of stating the same fact. Again, just in the same way as we call a memory, put into words, a belief, so we give the same name to an expectation in like clothing. And the fact already cited, that a child before it can speak acts upon its memories, is good evidence that it forms expectations. The infant who knows the meaning neither of "sugar-plum" nor of "sweet," nevertheless is in full possession of that complex idea, which, when he has learned to employ language, will take the form of the verbal proposition, "A sugar-plum will be sweet."

Thus, beliefs of expectation, or at any rate their potentialities, are, as much as those of memory, antecedent to speech, and are as incapable of justification by any logical process. In fact, expectations are but memories inverted. The association which is the foundation of expectation must exist as a memory before it can play its part. As Hume says,—

"... it is certain we here advance a very intelligible proposition at least, if not a true one, when we assert that after the constant conjunction of two objects, heat and flame, for instance, weight and solidity, we are determined by custom

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<sup>1</sup> We give no name to faint memories; but expectations of like character play so large a part in human affairs that they, together with the associated emotions of pleasure and pain, are distinguished as "hopes" or "fears."



alone to expect the one from the appearance of the other. This hypothesis seems even the only one which explains the difficulty why we draw from a thousand instances, an inference which we are not able to draw from one instance, that is in no respect different from them." . . .

"Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past." . . .

"All belief of matter-of-fact or real existence is derived merely from some object present to the memory or senses, and a customary conjunction between that and some other object; or, in other words, having found, in many instances, that any two kinds of objects, flame and heat, snow and cold, have always been conjoined together: if flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold, and to *believe* that such a quality does exist, and will discover itself upon a nearer approach. This belief is the necessary result of placing the mind in such circumstances. It is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love when we receive benefits, or hatred when we meet with injuries. All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent."—(IV. pp. 52—56.)

The only comment that appears needful here is, that Hume has attached somewhat too exclusive a weight to that repetition of experiences to which alone the term "custom" can be properly applied. The proverb says that "a burnt child dreads the fire;" and any one who will make the experiment will find that one burning is quite sufficient to establish an indissoluble belief that contact with fire and pain go together.

As a sort of inverted memory, expectation follows the same laws; hence, while a belief of expectation is, in most

cases, as Hume truly says, established by custom, or the repetition of weak impressions, it may quite well be based upon a single strong experience. In the absence of language, a specific memory cannot be strengthened by repetition. It is obvious that that which has happened cannot happen again, with the same collateral associations of co-existence and succession. But memories of the co-existence and succession of impressions are capable of being indefinitely strengthened by the recurrence of similar impressions, in the same order, even though the collateral associations are totally different; in fact, the ideas of these impressions become generic.

If I recollect that a piece of ice was cold yesterday, nothing can strengthen the recollection of that particular fact; on the contrary, it may grow weaker, in the absence of any record of it. But if I touch ice to-day and again find it cold, the association is repeated, and the memory of it becomes stronger. And, by this very simple process of repetition of experience, it has become utterly impossible for us to think of having handled ice without thinking of its coldness. But, that which is, under the one aspect, the strengthening of a memory, is, under the other, the intensification of an expectation. Not only can we not think of having touched ice without feeling cold, but we cannot think of touching ice in the future without expecting to feel cold. An expectation so strong that it cannot be changed, or abolished, may thus be generated out of repeated experiences. And it is important to note that such expectations may be formed quite unconsciously. In my dressing-room, a certain can is usually kept full of water, and I am in the habit of lifting it to pour out water for washing. Sometimes the servant has forgotten to fill it, and then I find that, when I take hold of

the handle, the can goes up with a jerk. Long association has, in fact, led me to expect the can to have a considerable weight; and, quite unawares, my muscular effort is adjusted to the expectation.

The process of strengthening generic memories of succession, and, at the same time, intensifying expectations of succession, is what is commonly called *verification*. The impression B has frequently been observed to follow the impression A. The association thus produced is represented as the memory,  $A \rightarrow B$ . When the impression A appears again, the idea of B follows, associated with that of the immediate appearance of the impression B. If the impression B does appear, the expectation is said to be verified; while the memory  $A \rightarrow B$  is strengthened, and gives rise in turn to a stronger expectation. And repeated verification may render that expectation so strong that its non-verification is inconceivable.

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## CHAPTER V.

### MENTAL PHENOMENA OF ANIMALS.

IN the course of the preceding chapters attention has been more than once called to the fact, that the elements of consciousness and the operations of the mental faculties, under discussion, exist independently of, and antecedent to, the existence of language.

If any weight is to be attached to arguments from analogy, there is overwhelming evidence in favour of the belief that children, before they can speak, and deaf-mutes, possess the feelings to which those who have acquired the faculty of speech apply the name of sensations; that they have the feelings of relation; that trains of ideas pass through their minds; that generic ideas are formed from specific ones; and that among these ideas of memory and expectation occupy a most important place, inasmuch as, in their quality of potential beliefs, they furnish the grounds of action. This conclusion, in truth, is one of those which, though they cannot be demonstrated, are never doubted; and, since it is highly probable and cannot be disproved, we are quite safe in accepting it as, at any rate, a good working hypothesis.

But, if we accept it, we must extend it to a much wider assemblage of living beings. Whatever cogency is attached to the arguments in favor of the occurrence of

all the fundamental phenomena of mind in young children and deaf-mutes, an equal force must be allowed to appertain to those which may be adduced to prove that the higher animals have minds. We must admit that Hume does not express himself too strongly when he says—

“no truth appears to me more evident than that the beasts are endowed with thought and reason as well as men. The arguments are in this case so obvious, that they never escape the most stupid and ignorant.”—(I. p. 232.)

In fact, this is one of the few cases in which the conviction which forces itself upon the stupid and the ignorant, is fortified by the reasonings of the intelligent, and has its foundation deepened by every increase of knowledge. It is not merely that the observation of the actions of animals almost irresistibly suggests the attribution to them of mental states, such as those which accompany corresponding actions in men. The minute comparison which has been instituted by anatomists and physiologists between the organs which we know to constitute the apparatus of thought in man, and the corresponding organs in brutes, has demonstrated the existence of the closest similarity between the two, not only in structure, as far as the microscope will carry us, but in function, as far as functions are determinable by experiment. There is no question in the mind of any one acquainted with the facts that, so far as observation and experiment can take us, the structure and the functions of the nervous system are fundamentally the same in an ape, or in a dog, and in a man. And the suggestion that we must stop at the exact point at which direct proof fails us; and refuse to believe that the similarity which extends so far stretches yet further, is no better than a quibble. Robinson Crusoe

did not feel bound to conclude, from the single human footprint which he saw in the sand, that the maker of the impression had only one leg.

Structure for structure, down to the minutest microscopical details, the eye, the ear, the olfactory organs, the nerves, the spinal cord, the brain of an ape, or of a dog, correspond with the same organs in the human subject. Cut a nerve, and the evidence of paralysis, or of insensibility, is the same in the two cases; apply pressure to the brain, or administer a narcotic, and the signs of intelligence disappear in the one as in the other. Whatever reason we have for believing that the changes which take place in the normal cerebral substance of man give rise to states of consciousness, the same reason exists for the belief that the modes of motion of the cerebral substance of an ape, or of a dog, produce like effects.

A dog acts as if he had all the different kinds of impressions of sensation of which each of us is cognisant. Moreover, he governs his movements exactly as if he had the feelings of distance, form, succession, likeness, and unlikeness, with which we are familiar, or as if the impressions of relation were generated in his mind as they are in our own. Sleeping dogs frequently appear to dream. If they do, it must be admitted that ideation goes on in them while they are asleep; and, in that case, there is no reason to doubt that they are conscious of trains of ideas in their waking state. Further, that dogs, if they possess ideas at all, have memories and expectations, and those potential beliefs of which these states are the foundation, can hardly be doubted by any one who is conversant with their ways. Finally, there would appear to be no valid argument against the supposition that dogs form generic ideas of sensible objects. One of the most curious pecu-

liarities of the dog mind is its inherent snobbishness, shown by the regard paid to external respectability. The dog who barks furiously at a beggar will let a well-dressed man pass him without opposition. Has he not then a "generic idea" of rags and dirt associated with the idea of aversion, and that of sleek broadcloth associated with the idea of liking?

In short, it seems hard to assign any good reason for denying to the higher animals any mental state, or process, in which the employment of the vocal or visual symbols of which language is composed is not involved; and comparative psychology confirms the position in relation to the rest of the animal world assigned to man by comparative anatomy. As comparative anatomy is easily able to show that, physically, man is but the last term of a long series of forms, which lead, by slow gradations, from the highest mammal to the almost formless speck of living protoplasm, which lies on the shadowy boundary between animal and vegetable life; so, comparative psychology, though but a young science, and far short of her elder sister's growth, points to the same conclusion.

In the absence of a distinct nervous system, we have no right to look for its product, consciousness; and, even in those forms of animal life in which the nervous apparatus has reached no higher degree of development than that exhibited by the system of the spinal cord and the foundation of the brain in ourselves, the argument from analogy leaves the assumption of the existence of any form of consciousness unsupported. With the super-addition of a nervous apparatus corresponding with the cerebrum in ourselves, it is allowable to suppose the appearance of the simplest states of consciousness, or the sensations; and it is conceivable that these may at first

exist, without any power of reproducing them, as memories; and, consequently, without ideation. Still higher, an apparatus of correlation may be superadded, until, as all these organs become more developed, the condition of the highest speechless animals is attained.

It is a remarkable example of Hume's sagacity that he perceived the importance of a branch of science which, even now, can hardly be said to exist; and that, in a remarkable passage, he sketches in bold outlines the chief features of comparative psychology.

" . . . any theory, by which we explain the operations of the understanding, or the origin and connexion of the passions in man, will acquire additional authority if we find that the same theory is requisite to explain the same phenomena in all other animals. We shall make trial of this with regard to the hypothesis by which we have, in the foregoing discourse, endeavoured to account for all experimental reasonings; and it is hoped that this new point of view will serve to confirm all our former observations.

"*First*, it seems evident that animals, as well as men, learn many things from experience, and infer that the same events will always follow from the same causes. By this principle they become acquainted with the more obvious properties of external objects, and gradually, from their birth, treasure up a knowledge of the nature of fire, water, earth, stones, heights, depths, &c., and of the effects which result from their operation. The ignorance and inexperience of the young are here plainly distinguishable from the cunning and sagacity of the old, who have learned, by long observation, to avoid what hurt them, and pursue what gave ease or pleasure. A horse that has been accustomed to the field becomes acquainted with the proper height which he can leap, and will never attempt what exceeds his force and ability. An old greyhound will trust the more fatiguing part of the chase



to the younger, and will place himself so as to meet the hare in her doubles; nor are the conjectures which he forms on this occasion founded on anything but his observation and experience.

"This is still more evident from the effects of discipline and education on animals, who, by the proper application of rewards and punishments, may be taught any course of action, the most contrary to their natural instincts and propensities. Is it not experience which renders a dog apprehensive of pain when you menace him or lift up the whip to beat him? Is it not even experience which makes him answer to his name, and infer from such an arbitrary sound that you mean him rather than any of his fellows, and intend to call him, when you pronounce it in a certain manner and with a certain tone and accent?

"In all these cases we may observe that the animal infers some fact beyond what immediately strikes his senses; and that this inference is altogether founded on past experience, while the creature expects from the present object the same consequences which it has always found in its observation to result from similar objects.

"*Secondly*, it is impossible that this inference of the animal can be founded on any process of argument or reasoning, by which he concludes that like events must follow like objects, and that the course of nature will always be regular in its operations. For if there be in reality any arguments of this nature, they surely lie too abstruse for the observation of such imperfect understandings; since it may well employ the utmost care and attention of a philosophic genius to discover and observe them. Animals, therefore, are not guided in these inferences by reasoning; neither are children; neither are the generality of mankind in their ordinary actions and conclusions; neither are philosophers themselves, who, in all the active parts of life, are in the main the same as the vulgar, and are governed by the same maxims. Nature must have provided some other principle, of more ready and more

general use and application; nor can an operation of such immense consequence in life as that of inferring effects from causes, be trusted to the uncertain process of reasoning and argumentation. Were this doubtful with regard to men, it seems to admit of no question with regard to the brute creation; and the conclusion being once firmly established in the one, we have a strong presumption, from all the rules of analogy, that it ought to be universally admitted, without any exception or reserve. It is custom alone which engages animals, from every object that strikes their senses, to infer its usual attendant, and carries their imagination from the appearance of the one to conceive the other, in that particular manner which we denominate *belief*. No other explication can be given of this operation in all the higher as well as lower classes of sensitive beings which fall under our notice and observation."—(IV. pp. 122—4.)

It will be observed that Hume appears to contrast the "inference of the animal" with the "process of argument or reasoning in man." But it would be a complete misapprehension of his intention, if we were to suppose that he thereby means to imply that there is any real difference between the two processes. The "inference of the animal" is a potential belief of expectation; the process of argument, or reasoning, in man is based upon potential beliefs of expectation, which are formed in the man exactly in the same way as in the animal. But, in men endowed with speech, the mental state which constitutes the potential belief is represented by a verbal proposition, and thus becomes what all the world recognises as a belief. The fallacy which Hume combats is that the proposition, or verbal representative of a belief, has come to be regarded as a reality, instead of as the mere symbol which it really is; and that reasoning, or logic, which deals with nothing but propositions, is supposed to be necessary in

order to validate the natural fact symbolised by those propositions. It is a fallacy similar to that of supposing that money is the foundation of wealth, whereas it is only the wholly unessential symbol of property.

In the passage which immediately follows that just quoted, Hume makes admissions which might be turned to serious account against some of his own doctrines:

“But though animals learn many parts of their knowledge from observation, there are also many parts of it which they derive from the original hand of Nature, which much exceed the share of capacity they possess on ordinary occasions, and in which they improve, little or nothing, by the longest practice and experience. These we denominate *INSTINCTS*, and are so apt to admire as something very extraordinary and inexplicable by all the disquisitions of human understanding. But our wonder will perhaps cease or diminish when we consider that the experimental reasoning itself, which we possess in common with beasts, and on which the whole conduct of life depends, is nothing but a species of instinct or mechanical power, that acts in us unknown to ourselves, and in its chief operations is not directed by any such relations or comparison of ideas as are the proper objects of our intellectual faculties.

“Though the instinct be different, yet still it is an instinct which teaches a man to avoid the fire, as much as that which teaches a bird, with such exactness, the art of incubation and the whole economy and order of its nursery.”—(IV. pp. 125, 126.)

The parallel here drawn between the “avoidance of a fire” by a man and the incubatory instinct of a bird is inexact. The man avoids fire when he has had experience of the pain produced by burning; but the bird incubates the first time it lays eggs, and therefore before it has had any experience of incubation. For the comparison to

be admissible, it would be necessary that a man should avoid fire the first time he saw it, which is notoriously not the case.

The term "instinct" is very vague and ill-defined. It is commonly employed to denote any action, or even feeling, which is not dictated by conscious reasoning, whether it is, or is not, the result of previous experience. It is "instinct" which leads a chicken just hatched to pick up a grain of corn; parental love is said to be "instinctive;" the drowning man who catches at a straw does it "instinctively;" and the hand that accidentally touches something hot is drawn back by "instinct." Thus "instinct" is made to cover everything from a simple reflex movement, in which the organ of consciousness need not be at all implicated, up to a complex combination of acts directed towards a definite end and accompanied by intense consciousness.

But this loose employment of the term "instinct" really accords with the nature of the thing; for it is wholly impossible to draw any line of demarcation between reflex actions and instincts. If a frog, on the flank of which a little drop of acid has been placed, rubs it off with the foot of the same side; and, if that foot be held, performs the same operation, at the cost of much effort, with the other foot, it certainly displays a curious instinct. But it is no less true that the whole operation is a reflex operation of the spinal cord, which can be performed quite as well when the brain is destroyed; and between which and simple reflex actions there is a complete series of gradations. In like manner, when an infant takes the breast, it is impossible to say whether the action should be rather termed instinctive or reflex.

What are usually called the instincts of animals are,

however, acts of such a nature that, if they were performed by men, they would involve the generation of a series of ideas and of inferences from them; and it is a curious, and apparently an insoluble, problem whether they are, or are not, accompanied by cerebral changes of the same nature as those which give rise to ideas and inferences in ourselves. When a chicken picks up a grain, for example, are there, firstly, certain sensations, accompanied by the feeling of relation between the grain and its own body; secondly, a desire of the grain; thirdly, a volition to seize it? Or, are only the sensational terms of the series actually represented in consciousness?

The latter seems the more probable opinion, though it must be admitted that the other alternative is possible. But, in this case, the series of mental states which occurs is such as would be represented in language by a series of propositions, and would afford proof positive of the existence of innate ideas, in the Cartesian sense. Indeed, a metaphysical fowl, brooding over the mental operations of his fully-fledged consciousness, might appeal to the fact as proof that, in the very first action of his life, he assumed the existence of the Ego and the non-Ego, and of a relation between the two.

In all seriousness, if the existence of instincts be granted, the possibility of the existence of innate ideas, in the most extended sense ever imagined by Descartes, must also be admitted. In fact, Descartes, as we have seen, illustrates what he means by an innate idea, by the analogy of hereditary diseases or hereditary mental peculiarities, such as generosity. On the other hand, hereditary mental tendencies may justly be termed instincts; and still more appropriately might those special proclivities, which constitute what we call genius, come into the same category.

