



LIFE AND LETTERS

Edited by Desmond MacCarthy

FIRST
QUARTERLY
ISSUE

Including a New Poem by D. H. LAWRENCE; DESMOND MACCARTHY on Lytton Strachey; STELLA BENSON; E. V. LUCAS; WILLIAM PLOMER; JANKO LAVRIN; J. A. OGDON; HUGH ANTHONY; and A CHRONICLE OF RECENT BOOKS

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EDITED BY DESMOND MACCARTHY

VOL. VIII. No. 44. MARCH 1932

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LIFE AND LETTERS

D. H. LAWRENCE

MEDITERRANEAN IN JANUARY

The blue anemone with a dark core
That has flowered before
Shows one bud more!

Far-off, far-off, in the hyacinth ages
It flowered, before men took to flowering for wages;
Flowers now, as we're crossing the dreary stages.

To-day, when the sun is computed old
And Europe's tail-spin rolls still unrolled;
And bank-tellers tell the one tale that is told;
And bank-notes are poetry purer than gold;
When the end of the world we are told, is scrolled;
And a man, when he isn't bought, feels sold:

Out of the winter's silky fur
Buds a blue anemone, still bluer.

Nations beside the sea are old,
Folk-flowers have faded, men have grown cold.
Nothing remains now but mould unto mould,—
Ichabod! Ichabod! lo and behold!

O age! that is hoar as anemone buds!
Oh chew, old cows, at your ancient cuds!
Chew also, young heifers, your juicier cuds!

The wisdom of ages droops! It is folly
 To laugh when we're feeling melancholy!
 Tears wrinkle our faces, like rain in the holly.
 The wisdom of ages droops! Ai'n't it jolly!

The sea has its bud-lips smilingly curled,
 What! Yet another bad end of the world!
 Why, 'twas only yesterday every man twirled
 His moustache with an elbow lifted, and hurled
 Braggadocios around the blue rims of the world!

Now the world is ending in dust and in sorrow.
 The world is ending; let's hurry to borrow
 Black for the funeral! Wow! waly! and worrow!
 The age is a joke! and surely, to-morrow
 We'll see the joke, and how funny is sorrow!

Yesterday, yes! is a tale that is told.
 To-morrow comes stealthily out of the mould
 Like a bud from winter disguised in grey,
 Hidden blue with the blueness of one more day.

When I see this sea looking shoddy and dead,
 And this sun cease shining overhead,
 And no more anemones rise from the dead,
 And never another *per Bacco!* is said:
 I shall come to New York, and live on Manhattan,
 And deep in Central Park I'll fatten
 My griefs, and on New York newspapers batten.

Till then, I like better this sea, I must say.
 Which is blue with the blueness of one more day.
 The which, since it coincides with my day
 And will shine if I stay or I go away,
 Persuades me to stay, since stay I may . . .

WILLIAM PLOMER

NAUSICAA

To René Janin

‘Great oaks from little acorns grow’, we wrote in our copybooks at school, and marvelled at such an astonishing fact. Later, seeing an acorn fall from a great oak, we were able to admire the converse of the statement, and came to reflect on the immense implications of small events. Still later, we found that some trifling situation could only be understood, was only lit up for us, by some rough perception of vast currents of history and of blood, the lapse of ages and the searching of ruins; and we trained ourselves to connect times and places remote from one another, relics with anecdotes, until we saw that no details presenting themselves to our notice were utterly irrelevant to whatever purpose we might have in hand at the moment (though naturally some were more and some less so), for we had at last discovered something of the unity of the world and the people it contains. And although it is supposed to be the duty of the artist to select only such details as are closely relevant to his task, we saw many an artist limiting himself too closely to what lay under his nose, and concluded that there is no reason why a modern artist should not occasionally take a wider view of the small world that this has become. Goethe, who lived so long before us, was aware of East and West, and the complexity of simple things, yet, in our own day, in spite of democracy and quick communications, not only have we no Goethe, but ordinary people, reading their newspaper and their *Outline of History*, show few

signs that they are aware even of their past or of what most vitally affects their present. Yes, ordinary people live blindly, and go groping to their graves, for Nature always has it so, and leaves it to the rare spectator to see what they are about—not that they will thank him for his observations, but will do their best to abuse and destroy him for having seen them more clearly than they can see themselves.

It was the island of Corfu that provoked in us these wandering thoughts, and especially our surprise at hearing a mother calling her child up an alleyway to dinner, by the name of Nausicaa. For this was the island of the Phæacians, it was here that Ulysses swam ashore and was received by Nausicaa; and it seemed to us that three thousand years and a great part of the world's history vibrated in the shrill voice of that woman, anxious lest her children's food should grow cold on the table. Remembering her voice, and the mixed blood that flowered in her face, we turned over in our minds a little of what we knew of our surroundings, and strove to connect the strange and various history of the island with every least manifestation of its life, with the cats in its gutters and the zinnias in its gardens, as well as with its children and its monuments in verse or stone.

The first part of Greece to become a colony of Rome, it was ruled later by the Byzantines, the Venetians, the despots of Epirus and the kings of Naples. Then, after four centuries of Venetian domination, it was occupied for a while by the French, until at the beginning of the last century it became a republic under Russian and Turkish protection. For fifty succeeding years it was controlled by the English, and at last, in 1863, became part of the kingdom, now the republic, of Greece. What vicissitudes!

Strange and various are the traces they have left. Old stones remain from the heroic age. The Byzantine church of St. Jason and St. Sosipater, the processions in which the mortal remains of St. Spiridion are carried in a silver coffin, the lousy monks at Palaiokastrizza, many a ruined convent, ikons in every house, bear witness to our Christian era. In the side of a forgotten rampart a fig-tree has split in halves a stone lion of St. Mark. On the esplanade a statue of the Venetian marshal, von der Schulenburg, brother of 'Maypole' Schulenburg, who was mistress of George I of England, crumbles slowly, a perfect specimen of the mock-heroic, exactly contemporary with the *Rape of the Lock*, and an image of our age of politics and war. As for the palace of the English governors, it belongs to the last good period of English architecture, the neo-classical elegance of the years about Waterloo, while at a proper distance stands a perfect specimen of the shoddy vulgarity of the end of the same century, the villa 'Achilleion' that formerly belonged to the Kaiser. The town library has first editions of Petrarch and Erasmus Darwin, while many a house contains Venetian mirrors and Victorian lamps, Empire chairs and Turkish silver. There is even a Chinese museum. Wherever we touched the place, we came upon this same extraordinary richness, an accumulation of racial tendencies and historical survivals, an epitome of Europe ever so faintly flavoured with Asia. And when we left the town, with its tall old pink Venetian houses, its ghetto, its mouldering forts and decaying hatchments, we found all round us a natural grandeur, beauty, and fertility of a kind to be found nowhere else, a landscape alternately Homeric and West Indian. Heather and sweet potatoes grow in the same ground with the fir and the palm, while the olive trees so

flourish that whole groves attain a height of fifty or sixty feet.

But in spite of all these glories there is certainly a curse on the island. It becomes evident on certain days, when the climate, which is sub-tropical and capricious, becomes suddenly violent or sultry, and brings with it low fevers and megrims; it is plain in the decay to be found on all sides; it can be felt instinctively by those whose instincts are sharp enough; and it can be learnt from the fate of many of the distinguished people who have been connected with the island. Capo d'Istria, Regent of Greece, died by the hand of an assassin; so did the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, who built 'Achilleion'; Kaiser Wilhelm II, her successor in the property, lost his throne; while Count Constantinos Theotoki, that noble Corfiote character, lost his fortune, died a death of lingering agony, and was attended to the grave by a mere handful of people. Nothing, however, is more sinister than the atmosphere in which the inhabitants of the island actually live, the aura, as it were, which emanates from them. One expects them to be decadent, but one is not prepared for such a degree of degeneration as that in which they live and move. It is not simply that they are poor and live for the most part in squalor, it is not simply that they share the generally low standards of living and physique common to most Greeks to-day, nor is it that, like the poor everywhere, they breed more children than they can feed. Nor can the climate be held solely to account, though it is certainly relaxing and demoralizing, and must have hastened the decay of the common people as well as that of the formerly pretentious Corfiote aristocracy. No, the truth is that the blood is stagnant, and that ever since the long lazy centuries of Venetian domination, though some

of the people have emigrated, to Athens, to India, Turkey or Egypt, to America, very little new blood has flowed in. Inbreeding has done, and is still doing, its work thoroughly. Cripples, half-wits, hunchbacks, are common enough; faces are pale, tissues flabby, blood and skin diseases very prevalent; and the unborn are often condemned to face this harsh world with as many handicaps as heredity and environment can well lay upon them. And if anybody feels any discontent, any enterprise, any energy, he goes to other lands to make his fortune, and is not over-anxious to return. If it is true, as it seems true, that some kind of spell hangs over the island, it is open to doubt whether the matter can just be explained scientifically, for, if any place is haunted, Corfu is haunted; and if it is possible for a place to be singled out for bad luck, for a curse, then Corfu is such a place. In contrast to the fertility of Nature, the orchards bowed down under many kinds of fruit, and the wild cyclamen which perfumes the mountain breeze, in contrast to the complexity of their history and the splendours of their past, the inhabitants have the appearance of victims. Whether Nemesis is to be explained in terms of science or not, it is certain that Nemesis has overtaken them.

Visitors to the island are not numerous, although it lies on the direct route between Brindisi and Athens, and this is perhaps because nothing is done to attract them. Consequently, when tourists arrive, they seldom stay more than a few days. They drive to the 'Achilleion', they take a boat to Pontikonisi—especially if they are Germans, for this is Böcklin's *Island of the Dead*—they climb to the top of the old fortress to enjoy what their Baedeker calls 'a superb** View', they take a few photographs and a disapproving stroll through the town, after which there is nothing, they

complain, to do. And it is true, that for the modern traveller, there is little to do. The hotels are few and bad, and their standards are those of the boarding-house, the only amusements they provide being a tuneless piano, a copy or two of last week's Continental *Daily Mail*, and some furniture and Tauchnitz novels of the late 'nineties. Many people to-day do not like the country, except in the form of 'scenery' taken in small doses while they are rushing along in a motor; they are seldom educated enough to be interested in history or humanitarian enough to be interested in other people, or placid enough to be at all at ease in a place where life is frugal, lazy, and corrupt. Cocktails, wireless programmes, and golf are not to be had for love or money; and when there is no taxi available one must drive in a battered victoria, so that Americans sometimes go away uttering a wish that somebody would 'clean up' Corfu—and this in spite of the fact that the English have left a legacy of roads, water, sanitation, cricket, and ginger beer. It is true that before the War some efforts were made to galvanize the place into some sort of flashiness. A casino, for example, was planned and built, but to-day its gardens are all overgrown with gigantic flowering yuccas, and the building itself, like every other available building in the place, has been used for the housing of refugee children from Asia Minor. The plaster is coming off the walls, and every afternoon a little girl with elephantiasis drags herself past on her way back from school.

In view of the general atmosphere of the town, which is undoubtedly provincial and nostalgic, where it is not actually mournful and unhealthy, it is a little surprising that among the Greeks themselves Corfu is considered to

be well worth visiting, not simply on account of its historical associations and natural beauties, but for a much odder reason. It would be too much to say that the town has a reputation for gaiety, but one hears it said in Athens that the Corfiotes have a certain licence of morals which is entertaining to the stranger. Nobody would assert that the Corfiotes, or any other Greeks in the mass, are remarkable for a strict moral rectitude, but what is the good of licence without enterprise? What is the use of wickedness, at least as an attraction for tourists, if it is accompanied only by anæmia, apathy and impotence, to say nothing of poverty and squalor? In Corfu the flesh may be willing but the spirit is weak. Yet there is the fact, and there is no getting away from it, that every year there are Greeks who come to Corfu expecting to be amused. Just such a person might have been seen, one evening at the end of last summer, strolling about on the esplanade.

Napoleon Emmanuelides was wondering how to conclude the day, which happened to be his forty-first birthday, and not finding any solution to the problem, he glanced at his watch. It was exactly ten o'clock. He looked casually at the people sitting in the cafés and at the passers-by, but they did not interest him nearly as much as he interested them. They knew him for a stranger, and some already knew him by sight, for he had been here a week, and everybody noticed that he was always well dressed. The Greeks, like most people undistinguished for intellect, attach an undue importance to clothes: they will often look at a man's clothes before they look at his face, while a slight shabbiness or incorrectness in their own attire will cause them a discomfort which amounts to pain. Indeed, there are few countries where men dress

so well and women so badly. A Greek with the most precarious means will contrive to look smarter than he is rich, while a Greek of any standing will often appear more stylish than a man of similar standing elsewhere. Emmanuelides was not exceptional in his tastes, and as he strolled about was agreeably conscious of his appearance. The night was warm for September, and he was wearing an elegant fawn-coloured suit that fitted him perfectly, while everything else, shirt, socks, and so on, had been chosen to harmonize with it. Growing older, he had become more particular. His hair and teeth were scrupulously brushed, his moustache was fastidiously trimmed, and his nails had been so carefully manicured that they shone like polished pebbles, but he was very careful that his manners and appearance should not lead people to say that he was effeminate. 'Well-groomed' was how he would have liked to hear himself described, and he was proud of his extraordinary resemblance to one of the only European monarchs of our day with any pretensions to looks and style. Like that monarch, Emmanuelides had his clothes made in England. To a casual acquaintance at the hotel he had remarked airily that he had only brought eleven suits with him to Corfu, and the acquaintance, who was not Greek, at once concluded that Emmanuelides was, besides being well dressed, well-to-do. But, as a matter of fact, Emmanuelides was not by any means a rich man: his private income was small and his salary an ordinary one—he was employed by an international commission in Egypt in matters of local government. If his salary was moderate, his vanity, as has perhaps been made plain, was greater, or at least more patent, than is usual. Yet one could not very well dislike him on that account, for it was only the usual

vanity of the Greek male, which is so frank and spontaneous, and often goes with such good nature and vivacity that it cannot be regarded as anything more than amusingly innocent—unless, of course, one is somehow made to suffer by it. If people are not only vain but unhappy and malicious, they can be very unpleasant, but Emmanuelides, coxcomb as he was, had pretty much what he wanted in life, and though shallow, was not unkind. Other people were amused by him, particularly his friends, who were of various nationalities and as shallow and cheerful as himself; they flattered him; he was especially flattered to be liked by English people, preferably those with titles or rank; he was flattered every now and again by being saluted in mistake for that monarch he so much resembled; women flattered him; and altogether he was quite gratified to find himself in a world which treated him so well.

But Corfu! This was another story! Never in his life had he been so disappointed by a place. Why, there was absolutely nowhere to go and dance of an evening; the theatre was closed; the women were dowdy and stuffy; the men provincial to a degree. He had only been here ten days, but he felt he had exhausted every pleasure the island had to offer. The hotel was as dreary as its inmates, German professors and American spinsters, and even the food was wretched. Fortunately he had brought an introduction to a man who had had to do with both the imperial owners of the 'Achilleion', and the anecdotes of royalty which he heard gave him some pleasure, but as he had come to Corfu for a little gaiety and international smartness, perhaps even a little illicit gaiety, he naturally felt frustrated. He had been to all the show-places and had been more or less bored by them, had tried swimming

and caught a cold, had scratched the surface of local society and found it wanting, for he had not the wit to see how even its decay was enthralling and not unseldom actually comic. He was definitely disappointed. Take to-day, for example. He had woken at nine, taken a bath, made his usual elaborate toilet, rung several times more than anybody else to call the servants, and, after a final survey of himself in the looking-glass, which certainly flattered him almost as much as he flattered himself, had sauntered out, immaculate and slightly scented, into the garden, where he consumed a light and leisurely breakfast. After this, while he was enjoying an English cigarette, he fell into conversation with a young American couple who were staying at the hotel. The man was a classical scholar who was just completing his first visit to Greece, and who, strangely enough, was more interested in the people than in broken columns and the débris which fills museums. He had a theory that the Greeks of to-day, in spite of the Byzantine tradition and in spite of their changed blood, are not entirely unlike the Greeks of antiquity, especially in their vices. He had seen something of the Greek colonists in America, and had detected in them (he thought) a certain matter-of-factness characteristic of their ancestors, the same love of money, the same obsession with politics, the same jealousy of anyone among them who gave evidence of possessing a few brains or a little power. In Greece itself he had learnt to feel affection for a race he could never help admiring in spite of its faults, and had been overjoyed to discover once or twice in Athens types of men and women who corresponded physically to the beautiful creatures of early Attic art. About them, as about the majority, he had few illusions, and now, here in Corfu, he had come to regard

Emmanuelides, whom he saw at meals, and with whom he and his wife exchanged a few words every day, as the very archetype of the modern Greek, not the antithesis, but the late offspring of archaic glories. He saw him plainly as one of those frivolous beings who abound in the modern world, who are incapable of thought, who take nothing seriously, who never seem to be without money though they appear to do little or no work for it, who like wearing parti-coloured shoes and silk shirts at expensive international resorts, who are often not without a little culture and a little charm, whose aim is pleasure and whose ambition is bound up with the gossip column and a little display; and he could not help seeing him at the same time as simply one of those Greeks who, in their decadence, long before Christ, had scattered abroad, to Rome, to Alexandria, to Babylon, ready to act (so Juvenal noticed) as tame poets, domestic philosophers, social parasites, speculators, quack doctors, cheapjacks, music-masters, rhetoricians, masseurs, or mountebanks. He could not dislike him, though he saw through all his shallowness and charlatanry; and as for his wife, she really liked him, feeling rather pleased to be asked if she knew why the Prince of Wales didn't marry, and if she didn't think the tango had come to stay. One could not, however, spend the whole morning, in this beautiful weather, discussing such matters, so he pressed his wife's arm and said to Emmanuelides:

'Well, if you'll excuse us, I'm afraid we must leave you. They've brought a couple of bicycles around for us, and we want to get to Canone and back before lunch.'

And so Emmanuelides was left alone again, glancing at his shoes to see once more whether they had been properly cleaned. He stood at the entrance to the hotel, sniffing

slightly, for he was not quite sure whether he had altogether lost the cold he had caught while bathing, and looked up and down in the sun-glare of the street, wondering how he should occupy the time until luncheon. He had already written postcards to all his friends, and felt disinclined to repeat the process again so soon. He yawned, with a slow, pleasurable, feline yawn, and then glanced at his nails, an occupation from which he was distracted by the arrival of a taxi. As soon as he saw it he at once decided to go for a drive, but he did not allow the chauffeur to guess his intention immediately. The month was September, in some ways the worst month of the year in Corfu, as he had just been told, for it is then that the heat tells most, not because it is greatest, but because of the unhealthy dampness with which it is overcharged; the air seems to have lost some essential ingredient, and becomes stale and listless, bringing no ozone from the sea; it is breathed with difficulty, like the atmosphere surrounding some other and crueller planet than this; the sea itself is silent, without ever a wave, and seems stagnant; at its edges whole banks of seaweed decay with a frightful and noxious stench; and at sunset the rock pools begin to coruscate with the transient gleams given off by tiny phosphorescent vermin; the very fish which are drawn from these waters seem, in September at least, to be either tasteless or touched with some almost imperceptible taint. Yes, decidedly, the only thing to do on a morning like this was to move through the air in the hope of refreshing oneself. One might drive through the village of Potamo, for example—not because one was interested in picturesque poverty, but because it was one of the places people went to, and would form a topic of conversation with the American couple. The taxi driver

approached him and suggested a drive, but he shook his head. They exchanged a few words, and the taxi driver became importunate, whereupon a thoroughly Greek conversation ensued. Emmanuelides called him a thief and a liar, they both invoked heaven, and their four hands went through a long series of eurhythmic and spasmodic which ended in the chauffeur's reluctantly agreeing to do the drive for half the price he had at first asked. Emmanuelides then put on a white hat and dark spectacles and got into the car. The chauffeur drove rather fast, hoping to get another fare on his return to the town, and it was noticeable that whenever there was a downward slope he switched off the engine for economy's sake. The car ran between hedges of prickly pear, past thickets of bamboo and pink-and-white chapels, a cemetery with cypresses, a villa with palms, past fields of cabbages and egg-plants, but Emmanuelides was not much interested in what he saw, and began to ask the chauffeur some facetious personal questions. At one point, where it was necessary to slow down, a boy with wasted limbs and eczema ran begging by the side of the car, and Emmanuelides without any hesitation threw him a drachma, which at that time was worth about three farthings. The chauffeur was sulky, and as for the village of Potamo, well, why did people come and see it? Certainly the church was large, but all the houses were rotting or in ruins, there were pigs in the main street and the discoloured plaster was everywhere coming away from the walls. Certainly some of the peasant women were wearing their celebrated costume, but although their hands and feet were small, they were not exactly what you would call beauties. . . . And before he knew where he was, he was back again at the hotel. The dining-room was chilly, in spite of the heat of the

day; the food was as poor as usual; and there was no liveliness among the visitors. Afterwards, following his usual routine, Emmanuelides took a long siesta, sleeping for more than two hours.

