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# **English Men of Letters**

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

VOL. VIII

DEFOE

STERNE

HAWTHORNE





**DEFOE**

By **W. MINTO**

**STERNE**

By **H. D. TRAILL**

**HAWTHORNE**

By **HENRY JAMES**

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# **English Men of Letters**

**EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY**

**DANIEL DEFOE**



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BY  
WILLIAM MINTO

London  
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1885.

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## P R E F A C E . .

THERE are three considerable biographies of Defoe—the first, by George Chalmers, published in 1786; the second by Walter Wilson, published in 1830; the third, by William Lee, published in 1869. All three are thorough and painstaking works, justified by independent research and discovery. The labour of research in the case of an author supposed to have written some two hundred and fifty separate books and pamphlets, very few of them under his own name, is naturally enormous; and when it is done, the results are open to endless dispute. Probably two men could not be found who would read through the vast mass of contemporary anonymous and pseudonymous print, and agree upon a complete list of Defoe's writings. Fortunately, however, for those who wish to get a clear idea of his life and character, the identification is not pure guess-work on internal evidence. He put his own name or initials to some of his productions, and treated the authorship of



others as open secrets. Enough is ascertained as his, to provide us with the means for a complete understanding of his opinions and his conduct. It is Defoe's misfortune that his biographers on the large scale have occupied themselves too much with subordinate details, and have been misled from a true appreciation of his main lines of thought and action by religious, political, and hero-worshipping bias. For the following sketch, taking Mr. Lee's elaborate work as my chronological guide, I have read such of Defoe's undoubted writings as are accessible in the Library of the British Museum—there is no complete collection, I believe, in existence—and endeavoured to connect them and him with the history of the time.

W. M.

*January 1879.*

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# DANIEL DEFOE

## CHAPTER I.

### DEFOE'S YOUTH AND EARLY PURSUITS.

THE life of a man of letters is not as a rule eventful. It may be rich in spiritual experiences, but it seldom is rich in active adventure. We ask his biographer to tell us what were his habits of composition, how he talked, how he bore himself in the discharge of his duties to his family, his neighbours, and himself; what were his beliefs on the great questions that concern humanity. We desire to know what he said and wrote, not what he did beyond the study and the domestic or the social circle. The chief external facts in his career are the dates of the publication of his successive books.

Daniel Defoe is an exception to this rule. He was a man of action as well as a man of letters. The writing of the books which have given him immortality was little more than an accident in his career, a comparatively trifling and casual item in the total expenditure of his many-sided energy. He was nearly sixty when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*. Before that event he

had been a rebel, a merchant, a manufacturer, a writer of popular satires in verse, a bankrupt; had acted as secretary to a public commission, been employed in secret services by five successive Administrations, written innumerable pamphlets, and edited more than one newspaper. He had led in fact as adventurous a life as any of his own heroes, and had met quickly succeeding difficulties with equally ready and fertile ingenuity.

For many of the incidents in Defoe's life we are indebted to himself. He had all the vaingloriousness of exuberant vitality, and was animated in the recital of his own adventures. Scattered throughout his various works are the materials for a tolerably complete autobiography. This is in one respect an advantage for any one who attempts to give an account of his life. But it has a counterbalancing disadvantage in the circumstance that there is grave reason to doubt his veracity. Defoe was a great story-teller in more senses than one. We can hardly believe a word that he says about himself without independent confirmation.

Defoe was born in London, in 1661. It is a characteristic circumstance that his name is not his own, except in the sense that it was assumed by himself. The name of his father, who was a butcher in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate, was Foe. His grandfather was a Northamptonshire yeoman. In his *True Born Englishman*, Defoe spoke very contemptuously of families that professed to have come over with "the Norman bastard," defying them to prove whether their ancestors were drummers or colonels; but apparently he was not above the vanity of making the world believe that he himself was of Norman-French origin. Yet such was the restless energy of the man that he could not leave

even his adopted name alone; he seems to have been about forty when he first changed his signature "D. Foe" into the surname of "Defoe;" but his patient biographer, Mr. Lee, has found several later instances of his subscribing himself "D. Foe," "D. F.," and "De Foe" in alternation with the "Daniel De Foe," or "Daniel Defoe," which has become his accepted name in literature.

In middle age, when Defoe was taunted with his want of learning, he retorted that if he was a blockhead it was not the fault of his father, who had "spared nothing in his education that might qualify him to match the accurate Dr. Browne, or the learned Observer." His father was a Nonconformist, a member of the congregation of Dr. Annesley, and the son was originally intended for the Dissenting ministry. "It was his disaster," he said afterwards, "first to be set apart for, and then to be set apart from, that sacred employ." He was placed at an academy for the training of ministers at the age, it is supposed, of about fourteen, and probably remained there for the full course of five years. He has himself explained why, when his training was completed, he did not proceed to the office of the pulpit, but changed his views and resolved to engage in business as a hose-merchant. The sum of the explanation is that the ministry seemed to him at that time to be neither honourable, agreeable, nor profitable. It was degraded, he thought, by the entrances of men who had neither physical nor intellectual qualification for it, who had received out of a denominational fund only such an education as made them pedants rather than Christian gentlemen of high learning, and who had consequently to submit to shameful and degrading practices in their

efforts to obtain congregations and subsistence. Besides, the behaviour of congregations to their ministers, who were dependent, was often objectionable and un-Christian. And finally, far-flown birds having fine feathers, the prizes of the ministry in London were generally given to strangers, "eminent ministers *called* from all parts of England," some even from Scotland, finding acceptance in the metropolis before having received any formal ordination.

Though the education of his "fund-bred" companions, as he calls them, at Mr. Morton's Academy in Newington Green, was such as to excite Defoe's contempt, he bears testimony to Mr. Morton's excellence as a teacher, and instances the names of several pupils who did credit to his labours. In one respect Mr. Morton's system was better than that which then prevailed at the Universities; all dissertations were written and all disputations held in English; and hence it resulted, Defoe says, that his pupils, though they were "not destitute in the languages," were "made masters of the English tongue, and more of them excelled in that particular than of any school at that time." Whether Defoe obtained at Newington the rudiments of all the learning which he afterwards claimed to be possessed of, we do not know; but the taunt frequently levelled at him by University men of being an "illiterate fellow" and no scholar, was one that he bitterly resented, and that drew from him many protestations and retorts. In 1705, he angrily challenged John Tutchin "to translate with him any Latin, French, or Italian author, and after that to retranslate them crosswise for twenty pounds each book;" and he replied to Swift, who had spoken of him scornfully as "an illiterate fellow, whose

name I forget," that "he had been in his time pretty well master of five languages, and had not lost them yet, though he wrote no bill at his door, nor set Latin quotations on the front of the *Review*." To the end of his days Defoe could not forget this taunt of want of learning. In one of the papers in *Applebee's Journal* identified by Mr. Lee (below, Chapter VIII.), he discussed what is to be understood by "learning," and drew the following sketch of his own attainments:—

"I remember an Author in the World some years ago, who was generally upbraided with Ignorance, and called an 'Illiterate Fellow,' by some of the *Beau-Monde* of the last Age. . . .

"I happened to come into this Person's Study once, and I found him busy translating a Description of the Course of the River Boristhenes, out of *Bleau's Geography*, written in *Spanish*. Another Time I found him translating some Latin Paragraphs out of *Leubnitz's Theatri Cometici*, being a learned Discourse upon Comets; and that I might see whether it was genuine, I looked on some part of it that he had finished, and found by it that he understood the Latin very well, and had perfectly taken the sense of that difficult Author. In short, I found he understood the *Latin*, the *Spanish*, the *Italian*, and could read the *Greek*, and I knew before that he spoke *French* fluently—*yet this Man was no Scholar*.

"As to Science, on another Occasion, I heard him dispute (in such a manner as surprized me) upon the motions of the Heavenly Bodies, the Distance, Magnitude, Revolutions, and especially the Influences of the Planets, the Nature and probable Revolutions of Comets, the excellency of the New Philosophy, and the like; *but this Man was no Scholar*.

"In Geography and History he had all the World at his Finger's ends. He talked of the most distant Countries with an inimitable Exactness; and changing from one Place to another, the Company thought, of every Place or Country he named, that certainly he must have been born there. He



know not only where every Thing was, but what everybody did in every Part of the World ; I mean, what Businesses, what Trade, what Manufacture, was carrying on in every Part of the World ; and had the History of almost all the Nations of the World in his Head,—*yet this Man was no Scholar.*

“This put me upon wondering, ever so long ago, what this *strange Thing* called a Man of Learning *was*, and what is it that constitutes a *Scholar* ? For, *said I*, here’s a man speaks five Languages and reads the Sixth, is a master of Astronomy, Geography, History, and abundance of other useful Knowledge, (which I do not mention, that you may not guess at the Man, who is too Modest to desire it,) and yet, they say *this Man is no Scholar.*”

How much of this learning Defoe acquired at school, and how much he picked up afterwards under the pressure of the necessities of his business, it is impossible to determine, but at any rate it was at least as good a qualification for writing on public affairs as the more limited and accurate scholarship of his academic rivals. Whatever may have been the extent of his knowledge when he passed from Mr. Morton’s tuition, qualified but no longer willing to become a Dissenting preacher, he did not allow it to rust unused ; he at once mobilised his forces for active service. They were keen politicians, naturally, at the Newington Academy, and the times furnished ample materials for their discussions. As Nonconformists they were very closely affected by the struggle between Charles II. and the defenders of Protestantism and popular liberties. What part Defoe took in the excitement of the closing years of the reign of Charles must be matter of conjecture, but there can be little doubt that he was active on the popular side. He had but one difference then, he afterwards said in one of his tracts, with his party. He

would not join them in wishing for the success of the Turks in besieging Vienna, because, though the Austrians were Papists and though the Turks were ostensibly on the side of the Hungarian reformers whom the Austrian Government had persecuted, he had read the history of the Turks and could not pray for their victory over Christians of any denomination. "Though then but a young man, and a younger author" (this was in 1683), "he opposed it and wrote against it, which was taken very unkindly indeed." From these words it would seem that Defoe had thus early begun to write pamphlets on questions of the hour. As he was on the weaker side, and any writing might have cost him his life, it is probable that he did not put his name to any of these tracts; none of them have been identified; but his youth was strangely unlike his mature manhood if he was not justified in speaking of himself as having been then an "author." Nor was he content merely with writing. It would have been little short of a miracle if his restless energy had allowed him to lie quiet while the air was thick with political intrigue. We may be sure that he had a voice in some of the secret associations in which plans were discussed of armed resistance to the tyranny of the King. We have his own word for it that he took part in the Duke of Monmouth's rising, when the whips of Charles were exchanged for the scorpions of James. He boasted of this when it became safe to do so, and the truth of the boast derives incidental confirmation from the fact that the names of three of his fellow-students at Newington appear in the list of the victims of Jeffreys and Kirke.

Escaping the keen hunt that was made for all

participants in the rebellion, Defoe towards the close of 1685 began business as a hosier or hose-factor in Freeman's Court, Cornhill. The precise nature of his trade has been disputed; and it does not particularly concern us here. When taunted afterwards with having been apprentice to a hosier, he indignantly denied the fact, and explained that though he had been a trader in hosiery he had never been a shopkeeper. A passing illustration in his *Essay on Projects*, drawn from his own experience, shows that he imported goods in the course of his business from abroad; he speaks of sometimes having paid more in insurance premiums than he had cleared by a voyage. From a story which he tells in his *Complete English Tradesman*, recalling the cleverness with which he defeated an attempt to outwit him about a consignment of brandy, we learn that his business sometimes took him to Spain. This is nearly all that we know about his first adventure in trade, except that after seven years, in 1692, he had to flee from his creditors. He hints in one of his *Reviews* that this misfortune was brought about by the frauds of swindlers, and it deserves to be recorded that he made the honourable boast that he afterwards paid off his obligations. The truth of the boast is independently confirmed by the admission of a controversial enemy, that very Tutchin whom he challenged to translate Latin with him. That Defoe should have referred so little to his own experience in the *Complete English Tradesman*, a series of Familiar Letters which he published late in life "for the instruction of our Inland Tradesmen, and especially of Young Beginners," is accounted for when we observe the class of persons to whom the letters were addressed. He distinguishes with his usual clear-

ness between the different ranks of those employed in the production and exchange of goods, and intimates that his advice is not intended for the highest grade of traders, the merchants, whom he defines by what he calls the vulgar expression, as being "such as trade beyond sea." Although he was eloquent in many books and pamphlets in upholding the dignity of trade, and lost no opportunity of scoffing at pretentious gentility he never allows us to forget that this was the grade to which he himself belonged, and addresses the petty trader from a certain altitude. He speaks in the preface to the *Complete Tradesman* of unfortunate creatures who have blown themselves up in trade, whether "for want of wit or from too much wit;" but lest he should be supposed to allude to his own misfortunes, he does not say that he miscarried himself but that he "had seen in a few years experience many young tradesmen miscarry." At the same time it is fair to conjecture that when Defoe warns the young tradesman against fancying himself a politician or a man of letters, running off to the coffee-house when he ought to be behind the counter, and reading Virgil and Horace when he should be busy over his journal and his ledger, he was glancing at some of the causes which conduced to his own failure as a merchant. And when he cautions the beginner against going too fast, and holds up to him as a type and exemplar the carrier's waggon, which "keeps wagging and always goes on," and "as softly as it goes" can yet in time go far, we may be sure that he was thinking of the over-rashness with which he had himself embarked in speculation.