The child who is impelled to draw as soon as it can hold a pencil; the Mozart who breaks out into music as early; the boy Bidder who worked out the most complicated sums without learning arithmetic; the boy Pascal who evolved *Eneid* out of his own consciousness: all these may be said to have been impelled by instinct, as much as are the beaver and the bee. And the man of genius is distinct in kind from the man of cleverness, by reason of the working within him of strong innate tendencies—which cultivation may improve, but which it can no more create than horticulture can make thistles bear figs. The analogy between a musical instrument and the mind holds good here also. Art and industry may get much music, of a sort, out of a penny whistle; but, when all is done, it has no chance against an organ. The innate musical potentialities of the two are infinitely different.

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## CHAPTER VI.

## LANGUAGE—PROPOSITIONS CONCERNING NECESSARY TRUTHS.

THOUGH we may accept Hume's conclusion that speechless animals think, believe, and reason; yet it must be borne in mind that there is an important difference between the signification of the terms when applied to them and when applied to those animals which possess language. The thoughts of the former are trains of mere feelings; those of the latter are, in addition, trains of the ideas of the signs which represent feelings, and which are called "words."

A word, in fact, is a spoken or written sign, the idea of which is, by repetition, so closely associated with the idea of the simple or complex feeling which it represents, that the association becomes indissoluble. No Englishman, for example, can think of the word "dog" without immediately having the idea of the group of impressions to which that name is given; and, conversely, the group of impressions immediately calls up the idea of the word "dog."

The association of words with impressions and ideas is the process of naming; and language approaches perfection, in proportion as the shades of difference between various ideas and impressions are represented by differences in their names.

The names of simple impressions and ideas, or of groups of co-existent or successive complex impressions and ideas, considered *per se*, are substantives; as redness, dog, silver, mouth; while the names of impressions or ideas considered as parts or attributes of a complex whole, are adjectives. Thus redness, considered as part of the complex idea of a rose, becomes the adjective red; flesh-eater, as part of the idea of a dog, is represented by carnivorous; whiteness, as part of the idea of silver, is white; and so on.

The linguistic machinery for the expression of belief is called *predication*; and, as all beliefs express ideas of relation, we may say that the sign of predication is the verbal symbol of a feeling of relation. The words which serve to indicate predication are verbs. If I say "silver" and then "white," I merely utter two names; but if I interpose between them the verb "is," I express a belief in the co-existence of the feeling of whiteness with the other feelings which constitute the totality of the complex idea of silver; in other words, I predicate "whiteness" of silver.

In such a case as this, the verb expresses predication and nothing else, and is called a copula. But, in the great majority of verbs, the word is the sign of a complex idea, and the predication is expressed only by its form. Thus in "silver shines," the verb "to shine" is the sign for the feeling of brightness, and the mark of predication lies in the form "shine-s."

Another result is brought about by the forms of verbs. By slight modifications they are made to indicate that a belief, or predication, is a memory, or is an expectation. Thus "silver *shone*" expresses a memory; "silver *will shine*" an expectation.

The form of words which expresses a predication is a



proposition. Hence, every predication is the verbal equivalent of a belief; and as every belief is either an immediate consciousness, a memory, or an expectation, and as every expectation is traceable to a memory, it follows that, in the long run, all propositions express either immediate states of consciousness or memories. The proposition which predicates A of X must mean either, that the fact is testified by my present consciousness, as when I say that two colours, visible at this moment, resemble one another; or that A is indissolubly associated with X in memory; or that A is indissolubly associated with X in expectation. But it has already been shown that expectation is only an expression of memory.

Hume does not discuss the nature of language, but so much of what remains to be said, concerning his philosophical tenets, turns upon the value and the origin of verbal propositions, that this summary sketch of the relations of language to the thinking process will probably not be deemed superfluous.

So large an extent of the field of thought is traversed by Hume, in his discussion of the verbal propositions in which mankind enshrine their beliefs, that it would be impossible to follow him throughout all the windings of his long journey within the limits of this essay. I purpose, therefore, to limit myself to those propositions which concern—1. Necessary Truths; 2. The order of Nature; 3. The Soul; 4. Theism; 5. The Passions and Volition; 6. The Principle of Morals.

Hume's views respecting necessary truths, and more particularly concerning causation, have, more than any other part of his teaching, contributed to give him a prominent place in the history of philosophy.

"All the objects of human reason and inquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact*. Of the first kind are the sciences of geometry, algebra, and arithmetic, and, in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. *That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides*, is a proposition which expresses a relation between these two figures. *That three times five is equal to the half of thirty*, expresses a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought without dependence on whatever is anywhere existent in the universe. Though there never were a circle or a triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would for ever retain their certainty and evidence.

"Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner, nor is an evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible, because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness as if ever so conformable to reality. *That the sun will not rise to-morrow*, is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation *that it will rise*. We should in vain, therefore, attempt to demonstrate its falsehood. Were it demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction, and could never be distinctly conceived by the mind."—(IV., pp. 32, 33.)

The distinction here drawn between the truths of geometry and other kinds of truth is far less sharply indicated in the *Treatise*, but as Hume expressly disowns any opinions on these matters but such as are expressed in the *Inquiry*, we may confine ourselves to the latter; and it is needful to look narrowly into the propositions here laid down, as much stress has been laid upon Hume's admission that the truths of mathematics are intuitively and

demonstratively certain; in other words, that they are necessary and, in that respect, differ from all other kinds of belief.

What is meant by the assertion that "propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe?"

Suppose that there were no such things as impressions of sight and touch anywhere in the universe, what idea could we have even of a straight line, much less of a triangle and of the relations between its sides? The fundamental proposition of all Hume's philosophy is that ideas are copied from impressions; and, therefore, if there were no impressions of straight lines and triangles, there could be no ideas of straight lines and triangles. But what we mean by the universe is the sum of our actual and possible impressions.

So, again, whether our conception of number is derived from relations of impressions in space or in time, the impressions must exist in nature, that is, in experience, before their relations can be perceived. Form and number are mere names for certain relations between matters of fact; unless a man had seen or felt the difference between a straight line and a crooked one, straight and crooked would have no more meaning to him than red and blue to the blind.

The axiom, that things which are equal to the same are equal to one another, is only a particular case of the predication of similarity; if there were no impressions, it is obvious that there could be no predicates. But what is an existence in the universe but an impression?

If what are called necessary truths are rigidly analysed, they will be found to be of two kinds. Either they de-

pend on the convention which underlies the possibility of intelligible speech, that terms shall always have the same meaning; or they are propositions the negation of which implies the dissolution of some association in memory or expectation, which is in fact indissoluble; or the denial of some fact of immediate consciousness.

The "necessary truth"  $A=A$  means that the perception which is called  $A$  shall always be called  $A$ . The "necessary truth" that "two straight lines cannot inclose a space," means that we have no memory, and can form no expectation of their so doing. The denial of the "necessary truth" that the thought now in my mind exists, involves the denial of consciousness.

To the assertion that the evidence of matter of fact is not so strong as that of relations of ideas, it may be justly replied that a great number of matters of fact are nothing but relations of ideas. If I say that red is unlike blue, I make an assertion concerning a relation of ideas; but it is also matter of fact, and the contrary proposition is inconceivable. If I remember<sup>1</sup> something that happened five minutes ago, that is matter of fact; and, at the same time, it expresses a relation between the event remembered and the present time. It is wholly inconceivable to me that the event did not happen, so that my assurance respecting it is as strong as that which I have respecting any other necessary truth. In fact, the man is either very wise or very virtuous, or very lucky, perhaps all three, who has gone through life without accumulating a store of such necessary beliefs, which he would give a good deal to be able to disbelieve.

It would be beside the mark to discuss the matter fur-

<sup>1</sup> Hume, however, expressly includes the "records of our memory" among his matters of fact.—(IV. p. 33.)

ther on the present occasion. It is sufficient to point out that, whatever may be the difference between mathematical and other truths, they do not justify Hume's statement. And it is, at any rate, impossible to prove that the cogency of mathematical first principles is due to anything more than these circumstances; that the experiences with which they are concerned are among the first which arise in the mind; that they are so incessantly repeated as to justify us, according to the ordinary laws of ideation, in expecting that the associations which they form will be of extreme tenacity; while the fact, that the expectations based upon them are always verified, finishes the process of welding them together.

Thus, if the axioms of mathematics are innate, nature would seem to have taken unnecessary trouble; since the ordinary process of association appears to be amply sufficient to confer upon them all the universality and necessity which they actually possess.

Whatever needless admissions Hume may have made respecting other necessary truths, he is quite clear about the axiom of causation, "That whatever event has a beginning must have a cause;" whether and in what sense it is a necessary truth; and, that question being decided, whence it is derived.

With respect to the first question, Hume denies that it is a necessary truth, in the sense that we are unable to conceive the contrary. The evidence by which he supports this conclusion in the *Inquiry*, however, is not strictly relevant to the issue.

"No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the cause which produced it, or the effects which will arise from it; nor can our reason, unassist-

ed by experience, ever draw any inference concerning real existence and matter of fact."—(IV. p. 35.)

Abundant illustrations are given of this assertion, which, indeed, cannot be seriously doubted; but it does not follow that, because we are totally unable to say what cause preceded, or what effect will succeed, any event, we do not necessarily suppose that the event had a cause and will be succeeded by an effect. The scientific investigator who notes a new phenomenon may be utterly ignorant of its cause, but he will, without hesitation, seek for that cause. If you ask him why he does so, he will probably say that it must have had a cause; and thereby imply that his belief in causation is a necessary belief.

In the *Treatise* Hume, indeed, takes the bull by the horns:

"... as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle."—(I. p. 111.)

If Hume had been content to state what he believes to be matter of fact, and had abstained from giving superfluous reasons for that which is susceptible of being proved or disproved only by personal experience, his position would have been stronger. For it seems clear that, on the ground of observation, he is quite right. Any man who lets his fancy run riot in a waking dream may experience the existence at one moment, and the non-existence at the next, of phenomena which suggest no connexion of cause and effect. Not only so, but it is notorious that, to the unthinking mass of mankind, nine-tenths

of the facts of life do not suggest the relation of cause and effect; and they practically deny the existence of any such relation by attributing them to chance. Few gamblers but would stare if they were told that the falling of a die on a particular face is as much the effect of a definite cause as the fact of its falling; it is a proverb that "the wind bloweth where it listeth;" and even thoughtful men usually receive with surprise the suggestion, that the form of the crest of every wave that breaks, wind driven, on the sea-shore, and the direction of every particle of foam that flies before the gale, are the exact effects of definite causes; and, as such, must be capable of being determined, deductively, from the laws of motion and the properties of air and water. So, again, there are large numbers of highly intelligent persons who rather pride themselves on their fixed belief that our volitions have no cause; or that the will causes itself, which is either the same thing, or a contradiction in terms.

Hume's argument in support of what appears to be a true proposition, however, is of the circular sort, for the major premiss, that all distinct ideas are separable in thought, assumes the question at issue.

But the question whether the idea of causation is necessary or not, is really of very little importance. For, to say that an idea is necessary is simply to affirm that we cannot conceive the contrary; and the fact that we cannot conceive the contrary of any belief may be a presumption, but is certainly no proof of its truth.

In the well-known experiment of touching a single round object, such as a marble, with crossed fingers, it is utterly impossible to conceive that we have not two round objects under them; and, though light is undoubtedly a mere sensation arising in the brain, it is utterly

impossible to conceive that it is not outside the retina. In the same way, he who touches anything with a rod, not only is irresistibly led to believe that the sensation of contact is at the end of the rod, but is utterly incapable of conceiving that this sensation is really in his head. Yet that which is inconceivable is manifestly true in all these cases. The beliefs and the unbeliefs are alike necessary, and alike erroneous.

It is commonly urged that the axiom of causation cannot be derived from experience, because experience only proves that many things have causes, whereas the axiom declares that all things have causes. The syllogism, "many things which come into existence have causes, A has come into existence: therefore A had a cause," is obviously fallacious, if A is not previously shown to be one of the "many things." And this objection is perfectly sound so far as it goes. The axiom of causation cannot possibly be deduced from any general proposition which simply embodies experience. But it does not follow that the belief, or expectation, expressed by the axiom, is not a product of experience, generated antecedently to, and altogether independently of, the logically unjustifiable language in which we express it.

In fact, the axiom of causation resembles all other beliefs of expectation in being the verbal symbol of a purely automatic act of the mind, which is altogether extra-logical, and would be illogical, if it were not constantly verified by experience. Experience, as we have seen, stores up memories; memories generate expectations or beliefs—why they do so may be explained hereafter by proper investigation of cerebral physiology. But, to seek for the reason of the facts in the verbal symbols by which they are expressed, and to be astonished that it is not to be



found there, is surely singular; and what Hume did was to turn attention from the verbal proposition to the psychological fact of which it is the symbol.

“When any natural object or event is presented, it is impossible for us, by any sagacity or penetration, to discover, or even conjecture, without experience, what event will result from it, or to carry our foresight beyond that object, which is immediately present to the memory and senses. Even after one instance or experiment, where we have observed a particular event to follow upon another, we are not entitled to form a general rule, or foretell what will happen in like cases; it being justly esteemed an unpardonable temerity to judge of the whole course of nature from one single experiment, however accurate or certain. But when one particular species of events has always, in all instances, been conjoined with another, we make no longer any scruple of foretelling one upon the appearance of the other, and of employing that reasoning which can alone assure us of any matter of fact or existence. We then call the one object *Cause*, the other *Effect*. We suppose that there is some connexion between them: some power in the one, by which it infallibly produces the other, and operates with the greatest certainty and strongest necessity. . . . But there is nothing in a number of instances, different from every single instance, which is supposed to be exactly similar; except only, that after a repetition of similar instances, the mind is carried by habit, upon the appearance of one event, to expect its usual attendant, and to believe that it will exist. . . . The first time a man saw the communication of motion by impulse, as by the shock of two billiard balls, he could not pronounce that the one event was *connected*, but only that it was *conjoined*, with the other. After he has observed several instances of this nature, he then pronounces them to be *connected*. What alteration has happened to give rise to this new idea of *connexion*? Nothing but that he now *feels* these events to be *connected* in his im-

agination, and can readily foresee the existence of the one from the appearance of the other. When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference, by which they become proofs of each other's existence: a conclusion which is somewhat extraordinary, but which seems founded on sufficient evidence."—(IV. pp. 87—89.)

In the fifteenth section of the third part of the *Treatise*, under the head of the *Rules by which to Judge of Causes and Effects*, Hume gives a sketch of the method of allocating effects to their causes, upon which, so far as I am aware, no improvement was made down to the time of the publication of Mill's *Logic*. Of Mill's four methods, that of *agreement* is indicated in the following passage:—

"... where several different objects produce the same effect, it must be by means of some quality which we discover to be common amongst them. For as like effects imply like causes, we must always ascribe the causation to the circumstance wherein we discover the resemblance."—(I. p. 229.)

Next, the foundation of the *method of difference* is stated:—

"The difference in the effects of two resembling objects must proceed from that particular in which they differ. For, as like causes always produce like effects, when in any instance we find our expectation to be disappointed, we must conclude that this irregularity proceeds from some difference in the causes."—(I. p. 230.)

In the succeeding paragraph the *method of concomitant variations* is foreshadowed.

"When any object increases or diminishes with the increase or diminution of the cause, 'tis to be regarded as a

compounded effect, derived from the union of the several different effects which arise from the several different parts of the cause. The absence or presence of one part of the cause is here supposed to be always attended with the absence or presence of a proportionable part of the effect. This constant conjunction sufficiently proves that the one part is the cause of the other. We must, however, beware not to draw such a conclusion from a few experiments."—(I. p. 230.)

Lastly, the following rule, though awkwardly stated, contains a suggestion of the *method of residues*:—

"... an object which exists for any time in its full perfection without any effect, is not the sole cause of that effect, but requires to be assisted by some other principle, which may forward its influence and operation. For as like effects necessarily follow from like causes, and in a contiguous time and place, their separation for a moment shows that these causes are not complete ones."—(I. p. 230.)

In addition to the bare notion of necessary connexion between the cause and its effect, we undoubtedly find in our minds the idea of something resident in the cause which, as we say, produces the effect, and we call this something Force, Power, or Energy. Hume explains Force and Power as the results of the association with inanimate causes of the feelings of endeavour or resistance which we experience, when our bodies give rise to, or resist, motion.

If I throw a ball, I have a sense of effort which ends when the ball leaves my hand; and, if I catch a ball, I have a sense of resistance which comes to an end with the quiescence of the ball. In the former case, there is a strong suggestion of something having gone from myself into the ball; in the latter, of something having been received from the ball. Let any one hold a piece of iron

near a strong magnet, and the feeling that the magnet endeavours to pull the iron one way in the same manner as he endeavours to pull it in the opposite direction, is very strong.

As Hume says:—

“No animal can put external bodies in motion without the sentiment of a *nisus*, or endeavour; and every animal has a sentiment or feeling from the stroke or blow of an external object that is in motion. These sensations, which are merely animal, and from which we can, *a priori*, draw no inference, we are apt to transfer to inanimate objects, and to suppose that they have some such feelings whenever they transfer or receive motion.”—(IV. p. 91, *note*.)

It is obviously, however, an absurdity not less gross than that of supposing the sensation of warmth to exist in a fire, to imagine that the subjective sensation of effort or resistance in ourselves can be present in external objects, when they stand in the relation of causes to other objects.