When he rose, he dressed carefully in a different suit to the one he had worn in the morning, and went out for a stroll in the town, where he had a little shopping to do. But directly he found himself in the narrow principal street, called after Our Lady of Victories, his progress was impeded by a crowd, he heard the slow strains of an approaching band, and was obliged to stand by for a funeral to pass. And what a funeral! After the band, which was playing a dirge stridently and slightly out of tune, came four popes and a number of young men holding candles. The bright westering sun, shafted between two rows of houses, shone full upon them, made the candle-flames almost invisible, and lit up the faces in such a way as to make them all livid or lurid, especially those already pale from sickness or debauchery. There were no women at all in the procession, but it did not produce any idea of restrained and manly grief or of the nobility of death. On the contrary, the sun was so merciless that it not only shone like a searchlight upon the funeral itself, but seemed to draw out grimly every suggestion of mortality in each living face and hand, showed up the greenish tinge of clothes once black, and made death seem but a matter of corruption, misery, and degradation. The climax came with the arrival of the hearse, all varnished black angels, gilded knobs, and twisted pillars, and drawn by two gaunt horses entirely caparisoned, except for the eyes and hooves, with a material which had once been purple velvet, but which the ruthless sun showed to have faded almost to grey and puce, revealing the tarnished

braid of the borders and even small rents and darns in the side. Two of the mourners had faces quite disfigured with grief, several more had affected the same emotion, and all the rest were set in various expressions of dutifulness, habit, sympathy, and indifference. The last slow feet followed the fading notes of the band, and the least sensitive spectators felt no doubt of the reality of either the sting of death or the victory of the grave. Even the un-serious Emmanuelides had been made to feel momentarily gloomy and uneasy, to remind himself that this was his birthday and to wonder how long he was likely to be allowed to live. The atmosphere had become steamy again, and he wiped the perspiration away from his forehead.

By the time he had done what he had set out to do, had sat in a café to watch the people and read the newspaper, had spent half an hour in conversation with a returned Greek-American who professed himself disgusted with the lack of comfort in his native island, and had finally returned to the hotel, it was nearly time to dress for dinner.

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And now it was ten o'clock, and there were three hours to be whiled away somehow, for Emmanuelides never dreamt of going to bed before one in the morning. He was standing irresolutely under a tree in the esplanade when somebody stepped out of the shadows and touched him on the arm. It was a young man who was wearing a large cap that had been manufactured to look like tiger-skin. He had a pale face and neat black moustache, and it was clear from his roguish expression and insinuating manner that he was a pimp. Every instinct that was most frivolous in Emmanuelides immediately awoke, and he began to

ask the man a number of bantering questions, although he had not the least intention of being persuaded by him. Coquettish and chaffing, his behaviour was never more characteristic of the type of man to which he belonged, and the pimp soon saw that there was no business to be done, and turned away to seek more honest game, so that Emmanuelides found himself exactly where he had been ten minutes before. But just at this moment the moon rose. An orange moon, not quite full, it suddenly looked out dramatically from a cloud-wreath above the mountains of northern Epirus on the other side of the strait, scattered its light on the sea, and with level rays cast a pale radiance upon the old fortress, the trees on the esplanade, the façade of the English palace, and the mouldy statues that stood here and there—an English governor in streaky bronze; Guilford, the eccentric philhellene, in marble; and especially the fantastic Schulenburg, in chipped periwig and sandstone toga, potbellied above his panelled trophies. Moonstruck, the whole scene had a touch of magic. Long shadows, and contrasts of light and shade, seemed to distort the proportions of things, and the esplanade became a stage set for any improbable happening; while by way of overture a blind fiddler had struck up in a café with an eerie Heptanese folk-tune. But although the appearance of the moon had given the hour a sudden glamour, Emmanuelides saw little chance of anything happening to distract him, and on turning over in his mind the possible amusements—a primitive open-air cinema, a game of cards or billiards, a dull walk or conversation—he rejected each in turn. It was then, however, that an idea occurred to him. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the only ideas which ever occurred to him were those connected with his own

pleasure, and this was accordingly one of them. Why, he reflected, should he not take a boat for an hour or two? He at once made his way to a landing-place he knew of, where there were always boats to be had, and sure enough there were several to choose from. But he did not choose a boat so much as a boatman, for what would be the good of spending time with a dreary companion? One of the boatmen was much younger than the others, and Emmanuelides at once got into his boat, at which the older men were annoyed. As soon as he had pushed off, the young boatman looked narrowly at his passenger, feeling for him, as it happened, an aversion as instinctive as the attraction he had exerted over Emmanuelides. He could only think of him as a fool with money to spend, and felt towards him the usual Greek envy of anybody apparently a little richer or happier than oneself, and that bitterness which can only be felt towards people of one's own kind. Emmanuelides could see the boy's black eyes sparkling in his handsome face, but he did not consider how far these good looks were due to poverty or hunger, and sought to please him by making amiable remarks. He was only answered shortly. The boat was not far from shore when some voices became audible, singing the words of a tango which had been the fashion in Greece for several months past, and the tune of which tended to haunt the least musical ear. It was a tune actually based on an indigenous Argentine melody, but had been written by a Polish-Australian Jew in Paris, and popularized by a negro comedian with what the Greeks call a pancosmic reputation. With Emmanuelides it was a special favourite, and as the singers ashore left it off he took it up, humming it in a rather highly-pitched voice, grinning, and beating time with his foot.

'Ah, how often have I danced to this tune!' he exclaimed.

The boatman, whose name was Spyros, made no comment, bending to the oar.

'Do you like dancing?' said Emmanuelides, without waiting for an answer. 'I love it myself. I usually dance every evening at the same cabaret, and forget the work I have done during the day. It's pleasure and exercise combined. But in Corfu there is no dancing. What a dull place it is!'

'Where do you live?' said Spyros.

'Well,' said Emmanuelides, 'I live in Athens.' He was very cautious and reticent.

'Are you in business there?'

'Yes,' he lied, 'in business.'

There was a silence broken only for a time by the creaking of the oars.

'And you?' said Emmanuelides, in a soft voice. 'Tell me something about yourself.'

The boy laughed rather contemptuously, and said nothing. 'Dancing', in the sense that Emmanuelides used the word, to Spyros represented all that he felt he himself could never attain to, a world of ease and pleasure and money, and his envy of the older man became intensified at every word.

'Well?' said Emmanuelides expectantly.

'What do you want to know?' said Spyros, avoiding his glance.

'First of all,' said Emmanuelides, 'please stop rowing. We've gone quite far enough, and it'll do you good to have a rest.'

Spyros obediently put up the oars, and still said nothing. Emmanuelides, leaning forward, offered him a

cigarette, which he took, and lighted. When the match lit up his face, Emmanuelides was quite struck with his good looks, so struck that he forgot to be discreet, and said suddenly:

‘Do you know, I was lying to you just now.’

‘Were you?’ said Spyros. ‘What about?’

‘I told you I was in business at Athens, but I’m not in business and I don’t live in Athens. I live in Egypt and I’m an official.’

‘Ah,’ said Spyros, ‘not in Alexandria?’

‘Yes, Alexandria. Why do you ask?’

‘I only wondered. . . . But why did you lie to me at first?’

‘Well,’ said Emmanuelides, ‘at first I didn’t trust you, because I didn’t know you. But now I see that I can trust you, I see that you’re a good boy.’

‘But is there any secret about where you live?’

‘Oh, you never know. I’m a stranger here, and an official. People sometimes talk——.’

There was a pause. The moon had risen higher, and the Othonian islands could be distinctly seen, bathed in a golden mist.

‘As you are an official,’ said Spyros, ‘perhaps you can help me.’

‘I’ll do anything I can for you,’ said Emmanuelides with an unexpected eagerness, leaning forward again. ‘Let me be your friend.’

Spyros was a trifle suspicious of this generosity, but he resolved to turn it to good account. It seemed to him an enjoyable sort of revenge, to take thorough advantage of the kindness of a person one despised. So he began talking a little of himself, making his story seem as pathetic as possible. He stressed his poverty, which was genuine;

explained that his parents were both dead, which was true; said that he lived with his uncle, that his life was dull, that he helped the fishermen in the intervals of managing his boat, that he had no money and no future—all of which was equally true. Seeing how effectively he was playing on Emmanuelides' feelings, he was careful not to overdo his performance, but with silence, and an occasional catch in the voice, he worked wonders. It became clear that Emmanuelides was excited and interested, perhaps by the story, or by his moonlight excursion, by this variation from his recent boredom, or by Spyros himself.

'Have you any brothers and sisters?' he asked, not because he wanted to know, but because he wanted to watch Spyros, to hear him talk, and to make it appear as if he took a very special interest in him. At this question the boy's manner and expression immediately changed. It was possible, even in the moonlight, to see his dark eyes dilate: to see that he had somehow been touched to the quick. And Emmanuelides, with an almost feminine alertness, missed nothing. Where Spyros had previously been speaking for effect, he now spoke with passion. The words hurried to keep pace with his thoughts.

'I have one sister,' he said, 'and it is with regard to her that I want to ask your help. Her name is Nausicaa. Three years ago she was married to a man who came from Egypt. We knew nothing of him, he was not a Corfiote, but my uncle said that she ought to marry him, and she did. When she went away, it was the worst day of my life. And although she promised to write, and although I have made inquiries, we have never heard a word from that day to this. I am longing to see her again, at least to have news of her, but I have a great fear. From things I

have heard indirectly, I believe it is possible that she has been forced to become a prostitute in Alexandria.'

Emmanuelides uttered a horrified exclamation.

'And this is where I ask you to help me. Can you inquire for me if she can be found? I can give you all particulars, and the name of the man she went away with——'

Emmanuelides felt a glow of satisfaction in his breast, felt that he had conquered this at first contemptuous boy, felt that by promising help he could complete that conquest. Laying his hand on the boy's knee, he said, in a very gentle and emotional voice:

'But of course I will help you, *pallikaraki*. I'll make detailed inquiries directly I get back, and let you know the result. I'm sure she can be traced.'

And Spyros believed him, forgot his envy, felt that he really had found a friend, so that his whole attitude to Emmanuelides changed, and his reserve melted away. They stayed out so long on the calm water that warm night that, by the time they returned, the moon was in quite a different part of the sky. After Emmanuelides had given the boy some money, he made his way back to the hotel.

Shortly afterwards he made a second excursion, spending the whole afternoon on the water with Spyros, renewing his promise and assurances in regard to Nausicaa, and making himself as amiable as possible. But in his own mind he had already decided to leave Corfu, and when, on their return in the evening, a little rain began to fall, he felt that his boredom might recur, for his curiosity about Spyros was satisfied.

'I shall have to leave in a few days,' he said on landing. 'If I don't see you before then, be sure to come and see me before I go.'

And although Spyros regretted his prospective departure in some ways, his heart beat quicker at the thought of the possibility of his sister's being found, so he said good night to his friend with mixed feelings.

Before Emmanuelides reached the hotel the rain was falling quite heavily. It continued to fall, on and off, for a week. Also, the weather was very cold, and because it was early in the autumn the hotel was inadequately heated. The visitors were miserable, but none was more bored than Emmanuelides, who did not know what to do with himself, and attached himself rather too closely to the American couple. They soon tired of him. Not having been long married, they were quite contented to be alone together, whatever the weather was like. One day, when it cleared a little, they went out bicycling again, partly with the idea of escaping for a time from Emmanuelides, but the bad luck which is characteristic of the island came upon them, and the woman fell off her machine and was slightly injured.

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It was the morning of Emmanuelides' departure. He rose much earlier than usual, put on his slippers of soft red leather and a dressing-gown of brocaded silk, and went over to the window. Not only had the rain stopped, but there was not a cloud in the sky. The room faced westwards, looking inland over a wide and varied panorama, which now appeared, with the sun's bright beams shining through the unsullied air as if through a crystal, clearer than he had ever seen it before. The sea, invisible to him, was all diamonds, while between the rocky heights of San Salvatore on the right and those of Hagia Deka on the left, towers and trees and gardens were as fine and

coloured as those in a medieval illumination or Oriental miniature, and just as the Middle Ages and the East are to be thought of as largely squalid and filthy, full of the corruption of earth and humanity, so were the houses of Corfu; but if those paintings are glorious projections of mortality, so, too, this aspect of the island seemed such a projection, with the white cliff-cluster of the village of Pelleka over there (so poor and dirty really) looking now like a colony of love in Paradise itself, as if Nature did not disdain the function of art, which can paint a heaven with earthy colours. The morning sky, the sunny white houses among green trees, the cries of children and the twinkling leaves below his window were not unappreciated by the spectator, for he was tired of days of rain. But he was also tired of Corfu, not with the frantic ennui of the nervous or highly-strung, but with the weak satiety of a dilettante. He was bored, and glad to go, and looked at the landscape without regrets. Indeed, it made him unwontedly reflective, for he felt it to be slightly sinister, and he remembered his birthday, the funeral he had seen, and the mad moon rising over the esplanade. Yes, he even became imaginative enough to think of the dirt and disease he had seen, which festered even now behind those white walls of near mansions and distant cottages; he remembered how he had been told only yesterday that Corfu had had the first lunatic asylum in Greece, and he saw madness brooding in distant hamlets; he thought of the two madwomen he knew so well by sight as familiar characters in the town—one, young and dressy, who hurried off daily to stand motionless for hours under a tree in the square, muttering empty litanies; the other older and lousy, with a shock of curls, who strolled about scavenging and sometimes wept so vehemently as to cause

laughter, hers seemingly the shrill grief of a buffoon. Already the magic of the light was slightly coarsened, soldiers were marching, a motor-lorry was passing, day was terrestrial, and Emmanuelides had finished his cigarette. He threw it away, and turned to shave and pack, glad to go, but feeling a slight irritation at the thought of a possible visit from Spyros.

As often, and perhaps usually happens, two human beings had each other in mind at the same moment, and Spyros was just dressing with a view to saying good-bye to Emmanuelides. He was dressing in borrowed clothes, while Emmanuelides was explaining to the valet de chambre that his tenth suit must not be crushed in the packing. From his childhood up Spyros had been familiar with the façade of the hotel. GRAND HOTEL BRISTOL & ITHAKA was written in Greek and Roman letters above the door, and he seldom went past without exchanging a nod with the hall porter, a distant connection of his by marriage. But the idea of entering had never occurred to him. Even on the occasions when he had brought back a scarf or camera which somebody had left in his boat, there had always been a servant at the entrance to receive it. Not that the hotel was awe-inspiring: it simply housed a floating population of persons who were mostly foreign, and therefore rich, or, if not rich, able, under pressure, to pay. Yet this morning, so brilliant after the rain, Spyros went up the steps a little awkwardly and uneasily, proud and yet somehow ashamed of his blue serge suit and borrowed white collar that pressed a trifle tightly on his brown, muscular neck. The clear voices of two young women from 'Europe', from one of those pulsating cities that form the nerve centres of the world, rang with quick laughter and repartee, and he caught sight of their

figures through the revolving glass door. They were tall and slender, dressed very simply and smartly, with a touch of carelessness and scarcely any jewellery or paint, standing and moving in ways that were neither slack nor stiff, but easy with the ease and elegance of people who have never known for several generations what it is to be without money or food, and who regard any momentary lack of either as a joke. They both glanced at him as he passed, with the quick, calculating glance of their species, and his gaze rested on each of them in turn, deliberately, independently, with that mixture of shyness and hostility that can be seen in the expression of peasants, children, animals, and persons very highly organized. A moment later they had gathered up their things and gone out into the sunshine, while he went slowly upstairs. On the first floor there was some confusion, but he managed to find his way to Emmanuelides' room.

'Ah, there you are,' said Emmanuelides airily. 'You're very smart this morning.'

'These clothes do not fit me,' said the boy, looking at the luggage piled up in the middle of the room.

'You haven't yet tied on the labels!' Emmanuelides exclaimed to the servant. 'Please do it quickly.'

'You won't forget——' began Spyros.

'Now where are my keys? Ah, here they are! I thought for a moment I had lost them!' Emmanuelides smiled broadly.

'I came to say good-bye,' said Spyros, 'and to ask you not to forget——'

'To inquire, you mean? But of course I shall not forget.' He glanced at his watch. 'Ah, look at the time! I must hurry. An American lady who is staying here has had a bicycle accident, and her husband says she is determined

to see me before I go. One must consider the ladies. And the ship sails in less than three quarters of an hour!

He moved out of the room, and Spyros followed, saying again:

‘You won’t forget?’

Emmanuelides looked over his shoulder at the servant, who was still busy with the labels, and seeing that he was unobserved, for he had a horror of scandal, pinched Spyros’ cheek.

‘Good-bye,’ he said facetiously, ‘and be good.’

He began to walk away, smiling as usual, on his way to the room occupied by the two Americans, glanced down at his breast pocket to see that the corner of his handkerchief was properly displayed, and then turned round and said to Spyros:

‘I’ll make inquiries, but they may not come to anything. People move about, you know—it is not always possible to trace them.’

Twenty minutes later he appeared at the front door. Spyros saw him go, and then, after a few minutes’ conversation with the porter, stepped across the street in the splendid sunshine, walking aimlessly in the direction of his home. The air was wonderfully fresh after the rain. Two or three children were playing with a cat in an alleyway, and a stout woman came out of a doorway, gave them a quick glance, and then, looking in the opposite direction, called out in a sonorous voice: ‘Nausicaa! Come back when I call you!’ Spyros started, and involuntarily glanced round, just in time to see a tiny child appear at the top of some steps in response to its mother’s call. When he reached the corner of the next street his ear caught the distant sound of a siren from the direction of the port. Familiar enough, that prolonged, vibrant wail

had never meant so much to him. But the boat was leaving, and its cry was not one of expectation but of farewell. Its effect on him was that of a warning to abandon hope, the last cry of the ghost of an illusion, and it seemed as though that departing ship were leaving him utterly alone on a desert island. He no longer cared whether Emmanuelides made inquiries or not, for he felt certain that Nausicaa would never be found. 'People move about, you know, it is not always possible to trace them.' When he considered how much he hated the man who had uttered those words, how instinctively and wholeheartedly he detested him, Spyros could not understand how he could have allowed himself to behave so amiably towards Emmanuelides. And because he was unwilling even to catch a glimpse of the departing ship, he turned and took a road that led directly away from the sea.

HUGH ANTHONY

ANÆSTHESIA

He leant out of the taxi and waved his hand. Perhaps it was just habit or politeness. He had asked her to marry him two, or was it three, months ago. She had said No; then, Perhaps. Her gradual approach to consent made him hesitate to ask again. Now she might say Yes. Would he be glad? He did not know. Opposition stimulated him: angrily he admitted it. A problem solved no longer existed, no longer fascinated. He wanted to oppose, to strive against, even to hate—it did not matter what or whom. Always to be against: that was it. He pulled down the window. To love, to work with, meant to give. He did not want to give. ‘I cannot give’, he shouted. And I hate myself for it, he thought. He found pleasure in hating himself, and was enraged at the admission. Intelligence told him that his attitude was wrong. But what did wrong mean? Yes, what the hell did it mean? Either nothing at all or something deeply embedded in humanity. A conditioned reflex, a social convention, a hedge over which one might the more delectably peep at pleasure, the salt that gave sensuality its flavour, or . . . ? He said the word out loud. The sound boomed. There was something in it beyond definition: it was dark and restrictive. Yet what did it matter? He leant back in the taxi and his muscles relaxed. The earth was cooling down, contracting; so they said. A mere speck in a universe of island universes. In time life would fade out, the earth would be cold. And he was only an electron vibrating precariously round the central nucleus of society. At any moment he might shoot

off into the void, become annihilated. Chemistry and physics, so they said, explained everything. How comforting, how cold! Why make an effort then? Why live? You couldn't help it. You were just part of a reversible reaction between life and not-life. How cold! Opposed to cold was heat. Heat accelerated the reaction: cold delayed. There was more comfort in heat. The night in a café in Budapest when the sobbing strains of gipsy music had told him that he loved her, and he had walked by the Danube and had seen her face in the hundreds of lights that hung on the hills of Buda; each light her face, smiling, entreating, gay, sad; and the broad river the life that streamed nobly within her. Perhaps the clever men of science could explain these things. They had an explanation for everything; a fact for every fancy, a ductless gland for every mood. His thoughts, he noticed, began with Helen and returned through innumerable and, it seemed, irrelevant associations back to Helen. The taxi stopped at the corner of Queen Anne Street.