There can be no doubt that eager and active as Defoe was in his trading enterprises, he was not so wrapt up

in them as to be an unconcerned spectator of the intense political life of the time. When King James aimed a blow at the Church of England by removing the religious disabilities of all dissenters, Protestant and Catholic, in his Declaration of Indulgence, some of Defoe's co-religionists were ready to catch at the boon without thinking of its consequences. He differed from them, he afterwards stated, and "as he used to say that he had rather the Popish House of Austria should ruin the Protestants in Hungaria, than the infidel House of Ottoman should ruin both Protestants and Papists by overrunning Germany," so now "he told the Dissenters he had rather the Church of England should pull our clothes off by fines and forfeitures, than the Papists should fall both upon the Church and the Dissenters, and pull our skins off by fire and faggot." He probably embodied these conclusions of his vigorous common sense in a pamphlet, though no pamphlet on the subject known for certain to be his has been preserved. Mr. Lee is over-rash in identifying as Defoe's a quarto sheet of that date entitled "A Letter containing some Reflections on His Majesty's declaration for Liberty of Conscience." Defoe may have written many pamphlets on the stirring events of the time, which have not come down to us. It may have been then that he acquired, or made a valuable possession by practice, that marvellous facility with his pen which stood him in such stead in after life. It would be no wonder if he wrote dozens of pamphlets, every one of which disappeared. The pamphlet then occupied the place of the newspaper leading article. The newspapers of the time were veritable chronicles of news, and not organs of opinion. The expression of opinion was not then asso-

dated with the dissemination of facts and rumours. A man who wished to influence public opinion wrote a pamphlet, small or large, a single leaf or a tract of a few pages, and had it hawked about the streets and sold in the bookshops. These pamphlets issued from the press in swarms, were thrown aside when read, and hardly preserved except by accident. That Defoe, if he wrote any or many, should not have reprinted them when fifteen years afterwards he published a collection of his works, is intelligible; he republished only such of his tracts as had not lost their practical interest. If, however, we indulge in the fancy, warranted so far by his describing himself as having been a young "author" in 1683, that Defoe took an active part in polemical literature under Charles and James, we must remember that the censorship of the press was then active, and that Defoe must have published under greater disadvantages than those who wrote on the side of the Court.

At the Revolution, in 1688, Defoe lost no time in making his adhesion to the new monarch conspicuous. He was, according to Oldmixon, one of "a royal regiment of volunteer horse, made up of the chief citizens, who, being gallantly mounted and richly accoutred, were led by the Earl of Monmouth, now Earl of Peterborough, and attended their Majesties from Whitehall," to a banquet given by the Lord Mayor and Corporation of the City. Three years afterwards, on the occasion of the Jacobite plot in which Lord Preston was the leading figure, he published the first pamphlet that is known for certain to be his. It is in verse, and is entitled *A New Discovery of an Old Intrigue, a Satire levelled at Treachery and Ambition*. In the preface, the author said that "he had never drawn his

pen before," and that he would never write again unless this effort produced a visible reformation. If we take this literally, we must suppose that his claim to have been an author eighteen years before had its origin in his fitful vanity. The literary merits of the satire, when we compare it with the powerful verse of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, to which he refers in the exordium, are not great. Defoe prided himself upon his verse, and in a catalogue of the Poets in one of his later pieces assigned himself the special province of "lampoon." He possibly believed that his clever doggerel was a better title to immortality than *Robinson Crusoe*. The immediate popular effect of his satires gave some encouragement to this belief, but they are comparatively dull reading for posterity. The clever hits at living City functionaries, indicated by their initials and nicknames, the rough ridicule and the biting innuendo, were telling in their day, but the lampoons have perished with their objects. The local celebrity of Sir Ralph and Sir Peter, Silly Will and Captain Tom the Tailor, has vanished, and Defoe's hurried and formless lines, incisive as their vivid force must have been, are not redeemed from dullness for modern readers by the few bright epigrams with which they are besprinkled.

## CHAPTER II.

### KING WILLIAM'S ADJUTANT.

DEFOE'S first business catastrophe happened about 1692. He is said to have temporarily absconded, and to have parleyed with his creditors from a distance till they agreed to accept a composition. Bristol is named as having been his place of refuge, and there is a story that he was known there as the Sunday Gentleman, because he appeared on that day and that day only in fashionable attire, being kept indoors during the rest of the week by fear of the bailiffs. But he was of too buoyant a temperament to sink under his misfortune from the sense of having brought it on himself, and the cloud soon passed away. A man so fertile in expedients, and ready, according to his own ideal of a thoroughbred trader, to turn himself to anything, could not long remain unemployed. He had various business offers, and among others an invitation from some merchants to settle at Cadiz as a commission agent, "with offers of very good commissions." But Providence, he tells us, and, we may add, a shrewd confidence in his own powers, "placed a secret aversion in his mind to quitting England upon any account, and made him refuse the best offers of that kind." He stayed at home, "to be



concerned with some eminent persons in proposing ways and means to the Government for raising money to supply the occasions of the war then newly begun." He also wrote a vigorous and loyal pamphlet, entitled, *The Englishman's Choice and True Interest: in the vigorous prosecution of the war against France, and serving K. William and Q. Mary, and acknowledging their right*. As a reward for his literary or his financial services or for both, he was appointed "without the least application" of his own, Accountant to the Commissioners of the Glass Duty, and held this post till the duty was abolished in 1699.

From 1694 to the end of William's reign was the most prosperous and honourable period in Defoe's life. His services to the Government did not absorb the whole of his restless energy. He still had time for private enterprise, and started a manufactory of bricks and pantiles at Tilbury, where, Mr. Lee says, judging from fragments recently dug up, he made good sound sonorous bricks, although according to another authority such a thing was impossible out of any material existing in the neighbourhood. Anyhow, Defoe prospered, and set up a coach and a pleasure-boat. Nor must we forget what is so much to his honour, that he set himself to pay his creditors in full, voluntarily disregarding the composition which they had accepted. In 1705 he was able to boast that he had reduced his debts in spite of many difficulties from 17,000*l.* to 5,000*l.*, but these sums included liabilities resulting from the failure of his pantile factory.

Defoe's first conspicuous literary service to King William, after he obtained Government employment, was a pamphlet on the question of a Standing Army

raised after the Peace of Ryswick in 1697. This Pen and Ink War, as he calls it, which followed close on the heels of the great European struggle, had been raging for some time before Defoe took the field. Hosts of writers had appeared to endanger the permanence of the triumph of William's arms and diplomacy by demanding the disbandment of his tried troops, as being a menace to domestic liberties. Their arguments had been encountered by no less zealous champions of the King's cause. The battle, in fact, had been won when Defoe issued his *Argument showing that a Standing Army, with consent of Parliament, is not inconsistent with a Free Government*. He was able to boast in his preface that "if books and writings would not, God be thanked the Parliament would confute" his adversaries. Nevertheless, though coming late in the day, Defoe's pamphlet was widely read, and must have helped to consolidate the victory.

Thus late in life did Defoe lay the first stone of his literary reputation. He was now in the thirty-eighth year of his age, his controversial genius in full vigour, and his mastery of language complete. None of his subsequent tracts surpass this as a piece of trenchant and persuasive reasoning. It shows at their very highest his marvellous powers of combining constructive with destructive criticism. He dashes into the lists with good-humoured confidence, bearing the banner of clear common sense, and disclaiming sympathy with extreme persons of either side. He puts his case with direct and plausible force, addressing his readers vivaciously as plain people like himself, among whom as reasonable men there cannot be two opinions. He cuts rival arguments to pieces with dexterous strokes, representing them as the

confused reasoning of well-meaning but dull intellects, and dances with lively mockery on the fragments. If the authors of such arguments knew their own minds, they would be entirely on his side. He echoes the pet prejudices of his readers as the props and mainstays of his thesis, and boldly laughs away misgivings of which they are likely to be half ashamed. He makes no parade of logic; he is only a plain freeholder like the mass whom he addresses, though he knows twenty times as much as many writers of more pretension. He never appeals to passion or imagination; what he strives to enlist on his side is homely self-interest, and the ordinary sense of what is right and reasonable. There is little regularity of method in the development of his argument; that he leaves to more anxious and elaborate masters of style. For himself he is content to start from a bold and clear statement of his own opinion, and proceeds buoyantly and discursively to engage and scatter his enemies as they turn up, without the least fear of being able to fight his way back to his original base. He wrote for a class to whom a prolonged intellectual operation, however comprehensive and complete, was distasteful. To persuade the mass of the freeholders was his object, and for such an object there are no political tracts in the language at all comparable to Defoe's. He bears some resemblance to Cobbett, but he had none of Cobbett's brutality; his faculties were more adroit, and his range of vision infinitely wider. Cobbett was a demagogue, Defoe a popular statesman. The one was qualified to lead the people, the other to guide them. Cobbett is contained in Defoe as the less is contained in the greater.

King William obtained a standing army from Parlia-

ment, but not so large an army as he wished, and it was soon afterwards still further reduced. Meantime, Defoe employed his pen in promoting objects which were dear to the King's heart. His *Essay on Projects*—which “relate to Civil Polity as well as matters of negoce”—was calculated, in so far as it advocated joint-stock enterprise, to advance one of the objects of the statesmen of the Revolution, the committal of the moneyed classes to the established Government, and against a dynasty which might plausibly be mistrusted of respect for visible accumulations of private wealth. Defoe's projects were of an extremely varied kind. The classification was not strict. His spirited definition of the word “projects” included Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel, as well as Captain Phippe's scheme for raising the wreck of a Spanish ship laden with silver. He is sometimes credited with remarkable shrewdness in having anticipated in this *Essay* some of the greatest public improvements of modern times—the protection of seamen, the higher education of women, the establishment of banks and benefit societies, the construction of highways. But it is not historically accurate to give him the whole credit of these conceptions. Most of them were floating about at the time, so much so that he had to defend himself against a charge of plagiarism, and few of them have been carried out in accordance with the essential features of his plans. One remarkable circumstance in Defoe's projects, which we may attribute either to his own natural bent or to his compliance with the King's humour, is the extent to which he advocated Government interference. He proposed, for example, an income-tax, and the appointment of a commission who should travel through the country and

ascertain by inquiry that the tax was not evaded. In making this proposal he shows an acquaintance with private incomes in the City, which raises some suspicion as to the capacity in which he was "associated with certain eminent persons in proposing ways and means to the Government." In his article on Banks, he expresses himself dissatisfied that the Government did not fix a maximum rate of interest for the loans made by chartered banks; they were otherwise, he complained, of no assistance to the poor trader, who might as well go to the goldsmiths as before. His Highways project was a scheme for making national highways on a scale worthy of Baron Haussmann. There is more fervid imagination and daring ingenuity than business talent in Defoe's essay; if his trading speculations were conducted with equal rashness, it is not difficult to understand their failure. The most notable of them are the schemes of a dictator, rather than of the adviser of a free Government. The essay is chiefly interesting as a monument of Defoe's marvellous force of mind, and strange mixture of steady sense with incontinent flightiness. There are ebullient sallies in it which we generally find only in the productions of madmen and charlatans, and yet it abounds in suggestions which statesmen might profitably have set themselves with due adaptations to carry into effect. The *Essay on Projects* might alone be adduced in proof of Defoe's title to genius.

One of the first projects to which the Government of the Revolution addressed itself was the reformation of manners—a purpose at once commendable in itself and politically useful as distinguishing the new Government from the old. Even while the King was absent in

Ireland at the beginning of his reign, the Queen issued a letter calling upon all justices of the peace and other servants of the Crown to exert themselves in suppressing the luxuriant growth of vice, which had been fostered by the example of the Court of Charles. On the conclusion of the war in 1697, William issued a most elaborate proclamation to the same effect, and an address was voted by Parliament, asking his Majesty to see that wickedness was discouraged in high places. The lively pamphlet in which Defoe lent his assistance to the good work, entitled *The Poor Man's Plea*, was written in the spirit of the parliamentary address. It was of no use to pass laws and make declarations and proclamations for the reform of the common *plebeii*, the poor man pleaded, so long as the mentors of the laws were themselves corrupt. His argument was spiced with amusing anecdotes to show the prevalence of swearing and drunkenness among members of the judicial bench. Defoe appeared several times afterwards in the character of a reformer of manners, sometimes in verse, sometimes in prose. When the retort was made that his own manners were not perfect, he denied that this invalidated the worth of his appeal, but at the same time challenged his accusers to prove him guilty of any of the vices that he had satirised.

It is impossible now to ascertain what induced Defoe to break with the Dissenters, among whom he had been brought up, but break with them he did in his pamphlet against the practice of *Occasional Conformity*. This practice of occasionally taking communion with the Established Church, as a qualification for public office, had grown up after the Revolution, and had attracted very little notice till a Dissenting lord mayor, after

attending church one Sunday forenoon, went in the afternoon with all the insignia of his office to a Conventicle. Defoe's objection to this is indicated in his quotation, "If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him." A man, he contended, who could reconcile it with his conscience to attend the worship of the Church, had no business to be a Dissenter. Occasional conformity was "either a sinful act in itself, or else his dissenting before was sinful." The Dissenters naturally did not like this intolerant logical dilemma, and resented its being forced upon them by one of their own number against a practical compromise to which the good sense of the majority of them assented. No reply was made to the pamphlet when first issued in 1698, and two or three years afterwards Defoe, exulting in the unanswerable logic of his position, reprinted it with a prefatory challenge to Mr. Howe, an eminent dissenting minister. During the next reign, however, when a bill was introduced to prohibit the practice of occasional conformity, Defoe strenuously wrote against it as a breach of the Toleration Act and a measure of persecution. In strict logic it is possible to make out a case for his consistency, but the reasoning must be fine, and he cannot be acquitted of having in the first instance practically justified a persecution which he afterwards condemned. In neither case does he point at the repeal of the Test Act as his object, and it is impossible to explain his attitude in both cases on the ground of principle. However much he objected to see the sacrament taken as a matter of form, it was hardly his province, in the circumstances in which Dissenters then stood, to lead an outcry against the practice; and if he considered it scandalous and

sinful, he could not with much consistency protest against the prohibition of it as an act of persecution. Of this no person was better aware than Defoe himself, and it is a curious circumstance that, in his first pamphlet on the bill for putting down occasional conformity, he ridiculed the idea of its being persecution to suppress politic or state Dissenters, and maintained that the bill did not concern true Dissenters at all. To this, however, we must refer again in connexion with his celebrated tract, *The Shortest Way with Dissenters*.