To the argument, that we have a right to suppose the relation of cause and effect to contain something more than invariable succession, because, when we ourselves act as causes, or in volition, we are conscious of exerting power; Hume replies, that we know nothing of the feeling we call power except as effort or resistance; and that we have not the slightest means of knowing whether it has anything to do with the production of bodily motion or mental changes. And he points out, as Descartes and Spinoza had done before him, that when voluntary motion takes place, that which we will is not the immediate consequence of the act of volition, but something which is separated from it by a long chain of causes and effects. If the will is the cause of the movement of a limb, it can

be so only in the sense that the guard who gives the order to go on, is the cause of the transport of a train from one station to another.

“We learn from anatomy, that the immediate object of power in voluntary motion is not the member itself which is moved, but certain muscles and nerves and animal spirits, and perhaps something still more minute and unknown, through which the motion is successively propagated, ere it reach the member itself, whose motion is the immediate object of volition. Can there be a more certain proof that the power by which the whole operation is performed, so far from being directly and fully known by an inward sentiment or consciousness, is to the last degree mysterious and unintelligible? Here the mind wills a certain event: Immediately another event, unknown to ourselves, and totally different from the one intended, is produced: This event produces another equally unknown: Till at last, through a long succession, the desired event is produced.”—(IV. p. 78.)

A still stronger argument against ascribing an objective existence to force or power, on the strength of our supposed direct intuition of power in voluntary acts, may be urged from the unquestionable fact, that we do not know, and cannot know, that volition does cause corporeal motion; while there is a great deal to be said in favour of the view that it is no cause, but merely a concomitant of that motion. But the nature of volition will be more fitly considered hereafter.

## CHAPTER VII

## ORDER OF NATURE: MIRACLES.

IF our beliefs of expectation are based on our beliefs of memory, and anticipation is only inverted recollection, it necessarily follows that every belief of expectation implies the belief that the future will have a certain resemblance to the past. From the first hour of experience, onwards, this belief is constantly being verified, until old age is inclined to suspect that experience has nothing new to offer. And when the experience of generation after generation is recorded, and a single book tells us more than Methuselah could have learned, had he spent every waking hour of his thousand years in learning; when apparent disorders are found to be only the recurrent pulses of a slow working order, and the wonder of a year becomes the commonplace of a century; when repeated and minute examination never reveals a break in the chain of causes and effects; and the whole edifice of practical life is built upon our faith in its continuity; the belief that that chain has never been broken and will never be broken, becomes one of the strongest and most justifiable of human convictions. And it must be admitted to be a reasonable request, if we ask those who would have us put faith in the actual occurrence of interruptions of that order, to pro-

dice evidence in favour of their view, not only equal, but superior, in weight to that which leads us to adopt ours.

This is the essential argument of Hume's famous disquisition upon miracles; and it may safely be declared to be irrefragable. But it must be admitted that Hume has surrounded the kernel of his essay with a shell of very doubtful value.

The first step in this, as in all other discussions, is to come to a clear understanding as to the meaning of the terms employed. Argumentation whether miracles are possible, and, if possible, credible, is mere beating the air until the arguers have agreed what they mean by the word "miracles."

Hume, with less than his usual perspicuity, but in accordance with a common practice of believers in the miraculous, defines a miracle as a "violation of the laws of nature," or as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent."

There must, he says,—

"be an uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed or the miracle rendered credible but by an opposite proof which is superior."—(IV. p. 134.)

Every one of these dicta appears to be open to serious objection.

The word "miracle"—*miraculum*—in its primitive and legitimate sense, simply means something wonderful.

Cicero applies it as readily to the fancies of philosophers, "Portenta et miracula philosophorum somniant-

tium," as we do to the prodigies of priests. And the source of the wonder which a miracle excites is the belief, on the part of those who witness it, that it transcends or contradicts ordinary experience.

The definition of a miracle as a "violation of the laws of nature" is, in reality, an employment of language which, on the face of the matter, cannot be justified. For "nature" means neither more nor less than that which is; the sum of phenomena presented to our experience; the totality of events past, present, and to come. Every event must be taken to be a part of nature, until proof to the contrary is supplied. And such proof is, from the nature of the case, impossible.

Hume asks:—

"Why is it more than probable that all men must die; that lead cannot of itself remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood and is extinguished by water; unless it be that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of those laws, or, in other words, a miracle, to prevent them?"—(IV. p. 133.)

But the reply is obvious; not one of these events is "more than probable;" though the probability may reach such a very high degree that, in ordinary language, we are justified in saying that the opposite events are impossible. Calling our often verified experience a "law of nature" adds nothing to its value, nor in the slightest degree increases any probability that it will be verified again, which may arise out of the fact of its frequent verification.

If a piece of lead were to remain suspended of itself in the air, the occurrence would be a "miracle," in the sense of a wonderful event, indeed; but no one trained in the



methods of science would imagine that any law of nature was really violated thereby. He would simply set to work to investigate the conditions under which so highly unexpected an occurrence took place, and thereby enlarge his experience and modify his hitherto unduly narrow conception of the laws of nature.

The alternative definition, that a miracle is "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent" (IV. p. 134, *note*), is still less defensible. For a vast number of miracles have professedly been worked, neither by the Deity, nor by any invisible agent; but by Beelzebub and his compeers, or by very visible men.

Moreover, not to repeat what has been said respecting the absurdity of supposing that something which occurs is a transgression of laws, our only knowledge of which is derived from the observation of that which occurs; upon what sort of evidence can we be justified in concluding that a given event is the effect of a particular volition of the Deity, or of the interposition of some invisible (that is, unperceivable) agent? It may be so, but how is the assertion that it is so to be tested? If it be said that the event exceeds the power of natural causes, what can justify such a saying? The day-fly has better grounds for calling a thunderstorm supernatural, than has man, with his experience of an infinitesimal fraction of duration, to say that the most astonishing event that can be imagined is beyond the scope of natural causes.

"Whatever is intelligible and can be distinctly conceived, implies no contradiction, and can never be proved false by any demonstration, argument, or abstract reasoning *a priori*."  
— (IV. p. 44.)

So wrote Hume, with perfect justice, in his *Sceptical Doubts*. But a miracle, in the sense of a sudden and complete change in the customary order of nature, is intelligible, can be distinctly conceived, implies no contradiction; and, therefore, according to Hume's own showing, cannot be proved false by any demonstrative argument.

Nevertheless, in diametrical contradiction to his own principles, Hume says elsewhere:—

“It is a miracle that a dead man should come to life: because that has never been observed in any age or country.”—(IV. p. 134.)

That is to say, there is an uniform experience against such an event, and therefore, if it occurs, it is a violation of the laws of nature. Or, to put the argument in its naked absurdity, that which never has happened never can happen, without a violation of the laws of nature. In truth, if a dead man did come to life, the fact would be evidence, not that any law of nature had been violated, but that those laws, even when they express the results of a very long and uniform experience, are necessarily based on incomplete knowledge, and are to be held only as grounds of more or less justifiable expectation.

To sum up, the definition of a miracle as a suspension or a contravention of the order of Nature is self-contradictory, because all we know of the order of Nature is derived from our observation of the course of events of which the so-called miracle is a part. On the other hand, no event is too extraordinary to be impossible; and, therefore, if by the term miracles we mean only “extremely wonderful events,” there can be no just ground for denying the possibility of their occurrence.

But when we turn from the question of the possibility of miracles, however they may be defined, in the abstract, to that respecting the grounds upon which we are justified in believing any particular miracle, Hume's arguments have a very different value, for they resolve themselves into a simple statement of the dictates of common sense—which may be expressed in this canon: the more a statement of fact conflicts with previous experience, the more complete must be the evidence which is to justify us in believing it. It is upon this principle that every one carries on the business of common life. If a man tells me he saw a piebald horse in Piccadilly, I believe him without hesitation. The thing itself is likely enough, and there is no imaginable motive for his deceiving me. But if the same person tells me he observed a zebra there, I might hesitate a little about accepting his testimony, unless I were well satisfied, not only as to his previous acquaintance with zebras, but as to his powers and opportunities of observation in the present case. If, however, my informant assured me that he beheld a centaur trotting down that famous thoroughfare, I should emphatically decline to credit his statement; and this even if he were the most saintly of men and ready to suffer martyrdom in support of his belief. In such a case, I could, of course, entertain no doubt of the good faith of the witness; it would be only his competency, which unfortunately has very little to do with good faith or intensity of conviction, which I should presume to call in question.

Indeed, I hardly know what testimony would satisfy me of the existence of a live centaur. To put an extreme case, suppose the late Johannes Muller, of Berlin, the greatest anatomist and physiologist among my contemporaries, had barely affirmed he had seen a live cen-

taur, I should certainly have been staggered by the weight of an assertion coming from such an authority. But I could have got no further than a suspension of judgment. For, on the whole, it would have been more probable that even he had fallen into some error of interpretation of the facts which came under his observation, than that such an animal as a centaur really existed. And nothing short of a careful monograph, by a highly competent investigator, accompanied by figures and measurements of all the most important parts of a centaur, put forth under circumstances which could leave no doubt that falsification or misinterpretation would meet with immediate exposure, could possibly enable a man of science to feel that he acted conscientiously in expressing his belief in the existence of a centaur on the evidence of testimony.

This hesitation about admitting the existence of such an animal as a centaur, be it observed, does not deserve reproach, as scepticism, but moderate praise, as mere scientific good faith. It need not imply, and it does not, so far as I am concerned, any *a priori* hypothesis that a centaur is an impossible animal; or that his existence, if he did exist, would violate the laws of nature. Indubitably, the organisation of a centaur presents a variety of practical difficulties to an anatomist and physiologist; and a good many of those generalisations of our present experience, which we are pleased to call laws of nature, would be upset by the appearance of such an animal, so that we should have to frame new laws to cover our extended experience. Every wise man will admit that the possibilities of nature are infinite, and include centaurs; but he will not the less feel it his duty to hold fast, for the present, by the dictum of Lucretius, "Nam certe ex vivo Centauri non fit imago," and to cast the entire burthen of proof, that centaurs exist,

on the shoulders of those who ask him to believe the statement.

Judged by the canons either of common sense or of science, which are indeed one and the same, all "miracles" are centaurs, or they would not be miracles; and men of sense and science will deal with them on the same principles. No one who wishes to keep well within the limits of that which he has a right to assert will affirm that it is impossible that the sun and moon should ever have been made to appear to stand still in the valley of Ajalon; or that the walls of a city should have fallen down at a trumpet blast; or that water was turned into wine; because such events are contrary to uniform experience and violate laws of nature. For aught he can prove to the contrary, such events may appear in the order of nature to-morrow. But common sense and common honesty alike oblige him to demand from those who would have him believe in the actual occurrence of such events, evidence of a cogency proportionate to their departure from probability; evidence at least as strong as that which the man who says he has seen a centaur is bound to produce, unless he is content to be thought either more than credulous or less than honest.

But are there any miracles on record, the evidence for which fulfils the plain and simple requirements alike of elementary logic and of elementary morality?

Hume answers this question without the smallest hesitation, and with all the authority of a historical specialist:—

"There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned goodness, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive oth-

ers; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts, performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance of the testimony of men."—(IV. p. 135.)

These are grave assertions, but they are least likely to be challenged by those who have made it their business to weigh evidence and to give their decision under a due sense of the moral responsibility which they incur in so doing.

It is probable that few persons who proclaim their belief in miracles have considered what would be necessary to justify that belief in the case of a professed modern miracle-worker. Suppose, for example, it is affirmed that A.B. died, and that C.D. brought him to life again. Let it be granted that A.B. and C.D. are persons of unimpeachable honour and veracity; that C.D. is the next heir to A.B.'s estate, and therefore had a strong motive for not bringing him to life again; and that all A.B.'s relations, respectable persons who bore him a strong affection, or had otherwise an interest in his being alive, declared that they saw him die. Furthermore, let A.B. be seen after his recovery by all his friends and neighbours, and let his and their depositions, that he is now alive, be taken down before a magistrate of known integrity and acuteness: would all this constitute even presumptive evidence that C.D. had worked a miracle? Unquestionably not. For the most important link in the whole chain of evidence is wanting, and that is the proof that A.B. was really dead. The evidence of ordinary observers on such a point as this is absolutely worthless. And even medical evidence, un-

less the physician is a person of unusual knowledge and skill, may have little more value. Unless careful thermometric observation proves that the temperature has sunk below a certain point; unless the cadaveric stiffening of the muscles has become well established; all the ordinary signs of death may be fallacious, and the intervention of C.D. may have had no more to do with A.B.'s restoration to life than any other fortuitously coincident event.

It may be said that such a coincidence would be more wonderful than the miracle itself. Nevertheless history acquaints us with coincidences as marvellous.

On the 19th of February, 1842, Sir Robert Sale held Jellalabad with a small English force, and, daily expecting attack from an overwhelming force of Afghans, had spent three months in incessantly labouring to improve the fortifications of the town. Akbar Khan had approached within a few miles, and an onslaught of his army was supposed to be imminent. That morning an earthquake—

“nearly destroyed the town, threw down the greater part of the parapets, the central gate with the adjoining bastions, and a part of the new bastion which flanked it. Three other bastions were also nearly destroyed, whilst several large breaches were made in the curtains, and the Peshawur side, eighty feet long, was quite practicable, the ditch being filled, and the descent easy. Thus in one moment the labours of three months were in a great measure destroyed.”<sup>1</sup>

If Akbar Khan had happened to give orders for an assault in the early morning of the 19th of February, what good follower of the Prophet could have doubted that Allah had lent his aid? As it chanced, however, Mahome-

<sup>1</sup> Report of Captain Broadfoot, garrison engineer, quoted in Kaye's *Afghanistan*.

tan faith in the miraculous took another turn ; for the energetic defenders of the post had repaired the damage by the end of the month ; and the enemy, finding no signs of the earthquake when they invested the place, ascribed the supposed immunity of Jellalabad to English witchcraft.

But the conditions of belief do not vary with time or place ; and, if it is undeniable that evidence of so complete and weighty a character is needed, at the present time, for the establishment of the occurrence of such a wonder as that supposed, it has always been needful. Those who study the extant records of miracles with due attention will judge for themselves how far it has ever been supplied.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE REPROBATION OF THEOLOGY.

HUME seems to have had but two hearty dislikes: the one to the English nation, and the other to all the professors of dogmatic theology. The one aversion he vented only privately to his friends; but, if he is ever bitter in his public utterances, it is against 'priests' in general and theological enthusiasts and fanatics in particular; if he ever seems insincere, it is when he wishes to insult theologians by a parade of sarcastic respect. One need go no further than the peroration of the *Essay on Miracles* for a characteristic illustration.

"I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends and disguised enemies to the *Christian religion* who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on *Faith*, not on reason, and it is a sure method of exposing it to put

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<sup>1</sup> In a note to the *Essay on Superstition and Enthusiasm*, Hume is careful to define what he means by this term. "By priests I understand only the pretenders to power and dominion, and to a superior sanctity of character, distinct from virtue and good morals. These are very different from *clergymen*, who are set apart to the care of sacred matters, and the conducting of public devotions with greater decency and order. There is no rank of men more to be respected than the latter:"—(III. p. 83.)

it to such a trial as it is by no means fitted to endure . . . the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continual miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."—(IV. pp. 153, 154.)

It is obvious that, here and elsewhere, Hume, adopting a popular confusion of ideas, uses religion as the equivalent of dogmatic theology; and, therefore, he says, with perfect justice, that "religion is nothing but a species of philosophy" (iv. p. 171). Here no doubt lies the root of his antagonism. The quarrels of theologians and philosophers have not been about religion, but about philosophy; and philosophers not unfrequently seem to entertain the same feeling towards theologians that sportsmen cherish towards poachers. "There cannot be two passions more nearly resembling each other than hunting and philosophy," says Hume. And philosophic hunters are given to think that, while they pursue truth for its own sake, out of pure love for the chase (perhaps mingled with a little human weakness to be thought good shots), and by open and legitimate methods; their theological competitors too often care merely to supply the market of establishments; and disdain neither the aid of the snares of superstition, nor the cover of the darkness of ignorance.

Unless some foundation was given for this impression by the theological writers whose works had fallen in Hume's way, it is difficult to account for the depth of feeling which so good-natured a man manifests on the subject.

Thu. he writes in the *Natural History of Religion*, with quite unusual acerbity:—

“The chief objection to it [the ancient heathen mythology] with regard to this planet is, that it is not ascertained by any just reason or authority. The ancient tradition insisted on by heathen priests and theologers is but a weak foundation: and transmitted also such a number of contradictory reports, supported all of them by equal authority, that it became absolutely impossible to fix a preference among them. A few volumes, therefore, must contain all the polemical writings of pagan priests: And their whole theology must consist more of traditional stories and superstitious practices than of philosophical argument and controversy.

“But where theism forms the fundamental principle of any popular religion, that tenet is so conformable to sound reason, that philosophy is apt to incorporate itself with such a system of theology. And if the other dogmas of that system be contained in a sacred book, such as the Alcoran, or be determined by any visible authority, like that of the Roman pontiff, speculative reasoners naturally carry on their assent, and embrace a theory, which has been instilled into them by their earliest education, and which also possesses some degree of consistence and uniformity. But as these appearances are sure, all of them, to prove deceitful, philosophy will very soon find herself very unequally yoked with her new associate; and instead of regulating each principle, as they advance together, she is at every turn perverted to serve the purposes of superstition. For besides the unavoidable incoherences, which must be reconciled and adjusted, one may safely affirm, that all popular theology, especially the scholastic, has a kind of appetite for absurdity and contradiction. If that theology went not beyond reason and common sense, her doctrines would appear too easy and familiar. Amazement must of necessity be raised: Mystery

affected: Darkness and obscurity sought after: And a foundation of merit afforded to the devout votaries, who desire an opportunity of subduing their rebellious reason by the belief of the most unintelligible sophisms.