'Thank you, sir.' The taxi-driver was impressed by the tip.

'You needn't thank me. You and I are merely a couple of machines working according to plan. We differ from the taxi only in that we break down more frequently.' Ambrose smiled. 'At least, that's what they say. But I don't believe it, do you?'

A nice gentleman, thought the maid, as she showed him into Mr. Candler's consulting room. A bit shy, but he did not look through you as though you didn't exist. 'What name shall I give, sir?'

'Helen is the name.'

'And *your* name, sir?'

He blushed and frowned. 'Er—I mean Ambrose: John Ambrose.'

Mr. Candler put his hands in his waistcoat pockets and squared his shoulders. He caught a satisfactory glimpse of himself in the mirror. His shoulders were broad; a good deep chest. Gave his patients confidence, he thought. Poor devils wanted it. He separated his legs and braced back his knees. He felt as fit as a fiddle.

'I've seen your X-ray plates,' he said. 'There's nothing much the matter. I shall have to manipulate your joint under an anæsthetic. But that's nothing. A whiff of gas, and off you go to sleep. Won't know anything about it.'

The sort of man who can have no doubts, thought Ambrose. Solid, confident; as substantial as his mahogany desk; as respectable as the engravings and water-colours on the blue walls, dark blue. Handsome in an athletic sort of way. Feared God, probably; honoured the King; was admired by his wife, and thought a good fellow by his colleagues. Oh, you felt you could trust him right enough: a man who knew his job. Must give them a false sense of power, he thought, having people unconscious on the table, pulling their joints about, cutting their flesh, watching the blood ooze from the body and then stanching the flow. How did they know when to stop, how far could they go without risk, he wondered.

'I suppose there is no risk in having an anæsthetic.'

Mr. Candler smiled, showing a perfect set of teeth. Funny how much more alarmed patients were about small operations than about big ones.

'No need to worry at all, my good fellow. A little gas and oxygen is the safest anæsthetic in the world. I've never known anything go wrong, and I . . .' He cleared his throat and jerked back his shoulders. 'Well, I've seen

two thousand seven hundred and one cases in the last two years. Not a bad average, eh?

Ambrose took a box of matches from his pocket, opened the box, and then put it back. It must be a queer experience to have seen hundreds of *cases* talking to you in a consulting room, losing consciousness, dying, so to speak, on the operating table, then returning to life and talking again. He wondered what his fees would be; it would be indelicate, he thought, to ask, almost ungrateful.

‘And you don’t feel anything?’ Ambrose was not afraid, but he felt that he ought to sustain conversation. The surgeon laughed: the idea amused him.

‘Good lord, no! Nothing at all. A few breaths, then a nice quiet sleep, and you won’t know anything has happened.’

Ambrose thought that he certainly could not hate this man, he was too powerful. Absurd really to hate anyone. Why did he hate anything? Probably because he was baffled by the dead theories of life he read about. Purpose, progress, beauty, ideals, must mean something. And life must be more than an intricate machine, he thought, as he got onto the operating table.

‘No false teeth or artificial eyeballs?’ The fat, sleepy-looking anæsthetist grinned sympathetically. ‘A neat little gadget this,’ he said, turning to the surgeon. ‘You can strap the mask on with these rubber bands. Then you’ve got both hands free.’

He listened to Ambrose’s heart for a few seconds. He then gently put the mask over his mouth and nose. ‘Is that quite comfortable?’ Ambrose nodded. ‘Splendid. Now I just want you to breathe in and out. That’s the style. You’ll soon be asleep.’

Soon be asleep, thought Ambrose. Don’t like the smell

of rubber. Soon be asleep; what a comfort; oblivion for a few minutes. He'd heard that some people struggled under an anæsthetic and swore. Hoped he wouldn't make a fool of himself: must try to remain conscious till the last minute. He took a deep breath: a heavy, sweetish smell. His head swam a bit: rather like being drunk. He wanted to remove the mask for just a moment so that he might take a draught of air. A voice that seemed to come to him over a wide stretch of water murmured 'That's all right. Breathe in and out.' It was no use resisting. His legs were heavy. He felt his muscles loosen. A delicious tingling sensation came in his feet and rippled slowly upwards along his thighs and his belly. His head went round and round in widening circles. He became wildly happy; he wanted to tell them he was still conscious; no, he must control himself. Two or three snakes uncoiled themselves on his cheeks, numbing them. That must be the rubber bands. Lord, he was going under! He strove desperately to remain conscious. It was of no avail: they had absolute control over him; he had given himself into their hands. He was aware of nothing but revolving space. He saw himself suspended in an immense void. Life was being filtered through his body. Death must be like this. He was dying: there could be no doubt of it, his doom was ineluctable. His swaying mind groped for his last thoughts; there were so many things unsolved—the riddle of the universe, the meaning of life, was God a philosopher or a jester? The answer to the riddle was revealed to him in his last moments, divine in its simplicity, true because of its simplicity. To LAUGH! What a sublime reply! To laugh! The cord hanging him in space shook dangerously. Laughter, not reason, was the gift of the Gods to man. And people wept, poor fools, they wept because no one

knew the secret. Nobody understood. How ridiculous! How fantastic! And he was dying and could not tell anyone. He would take his message to the grave, he, the one man who had discovered the secret of life. The salvation of the world was in his hands, and they were killing him. And they would continue to chase first causes across the absolute; they would try to annihilate matter and to create life in test-tubes, until one day the sun would wrinkle its face in a cold, sardonic grin, and men would lie stark, stiff, and baffled at the last on a frozen earth. God, how grotesque! No, not grotesque, but uproariously funny. He must make a final effort and tell these fellows who were killing him; they were destroying their last chance. It was no good. He was dying, practically dead, the one person to tell them the truth. But that was surely the greatest joke of all, the supreme jest. He could not help laughing, yet it seemed rude because they did not know. If he laughed they might understand. He could no longer hold himself in; his belly heaved; his sides shook with unmanageable mirth. The cord rippled and snapped; he was scattered dizzily into emptiness.

‘He went under quickly,’ said the anæsthetist. ‘I wonder what the joke was.’

Mr. Candler said: ‘A pity he won’t be able to tell us when he comes round. Funny how they can never remember their dreams.’

The last echo of his laughter was lost in the air. In his dream Ambrose walked up a steep hill in search for the cause and meaning of death. Dying had been pleasurable, but death was perplexing. The same problems pursued him in death as in life. He wished he could remember the secret of life revealed to him in the moment of death. If there were the same problems, the solution would prob-

ably be the same also. Other people were walking up and down the hill, each one hidden from the other by his solitary and bewildered thoughts. Ambrose passed a grey-haired woman sitting on a stone and drawing pictures of children in the earth with a stick. He thought it was his mother, but they did not recognize each other when their eyes met. As he lifted his head he saw Helen on the top of the hill. She was building a house with children's bricks. As she built, a hand would appear from time to time and topple the house over, and despairingly she would start again. Ambrose shouted to her but she did not hear him, nor did she seem to recognize him. Ambrose shouted again. Then he listened and shouted once more, but he could not hear his own voice. He tried to speak aloud, and said, 'I love you, Helen.' His lips moved, he could feel the words form in his mouth, but no sound came forth: he could speak but not communicate. Panic seized him, and he stumbled hurriedly up the hill. Was the summit of the hill life, and the base of the hill where he was wandering looking for the meaning of death, death itself? As he stepped across a brook to enter the wood circling the middle belt of the hill he noticed that the water in the brook was still. In a clearing in the middle of the wood stood a Greek temple. He hesitated on the steps at the base. As he entered a sigh echoed from the columns. He stopped and looked round for the origin of the echo. Then he saw himself walk forward and pass into the cella of the temple, where a group of men were pacing to and fro in angry discussion. He felt no surprise at seeing himself. It was another consequence of being dead: you saw yourself.

'If he cannot decide to live at the top of the hill or to remain dead at the bottom, we shall have to destroy him.'

The man who spoke seemed to have authority with the others.

‘He cannot stay with us. He has done nothing to merit it,’ said another, a lean man with close-fitting black hair and an ascetic face.

‘He has not the strength to endure doubt,’ said the first speaker.

‘He is yet but a tracing in the sand,’ they all murmured.

The echo of a sigh travelled from column to column of the temple, and the men in the cella stopped and listened to it. ‘He shall return and try once more,’ they said.

Ambrose saw himself seized and bound and carried out of the temple. He felt impelled to follow. As he crossed the brook behind the cortège carrying his body he thought he observed a sluggish motion in its waters. Looking back, he caught a glimpse of Helen; her house was nearly completed. ‘How beautiful she is,’ he whispered, and strove to turn on his tracks so that he might meet her; but he was unable to leave the body that was being borne down the hill. There was a curious noise in his ears, and for a moment he could see nothing. When his vision cleared he saw the procession walking down a long corridor, at the end of which the leader stopped and knocked at a door. They entered and put his body on a table covered with a white sheet in the middle of the room. Then, all but two, the men disappeared. One of them removed something from his face, and he saw himself sit up and anxiously look round. He rubbed his eyes and took a deep breath; at that moment he became identified with the figure on the table.

‘But where is Helen?’ he shouted, seizing the surgeon by the arm.

‘That’s all right, old man. It’s all over,’ said Mr. Candler.

‘Sorry. Didn’t know where I was at first. I thought you were—I must have been dreaming. Yes, of course. You were in a temple and—wait a minute. Let me think. It will come back to me.’

Mr. Candler squared his shoulders and laughed: ‘Don’t you worry. You’ll never remember. No one ever does. Now let me see you move your leg.’

Ambrose moved his leg. ‘But,’ he said, ‘there was somebody on a hill. I hope I wasn’t any trouble, was I? I mean, people sometimes——’

‘Not a bit of it. You roared with laughter just as you were going off, but you won’t remember the joke. A pity: it must have been a good one.’

JANKO LAVRIN

LUIGI PIRANDELLO

I

Of all the recent Italian playwrights, Pirandello alone has achieved an international reputation. The reason is to be sought in his provocative quaintness rather than in exceptional originality or depth. At the first glance he reminds one somewhat of the equally provocative Bernard Shaw, whom he resembles not only by his love of paradoxes, but also by his 'cerebral' bent, as well as by his utter lack of sentimentality. Yet in contrast to the optimistic and warlike Shaw, Pirandello has nothing to preach, nothing to fight for, or even to fight against. Disregarding all those social, political, and ethical problems from which the author of *Man and Superman* seems to draw his inspiration, Pirandello introduces himself at the very outset as a frank pessimist and sceptic. What interests him instead is human personality as such. And he scrutinizes its riddle through the modern spectacles and from a highly modern standpoint. Bergsonism, psycho-analysis, the self-divided consciousness, the principle of relativity as applied to man's inner world—this all is reflected in Pirandello's works, whose two basic themes are intertwined and repeated with an almost monotonous insistence. One of them is the emphasis on the instability of everything human, including our sincerest affections and opinions; while the other is the antithesis he makes between life as such, and its external forms, or 'masks' as he calls them.

Endowed with a capricious and sardonic mind, Pirandello is attracted, first of all, by what is grotesque and

cruelly comic. Yet, behind such a predilection one can easily detect the hidden anxiety of a modern Hamlet, the 'tragedy of a bewildered spirit gone astray and unable to find its way again'. For, not unlike some of his typical heroes, Pirandello knows too much about life and is too acutely aware of it to be able to live really and fully. All he can do is to observe, analyse, criticize, and reason. In fact, he reasons so much as to turn entire acts of his plays into dramatized discussions. And in doing this he is always glad to discredit reason itself—in the name of that irrational flux which is beneath the surface of our normal consciousness and which often threatens to sweep away all the 'fictitious forms around which our stupid daily life has solidified'. The conflict between life and its fictitious masks thus becomes the very *leitmotif* of Pirandello's creations. So much so that his collected plays bear the common title, *Le Maschere Nude*—the 'Naked Masks'. And for good reasons, too.

II

Pirandello's earliest work consists of realistic stories dealing with Sicilian life—partly after the manner of the older Sicilian writer, Verga. Yet he soon replaced his straightforward realism by a more introspective method, coupled with paradoxical and pathologic themes—preferably those dealing with a modern self-divided personality. His two novels, *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (the late M. Pascal), *Quaderni di* (Notebooks of) *Serafimo Gubbio*,¹ as well as his numerous *novelle*, show most of those aspects which he took up later on—from 1913 onwards—in his plays. Several of his plays had even appeared previously as stories (now collected under the general title, *Novelle d'un*

¹Originally published under the title, *Si Gira*.

Anno—Stories for a Year), which is a proof that his notorious ‘futilitarianism’ did not develop gradually, but was inherent, as it were, in his very first significant things. It was partly responsible also for his method, for his peculiar humour, as well as for his endless variations on the relationship between life and its ‘masks’.

This relationship can be treated farcically, tragically, and tragically—according to the way one looks at it. Pirandello shows all three attitudes, but preferably the first two, which is more than confirmed by his love of grotesquely ‘funny’ situations. Thus, in one of his early plays, *Pensaci Giacomino* (Think of it, Giacomino, 1917), the husband, an elderly schoolmaster, not only supports and encourages the love of Giacomino—his wife’s paramour and the father of his child—but actually compels him to return to her, after he had run away. The climax of ‘fun’ is reached when the indignant husband snarls at the priest who wants to prevent the lover from returning: ‘You—destroyer of family life!’

In *Il Piacere di Onestà* (The Pleasure of Being Respectable) he works out another highly ‘Pirandellian’ theme. The professional bounder, Angelo Baldovino, marries Agata for payment in order to save her and her family from the scandal, since she expects a child from a man whom she cannot possibly marry. The play opens with a sordid bargain and finishes with real affection, even with mutual respect of the married couple, a few months later. Or take the conflict between the two friends in *Ciascuno a suo Modo* (Each in his own Way). At the beginning of the play both of them collide because they hold opposite views with regard to a woman. In the process of the conflict, however, they both change their minds at the same time and collide again, because each of them has come

around to the views of the other. In *Ma non è una Cosa Seria* (It's not a Serious Matter) Memmo marries in joke the humble drudge, Gasparina, in order to escape the danger of a serious marriage. But as a wife, Gasparina changes into a pretty and dignified woman. When—a few months later—she shows her dignity and even insists on a divorce, her husband really falls in love with her, and his married life thus becomes a serious matter indeed. In one of Pirandello's more recent plays, again, *L'Amica delle Mogli* (The Wives' Friend), we watch the evil which is generated all around by the genuine goodness of Marta—one of the very few sympathetic women one comes across in Pirandello's works.

The love of such paradoxical themes is hardly surprising in an author who sees in life as a whole mere inconsistency, and in human beings only a collection of grotesque puppets. And what delights him most is to tear off the masks from his puppets—not in the name of 'Truth' as Ibsen used to do, but simply that he might grin at their tragi-comic antics and grimaces. It would not be difficult to discover underneath it all a suppressed romanticist who grins because even his 'tears have dried away'; who treats life comically in order to forget the tragedy that is behind its grotesque surface. In *Il Berretto a Sonagli* (A Clown's Cap), for example, the respectable puppet Ciampa, with the entire masquerade of his married life, is treated in the style of a farcical comedy; whereas the tragic element becomes more salient in *Tutto per Bene* (All for the Best). In contrast to Ciampa's conscious life-lie (as Ibsen would call it), the 'masks' Martino Lori wears are unconscious delusions. He cherishes the memory of his deceased wife so reverently as to make—years after her death—a daily pilgrimage to her tomb; he adores his

daughter, respects his learned friend, and is just about to become father-in-law when he discovers that the actual father of his daughter is not he, but his best friend. Everything crumbles down. He tries to act (this time consciously) a comedy, but finds it impossible. Finally, in the void that surrounds him, he is saved by another 'mask' which becomes reality to him: through his profound sorrow he wins the respect of his would-be daughter, who now begins to treat him as if he actually were her father. And so everything ends 'for the best'.

III

In order to see what Pirandello's tragic vein can be like, we must turn to such plays as *Vestire gl' Ignudi* (Dressing the Naked), or *Enrico* (Henry) *IV*. Both are, of course, tragedies of 'masks'. Ersilia, the heroine of the first play, is 'soiled with all the lowest and vilest filth in the world', but she deliberately tries to cover her past with beautiful lies, in order to die at least 'in a good dress—something beautiful to be buried in'. Yet even that is denied to her. For, after she has been saved from suicide, her 'mask' is taken off her face. The truth about her past comes out, and in her despair she is once more driven into suicide, which she now commits without trying or even without caring to put on a good moral dress: she dies 'naked'.

Another poignant variation of Pirandello's *leitmotif* we find in his best and cleverest play, *Enrico IV*. Owing to a fall from the horse during a pageant in which he was arrayed as the German Emperor, Henry IV, the hero of the play went mad, and in his madness actually believed he was Henry IV. Everything in his solitary villa had to be arranged accordingly. After several years, however, he recovered his reason. He tried to cast off his 'mask'—only

in order to be provoked to a murder, and to arrive at the irrevocable fact that life could no longer take him back. 'I perceived it all of a sudden one day, when I opened my eyes, and I was terrified because I understood at once that not only had my hair gone grey, but that I was all grey inside; that everything had fallen to pieces, that everything was finished; and I was going to arrive, hungry as a wolf, at a banquet which had already been cleared away. . . .' So he resumed his mask of madness as his only bearable reality—a mask which he now considered no less real than thousands of imposed rôles, performed by other people all their lives. 'This dress [*plucking his dress*] which is for me the evident, involuntary caricature of other continuous, everlasting masquerade, of which we are the involuntary puppets, when, without knowing it, we mask ourselves with that which we appear to be . . . ah, that dress of theirs, this masquerade of theirs, of course we must forgive it them, since they do not yet see it is identical with themselves. . . . You know, it is quite easy to get accustomed to it. One walks about as a tragic character, just as if it were nothing . . . [*Imitates the tragic manner*] in a room like this. . . . I am cured, gentlemen; because I can act the madman to perfection, here; and I do it very quietly, I'm only sorry for you that have to live your madness so agitatedly, without knowing it or seeing it.'¹

Looking upon human beings as unreal puppets, Pirandello is bound to reduce also their views, truths, and opinions to something equally unreal: to conscious or unconscious illusions. Like a jesting Pilate, he makes Laudisi reason in one of his most typical plays, *Così è se vi Pare* (You're Right if you think you are): 'Now, you

¹Translated by E. Storer in *Three Plays by Luigi Pirandello*. (Dent.)

have touched me, have you not? And you see me? And you are absolutely sure about me, are you not? Well now, madam, I beg of you: do not tell your husband, nor my sister, nor my niece, nor Signora Cini here, what you think of me; because, if you were to do that, they would all tell you that you are completely wrong. But, you see, you are really right; because I am really what you take me to be, though, my dear madam, that does not prevent me from also being really what your husband, my sister, my niece, and Signora Cini take me to be—because they also are absolutely right!

Pirandello not only resigns himself to such relativity of truths and opinions, but even welcomes it as something which makes life varied and changeable. What he dreads most is a fixed and static existence under the dictatorship of some mummified 'truth' or other. Eventually he is not afraid of condemning art itself, in so far as it tries to fix and freeze down the eternally changing flux of life. Hence the repulsion with which the old sculptor Giuncano (*Diana e la Tuda*) looks upon his own creations—an attitude reminiscent of Rubek in Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*. Change, and change alone, is life, whereas fixity of any kind means death and stagnation.