The troubles into which the European system was plunged by the death of the childless King of Spain, and that most dramatic of historical surprises, the bequest of his throne by a death-bed will to the Duke of Anjou, the second grandson of Louis XIV., furnished Defoe with a great opportunity for his controversial genius. In Charles II.'s will, if the legacy was accepted, William saw the ruin of a life-long policy. Louis, though he was doubly pledged against acknowledging the will, having renounced all pretensions to the throne of Spain for himself and his heirs in the Treaty of the Pyrenees, and consented in two successive treaties of partition to a different plan of succession, did not long hesitate ; the news that he had saluted his grandson as King of Spain followed close upon the news of Charles's death. The balance of the great Catholic Powers which William had established by years of anxious diplomacy and costly war, was toppled over by a stroke of the pen. With Spain and Italy virtually added to his dominions, the French King would now be supreme upon the Continent. Louis soon showed that this was his view of what had happened, by saying that the Pyrenees had ceased to exist. He gave a practical illustration of the



same view by seizing, with the authority of his grandson, the frontier towns of the Spanish Netherlands, which were garrisoned under a special treaty by Dutch troops. Though deeply enraged at the bad faith of the most Christian King, William was not dismayed. The stone which he had rolled up the hill with such effort had suddenly rolled down again, but he was eager to renew his labours. Before, however, he could act, he found himself, to his utter astonishment and mortification, paralysed by the attitude of the English Parliament. His alarm at the accession of a Bourbon to the Spanish throne was not shared by the ruling classes in England. They declared that they liked the Spanish King's will better than William's partition. France, they argued, would gain much less by a dynastic alliance with Spain, which would exist no longer than their common interests dictated, than by the complete acquisition of the Spanish provinces in Italy.

William lost no time in summoning a new Parliament. An overwhelming majority opposed the idea of vindicating the Partition Treaty by arms. They pressed him to send a message of recognition to Philip V. Even the occupation of the Flemish fortresses did not change their temper. That, they said, was the affair of the Dutch ; it did not concern England. In vain William tried to convince them that the interests of the two Protestant States were identical. In the numerous pamphlets that were hatched by the ferment, it was broadly insinuated that the English people might pay too much for the privilege of having a Dutch King, who had done nothing for them that they could not have done for themselves, and who was perpetually sacrificing the interests of his adopted country to the necessities of his

beloved Holland. What had England gained by the Peace of Ryswick! Was England to be dragged into another exhausting war, merely to secure a strong frontier for the Dutch! The appeal found ready listeners among a people in whose minds the recollections of the last war were still fresh, and who still felt the burdens it had left behind. William did not venture to take any steps to form an alliance against France, till a new incident emerged to shake the country from its mood of surly calculation. When James II. died and Louis recognised the Pretender as King of England, all thoughts of isolation from a Continental confederacy were thrown to the winds. William dissolved his Long Parliament, and found the new House as warlike as the former had been peaceful. "Of all the nations in the world," cried Defoe, in commenting on this sudden change of mood, "there is none that I know of so entirely governed by their humour as the English."

For ten months Defoe had been vehemently but vainly striving to accomplish by argument what had been wrought in an instant by the French King's insufferable insult. It is one of the most brilliant periods of his political activity. Comparatively undistinguished before, he now, at the age of forty, stepped into the foremost rank of publicists. He lost not a moment in throwing himself into the fray as the champion of the King's policy. Charles of Spain died on the 22nd of October, 1701; by the middle of November, a few days after the news had reached England, and before the French King's resolve to acknowledge the legacy was known, Defoe was ready with a pamphlet to the clear and stirring title of—*The Two Great questions considered. I. What the French King will do*

*with respect to the Spanish Monarchy.* II. *What measures the English ought to take.* If the French King were wise, he argued, he would reject the dangerous gift for his grandson. But if he accepted it, England had no choice but to combine with her late allies the Emperor and the States, and compel the Duke of Anjou to withdraw his claims. This pamphlet being virulently attacked, and its author accused of bidding for a place at Court, Defoe made a spirited rejoinder, and seized the occasion to place his arguments in still clearer light. Between them the two pamphlets are a masterly exposition, from the point of view of English interests, of the danger of permitting the Will to be fulfilled. He tears the arguments of his opponents to pieces with supreme scorn. What matters it to us who is King of Spain? asks one adversary. As well ask, retorts Defoe, what it matters to us who is King of Ireland. All this talk about the Balance of Power, says another, is only "a shoeing-horn to draw on a standing army." We do not want an army; only let us make our fleet strong enough and we may defy the world; our militia is perfectly able to defend us against invasion. If our militia is so strong, is Defoe's reply, why should a standing-army make us fear for our domestic liberties? But if you object to a standing-army in England, avert the danger by subsidising allies and raising and paying troops in Germany and the Low Countries. Even if we are capable of beating off invasion, it is always wise policy to keep the war out of our own country, and not trust to such miracles as the dispersion of the Armada. In war, Defoe says, repeating a favourite axiom of his, "it is not the longest sword but the longest purse that conquers," and

if the French get the Spanish crown, they get the richest trade in the world into their hands. The French would prove better husbands of the wealth of Mexico and Peru than the Spaniards. They would build fleets with it, which would place our American plantations at their mercy. Our own trade with Spain, one of the most profitable fields for our enterprise, would at once be ruined. Our Mediterranean trade would be burdened with the impost of a toll at Gibraltar. In short Defoe contended, if the French acquired the upper hand in Spain, nothing but a miracle could save England from becoming practically a French province.

Defoe's appeal to the sense of self-interest fell, however, upon deaf ears. No eloquence or ingenuity of argument could have availed to stem the strong current of growling prepossession. He was equally unsuccessful in his attempt to touch deeper feelings by exhibiting in a pamphlet, which is perhaps the ablest of the series, *The danger of the Protestant Religion, from the present prospect of a Religious War in Europe*. "Surely you cannot object to a standing army for the defence of your religion?" he argued; "for if you do, then you stand convicted of valuing your liberties more than your religion, which ought to be your first and highest concern." Such scraps of rhetorical logic were but as straws in the storm of anti-warlike passion that was then raging. Nor did Defoe succeed in turning the elections by addressing "to the good people of England" his *Six Distinguishing Characters of a Parliament Man*, or by protesting as a freeholder against the levity of making the strife between the new and the old East India Companies a testing question, when the very existence of the kingdom was at stake. His

pamphlets were widely distributed, but he might as soon have tried to check a tempest by throwing handfuls of leaves into it. One great success, however, he had, and that, strangely enough, in a direction in which it was least to be anticipated. No better proof could be given that the good-humoured magnanimity and sense of fair-play on which English people pride themselves is more than an empty boast than the reception accorded to Defoe's *True-Born Englishman*. King William's unpopularity was at its height. A party writer of the time had sought to inflame the general dislike to his Dutch favourites by "a vile pamphlet in abhorred verse," entitled *The Foreigners*, in which they are loaded with scurrilous insinuations. It required no ordinary courage in the state of the national temper at that moment to venture upon the line of retort that Defoe adopted. What were the English, he demanded, that they should make a mock of foreigners? They were the most mongrel race that ever lived upon the face of the earth; there was no such thing as a true-born Englishman; they were all the offspring of foreigners; what was more, of the scum of foreigners.

"For Englishmen to boast of generation  
Cancels their knowledge, and lampoons the nation.  
A true-born Englishman's a contradiction,  
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction.

\* \* \* \*

And here begins the ancient pedigree  
That so exalts our poor nobility.

'Tis that from some French trooper they derive,  
Who with the Norman bastard did arrive;  
The trophies of the families appear,  
Some show the sword, the bow, and some the spear

Which their great ancestor, forsooth, did wear.  
These in the herald's register remain,  
Their noble mean extraction to explain,  
Yet who the hero was no man can tell,  
Whether a drummer or a colonel ;  
The silent record blushes to reveal  
Their undescended dark original.

\* \* \* \*

"These are the heroes that despise the Dutch  
And rail at new-come foreigners so much ;  
Forgetting that themselves are all derived  
From the most scoundrel race that ever lived ;  
A horrid crowd of rambling thieves and drones,  
Who ransacked kingdoms and dispeopled towns ;  
The Pict and painted Briton, treacherous Scot,  
By hunger, theft, and rapine hither brought ;  
Norwegian pirates, buccaneering Danes,  
Whose red-haired offspring everywhere remains ;  
Who joined with Norman French compound the breed  
From whence your true-born Englishmen proceed.

"And lest, by length of time, it be pretended,  
The climate may this modern breed have mended,  
Wise Providence, to keep us where we are,  
Mixes us daily with exceeding care ;  
We have been Europe's sink, the jakes where she  
Voids all her offal outcast progeny ;  
From our fifth Henry's time the strolling bands  
Of banished fugitives from neighbouring lands  
Have here a certain sanctuary found :  
The eternal refuge of the vagabond,  
Wherein but half a common age of time,  
Borrowing new blood and manners from the clime,  
Proudly they learn all mankind to contemn,  
And all their race are true-born Englishmen."

As may be judged from this specimen, there is little delicacy in Defoe's satire. The lines run on from

beginning to end in the same strain of bold, broad, hearty banter, as if the whole piece had been written off at a heat. The mob did not lynch the audacious humourist. In the very height of their fury against foreigners, they stopped short to laugh at themselves. They were tickled by the hard blows as we may suppose a rhinoceros to be tickled by the strokes of an oaken cudgel. Defoe suddenly woke to find himself the hero of the hour, at least with the London populace. The pamphlet was pirated, and eighty thousand copies, according to his own calculation, were sold in the streets. Henceforth he described himself in his title-pages as the author of the *True-Born Englishman*, and frequently did himself the honour of quoting from the work as from a well-established classic. It was also, he has told us, the means of his becoming personally known to the King, whom he had hitherto served from a distance.

Defoe was not the man to be abashed by his own popularity. He gloried in it, and added to his reputation by taking a prominent part in the proceedings connected with the famous Kentish Petition, which marked the turn of the tide in favour of the King's foreign policy. Defoe was said to be the author of "Legion's Memorial" to the House of Commons, sternly warning the representatives of the freeholders that they had exceeded their powers in imprisoning the men who had prayed them to "turn their loyal addresses into Bills of Supply." When the Kentish Petitioners were liberated from the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms, and feasted by the citizens at Mercers' Hall, Defoe was seated next to them as an honoured guest.

Unfortunately for Defoe, William did not live long

after he had been honoured with his Majesty's confidence. He declared afterwards that he had often been privately consulted by the King. The pamphlets which he wrote during the close of the reign are all such as might have been directly inspired. That on the Succession is chiefly memorable as containing a suggestion that the heirs of the Duke of Monmouth should be heard as to King Charles's alleged marriage with Lucy Walters. It is possible that this idea may have been sanctioned by the King, who had had painful experience of the disadvantages attending a ruler of foreign extraction, and besides had reason to doubt the attachment of the Princess Sophia to the Protestant faith. When the passionate aversion to war in the popular mind was suddenly changed by the recognition of the Pretender into an equally passionate thirst for it, and the King seized the opportunity to dissolve Parliament and get a new House in accord with the altered temper of the people, Defoe justified the appeal to the freeholders by an examination and assertion of "the Original Power of the Collective Body of the People of England." His last service to the King was a pamphlet bearing the paradoxical title, *Reasons against a War with France*. As Defoe had for nearly a year been zealously working the public mind to a warlike pitch, this title is at first surprising, but the surprise disappears when we find that the pamphlet is an ingenious plea for beginning with a declaration of war against Spain, showing that not only was there just cause for such a war, but that it would be extremely profitable, inasmuch as it would afford occasion for plundering the Spaniards in the West Indies, and thereby making up for whatever losses our trade might suffer from the



French privateers. And it was more than a mere plundering descent that Defoe had in view; his object was that England should take actual possession of the Spanish Indies, and so rob Spain of its chief source of wealth. There was a most powerful buccansering spirit concealed under the peaceful title of this pamphlet. The trick of arresting attention by an unexpected thesis, such as this promise of reasons for peace when everybody was dreaming of war, is an art in which Defoe has never been surpassed. As we shall have occasion to see, he practised it more than once too often for his comfort.

## CHAPTER III.

### A MARTYR TO DISSENT !

FROM the death of the King in March, 1702, we must date a change in Defoe's relations with the ruling powers. Under William, his position as a political writer had been distinct and honourable. He supported William's policy warmly and straightforwardly, whether he divined it by his own judgment, or learned it by direct or indirect instructions or hints. When charged with writing for a place, he indignantly denied that he held either place or pension at Court, but at another time he admitted that he had been employed by the King and rewarded by him beyond his deserts. Any reward that he received for his literary services was well earned, and there was nothing dishonourable in accepting it. For concealing the connexion while the King was alive, he might plead the custom of the time. But in the confusion of parties and the uncertainty of government that followed William's death, Defoe slid into practices which cannot be justified by any standard of morality.

It was by accident that Defoe drifted into this equivocal position. His first writings under the new reign were in staunch consistency with what he had written

before. He did not try to flatter the Queen as many others did by alighting her predecessors; on the contrary, he wrote a poem called *The Mock Mourners*, in which he extolled "the glorious memory"—a phrase which he did much to bring into use—and charged those who spoke disrespectfully of William with the vilest insolence and ingratitude. He sang the praises of the Queen also, but as he based his joy at her accession on an assurance that she would follow in William's footsteps, the compliment might be construed as an exhortation. Shortly afterwards, in another poem, *The Spanish Descent*, he took his revenge upon the fleet for not carrying out his West Indian scheme by ridiculing unmercifully their first fruitless cruise on the Spanish coast, taking care at the same time to exult in the capture of the galleons at Vigo. In yet another poem—the success of the *True Born Englishman* seems to have misguided him into the belief that he had a genius for verse—he reverted to the Reformation of Manners, and angered the Dissenters by belabouring certain magistrates of their denomination. A pamphlet entitled *A New Test of the Church of England's Loyalty*—in which he twitted the High Church party with being neither more nor less loyal than the Dissenters, inasmuch as they consented to the deposition of James and acquiesced in the accession of Anne—was better received by his co-religionists.