"Ecclesiastical history sufficiently confirms these reflections. When a controversy is started, some people always pretend with certainty to foretell the issue. Whichever opinion, say they, is most contrary to plain reason is sure to prevail; even when the general interest of the system requires not that decision. Though the reproach of heresy may, for some time, be bandied about among the disputants, it always rests at last on the side of reason. Any one, it is pretended, that has but learning enough of this kind to know the definition of *Arian*, *Pelagian*, *Erastian*, *Socinian*, *Sabellian*, *Eutychian*, *Nestorian*, *Monothelite*, &c., not to mention *Protestant*, whose fate is yet uncertain, will be convinced of the truth of this observation. It is thus a system becomes absurd in the end, merely from its being reasonable and philosophical in the beginning.

"To oppose the torrent of scholastic religion by such feeble maxims as these, that *it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be*, that *the whole is greater than a part*, that *two and three make five*, is pretending to stop the ocean with a bulrush. Will you set up profane reason against sacred mystery? No punishment is great enough for your impiety. And the same fires which were kindled for heretics will serve also for the destruction of philosophers."—(IV. pp. 481—3.)

Holding these opinions respecting the recognised systems of theology and their professors, Hume, nevertheless, seems to have had a theology of his own; that is to say, he seems to have thought (though, as will appear, it is needful for an expositor of his opinions to speak very guardedly on this point) that the problem of theism is susceptible of scientific treatment, with something more

than a negative result. His opinions are to be gathered from the eleventh section of the *Inquiry* (1748); from the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, which were written at least as early as 1751, though not published till after his death; and from the *Natural History of Religion*, published in 1757.

In the first two pieces, the reader is left to judge for himself which interlocutor in the dialogue represents the thoughts of the author; but, for the views put forward in the last, Hume accepts the responsibility. Unfortunately, this essay deals almost wholly with the historical development of theological ideas; and, on the question of the philosophical foundation of theology, does little more than express the writer's contentment with the argument from design.

"The whole frame of nature bespeaks an Intelligent Author; and no rational inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion."—(IV. p. 435.)

"Were men led into the apprehension of invisible, intelligent power by a contemplation of the works of nature, they could never possibly entertain any conception but of one single being, who bestowed existence and order on this vast machine, and adjusted all its parts according to one regular plan or connected system. For though, to persons of a certain turn of mind, it may not appear altogether absurd that several independent beings, endowed with superior wisdom, might conspire in the contrivance and execution of one regular plan, yet is this a merely arbitrary supposition, which, even if allowed possible, must be confessed neither to be supported by probability nor necessity. All things in the universe are evidently of a piece. Everything is adjusted to everything. One design prevails throughout the whole. And this uniformity leads the mind to acknowledge one au-

thor; because the conception of different authors, without any distinction of attributes or operations, serves only to give perplexity to the imagination, without bestowing any satisfaction on the understanding."—(IV. p. 412.)

Thus Hume appears to have sincerely accepted the two fundamental conclusions of the argument from design; firstly, that a Deity exists; and, secondly, that He possesses attributes more or less allied to those of human intelligence. But, at this embryonic stage of theology, Hume's progress is arrested; and, after a survey of the development of dogma, his "general corollary" is, that—

"The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject. But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarcely be upheld; did we not enlarge our view, and, opposing one species of superstition to another, set them a quarrelling; while we ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily make our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy."—(IV. p. 513.)

Thus it may be fairly presumed that Hume expresses his own sentiments in the words of the speech with which Philo concludes the *Dialogues*.

"If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, *That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*: If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it affords no inference that affects human life or can be the source of any action or forbearance: And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no further than to the human

intelligence, and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other qualities of the mind; if this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition as often as it occurs, and believe that the arguments on which it is established exceed the objections which lie against it? Some astonishment, indeed, will naturally arise from the greatness of the object; some melancholy from its obscurity; some contempt of human reason, that it can give no solution more satisfactory with regard to so extraordinary and magnificent a question. But believe me, Cleanthes, the most natural sentiment which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire and expectation that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance, by affording some more particular revelation to mankind, and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the Divine object of our faith."<sup>1</sup>—(H. p. 547—8.)

Such being the sum total of Hume's conclusions, it cannot be said that his theological burden is a heavy one. But, if we turn from the *Natural History of Religion*, to the *Treatise*, the *Inquiry*, and the *Dialogues*, the story of what happened to the ass laden with salt, who took to the water, irresistibly suggests itself. Hume's theism, such as it is, dissolves away in the dialectic river,

<sup>1</sup> It is needless to quote the rest of the passage, though I cannot refrain from observing that the recommendation which it contains, that a "man of letters" should become a philosophical sceptic as "the first and most essential step towards being a sound believing Christian," though adopted and largely acted upon by many a champion of orthodoxy in these days, is questionable in taste, if it be meant as a jest, and more than questionable in morality, if it is to be taken in earnest. To pretend that you believe any doctrine for no better reason than that you doubt everything else, would be dishonest, if it were not preposterous.

until nothing is left but the verbal sack in which it was contained.

Of the two theistic propositions to which Hume is committed, the first is the affirmation of the existence of a God, supported by the argument of the nature of causation. In the *Dialogues*, Philo, while pushing scepticism to its utmost limit, is nevertheless made to say that—

“ . . . where reasonable men treat these subjects, the question can never be concerning the *Being*, but only the *Nature*, of the Deity. The former truth, as you will observe, is unquestionable and self-evident. Nothing exists without a cause, and the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call God, and piously ascribe to him every species of perfection.”—(II. p. 439.)

The expositor of Hume, who wishes to do his work thoroughly, as far as it goes, cannot but fall into perplexity<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A perplexity which is increased rather than diminished by some passages in a letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto (March 10, 1751). Hume says, “ You would perceive by the sample I have given you that I make Cleanthes the hero of the dialogue; whatever you can think of, to strengthen that side of the argument, will be most acceptable to me. Any propensity you imagine I have to the other side crept in upon me against my will; and 'tis not long ago that I burned an old manuscript book, wrote before I was twenty, which contained, page after page, the gradual progress of my thoughts on this head. It began with an anxious scent after arguments to confirm the common opinion; doubts stole in, dissipated, returned; were again dissipated, returned again; and it was a perpetual struggle of a restless imagination against inclination—perhaps against reason. . . . I could wish Cleanthes' argument could be so analysed as to be rendered quite formal and regular. The propensity of the mind towards it—unless that propensity were as strong and universal as that to believe in our senses and experience—will still, I am afraid, be esteemed a suspicious foundation. 'Tis here I wish for your assistance. We must endeavour to prove that this propensity is somewhat differ-



when he contrasts this language with that of the sections of the third part of the *Treatise*, entitled, *Why a Cause is Always Necessary*, and *Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion*.

It is there shown, at large, that "every demonstration which has been produced for the necessity of a cause is fallacious and sophistical" (l. p. 111); it is affirmed that "there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity that every beginning of existence should be attended with such an object" [as a cause] (l. p. 227); and it is roundly asserted that it is "easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle" (l. p. 111). So far from the axiom, that whatever begins to exist must have a cause of existence, being "self-evident," as Philo calls it, Hume spends the greatest care in showing that it is nothing but the product of custom or experience.

And the doubt thus forced upon one, whether Philo ought to be taken as even, so far, Hume's mouth-piece, is increased when we reflect that we are dealing with an acute reasoner; and that there is no difficulty in drawing the deduction from Hume's own definition of a cause, that the very phrase, a "first cause," involves a contradiction in terms. He lays down that,—

"'Tis an established axiom both in natural and moral philosophy, that an object, which exists for any time in its full

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ent from our inclination to find our own figures in the clouds, our faces in the moon, our passions and sentiments even in inanimate matter. Such an inclination may and ought to be controlled, and can never be a legitimate ground of assent." (Burton, *Life*, l., p. 331—3.) The picture of Hume here drawn unconsciously by his own hand, is unlike enough to the popular conception of him as a careless sceptic loving doubt for doubt's sake.

perfection without producing another, is not its sole cause; but is assisted by some other principle which pushes it from its state of inactivity, and makes it exert that energy of which it was secretly possessed."—(I. p. 106.)

Now the "first cause" is assumed to have existed from all eternity, up to the moment at which the universe came into existence. Hence it cannot be the sole cause of the universe; in fact, it was no cause at all until it was "assisted by some other principle;" consequently the so-called "first cause," so far as it produces the universe, is in reality an effect of that other principle. Moreover, though, in the person of Philo, Hume assumes the axiom "that whatever begins to exist must have a cause," which he denies in the *Treatise*, he must have seen, for a child may see, that the assumption is of no real service.

Suppose Y to be the imagined first cause and Z to be its effect. Let the letters of the alphabet, *a, b, c, d, e, f, g*, in their order, represent successive moments of time, and let *g* represent the particular moment at which the effect Z makes its appearance. It follows that the cause Y could not have existed "in its full perfection" during the time *a—e*, for if it had, then the effect Z would have come into existence during that time, which, by the hypothesis, it did not do. The cause Y, therefore, must have come into existence at *f*, and if "everything that comes into existence has a cause," Y must have had a cause X operating at *e*; X, a cause W operating at *d*; and so on *ad infinitum*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kant employs substantially the same argument:—"Würde das höchste Wesen in dieser Kette der Bedingungen stehen, so würde es selbst ein Glied der Reihe derselben sein, und eben so wie die niederen Glieder, denen es vorgesetzt ist, noch fernere Untersuchungen wegen seines noch höheren Grundes erfahren."—*Kritik*. Ed. Hartenstein, p. 422.

If the only demonstrative argument for the existence of a Deity, which Hume advances, thus, literally, "goes to water" in the solvent of his philosophy, the reasoning from the evidence of design does not fare much better. If Hume really knew of any valid reply to Philo's arguments in the following passages of the *Dialogues*, he has dealt unfairly by the reader in concealing it:—

"But because I know you are not much swayed by names and authorities, I shall endeavour to show you, a little more distinctly, the inconveniences of that Anthropomorphism which you have embraced; and shall prove that there is no ground to suppose a plan of the world to be formed in the Divine mind, consisting of distinct ideas, differently arranged, in the same manner as an architect forms in his head the plan of a house which he intends to execute.

"It is not easy, I own, to see what is gained by this supposition, whether we judge the matter by *Reason* or by *Experience*. We are still obliged to mount higher, in order to find the cause of this cause, which you had assigned as satisfactory and conclusive.

"If *Reason* (I mean abstract reason, derived from inquiries *a priori*) be not alike mute with regard to all questions concerning cause and effect, this sentence at least it will venture to pronounce: That a mental world, or universe of ideas, requires a cause as much as does a material world, or universe of objects; and, if similar in its arrangement, must require a similar cause. For what is there in this subject which should occasion a different conclusion or inference? In an abstract view, they are entirely alike; and no difficulty attends the one supposition, which is not common to both of them.

"Again, when we will needs force *Experience* to pronounce some sentence, even on those subjects which lie beyond her sphere, neither can she perceive any material difference in this particular between these two kinds of worlds; but finds

them to be governed by similar principles, and to depend upon an equal variety of causes in their operations. We have specimens in miniature of both of them. Our own mind resembles the one; a vegetable or animal body the other. Let experience, therefore, judge from these samples. Nothing seems more delicate, with regard to its causes, than thought: and as these causes never operate in two persons after the same manner, so we never find two persons who think exactly alike. Nor indeed does the same person think exactly alike at any two different periods of time. A difference of age, of the disposition of his body, of weather, of food, of company, of books, of passions; any of these particulars, or others more minute, are sufficient to alter the curious machinery of thought, and communicate to it very different movements and operations. As far as we can judge, vegetables and animal bodies are not more delicate in their motions, nor depend upon a greater variety or more curious adjustment of springs and principles.

“How, therefore, shall we satisfy ourselves concerning the cause of that Being whom you suppose the Author of Nature, or, according to your system of anthropomorphism, the ideal world in which you trace the material? Have we not the same reason to trace the ideal world into another ideal world, or new intelligent principle? But if we stop and go no farther; why go so far? Why not stop at the material world? How can we satisfy ourselves without going on *in infinitum*? And, after all, what satisfaction is there in that infinite progression? Let us remember the story of the Indian philosopher and his elephant. It was never more applicable than to the present subject. If the material world rests upon a similar ideal world, this ideal world must rest upon some other; and so on without end. It were better, therefore, never to look beyond the present material world. By supposing it to contain the principle of its order within itself, we really assert it to be God; and the sooner we arrive at that Divine Being, so much the better. When

you go one step beyond the mundane system you only excite an inquisitive humour, which it is impossible ever to satisfy.

To say that the different ideas which compose the reason of the Supreme Being fall into order of themselves and by their own natures, is really to talk without any precise meaning. If it has a meaning, I would fain know why it is not as good sense to say that the parts of the material world fall into order of themselves, and by their own nature. Can the one opinion be intelligible while the other is not so?"—(II. p. 461—4.)

Cleanthes, in replying to Philo's discourse, says that it is very easy to answer his arguments; but, as not unfrequently happens with controversialists, he mistakes a reply for an answer, when he declares that—

"The order and arrangement of nature, the curious adjustment of final causes, the plain use and intention of every part and organ; all these bespeak in the clearest language one intelligent cause or author. The heavens and the earth join in the same testimony. The whole chorus of nature raises one hymn to the praises of its Creator."—(II. p. 465.)

Though the rhetoric of Cleanthes may be admired, its irrelevancy to the point at issue must be admitted. Wandering still further into the region of declamation, he works himself into a passion:

"You alone, or almost alone, disturb this general harmony. You start abstruse doubts, cavils, and objections: You ask me what is the cause of this cause? I know not: I care not: that concerns not me. I have found a Deity; and here I stop my inquiry. Let those go further who are wiser or more enterprising."—(II. p. 466.)

In other words, O Cleanthes, reasoning having taken you as far as you want to go, you decline to advance any

further; even though you fully admit that the very same reasoning forbids you to stop where you are pleased to cry halt! But this is simply forcing your reason to abdicate in favour of your caprice. It is impossible to imagine that Hume, of all men in the world, could have rested satisfied with such an act of high-treason against the sovereignty of philosophy. We may rather conclude that the last word of the discussion, which he gives to Philo, is also his own.

“If I am still to remain in utter ignorance of causes, and can absolutely give an explication of nothing, I shall never esteem it any advantage to shove off for a moment a difficulty, which, you acknowledge, must immediately, in its full force, recur upon me. Naturalists,<sup>1</sup> indeed, very justly explain particular effects by more general causes, though these general causes should remain in the end totally inexplicable; but they never surely thought it satisfactory to explain a particular effect by a particular cause, which was no more to be accounted for than the effect itself. An ideal system, arranged of itself, without a precedent design, is not a whit more explicable than a material one, which attains its order in a like manner; nor is there any more difficulty in the latter supposition than in the former.”—(II. p. 466.)

It is obvious that, if Hume had been pushed, he must have admitted that his opinion concerning the existence of a God, and of a certain remote resemblance of his intellectual nature to that of man, was an hypothesis which might possess more or less probability, but was incapable on his own principles of any approach to demonstration. And to all attempts to make any practical use of his theism; or to prove the existence of the attributes of

<sup>1</sup> *I. e.*, Natural philosophers.

infinite wisdom, benevolence, justice, and the like, which are usually ascribed to the Deity, by reason, he opposes a searching critical negation.<sup>1</sup>

The object of the speech of the imaginary Epicurean in the eleventh section of the *Inquiry*, entitled *Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State*, is to invert the argument of Bishop Butler's *Analogy*.

That famous defence of theology against the *a priori* scepticism of Freethinkers of the eighteenth century, who based their arguments on the inconsistency of the revealed scheme of salvation with the attributes of the Deity, consists, essentially, in conclusively proving that, from a moral point of view, Nature is at least as reprehensible as orthodoxy. If you tell me, says Butler, in effect, that any part of revealed religion must be false because it is inconsistent with the divine attributes of justice and mercy; I beg leave to point out to you, that there are undeniable natural facts which are fully open to the same objection. Since you admit that nature is the work of God, you are forced to allow that such facts are consistent with his attributes. Therefore, you must also admit, that the parallel facts in the scheme of orthodoxy are also consistent with them, and all your arguments to the contrary fall to the ground. Q.E.D. In fact, the solid sense of Butler left the Deism of the Freethinkers not a leg to stand upon. Perhaps, however, he did not remember the wise saying that "A man seemeth right in his own cause, but another cometh after and judgeth him." Hume's Epicurean philosopher adopts the main arguments of the *Analogy*, but unfortunately drives them home to a

<sup>1</sup> Hume's letter to Mure of Caldwell, containing a criticism of Leechman's sermon (Burton I. p. 163), bears strongly on this point.

conclusion of which the good Bishop would hardly have approved.