IV

Pirandello is at his best when depicting the tragi-comic aspects of a conflict between the two. Where he shows his weakness, however, is in his characters. For, as a rule, they are too little detached from their creator to have an independent existence of their own. Instead of expressing themselves through action, they often express through discussions only Pirandello's own attitude towards life. Plays such as *L'Innesto* (Grafting), *La Ragione degli Altri*

(Other People's Reason), *Ma non è una Cosa Seria*, *Ciascuno a suo Modo*, and even *Il Piacere dell' Onestà*, are crowded with discussions. At times one seems to listen to paradoxical theorems galvanized through lively dialectics into a semblance of life—a process in which the subtlety of Pirandello the sophist thrives, even at the expense of psychological convincingness.

It is here that Pirandello's sophisticated cleverness is likely to dazzle one by its tricks and logical somersaults. With all that, his plays look simple enough on the surface. A closer scrutiny reveals, however, their invariable and real complexity. It is not only his subject-matter that is complex, but also his technique, which has assimilated quite a number of external influences. The old *commedia dell' arte* has had a considerable share in the 'Pirandellian' play. So has the modern *teatro grottesco*, as well as Ibsen (with his retrospective action), Bernard Shaw, futurism, German expressionism, the cinema. Pirandello himself may try to divulge the secret of his own creative process in *Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore* (Six Characters in Search of an Author); yet any attempt to reduce his dramatic technique to a formula would be misleading, for the simple reason that in this respect, too, he does not adhere to any fixed rules. He is always on the look out, always ready to experiment with new means and methods. What could be more experimental than his *Enrico IV*? His *Sei Personaggi* and *Ciascuno a suo Modo*, with their mixture of planes and the cunningly adapted device of the 'play within a play'? Or his more recent *La Nova Colonia* (The New Colony, 1928) in which he tries to create a modern myth with the crowd as its actual hero?

One of his best qualities is, perhaps, his artistic economy, which amounts, in his later plays, to a kind of monu-

mental baldness. His sophisticated 'cerebrality', on the other hand, becomes a drawback mainly in so far as he often wants to stun the spectator, to take him by surprise. He also concentrates on the chief hero too much at the expense of other characters. And the most effectful 'Pirandellian' climax is, of course, the moment when the hero loses all ground, gets stripped of his 'masks', and if he escapes from the catastrophe at all, he does so only by means of a new 'mask'.

Herein lies, by the way, not only the irony, but also the consistency of Pirandello's attitude towards man and life. For if life is continuous change and renewal, we can renew ourselves only by consciously changing our 'masks'—in the way we change our worn-out clothes. And since everything is illusion, then let us be carried along the stream of life at least on our own (and not on borrowed) illusions and delusions—until we say good-bye to it all. 'One has to live, that is, to deceive oneself; to let act in us the devilish buffoon until he gets tired, and not to forget that all this will pass . . . will pass.'

Such an attitude was expressed by Pirandello already in his early novel, *Vechi e Giovani*.¹ All he has done since then is to expand and to illustrate this unheroic wisdom. Apart from Anton Chekhov, Pirandello is perhaps the most unheroic of modern authors—unheroic on principle. Yet, only by being so, he remains intellectually honest both towards himself and towards others. One has to pay for belonging to the twentieth century. Pirandello seems to have paid his price fully; but at the same time he has also avenged himself—through his art.

¹The Old and the Young Generation.

E. V. LUCAS

THE LAST TO CALL HIM CHARLEY

Notes on Lamb's friend, Randal Norris, and his family

Fortunate circumstances having just put me in possession of a photograph of a miniature portrait of Lamb's friend Randal Norris, the subject of the essay entitled 'A Death-



Bed' in the first edition of the second *Elia* volume, I am eager that others should see it too, for there can be no member of that vanished circle in and about the Temple who is nearer our hearts than the kindly 'R. N.' Lamb saw to that.

Our first definite glimpse of Randal Norris, who was Sub-Treasurer and Librarian of the Inner Temple for many years before his death in 1827, is in the postscript to the essay on 'The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple',

written in 1821, where Lamb says that he went to him—to R. N.—for information about Samuel Salt, who, it will be remembered, was the employer of Lamb's father. But it is more than probable—in fact, I think, certain—that the 'Mr. Norris of Christ's Hospital' who, after the tragedy in the Lamb household in 1796, was in Lamb's words, 'as a father to me', was this same worthy man. In 1796 he was forty-five, having been born in 1751, and we know that he had known Lamb from childhood, for in 'A Death-Bed' it is so stated: 'he was my friend and my father's friend for all the life I can remember. . . . He was the last link that bound me to the Temple'. I have not been able to trace Randal Norris to Christ's Hospital, where it is, I hope, superfluous to state that Lamb was at school, but, when fortified by Lamb's remark about Norris in a letter to Wordsworth in 1830—he was 'sixty years ours and our father's friend'—it is reasonable enough to assume that he may have had an official post there before he went to serve the lawyers.

The passage in the piteous letter of 1796 continues: 'Mrs. Norris as a mother; though we had few claims on them'. But as for 'claims', it would be enough for the Norrises that Mrs. Norris had been brought up at Widford and knew there Lamb's maternal grandmother, Mrs. Field.

I have referred to 'A Death-Bed', but since that was but a reproduction of the famous and beautiful letter to Crabb Robinson on January 20th, 1827, with the names altered, let me refresh memories by quoting the letter rather than the essay:

Dear Robinson,—I called upon you this morning, and found that you were gone to visit a dying friend. I had been upon a like errand. Poor Norris has been

lying dying for now almost a week, such is the penalty we pay for having enjoyed a strong constitution! Whether he knew me or not, I know not, or whether he saw me through his poor glazed eyes; but the group I saw about him I shall not forget. Upon the bed, or about it, were assembled his wife and two daughters, and poor deaf Richard, his son, looking doubly stupified. There they were, and seemed to have been sitting all the week. I could only reach out a hand to Mrs. Norris. Speaking was impossible in that mute chamber. By this time I hope it is all over with him.

In him I have a loss the world cannot make up. He was my friend and my father's friend all the life I can remember. I seem to have made foolish friendships ever since. Those are friendships which outlive a second generation. Old as I am waxing, in his eyes I was still the child he first knew me. To the last he called me Charley. I have none to call me Charley now. He was the last link that bound me to the Temple. You are but of yesterday. In him seem to have died the old plainness of manners and singleness of heart. Letters he knew nothing of, nor did his reading extend beyond the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Yet there was a pride of literature about him from being amongst books (he was librarian), and from some scraps of doubtful Latin which he had picked up in his office of entering students, that gave him very diverting airs of pedantry. Can I forget the erudite look with which, when he had been in vain trying to make out a black-letter text of Chaucer in the Temple Library, he laid it down and told me that—'in those old books, Charley, there is sometimes a deal of indifferent spelling'; and seemed to console himself in the reflection!

His jokes, for he had his jokes, are now ended, but they were old trusty perennials, staples that pleased after *decies repetita*, and were always as good as new. One song he had, which was reserved for the night of Christmas-day, which we always spent in the Temple. It was an old thing, and spoke of the flat bottoms of our foes and the possibility of their coming over in darkness, and alluded to threats of an invasion many years blown over; and when he came to the part

‘We’ll still make ’em run, and we’ll still make ’em sweat,

In spite of the devil and Brussels Gazette!’

his eyes would sparkle as with the freshness of an impending event. And what is the ‘Brussels Gazette’ now? I cry while I enumerate these trifles. ‘How shall we tell them in a stranger’s ear?’

His poor good girls will now have to receive their afflicted mother in an inaccessible hovel in an obscure village in Herts, where they have been long struggling to make a school without effect; and poor deaf Richard—and the more helpless for being so—is thrown on the wide world.

My first motive in writing, and, indeed, in calling on you, was to ask if you were enough acquainted with any of the Benchers, to lay a plain statement before them of the circumstances of the family. I almost fear not, for you are of another hall. But if you can oblige me and my poor friend, who is now insensible to any favours, pray exert yourself. You cannot say too much good of poor Norris and his poor wife.

Yours ever,

CHARLES LAMB

—Later, Lamb thought it better to approach members of Norris's own hall and, in the end, a pension of £80 was secured for the widow.

Of Randal Norris we know only what Lamb tells us. But there lately have come to me, through the courtesy of Miss Julia Towndrow of Kettering, a descendent, two letters in his own hand, and as both contain the latest tidings of Mr. and Miss Lamb up to the moment of writing—stop press news, in short—they have an interest far beyond that of their staple subject matter. For to read in the faded ink of more than a century ago what Mr. and Miss Lamb were doing is to bring the Brother and Sister very near to us. The first, dated Inner Temple, August 6th, 1823, is to the Misses Norris at Widford, Herts, wishing them well with their school and urging them not to despair if success does not come at once. 'Tell your Mother that the Lambs have taken a House in Colebrook Row, Islington, have left Russell Street and will leave Dalston very soon where Mary is and Miss James. She has been ill but is recovering. Mr. Lamb thinks it was occasioned by [merely] thinking of the removal, for she had no trouble in it.'

Miss James was Mary Lamb's devoted nurse for many years: indeed, till her death, as we shall see. 'Give my Love to your Mother', the writer also says, 'and tell her Richard and Self are quite well and do not wish her to come home sooner on our account, as we jog on very well.'

The next letter, dated September 28th, 1825, is to Mrs. Norris, who was again staying at Widford, and it is chiefly about some building alterations to a house there. 'Dear Betsy', it begins, and the last sentence runs 'I am sorry to say I have just heard by Miss Emma that Mr. and Miss

Lamb are both unwell and the more so as it is Miss Lamb's old complaint she is afflicted with, Charles having wrote to Miss Emma not to come to the House as is usual at Michaelmas'. Emma, of course, was Emma Isola, the Lambs' adopted child, then away teaching.

Randal Norris died in 1827 and was buried in the Temple, and we come now to the survivors—Mrs. Norris, the two daughters Elizabeth and Jane, and the deaf son Richard, all henceforward to be living at Widford. Of the Misses Norris and Richard I chanced, at a single remove, to come, in 1902, in touch, when I was preparing a biography of Lamb, for through my friend the late W. J. Craig, the Shakespearean scholar and philologist and an adorer of Elia, I had an introduction to Mrs. Elizabeth Coe, a very old but sprightly lady living at Berkhamsted, who as a child had been a pupil of the Misses Norris and remembered Lamb's visits; and Craig and I went down together one afternoon to have tea with her and to collect her reminiscences. Subsequently I wrote for *The Athenæum* the following account of our experiences, extracts from which were afterwards incorporated in my book.

We have very little knowledge of Lamb's ways with children; but enough to show that he must have been very good company with them when he liked. He cannot have been thrown much among them. There is his charming letter to his 'child-wife', Sophy Kenney, and the allusion, in the same vein, to little Louisa Martin (whom he called Monkey), in the letter to Hazlitt of November 10th, 1805:—

'Some things too about Monkey which can't so well be written: how it set up for a fine lady, and thought it

had got lovers, and was obliged to be convinced of its age from the parish register, where it was proved to be only twelve; and an edict issued, that it should not give itself airs yet these four years; and how it got leave to be called Miss, by grace.'

And in an unpublished letter from Mary Lamb to Dorothy Wordsworth I read that John Hazlitt's little girl was so fond of Charles Lamb that, when he was expected, she used to stop strangers in the street and tell them 'Mr. Lamb is coming to-night.'

There is also a passage in Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke's *Recollections of Writers*, which is so much of a piece with Mrs. Coe's reminiscences that I copy it here:—

'Charles Lamb brought a choice condiment in the shape of a jar of preserved ginger for the little Novellos' delectation; and when some officious elder suggested that it was lost upon children, and therefore had better be reserved for the grown-up people, Lamb would not hear of the transfer, but insisted that children were excellent judges of good things, and that they must and should have the cate in question. He was right, for long did the remembrance remain in the family of that delicious rarity, and of the mode in which "Mr. Lamb" stalked up and down the passage with a mysterious harbingering look and stride, muttering something that sounded like a conjuration, holding the precious jar under his arm, and feigning to have found it stowed away in a dark chimney somewhere near.'

Beyond these references, and a few others, there is little evidence as to Lamb's way with children, for whom he wrote so much.

Mrs. Coe, in her eighty-fourth year, remembers

Lamb as he was between 1827 and 1833. In 1827—aged fifty-two and free of the India House—he used often to walk down to Widford—twenty-two miles from London—to stay a day or two among old friends and older associations. These little visits probably signified that Mary Lamb was ill, for Mrs. Coe does not remember that Mary Lamb ever accompanied her brother. At any rate, she never saw her. Miss Isola, she says, came with him once, and her feet were so sore from the journey that she had to lie in bed for two or three days, Mr. Lamb waiting for her recovery. Mr. Lamb often had blisters too, but he did not seem to mind. He loved walking too much.

Lamb's chief friends at Widford in those days were the Norrises. The sisters were known as Miss Betsy and Miss Jane. Mrs. Norris was the good angel of the village: doctor, nurse, and everyone's refuge in trouble. Mr. Richard Norris, who was deaf and peculiar, lived in the house too.

Among the pupils at Goddard House was Elizabeth Hunt (afterwards to become Mrs. Coe), one of the three little daughters of Thomas Hunt, of the Widford water mill, whose wife and Mrs. Norris were old friends.

In those days—seventy and more years ago—she was Mr. Lamb's favourite of all the Widford children—partly, she suspects, from her quickness in catching a mischievous idea. She remembers, with a vividness that is, to some extent, communicable, his affected conviction that her hair curled only by artificial means, and his repeated warnings at bedtime that she must on no account forget to put in her papers. 'But I don't have to curl it, Mr. Lamb, I don't, I don't.' 'Well, bring me

a mug of beer from old Bogey and we'll say no more about it.' Old Bogey was the big cask. For, as a rule, when Mr. Lamb walked down to see the Norrises, he used to sleep at the mill. 'Now, Mrs. Hunt,' he would say, 'are you going to let me creep into a goose's belly to-night?' for he always had his joke, and no one would expect him to call a feather bed a 'feather bed', like other folks. He said it was like heaven, in a goose's belly. When he made a joke he did not laugh himself.

He always brought a book with him, sometimes several, and he would read or write a great deal. His clothes were rusty and shabby, like a poor Dissenting minister's. He was very thin and looked half-starved, partly the effect of high cheek-bones. He wore knee-breeches and gaiters and a high stock. He carried a walking stick with which he used to strike at pebbles. He smoked a black clay pipe. No one would have taken him for what he was, but he was clearly a man apart. He took pleasure in looking eccentric. He was proud of being *the* Mr. Lamb.

Mrs. Coe does not remember anything about Mr. Lamb's taste in food, except that he was fond of turnips. He used to come down to breakfast late.

He was very free with his money. To beggars he always gave: just what his hand happened to draw from his pocket, even as much as three shillings. 'Poor devil! he wants it more than I do; and I've got plenty', he used to say. He would take the children into the village to the little general shop. It had a door cut in two, like a butcher's, and he would lean over the lower half and rap his stick on the floor, calling loudly, 'Abigail Ives! Abigail Ives!' 'Ah, Mr. Lamb,' she used to reply from the inner room, 'I thought I knew your

rap.' 'Yes, Abigail, it is I,' he would say, 'and I've got my money with me. Give these young ladies sixpennyworth of Gibraltar rock.' Gibraltar rock was Abigail Ives's speciality, and sixpennyworth was an unheard-of amount except when Mr. Lamb was in the village. It had to be broken with a hammer. The children, Mrs. Coe says, always stood a little in awe of his unlikeness to other people, in spite of these treats.

When he joined the Norrises' dinner-table he kept every one laughing. Mr. Richard sat at one end, and some of the school children would be there too. One day Mr. Lamb gave every one a fancy name all round the table, and made a verse on each. 'You are so-and-so,' he said, 'and you are so-and-so,' adding the rhyme. 'What's he saying? What are you laughing at?' Mr. Richard asked testily, for he was short-tempered. Miss Betsy explained the joke to him, and Mr. Lamb, coming to his turn, said—only he said it in verse—'Now, Dick, it's your turn. I shall call you Gruborum; because all you think of is your food and your stomach.' Mr. Richard pushed back his chair in a rage and stamped out of the room. 'Now I've done it,' said Mr. Lamb, 'I must go and make friends with my old chum. Give me a large plate of pudding to take to him.' When he came back he said, 'It's all right. I thought the pudding would do it.' Mr. Lamb and Mr. Richard never got on very well, and Mr. Richard didn't like his teasing ways at all; but Mr. Lamb often went for long walks with him, because no one else would. He did many kind things like that.

There used to be a half-holiday when Mr. Lamb came, partly because he would force his way into the schoolroom and make seriousness impossible. His head

would suddenly appear at the door in the midst of lessons, with 'Well, Betsy! How do, Jane?' 'Oh, Mr. Lamb!' they would say, and that was the end of work for that day. He was really rather naughty with the children. One of his tricks was to teach them a new kind of catechism (Mrs. Coe does not remember it, but we may rest assured, I fear, that it was secular), and he made a great fuss with Lizzie Hunt for her skill in saying the Lord's prayer backwards, which he had taught her.

He had a favourite seat in a tree in the Wilderness at Blakesware, where he would sit and read for hours. Just before meal times Mrs. Hunt would send the children to tell him to come; but sometimes he preferred to stay there and eat some bread and cheese. He always was particular to return a message either way. 'Give your mother my love and kisses, and say I'll come directly.' Or 'Give your mother my love and kisses, and say I'll eat her beautiful luncheon here.' Adding, 'Don't forget the kisses, whatever you do.'

Mrs. Coe remembers perfectly Blakesware as it used to be. It was only partly destroyed in her young days. She recollects particularly the figure of Nebuchadnezzar eating grass, in one of the pieces of tapestry, with his long fingers like bird's claws. It was one of the great treats for the children to pretend to take rides in the state coach, which Lamb's friend John Lily, the postilion (mentioned in the poem 'Going or Gone'), had often driven.

At other times Mr. Lamb would watch the trout in the stream, and perhaps feed them, for half the morning. Once or twice he took a rod, but he could never bring himself to fix the worms. 'Barbarous,' he used to say, 'barbarous.'

(It was one of the proudest moments of my life, let me interpolate here, when in a lecture on Lamb which the late Sir Walter Raleigh delivered at The Times Book Club I heard him read in his enjoying, confidential voice some of the foregoing passages.)

Miss Towndrow, who lends me the two Randal Norris letters from which I have quoted, has in her possession also a card-prospectus of the Goddard House School, the scene of some of the foregoing incidents, and I reproduce it here as a further link between Lamb and ourselves, between those days and these:

<p>MISS NORRIS'S Establishment, WIDFORD, NEAR WARE, HERTS.</p>			
<p>YOUNG LADIES boarded and instructed in ENGLISH, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY and NEEDLEWORK.</p>			
<p>TERMS, THIRTY GUINEAS PER ANNUM.</p>			
		per Quarter	£ s. d.
FRENCH			1 1 0
DANCING		ditto	1 1 0
MUSIC		ditto	1 1 0
DRAWING		ditto	1 1 0
WRITING AND ARITHMETIC		ditto	1 1 0
PAINTING ON VELVET AND SATIN..		ditto	1 1 0
WASHING		ditto	0 15 0
<p>It is requested that each Lady bring a Silver Table Spoon and Six Towels.</p>			
<p>A Stage to and from London daily (Sundays excepted).</p>			

Whether the Misses Norris began at Goddard House and Lamb miscalled it a 'hovel', or whether they moved

into Goddard House later, I cannot say. But if Lamb's word was correct, then they must have moved, for Goddard House still stands for all to see. We are brought into touch with it in a reminiscent poem by Lady Buckmaster, who was born at Widford, which was published in 1911 under the title 'My Native Village'. I quote a few lines:

There is a village little known,
That in my memory o'ergrown,
Will ever stand out quite alone;
For there—the reason you may scorn—
There stands the house where I was born. . . .

Now in this little village blest
One house I ever loved the best,
(Charles Lamb stayed in it as a guest),
'Twas built in days of Good Queen Anne,
I write of it as best I can;
'Twas red like others of that date,
And had the sweetest garden gate,
A little wrought-iron work of art,
A joy to every artist's heart. . . .

No matter what the time of year,
The finest flowers were always here;
A holly hedge grew with such bounty,
Its fame was spread all through the county;
And oh! the apples, cherries, pears,
What colour and what taste was theirs!