But when the Bill to prevent occasional conformity was introduced by some hot-headed partisans of the High Church, towards the close of 1702, with the Queen's warm approval, Defoe took a course which made the Dissenters threaten to cast him altogether out of the synagogue. We have already seen how

Defoe had taken the lead in attacking the practice of occasional conformity. While his co-religionists were imprecating him as the man who had brought this persecution upon them, Defoe added to their ill-feeling by issuing a jaunty pamphlet in which he proved with provoking unanswerableness that all honest Dissenters were noways concerned in the Bill. Nobody, he said, with his usual bright audacity, but himself "who was altogether born in sin," saw the true scope of the measure. "All those people who designed the Act as a blow to the Dissenting interests in England are mistaken. All those who take it as a prelude or introduction to the further suppressing of the Dissenters, and a step to repealing the Toleration, or intend it as such, are mistaken. . . . All those phlegmatic Dissenters who fancy themselves undone, and that persecution and desolation is at the door again, are mistaken. All those Dissenters who are really at all disturbed at it, either as an advantage gained by their enemies or as a real disaster upon themselves, are mistaken. All those Dissenters who deprecate it as a judgment, or would vote against it as such if it were in their power, are mistaken." In short, though he did not suppose that the movers of the Bill "did it in mere kindness to the Dissenters, in order to refine and purge them from the scandals which some people had brought upon them," nevertheless it was calculated to effect this object. The Dissenter being a man that was "something desirous of going to Heaven," ventured the displeasure of the civil magistrate at the command of his conscience, which warned him that there were things in the Established form of worship not agreeable to the Will of God as revealed in Scripture. There is nothing in

the Act to the prejudice of this Dissenter; it affects only the Politic Dissenter, or State Dissenter, who if he can attend the Established worship without offending his conscience, has no cause to be a Dissenter. An Act against occasional conformity would rid the D'ssenting body of these lukewarm members, and the riddance would be a good thing for all parties.

It may have been that this cheerful argument, the legitimate development of Defoe's former writings on the subject, was intended to comfort his co-religionists at a moment when the passing of the Act seemed certain. They did not view it in that light; they resented it bitterly, as an insult in the hour of their misfortune from the man who had shown their enemies where to strike. When, however, the Bill, after passing the Commons, was opposed and modified by the Lords, Defoe suddenly appeared on a new tack, publishing the most famous of his political pamphlets, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, which has, by a strange freak of circumstances, gained him the honour of being enshrined as one of the martyrs of Dissent. In the "brief explanation" of the pamphlet which he gave afterwards, he declared that it had no bearing whatever upon the Occasional Conformity Bill, pointing to his former writings on the subject, in which he had denounced the practice, and welcomed the Bill as a useful instrument for purging the D'ssenting bodies of half-and-half professors. It was intended, he said, as a banter upon the High-flying Tory Churchmen, putting into plain English the drift of their furious invectives against the Dissenters and so, "by an irony not unusual," answering them out of their own mouths.

The *Shortest Way* is sometimes spoken of as a piece

of exquisite irony, and on the other hand Mr. Saintsbury<sup>1</sup> has raised the question whether the representation of an extreme case, in which the veil is never lifted from the writer's own opinions, can properly be called irony at all. This last is, perhaps, a question belonging to the strict definition of the figures of speech; but, however that might be settled, it is a mistake to describe Defoe's art in this pamphlet as delicate. There are no subtle strokes of wit in it such as we find in some of Swift's ironical pieces. Incomparably more effective as an engine of controversy, it is not entitled to the same rank as a literary exercise. Its whole merit and its rousing political force lay in the dramatic genius with which Defoe personated the temper of a thorough-going High-flier, putting into plain and spirited English such sentiments as a violent partisan would not dare to utter except in the unguarded heat of familiar discourse, or the half-humorous ferocity of intoxication. Have done, he said, addressing the Dissenters, with this cackle about Peace and Union, and the Christian duties of moderation, which you raise now that you find "your day is over, your power gone, and the throne of this nation possessed by a Royal, English, true, and ever-constant member of and friend to the Church of England. . . We have heard none of this lesson for fourteen years past. We have been huffed and bullied with your Act of Toleration; you have told us that you are the Church established by law as well as others; have set up your canting synagogues at our Church doors, and the Church and members have been loaded with reproaches, with oaths, associations, abjurations, and what

<sup>1</sup> In an admirable article on Defoe in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

not. Where has been the mercy, the forbearance, the charity, you have shown to tender consciences of the Church of England, that could not take oaths as fast as you made them; that having sworn allegiance to their lawful and rightful King, could not dispense with that oath, their King being still alive, and swear to your new hodge-podge of a Dutch constitution? . . . Now that the tables are turned upon you, you must not be persecuted; 'tis not a Christian spirit." You talk of persecution; what persecution have you to complain of? "The first execution of the laws against Dissenters in England was in the days of King James I. And what did it amount to? Truly the worst they suffered was at their own request to let them go to New England and erect a new colony, and give them great privileges, grants, and suitable powers, keep them under protection, and defend them against all invaders, and receive no taxes or revenue from them. This was the cruelty of the Church of England, fatal lenity! 'Twas the ruin of that excellent prince, King Charles I. Had King James sent all the Puritans in England away to the West Indies, we had been a national, unmixed Church; the Church of England had been kept undivided and entire. To requite the lenity of the father, they take up arms against the son; conquer, pursue, take, imprison, and at last put to death the Anointed of God, and destroy the very being and nature of government, setting up a sordid impostor, who had neither title to govern, nor understanding to manage, but supplied that want with power, bloody and desperate councils, and craft, without conscience." How leniently had King Charles treated these barbarous regicides, coming in all mercy and love, cherishing them, preferring them, giving them employ-

ment in his service. As for King James, "as if mercy was the inherent quality of the family, he began his reign with unusual favour to them, nor could their joining with the Duke of Monmouth against him move him to do himself justice upon them, but that mistaken prince thought to win them by gentleness and love, proclaimed a universal liberty to them, and rather discountenanced the Church of England than them. How they requited him all the world knows." Under King William, "a king of their own," they "crope into all places of trust and profit," engrossed the ministry, and insulted the Church. But they must not expect this kind of thing to continue. "No, gentlemen, the time of mercy is past; your day of grace is over; you should have practised peace, and moderation. and charity, if you expected any yourselves."

In this heroic strain the pamphlet proceeds, reaching at length the suggestion that "if one severe law were made, and punctually executed, that whoever was found at a conventicle should be banished the nation, and the preacher be hanged, we should soon see an end of the tale—they would all come to church, and one age would make us all one again." That was the mock churchman's shortest way for the suppression of Dissent. He supported his argument by referring to the success with which Louis XIV. had put down the Hugonots. There was no good in half-measures, fines of five shillings a month for not coming to the Sacrament, and one shilling a week for not coming to church. It was vain to expect compliance from such trifling. "The light foolish handling of them by mulcts, fines, etc., 'tis their glory and their advantage. If the gallows instead of the counter, and the galleys instead of the fines, were



the reward of going to a conventicle, to preach or hear, there would not be so many sufferers—the spirit of martyrdom is over. They that will go to church to be chosen sheriffs and mayors, would go to forty churches rather than be hanged.” “Now let us crucify the th’eves,” said the author of this truculent advice in conclusion. “And may God Almighty put it into the hearts of all friends of truth to lift up a standard against pride and Antichrist, that the posterity of the sons of error may be rooted out from the face of this land for ever.”

Defoe's disguise was so complete, his caricature of the ferocious High-flier so near to life, that at first people doubted whether the *Shortest Way* was the work of a satirist or a fanatic. When the truth leaked out, as it soon did, the Dissenters were hardly better pleased than while they feared that the proposal was serious. With the natural timidity of precariously situated minorities, they could not enter into the humour of it. The very title was enough to make them shrink and tremble. The only people who were really in a position to enjoy the jest were the Whigs. The High Churchmen, some of whom, it is said, were at first so far taken in as to express their warm approval, were furious when they discovered the trick that had been played upon them. The Tory ministers of the Queen felt themselves bound to take proceedings against the author, whose identity seems to have soon become an open secret. Learning this, Defoe went into concealment. A proclamation offering a reward for his discovery was advertised in the *Gazette*. The description of the fugitive is interesting; it is the only extant record of Defoe's personal appearance, except the portrait pre-

fixed to his collected works, in which the mole is faithfully reproduced :—

"He is a middle-aged, spare man, about forty years old, of a brown complexion, and dark-brown coloured hair, but wears a wig; a hooked nose, a sharp chin, grey eyes, and a large mole near his mouth: was born in London, and for many years was a hose-factor in Freeman's Yard in Cornhill, and now is the owner of the brick and pantile works near Tilbury Fort in Essex."

This advertisement was issued on the 10th of January, 1703. Meantime the printer and the publisher were seized. From his safe hiding, Defoe put forth an explanation, protesting, as we have seen, that his pamphlet had not the least respect to or concern in the public bills in Parliament now depending, or any other proceeding of either House or of the Government relating to the Dissenters, whose occasional conformity the author has constantly opposed. It was merely, he pleaded, the cant of the Non-juring party exposed; and he mentioned several printed books in which the same objects were expressed, though not in words so plain, and at length. But the Government would not take this view; he had represented virulent partisans as being supreme in the Queen's counsels, and his design was manifest "to blacken the Church party as men of a persecuting spirit, and to prepare the mob for what further service he had for them to do." Finding that they would not listen to him, Defoe surrendered himself, in order that others might not suffer for his offence. He was indicted on the 24th of February. On the 25th, the *Shortest Way* was brought under the notice of the House of Commons, and ordered to be burnt by the common hangman. His trial came on in July. He

was found guilty of a seditious libel, and sentenced to pay a fine of 200 marks to the Queen, stand three times in the pillory, be imprisoned during the Queen's pleasure, and find sureties for his good behaviour for seven years.

Defoe complained that three Dissenting ministers, whose poor he had fed in the days of his prosperity, had refused to visit him during his confinement in Newgate. There was, doubtless, a want of charity in their action, but there was also a want of honesty in his complaint. If he applied for their spiritual ministrations, they had considerable reason for treating his application as a piece of provoking effrontery. Though Defoe was in prison for this banter upon the High-fliers, it is a mistake to regard him as a martyr, except by accident, to the cause of Toleration as we understand it now, and as the Dissenters bore the brunt of the battle for it then. Before his trial and conviction, while he lay in prison, he issued an exposition of his views of a fair Toleration in a tract entitled *The Shortest Way to Peace and Union*. The toleration which he advised, and which commended itself to the moderate Whigs with whom he had acted under King William and was probably acting now, was a purely spiritual Toleration. His proposal, in fact, was identical with that of Charles Leslie's in the *New Association*, one of the pamphlets which he professed to take off in his famous squib. Leslie had proposed that the Dissenters should be excluded from all civil employments, and should be forced to remain content with liberty of worship. Addressing the Dissenters, Defoe, in effect, urged them to anticipate forcible exclusion by voluntary withdrawal. Extremes on both sides should be in-

dustriously crushed and discouraged, and the extremes on the Dissenting side were those who not being content to worship after their own fashion, had also a hankering after the public service. It is the true interest of the Dissenters in England, Defoe argued, to be governed by a Church of England magistracy; and with his usual paradoxical hardihood, he told his co-religionists bluntly that "the first reason of his proposition was that they were not qualified to be trusted with the government of themselves." When we consider the active part Defoe himself took in public affairs, we shall not be surprised that offence was given by his countenancing the civil disabilities of Dissenters, and that the Dissenting preachers declined to recognise him as properly belonging to their body. It was not, indeed, as a Dissenter that Defoe was prosecuted by the violent Tories then in power, but as the suspected literary instrument of the great Whig leaders.

This, of course, in no way diminishes the harsh and spiteful impolicy of the sentence passed on Defoe. Its terms were duly put in execution. The offending satirist stood in the pillory on the three last days of July, 1703, before the Royal Exchange in Cornhill, near the Conduit in Cheapside, and at Temple Bar. It is incorrect, however, to say with Pope that

"Earloss on high stood unabashed Defoe."

His ears were not cropped, as the barbarous phrase went, and he had no reason to be abashed. His reception by the mob was very different from that accorded to the anti-Jacobite Fuller, a scurrilous rogue who had tried to make a few pounds by a Plain Proof that

the Chevalier was a supposititious child. The author of the *True-Born Englishman* was a popular favourite, and his exhibition in the pillory was an occasion of triumph and not of ignominy to him. A ring of admirers was formed round the place of punishment, and bunches of flowers instead of handfuls of garbage were thrown at the criminal. Tankards of ale and stoups of wine were drunk in his honour by the multitude whom he had delighted with his racy verse and charmed by his bold defiance of the authorities.

The enthusiasm was increased by the timely publication of a *Hymn to the Pillory*, in which Defoe boldly declared the iniquity of his sentence, and pointed out to the Government more proper objects of their severity. Atheists ought to stand there, he said, profligate beaux, swindling stock-jobbers, fanatic Jacobites, and the commanders who had brought the English fleet into disgrace. As for him, his only fault lay in his not being understood; but he was perhaps justly punished for being such a fool as to trust his meaning to irony. It would seem that though the Government had committed Defoe to Newgate, they did not dare, even before the manifestation of popular feeling in his favour, to treat him as a common prisoner. He not only had liberty to write, but he found means to convey his manuscripts to the printer. Of these privileges he had availed himself with that indomitable energy and fertility of resource which we find reason to admire at every stage in his career, and most of all now that he was in straits. In the short interval between his arrest and his conviction he carried on a vigorous warfare with both hands,—with one hand seeking to propitiate the Government, with the other attracting support outside among the people. He

proved to the Government incontestably by a collection of his writings that he was a man of moderate views, who had no aversion in principle even to the proposals of the *New Association*. He proved the same thing to the people at large by publishing this *Collection of the writings of the author of the True-Born Englishman*, but he accompanied the proof by a lively appeal to their sympathy under the title of *More Reformation, a Satire on himself*, a lament over his own folly which was calculated to bring pressure on the Government against prosecuting a man so innocent of public wrong. When, in spite of his efforts, a conviction was recorded against him, he adopted a more defiant tone towards the Government. He wrote the *Hymn to the Pillory*. This daring effusion was hawked in the streets among the crowd that had assembled to witness his penance in the

“hieroglyphic State-machine,  
Contrived to punish Fancy in.”