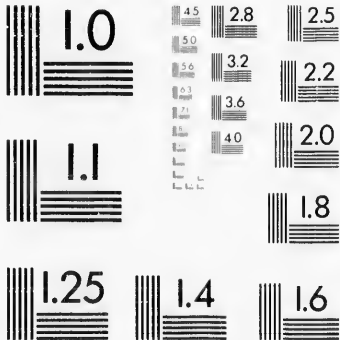
"I deny a Providence, you say, and supreme governor of the world, who guides the course of events, and punishes the vicious with infamy and disappointment, and rewards the virtuous with honour and success in all their undertakings. But surely I deny not the course itself of events, which is open to every one's inquiry and examination. I acknowledge that, in the present order of things, virtue is attended with more peace of mind than vice, and meets with a more favourable reception from the world. I am sensible that, according to the past experience of mankind, friendship is the chief joy of human life, and moderation the only source of tranquillity and happiness. I never balance between the virtuous and the vicious course of life; but am sensible that, to a well-disposed mind, every advantage is on the side of the former. And what can you say more, allowing all your suppositions and reasonings? You tell me, indeed, that this disposition of things proceeds from intelligence and design. But, whatever it proceeds from, the disposition itself, on which depends our happiness and misery, and consequently our conduct and deportment in life, is still the same. It is still open for me, as well as you, to regulate my behaviour by my experience of past events. And if you affirm that, while a divine providence is allowed, and a supreme distributive justice in the universe, I ought to expect some more particular reward of the good, and punishment of the bad, beyond the ordinary course of events, I here find the same fallacy which I have before endeavoured to detect. You persist in imagining, that if we grant that divine existence for which you so earnestly contend, you may safely infer consequences from it, and add something to the experienced order of nature, by arguing from the attributes which you ascribe to your gods. You seem not to remember that all your reasonings on this subject can only be drawn from effects to causes; and that every argument, deduced from causes to effects, must of ne-





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cessity be a gross sophism, since it is impossible for you to know anything of the cause, but what you have antecedently not inferred, but discovered to the full, in the effect.

“But what must a philosopher think of those vain reasoners who, instead of regarding the present scene of things as the sole object of their contemplation, so far reverse the whole course of nature as to render this life merely a passage to something further; a porch which leads to a greater and vastly different building; a prologue which serves only to introduce the piece, and give it more grace and propriety? Whence, do you think, can such philosophers derive their idea of the gods? From their own conceit and imagination surely. For if they derive it from the present phenomena, it would never point to anything further, but must be exactly adjusted to them. That the divinity may *possibly* be endowed with attributes which we have never seen exerted, may be governed by principles of action which we cannot discover to be satisfied; all this will freely be allowed. But still this is mere *possibility* and hypothesis. We never can have reason to *infer* any attributes or any principles of action in him, but so far as we know them to have been exerted and satisfied.

“*Are there any marks of a distributive justice in the world?* If you answer in the affirmative, I conclude that, since justice here exerts itself, it is satisfied. If you reply in the negative, I conclude that you have then no reason to ascribe justice, in our sense of it, to the gods. If you hold a medium between affirmation and negation, by saying that the justice of the gods at present exerts itself in part, but not in its full extent, I answer that you have no reason to give it any particular extent, but only so far as you see it, *at present*, exert itself.”  
—(IV. p. 164—6.)

Thus, the Freethinkers said, the attributes of the Deity being what they are, the scheme of orthodoxy is inconsistent with them; whereupon Butler gave the crushing re-

ply: Agreeing with you as to the attributes of the Deity, nature, by its existence, proves that the things to which you object are quite consistent with them. To whom enters Hume's Epicurean with the remark: Then, as nature is our only measure of the attributes of the Deity in their practical manifestation, what warranty is there for supposing that such measure is anywhere transcended? That the "other side" of nature, if there be one, is governed on different principles from this side?

Truly on this topic silence is golden; while speech reaches not even the dignity of sounding brass or tinkling cymbal, and is but the weary clatter of an endless logomachy. One can but suspect that Hume also had reached this conviction; and that his shadowy and inconsistent theism was the expression of his desire to rest in a state of mind which distinctly excluded negation, while it included as little as possible of affirmation, respecting a problem which he felt to be hopelessly insoluble.

But, whatever might be the views of the philosopher as to the arguments for theism, the historian could have no doubt respecting its many-shaped existence, and the great part which it has played in the world. Here, then, was a body of natural facts to be investigated scientifically, and the result of Hume's inquiries is embodied in the remarkable essay on the *Natural History of Religion*. Hume anticipated the results of modern investigation in declaring fetishism and polytheism to be the form in which savage and ignorant men naturally clothe their ideas of the unknown influences which govern their destiny; and they are polytheists rather than monotheists because,—

“... the first ideas of religion arose, not from a contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and

fears which actuate the human mind . . . in order to carry men's attention beyond the present course of things, or lead them into any inference concerning invisible intelligent power, they must be actuated by some passion which prompts their thought and reflection, some motive which urges their first inquiry. But what passion shall we have recourse to for explaining an effect of such mighty consequence? Not speculative curiosity merely, or the pure love of truth. That motive is too refined for such gross apprehensions, and would lead men into inquiries concerning the frame of nature, a subject too large and comprehensive for their narrow capacities. No passions, therefore, can be supposed to work on such barbarians, but the ordinary affections of human life; the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food, and other necessaries. Agitated by hopes and fears of this nature, especially the latter, men scrutinize, with a trembling curiosity, the course of future causes, and examine the various and contrary events of human life. And in this disordered scene, with eyes still more disordered and astonished, they see the first obscure traces of divinity."—(IV. pp. 443, 4.)

The shape assumed by these first traces of divinity is that of the shadows of men's own minds, projected out of themselves by their imaginations:—

"There is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. . . . The *unknown causes* which continually employ their thought appearing always in the same aspect, are all apprehended to be of the same kind or species. Nor is it long before we ascribe to them thought, and reason, and passion, and sometimes even the limbs and figures of men, in order to bring them nearer to a resemblance with ourselves."—(IV. p. 446—7.)

Hume asks whether polytheism really deserves the name of theism.

"Our ancestors in Europe, before the revival of letters, believed as we do at present, that there was one supreme God, the author of nature, whose power, though in itself uncontrollable, was yet often exerted by the interposition of his angels and subordinate ministers, who executed his sacred purposes. But they also believed that all nature was full of other invisible powers: fairies, goblins, elves, sprites; beings stronger and mightier than men, but much inferior to the celestial natures who surround the throne of God. Now, suppose that any one, in these ages, had denied the existence of God and of his angels, would not his impiety justly have deserved the appellation of atheism, even though he had still allowed, by some odd capricious reasoning, that the popular stories of elves and fairies were just and well grounded? The difference, on the one hand, between such a person and a genuine theist, is infinitely greater than that, on the other, between him and one that absolutely excludes all invisible intelligent power. And it is a fallacy, merely from the casual resemblance of names, without any conformity of meaning, to rank such opposite opinions under the same denomination.

"To any one who considers justly of the matter, it will appear that the gods of the polytheists are no better than the elves and fairies of our ancestors, and merit as little as any pious worship and veneration. These pretended religionists are really a kind of superstitious atheists, and acknowledge no being that corresponds to our idea of a Deity. No first principle of mind or thought; no supreme government and administration; no divine contrivance or intention in the fabric of the world."—(IV. p. 450—51.)

The doctrine that you may call an atheist anybody whose ideas about the Deity do not correspond with your own, is so largely acted upon by persons who are certainly

not of Hume's way of thinking, and probably, so far from having read him, would shudder to open any book bearing his name, except the *History of England*, that it is surprising to trace the theory of their practice to such a source.

But on thinking the matter over, this theory seems so consonant with reason, that one feels ashamed of having suspected many excellent persons of being moved by mere malice and viciousness of temper to call other folks atheists, when, after all, they have been obeying a purely intellectual sense of fitness. As Hume says, truly enough, it is a mere fallacy, because two people use the same names for things, the ideas of which are mutually exclusive, to rank such opposite opinions under the same denomination. If the Jew says that the Deity is absolute unity, and that it is sheer blasphemy to say that He ever became incarnate in the person of a man; and if the Trinitarian says that the Deity is numerically three as well as numerically one, and that it is sheer blasphemy to say that He did not so become incarnate, it is obvious enough that each must be logically held to deny the existence of the other's Deity. Therefore, that each has a scientific right to call the other an atheist; and that, if he refrains, it is only on the ground of decency and good manners, which should restrain an honourable man from employing even scientifically justifiable language, if custom has given it an abusive connotation. While one must agree with Hume, then, it is, nevertheless, to be wished that he had not set the bad example of calling polytheists "superstitious atheists." It probably did not occur to him that, by a parity of reasoning, the Unitarians might justify the application of the same language to the Ultramontanes, and *vice versa*. But, to return from a digression which may not be whol-

ly unprofitable, Hume proceeds to show in what manner polytheism incorporated physical and moral allegories, and naturally accepted hero-worship; and he sums up his views of the first stages of the evolution of theology as follows:—

“These then are the general principles of polytheism, founded in human nature, and little or nothing dependent on caprice or accident. As the *causes* which bestow happiness or misery are in general very little known and very uncertain, our anxious concern endeavours to attain a determinate idea of them: and finds no better expedient than to represent them as intelligent, voluntary agents, like ourselves, only somewhat superior in power and wisdom. The limited influence of these agents, and their proximity to human weakness, introduce the various distribution and division of their authority, and thereby give rise to allegory. The same principles naturally deify mortals, superior in power, courage, or understanding, and produce hero-worship; together with fabulous history and mythological tradition, in all its wild and unaccountable forms. And as an invisible spiritual intelligence is an object too refined for vulgar apprehension, men naturally affix it to some sensible representation; such as either the more conspicuous parts of nature, or the statues, images, and pictures, which a more refined age forms of its divinities.”—(IV. p. 461.)

How did the further stage of theology, monotheism, arise out of polytheism? Hume replies, certainly not by reasonings from first causes or any sort of fine-drawn logic:—

“Even at this day, and in Europe, ask any of the vulgar why he believes in an Omnipotent Creator of the world, he will never mention the beauty of final causes, of which he is wholly ignorant: He will not hold out his hand and bid you contemplate the suppleness and variety of joints in his fin-



gers. their bending all one way, the counterpoise which they receive from the thumb, the softness and fleshy parts of the inside of the hand, with all the other circumstances which render that member fit for the use to which it was destined. To these he has been long accustomed; and he beholds them with listlessness and unconcern. He will tell you of the sudden and unexpected death of such-a-one; the fall and bruise of such another; the excessive drought of this season; the cold and rains of another. These he ascribes to the immediate operation of Providence: And such events as, with good reasoners, are the chief difficulties in admitting a Supreme Intelligence, are with him the sole arguments for it. . . .

“We may conclude, therefore, upon the whole, that since the vulgar, in nations which have embraced the doctrine of theism, still build it upon irrational and superstitious grounds, they are never led into that opinion by any process of argument, but by a certain train of thinking, more suitable to their genius and capacity.

“It may readily happen, in an idolatrous nation, that though men admit the existence of several limited deities, yet there is some one God whom, in a particular manner, they make the object of their worship and adoration. They may either suppose that, in the distribution of power and territory among the Gods, their nation was subjected to the jurisdiction of that particular deity; or, reducing heavenly objects to the model of things below, they may represent one god as the prince or supreme magistrate of the rest, who, though of the same nature, rules them with an authority like that which an earthly sovereign exerts over his subjects and vassals. Whether this god, therefore, be considered as their peculiar patron, or as the general sovereign of heaven, his votaries will endeavour, by every art, to insinuate themselves into his favour; and supposing him to be pleased, like themselves, with praise and flattery, there is no eulogy or exaggeration which will be spared in their addresses to him. In

proportion as men's fears or distresses become more urgent, they still invent new strains of adulation; and even he who outdoes his predecessor in swelling the titles of his divinity, is sure to be outdone by his successor in newer and more pompous epithets of praise. Thus they proceed, till at last they arrive at infinity itself, beyond which there is no further progress: And it is well if, in striving to get further, and to represent a magnificent simplicity, they run not into inexplicable mystery, and destroy the intelligent nature of their deity, on which alone any rational worship or adoration can be founded. While they confine themselves to the notion of a perfect being, the Creator of the world, they coincide, by chance, with the principles of reason and true philosophy; though they are guided to that notion, not by reason, of which they are in a great measure incapable, but by the adulation and fears of the most vulgar superstition.—(IV. p. 463—6.)

“Nay, if we should suppose, what never happens, that a popular religion were found, in which it was expressly declared that nothing but morality could gain the divine favour; if an order of priests were instituted to inculcate this opinion, in daily sermons, and with all the arts of persuasion; yet so inveterate are the people's prejudices, that, for want of some other superstition, they would make the very attendance on these sermons the essentials of religion, rather than place them in virtue and good morals. The sublime prologue of Zaleucus' laws inspired not the Locrians, so far as we can learn, with any sounder notions of the measures of acceptance with the deity, than were familiar to the other Greeks.”—(IV. p. 505.)

It has been remarked that Hume's writings are singularly devoid of local colour; of allusions to the scenes with which he was familiar, and to the people from whom he sprang. Yet, surely, the Lowlands of Scotland were more in his thoughts than the Zephyrean promontory, and the

hard visage of John Knox peered from behind the mask of Zaleucus, when this passage left his pen. Nay, might not an acute German critic discern therein a reminiscence of that eminently Scottish institution, a "Holy Fair?" where, as Hume's young contemporary sings:—

"\* \* \* opens ont his cauld harangues  
On practice and on morals;  
An' aff the godly pour in thrangs  
To gie the jars and barrels  
A lift that day.

"What signifies his barren shine  
Of moral powers and reason?  
His English style and gesture fine  
Are a' clean ont of season.  
Like Soerates or Antonine,  
Or some auld pagan heathen,  
The moral man he does define,  
But ne'er a word o' faith in  
That's right that day."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Burns published the *Holy Fair* only ten years after Hume's death.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## THE SOUL: THE DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY.

DESCARTES taught that an absolute difference of kind separates matter, as that which possesses extension, from spirit, as that which thinks. They not only have no character in common, but it is inconceivable that they should have any. On the assumption that the attributes of the two were wholly different, it appeared to be a necessary consequence that the hypothetical causes of these attributes—their respective substances—must be totally different. Notably, in the matter of divisibility, since that which has no extension cannot be divisible, it seemed that the *chose pensante*, the soul, must be an indivisible entity.

Later philosophers, accepting this notion of the soul, were naturally much perplexed to understand how, if matter and spirit had nothing in common, they could act and react on one another. All the changes of matter being modes of motion, the difficulty of understanding how a moving extended material body was to affect a thinking thing which had no dimension, was as great as that involved in solving the problem of how to hit a nominative case with a stick. Hence, the successors of Descartes either found themselves obliged, with the Occasionalists, to call in the aid of the Deity, who was supposed to be

a sort of go-between betwixt matter and spirit; or they had recourse, with Leibnitz, to the doctrine of pre-established harmony, which denies any influence of the body on the soul, or *vice versa*, and compared matter and spirit to two clocks so accurately regulated to keep time with one another, that the one struck whenever the other pointed to the hour; or, with Berkeley, they abolished the "substance" of matter altogether, as a superfluity, though they failed to see that the same arguments equally justified the abolition of soul as another superfluity, and the reduction of the universe to a series of events or phenomena; or, finally, with Spinoza, to whom Berkeley makes a perilously close approach, they asserted the existence of only one substance, with two chief attributes, the one thought, and the other extension.

There remained only one possible position, which, had it been taken up earlier, might have saved an immensity of trouble; and that was to affirm that we do not, and cannot, know anything about the "substance" either of the thinking thing or of the extended thing. And Hume's sound common sense led him to defend this thesis, which Locke had already foreshadowed, with respect to the question of the substance of the soul. Hume enunciates two opinions. The first is that the question itself is unintelligible, and therefore cannot receive any answer; the second is that the popular doctrine respecting the immateriality, simplicity, and indivisibility of a thinking substance is a "true atheism, and will serve to justify all those sentiments for which Spinoza is so universally infamous."

In support of the first opinion, Hume points out that it is impossible to attach any definite meaning to the word "substance" when employed for the hypothetical

substratum of soul and matter. For if we define substance as that which may exist by itself, the definition does not distinguish the soul from perceptions. It is perfectly easy to conceive that states of consciousness are self-subsistent. And, if the substance of the soul is defined as that in which perceptions inhere, what is meant by the inherence? Is such inherence conceivable? If conceivable, what evidence is there of it? And what is the use of a substratum to things which, for anything we know to the contrary, are capable of existing by themselves?

Moreover, it may be added, supposing the soul has a substance, how do we know that it is different from the substance, which, on like grounds, must be supposed to underlie the qualities of matter?

Again, if it be said that our personal identity requires the assumption of a substance which remains the same while the accidents of perception shift and change, the question arises what is meant by personal identity?

"For my part," says Hume, "when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may be truly said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death, and I could neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate, after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is further requisite to make me a perfect nonentity. If any one, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he

may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may perhaps perceive something simple and continued which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me.

“But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. . . . The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance, pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in 't at one time, nor *identity* in different, whatever natural propensity we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place where these scenes are represented, or of the materials of which it is composed.

“What then gives so great a propensity to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possessed of an invariable and uninterrupted existence through the whole course of our lives? In order to answer this question, we must distinguish between personal identity as it regards our thought and imagination, and as it regards our passions, or the concern we take in ourselves. The first is our present subject; and to explain it perfectly we must take the matter pretty deep, and account for that identity which we attribute to plants and animals, there being a great analogy betwixt it and the identity of a self or person.”—(I. p. 321, 322.)

Perfect identity is exhibited by an object which remains unchanged throughout a certain time; perfect diversity is seen in two or more objects which are separated by intervals of space and periods of time. But in both these

cases there is no sharp line of demarcation between identity and diversity, and it is impossible to say when an object ceases to be one and becomes two.