The next reference to the family in the Lamb correspondence after 1827 comes in 1830, when we find Lamb informing Sarah Hazlitt that the Norris who had just

been made Treasurer of the Inner Temple was not, as she had hoped, Dick, but another man of the same name. He adds that, according to the last advices, in 1829, the family were well. There was no more Norris news from Lamb until 1833 when he wrote to Mrs. Norris sending her some books and thanking her for three agreeable days: one of the visits which Mrs. Coe recollected.

Lamb died in 1834, and poor deaf Richard in 1836 and was buried at Widford. Mary Lamb, however, survived, and on Christmas Day, 1841, we find her writing from 41 Alpha Road, Regent's Park, where she was still in the care of Miss James, to Miss Jane Norris:

My dear Jane,—Many thanks for your kind presents—your Michaelmas goose. I thought Mr. Moxon had written to thank you—the turkeys and nice apples came yesterday.

Give my love to your dear Mother. I was unhappy to find your note in the basket, for I am always thinking of you all, and wondering when I shall ever see any of you again.

I long to shew you what a nice snug place I have got into—in the midst of a pleasant little garden. I have a room for myself and my old books on the ground floor, and a little bedroom up two pairs of stairs. When you come to town, if you have not time to go [to] the Moxons, an Omnibus from the Bell and Crown in Holborn would [bring] you to our door in [a] quarter of an hour. If your dear Mother does not venture so far, I will contrive to pop down to see [her]. Love and all seasonable wishes to your sister and Mary, &c. . . .

If the lodger is gone, I shall have a bedroom will

hold two! Heaven bless and preserve you all in health and happiness many a long year.

In October 1842, Mary Lamb wrote again, with thanks for another goose—‘The two legs fell to my share’:

Your chearful (letter,) my Jane, made me feel ‘almost as good as new’.

Your Mother and I *must meet again*. Do not be surprised if I pop in again for a half-hour’s call some fine frosty morning.

A year later Mrs. Norris died, aged seventy-eight, and was buried at Widford. Mary Lamb was not well enough to write herself and Miss James therefore wrote for her, again to Jane Norris. The date is July 25th, 1843:

Madam,—Miss Lamb, having seen the Death of your dear Mother in the Times News Paper, is most anxious to hear from or to see one of you, as she wishes to know how you intend settling yourselves, and to have a full account of your dear Mother’s last illness. She was much shocked on reading of her death, and appeared very vexed that she had not been to see her, [and] wanted very much to come down and see you both; but we were really afraid to let her take the journey. If either of you are coming up to town, she would be glad if you would call upon her, but should you not be likely to come soon, she would be very much pleased if one of you would have the goodness to write a few lines to her, as she is most anxious about you. She begs you to excuse her writing to you herself, as she don’t feel equal to it; she asked me yesterday to write for her. I am happy to say she is at present pretty well, although your

dear Mother's death appears to dwell much upon her mind. She desires her kindest love to you both, and hopes to hear from you very soon, if you are equal to writing. I sincerely hope you will oblige her, and am,

Madam,

Your obedient, &c.,

SARAH JAMES

Pray don't invite her to come down to see you.

After their mother's death, both the daughters married. Their husbands were local farmers and were brothers: Charles Tween and Arthur Tween. Subsequently, when a wealthy relative of the Norris family named Faint died, the two ladies inherited an independent competency. Just as Craig and I, in 1902, sought out Mrs. Coe, so had Canon Ainger, in 1881, sought out the Mrs. Tweens—Elizabeth, who became Mrs. Charles, and Jane, who became Mrs. Arthur—and was fortunate to find Mrs. Charles. The very pleasant account of his conversations with her will be found in 'Charles Lamb in Hertfordshire' in his *Lectures and Essays*. Mrs. Tween not only had her memories of Lamb; she had two presentation copies of the *Poetry for Children*, no fewer than three copies of the *Poetical Pieces* of John Lamb, and a specimen of his ability, mentioned in his son's essay, as a moulder of heads in clay or plaster of Paris. Ainger made a double appeal to the old lady, for he was not only a Lamb enthusiast but Master of the Temple, and it was in the Temple that she had been born and brought up. She still bought many of her household necessities from a shop in Fleet Street, just opposite the Temple, for old sake's sake.

One thing that Canon Ainger does not seem to have

asked Mrs. Tween—about which I want to know more—is the actual reason why the Norrises—herself, her sister, her mother, and poor deaf Richard—objected, as it is always understood that they did, to the account of Randal Norris appearing under the title ‘A Death-Bed’ in the second *Elia* volume. There is nothing in it but good and the names are disguised. R. N. becomes N. R., Richard becomes Robert, and Charley becomes Jemmy. The accepted theory is that Mrs. Norris did not like the publicity given to her poverty. But why, then, had she not objected when, in 1827, the letter made its first appearance in print in Hone’s *Table Book*? Had she done so then, Lamb could never have reprinted it in 1833. Nor need her disapproval have applied to anything but the last few lines, after the character sketch was completed. There was, however, sufficient adverse criticism from some quarter or another to cause Lamb, or possibly his publisher, Edward Moxon, to remove ‘A Death-Bed’ from the volume, and when in 1835 a second edition was called for, to substitute for it that lurid and disturbing fantasy ‘Confessions of a Drunkard’, which had been written as long ago as 1813.

Canon Ainger, I may add, was not the only student of Lamb to visit the Tweens. Carew Hazlitt also did so, bringing away Mr. Charles Tween’s testimony that ‘Mr. Lamb had so small and “immaterial” a figure that when out walking with him he used to put his hands under his arms and lift him over a stile as if he were nothing’.

It is through the courtesy of Mr. C. W. B. Richardson, a descendant by marriage of Charles Tween, that I am able to publish for the first time the reproduction of Randal Norris’s portrait, which to my eye has a fine air of rugged benevolence. The original is a miniature dated

1816, and the fact that the painter of it was Matilda Betham gives it further interest, for she was of the Lamb circle too.

Matilda Betham, the daughter of a Suffolk parson, was a year younger than Lamb, and she survived him until 1852. In addition to making likenesses, she wrote poetry and compiled a biographical dictionary of famous women. Everyone seems to have liked her, and Lamb's praises of her *Lay of Marie* should have been intoxicating to her. But he would not allow her to do his face, although Coleridge had submitted to the ordeal. His first refusal was in 1808, and I feel sure there were others. Nor in 1815 could he find time to go through the artist's poem; but to be the recipient of such excuses as follow should have been gratification enough:

. . . My head is in such a state from incapacity for business that I certainly know it to be my duty not to undertake the veriest trifle in addition. I hardly know how to go on. I have tried to get some redress by explaining my health, but with no great success. No one can tell how ill I am, because it does not come out to the exterior of my face, but lies in my skull deep and invisible. I wish I was leprous & black jaundiced skin-over, and that all was as well within as my cursed looks. You must not think me worse than I am. I am determined not to be overset, but to give up business rather and get 'em to allow me a trifle for services past. O that I had been a shoe-maker or a baker, or a man of large independent fortune. O darling Laziness! heaven of Epicurus! Saints Everlasting Rest! that I could drink vast potations of thee thro' unmeasured Eternity. Otium *cum* vel *sine* dignitate. Scandalous, dishonourable,

any-kind-of-repose. I stand not upon the *dignified sort*.
Accursed damned desks, trade, commerce, business—
Inventions of that old original busybody brainworking
Satan, sabbathless restless Satan—

A curse relieves. Do you ever try it?

Although Lamb did not want his own countenance limned, he was busy in Miss Betham's interest. In 1816, the year in which the Randal Norris portrait was made, Mary Lamb was writing to Sarah Hutchinson, Wordsworth's sister-in-law (or 'third wife', as Lamb called her):

. . . Do you think Mr. Wordsworth would have any reluctance to write (strongly recommending to their patronage) to any of his rich friends in London to solicit employment for Miss Betham as a Miniature Painter? If you give me hopes that he will not be averse to do this, I will write to you more fully stating the infinite good he would do by performing so irksome a task as I know asking favours to be. . . .

to which Charles Lamb adds:

. . . I just snatch the Pen out of my sister's hand to finish rapidly. Wordswth. may tell De Q that Miss B's price for a Virgin and Child is three guineas.

Bearing these remarks in mind, I should say it is more than likely that it was Lamb's commendation of Miss Betham's skill which led to this miniature of Randal Norris being painted at all. 'He did many kind things like that.'

STELLA BENSON

CHINESE
PUNCH AND JUDY

There is suddenly a Chinese Punch and Judy epidemic in Hongkong. Can it be that a ship full of Punches and Judies has just landed them all at once?—if so, what a curious voyage she must have had. One imagines her whole deck bristling with the little flimsy uplifted fortresses that all Punches defend so manfully against an encroaching world; one imagines everyone making jokes and no one laughing at them; one imagines scores of Judies comparing notes about their husbands' touch on the cudgel; one imagines the whole sky from horizon to horizon above the empty sea ringing with the challenging *Ahoy-yoy-oy-oy*, or the heartbroken *Aw-aw-aw-kawky-kawky-kawky*. . . . Can there be a Pan-Punch Conference planned in China, now that the Pan-Pacific Conference looks like fizzling out? If so, are not our British Punches and Judies to be represented? Not once in the Punch-haunted streets of Hongkong have I seen the fresh complexion, the nose, the engaging spinal deformity, the bright medieval clothes of our British Punch; no Toby adds his bored assistance to any Hongkong drama.

I saw—and heard—a Chinese Punch and Judy man passing our door. He was a large, serene, young coolie from Shantung (all Chinese Punch and Judy men come from Shantung, our servants tell me, and the show is called, in Cantonese, 'Shantung Show'); he looked as if he constantly enjoyed his fine old joke of a livelihood. He

carried a pole on his shoulder at one end of which dangled a thing like a dog-kennel walled in blue canvas, and at the other a thing like a drum. All the way along the road he was blazing a trail of sound—that penetrating *Ahoy-yoy-oy-oy* that is the Esperanto of Punch and Judy men all the world over. The voice was exactly the same as our English Punch's voice—even the syllables seemed familiar. Although that Punch and Judy man was for me the first drop in a shower of his kind, although up to that time I had hardly heard of a Chinese Punch, I recognized that voice immediately, without possibility of mistake. Chinese street vendors make many strange cries and noises, but nobody except a Punch and Judy man could make just *that* noise, far east and far west. The noise brought back to me instantly sultry London July streets and pavements in the 'nineties, and before I had time to think 'How unlikely—a Punch and Judy Show in Hong-kong!', I was at the window beckoning the man into the garden. Our tennis party was just beginning; spotless guests were approaching from all sides, but the Punch and Judy man was not abashed. He was quite certain that his game was a better game than tennis. He was only prevented by a little rapid diplomacy from putting up his tall, tiny theatre on the tennis-court itself. Tactfully persuaded that a better pitch was in the corner behind the tea-table, he began his performance with a disconcerting suddenness. We had hoped that he would amuse us during tea, but he was determined that we needed amusement during tennis. Deafening *Ahoy-yoy-oy-oys* swept all other interests over the horizon. The two actors of the prologue appeared upon the stage and began to sing inexorably; they would not be hushed. The show had begun; it was gathering momentum every second.

The fact that the puppet-master was invisible—immured in the blue canvas tower he had built—seemed to make the whole business impersonal, monstrous as a manifestation of nature. There was no bond of language between us and the little wooden puppets, but something was lacking besides a bond of language—they moved in another world: tennis and tea, and the British bourgeoisie at play, were as remote from them as they would be from spiders. In vain our Chinese servant whispered outside the blue walls, ‘Wait a little while—the ladies and gentlemen are not yet ready for the show’—one might as well have asked poppies to stop nodding in the wind. The show went on. The tennis, caught in a hurricane of *oy-oy-oy*s, faltered and failed. The audience meekly assembled, as meekly as though about to suffer a new homeric impertinence by Mr. Bernard Shaw.

The prologue was acted by two most lifelike puppets: a mandarin in black with a winged hat and a chalky weatherbeaten face, and a lady with a beaded sunburst for a headdress, and a real, rather rigid, pigtail of hair. The necks of both consisted of pliant wire coils, and the shrugging of shoulders, worked by the puppet-master’s fingers inside, wobbled the heads in an almost perfect reproduction of the Chinese actor’s sinuous manner. Whenever the lady spoke or sang in the shrill falsetto quaver of the Chinese female impersonator, her male friend turned to us, the audience, with a helpless flinging gesture which exactly expressed: ‘There now, just listen to her—what can one do with a thing like that?’ These prologue actors were entirely alien from our Punch and Judy: their voices were Chinese stage voices; their gestures were incredibly naturalistic; Punch would have disdained their acquaintance, and Judy would not have

called on them. But they proved to be not what we came out for to see—they were merely a frill on the essential stuff of the performance. They passed out through the two little doors at the back of the stage, and one could hear their voices dying away in endless dialogue in the distance—a device to fill up the time while the puppet-master assembled his puppets and properties for the main show.

With a loud, challenging squawk, Punch appeared, leaning askew over the counter as Punches should. Where was his nose? He had none. Where was his hump? He had none. Where were his gaudy suit, his tassels, his perking-forward hat? He had none of these. He was, in fact, simply a little piece of wood with a rounded knob, wrapped in a dingy greyish piece of cotton material which sheathed his mobile and prehensile arms. Nevertheless, Punch he was, quite unmistakably—Punch in a different incarnation, if you like; Punch speaking Chinese, but still Punch. And, to clinch the matter, here was Judy—another little round-knobbed broomstick with features once painted but now rubbed out, but indubitably Judy. One could not follow the details of the inevitable domestic squabble that immediately began; it was all in Chinese, of course, but it was essentially a Punch and Judy row. It is so long since I really ‘stood out’ an English Punch and Judy show (one sees them in London, if at all, always from the tops of buses) that I have forgotten the exact plot, but there was much in the Chinese drama that rang with a familiar note—the beating of Judy with broomsticks of increasing thickness, her resilience in adversity, her revenges (each time she managed, after a struggle, to secure the weapon and become the aggressor), the way the beaten one always leaned his or her head on the

counter, rubbing the top of it with the hands, like a fly cleaning itself, amid cries of *Aw-aw-aw-kawky-kawky-kawky*—the epitome of self-pity. All this, if not always quite Punch, was potentially-spiritually Punch. There was one un-Punchesque interpolation, which I think was typically Chinese, for it involved a ‘stunt’. The Chinese showman always must do something that cannot be done: in all branches of the Chinese theatrical art this peculiarity can be seen—he must do something with his voice, with his body, with his feet, writhing against the writhing scope of bones, holding a note beyond the limits of the human breath—waving a sword too quickly to be followed by the human eye, touching a high note that the voice, theoretically, cannot compass. The Chinese actor does not seem to feel he is giving his audience their money’s worth if he is simply impersonating a human character; he must behave ‘out of’ human character—he must be superhuman. The stunt is his ideal, and it is the stunt that makes his fame and secures his applause. And so I imagine a Chinese Punch and Judy man saying to himself: ‘Anybody could work Punch and Judy themselves—two puppets for two hands—how banal! But could anybody work seven puppets on the stage at once? Answer, no. Very well then, I shall have seven puppets on the stage at once.’ And so five other puppets of strong family likeness, but doubtful sex, interfered in the squabble between Punch and his wife, snatching the stick one from another, dodging one another in at one door and out at another, knotting themselves into a writhing, swaying mass, detaching themselves only to nurse a wounded head upon the counter during a moment’s prostration—*Aw-aw-aw-kawky-kawky-kawky*. . . . It was a very stirring scene, though at times the general tangle

was so compact that only an expert could have appreciated the finer points of the stunt. It was all brought to an end, however, by the appearance of the Tiger. The Tiger must be a debased relation of Dog Toby—a very deeply debased relation, a soured Dog Toby. His simple face, evidently once painted, but never repainted, in black and yellow stripes, was made of two slabs of wood, representing upper and lower jaws. His rôle was simple, too: he simply swallowed everybody. Some approached him unawares and were swallowed with one lightning, comprehensive snap, as a dog swallows a thrown scrap of meat; others came forth bravely with sticks against him, and their fate was the same horrifying gulp—in mid-squawk. *Aw-aw-kawky-kawky-kawky-kaw*, squealed the mourners, and their mourning was suddenly silenced. Finally, a hero came: he wore his hair in a rigid pigtail, nodding upward like a plume on his head; the Tiger strove to swallow him, but for the first time missed its aim and bit off the pigtail instead. This, I think, was the hero's intention, and we all applauded, as movie audiences applaud the sheriff's posse riding to rescue the heroine. The hero produced a large carving knife and killed the Tiger. The poor animal laid its head on the counter, but it did not cry *kawky-kawky-kawky* and rub its wounds; it died in limp silence. The hero's work was not yet finished, he opened its terrible jaws and drew from its crop the still active bodies of his undigested friends. Like Jonah in similar circumstances, these resurrected persons were chastened; they had learnt their lesson; they squabbled no more. No more squabble—no more show. Suddenly the puppet-master walked out of his blue fortress. He gave us quite a start; we had forgotten him; our sight was adjusted to puppet size. We had forgotten tennis. Our

minds were adjusted to some triumph more elemental than tennis. Something had called from the past—a long shrill nasal *ahoy* had hailed us from the past; was it from our own little life-time's past, or was it perhaps from a much older past than that? Where do Punch and Judy come from, that they travel thus far east and far west? From what elemental garden of Eden do these immortal incompatibles hail? Do I not remember that the Serpent had four legs before his punishment? A Toby or a Tiger on a tall stilted stage—a serpent in an apple tree. . . . *Aw-aw-aw-kawky-kawky-kawky*—woe is me, for the descent of men and women and serpents. . . .

J. A. H. OGDON

PASSENGERS

The train came in with a great pothor, to show how well it had striven in keeping ahead of time; it was two minutes early; it rolled in with a clin-clan-clin-clan, the distinguishing mark of engines on that line; and this one, 'Lord of Boscombe', kept up a sort of purr (or rather a sizzle) of contentment, on coming temporarily to rest. The small group of people waiting on the platform readily found seats in a sparsely populated train: it was at a time of accident scares—there had been two, one wreaking much havoc on head coaches, the second on tail coaches; and now for a little time numbers of passengers crowded the middle coaches of trains, while pretending to laugh away their apprehensions, or trying to make their herding together seem *entirely* fortuitous by passing such remarks (in the service of concealment) as really made quite clear what was lurking in their minds; one might indeed conjecture what would happen should a third smash destroy the middle of a train.

And yet memory in these matters is short.

So the passengers found seats; all but one: and he, a connoisseur—though of a limited discernment—sought his company to suit his mood: he had the two spare minutes in which to probe and assess and collate. He had no profound comments to make on the weather: it was bad enough in all conscience; he had no grievances—domestic or political—to air; nor to pursue those potential erotic chances which for some are the very soul of

travel. He had just to satisfy his mood, which at the time was ill-defined, even to himself, but certainly uneasy.

The first coach after the fussing engine was blank—a parcels van; the next also was blank; excepting its middle compartment, which contained one man dozing placidly behind his newspaper, that rose and fell as he suspired.

With him the seeker began his inventory.

The next coach was better filled: in the first compartment sat a clergyman, truculent and aggressive. He glowered virulently. 'How very un-venerable', thought the seeker, quailing a little, 'I would not choose to be either his curate or his bishop.' The seeker's name was Fontaine, James Fontaine. But he always thought of himself as *Mr.* Fontaine; from which it may be rightly inferred that he had no intimate contacts; he was never James, Jimmy, nor Fontaine, but always *Mr.* Fontaine.

Next he found two ladies, benign and apparently maiden; next a family—the husband a small wizened, weepish man, gloaming from astigmatic eyes, a personation of connubial infelicity; the wife stout and culottish, a male in all but function, sitting like a fat priest surrounded by acolytes—there were four of them, got on the échelon system: the first 'rung' was crying; the second was playing obscurely on the floor; the third and fourth were fighting on the seat. And their Author sat gloaming wearily upon them.

Mr. Fontaine blinked hard in comment, and passed on. Mr. Fontaine was nervous and retiring: he had a private income, small but adequate, and a passion for brass-rubbing in churches, from which hectic pursuit he was now returning to Plymouth, hoping with mild optimism for a convenient express to Paddington. The rector at Chippleigh Salterton had been very courteous: 'Such a

nice man', murmured Mr. Fontaine; and, in more immediate reminiscence, he turned and glared at the compartment which held the truculent parson.