“Come,” he cried, in the concluding lines—

“Tell ‘em the M—— that placed him here  
Are Sc——ls to the times,  
Are at a loss to find his guilt,  
And can’t commit his crimes.”

“M——” stands for Men, and “Sc——ls” for Scandals. Defoe delighted in this odd use of methods of reserve, more common in his time than in ours.

The dauntless courage of Defoe’s *Hymn to the Pillory* can only be properly appreciated, when we remember with what savage outrage it was the custom of the mob to treat those who were thus exposed to make a London holiday. From the pillory he was taken back to

Newgate, there to be imprisoned during her Majesty's pleasure. His confinement must have been much less disagreeable to him than it would have been to one of less hardy temperament. Defoe was not the man to shrink with loathing from the companionship of thieves, highwaymen, forgers, coiners, and pirates. Curiosity was a much stronger power with him than disgust. Newgate had something of the charm for Defoe that a hospital full of hideous diseases has for an enthusiastic surgeon. He spent many pleasant hours in listening to the tales of his adventurous fellow-prisoners. Besides, the Government did not dare to deprive him of the liberty of writing and publishing. This privilege enabled him to appeal to the public, whose ear he had gained in the character of an undismayed martyr, an enjoyment which to so buoyant a man must have compensated for a great deal of irksome suffering. He attributed the failure of his pantile works at Tilbury to his removal from the management of them; but bearing in mind the amount of success that had attended his efforts when he was free, it is fair to suppose that he was not altogether sorry for the excuse. It was by no means the intention of his High Church persecutors that Defoe should enjoy himself in Newgate, and he himself lamented loudly the strange reverse by which he had passed within a few months from the closet of a king to a prisoner's cell; but on the whole he was probably as happy in Newgate as he had been at Whitehall. His wife and six children were most to be commiserated, and their distress was his heaviest trial.

The first use which Defoe made of his pen after his exhibition in the pillory was to reply to a Dissenting minister who had justified the practice of occasional

conformity. He thereby marked once more his separation from the extreme Dissenters, who were struggling against having their religion made a disqualification for offices of public trust. But in the changes of parties at Court he soon found a reason for marking his separation from the opposite extreme, and facing the other way. Under the influence of the moderate Tories, Marlborough, Godolphin, and their invaluable ally, the Duchess, the Queen was gradually losing faith in the violent Tories. According to Swift, she began to dislike her bosom friend, Mrs. Freeman, from the moment of her accession, but though she may have chafed under the yoke of her favourite, she could not at once shake off the domination of that imperious will. The Duchess, finding the extreme Tories unfavourable to the war in which her husband's honour and interests were deeply engaged, became a hot partisan against them, and used all their blunders to break down their power at Court. Day by day she impressed upon the Queen the necessity of peace and union at home in the face of the troubles abroad. The moderate men of both parties must be rallied round the throne. Extremes on both sides must be discouraged. Spies were set to work to take note of such rash expressions among "the hot and angry men" as would be likely to damage them in the Queen's favour. Queen Anne had not a little of the quiet tenacity and spitefulness of enfeebled constitutions, but in the end reason prevailed, resentment at importunity was overcome, and the hold of the High Churchmen on her affections gave way.

Nobody, Swift has told us, could better disguise her feelings than the Queen. The first intimation which the High Church party had of her change of views was



her opening speech to Parliament on the 9th November, 1703, in which she earnestly desired parties in both Houses to avoid heats and divisions. Defoe at once threw himself in front of the rising tide. Whether he divined for himself that the influence of the Earl of Nottingham, the Secretary of State, to whom he owed his prosecution and imprisonment, was waning, or obtained a hint to that effect from his Whig friends, we do not know, but he lost no time in issuing from his prison a bold attack upon the High Churchmen. In his *Challenge of Peace, addressed to the whole Nation*, he denounced them as Church Vultures and Ecclesiastical Harpies. It was they and not the Dissenters that were the prime movers of strife and dissension. How are peace and union to be obtained, he asks. He will show people first how peace and union cannot be obtained.

"First, Sacheverell's Bloody Flag of Defiance is not the way to Peace and Union. *The shortest way to destroy is not the shortest way to unite.* Persecution, Laws to Compel, Restrain, or force the Conscience of one another, is not the way to this Union, which her Majesty has so earnestly recommended.

"Secondly, to repeal or contract the late Act of Toleration is not the way for this so much wished-for happiness; to have laws revived that should set one party a plundering, excommunicating and unchurching another, that should renew the oppressions and devastations of late reigns, this will not by any means contribute to this Peace, which all good men desire.

"New Associations and proposals to divest men of their freehold right for differences in opinion, and take away the right of Dissenters voting in elections of Members; this is not the way to Peace and Union.

"Railing pamphlets, buffooning our brethren as a party to be suppressed, and dressing them up in the Bear's skin for all

the dogs in the street to bait them, is not the way to Peace and Union.

"Railing sermons, exciting people to hatred and contempt of their brethren, because they differ in opinions, is not the way to Peace and Union.

"Shutting all people out of employment and the service of their Prince and Country, unless they can comply with indifferent ceremonies of religion, is far from the way to Peace and Union.

"Reproaching the Succession settled by Parliament, and reviving the abdicated title of the late King James, and his supposed family, cannot tend to this Peace and Union.

"Laws against Occasional Conformity, and compelling people who bear offices to a total conformity, and yet force them to take and serve in those public employments, cannot contribute to this Peace and Union."

In this passage Defoe seems to ally himself more closely with his Dissenting brethren than he had done before. It was difficult for him, with his published views on the objectionableness of occasional conformity, and the propriety of Dissenters leaving the magistracy in the hands of the Church, to maintain his new position without incurring the charge of inconsistency. The charge was freely made, and his own writings were collected as a testimony against him, but he met the charge boldly. The Dissenters ought not to practise occasional conformity, but if they could reconcile it with their consciences, they ought not to receive temporal punishment for practising it. The Dissenters ought to withdraw from the magistracy, but it was persecution to exclude them. In tract after tract of brilliant and trenchant argument, he upheld these views, with his usual courage attacking most fiercely those antagonists who went most nearly on the lines of his own previous writings. Ignoring what he had said

before, he now proved clearly that the Occasional Conformity Bill was a breach of the Act of Toleration. There was little difference between his own *Shortest Way to Peace and Union* and Sir Humphrey Mackworth's *Peace at Home*, but he assailed the latter pamphlet vigorously, and showed that it had been the practice in all countries for Dissenters from the established religion to have a share in the business of the State. At the same time he never departed so far from the "moderate" point of view, as to insist that Dissenters ought to be admitted to a share in the business of the State. Let the High Church ministers be dismissed, and moderate men summoned to the Queen's councils, and the Dissenters would have every reason to be content. They would acquiesce with pleasure in a ministry and magistracy of Low Churchmen.

Defoe's assaults upon the High Church Tories were neither interdicted nor resented by the Government, though he lay in prison at their mercy. Throughout the winter of 1703-4 the extreme members of the Ministry, though they had still a majority in the House of Commons, felt the Queen's coldness increase. Their former high place in her regard and their continued hold upon Parliament tempted them to assume airs of independence which gave deeper offence than her unruffled courtesy led either them or their rivals to suspect. At last the crisis came. The Earl of Nottingham took the rash step of threatening to resign unless the Whig Dukes of Somerset and Devonshire were dismissed from the Cabinet. To his surprise and chagrin, his resignation was accepted (1704), and two more of his party were dismissed from office at the same time.

The successor of Nottingham was Robert Harley, after-

wards created Earl of Oxford and Mortimer. He gave evidence late in life of his love for literature by forming the collection of manuscripts known as the Harleian, and we know from Swift that he was deeply impressed with the importance of having allies in the Press. He entered upon office in May, 1704, and one of his first acts was to convey to Defoe the message, "Pray, ask that gentleman what I can do for him." Defoe replied by likening himself to the blind man in the parable, and paraphrasing his prayer, "Lord, that I may receive my sight!" He would not seem to have obtained his liberty immediately, but, through Harley's influence, he was set free towards the end of July or the beginning of August. The Queen also, he afterwards said, "was pleased particularly to inquire into his circumstances and family, and by Lord Treasurer Godolphin to send a considerable supply to his wife and family, and to send him to the prison money to pay his fine and the expenses of his discharge."

On what condition was Defoe released? On condition, according to the *Elegy on the Author of the True-Born Englishman*, which he published immediately after his discharge, that he should keep silence for seven years, or at least "not write what some people might not like." To the public he represented himself as a martyr grudgingly released by the Government, and restrained from attacking them only by his own bond and the fear of legal penalties.

"Memento Mori here I stand,  
With silent lips but speaking hand;  
A walking shadow of a Poet,  
But bound to hold my tongue and never show it.  
A monument of injury,  
A sacrifice to legal tyranny."

"For shame, gentlemen," he humorously cries to his enemies, "do not strike a dead man ; beware, scribblers, of fathering your pasquinades against authority upon me ; for seven years the True-Born Englishman is tied under sueties and penalties not to write.

"To seven long years of silence I betake,  
Perhaps by then I may forget to speak."

This elegy he has been permitted to publish as his last speech and dying confession—

"When malefactors come to die  
They claim uncommon liberty :  
Freedom of speech gives no distaste,  
They let them talk at large, because they talk their last."

The public could hardly have supposed from this what Defoe afterwards admitted to have been the true state of the case, namely, that on leaving prison he was taken into the service of the Government. He obtained an appointment, that is to say a pension, from the Queen, and was employed on secret services. When charged afterwards with having written by Harley's instructions, he denied this, but admitted the existence of certain "capitulations," in which he stipulated for liberty to write according to his own judgment, guided only by a sense of gratitude to his benefactor. There is reason to believe that even this is not the whole truth. Documents which Mr. Lee recently brought to light make one suspect that Defoe was all the time in private relations with the leaders of the Whig party. Of this more falls to be said in another place. The True-Born Englishman was, indeed, dead. Defoe was no longer the straightforward advocate of King William's

policy. He was engaged henceforward in serving two masters, persuading each that he served him alone, and persuading the public, in spite of numberless insinuations, that he served nobody but them and himself, and wrote simply as a free lance under the jealous sufferance of the Government of the day.

I must reserve for a separate chapter some account of Defoe's greatest political work, which he began while he still lay in Newgate, the *Review*. Another work which he wrote and published at the same period deserves attention on different grounds. His history of the great storm of November 1703, *A Collection of the most remarkable Casualties and Disasters which happened in the late Dreadful Tempest, both by Sea and Land*, may be set down as the first of his works of invention. It is a most minute and circumstantial record, containing many letters from eye-witnesses of what happened in their immediate neighbourhood. Defoe could have seen little of the storm himself from the interior of Newgate, but it is possible that the letters are genuine, and that he compiled other details from published accounts. Still, we are justified in suspecting that his annals of the storm are no more authentic history than his *Journal of the Plague*, or his *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and that for many of the incidents he is equally indebted to his imagination.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE REVIEW OF THE AFFAIRS OF FRANCE.

It was a bold undertaking for a prisoner in Newgate to engage to furnish a newspaper written wholly by himself, "purged from the errors and partiality of news-writers and petty statesmen of all sides." It would, of course, have been an impossible undertaking if the *Review* had been, either in size or in contents, like a newspaper of the present time. The *Review* was, in its first stage, a sheet of eight small quarto pages. After the first two numbers, it was reduced in size to four pages, but a smaller type was used, so that the amount of matter remained nearly the same—about equal in bulk to two modern leading articles. At first the issue was weekly; after four numbers it became bi-weekly, and so remained for a year.

For the character of the *Review* it is difficult to find a parallel. There was nothing like it at the time, and nothing exactly like it has been attempted since. The nearest approach to it among its predecessors was the *Observer*, a small weekly journal written by the erratic John Tutchin, in which passing topics, political and social, were discussed in dialogues. Personal scandals were a prominent feature in the *Observer*. Defoe was

not insensible to the value of this element to a popular journal. He knew, he said, that people liked to be amused; and he supplied this want in a section of his paper entitled "Mercure Scandale; or Advice from the Scandalous Club, being a weekly history of Nonsense, Impertinence, Vice, and Debauchery." Under this attractive heading, Defoe noticed current scandals, his club being represented as a tribunal before which offenders were brought, their cases heard, and sentences passed upon them. Slanderers of the True-Born Englishman frequently figure in its proceedings. It was in this section also that Defoe exposed the errors of contemporary news-writers, the *Postman*, the *Post-Boy*, the *London Post*, the *Flying Post*, and the *Daily Courant*. He could not in his prison pretend to superior information regarding the events of the day; the errors which he exposed were chiefly blunders in geography and history. The *Mercure Scandale* was avowedly intended to amuse the frivolous. The lapse of time has made its artificial sprightliness dreary. It was in the serious portion of the *Review*, the *Review* proper, that Defoe showed most of his genius. The design of this was nothing less than to give a true picture, drawn with "an impartial and exact historical pen," of the domestic and foreign affairs of all the States of Europe. It was essential, he thought, that at such a time of commotion Englishmen should be thoroughly informed of the strength and the political interests and proclivities of the various European Powers. He could not undertake to tell his readers what was passing from day to day, but he could explain to them the policy of the Continental Courts; he could show how that policy was affected by their past history



and present interests ; he could calculate the forces at their disposal, set forth the grounds of their alliances, and generally put people in a position to follow the great game that was being played on the European chess-board. In the *Review*, in fact, as he himself described his task, he was writing a history sheet by sheet, and letting the world see it as it went on.