When a sea-anemone multiplies by division, there is a time during which it is said to be one animal partially divided; but, after a while, it becomes two animals adherent together, and the limit between these conditions is purely arbitrary. So in mineralogy, a crystal of a definite chemical composition may have its substance replaced, particle by particle, by another chemical compound. When does it lose its primitive identity and become a new thing?

Again, a plant or an animal, in the course of its existence, from the condition of an egg or seed to the end of life, remains the same neither in form, nor in structure, nor in the matter of which it is composed: every attribute it possesses is constantly changing, and yet we say that it is always one and the same individual. And if, in this case, we attribute identity without supposing an indivisible immaterial something to underlie and condition that identity, why should we need the supposition in the case of that succession of changeful phenomena we call the mind?

In fact, we ascribe identity to an individual plant or animal, simply because there has been no moment of time at which we could observe any division of it into parts separated by time or space. Every experience we have of it is as one thing and not as two; and we sum up our experiences in the ascription of identity, although we know quite well that, strictly speaking, it has not been the same for any two moments.

So with the mind. Our perceptions flow in even succession; the impressions of the present moment are inextricably mixed up with the memories of yesterday and



the expectations of to-morrow, and all are connected by the links of cause and effect.

“. . . as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity. Whatever changes he endures, his several parts are still connected by the relation of causation. And in this view our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures.

“As memory alone acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions, 'tis to be considered, upon that account chiefly, as the source of personal identity. Had we no memory we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects which constitute our self or person. But having once acquired this notion of causation from the memory, we can extend the same chain of causes, and consequently the identity of our persons, beyond our memory, and can comprehend times, and circumstances, and actions, which we have entirely forgot, but suppose in general to have existed. For how few of our past actions are there of which we have any memory? Who can tell me, for instance, what were his thoughts and actions on the first of January, 1715, the eleventh of March, 1719, and the third of August, 1733? Or will he affirm, because he has entirely forgot the incidents of those days, that the present self is not the same person with the self of that time, and by that means overturn all the most established notions of personal identity? In this view, therefore, memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity, by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. 'Twill be incumbent on those who affirm that memory produces entirely our person-

al identity, to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory.

“The whole of this doctrine leads us to a conclusion which is of great importance in the present affair, viz., that all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties. Identity depends on the relations of ideas, and these relations produce identity by means of that easy transition they occasion. But as the relations, and the easiness of the transition may diminish by insensible degrees, we have no just standard by which we can decide any dispute concerning the time when they acquire or lose a title to the name of identity. All the disputes concerning the identity of connected objects are merely verbal, except so far as the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union, as we have already observed.

“What I have said concerning the first origin and uncertainty of our notion of identity, as applied to the human mind, may be extended, with little or no variation, to that of *simplicity*. An object, whose different co-existent parts are bound together by a close relation, operates upon the imagination after much the same manner as one perfectly simple and indivisible, and requires not a much greater stretch of thought in order to its conception. From this similarity of operation we attribute a simplicity to it, and feign a principle of union as the support of this simplicity, and the centre of all the different parts and qualities of the object.”—(I. p. 331—3.)

The final result of Hume's reasoning comes to this: As we use the name of body for the sum of the phenomena which make up our corporeal existence, so we employ the name of soul for the sum of the phenomena which constitute our mental existence; and we have no more reason, in the latter case, than in the former, to suppose that there

is anything beyond the phenomena which answers to the name. In the case of the soul, as in that of the body, the idea of substance is a mere fiction of the imagination. This conclusion is nothing but a rigorous application of Berkeley's reasoning concerning matter to mind, and it is fully adopted by Kant.<sup>1</sup>

Having arrived at the conclusion that the conception of a soul, as a substantive thing, is a mere figment of the imagination; and that, whether it exists or not, we can by no possibility know anything about it, the inquiry as to the durability of the soul may seem superfluous.

Nevertheless, there is still a sense in which, even under these conditions, such an inquiry is justifiable. Leaving aside the problem of the substance of the soul, and taking the word "soul" simply as a name for the series of mental phenomena which make up an individual mind; it remains open to us to ask whether that series commenced with, or before, the series of phenomena which constitute the corresponding individual body; and whether it terminates with the end of the corporeal series, or goes on after the existence of the body has ended. And in both cases there arises the further question, whether the excess of duration of the mental series over that of the body is finite or infinite.

Hume has discussed some of these questions in the remarkable essay *On the Immortality of the Soul*, which was not published till after his death, and which seems long to have remained but little known. Nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup> "Our internal intuition show<sup>e</sup> no permanent existence, for the Ego is only the consciousness of my thinking." "There is no means whatever by which we can learn anything respecting the constitution of the soul, so far as regards the possibility of its separate existence."—*Kritik von den Paralogismen der reinen Vernunft*.

indeed, possibly, for that reason, its influence has been manifested in unexpected quarters, and its main arguments have been adduced by archiepiscopal and episcopal authority in evidence of the value of revelation. Dr. Whately,<sup>1</sup> sometime Archbishop of Dublin, paraphrases Hume, though he forgets to cite him; and Bishop Courtenay's elaborate work,<sup>2</sup> dedicated to the Archbishop, is a development of that prelate's version of Hume's essay.

This little paper occupies only some ten pages, but it is not wonderful that it attracted an acute logician like Whately, for it is a model of clear and vigorous statement. The argument hardly admits of condensation, so that I must let Hume speak for himself:—

“By the mere light of reason it seems difficult to prove the immortality of the soul: the arguments for it are commonly derived either from metaphysical topics, or moral, or physical. But in reality it is the gospel, and the gospel alone, that has brought *life and immortality* to light.”<sup>3</sup>

“1. Metaphysical topics suppose that the soul is immaterial, and that 'tis impossible for thought to belong to a material substance.”<sup>4</sup> But just metaphysics teach us that the no-

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Some of the Peculiarities of the Christian Religion* (Essay I. Revelation of a Future State), by Richard Whately, D.D., Archbishop of Dublin. Fifth Edition, revised, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> *The Future States: their Evidences and Nature; considered on Principles Physical, Moral, and Scriptural, with the Design of showing the Value of the Gospel Revelation*, by the Right Rev. Reginald Courtenay, D.D., Lord Bishop of Kingston (Jamaica), 1857.

<sup>3</sup> “Now that ‘Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,’ and that in the most literal sense, which implies that the revelation of the doctrine is *peculiar* to his Gospel, seems to be at least the most obvious meaning of the Scriptures of the New Testament.”—Whately, *l.c.* p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Compare, *Of the Immateriality of the Soul*, Section V. of Part

tion of substance is wholly confused and imperfect; and that we have no other idea of any substance, than as an aggregate of particular qualities inhering in an unknown something. Matter, therefore, and spirit, are at bottom equally unknown, and we cannot determine what qualities inhere in the one or in the other.<sup>1</sup> They likewise teach us that nothing can be decided *a priori* concerning any cause or effect; and that experience being the only source of our judgments of this nature, we cannot know from any other principle, whether matter, by its structure or arrangement, may not be the cause of thought. Abstract reasonings cannot decide any question of fact or existence. But admitting a spiritual substance to be dispersed throughout the universe, like the ethereal fire of the Stoics, and to be the only inherent subject of thought, we have reason to conclude, from *analogy*, that nature uses it after the manner she does the other substance, *matter*. She employs it as a kind of paste or clay; modifies it into a variety of forms or existences; dissolves after a time each modification, and from its substance erects a new form. As the same material substance may successively compose the bodies of all animals, the same spiritual substance may compose their minds: Their consciousness, or that system of thought which they formed during life, may be continually dissolved by death, and nothing interests them in the new modification. The most positive assertors of the mortality of the soul never denied the immortality of its substance; and that an immaterial substance, as well as a material, may

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IV., Book I., of the *Treatise*, in which Hume concludes (I. p. 319) that, whether it be material or immaterial, "in both cases the metaphysical arguments for the immortality of the soul are equally inconclusive; and in both cases the moral arguments and those derived from the analogy of nature are equally strong and convincing."

<sup>1</sup> "The question again respecting the materiality of the soul is one which I am at a loss to understand clearly, till it shall have been clearly determined *what matter is*. We know nothing of it, any more than of mind, except its attributes."—Whately, *l.c.* p. 66.

lose its memory or consciousness, appears in part from experience, if the soul be immaterial. Reasoning from the common course of nature, and without supposing any new interposition of the Supreme Cause, which ought always to be excluded from philosophy, *what is incorruptible must also be ingenerable*. The soul, therefore, if immortal, existed before our birth, and if the former existence noways concerned us, neither will the latter. Animals undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason, though in a more imperfect manner than men: Are their souls also immaterial and immortal?"<sup>1</sup>

Hume next proceeds to consider the moral arguments, and chiefly

"... those derived from the justice of God, which is supposed to be further interested in the future punishment of the vicious and reward of the virtuous."

But if by the justice of God we mean the same attribute which we call justice in ourselves, then why should either reward or punishment be extended beyond this life?<sup>2</sup> Our sole means of knowing anything is the rea-

<sup>1</sup> "None of those who contend for the natural immortality of the soul . . . have been able to extricate themselves from one difficulty, viz., that all their arguments apply, with exactly the same force, to prove an immortality, not only of *brutes*, but even of *plants*; though in such a conclusion as this they are never willing to acquiesce."—Whately, *l.c.* p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> "Nor are we therefore authorised to infer *a priori*, independent of Revelation, a future state of retribution, from the irregularities prevailing in the present life, since that future state does not account fully for these irregularities. It may explain, indeed, how present evil may be conducive to future good, but not why the good could not be attained without the evil; it may reconcile with our notions of the divine justice the present prosperity of the wicked, but it does not account for the existence of the wicked."—Whately, *l.c.* pp. 69, 70.

soning faculty which God has given us; and that reasoning faculty not only denies us any conception of a future state, but fails to furnish a single valid argument in favour of the belief that the mind will endure after the dissolution of the body.

“. . . If any purpose of nature be clear, we may affirm that the whole scope and intention of man's creation, so far as we can judge by natural reason, is limited to the present life.”

To the argument that the powers of man are so much greater than the needs of this life require, that they suggest a future scene in which they can be employed, Hume replies:—

“If the reason of man gives him great superiority above other animals, his necessities are proportionably multiplied upon him; his whole time, his whole capacity, activity, courage, and passion, find sufficient employment in fencing against the miseries of his present condition; and frequently, nay, almost always, are too slender for the business assigned them. A pair of shoes, perhaps, was never yet wrought to the highest degree of perfection that commodity is capable of attaining; yet it is necessary, at least very useful, that there should be some politicians and moralists, even some geometers, poets, and philosophers, among mankind. The powers of men are no more superior to their wants, considered merely in this life, than those of foxes and hares are, compared to *their* wants and to their period of existence. The inference from parity of reason is therefore obvious.”

In short, Hume argues that, if the faculties with which we are endowed are unable to discover a future state, and if the most attentive consideration of their nature serves to show that they are adapted to this life and nothing more, it is surely inconsistent with any conception of justice that we should be dealt with as if we had all along

had a secret knowledge of the fact thus carefully concealed from us. What should we think of the justice of a father who gave his son every reason to suppose that a trivial fault would only be visited by a box on the ear; and then, years afterwards, put him on the rack for a week for the same fault?

Again, the suggestion arises, if God is the cause of all things, he is responsible for evil as well as for good; and it appears utterly irreconcilable with our notions of justice that he should punish another for that which he has, in fact, done himself. Moreover, just punishment bears a proportion to the offence, while suffering which is infinite is *ipso facto* disproportionate to any finite deed.

“Why then eternal punishment for the temporary offences of so frail a creature as man? Can any one approve of Alexander's rage, who intended to exterminate a whole nation because they had seized his favourite horse Bucephalus?”

“Heaven and hell suppose two distinct species of men, the good and the bad; but the greatest part of mankind float betwixt vice and virtue. Were one to go round the world with the intention of giving a good supper to the righteous and a sound drubbing to the wicked, he would frequently be embarrassed in his choice, and would find the merits and demerits of most men and women scarcely amount to the value of either.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “So reason also shows, that for man to expect to earn for himself by the practice of virtue, and claim, as his just right, an immortality of exalted happiness, is a most extravagant and groundless pretension.”—Whately, *l.c.* p. 101. On the other hand, however, the Archbishop sees no unreasonableness in a man's earning for himself an immortality of intense unhappiness by the practice of vice. So that life is, naturally, a venture in which you may lose all, but can earn nothing. It may be thought somewhat hard upon mankind if they are pushed into a speculation of this sort, willy-nilly.



One can but admire the broad humanity and the insight into the springs of action manifest in this passage. *Comprendre est à moitié pardonner.* The more one knows of the real conditions which determine men's acts, the less one finds either to praise or blame. For kindly David Hume, "the damnation of one man is an infinitely greater evil in the universe than the subversion of a thousand million of kingdoms." And he would have felt with his countryman Burns, that even "auld Nickie Ben" should "hae a chance."

As against those who reason for the necessity of a future state, in order that the justice of the Deity may be satisfied, Hume's argumentation appears unanswerable. For if the justice of God resembles what we mean by justice, the bestowal of infinite happiness for finite well-doing and infinite misery for finite ill-doing, it is in no sense just. And, if the justice of God does not resemble what we mean by justice, it is an abuse of language to employ the name of justice for the attribute described by it. But, as against those who choose to argue that there is nothing in what is known to us of the attributes of the Deity inconsistent with a future state of rewards and punishments, Hume's pleadings have no force. Bishop Butler's argument that, inasmuch as the visitation of our acts by rewards and punishments takes place in this life, rewards and punishments must be consistent with the attributes of the Deity, and therefore may go on as long as the mind endures, is unanswerable. Whatever exists is, by the hypothesis, existent by the will of God; and, therefore, the pains and pleasures which exist now may go on existing for all eternity, either increasing, diminishing, or being endlessly varied in their intensity, as they are now.

It is remarkable that Hume does not refer to the senti-

mental arguments for the immortality of the soul which are so much in vogue at the present day, and which are based upon our desire for a longer conscious existence than that which nature appears to have allotted to us. Perhaps he did not think them worth notice. For indeed it is not a little strange, that our strong desire that a certain occurrence should happen should be put forward as evidence that it will happen. If my intense desire to see the friend from whom I have parted does not bring him from the other side of the world, or take me thither; if the mother's agonised prayer that her child should live has not prevented him from dying; experience certainly affords no presumption that the strong desire to be alive after death, which we call the aspiration after immortality, is any more likely to be gratified. As Hume truly says, "All doctrines are to be suspected which are favoured by our passions;" and the doctrine, that we are immortal because we should extremely like to be so, contains the quintessence of suspiciousness.

In respect of the existence and attributes of the soul, as of those of the Deity, then, logic is powerless and reason silent. At the most we can get no further than the conclusion of Kant:—

"After we have satisfied ourselves of the vanity of all the ambitious attempts of reason to fly beyond the bounds of experience, enough remains of practical value to content us. It is true that no one may boast that he *knows* that God and a future life exist; for, if he possesses such knowledge, he is just the man for whom I have long been seeking. All knowledge (touching an object of mere reason) can be communicated, and therefore I might hope to see my own knowledge increased to this prodigious extent, by his instruction. No; our conviction in these matters is not *logical*, but *moral*."

certainty; and, inasmuch as it rests upon subjective grounds (of moral disposition), I must not even say, *it is* morally certain that there is a God, and so on; but, *I am* morally certain, and so on. That is to say, the belief in a God and in another world is so interwoven with my moral nature, that the former can no more vanish than the latter can ever be torn from me.

“The only point to be remarked here is that this act of faith of the intellect (*Vernunftglaube*) assumes the existence of moral dispositions. If we leave them aside, and suppose a mind quite indifferent to moral laws, the inquiry started by reason becomes merely a subject for speculation; and [the conclusion attained] may then indeed be supported by strong arguments from analogy, but not by such as are competent to overcome persistent scepticism.

“There is no one, however, who can fail to be interested in these questions. For, although he may be excluded from moral influences by the want of a good disposition, yet, even in this case, enough remains to lead him to fear a divine existence and a future state. To this end, no more is necessary than that he can at least have no certainty that there is no such being, and no future life; for, to make this conclusion demonstratively certain, he must be able to prove the impossibility of both; and this assuredly no rational man can undertake to do. This negative belief, indeed, cannot produce either morality or good dispositions, but can operate in an analogous fashion, by powerfully repressing the outbreak of evil tendencies.

“But it will be said, is this all that Pure Reason can do when it gazes out beyond the bounds of experience? Nothing more than two articles of faith? Common sense could achieve as much without calling the philosophers to its counsels!

“I will not here speak of the service which philosophy has rendered to human reason by the laborious efforts of its criticism, granting that the outcome proves to be merely neg-

ative: about that matter something is to be said in the following section. But do you then ask, that the knowledge which interests all men shall transcend the common understanding, and be discovered for you only by philosophers? The very thing which you make a reproach is the best confirmation of the justice of the previous conclusions, since it shows that which could not, at first, have been anticipated; namely, that in those matters which concern all men alike, nature is not guilty of distributing her gifts with partiality; and that the highest philosophy, in dealing with the most important concerns of humanity, is able to take us no further than the guidance which she affords to the commonest understanding."<sup>1</sup>

In short, nothing can be proved or disproved respecting either the distinct existence, the substance, or the durability of the soul. So far, Kant is at one with Hume. But Kant adds, as you cannot disprove the immortality of the soul, and as the belief therein is very useful for moral purposes, you may assume it. To which, had Hume lived half a century later, he would probably have replied that, if morality has no better foundation than an assumption, it is not likely to bear much strain; and, if it has a better foundation, the assumption rather weakens than strengthens it.