'Vile prelate', he added, with apparent inconsequence.

The next compartment was held like a fort by the scowling eyes of a young couple, not desiring company, and thus letting it be known. Mr. Fontaine hurried by furtively: he was but mildly sexed and he gauged the attitude of the young lovers to be a mere duplication of his own frequent desire for solitude, a desire which, at the present time, was *not* strong within him. Nevertheless, he was by nature an integral celibate beast.

The next compartment, judged Mr. Fontaine, was full of workmen: because he could see practically nothing through tobacco fog. 'It's getting worse', he thought, and retraced his steps.

A quarter-minute remained: the engine was fussing in sibilant unrest, and the guard also was fussing, after the manner of his kind, with whistle and watch. Fontaine, perceiving himself to be the occasion of this turmoil—all the other passengers were comfortably settled in—hurried forward and entered with the man dozing behind his rhythmically aspirated newspaper; the guard came up and slammed the door viciously, giving Fontaine a sensation of acute discomfort.

His first thought was for his fellow-passenger. Did he want to get out at Chippleigh Salterton? Now a man less ruminant than Fontaine would have roused the sleeper at once, and asked. But Fontaine had to reach a conclusion by devious processes of reasoning, by the collation and assessment of facts and opinions—and it was no conclusion of his own, but a shrill blast from the guard's whistle, that resolved him to inactivity. So he settled

down in the corner diagonally opposite to his sleeping partner.

Just as the train began to move, a man dashed on to the platform, dodging past a surprised porter and station-master and eluding the guard's outstretched vigilance: the guard swelled with indignation as the man bolted into Fontaine's compartment and flung himself down right opposite Fontaine. He bristled with surprise. The newcomer pulled off his cap, placing it on his knee, and sat for some time trying to catch up his breath: as he breathed in and out through pursed lips, the result was a sort of fluty whistle that kept time to the motion of the train for a while, but at length gave up—the train was going too fast. Fontaine became more and more alarmed at this man's behaviour; he studied him from behind a veil of half-lowered lids. He could not decide whether he most resembled an underfed pig, a rat, a snake, or a fish: there was something of all four in his face. He was of an extreme albino type with a pinkish complexion, and sickly blue eyes—they also had a pink tinge because of the raw lids and bright yellow lashes; he was thin lipped and had rodent teeth; his hair was thinning and the extended forehead was as pink as the face below. He sat hitching himself about, with jerks, as though nervously afflicted, first one shoulder, then the other; all the time his head was writhing from side to side like the head of a tortoise, and his heels were playing a tattoo on the floor. Fontaine perceived also that the man was weighing *him* up, a furtive glance with every writhe of his head.

His alarm increased.

Then the train rushed, after a shrill warning, into Chippleigh tunnel.

Immediately there came from the man a sequence of

unearthly sounds that made Fontaine shudder as though something clammy were reaching at him. The voice rose high above the roar of the train, surging and welling and throbbing. To Fontaine it was *xanthochroic sound*: the phono-correlate of the blond, who, as an extreme type, was entirely repulsive to him.

But Fontaine was no judge of yodelling.

He was horribly scared, and, as the train rushed into daylight again, his heart continued to patter at a great speed. There sat the man, writhing and hitching as before, and as though he had done nothing that normal men have not in common use. The train drew up at Appletree Halt, and the man, hastily pulling on his cap, fairly ejected himself through the door, leaving it wide open.

Fontaine reached the strap and banged it to. The train slid out smoothly, the engine resumed its pleasant clin-clan, slipped twice with a mighty uproar, and then recovered and gathered speed. The next stop was Plymouth, a run of about twenty minutes. Fontaine was looking out of the window. The yodeller had left behind him an aura of something animal, strange, and earthy: to Fontaine it was of something *obscene*, something he ought to impugn for his safety and comfort; and yet, as one cannot impugn an aura, Fontaine had to suffer it. On this account his discomfiture and distress were increased manifold.

Dusk was coming on; the landscape was grey and sterile, not typically Devon or Cornwall, but drab and listless; a gathering mist made it still more depressing, like the poem 'November', or like the poem 'Les Limbes'; now and then cattle could be glimpsed in desolate groups, their condensed breathing so acutely visible as almost to be *heard*; wisps of a denser fog were settling round the

trees; on the windows heavy drops of rain came intermittently with a dullish rattle—in earnest that the laden mist should shortly discharge its burden. The carriage lights were put on suddenly so that the grey half-light of late evening became by contrast semi-darkness. Fontaine turned, much depressed, from the achromatic world externally presented to the brighter one within. He scrutinized his chance companion; the latter was oblivious of the draught from the window, and of the splashes of rain that fell on him, and of the flapping of his paper. He also had no ear for the art of yodelling.

Then Fontaine was distracted by the rhythm of the engine striving bitterly with a steep upgrade; it snorted heavily, in common measures, each one distorted, labouring and labouring: the engine seemed to say: 'How I labour . . . how I labour . . . how I labour . . .', and the carriage-wheels passing over the joints of the metals made reply: 'You do—you do—you do.' A cutting which began half-way up the slope made this strange dialogue proportionately more and more resonant; Fontaine wondered why the cutting had not been made a little deeper, to ease the gradient; the engine was almost staggering in its gait—the dialogue took on an ominous thundering quality through the reverberations of the cutting, and it had slackened in intensity, like two people who abuse each other with all their strength, until, strength failing, abuse declines to a dullard querulousness.

The engine staggered and faltered.

Mr. Fontaine had become sated with monotony: he longed to hear the rumble of the wheels over the Hamoaze instead of this interminable 'You do—you do—you do'.

'Voodoo', said Fontaine, impelled to a very obvious rhyme, and yet a very suitable one. For the compartment

seemed to be under the spell of a pervasive mesmerism on a rhythmic ground; Fontaine had the typical *solitaire* habit of thinking aloud: 'it has put him right off' (referring to the sleeper), 'and it will shortly . . .', the end of his sentence, probably relating to his own anticipated sleep of boredom, was cut off by readvertence of the earlier, pleasanter idea; for the rumble of the wheels over the Hamoaze would be foretelling the end of his tedious-brief journey: the Hamoaze is a fairly wide arm of water, part river, part sea, where the Tamar disembogues; the viaduct has several piers, and the wheels go pleasantly along, while the carriage lights are broken and multiplied on the water; the night cries of sea-fowl will sometimes well up, eerie and exotic, like voices from a dim past; and water-craft, banal and uncouth by day, ride at anchor by night with the glamour of marine phantoms. Mr. Fontaine was snatched from his reverie by the sight of showers of sparks which attested the ardours of the climb—they eddied and whirled for a little space and then came to extinction and rest.

The engine was hard pressed to top the gradient, 'as in travail', thought Fontaine, with a strange intuition; and, vague as was his knowledge of obstetrics, the recurrence of stress really made his simile truer than he knew: the engine was straining so violently that, in the animate, a mental phantasmagoria would have supervened; and the wheels passing over the rail-joints were now murmuring in sorrow and doubt: 'You——do——you——do'.

At that moment the train topped the gradient, and, after a slight pause, spurted forward; this sudden change of speed sent the sleeping partner's newspaper fluttering to the floor; the sleeper himself lurched sideways in his seat.

Mr. Fontaine was now assailed and overwhelmed by a complex of impressions; without his realizing it, they had been accumulating for some time, but his dark ruminations had kept them outside the threshold of consciousness—now they rushed in and stormed him. As a result he was half-paralysed. He had really been surprised that the voice had not roused him when it surged above the roar of the train in the tunnel; he had really noted (without admitting the note) the uneasy sprawl of the sleeper's legs; that his arms were *fallen* to his sides and across the carriage seat: not holding the newspaper, which was kept in position partly by the nature of its own folds, partly by the draught from the open window; the rhythmical motions of the newspaper, which he had believed due to the inspiration and expiration of the sleeper, were in clear fact caused by the fitful breath of the wind through the open window; he had sagged in his sleep, and the discomfort of his posture—not to mention the wetting and pelting he had lately received from in-blown rain—should have wakened any but a sleeper quite out-wearied. He was dead.

That he was dead Fontaine was fully aware, but unwilling to admit: he was a nervous man, nervous through protracted introspection, and he strove to stave off the full realization of his present circumstances. The train was now tearing along, and its motion aggravated his mental turmoil. First he assured himself that the sleeper was really asleep, however deeply; then, that he was cataleptic, and would shortly recover; to reassure himself the more, he determined to open up a conversation.

He was stayed by the thought that the dead have no speech. And this brought the true facts crashing about him.

He sat for a while in his corner, crumpled, overwhelmed, unable to think constructively, only to regret, and to apportion the blame—for someone had to be blamed for his sorry venture. And the lot fell on the guard, who had *looked* so officious and *driven* him into this compartment. What a choice; what a sorry, *forced* choice! Outside was the melancholy of the hills, a grey mist, grey as Fontaine's tortured face, grey as . . .

The connection of ideas brought him to scrutinize the lifeless figure.

He was dead beyond all question, although the rigor mortis was not fully set in, and his head lolled about like a baby's; in physique he was inclined to grossness, but seemingly of short stature and undistinguished; this vagueness of characteristic was further assured by the dress: a shabby raincoat, unbuttoned, revealed a shabby mid-brown suit rubbed and shiny on the folds; many stains down the front bore witness to frequent potations, and this was supported by the gross habit of the dead man; heavy, shabby brown boots, a shabby dark tie helping to keep a dirty striped collar in place, completed the ensemble, except that overhead on the rack was a shabby felt hat, shiny in front through much fingering, and resting on a small suitcase of a cardboard composition worn rough.

The whites of his eyes glared as with a diffused malice, and a faint rim, a mere suspicion of pupil, showed below the eyelids stretched taut with full-openness; the lips had taken on a purplish tinge and they were drawn back, leaving both sets of teeth exposed; the right side of the mouth was turned up in a sardonian leer, but the left side was drawn down in the agony of dissolution: from both corners a red dribble, now congealing pendulously,

indicated the convulsive onslaught of death; the head was flattish, the hair tending to wiriness and ill-kempt; Fontaine saw with a shudder that on one side of the nose was a large wart, such as may be seen in pictures of the composer Liszt; the fists were clenched, white knuckles contrasting strongly with the blue skin.

One leg was swinging and knocking with the motion of the train.

But for all the vileness of the death-mask, there was a passivity, an ulterior barrier which the corpse seemed to raise within himself, withdrawing himself essentially from the grasp and scope of Fontaine's understanding; it was this ultimacy of poise, equally with the physical nausea, which affected him beyond endurance; the grinning mask seemed to imply: 'You are there, quivering, suffering, tense, near to the borderland of sanity: how I despise your sweating, throbbing, aching *life*; so does the hand of the dead oppress the living.' Many such derisive sentiments passed in flickering turmoil for a few moments through the mind of Fontaine. And then the leering death so horrified him that his mind, shocked and glutted with impressions of such repulsiveness, shut itself tight like a vice, and rejected any more stimulations from the sight of the dead man. What he saw was the nose, bulbous and bibulous, with enlarged pores, its ruddiness not entirely defaced by the encroachment of a leprous whiteness.

Thus relieved of the onus of fear, Fontaine began to think: he could not *remain* fascinated by the crumpled heap in the opposite corner; involved thus in a situation, he had to *do* something: and it seemed to him that this something would best be to discover the identity of his companion.

Fontaine was a nervous man: he rose from his seat, and,

sedulously averting his face, made towards the dead, but finding the averting process a hindrance, he directed his glance straight at the nose—or, more accurately, at the wart, which he found to be topped by a cluster of fine hairs, something like a hilltop crowned by a regular clump of tall trees. Then he instituted a systematic search of the pockets, first slipping his hand into the inner breast pocket.

At this juncture, without his perceiving it, the train, momentarily delayed by an adverse signal, slowed down beside a signal-box and came to rest, so that the compartment was just below the glass-house; and as the train, newly released, began to pull away, Fontaine found himself gazing into the eyes of the signalman. Amazement was mutual; the man in the box, at first taken aback, rushed to the side of his hut, pointing and mouthing at Fontaine, who sank backwards with a moan, overwhelmed with horror and black preconceptions.

He could see it all so clearly: places reversed, he would have thought the very things that the conduct of the signalman showed that *he* was thinking—a murder had been committed, the murderer was seen rifling the victim: and not just seen, but clearly recognized. At Plymouth there would be the police, and a crowd—an awful crowd—and the removal of the dead man, and the explanations of him, Fontaine, so incoherent as to be self-accusations; and then there would be the coroner's inquiry and more incoherency, and mortifying rebukes, and columns in the yellow press with its aptness for wounding susceptible creatures like him.

His prescience was all too vivid, and as these images took shape the unhappy man lay back writhing and quivering in the ecstasy of self-torture: from time to time

a strangulated sob half broke the stillness of the compartment, and that was when he created an image of intenser quality, so that the mental anguish found expression in physical agony.

There was no solace for him—the train plunged into the night, and the night seemed lashed into black chaos by the turmoil of the train; there was a farther stillness, traversed meteor-wise by a nearer commotion, shrouding an inner silence; and the train plunged deeper and faster into the night. And it rained. The earlier fog had lifted, and in its place the rain came down, lashing itself furiously against the bankside windows and putting to utter scorn the roar of the train.

Fontaine sat, a miserable huddle, and entered a new stage of adjustment—that of repining; in the back of his mind he blamed the officious guard, but also he wished, and that with the ardour of unattainable desire, that he had chosen any other travelling companion: with incredible calmness he reviewed the past possibilities of choice, each in turn; and, in particular, the truculent parson seemed as one desirable beyond all flesh. He wished that the collection of tickets had been made at Chippleigh rather than at the Plymouth barrier, for then the collector would have discovered. . . . If only the coach had been a corridor; if only the horrible fishy man had found it out; if only the train had not slowed down; if only that signalman had not seen; if only he dared climb along the footboard and so relieve himself of the awful tension; if only he had taken an earlier (or a later) train.

The rain came down in sheets, swishing and swirling against the window-panes, and the train plunged more violently into the night.

After his season of repining, Fontaine prepared to enter

the next phase of adjustment, namely, the exhaustion of prospective events. Such people are loosely named pessimists, and ill-considered by those who have regard only for extranea. But an introspective mind like Fontaine's, though it can be a dangerous instrument of torture, is also a vital weapon of defence, meeting troubles half-way and taking down their edge, which would otherwise have bitten too shrewdly. And so with Fontaine: the events in which he thought himself destined—or doomed—to participate, coming upon him unexpectedly, and himself quite unprepared, might have involved the most serious effects upon his person, bereaving him for a time of sense—or doing him more lasting mental injury. As it was, behaving in character, he was prepared to explore the furthest possibility, to pre-enact the scene on the platform, to pre-construct his explanations, to prevent the inquest by enactment of every phase, to pre-read the flaming press accounts: in short, to wear to shreds every computably contingent emotion. Fontaine was a nervous man, and he found that he got along really very well in the introspective style, or (as he thought) in spite of it—which amounted to the same thing.

And so he settled himself for the unpleasant rehearsal; when the train, with a seethe of brake-power, slowed down and began—quite exceptionally—to take the Hamoaze viaduct at a crawl.

The roar of the train was allayed, the swish of the rain became in compensation more insistent.

Sight of the sombre flowing water, with carriage lights reflected like stars in a pitchy sky, river craft swinging impalpably at anchor, the muffled creak of a chain blending with the swirl of the downpour, the raucous shifting cry of some errant gull, all impinging simultaneously

upon Fontaine, set him upon a course of action which he never fully understood, and which, after the event, he was never able to appreciate: the intuition and the execution welled up together. Not only was he, subsequently, unable to understand the course of his action, but in addition the attempt to recall it parched his throat so badly and sent him dizzying for the nearest support, that he found oblivion itself a relief and strove no further to break its cover: for one thing, the event was completed in less time than a whole minute; and for another, his mind, out of consciousness, relaxed of the vicious strain, took control of the situation and put it out of reach, hermetically, as in a box. Whether that were truly good for him is not here to be discussed.

The train began to crawl over the Hamoaze. Fontaine leapt into activity.

To be free of the odour of scandal mattered to him more than anything else in the world.

Before the first span of the viaduct was completed the dead man's newspaper had been crumpled into a ball, his hat and case snatched down from the rack. In at the open window came the driven rain, with elemental force: the case fell with a remote splash, scarcely heard, into the flood; the fate of the hat was unnoted because of its texture; the paper began its course over the parapet of the bridge, but was hurled back in the wind and lodged somewhere in the masonry, there chattering in protest: Fontaine heard it chattering there, almost beyond ear-shot, for his senses were for the time being sharpened to a brutish power. Then he pulled the shade over the light; the gloom enheartened him, and he set feverishly to work in a monstrous access of muscular innervation. He drew five of the blinds, and each, under his unaccustomed

touch, shot up again on its spring, and each time he cried out in the agony of desperation; at length all five were set firmly down: the open window he left uncovered. The rain came swirling in, but it came unnoticed. The train continued to crawl against rasping brakes. Then Fontaine turned to grapple with the corpse. He buttoned the rain-coat from top to bottom, setting him upright. The head rolled forward, sinking on the chest, mutely consenting, leering fixedly, permanently rooted and passive, at the anguished toil of the half-demented Fontaine; and then Fontaine propped him, face upwards, with his shoulders against the open window, and the head sank gently backwards as though in the sweet rapture of falling rain; for at once the head was drenched; and the face, still taut with grimace, but now ashy pale, became mottled in the downpour. And so Fontaine stood straddling him with a foot on each seat, and gripped him.

Then a rending sound broke that inner, overcharged silence, which was encompassed by the sound of water swishing, beating, gurgling, splashing, and—afar off—churning powerfully and turbidly. The rotten material of the coat had given, the burden fell, almost supine, and Fontaine stiffening with terror cowered back on his seat, voiceless, but shaken by convulsing sobs which tore with violence at the cords of his heart.

The train continued to crawl over the viaduct.

In his last frenzy, Fontaine leapt on to the seats and stood astride his burden, gripping at random, launching the deadweight, heaving, staggering, recovering, shifting his grip, again launching, and again recovering. And for all his exertion he shivered without end. For the sweat rose on him surge after surge, white hot in its progress but rising out stone cold on the flesh, leaving him chilled.

He had him gripped about the middle, himself working slowly towards the opening so as to keep the centre of balance; an arm stuck in the opening, but he drove it through with his foot, crashing, as he did so, against the frame of the door, but recovering to secure a tighter hold, because the swaying arms brought a bigger strain.

The train was nearing the last span of the viaduct.

The bulk almost stuck in the opening until he shifted his grip, and then the semi-rigid body began to sway further and further out. A last frantic heave and the legs went away into the darkness; a thud was heard on the parapet, followed by a second, less distinct, and a third, lower still, dull and muffled.

And a splash below. He was gone.

The rain came streaming down, the black flood rolled away in sullen anger, the train drew off with a sharp blast of defiance, but Fontaine heard none of these things. He stood, something less than human, in blank imperciencie, a foot on each seat, clutching the ventilator above the open window, panting as a dog pants in summer. He made an automatic progress of the five blinds, releasing them one by one, and pulling the cover from the light.

Then Fontaine sat down, cold and trembling, and without restraint he sobbed away the surge of *hysterica passio* which was rising like a muther about his throat and threatening to stifle him.

DESMOND MACCARTHY

LYTTON STRACHEY AS A
BIOGRAPHER

I

Most of the obituary criticisms of Lytton Strachey, and, for that matter, most of those which appeared during his lifetime, treated him as though his importance lay in having started that reaction against the Victorian Age and its great men, which now shows signs of waning. This is not true. His books certainly stimulated this reaction, but it began in the reign of Victoria herself; and in this respect the work of several other writers, that of Samuel Butler, Shaw, Wells, was more influential. Secondly, to emphasize this aspect of Lytton Strachey's work conceals its real importance. It is a serious critical blunder. Lytton Strachey was an artist in biography. He was a fine critic of literature and a prose writer of rare excellence, but first and foremost he was an artist in biography. His methods, for better and for worse (he was both easy and dangerous to imitate), changed those of popular biographers all over Europe and in America. In his preface to *Eminent Victorians*, which was published in May 1918, he expounded his idea of biography.