This excellent plan of instruction was carried out with incomparable brilliancy of method, and vivacity of style. Defoe was thoroughly master of his subject ; he had read every history that he could lay his hands on, and his connexion with King William had guided him to the mainsprings of political action, and fixed in his mind clear principles for England's foreign policy. Such a mass of facts and such a maze of interests would have encumbered and perplexed a more commonplace intellect, but Defoe handled them with experienced and buoyant ease. He had many arts for exciting attention. His confinement in Newgate, from which the first number of the *Review* was issued on the 19th February, 1704, had in no way impaired his clear-sighted daring and self-confident skill. There was a sparkle of paradox and a significant lesson in the very title of his journal—*A Review of the Affairs of France*. When, by and by, he digressed to the affairs of Sweden and Poland, and filled number after number with the history of Hungary, people kept asking, "What has this to do with France?" "How little you understand my design," was Defoe's retort. "Patience till my work is completed, and then you will see that, however much I may seem to have been digressing, I have always kept strictly to the point. Do not judge me as you judged St. Paul's before the roof was put on. It

is not affairs *in* France that I have undertaken to explain, but the affairs *of* France, and the affairs of France are the affairs of Europe. So great is the power of the French money, the artifice of their conduct, the terror of their arms, that they can bring the greatest kings in Europe to promote their interest and grandeur at the expense of their own."

Defoe delighted to brave common prejudice by throwing full in its face paradoxes expressed in the most unqualified language. While we were at war with France, and commonplace hunters after popularity were doing their utmost to flatter the national vanity, Defoe boldly announced his intention of setting forth the wonderful greatness of the French nation, the enormous numbers of their armies, the immense wealth of their treasury, the marvellous vigour of their administration. He ridiculed loudly those writers who pretended that we should have no difficulty in beating them, and filled their papers with dismal stories about the poverty and depopulation of the country. "Consider the armies that the French King has raised," cried Defoe, "and the reinforcements and subsidies he has sent to the King of Spain; does that look like a depopulated country and an impoverished exchequer?" It was perhaps a melancholy fact, but what need to apologise for telling the truth? At once, of course, a shout was raised against him for want of patriotism; he was a French pensioner, a Jacobite, a hireling of the Peace-party. This was the opportunity on which the chuckling paradox-monger had counted. He protested that he was not drawing a map of the French power to terrify the English. But, he said, "there are two cheats equally hurtful to us; the first to terrify us, the last to

make us too easy and consequently too secure ; 'tis equally dangerous for us to be terrified into despair and bullied into more terror of our enemies than we need, or to be so exalted in conceit of our own force as to undervalue and condemn the power which we cannot reduce." To blame him for making clear the greatness of the French power, was to act as if the Romans had killed the geese in the Capitol for frightening them out of their sleep. "If I, like an honest Protestant goose, have gaggled too loud of the French power, and raised the country, the French indeed may have reason to cut my throat if they could ; but 'tis hard my own countrymen, to whom I have shown their danger, and whom I have endeavoured to wake out of their sleep, should take offence at the timely discovery."

If we open the first volume, or indeed any volume of the *Review*, at random, we are almost certain to meet with some electric shock of paradox designed to arouse the attention of the torpid. In one number we find the writer, ever daring and alert, setting out with an eulogium on "the wonderful benefit of arbitrary power" in France. He runs on in this vein for some time, accumulating examples of the wonderful benefit, till the patience of his liberty-loving readers is sufficiently exasperated, and then he turns round with a grin of mockery and explains that he means benefit to the monarch, not to the subject. "If any man ask me what are the benefits of arbitrary power to the subject, I answer these two, *poverty and subjection*." But to an ambitious monarch unlimited power is a necessity ; unless he can count upon instant obedience to his will, he only courts defeat if he embarks in schemes of aggression and conquest.

"When a Prince must court his subjects to give him leave to raise an army, and when that's done, tell him when he must disband them; that if he wants money, he must assemble the States of his country, and not only give them good words to get it, and tell them what 'tis for, but give them an account how it is expended before he asks for more. The subjects in such a government are certainly happy in having their property and privileges secured, but if I were of his Privy Council, I would advise such a Prince to content himself within the compass of his own government, and never think of invading his neighbours or increasing his dominions, for subjects who stipulate with their Princes, and make conditions of government, who claim to be governed by laws and make those laws themselves, who need not pay their money but when they see cause, and may refuse to pay it when demanded without their consent; such subjects will never empty their purses upon foreign wars for enlarging the glory of their sovereign."

This glory he describes as "the leaf-gold which the devil has laid over the backside of ambition, to make it glitter to the world."

Defoe's knowledge of the irritation caused among the Dissenters by his *Shortest Way*, did not prevent him from shocking them and annoying the high Tories by similar *jeux d'esprit*. He had no tenderness for the feelings of such of his brethren as had not his own robust sense of humour and boyish glee in the free handling of dangerous weapons. Thus we find him, among his eulogies of the Grand Monarque, particularly extolling him for the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. By the expulsion of the Protestants, Louis impoverished and unpeopled part of his country, but it was "the most politic action the French King ever did." "I don't think fit to engage here in a dispute about the honesty of it," says Defoe; "but till he had first

cleared the country of that numerous injured people, he could never have ventured to carry an offensive war into all the borders of Europe." And Defoe was not content with shocking the feelings of his nominal co-religionists by a light treatment of matters in which he agreed with them. He upheld with all his might the opposite view from theirs on two important questions of foreign policy. While the Confederates were doing battle on all sides against France, the King of Sweden was making war on his own account against Poland for the avowed purpose of placing a Protestant prince on the throne. Extreme Protestants in England were disposed to think that Charles XII. was fighting the Lord's battle in Poland. But Defoe was strongly of opinion that the work in which all Protestants ought at that moment to be engaged was breaking down the power of France, and as Charles refused to join the Confederacy, and the Catholic prince against whom he was fighting was a possible adherent, the ardent preacher of union among the Protestant powers insisted upon regarding him as a practical ally of France, and urged that the English fleet should be sent into the Baltic to interrupt his communications. Disunion among Protestants, argued Defoe, was the main cause of French greatness; if the Swedish King would not join the Confederacy of his own free will, he should be compelled to join it, or at least to refrain from weakening it.

Defoe treated the revolt of the Hungarians against the Emperor with the same regard to the interests of the Protestant cause. Some uneasiness was felt in England at co-operating with an ally who so cruelly oppressed his Protestant subjects, and some scruple of conscience at seeming to countenance the oppression. Defoe fully

admitted the wrongs of the Hungarians, but argued that this was not the time for them to press their claims for redress. He would not allow that they were justified at such a moment in calling in the aid of the Turks against the Emperor. "It is not enough that a nation be Protestant and the people our friends; if they will join with our enemies, they are Papists, Turks, and Heathens, to us." "If the Protestants in Hungary will make the Protestant religion in Hungary clash with the Protestant religion in all the rest of Europe, we must prefer the major interest to the minor." Defoe treats every foreign question from the cool high-political point of view, generally taking up a position from which he can expose the unreasonableness of both sides. In the case of the Cevennois insurgents, one party had used the argument that it was unlawful to encourage rebellion even among the subjects of a prince with whom we were at war. With this Defoe dealt in one article, proving with quite a superfluity of illustration that we were justified by all the precedents of recent history in sending support to the rebellious subjects of Louis XIV. It was the general custom of Europe to "assist the malcontents of our neighbours." Then in another article he considered whether, being lawful, it was also expedient, and he answered this in the negative, treating with scorn a passionate appeal for the Cevennois entitled "Europe enslaved if the Camisars are not relieved." "What nonsense is this," he cried, "about a poor despicable handful of men who have only made a little diversion in the great war." "The haste these men are in to have that done which they cannot show us the way to do," he cried; and proceeded to prove in a minute discussion of conceivable strategic

movements that it was impossible for us in the circumstances to send the Camisards the least relief.

There is no reference in the *Review* to Defoe's release from prison. Two numbers a week were issued with the same punctuality before and after, and there is no perceptible difference either in tone or in plan. Before he left prison, and before the fall of the high Tory Ministers, he had thrown in his lot boldly with the moderate men, and he did not identify himself more closely with any political section after Harley and Godolphin recognised the value of his support and gave him liberty and pecuniary help. In the first number of the *Review* he had declared his freedom from party ties, and his unreserved adherence to truth and the public interest, and he made frequent protestation of this independence. "I am not a party man," he kept saying; "at least, I resolve this shall not be a party paper." In discussing the affairs of France, he took more than one side-glance homewards, but always with the protest that he had no interest to serve but that of his country. The absolute power of Louis, for example, furnished him with an occasion for lamenting the disunited counsels of Her Majesty's Cabinet. Without imitating the despotic form of the French Government, he said, there are ways by which we might secure under our own forms greater decision and promptitude on the part of the Executive. When Nottingham was dismissed, he rejoiced openly, not because the ex-Secretary had been his persecutor, but because at last there was unity of views among the Queen's Ministers. He joined naturally in the exultation over Marlborough's successes, but in the *Review*, and in his *Hymn to Victory*, separately published, he courteously diverted some part of the credit to the new

Ministry. "Her Majesty's measures, moved by new and polished councils, have been pointed more directly at the root of the French power than ever we have seen before. I hope no man will suppose I reflect on the memory of King William; I know 'tis impossible the Queen should more sincerely wish the reduction of France than his late Majesty; but if it is expected I should say he was not worse served, oftener betrayed, and consequently hurried into more mistakes and disasters, than Her Majesty now is, this must be by somebody who believes I know much less of the public matters of those days than I had the honour to be informed of." But this praise, he represented, was not the praise of a partisan; it was an honest compliment wrung from a man whose only connexion with the Government was a bond for his good behaviour, an undertaking "not to write what some people might not like."

Defoe's hand being against every member of the writing brotherhood, it was natural that his reviews should not pass without severe criticisms. He often complained of the insults, ribaldry, Billingsgate, and Bear-garden language to which he was exposed; and some of his biographers have taken these lamentations seriously, and expressed their regret that so good a man should have been so much persecuted. But as he deliberately provoked these assaults, and never missed a chance of effective retort, it is difficult to sympathise with him on any ground but his manifest delight in the strife of tongues. Infinitely the superior of his antagonists in power, he could affect to treat them with good humour, but this good humour was not easy to reciprocate when combined with an imperturbable assumption that they were all fools or knaves. When we find



him, after humbly asking pardon for all his errors of the press, errors of the pen, or errors of opinion, expressing a wish that "all gentlemen on the other side would give him equal occasion to honour them for their charity, temper, and gentlemanlike dealing, as for their learning and virtue," and offering to "capitulate with them, and enter into a treaty or cartel for exchange of good language," we may, if we like, admire his superior mastery of the weapons of irritation, but pity is out of place.

The number of February 17, 1705, was announced by Defoe as being "the last Review of this volume, and designed to be so of this work." But on the following Tuesday, the regular day for the appearance of the *Review*, he issued another number, declaring that he could not quit the volume without some remarks on "charity and poverty." On Saturday yet another last number appeared, dealing with some social subjects which he had been urged by correspondents to discuss. Then on Tuesday, February 27, apologising for the frequent turning of his design, he issued the Preface to a new volume of the *Review* with a slight change of title. He would overtake sooner or later all the particulars of French greatness which he had promised to survey, but as the course of his narrative had brought him to England, and he might stay there for some time, it was as well that this should be indicated in the title, which was henceforth to be *A Review of the Affairs of France, with Observations on Affairs at Home*. He had intended, he said, to abandon the work altogether, but some gentlemen had prevailed with him to go on, and had promised that he should not be at a loss by it. It was now to be issued three times a week.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ADVOCATE OF PEACE AND UNION.

IN putting forth the prospectus of the second volume of his *Review*, Defoe intimated that its prevailing topic would be the Trade of England—a vast subject, with many branches, all closely interwoven with one another and with the general well-being of the kingdom. It grieved him, he said, to see the nation involved in such evils while remedies lay at hand which blind guides could not, and wicked guides would not, see—trade decaying, yet within reach of the greatest improvements, the navy flourishing yet fearfully mismanaged, rival factions brawling and fighting when they ought to combine for the common good. “Nothing could have induced him to undertake the ungrateful office of exposing these things, but the full persuasion that he was capable of convincing anything of an Englishman that had the least angle of his soul untainted with partiality, and that had the least concern left for the good of his country, that even the worst of these evils were easy to be cured; that if ever this nation were shipwrecked and undone, it must be at the very entrance of her port of deliverance, in the sight of her safety that Providence held out to her, in the sight of her safe establishment,

a prosperous trade, a regular, easily-supplied navy, and a general reformation both in manners and methods in Church and State."

Defoe began as usual by laying down various clear heads, under which he promised to deal with the whole field of trade. But as usual he did not adhere to this systematic plan. He discussed some topics of the day with brilliant force, and then he suddenly digressed to a subject only collaterally connected with trade. The Queen, in opening the session of 1704-5, had exhorted her Parliament to peace and union; but the High Churchmen were too hot to listen to advice even from her. The Occasional Conformity Bill was again introduced and carried in the Commons. The Lords rejected it. The Commons persisted, and to secure the passing of the measure, tacked it to a Bill of Supply. The Lords refused to pass the Money Bill till the tack was withdrawn. Soon afterwards the Parliament—Parliaments were then triennial—was dissolved, and the canvass for a general election set in amidst unusual excitement. Defoe abandoned the quiet topic of trade, and devoted the *Review* to electioneering articles.