As has been already said, Hume is not content with denying that we know anything about the existence or the nature of the soul; but he carries the war into the enemy's camp, and accuses those who affirm the immateriality, simplicity, and indivisibility of the thinking substance, of atheism and Spinozism, which are assumed to be convertible terms.

The method of attack is ingenious. Observation ap-

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<sup>1</sup> *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Ed. Hartenstein, p. 547.

pears to acquaint us with two different systems of beings, and both Spinoza and orthodox philosophers agree that the necessary substratum of each of these is a substance, in which the phenomena adhere, or of which they are attributes or modes.

“I observe first the universe of objects or of body; the sun, moon, and stars: the earth, seas, plants, animals, men, ships, houses, and other productions either of art or of nature. Here Spinoza appears, and tells me that these are only modifications, and that the subject in which they inhere is simple, un compounded, and indivisible. After this I consider the other system of beings, viz., the universe of thought, or my impressions and ideas. Then I observe another sun, moon, and stars; an earth and seas, covered and inhabited by plants and animals, towns, houses, mountains, rivers, and, in short, everything I can discover or conceive in the first system. Upon my inquiring concerning these, theologians present themselves, and tell me that these also are modifications, and modifications of one simple, un compounded, and indivisible substance. Immediately upon which I am deafened with the noise of a hundred voices, that treat the first hypothesis with detestation and scorn, and the second with applause and veneration. I turn my attention to these hypotheses to see what may be the reason of so great a partiality; and find that they have the same fault of being unintelligible, and that, as far as we can understand them, they are so much alike, that 'tis impossible to discover any absurdity in one which is not common to both of them.”—(I. p. 309.)

For the manner in which Hume makes his case good, I must refer to the original. Plain people may rest satisfied that both hypotheses are unintelligible, without plunging any further among syllogisms, the premisses of which convey no meaning, while the conclusions carry no conviction.

## CHAPTER X.

## VOLITION: LIBERTY AND NECESSITY.

IN the opening paragraphs of the third part of the second book of the *Treatise*, Hume gives a description of the will.

“Of all the immediate effects of pain and pleasure there is none more remarkable than the *will*; and though, properly speaking, it be not comprehended among the passions, yet as the full understanding of its nature and properties is necessary to the explanation of them, we shall here make it the subject of our inquiry. I desire it may be observed, that by the *will* I mean nothing but *the internal impression we feel, and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind*. This impression, like the preceding ones of pride and humility, love and hatred, 'tis impossible to define, and needless to describe any further.”—(II. p. 150.)

This description of volition may be criticised on various grounds. More especially does it seem defective in restricting the term “will” to that feeling which arises when we act, or appear to act, as causes; for one may will to strike without striking, or to think of something which we have forgotten.

Every volition is a complex idea composed of two elements: the one is the idea of an action; the other is a desire for the occurrence of that action. If I will to

strike, I have an idea of a certain movement, and a desire that that movement should take place; if I will to think of any subject, or, in other words, to attend to that subject, I have an idea of the subject and a strong desire that it should remain present to my consciousness. And so far as I can discover, this combination of an idea of an object with an emotion is everything that can be directly observed in an act of volition. So that Hume's definition may be amended thus: Volition is the impression which arises when the idea of a bodily or mental action is accompanied by the desire that the action should be accomplished. It differs from other desires simply in the fact that we regard ourselves as possible causes of the action desired.

Two questions arise, in connexion with the observation of the phenomenon of volition, as they arise out of the contemplation of all other natural phenomena. Firstly, has it a cause, and, if so, what is its cause? Secondly, is it followed by any effect, and, if so, what effect does it produce?

Hume points out, that the nature of the phenomena we consider can have nothing to do with the origin of the conception that they are connected by the relation of cause and effect. For that relation is nothing but an order of succession, which, so far as our experience goes, is invariable; and it is obvious that the nature of phenomena has nothing to do with their order. Whatever it is that leads us to seek for a cause for every event, in the case of the phenomena of the external world, compels us, with equal cogency, to seek it in that of the mind.

The only meaning of the law of causation, in the physical world, is, that it generalises universal experience of the order of that world; and if experience shows a sim-

ilar order to obtain among states of consciousness, the law of causation will properly express that order.

That such an order exists, however, is acknowledged by every sane man :

“ Our idea, therefore, of necessity and causation, arises entirely from the uniformity observable in the operations of nature, where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other. These two circumstances form the whole of that necessity which we ascribe to matter. Beyond the constant *conjunction* of similar objects and the consequent *inference* from one to the other, we have no notion of any necessity of connexion.

“ If it appear, therefore, what all mankind have ever allowed, without any doubt or hesitation, that these two circumstances take place in the voluntary actions of men, and in the operations of mind, it must follow that all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of necessity, and that they have hitherto disputed merely for not understanding each other.”—(IV. p. 97.)

But is this constant conjunction observable in human actions? A student of history could give but one answer to this question :

“ Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit : these passions, mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises which have ever been observed among mankind. Would you know the sentiments, inclinations, and course of life of the Greeks and Romans? Study well the temper and actions of the French and English. You cannot be much mistaken in transferring to the former *most* of the observations which you have made with regard to the latter. Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history



informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations, and furnishing us with materials from which we may form our observations, and become acquainted with the regular springs of human action and behaviour. These records of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions are so many collections of experiments, by which the politician or moral philosopher fixes the principles of his science, in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects, by the experiments which he forms concerning them. Nor are the earth, air, water, and other elements, examined by Aristotle and Hippocrates, more like to those which at present lie under our observation, than the men described by Polybius and Tacitus are to those who now govern the world."—(IV. p. 97—8.)

Hume proceeds to point out that the value set upon experience in the conduct of affairs, whether of business or of politics, involves the acknowledgment that we base our expectation of what men will do upon our observation of what they have done, and that we are as firmly convinced of the fixed order of thoughts as we are of that of things. And, if it be urged that human actions not unfrequently appear unaccountable and capricious, his reply is prompt:—

"I grant it possible to find some actions which seem to have no regular connexion with any known motives, and are exceptions to all the measures of conduct which have ever been established for the government of men. But if one could willingly know what judgment should be formed of such irregular and extraordinary actions, we may consider the sentiments commonly entertained with regard to those irregular events which appear in the course of nature, and

the operations of external objects. All causes are not conjoined to their usual effects with like uniformity. An artificer, who handles only dead matter, may be disappointed in his aim, as well as the politician who directs the conduct of sensible and intelligent agents.

“The vulgar, who take things according to their first appearance, attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes as make the latter often fail of their usual influence, though they meet with no impediment to their operation. But philosophers, observing that, almost in every part of nature, there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid, by reason of their minuteness or remoteness, find that it is at least possible the contrariety of events may not proceed from any contingency in the cause, but from the secret operation of contrary causes. This possibility is converted into certainty by further observation, when they remark that, upon an exact scrutiny, a contrariety of effects always betrays a contrariety of causes, and proceeds from their mutual opposition. A peasant can give no better reason for the stopping of any clock or watch than to say that it does not commonly go right. But an artist easily perceives that the same force in the spring or pendulum has always the same influence on the wheels; but fails of its usual effect, perhaps by reason of a grain of dust, which puts a stop to the whole movement. From the observation of several parallel instances, philosophers form a maxim, that the connexion between all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes.”—(IV. p. 101—2.)

So with regard to human actions:—

“The internal principles and motives may operate in a uniform manner, notwithstanding these seeming irregularities; in the same manner as the winds, rains, clouds, and other variations of the weather are supposed to be governed by steady principles; though not easily discoverable by human sagacity and inquiry.”—(IV. p. 103.)

Meteorology, as a science, was not in existence in Hume's time, or he would have left out the "supposed to be." In practice, again, what difference does any one make between natural and moral evidence?

"A prisoner who has neither money nor interest, discovers the impossibility of his escape, as well when he considers the obstinacy of the gaoler, as the walls and bars with which he is surrounded; and, in all attempts for his freedom, chooses rather to work upon the stone and iron of the one, than upon the inflexible nature of the other. The same prisoner, when conducted to the scaffold, foresees his death as certainly from the constancy and fidelity of his guards, as from the operation of the axe or wheel. His mind runs along a certain train of ideas: The refusal of the soldiers to consent to his escape; the action of the executioner; the separation of the head and body; bleeding, convulsive motions, and death. Here is a connected chain of natural causes and voluntary actions; but the mind feels no difference between them, in passing from one link to another, nor is less certain of the future event, than if it were connected with the objects presented to the memory or senses, by a train of causes cemented together by what we are pleased to call a *physical* necessity. The same experienced union has the same effect on the mind, whether the united objects be motives, volition and actions, or figure and motion. We may change the names of things, but their nature and their operation on the understanding never change."—(IV. p. 105—6.)

But, if the necessary connexion of our acts with our ideas has always been acknowledged in practice, why the proclivity of mankind to deny it words?

"If we examine the operations of body, and the production of effects from their causes, we shall find that all our faculties can never carry us further in our knowledge of this relation, than barely to observe that particular objects are *con-*

*stantly conjoined* together, and that the mind is carried, by a *customary transition*, from the appearance of the one to the belief of the other. But though this conclusion concerning human ignorance be the result of the strictest scrutiny of this subject, men still entertain a strong propensity to believe, that they penetrate further into the province of nature, and perceive something like a necessary connexion between cause and effect. When, again, they turn their reflections towards the operations of their own minds, and *feel* no such connexion between the motive and the action, they are thence apt to suppose that there is a difference between the effects which result from material force, and those which arise from thought and intelligence. But, being once convinced that we know nothing of causation of any kind, than merely the *constant conjunction* of objects, and the consequent *inference* of the mind from one to another, and finding that these two circumstances are universally allowed to have place in voluntary actions, we may be more easily led to own the same necessity common to all causes."—(IV. pp. 107—8.)

The last asylum of the hard-pressed advocate of the doctrine of uncaused volition is usually that, argue as you like, he has a profound and ineradicable consciousness of what he calls the freedom of his will. But Hume follows him even here, though only in a note, as if he thought the extinction of so transparent a sophism hardly worthy of the dignity of his text.

"The prevalence of the doctrine of liberty may be accounted for from another cause, viz., a false sensation, or seeming experience, which we have, or may have, of liberty or indifference in many of our actions. The necessity of any action, whether of matter or of mind, is not, properly speaking, a quality in the agent, but in any thinking or intelligent being who may consider the action; and it consists chiefly in the determination of his thoughts to infer the existence

of that action from some preceding objects; as liberty, when opposed to necessity, is nothing but the want of that determination, and a certain looseness or indifference which we feel, in passing or not passing, from the idea of any object to the idea of any succeeding one. Now we may observe that though, in *reflecting* on human actions, we seldom feel such looseness or indifference, but are commonly able to infer them with considerable certainty from their motives, and from the dispositions of the agent; yet it frequently happens that, in *performing* the actions themselves, we are sensible of something like it: And as all resembling objects are taken for each other, this has been employed as demonstrative and even intuitive proof of human liberty. We feel that our actions are subject to our will on most occasions; and imagine we feel that the will itself is subject to nothing, because, when by a denial of it we are provoked to try, we feel that it moves easily every way, and produces an image of itself (or a *Velleity*, as it is called in the schools), even on that side on which it did not settle. This image or faint motion, we persuade ourselves, could at that time have been completed into the thing itself; because, should that be denied, we find up. a second trial that at present it can. We consider not that the fantastical desire of showing liberty is here the motive of our actions."—(IV. p. 110, *note*.)

Moreover, the moment the attempt is made to give a definite meaning to the words, the supposed opposition between free-will and necessity turns out to be a mere verbal dispute.

"For what is meant by liberty when applied to voluntary actions? We cannot surely mean that actions have so little connexion with motive, inclinations, and circumstances, that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other, and that one affords no inference by which we can conclude the existence of the other. For these are plain and acknowledged matters of fact. By liberty, then, we can

only mean *a power of acting or not acting according to the determinations of the will*; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to every one who is not a prisoner and in chains. Here, then, is no subject of dispute."—(IV. p. 111.)

Half the controversies about the freedom of the will would have had no existence, if this pithy paragraph had been well pondered by those who oppose the doctrine of necessity. For they rest upon the absurd presumption that the proposition, "I can do as I like," is contradictory to the doctrine of necessity. The answer is, nobody doubts that, at any rate within certain limits, you can do as you like. But what determines your likings and dislikings? Did you make your own constitution? Is it your contrivance that one thing is pleasant and another is painful? And even if it were, why did you prefer to make it after the one fashion rather than the other? The passionate assertion of the consciousness of their freedom, which is the favourite refuge of the opponents of the doctrine of necessity, is mere futility, for nobody denies it. What they really have to do, if they would upset the necessarian argument, is to prove that they are free to associate any emotion whatever with any idea whatever; to like pain as much as pleasure; vice as much as virtue; in short, to prove that, whatever may be the fixity of order of the universe of things, that of thought is given over to chance.

In the second part of this remarkable essay, Hume considers the real, or supposed, immoral consequences of the doctrine of necessity, premising the weighty observation that

"When any opinion leads to absurdity, it is certainly false, but it is not certain that an opinion is false because it is of dangerous consequence."—(IV. p. 112.)

And, therefore, that the attempt to refute an opinion by a picture of its dangerous consequences to religion and morality, is as illogical as it is reprehensible.

It is said, in the first place, that necessity destroys responsibility; that, as it is usually put, we have no right to praise or blame actions that cannot be helped. Hume's reply amounts to this, that the very idea of responsibility implies the belief in the necessary connection of certain actions with certain states of the mind. A person is held responsible only for those acts which are preceded by a certain intention; and, as we cannot see, or hear, or feel, an intention, we can only reason out its existence on the principle that like effects have like causes.

If a man is found by the police busy with "jenny" and dark lantern at a jeweller's shop door over night, the magistrate before whom he is brought the next morning, reasons from those effects to their causes in the fellow's "burglarious" ideas and volitions, with perfect confidence, and punishes him accordingly. And it is quite clear that such a proceeding would be grossly unjust, if the links of the logical process were other than necessarily connected together. The advocate who should attempt to get the man off on the plea that his client need not necessarily have had a felonious intent, would hardly waste his time more if he tried to prove that the sum of all the angles of a triangle is not two right angles, but three.

A man's moral responsibility for his acts has, in fact, nothing to do with the causation of these acts, but depends on the frame of mind which accompanies them. Common language tells us this, when it uses "well-disposed" as the equivalent of "good," and "evil-minded" as that of "wicked." If A does something which puts B in a violent passion, it is quite possible to admit that B's

passion is the necessary consequence of A's act, and yet to believe that B's fury is morally wrong, or that he ought to control it. In fact, a calm bystander would reason with both on the assumption of moral necessity. He would say to A, "You were wrong in doing a thing which you knew (that is, of the necessity of which you were convinced) would irritate B." And he would say to B, "You are wrong to give way to passion, for you know its evil effects"—that is the necessary connection between yielding to passion and evil.

So far, therefore, from necessity destroying moral responsibility, it is the foundation of all praise and blame; and moral admiration reaches its climax in the ascription of necessary goodness to the Deity.

To the statement of another consequence of the necessitarian doctrine that, if there be a God, he must be the cause of all evil as well as of all good, Hume gives no real reply—probably because none is possible. But then, if this conclusion is distinctly and unquestionably deducible from the doctrine of necessity, it is no less unquestionably a direct consequence of every known form of monotheism. If God is the cause of all things, he must be the cause of evil among the rest; if he is omniscient, he must have the fore-knowledge of evil; if he is almighty, he must possess the power of preventing or of extinguishing evil. And to say that an all-knowing and all-powerful being is not responsible for what happens, because he only permits it, is, under its intellectual aspect, a piece of childish sophistry; while, as to the moral look of it, one has only to ask any decently honorable man whether, under like circumstances, he would try to get rid of his responsibility by such a plea.

Hume's *Inquiry* appeared in 1748. He does not refer



to Anthony Collins' essay on Liberty, published thirty-three years before, in which the same question is treated to the same effect, with singular force and lucidity. It may be said, perhaps, that it is not wonderful that the two freethinkers should follow the same line of reasoning; but no such theory will account for the fact that in 1754, the famous Calvinistic divine, Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey, produced, in the interests of the strictest orthodoxy, a demonstration of the necessarian thesis, which has never been equalled in power, and certainly has never been refuted.

In the ninth section of the fourth part of Edwards' *Inquiry*, he has to deal with the Arminian objection to the Calvinistic doctrine that "it makes God the author of sin;" and it is curious to watch the struggle between the theological controversialist, striving to ward off an admission which he knows will be employed to damage his side, and the acute logician, conscious that, in some shape or other, the admission must be made. Beginning with a *tu quoque*, that the Arminian doctrine involves consequences as bad as the Calvinistic view, he proceeds to object to the term "author of sin," though he ends by admitting that, in a certain sense, it is applicable; he proves from Scripture that God is the disposer and orderer of sin; and then, by an elaborate false analogy with the darkness resulting from the absence of the sun, endeavours to suggest that he is only the author of it in a negative sense; and, finally, he takes refuge in the conclusion that, though God is the orderer and disposer of those deeds which, considered in relation to their agents, are morally evil, yet, inasmuch as His purpose has all along been infinitely good, they are not evil relatively to him.