I hope, however, that the following pages may prove to be of interest from the strictly biographical no less than from the historical point of view. Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past. They have a value which is independent of any temporal process—which is eternal, and must be felt for its own sake. The art of biography seems to have

fallen on evil times in England. We have had, it is true, a few masterpieces, but we have never had, like the French, a great biographical tradition; we have had no Fontenelles and Condorcets, with their incomparable *éloges*, compressing into a few shining pages the manifold existences of men. With us, the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing has been relegated to the journeymen of letters. . . . How many lessons are to be learnt from them! But it is hardly necessary to particularize. To preserve, for instance, a becoming brevity—a brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant—that, surely, is the first duty of the biographer. The second, no less surely, is to maintain his own freedom of spirit.

It was in this, 'the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing', that he excelled, and he did so, apart from his gifts as a writer and story-teller, thanks to 'maintaining his own freedom of spirit'. There lay his originality when he began to write. It was the custom of our biographers to curb in themselves all 'freedom of spirit'. They deliberately obliterated their own attitude towards life, and either adopted for the time being that of the man about whom they were writing, or a nondescript point of view supposed to be equivalent to 'impartiality'. The lives of Conservatives were written by Conservatives, of Liberals by Liberals; those of religious leaders and reformers by writers who either shared their convictions or pretended to do so. These books might have great merits, but they could not have those of a work of art. Take, for example, Morley's *Life of Gladstone*: no one would guess from that book that Lord Morley was an ardent rationalist. His rationalism must have made many of Gladstone's judgements and emotions, and much of his behaviour, appear fantastic to him: though he might not cease to admire, his admiration must have

been often tinged with irony or amazement. But he was on his honour 'as a biographer' to let none of this appear in his book. A work of art cannot be created under such conditions. To Lytton Strachey biography was interpretation, and therefore the record, not only of facts, but of the biographer's deepest responses to them. There could be no genuine focus otherwise, no vital principle of selection. True, he might limit himself to tracing the part played by his hero in political changes, but then he would be an historian rather than a biographer. When he says 'human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past', he gives us the clue to his own sense of proportion. His preoccupation was with human nature itself, and only incidentally with the causes of events or of changes. These he had often to deal with in order to tell the story, and admirably he did so: witness his masterly summary of the Oxford Movement, or of the causes of the tardy change in the Liberal Government towards Gordon and the Sudan. But it is upon the effect of temperament and character on events that he invariably fixes our attention, or, again, the effect of events upon character, as he has shown with such exquisite skill in his *Queen Victoria*. He gratifies perpetually our curiosity about human beings. In biographies of famous men and women, the accounts of their private and public life are seldom blended satisfactorily. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the biographer gives up the attempt, giving us first a peep at the youth of the hero, then a long account of his public activities, and at the end a chapter describing his private life. Yet what is most interesting from a biographical point of view, is precisely the interplay of the private and public life. No biographer ever satisfied more convincingly and artistically that central curiosity.

II

During the long career of Queen Victoria, the changes she lived through, and her relation to them as head of the State, we were aware of her also as a woman, changing, yet remaining impressively herself. The psychological humorist who dwells in every reader worth considering was satisfied; the political and social historian not so completely, but in a generous measure. We saw pictures as we read, yet the word-painting was never obtrusive. We found ourselves, so well chosen and arranged were the facts set before us, anticipating the author's comments, and were only surprised at the neat conclusiveness with which they were expressed. The five periods of her life were made clear: the Melbourne period, her married years, the years of seclusion and unpopularity which followed the death of the Prince Consort, her emergence under the influence of Disraeli, and, finally, her apotheosis in old age as the mother of her people and the symbol of their imperial power. Each period was triumphantly 'done'. Incidentally, among the many admirably suggested figures Albert himself, rescued at last from the ignominy of bleached perfection, became an interesting and even a mysterious character.

His work, for which at last he came to crave with an almost morbid appetite, was a solace and not a cure; the dragon of his dissatisfaction devoured with dark relish that ever-growing tribute of laborious days and nights; but it was hungry still. The causes of his melancholy were hidden, mysterious, unanalysable perhaps—too deeply rooted in the innermost recesses of his temperament for the eye of reason to apprehend. There were contradictions in his nature, which, to some of those who knew him best, made him seem an inexplicable enigma; he was severe and gentle; he was modest and scornful; he longed for affection and he was cold. He was lonely, not merely with the

loneliness of exile, but with the loneliness of conscious and unrecognized superiority. He had the pride, at once resigned and overweening, of a doctrinaire. . . . There was something he wanted and that he could never get. What was it? Some absolute, some ineffable sympathy? Some extraordinary, some sublime success? Possibly a mixture of both. To dominate and to be understood!

Here Lytton Strachey allowed himself something of the vivid freedom of the novelist, but this intimate reading of character is also supported by facts.

And Queen Victoria herself? How can we define his attitude towards her? Admiration? It would be truer to say that he sympathized with and wondered at her. He is astonished at her intense consciousness of her own position, the passionate tenacity of her hold on life (how moving is the description of her desperate determination in old age that nothing round her shall pass and change!), the simple firm outlines of her character, her grand manners unsupported by stature or beauty, her vivid emotions, and, above all, her truthfulness.

It was her sincerity which gave her at once her impressiveness, her charm, and her absurdity. She moved through life with the imposing certitude of one to whom concealment was impossible—either towards her surroundings or towards herself. There she was, all of her—the Queen of England, complete and obvious; the world might take her or leave her; she had nothing more to show, or to explain, or to modify; and with her peerless carriage, she swept along her path. And not only was concealment out of the question; reticence, reserve, even dignity itself, as it sometimes seemed, might be very well dispensed with.

Her people felt instinctively her irresistible sincerity, ‘and in truth’, he adds, ‘it was an endearing trait’. But she was not intelligent. Of the vast changes in thought and society between 1837 and 1897, she understood nothing,

unlike Albert, who grasped the significance both of science and the industrial movement. She was not intelligent, and intelligence, from the angle from which Strachey judges human nature, is an indispensable quality. It alone preserves us in life from being frequently ridiculous. In its absence even a genuineness so unembarrassed as Queen Victoria's cannot really endear her to him. Cunningly, insidiously, and usually without comment, quotations from her diaries and letters do their destructive work; but—and here is the miracle at which he gazes himself in wonder—her character stands solidly, splendidly, grotesquely impressive.

Novelists are praised for, and largely judged by, their power to convey to us a sense of the passage of time. It is an all-important element in a work of representative art, in a picture of life. Lytton Strachey is the biographer who gives us that sense in greatest perfection, whether he is working on a small scale, as in *Cardinal Manning*, *Florence Nightingale*, or *General Gordon*, or on a large one in *Queen Victoria*. How fast the time races with Gordon, how it creeps through the life of Florence Nightingale after her middle years are past! This is all important if we are to feel the pathos and comedy of human lives, the magnificence and futility of efforts, the significance of triumphs and defeats. In Lytton Strachey's biographies events are not merely passed, they are actually passing, men and women are not merely dead, they are dying; everything is flowing away while we read. Other biographies are static compared with his. So new and so poignant was this element in his work as an artist that people cried out at it: it was cruel to dwell on old age, to describe, for instance, the change in Florence Nightingale—he was mocking. Nothing of the kind. They might as well have abused

Tolstoy for making Natasha change in *War and Peace*. I have noticed that when one of the younger critics has pulled himself together to attack the work of Lytton Strachey (it is not easy except from a religious point of view), he usually accuses him of being obsessed by the 'absurdity' of old age—its tragedy would be nearer the mark. In any case, how could that passage of time in *Queen Victoria* have been made real to us had we not watched Melbourne 'sinking into unconsciousness and imbecility', or if the miles had not been thus marked, say, at the beginning of Chapter VIII:

Lord Palmerston's laugh—a queer metallic 'Ha! ha! ha!', with reverberations in it from the days of Pitt and the Congress of Vienna—was heard no more in Piccadilly; Lord John Russell dwindled into senility; Lord Derby tottered from the stage. A new scene opened; and new protagonists—Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli—struggled together in the limelight.

III

The above passage, which is merely a transition, reminds us less of his best work than the tricks of his imitators. With the publication of *Eminent Victorians* in 1918, English biography entered on its modern phase. In the *Life of General Gordon* our attention was at once drawn to a short, slight English gentleman of a sunburnt complexion, with a touch of grey in his hair and whiskers, and a pair of unusually candid blue eyes, wandering in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. He carried a thick book under his arm. The book was the Bible, and he was engaged in elucidating four questions—the site of the Crucifixion, the line of division between the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, the identification of Gibeon, and the position of the Garden of Eden.

Since then this method of approach has proved irresistible to lively biographers. Indeed, it has become so common that a biography beginning in the old way with date, place, and pedigree now produces in the jaded reader a start of surprised relief. The brilliant, picturesque and antithetical manner of Macaulay exercised for many years a disastrous influence on historical essayists now forgotten; the method of Lytton Strachey had similarly unfortunate results. Many of his imitators seem to think that it is an essential qualification in a biographer to lack sympathy with the aims and passions of the man he describes. But the trick of looking at the past through the wrong end of the telescope, and of seeing it in bright small pictures, requires that intellectual focus which is certainly present in Strachey's work, and usually absent in theirs. The half-dropped eyelid of the quizzical observer, the airy and contemptuous manner, are no substitutes for a passionate intelligence. Moreover, the picturesque interpretative method, with its licence to pass beyond and behind recorded facts, requires a high degree of literary tact and long saturation in a subject. *Elizabeth and Essex* was born seven years after the *Life of Queen Victoria* saw the light; and in nothing is it safer to imitate Strachey than in the length of his gestations, for no literary form lends itself more to bounce and superficiality than history written with the vivacity of fiction. When Lamartine published his history of the Girondins, Dumas' comment was, 'He has raised history to the dignity of fiction'; we are getting a little tired of being told what memories brought tears to the cold grey eyes of Napoleon as he gazed from the Tuileries windows, or what Frederick the Great muttered beneath his breath as he pulled on his boots. This kind of thing has begun to

fail as a stimulant in my own case; I am begining to perceive a subtler charm in Stubbs's *Select Charters*.

It was Lytton Strachey's work which gave to others the most pertinent hints how to produce this light kind of history, in which interest in human nature and character is uppermost. What he endeavoured to do, and succeeded in doing, was to follow the dramatic rhythm of certain lives and describe the tone and aspect of their times. In the case of minor characters in those times, he sometimes over-emphasized peculiarities, and these figures lost some of their real humanity. But this is not true of his main characters. In their case, having seized the central characteristic he arranged everything else round it. How artfully the opening of *General Gordon* prepares us for the end of the story: 'That morning, while Slatin Pasha was sitting in his chains in the camp of Omdurman, he saw a group of Arabs approaching, one of whom was carrying something wrapped up in a cloth. As the group passed him, they stopped for a moment, and railed at him in savage mockery. Then the cloth was lifted, and he saw before him Gordon's head. The trophy was taken to the Mahdi: at last the two fanatics had indeed met face to face.' And how artfully that opening has prepared us for the perpetual comi-tragedy of Gordon's relations to those who used him, and all the cross-purposes inevitable between practical administrators and a violent mystic. Strachey's imitators do not see that his picturesque or ironic effects are not there for their own sake alone. They copy his methods because they can see they are arresting; they do not observe apparently that they are introductions to a theme. Ambition, the love of power, is the keynote of his study of Manning. Therefore, when he tells the story of Manning at Harrow, when caught out of bounds,

out-running a master, fetching a circle and jumping on to the master's horse, his comment, 'For this he was very properly chastised; but of what use was chastisement? No whipping, however severe, could have eradicated from little Henry's mind a quality at least as firmly planted in it as his fear of Hell and his belief in the arguments of Paley', is not merely made to amuse us, but strikes the note which we are to hear again and again in the story of Manning's treatment of Newman and Bishop Errington. It helps us to relish the account of Manning's intrigues while the declaration of Papal Infallibility was in the balance, and the irony of the comment: 'Yet his modesty would not allow him to assume for himself a credit which, after all, was due elsewhere; and, when he told the story of these days, he would add, with more than wonted seriousness, "It was by the Divine Will that the designs of His enemies were frustrated."' "

In *Elizabeth and Essex* he was again successful in bringing out the clashing of character and of sequent events. It abounds in passages of delicate hyperbole and intellectual nicety. Its faults from an artistic point of view lie in the story itself rather than in the treatment of it—so many of the episodes were as inconclusive as they were frantic, until the last. His workmanship was never finer than it was in this book. It is also different from his other books. A Renaissance subject does not stimulate his irony so much as his sense of beauty. The characters are more puzzling. 'By what art', he asked, on an opening page, 'are we to worm our way into those strange spirits, those even stranger bodies?'

It was the age of *baroque*, and it is the incongruity between their structure and their ornament that makes these figures of the Renaissance so puzzling: 'it is so hard

to gauge, from the exuberance of their decoration, the subtle secret lines of their nature.'

Elizabeth herself, from her visible aspect to the profundities of her being, is the very type of the *baroque*, the epitome of her age. It must be said that he succeeded marvellously well in 'worming his way' into this strange spirit, in looking behind the robes of the great queen, superficially 'a lion-hearted heroine who flung back the insolence of Spain and crushed the tyranny of Rome with splendid unhesitating gestures'. His conception of her is as different from this as the clothed Elizabeth was from the naked one, though he does not minimize her triumph or her influence upon history.

That triumph was not the result of heroism. The very contrary was the case: the grand policy which dominated Elizabeth's life was the most unheroic conceivable; and her true history remains a standing lesson for melodramatists in statecraft. In reality she succeeded by virtue of all the qualities which every hero should be without—dissimulation, pliability, indecision, procrastination, parsimony. It might almost be said that the heroic element chiefly appeared in the unparalleled lengths to which she allowed those qualities to carry her. It needed a lion heart indeed to spend twelve years in convincing the world that she was in love with the Duke of Anjou, and to stint the victuals of the men who defeated the Armada; but in such directions she was in very truth capable of everything. She found herself a sane woman in a universe of violent maniacs, between contending forces of terrific intensity—the rival nationalisms of France and Spain, the rival religions of Rome and Calvin; for years it had seemed inevitable that she should be crushed by one or other of them, and she had survived because she had been able to meet the extremes around her with her own extremes of cunning and prevarication. It so happened that the subtlety of her intellect was exactly adapted to the complexities of her environment.

Both her intellect and her temperament dictated a policy

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at once sinuous and vigorous, persistent only in vacillation; and such a policy was the only one which could have then moulded England into a strong coherent nation. 'Her femininity saved her. Only a woman could have shuffled so shamelessly, only a woman could have abandoned with such unscrupulous completeness the last shreds, not only of consistency but of dignity, honour, and common decency, in order to escape the appalling necessity of having, really and truly, to make up her mind.'

Lytton Strachey will be reckoned among the masters of English prose; the criticisms which have been directed against his style spring from the preferences of a temporary fashion. In the management of ironical statement he learnt much from Voltaire, but his style blent in an original fashion the two sides of his nature: his love of brief rational lucidity, and his admiration of what was subtle and extreme in expression.

A CHRONICLE OF RECENT BOOKS

POETRY

By AUSTIN CLARKE

There has been no great ado in poetry for some time, and one cannot but be aware of a decided lull in hostilities. Modern poets have won the right to do whatever they choose, to break any rule of rhetoric that still remains, to pursue ugliness as frankly as beauty, to leave every discord unresolved. Critical standards have become more sensitive, but as yet there is no sign of a new idea of law and order arising. Some poets, in despair, are returning to the eighteenth century, attracted by what seems, once more, an ideal age of poetic reason.

Eloquence has always been an excellent means of keeping law and order in poetry. The classical words of the vocabulary, by virtue of their polysyllabic superiority, hold the native commoners in check. The *Collected Poems of Laurence Binyon*, published in two volumes (*Macmillan. 10s. 6d. each*), brings us sharply against this question of law-abiding rhetoric. Mr. Binyon's early lyrics reach as far back as the mid 'eighties, when poetry could still be regarded, in a period of stable values, as a criticism of life. By the close of the century, Mr. Binyon was among those thirty poets of the younger generation ranked by William Archer in a book from which, even long after, many of us gained an excited glimpse of a Promised Land. Looking through these two volumes, one must admire the

consistency of the poet's manner. His work has been a ceaseless endeavour to perfect and maintain that manner, and to sustain the grave, equable, large-mindedness which informs it. Much of Mr. Binyon's success has been due to a harmonious balance of temperament, and to a necessity of mind which has always compelled him to resolve the particular into the abstract. The early fevers of imagination are absent from his work. He seems, in fact, to have started where Keats left off in *Hyperion*. He inherited a serene and liberal world of thought, in which the larger utterance could be suitably modulated by carefully chosen distances, undisturbed by unpleasing echoes. When his manner and theme are in accordance, picturesquely, as in several of his narrative poems, there can be no question of his individual supremacy. In such a passage as this, from 'The Death of Adam', one cannot dispute the civilized pitch of calm perfection to which our troublesome language has been brought:

Cedars, that high upon the untrodden slopes
Of Lebanon stretch out their stubborn arms,
Through all the tempests of seven hundred years
Fast in their ancient place, where they look down
Over the Syrian plains and faint blue sea,
When snow for three days and three nights hath fall'n
Continually, and heaped those terraced boughs
To massy whiteness, still in fortitude
Maintain their aged strength, although they groan;
In such a wintriness of majesty,
O'ersnowed by his uncounted years, and scarce
Supporting that hard load, yet not o'ercome,
Was Adam: all his knotted thews were shrunk,
Hollow his mighty thighs, toward which his beard,

Pale as the stream of far-seen waterfalls,
 Hung motionless; betwixt his shoulders grand
 Bowed was the head, and dim the gaze; and both
 His heavy hands lay on his marble knees.

In the philosophic odes and graver lyrics, Mr. Binyon's idealism implies a measure of belief and acceptance which, in the immediacy of our day, we are unwilling to concede. His thought has not been untouched by the pressure of the age: in such an ode as 'The Idols', he reveals those doubts and darker moods when the Beautiful and the True are obscured. No one, in a restless age, has kept more faithfully to the ideal of artistic perfection, though this fact has not been always realized. But his poetic diction, being formalized, cannot yield new secrets, however finely it has been polished. Augustan couplet, Alexandrine, what you will; no set form can yield more than is inherent in its nature. Totally his poetry brings us an orderly vision of justice and nobility, regulated by temperate emotion. He has not been a fire-bringer to our age, but a guardian of the official flame. Doubtless his work remains: and after a period of *Sturm und Drang*, poetry must find its way back to belief and serenity.

In that fascinating fragment of æsthetics, *Armour for Aphrodite*, Mr. Sturge Moore says: 'It has become necessary to arm the naked goddess, who figures the divineness of our liking, in order that she may re-invade our minds made hostile to her by the overweening exclusiveness of intellect.' In his own poetry, he has avoided generalization, which is the method of intellect, and found an abstract content by the difficult way of meditation. Ever since *The Vinedresser and Other Poems* made its appearance in the late 'nineties, Mr. Moore's dramatic dialogues,

sonnets, and meditative lyrics have come quietly, year in and year out. His *Collected Poems*, of which the first volume has been recently published (*Macmillan. 12s. 6d.*), will enable one to see his work in perspective. Clearly, he has opposed in practice the Victorian belief that science and poetry should advance in amity. He is in sympathy with Rossetti rather than with the theoretic Matthew Arnold. Poetry was enriched by the pre-Raphaelite poet-painters, its relations towards the other arts were emphasized, the feeling for words as a definite, almost tactile medium was restored. It is clear, now, that Mr. Sturge Moore's work prepared the way for modern simplicity of means. He has been like the craftsman, best pleased by the plain material of stone or wood:

O wherefore tempt me with quaint images,
 Figment for shows whereof no eyes report?
 Richer is ignorance than phantasies;
 Choose words that foot the ground for your escort!
 More powerful than passion, patient as stone.
 Behind the 'I' of which fools' lips are fond,
 Where even pride must let the void alone,
 Gentleness, too receptive to respond,
 Listens to prayer and shriek as a calm sea
 Receiveth drops of rain. . . . Lovely at night
 Gleams the star dust whirled through immensity:—
 So o'er the dome of mind thoughts small and bright
 Drift and the heart reflects them like a well:
 There fade the once bright myths of heaven and hell!