But he did not take a side, at least not a party side. He took the side of peace and his country. "I saw with concern," he said, in afterwards explaining his position, "the weighty juncture of a new election for members approach, the variety of wheels and engines set to work in the nation, and the furious methods to form interests on either hand and put the tempers of men on all sides into an unusual motion; and things seemed acted with so much animosity and party fury that I confess it gave me terrible apprehensions of the consequences." On both sides "the methods seemed to

him very scandalous." "In many places most horrid and villainous practices were set on foot to supplant one another. The parties stooped to vile and unbecoming meannesses; infinite briberies, forgeries, perjuries, and all manner of debauchings of the principles and manners of the electors were attempted. All sorts of violences, tumults, riots, breaches of the peace, neighbourhood, and good manners were made use of to support interests and carry elections." In short, Defoe saw the nation "running directly on the steep precipice of confusion." In these circumstances, he seriously reflected what he should do. He came to the conclusion that he must "immediately set himself in the *Review* to exhort, persuade, entreat, and in the most moving terms he was capable of prevail on all people in general to STUDY PEACE."

Under cover of this profession of impartiality, Defoe issued most effective attacks upon the High Church party. In order to promote peace, he said, it was necessary to ascertain first of all who were the enemies of peace. On the surface, the questions at stake in the elections were the privileges of the Dissenters and the respective rights of the Lords and the Commons in the matter of Money Bills. But people must look beneath the surface. "King James, French power, and a general turn of affairs was at the bottom, and the quarrels between Church and Dissenters only a politic noose they had hooked the parties on both sides into." Defoe lashed the Tackers into fury by his exhortations to the study of peace. He professed the utmost good-will to them personally, though he had not words strong enough to condemn their conduct in tacking the Occasional Bill to a Money Bill when they knew that the

Lords would reject it, and so in a moment of grave national peril leave the army without supplies. The Queen, in dissolving Parliament, had described this tacking as a dangerous experiment, and Defoe explained the experiment as being "whether losing the Money Bill, breaking up the Houses, disbanding the Confederacy, and opening the door to the French, might not have been for the interest of the High Church." Far be it from him to use Billingsgate language to the Tackers, but "the effect of their action, which, and not their motive, he had to consider, would undoubtedly be to let in the French, depose the Queen, bring in the Prince of Wales, abdicate the Protestant religion, restore Popery, repeal the Toleration, and persecute the Dissenters." Still it was probable that the Tackers meant no harm. *Humanum est errare*. He was certain that if he showed them their error, they would repent and be converted. All the same, he could not recommend them to the electors. "A Tacker is a man of passion, a man of heat, a man that is for ruining the nation upon any hazards to obtain his ends. Gentlemen freeholders, you must not choose a Tacker, unless you will destroy our peace, divide our strength, pull down the Church, let in the French, and depose the Queen."

From the dissolution of Parliament in April till the end of the year Defoe preached from this text with infinite variety and vigour. It is the chief subject of the second volume of the *Review*. The elections, powerfully influenced by Marlborough's successes as well as by the eloquent championship of Defoe, resulted in the entire defeat of the High Tories, and a further weeding of them out of high places in the Administration. Defoe was able to close this volume of the *Review* with

expressions of delight at the attainment of the peace for which he had laboured, and, the victory being gained and the battle over, to promise a return to the intermitted subject of Trade. He returned to this subject in the beginning of his third volume. But he had not pursued it long when he was again called away. The second diversion, as he pointed out, was strictly analogous to the first. It was a summons to him to do his utmost to promote the union of the two kingdoms of England and Scotland. "From the same zeal," Defoe said, "with which I first pursued this blessed subject of peace, I found myself embarked in the further extent of it, I mean the Union. If I thought myself obliged in duty to the public interest to use my utmost endeavour to quiet the minds of enraged parties, I found myself under a stronger necessity to embark in the same design between two most enraged nations."

The union of the two kingdoms had become an object of pressing and paramount importance towards the close of William's reign. He had found little difficulty in getting the English Parliament to agree to settle the succession of the House of Hanover, but the proposal that the succession to the throne of Scotland should be settled on the same head was coldly received by the Scottish Parliament. It was not so much that the politicians of Edinburgh were averse to a common settlement, or positively eager for a King and Court of their own, but they were resolved to hold back till they were assured of commercial privileges which would go to compensate them for the drain of wealth that was supposed to have followed the King southwards. This was the policy of the wiser heads, not to accept the Union without as advantageous terms as they could

secure. They had lost an opportunity at the Revolution, and were determined not to lose another. But among the mass of the population the feeling was all in favour of a separate kingdom. National animosity had been inflamed to a passionate pitch by the Darien disaster and the Massacre of Glencoe. The people listened readily to the insinuations of hot-headed men that the English wished to have everything their own way. The counter-charge about the Scotch found equally willing hearers among the mass in England. Never had cool-headed statesmen a harder task in preventing two nations from coming to blows. All the time that the Treaty of Union was being negotiated which King William had earnestly urged from his deathbed, throughout the first half of Queen Anne's reign they worked under a continual apprehension lest the negotiations should end in a violent and irreconcilable rupture.

Defoe might well say that he was pursuing the same blessed subject of Peace in trying to reconcile these two most enraged nations, and writing with all his might for the Union. An Act enabling the Queen to appoint Commissioners on the English side to arrange the terms of the Treaty had been passed in the first year of her reign, but difficulties had arisen about the appointment of the Scottish Commissioners, and it was not till the Spring of 1706 that the two Commissions came together. When they did at last meet, they found each other much more reasonable and practical in spirit than had appeared possible during the battle over the preliminaries. But while the statesmen sat concocting the terms of the Treaty most amicably, from April to July, the excitement raged fiercely out of doors. Amidst the blaze of recriminations and counter-

recriminations, Defoe moved energetically as the Apostle of Peace, making his *Review* play like a fireman's hose upon the flames. He did not try to persuade the Scotch to peace by the same methods which he had used in the case of the Highfliers and Tackers. His Reviews on this subject, full of spirit as ever, are models of the art of conciliation. He wrestled ardently with national prejudices on both sides, vindicating the Scotch Presbyterians from the charge of religious intolerance, labouring to prove that the English were not at all to blame for the collapse of the Darien expedition and the Glencoe tragedy, expounding what was fair to both nations in matters concerning trade. Abuse was heaped upon him plentifully by hot partisans; he was charged with want of patriotism from the one side, and with too much of it from the other; but he held on his way manfully, allowing no blow from his aspersers to pass unreturned. Seldom has so bold and skilful a soldier been enlisted in the cause of peace.

Defoe was not content with the *Review* as a literary instrument of pacification. He carried on the war in both capitals, answering the pamphlets of the Scotch patriots with counter-pamphlets from the Edinburgh press. He published also a poem, "in honour of Scotland," entitled *Caledonia*, with an artfully flattering preface, in which he declared the poem to be a simple tribute to the greatness of the people and the country without any reference whatever to the Union. Presently he found it expedient to make Edinburgh his headquarters, though he continued sending the *Review* three times a week to his London printer. When the Treaty of Union had been elaborated by the Commissioners and had passed the English Parliament, its difficulties



were not at an end. It had still to pass the Scotch Parliament, and a strong faction there, riding on the storm of popular excitement, insisted on discussing it clause by clause. Moved partly by curiosity, partly by earnest desire for the public good, according to his own account in the *Review* and in his *History of the Union*, Defoe resolved to undertake the "long, tedious, and hazardous journey" to Edinburgh, and use all his influence to push the Treaty through. It was a task of no small danger, for the prejudice against the Union went so high in the Scottish capital that he ran the risk of being torn to pieces by the populace. In one riot of which he gives an account, his lodging was beset, and for a time he was in as much peril "as a grenadier on a counter-scarp." Still he went on writing pamphlets, and lobbying members of Parliament. Owing to his intimate knowledge of all matters relating to trade, he also "had the honour to be frequently sent for into the several Committees of Parliament which were appointed to state some difficult points relating to equalities, taxes, prohibitions, &c." Even when the Union was agreed to by the Parliaments of both kingdoms, and took effect formally in May 1707, difficulties arose in putting the details in operation, and Defoe prolonged his stay in Scotland through the whole of that year.

In this visit to Scotland Defoe protested to the world at the time that he had gone as a diplomatist on his own account, purely in the interests of peace. But a suspicion arose and was very freely expressed, that both in this journey and in previous journeys to the West and the North of England during the elections, he was serving as the agent, if not as the spy, of the Government. These reproaches he denied with indignation,

declaring it particularly hard that he should be subjected to such despicable and injurious treatment even by writers "embarked in the same cause, and pretending to write for the same public good." "I condemn," he said in his *History*, "as not worth mentioning, the suggestions of some people, of my being employed thither to carry on the interest of a party. I have never loved any parties, but with my utmost zeal have sincerely espoused the great and original interest of this nation, and of all nations—I mean truth and liberty,—and whoever are of that party, I desire to be with them." He took up the same charges more passionately in the Preface to the third volume of the *Review*, and dealt with them in some brilliant passages of apologetic eloquence.

"I must confess," he said, "I have sometimes thought it very hard, that having voluntarily, without the least direction, assistance, or encouragement, in spite of all that has been suggested, taken upon me the most necessary work of removing national prejudices against the two most capital blessings of the world, Peace and Union, I should have the disaster to have the nations receive the doctrine and damn the teacher.

"Should I descend to particulars, it would hardly appear credible that in a Christian, a Protestant, and a Reformed nation, any man should receive such treatment as I have done, even from those very people whose consciences and judgments have stooped to the venerable truth, owned it has been useful, serviceable, and seasonable. . . .

"I am charged with partiality, bribery, pensions, and payments—a thing the circumstances, family, and fortunes of a man devoted to his country's peace clears me of. If paid, gentlemen, for writing, if hired, if employed, why still harassed with merciless and malicious men, why pursued to all extremities by law for old accounts, which you clear other men

of every day? Why oppressed, distressed, and driven from his family and from all his prospects of delivering them or himself? Is this the fate of men employed and hired? Is this the figure the agents of Courts and Princes make? Certainly had I been hired or employed, those people who own the service would by this time have set their servant free from the little and implacable malice of litigious persecutions, murdering warrants, and men whose mouths are to be stopt by trifles. Let this suffice to clear me of all the little and scandalous charges of being hired and employed."

But then, people ask, if he was not officially employed, what had he to do with these affairs? Why should he meddle with them? To this he answers:—

"Truly, gentlemen, this is just the case. I saw a parcel of people caballing together to ruin property, corrupt the laws, invade the Government, debauch the people, and in short, enslave and embroil the nation, and I cried 'Fire!' or rather I cried 'Water!' for the fire was begun already. I see all the nation running into confusions and directly flying in the face of one another, and cried out 'Peace!' I called upon all sorts of people that had any senses to collect them together and judge for themselves what they were going to do, and excited them to lay hold of the madmen and take from them the wicked weapon, the knife with which they were going to destroy their mother, rip up the bowels of their country, and at last effectually ruin themselves.

"And what had I to do with this? Why, yes, gentlemen, I had the same right as every man that has a footing in his country, or that has a posterity to possess liberty and claim right, must have, to preserve the laws, liberty, and government of that country to which he belongs, and he that charges me with meddling in what does not concern me, meddles himself with what 'tis plain he does not understand."

"I am not the first," Defoe said in another place, "that has been stoned for saying the truth. I cannot but think that as time and the conviction of their senses

will restore men to love the peace now established in this nation, so they will gradually see I have acted no part but that of a lover of my country, and an honest man."

Time has undeniably shown that in these efforts to promote party peace and national union Defoe acted like a lover of his country, and that his aims were the aims of a statesmanlike as well as an honest man. And yet his protestations of independence and spontaneity of action, with all their ring of truth and all their solemnity of asseveration, were merely diplomatic blinds. He was all the time, as he afterwards admitted, when the admission could do no harm except to his own passing veracity, acting as the agent of Harley, and in enjoyment of an "appointment" from the Queen. What exactly the nature of his secret services in Scotland and elsewhere were, he very properly refused to reveal. His business probably was to ascertain and report the opinions of influential persons, and keep the Government informed as far as he could of the general state of feeling. At any rate it was not as he alleged, mere curiosity, or the fear of his creditors, or private enterprise, or pure and simple patriotic zeal that took Defoe to Scotland. The use he made of his debts as diplomatic instruments is curious. He not merely practised his faculties in the management of his creditors, which one of Lord Beaconsfield's characters commends as an incomparable means to a sound knowledge of human nature; but he made his debts actual pieces in his political game. His poverty, apparent, if not real, served as a screen for his employment under Government. When he was despatched on secret missions, he could depart wiping his eyes at the hardship of having to flee from his creditors.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DR. SACHEVERELL, AND THE CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT.

SOME of Defoe's biographers have claimed for him that he anticipated the doctrines of Free Trade. This is an error. It is true that Defoe was never tired of insisting, in pamphlets, books, and number after number of the *Review*, on the all-importance of trade to the nation. Trade was the foundation of England's greatness; success in trade was the most honourable patent of nobility; next to the maintenance of the Protestant religion, the encouragement of trade should be the chief care of English statesmen. On these heads Defoe's enthusiasm was boundless, and his eloquence inexhaustible. It is true also that he supported with all his might the commercial clauses of the Treaty of Utrecht, which sought to abolish the prohibitory duties on our trade with France. It is this last circumstance which has earned for him the repute of being a pioneer of Free-Trade. But his title to that repute does not bear examination. He was not so far in advance of his age as to detect the fallacy of the mercantile system. On the contrary, he avowed his adherence to it against those of his contemporaries who were inclined to call it in question. How Defoe came to support the new commercial treaty with France,

and the grounds on which he supported it, can only be understood by looking at his relations with the Government.