And this, of course, may be perfectly true; but if true,

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it is inconsistent with the attribute of omnipotence. It is conceivable that there should be no evil in the world; that which is conceivable is certainly possible; if it were possible for evil to be non-existent, the maker of the world, who, though foreknowing the existence of evil in that world, did not prevent it, either did not really desire it should not exist, or could not prevent its existence. It might be well for those who inveigh against the logical consequences of necessitarianism to bethink them of the logical consequences of theism; which are not only the same when the attribute of Omniscience is ascribed to the Deity, but which bring out, from the existence of moral evil, a hopeless conflict between the attributes of Infinite Benevolence and Infinite Power, which, with no less assurance, are affirmed to appertain to the Divine Being.

Kant's mode of dealing with the doctrine of necessity is very singular. That the phenomena of the mind follow fixed relations of cause and effect is, to him, as unquestionable as it is to Hume. But then there is the *Ding an sich*, the *Noumenon*, or Kantian equivalent for the substance of the soul. This, being out of the phenomenal world, is subject to none of the laws of phenomena, and is consequently as absolutely free, and as completely powerless, as a mathematical point, *in vacuo*, would be. Hence volition is uncaused, so far as it belongs to the noumenon, but necessary so far as it takes effect in the phenomenal world.

Since Kant is never weary of telling us that we know nothing whatever, and can know nothing, about the noumenon, except as the hypothetical subject of any number of negative predicates; the information that it is free, in the sense of being out of reach of the law of causation, is about as valuable as the assertion that it is neither grey,

nor blue, nor square. For practical purposes, it must be admitted that the inward possession of such a noumenal libertine does not amount to much for people whose actual existence is made up of nothing but definitely regulated phenomena. When the good and evil angels fought for the dead body of Moses, its presence must have been of about the same value to either of the contending parties, as that of Kant's noumenon, in the battle of impulses which rages in the breast of man. Metaphysicians, as a rule, are sadly deficient in the sense of humour, or they would surely abstain from advancing propositions which, when stripped of the verbiage in which they are disguised, appear to the profane eye to be bare shams, naked but not ashamed.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS.

IN his autobiography, Hume writes:—

“In the same year [1752] was published at London my *Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*; which, in my own opinion (who ought not to judge on that subject), is of all my writings, historical, philosophical, and literary, incomparably the best. It came unnoticed and unobserved into the world.”

It may commonly be noticed that the relative value which an author ascribes to his own works rarely agrees with the estimate formed of them by his readers, who criticise the products, without either the power or the wish to take into account the pains which they may have cost the producer. Moreover, the clear and dispassionate common sense of the *Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* may have tasted flat after the highly-seasoned *Inquiry concerning the Human Understanding*. Whether the public like to be deceived or not may be open to question; but it is beyond a doubt that they love to be shocked in a pleasant and mannerly way. Now Hume's speculations on moral questions are not so remote from those of respectable professors, like Hutcheson, or saintly prelates, such as Butler, as to present any striking novelty. And they support the cause of righteousness in a cool, rea-

sonable, indeed slightly patronising fashion, eminently in harmony with the mind of the eighteenth century; which admired virtue very much, if she would only avoid the rigour which the age called fanaticism, and the fervour which it called enthusiasm.

Having applied the ordinary methods of scientific inquiry to the intellectual phenomena of the mind, it was natural that Hume should extend the same mode of investigation to its moral phenomena; and, in the true spirit of a natural philosopher, he commences by selecting a group of those states of consciousness with which every one's personal experience must have made him familiar: in the expectation that the discovery of the sources of moral approbation and disapprobation, in this comparatively easy case, may furnish the means of detecting them where they are more recondite.

“We shall analyse that complication of mental qualities which form what, in common life, we call PERSONAL MERIT: We shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which, if ascribed to any person, implies either praise or blame, and may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners. The quick sensibility which, on this head, is so universal among mankind, gives a philosopher sufficient assurance that he can never be considerably mistaken in framing the catalogue, or incurs any danger of misplacing the objects of his contemplation: He needs only enter into his own breast for a moment, and consider whether he should or should not desire to have this or that quality assigned to him, and whether such or such an imputation would proceed from a friend or an enemy. The very nature of language guides us almost infallibly in forming a judgment of this nature; and as every tongue possesses one set of words

which are taken in a good sense, and another in the opposite, the least acquaintance with the idiom suffices, without any reasoning, to direct us in collecting and arranging the estimable or blamable qualities of men. The only object of reasoning is to discover the circumstances, on both sides, which are common to these qualities; to observe that particular in which the estimable qualities agree on the one hand, and the blamable on the other, and thence to reach the foundation of ethics, and find their universal principles, from which all censure or approbation is ultimately derived. As this is a question of fact, not of abstract science, we can only expect success by following the experimental method, and deducing general maxims from a comparison of particular instances. The other scientific method, where a general abstract principle is first established, and is afterwards branched out into a variety of inferences and conclusions, may be more perfect in itself, but suits less the imperfection of human nature, and is a common source of illusion and mistake, in this as well as in other subjects. Men are now cured of their passion for hypotheses and systems in natural philosophy, and will hearken to no arguments but those which are derived from experience. It is full time they should attempt a like reformation in all moral disquisitions, and reject every system of ethics, however subtle or ingenious, which is not founded on fact and observation."—(IV. pp. 242—4.)

No qualities give a man a greater claim to personal merit than benevolence and justice; but if we inquire why benevolence deserves so much praise, the answer will certainly contain a large reference to the utility of that virtue to society; and as for justice, the very existence of the virtue implies that of society; public utility is its sole origin; and the measure of its usefulness is also the standard of its merit. If every man possessed everything he wanted, and no one had the power to interfere with such

possession; or if no man desired that which could damage his fellow man, justice would have no part to play in the universe. But as Hume observes:—

“In the present disposition of the human heart, it would perhaps be difficult to find complete instances of such enlarged affections; but still we may observe that the case of families approaches towards it; and the stronger the mutual benevolence is among the individuals, the nearer it approaches, till all distinction of property be in a great measure lost and confounded among them. Between married persons, the cement of friendship is by the laws supposed so strong as to abolish all division of possessions, and has often, in reality, the force assigned to it:<sup>1</sup> And it is observable that, during the ardour of new enthusiasms, when every principle is inflamed into extravagance, the community of goods has frequently been attempted; and nothing but experience of its inconveniences, from the returning or disguised selfishness of men, could make the imprudent fanatics adopt anew the ideas of justice and separate property. So true is it that this virtue derives its existence entirely from its necessary *use* to the intercourse and social state of mankind.”—(IV. p. 256.)

“Were the human species so framed by nature as that each individual possessed within himself every faculty requisite both for his own preservation and for the propagation of his kind: Were all society and intercourse cut off between man and man by the primary intention of the Supreme Creator: It seems evident that so solitary a being would be as much incapable of justice as of social discourse and conver-

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<sup>1</sup> Family affection in the eighteenth century may have been stronger than in the nineteenth; but Hume's bachelor inexperience can surely alone explain his strange account of the suppositions of the marriage law of that day, and their effects. The law certainly abolished all division of possessions, but it did so by making the husband sole proprietor.

sation. Where mutual regard and forbearance serve to no manner of purpose, they would never direct the conduct of any reasonable man. The headlong course of the passions would be checked by no reflection on future consequences. And as each man is here supposed to love himself alone, and to depend only on himself and his own activity for safety and happiness, he would, on every occasion, to the utmost of his power, challenge the preference above every other being, to none of which he is bound by any ties, either of nature or of interest.

“But suppose the conjunction of the sexes to be established in nature, a family immediately arises; and particular rules being found requisite for its subsistence, these are immediately embraced, though without comprehending the rest of mankind within their prescriptions. Suppose that several families unite together in one society, which is totally disjoined from all others, the rules which preserve peace and order enlarge themselves to the utmost extent of that society; but becoming then entirely useless, lose their force when carried one step further. But again, suppose that several distinct societies maintain a kind of intercourse for mutual convenience and advantage, the boundaries of justice still grow larger, in proportion to the largeness of men’s views and the force of their mutual connexion. History, experience, reason, sufficiently instruct us in this natural progress of human sentiments, and in the gradual enlargement of our regard to justice in proportion as we become acquainted with the extensive utility of that virtue.”—(IV. pp. 262—4.)

The moral obligation of justice and the rights of property are by no means diminished by this exposure of the purely utilitarian basis on which they rest:—

“For what stronger foundation can be desired or conceived for any duty, than to observe that human society, or even human nature, could not subsist without the establishment of it, and will still arrive at greater degrees of happi-



ness and perfection, the more inviolable the regard is which is paid to that duty?

"The dilemma seems obvious: As justice evidently tends to promote public utility and to support civil society, the sentiment of justice is either derived from our reflecting on that tendency, or, like hunger, thirst, and other appetites, resentment, love of life, attachment to offspring, and other passions, arises from a simple original instinct in the human heart, which nature has implanted for like salutary purposes. If the latter be the case, it follows that property, which is the object of justice, is also distinguished by a simple original instinct, and is not ascertained by any argument or reflection. But who is there that ever heard of such an instinct? Or is this a subject in which new discoveries can be made? We may as well expect to discover in the body new senses which had before escaped the observation of all mankind."—(IV. pp. 273, 4.)

The restriction of the object of justice to property, in this passage, is singular. Pleasure and pain can hardly be included under the term property, and yet justice surely deals largely with the withholding of the former, or the infliction of the latter, by men on one another. If a man bars another from a pleasure which he would otherwise enjoy, or actively hurts him without good reason, the latter is said to be injured as much as if his property had been interfered with. Here, indeed, it may be readily shown that it is as much the interest of society that men should not interfere with one another's freedom, or mutually inflict positive or negative pain, as that they should not meddle with one another's property; and hence the obligation of justice in such matters may be deduced. But if a man merely thinks ill of another, or feels maliciously towards him without due cause, he is properly said to be unjust. In this case it would be hard to prove that

any injury is done to society by the evil thought; but there is no question that it will be stigmatised as an injustice; and the offender himself, in another frame of mind, is often ready enough to admit that he has failed to be just towards his neighbour. However, it may plausibly be said that so slight a barrier lies between thought and speech, that any moral quality attached to the latter is easily transferred to the former; and that, since open slander is obviously opposed to the interests of society, injustice of thought, which is silent slander, must become inextricably associated with the same blame.

But, granting the utility to society of all kinds of benevolence and justice, why should the quality of those virtues involve the sense of moral obligation?

Hume answers this question in the fifth section, entitled, *Why Utility Pleases*. He repudiates the deduction of moral approbation from self-love, and utterly denies that we approve of benevolent or just actions because we think of the benefits which they are likely to confer indirectly on ourselves. The source of the approbation with which we view an act useful to society must be sought elsewhere; and, in fact, is to be found in that feeling which is called sympathy.

“No man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others. The first has a natural tendency to give pleasure, the second pain. This every one may find in himself. It is not probable that these principles can be resolved into principles more simple and universal, whatever attempts may have been made for that purpose.”—(IV. p. 294, *note*.)

Other men's joys and sorrows are not spectacles at which we remain unmoved:—

“ . . . The view of the former, whether in its causes or ef-

fects, like sunshine, or the prospect of well-cultivated plains (to carry our pretensions no higher), communicates a secret joy and satisfaction; the appearance of the latter, like a lowering cloud or barren landscape, throws a melancholy damp over the imagination. And this concession being once made, the difficulty is over; and a natural unforced interpretation of the phenomena of human life will afterwards, we hope, prevail among all speculative inquirers."— (IV. p. 320.)

The moral approbation, therefore, with which we regard acts of justice or benevolence rests upon their utility to society, because the perception of that utility, or, in other words, of the pleasure which they give to other men, arouses a feeling of sympathetic pleasure in ourselves. The feeling of obligation to be just, or of the duty of justice, arises out of that association of moral approbation or disapprobation with one's own actions, which is what we call conscience. To fail in justice, or in benevolence, is to be displeas'd with oneself. But happiness is impossible without inward self-approval; and, hence, every man who has any regard to his own happiness and welfare, will find his best reward in the practice of every moral duty. On this topic Hume expends much eloquence.

"But what philosophical truths can be more advantageous to society than these here delivered, which represent virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms, and make us approach her with ease, familiarity, and affection? The dismal dress falls off, with which many divines and some philosophers have covered her; and nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability; nay, even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety. She talks not of useless austerities and rigours, suffering and self-denial. She declares that her sole purpose is to make her votaries, and all mankind, during every period of their existence, if possible,

cheerful and happy; nor does she ever willingly part with any pleasure but in hopes of ample compensation in some other period of their lives. The sole trouble which she demands is that of just calculation, and a steady preference of the greater happiness. And if any austere pretenders approach her, enemies to joy and pleasure, she either rejects them as hypocrites and deceivers, or, if she admit them in her train, they are ranked, however, among the least favoured of her votaries.

“And, indeed, to drop all figurative expression, what hopes can we ever have of engaging mankind to a practice which we confess full of austerity and rigour? Or what theory of morals can ever serve any useful purpose, unless it can show, by a particular detail, that all the duties which it recommends are also the true interest of each individual? The peculiar advantage of the foregoing system seems to be, that it furnishes proper mediums for that purpose.”—(IV. p. 360.)

In this pream to virtue, there is more of the dance measure than will sound appropriate in the ears of most of the pilgrims who toil painfully, not without many a stumble and many a bruise, along the rough and steep roads which lead to the higher life.

Virtue is undoubtedly beneficent; but the man is to be envied to whom her ways seem in anywise playful. And, though she may not talk much about suffering and self-denial, her silence on that topic may be accounted for on the principle *ça va sans dire*. The calculation of the greatest happiness is not performed quite so easily as a rule of three sum; while, in the hour of temptation, the question will crop up, whether, as something has to be sacrificed, a bird in the hand is not worth two in the bush; whether it may not be as well to give up the problematical greater happiness in the future for a certain great happiness in the present, and

“Buy the merry madness of one hour  
With the long irksomeness of following time.”<sup>1</sup>

If mankind cannot be engaged in practices “full of austerity and rigour,” by the love of righteousness and the fear of evil, without seeking for other compensation than that which flows from the gratification of such love and the consciousness of escape from debasement, they are in a bad case. For they will assuredly find that virtue presents no very close likeness to the sportive leader of the joyous hours in Hume’s rosy picture; but that she is an awful Goddess, whose ministers are the Furies, and whose highest reward is peace.

It is not improbable that Hume would have qualified all this as enthusiasm or fanaticism, or both; but he virtually admits it:—

“Now, as virtue is an end, and is desirable on its own account, without fee or reward, merely for the immediate satisfaction which it conveys, it is requisite that there should be some sentiment which it touches; some internal taste or feeling, or whatever you please to call it, which distinguishes moral good and evil, and which embraces the one and rejects the other.

“Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: The latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: The other has a productive faculty: and gilding and staining all natural objects with the colours borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation. Reason being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or in-

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson’s *Cynthia’s Revels*, act 1.

clination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery. Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition. From circumstances and relations known or supposed, the former leads us to the discovery of the concealed and unknown. After all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation. The standard of the one, being founded on the nature of things, is external and inflexible, even by the will of the Supreme Being: the standard of the other, arising from the internal frame and constitution of animals, is ultimately derived from the Supreme Will, which bestowed on each being its peculiar nature, and arranged the several classes and orders of existence."—(IV. p. 376—7.)

Hume has not discussed the theological theory of the obligations of morality, but it is obviously in accordance with his view of the nature of those obligations. Under its theological aspect, morality is obedience to the will of God; and the ground for such obedience is two-fold; either we ought to obey God because He will punish us if we disobey Him, which is an argument based on the utility of obedience; or our obedience ought to flow from our love towards God, which is an argument based on pure feeling, and for which no reason can be given. For, if any man should say that he takes no pleasure in the contemplation of the ideal of perfect holiness, or, in other words, that he does not love God, the attempt to argue him into acquiring that pleasure would be as hopeless as the endeavour to persuade Peter Bell of the "witchery of the soft blue sky."

In which ever way we look at the matter, morality is based on feeling, not on reason; though reason alone is

competent to trace out the effects of our actions, and thereby dictate conduct. Justice is founded on the love of one's neighbour; and goodness is a kind of beauty. The moral law, like the laws of physical nature, rests in the long run upon instinctive intuitions, and is neither more nor less "innate" and "necessary" than they are. Some people cannot by any means be got to understand the first book of Euclid; but the truths of mathematics are no less necessary and binding on the great mass of mankind. Some there are who cannot feel the difference between the *Sonata Appassionata* and *Cherry Ripe*; or between a gravestone-cutter's cherub and the Apollo Belvidere; but the canons of art are none the less acknowledged. While some there may be who, devoid of sympathy, are incapable of a sense of duty; but neither does their existence affect the foundations of morality. Such pathological deviations from true manhood are merely the halt, the lame, and the blind of the world of consciousness; and the anatomist of the mind leaves them aside, as the anatomist of the body would ignore abnormal specimens.

And as there are Pascals and Mozarts, Newtons and Raffaelles, in whom the innate faculty for science or art seems to need but a touch to spring into full vigour, and through whom the human race obtains new possibilities of knowledge and new conceptions of beauty: so there have been men of moral genius, to whom we owe ideals of duty and visions of moral perfection, which ordinary mankind could never have attained; though, happily for them, they can feel the beauty of a vision, which lay beyond the reach of their dull imaginations, and count life well spent in shaping some faint image of it in the actual world.

THE END.

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