Pursuing his individual quest, making each poem a self-contained experience, Mr. Sturge Moore has worked through classic legend and myth. Danaë in her brazen tower, Absalom among trees, 'the proud Philistian lords':

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these have been his themes, but they have never been merely picturesque. Legend and story have been the symbolic processes of his meditation. To read his poems is to realize art's difficulties when one has forsworn impression and external delight. His work will not yield to the hasty: and it is not without the faults of concentrated effort. The goddess is indeed armed, but so heavily that her gait at times is awkward.

Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie is the only living poet to have been included in the Oxford series of poets—signal honour—excellent guest. His dramatic narrative poem, *The Sale of Saint Thomas* (*Secker. 3s. 6d.*), in a less hurried age would have held up the traffic of interest. A fragment of this poem appeared in the first Georgian book of verse, yet the whole narrative might well have been cast in one piece at imagination's foundry. Mr. Abercrombie is a philosophic poet whose ideas force their way through metaphor and surprising image. He keeps language at that high pitch, first discovered by the Elizabethans, in which noun and preterite become sounding centres of energy. He does not hold the gorgeous East in fee, but shows us tropical nature, its vertiginous productivity, its swarming millions of beings. We look into 'the dreaming mind of Satan' rather than upon the fair orders of Creation. St. Thomas, quailing before the teeming humanity of this earth, symbolizes the doubts and perplexities of the modern mind.

Modern Irish poetry owes much to a living tradition of folk-lore and song: it has dwelt by bright sources. Mr. Padraic Colum is better known in America, where he has lived for many years, than in this country. Attention may be drawn to the collected edition of his work, *Poems* (*Macmillan. 7s. 6d.*). No Irish poet of his time has expressed

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with such rare instinct and delight the tradition of his people. He has kept, even in later work, that sense of wonder, which Theodore Watts-Dunton, in a more sophisticated sense, defined as the true approach of poetry. The poems of Mr. Robin Flower have been known in private circulation to friends: his *Poems and Translations* (Macmillan. 7s. 6d.) are worthy of note. A well-known Gaelic scholar, he has completed the great Catalogue of Irish MSS. in the British Museum. His translations introduce us to the delightful lyric snatches left by monk and scribe upon the margins of manuscripts, when they wearied of argument over Father and Son, and escaped for moments into the nature-world of old Irish pagan poetry. Mr. Flower, as a scholar, has, however, resisted the Celtic obsession: his personal poems keep almost self-consciously to a serene English mode.

The modern writer of Nature lyrics must find apt word for his fancies. In *The New Shepherd* (Bumpus. 3s. 6d.) Mr. A. J. Young shows he has that feeling for happy phrase. *Persephone in Hades*, by Ruth Pitter (from the Author, Church Street, Chelsea), renews an ancient theme, but the blank verse lacks a true sense of rhythm. *Poems by Clere Parsons* (Faber & Faber. 2s. 6d.) has a pathetic interest, for the author died at the early age of twenty-three. These poems are eager, youthful, interesting in showing the influence of Mallarmé. *Rooming House*, by Horace Gregory (Faber & Faber. 2s. 6d.), is very modern, American, giving us, as it were, a Browningsesque world of crime and violence perceived by the X-ray method. Throughout *Betsinda Dances*, by Jan Struther (Oxford University Press. 2s. 6d.), grace is not entirely concealed by mere light-heartedness. *Poets at Play*, edited by Stephen Miall (Benn. The Essex Library. 3s. 6d.), is an orthodox anthology of light

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verse from Canning to Calverley, with an interesting Introduction.

The *Augustan Books of Poetry* (Benn) are climbing beyond the first century. In the new batch, there is an interesting experiment: *Modern German Poets*, a contemporary selection in German, which should prove useful to students. Here, too, will be found Hawker, best known for that snatch 'And Shall Trelawny Die?', Lionel Johnson, Henley, and Herrick. But a word about prefaces. In this age of candour, it is surprising to find Herrick 'told-off' for his coarseness in the best mid-Victorian fashion. Donne has been already exculpated. Someone, even though it be in the contemporary terms of suppressions and sublimations, must explain for us Herrick's plain human nature.

GENERAL LITERATURE

By PETER QUENNELL

Prophecy is one of the habits of civilized man, and marks a certain degree of social decrepitude. When the fire is beginning to sink to ashes, we pull up our chairs towards the hearth. The room behind us becomes cold and fills with shadows, as we meditate on what the future has in reserve—that Future which we ourselves shall never see. 'And thank God for it!' exclaim with startling and united emphasis Mr. Bertrand Russell and Mr. Aldous Huxley.

Anything less rosily Panglossian than the frightful visions of this distinguished pair of soothsayers we should most of us be hard put to it to imagine. Let us take Mr. Aldous Huxley first. *Brave New World* (Chatto & Windus.

7s. 6d.), though clad in the dust-covers of current fiction, contains a lurid peep at human society as it may have developed six hundred years 'after Ford'. Given the various ingredients of modern life, it needs very little experience in successful prophesying to forecast a slow descent into the abyss. It is a conclusion, unpleasant, but comparatively easy. Whereas the picture which Mr. Huxley limns is the more unnerving for being slightly unexpected.

Those readers who remember *Jesting Pilate* will not have forgotten his description of Los Angeles, which he entitles 'The City of Dreadful Joy'—Dreadful Joy is the keynote of the new society; or, if the word 'joy' seems somewhat out of place, Dreadful Happiness or Dreadful Heartiness would serve as well. Everyone in the future world is dreadfully happy, for human life has been robbed

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of all its terrors, and even Death has an anæsthetized sting. Babies are now incubated in test-tubes, and are so treated and 'conditioned' from the earliest stage that work—the dullest work—has become a delight. Thus labour troubles have gone the way of inefficiency, since the different classes of workers and technicians, who range from intellectuals to semi-morons, are reared each for a separate allotted task. Our showman being Mr. Aldous Huxley, the class of whose existence we learn most are the brain-workers, the dominant intelligentsia. They, too, have nothing to complain of, for physically and mentally they are as near perfect as 'The Central London Hatchery' can turn them out. From the gigantic nurseries, where they are taught erotic games, to the orgiastic jamborees of later life, their animal needs are sensuously anticipated. Love, the recognized pastime of young and old, has been carefully sterilized and re-directed.

Here the reader who knows his Aldous Huxley will look forward to some ingenious and 'daring' satire, and will be gratified or definitely satiated, according to temperament. Indeed, the book might be divided into two parts: a serious outline, constructed with much skill and many references to the work of modern scientists (particularly to Pavlov's work on dogs), and an extravaganza in which the skeleton is clothed, often witty, but sometimes a trifle thin. Mr. Huxley can never forgo making a hit, and not all his hits are equally amusing. If one deplors the 'smarter' aspect of his narrative, it is because the bare thesis which he propounds promises so satisfying a drama. It deals with the 'right to be unhappy', and with the revolt of the Individual against the Mass which attempts to force on him a mechanical well-being. As a drama, a

potential tragedy, the book fails; but as a spirited fantasia it is worth digesting.

The Scientific Outlook, by *Bertrand Russell* (*Allen & Unwin*, 7s. 6d.), should be read at the same time as *Brave New World*. Mr. Russell, a prophet of a different calibre, corroborates Mr. Huxley at several points. He, too, imagines that the commonweal may take over the organization of human breeding, that certain categories may be reared for certain tasks, and supervised and strictly controlled during their leisure:

As for manual workers, they will be discouraged from serious thought: they will be made as comfortable as possible, and their hours of work will be much shorter than they are at present; they will have no fear of destitution. . . . As soon as working hours are over, amusements will be provided, of a sort calculated to

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cause wholesome mirth, and to prevent any thoughts of discontent which otherwise might cloud their happiness.

He, too, sees in the removal of all suffering the shipwreck of the restless human soul; while his vision of the scientific world-oligarchy is even more appalling and fraught with terror:

In such a world, though there may be pleasure, there will be no joy. The result will be a type displaying the usual characteristics of vigorous ascetics. They will be harsh and unbending. . . . I do not imagine that pain will be much inflicted as punishment for sin, since no sin will be recognized except insubordination and failure to carry out the purposes of the State. It is more probable that the sadistic impulses which asceticism will generate will find their outlet in scientific experiment. . . . The new scientific religion will demand its holocausts of sacred victims. . . . In the end such a system must break down either in an orgy of bloodshed or in the rediscovery of joy.

From the hypothetical terrors of a future age, one turns, with a feeling of some relief, to the contemplation of bogies nearer home. *Prosperity*, by M. J. Bonn (*Hopkinson*. 7s. 6d.), discusses, in the words of its sub-title, 'Myth and Reality in American Economic Life'. Professor Bonn is a German economist; but, unlike many compatriots and most of his colleagues, he has the faculty of making an important subject interesting. There is, indeed, as Professor Bonn explains it—even for the most frivolous and least financial—an extraordinary fascination in his story. What were the causes of the American boom? Why was the boom followed by a slump? These are questions we

are few of us prepared to answer, but in the solution of which we are, willy-nilly, all involved.

A book which, for sheer amusement value, I should recommend to every reader who likes biography, is a new life of Mrs. Annie Besant, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams. (*John Hamilton. 18s.*) The style is somewhat effusive and journalistic, but this criticism can be applied to the style alone. The author, who is apparently American, writes with both humour and restraint: she has grasped the possibilities of her subject, but is sensible enough not to over-dramatize them. And what a subject! No woman, still alive, has lived her life with such energy and such enthusiasm. The various phases which Mrs. Besant has gone through leave the giddy curves of a switchback far behind—Christianity, Atheism, Socialism, and Theosophy—yet never once has she quite deserted the rails, though many passengers have been tumbled out *en route*. Even the defection of the New Messiah has not daunted the abundant optimism of his chief apostle.

Mrs. Besant is an extremely able woman, but some element is lacking from her composition. She is hardheaded and gullible at the same time, with the result that her brilliant natural gifts have been largely squandered at a number of gimcrack side-shows. Similarly, the biographer of Ludendorff describes in his study of the General a prolonged conflict between gifts and limitations which has made him one of the conspicuous failures of modern times. *Ludendorff: The Tragedy of a Specialist*, by Karl Tschuppik, translated by W. H. Johnston (*Allen & Unwin. 16s.*), is interesting if not particularly readable. It is the story of a great organizer and skilled tactician, whom circumstances out-flanked and overwhelmed.

Among the more recent literary biographies, Mathew Josephson's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Gollancz. 18s.) is obviously the best. Rousseau has at last found a biographer who is impartial without being apologetic, who neither blushes nor scolds as he tells his tale. Mr. Josephson, in writing this book, has made use of the new material which has come to light—for example, the part played by Grimm and Diderot in the 'editing' of Madame d'Épinay's notorious Memoirs. He is definitely on Rousseau's side throughout, but his partisanship is not allowed to become obtrusive. His monograph supplements the *Confessions*, while making full use of the foundation which they provide.

Goethe and Schiller, by Annette M. B. Meakin (Francis Griffiths. 21s.), the first of a series of three volumes, is a useful, but decidedly heavy, work which suggests that it was perhaps written for a degree. The authoress, who keeps modestly in the background, has contented herself with translating and stringing together passages from the correspondence of her protagonists. Nor does *The Life of Daniel Defoe*, by Thomas Wright (Farncombe. 21s.), make many concessions to the vitiated modern taste which judges biographies by the standards of the novel. First published in 1894, it has now been 'almost entirely rewritten', and includes some interesting new discoveries. As it stands, it is a workmanlike compilation which will be referred to more often than actually read.

Mr. Clive Bell prefaces his *Account of French Painting* (Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d.) by a short definition of its scope. He wishes to act primarily as a guide; and in so far as it is the business of a guide not only to communicate names and periods, but also the enthusiasm he himself feels, not only to inform, but to encourage, few of us who have

visited Burlington House could wish for a more amiable cicerone. Besides making a general survey of his subject, Mr. Bell has set out in his first chapter to pin down the national quality of French art. 'No one who generalizes as much as I has a more lively mistrust of generalizations.' But what Mr. Bell may consider his special weakness proves a source of strength when he indulges in it freely. His generalizations are half the charm of the present book, since they are always enunciated with good humour. The generalizations of other critics are bred in spleen; and 'le spleen anglais' is one of those distressing British traits which Mr. Bell appears to have lost on the Channel boat. Incidentally, the reader's seven-and-sixpence buys him thirty-two admirable illustrations.

FICTION

By VIOLA MEYNELL

They say—and this prefix is a handy form for promulgating views for which you do not accept the responsibility—that fiction and the theatre are doomed, infallibly to be replaced by mechanical entertainment. To those on whom the emphatic prophecy succeeds in making an impression, the reading of the novel is given almost the character of a solemn and tender ceremony, a reluctant farewell, with sighs for Mr. Strong and a jeremiad for Mr. Golding, and a secret pang for the obsequies of whatever author is your favourite. The general threat of the times cannot, at least, be quite without its effect on writers themselves, who meet it in their own way with their own weapons—but certainly do not parade a consciousness of their approaching end. Mr. Golding's

Magnolia Street (Gollancz. 8s. 6d.) is a particularly lively argument against extinction. It is a long book (length, for some reason, is one of the weapons the novel has grasped in its defence), covering the period of the last twenty years, and it tells a little about a lot of people in one poor street of a Northern city. This house-to-house inspection, in and out of little sitting-rooms and a barber's shop and a bar-parlour, and across the road and back again, would have elicited a too indiscriminate sounding collection of facts if it did not prove to be a census of one guiding race-question—Jew or Gentile, and thus unite its facts in one idea. *Magnolia Street* has, roughly, Jews on one side of the street and Gentiles on the other, militant peoples, Gentiles crying 'Oo killed Christ!' to old Rabbi Shulman who, with his greasy coat, dented silk-hat, and wild eyes, smiles and mutters a reply 'as if to some spiritual being who had addressed him'; Jews loving England and thinking of Queen Victoria of blessed memory as a Jewish matron, and Buckingham Palace as something like the Temple of Solomon; Jew and Gentile who cannot love and marry without bringing *Magnolia Street* about their heads. The large-scale national theme pervades the ephemeral interests of the street, and Mr. Golding sees the pre-War years, the War, and *Magnolia Street's* distant heaven of America consistently in the light of the racial difference. He sharpens his characters with it. His young sailor lover of a Jewish girl—the man who was going to be captain of a ship some day—walked 'with a slight swing in the shoulders and hips as if the pavement of *Magnolia Street* lifted slowly to the pull of the moon', while his Jewish rabbi had 'so much benignity in his seamed cheeks and so soft a light in his old eyes that he took peace with him wherever he went. For though you

might have said of the other Jews in Magnolia Street that they nourished a spark within their bosoms which, fanned into flame, might have agitated them into nailing Christ upon a cross, somehow it seemed flatly impossible that Reb Feivel could have done so cruel a thing. He would, with that streak of sweet cunning there was in him, have had himself strung up first upon that same cross, and there would have been no place that evening for the hanging up of Jesus, that evening or ever again.' For a moment Mr. Golding will pause thus, and then in his hurry, rather than probe further, he proceeds to the next house. He is certainly against small families; he loves a crowd, and a full day. But *Magnolia Street* is a long book, and by no means all who are in it are seen with as sharp an eye for a characteristic as some; the virtue of mere plenty is sometimes relied upon. Let not the meticulous author, busy on his concentrated study to produce one minute portrait instead of this crowded exhibition, be discouraged to think that nothing is lost by such a scale as Mr. Golding's. Something *is* lost. His gregariousness is such that he is not nailed down to any truth, of his own making, that the reader can check. How can such ready inventiveness of detail not have sometimes a merely glib sound when it is bound by no faithfulness to a pattern?

The truth is that a novel of this kind, written not without a consciousness of the agile, mechanical rivalry threatening its existence, is tempted to a large display of agility on its own account. It seeks to break down restrictions and goes out into the open, into the rough-and-tumble where all arts meet that have left their own convention farthest behind—and there *Magnolia Street* puts up a splendid fight. This is its contribution towards the effort for survival. But perhaps a surer way lies in the

intensification of the sheer novelist's art to which the instinct of other writers is leading them; for it is when the novel retreats farthest into its own lair that its power is unassailable. What stronghold could be more protected from all possibility of encroachment than an art made only of the qualities peculiar to itself, retreating into its own individuality, confining itself to those necessities which forced it, as an art, into being? The novelist's power of holding the subject still while the words move about it is what Mr. Golding hardly makes use of—his procession races past with almost mechanical speed; but it is a power which other recent writers have not been tempted to forsake. And among those whose movement and play of words around their subject gives to their writing the stamp of an individual unassailable art, Mr. V. S. Pritchett is prominent. Mr. Pritchett is not a widely-known writer, but his former books have brought him that small number of ardent admirers that are generally the forerunners of the many; and his new book, *Shirley Sanz* (*Gollancz. 7s. 6d.*), should precipitate the many into existence. Mr. Pritchett does not, any more than Mr. Golding, intend to let the times get ahead of him: his swearing young woman has to-day's date; his characters' sins are sinned, not in the revolting way they would have been, but precisely in the revolting way they are. But he has no notion of acquiring a mechanical efficiency to manipulate events and efface distance. His battle for existence is fought in a different way, the secret way of his individual mind. Every character and happening in *Shirley Sanz* is safe within a fortress of a mere turn of words. He can write almost too well: situations entice his talent to so perfect a performance that he asks nothing greater of his main idea than to afford him opportunities.

His main theme centres round two women, one of whom is tempted, by the influence of the licentiousness of the other, to an infidelity to her husband. The book ends in the air with the infidelity, the theme proving itself to be merely episodic, rather than one into which the author can throw the weight of his contribution to an ideal conception of life. But within their somewhat arbitrary enclosure, the richly characteristic scenes seem sufficient. There is one in which a man is indifferently breaking with a woman in a London restaurant. This couple is not the real concern of the reader, who is absorbed in the main eloping pair at another table; they are for the present merely overheard, giving an effect of life going on urgently into the distance. The woman, perforce agreeing with the man's abandonment of her, yet makes her hopeless efforts, and tastes the 'astounding reasoning detachment of those who have ceased to love' in the man's comfortable disagreement with any plea she puts forward. A London boarding-house and the beautiful Spanish setting in which most of the story moves are equally Mr. Pritchett's opportunity for this kind of infallible hitting of the mark.

Another writer with whom the movement of his story is far less important than his own movement around it is Mr. Charles Morgan. On story-writing grounds he does not fight: probably a penny-in-the-slot machine on the pier could give him points in episode. All Mr. Morgan requires is a situation to which the workings of a fine mind can give the greatest degree of significance, letting every action have its full weight of moral importance. His stand, away from the threatened position of mere story-writing, and well into the security of literature, takes him into other recesses than those of Mr. Pritchett. For *The Fountain* (Macmillan. 7s. 6d.), a history of an

officer interned in Holland during the War, and of the woman he loves and her husband, has brought into use no mere delightful exercise of observation, but philosophic and spiritual and contemplative powers of a rare quality and finely applied. The effect on the reader, who is beguiled by the exceedingly attractive company of the young naval officer and his internment companions gradually into these largest issues, is profound, for Mr. Morgan provides him with something permanent and for more than his mere pleasure. Another far slighter book to give one a dash of the same responsible outlook is Miss Curtis Brown's *For the Delight of Antonio* (Macmillan. 7s. 6d.), in which the interest of the admirably written adventure story of Italy in the last century is steadied and deepened by it.

This various individuality (such as never fails in Mr. Garnett, and is to be discovered in the method of Miss Theodora Benson), which is the novelist's chief salvation, and which is so much also the novel reader's chief reward that he likes it even carried to the point of freakishness (as in Miss Kay Boyle's brilliant *Plagued by the Nightingale*), is not greatly developed by Mr. Strong in *The Brothers* (Gollancz. 7s. 6d.). His story of two brothers in wild Highland surroundings relies more on grim horror and cruelty and lust for its effect than on that delicate, sensitive character which it might have taken more naturally from its author. In Mr. Boden's *The Miner* (Dent. 6s.), an impressive account of a miner's experiences, the grimness is intrinsic to the subject, but Mr. Strong has somewhat inflated the horrors of a relentless, peasant savagery instead of doing all that a writer of such charm needs to do to prevail, building himself more securely into his own mind.



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