While Defoe was living in Scotland in 1707, and filling the *Review* so exclusively with Scotch affairs that his readers, according to his own account, began to say that the fellow could talk of nothing but the Union, and had grown mighty dull of late, Harley's position in the Ministry was gradually becoming very insecure. He was suspected of cooling in his zeal for the war, and of keeping up clandestine relations with the Tories; and when Marlborough returned from his campaign at the close of the year he insisted upon the Secretary's dismissal. The Queen, who secretly resented the Marlborough yoke, at first refused her consent. Presently an incident occurred which gave them an excuse for more urgent pressure. One Gregg, a clerk in Harley's office, was discovered to be in secret correspondence with the French Court, furnishing Louis with the contents of important State papers. Harley was charged with complicity. This charge was groundless, but he could not acquit himself of gross negligence in the custody of his papers. Godolphin and Marlborough threatened to resign unless he was dismissed. Then the Queen yielded.

When Harley fell, Defoe, according to his own account in the *Appeal to Honour and Justice*, looked upon himself as lost, taking it for granted that "when a great officer fell, all who came in by his interest fall with him." But when his benefactor heard of this, and of Defoe's "resolution never to abandon the fortunes of the man to whom he owed so much," he kindly urged the devoted follower to think rather of his own interest than of any romantic obligation. "My lord Treasurer,"

he said, "will employ you in nothing but what is for the public service, and agreeably to your own sentiments of things; and besides, it is the Queen you are serving, who has been very good to you. Pray apply yourself as you used to do; I shall not take it ill from you in the least." To Godolphin accordingly Defoe applied himself, was by him introduced a second time to Her Majesty and to the honour of kissing her hand, and obtained "the continuance of an appointment which Her Majesty had been pleased to make him in consideration of a former special service he had done." This was the appointment which he held while he was challenging his enemies to say whether his outward circumstances looked like the figure the agents of Courts and Princes make.

The services on which Defoe was employed were, as before, of two kinds, active and literary. Shortly after the change in the Ministry early in 1708, news came of the gathering of the French expedition at Dunkirk, with a view, it was suspected, of trying to effect a landing in Scotland. Defoe was at once despatched to Edinburgh on an errand which, he says, was "far from being unfit for a sovereign to direct or an honest man to perform." If his duties were to mix with the people and ascertain the state of public feeling, and more specifically to sound suspected characters, to act, in short, as a political detective or spy, the service was one which it was essential that the Government should get some trustworthy person to undertake, and which any man at such a crisis might perform, if he could, without any discredit to his honesty or his patriotism. The independence of the seagirt realm was never in greater peril. The French expedition was a well-conceived diversion, and it was

imperative that the Government should know on what amount of support the invaders might rely in the bitterness prevailing in Scotland after the Union. Fortunately the loyalty of the Scotch Jacobites was not put to the test. As in the case of the Spanish Armada, accident fought on our side. The French fleet succeeded in reaching the coast of Scotland before the ships of the defenders; but it overshot its arranged landing-point, and had no hope but to sail back ingloriously to Dunkirk. Meantime, Defoe had satisfactorily discharged himself of his mission. Godolphin showed his appreciation of his services by recalling him as soon as Parliament was dissolved, to travel through the counties and serve the cause of the Government in the general elections. He was frequently sent to Scotland again on similarly secret errands, and seems to have established a printing business there, made arrangements for the simultaneous issue of the *Review* in Edinburgh and London, besides organizing Edinburgh newspapers, executing commissions for English merchants, and setting on foot a linen manufactory.

But we are more concerned with the literary labours of this versatile and indefatigable genius. These, in the midst of his multifarious commercial and diplomatic concerns, he never intermitted. All the time the *Review* continued to give a brilliant support to the Ministry. The French expedition had lent a new interest to the affairs of Scotland, and Defoe advertised, that though he never intended to make the *Review* a newspaper, circumstances enabled him to furnish exceptionally correct intelligence from Scotland as well as sound impartial opinions. The intelligence which he communicated was all with a purpose, and a good purpose—the promotion



of a better understanding between the united nations. He never had a better opportunity for preaching from his favourite text of Peace and Union, and he used it characteristically, championing the cause of the Scotch Presbyterians, asserting the firmness of their loyalty, smoothing over trading grievances by showing elaborately how both sides benefited from the arrangements of the Union, launching shafts in every direction at his favourite butts, and never missing a chance of exulting in his own superior wisdom. In what a posture would England have been now, he cried, if those wiseacres had been listened to, who were for trusting the defence of England solely to the militia and the fleet! Would our fleet have kept the French from landing if Providence had not interposed; and if they had landed, would a militia, undermined by disaffection, have been able to beat them back? The French king deserved a vote of thanks for opening the eyes of the nation against foolish advisers, and for helping it to heal internal divisions. Louis, poor gentleman, was much to be pitied, for his informers had evidently served him badly, and had led him to expect a greater amount of support from disloyal factions than they had the will or the courage to give him.

During the electoral canvass, Defoe surpassed himself in the lively vigour of his advocacy of the Whig cause. "And now, gentlemen of England," he began in the *Review*—as it went on he became more and more direct and familiar in his manner of addressing his readers—"now we are a-going to choose Parliament men, I will tell you a story." And he proceeded to tell how in a certain borough a great patron procured the election of a "shock dog" as its parliamentary representative.

Money and ale, Defoe says, could do anything. "God knows I speak it with regret for you all and for your posterity, it is not an impossible thing to debauch this nation into a choice of thieves, knaves, devils, shock dogs, or anything comparatively speaking, by the power of various intoxications." He spent several numbers of the *Review* in an ironical advice to the electors to choose Tories, showing with all his skill "the mighty and prevailing reason why we should have a Tory Parliament." "O gentlemen," he cried, "if we have any mind to buy some more experience, be sure and choose Tories." "We want a little instruction, we want to go to school to knaves and fools." Afterwards, dropping this thin mask, he declared that among the electors only "the drunken, the debauched, the swearing, the persecuting" would vote for the Highfliers. "The grave, the sober, the thinking, the prudent," would vote for the Whigs. "A House of Tories is a House of Devils." "If ever we have a Tory Parliament, the nation is undone." In his *Appeal to Honour and Justice* Defoe explained, that while he was serving Godolphin, "being resolved to remove all possible ground of suspicion that he kept any secret correspondence, he never visited, or wrote to, or any way corresponded with his principal benefactor for above three years." Seeing that Harley was at that time the leader of the party which Defoe was denouncing with such spirit, it would have been strange indeed if there had been much intercourse between them.

Though regarded after his fall from office as the natural leader of the Tory party, Harley was a very reserved politician, who kept his own counsel, used instruments of many shapes and sizes, steered clear of

entangling engagements, and left himself free to take advantage of various opportunities. To wage war against the Ministry was the work of more ardent partisans. He stood by and waited while Bolingbroke and Rochester and their allies in the press cried out that the Government was now in the hands of the enemies of the Church, accused the Whigs of protracting the war to fill their own pockets with the plunder of the Supplies, and called upon the nation to put an end to their jobbery and mismanagement. The victory of Oudenarde in the summer of 1708 gave them a new handle. "What is the good," they cried, "of these glorious victories, if they do not bring peace? What do we gain by beating the French in campaign after campaign, if we never bring them nearer to submission? It is incredible that the French King is not willing to make peace, if the Whigs did not profit too much by the war to give peace any encouragement." To these arguments for peace, Defoe opposed himself steadily in the *Review*. "Well, gentlemen," he began, when the news came of the battle of Oudenarde, "have the French noosed themselves again? Let us pray the Duke of Marlborough that a speedy peace may not follow, for what would become of us?" He was as willing for a peace on honourable terms as any man, but a peace till the Protestant Succession was secured and the balance of power firmly settled, "would be fatal to peace at home." "If that fatal thing called Peace abroad should happen, we shall certainly be undone." Presently, however, the French king began to make promising overtures for peace; the Ministry in hopes of satisfactory terms encouraged them; the talk through the nation was all of peace, and the Whigs contented themselves with passing an address to the Crown through

Parliament urging the Queen to make no peace till the Pretender should be disowned by the French Court, and the Succession guaranteed by a compact with the Allies. Throughout the winter the *Review* expounded with brilliant clearness the only conditions on which an honourable peace could be founded, and prepared the nation to doubt the sincerity with which Louis had entered into negotiations. Much dissatisfaction was felt, and that dissatisfaction was eagerly fanned by the Tories when the negotiations fell through, in consequence of the distrust with which the allies regarded Louis, and their imposing upon him too hard a test of his honesty. Defoe fought vigorously against the popular discontent. The charges against Marlborough were idle rhodomontade. We had no reason to be discouraged with the progress of the war unless we had formed extravagant expectations. Though the French king's resources had been enfeebled, and he might reasonably have been expected to desire peace, he did not care for the welfare of France so much as for his own glory; he would fight to gain his purpose while there was a pistole in his treasury, and we must not expect Paris to be taken in a week. Nothing could be more admirable than Godolphin's management of our own Treasury; he deserved almost more credit than the Duke himself. "Your Treasurer has been your general of generals; without his exquisite management of the cash the Duke of Marlborough must have been beaten."

The Sacheverell incident, which ultimately led to the overthrow of the Ministry, gave Defoe a delightful opening for writing in their defence. A collection of his articles on this subject would show his controversial style at its best and brightest. Sacheverell and he

were old antagonists. Sacheverell's "bloody flag and banner of defiance," and other Highflying truculencies, had furnished him with the main basis of his *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. The laugh of the populace was then on Defoe's side, partly, perhaps, because the Government had prosecuted him. But in the changes of the troubled times, the Oxford Doctor, nurtured in "the scolding of the ancients," had found a more favourable opportunity. His literary skill was of the most mechanical kind, but at the close of 1709, when hopes of peace had been raised only to be disappointed, and the country was suffering from the distress of a prolonged war, people were more in a mood to listen to a preacher who disdained to check the sweep of his rhetoric by qualifications or abatements, and luxuriated in denouncing the Queen's Ministers from the pulpit under scriptural allegories. He delivered a tremendous philippic about the Perils of False Brethren, as a sermon before the Lord Mayor in November. It would have been a wise thing for the Ministry to have left Sacheverell to be dealt with by their supporters in the press and in the pulpit. But in an evil hour Godolphin, stung by a nickname thrown at him by the rhetorical priest—a singularly comfortable-looking man to have so virulent a tongue, one of those orators who thrive on ill-conditioned language—resolved, contrary to the advice of more judicious colleagues, to have him impeached by the House of Commons. The Commons readily voted the sermon seditious, scandalous, and malicious, and agreed to a resolution for his impeachment; the Lords ordered that the case should be heard at their bar; and Westminster Hall was prepared to be the scene of a great

public trial. At first Defoe, in heaping contemptuous ridicule upon the Highflying Doctor, had spoken as if he would consider prosecution a blunder. The man ought rather to be encouraged to go on exposing himself and his party. "Let him go on," he said, "to bully Moderation, explode Toleration, and damn the Union ; the gain will be ours."

"You should use him as we do a hot horse. When he first frets and pulls, keep a stiff rein and hold him in if you can ; but if he grows mad and furious, slack your hand, clap your heels to him, and let him go. Give him his belly full of it. Away goes the beast like a fury over hedge and ditch, till he runs himself off his mettle ; perhaps bogs himself, and then he grows quiet of course. . . . Besides, good people, do you not know the nature of the barking creatures ? If you pass but by, and take no notice, they will yelp and make a noise, and perhaps run a little after you ; but turn back, offer to strike them or throw stones at them, and you'll never have done—nay, you'll raise all the dogs of the parish upon you."

This last was precisely what the Government did, and they found reason to regret that they did not take Defoe's advice and let Sachseverell alone. When, however, they did resolve to prosecute him, Defoe immediately turned round, and exulted in the prosecution as the very thing which he had foreseen. "Was not the *Review* right when he said you ought to let such people run on till they were out of breath ? Did I not note to you that precipitations have always ruined them and served us ? . . . Not a hound in the pack opened like him. He has done the work effectually. . . . He has raised the house and waked the landlady. . . . Thank him, good people, thank him and clap him on the back ; let all his party do but this, and the day is our own." Nor did

Defoe omit to remind the good people that he had been put in the pillory for satirically hinting that the High Church favoured such doctrines as Sacheverell was now prosecuted for. In his *Hymn to the Pillory* he had declared that Sacheverell ought to stand there in his place. His wish was now gratified; "the bar of the House of Commons is the worst pillory in the nation." In the two months which elapsed before the trial, during which the excitement was steadily growing, Sacheverell and his doctrines were the main topic of the *Review*. If a popular tempest could have been allayed by brilliant argument, Defoe's papers ought to have done it. He was a manly antagonist, and did not imitate coarser pamphleteers in raking up scandals about the Doctor's private life—at least not under his own name. There was, indeed, a pamphlet issued by "a Gentleman of Oxford," which bears many marks of Defoe's authorship, and contains an account of some passages in Sacheverell's life not at all to the clergyman's credit. But the only pamphlet outside the *Review* which the biographers have ascribed to Defoe's activity, is a humorous Letter from the Pope to Don Sacheverellio, giving him instructions how to advance the interest of the Pretender. In the *Review* Defoe, treating Sacheverell with riotously mirthful contempt, calls for the punishment of the doctrines rather than the man. During the trial, which lasted more than a fortnight, a mob attended the Doctor's carriage every day from his lodgings in the Temple to Westminster Hall, huzzaing, and pressing to kiss his hand, and spent the evenings in rabbling the Dissenters' meeting-houses, and hooting before the residences of prominent Whigs. Defoe had always said that the Highfliers would use violence to their opponents

if they had the power, and here was a confirmation of his opinion on which he did not fail to insist. The sentence on Sacheverell, that his sermon and vindication should be burnt by the common hangman and himself suspended from preaching for three years, was hailed by the mob as an acquittal, and celebrated by tumultuous gatherings and bonfires. Defoe reasoned hard and joyfully to prove that the penalty was everything that could be wished, and exactly what he had all along advised and contemplated, but he did not succeed in persuading the masses that the Government had not suffered a defeat.

The impeachment of Sacheverell turned popular feeling violently against the Whigs. The break up of the Gertruydenberg Conference without peace gave a strong push in the same direction. It was all due, the Tories shouted, and the people were now willing to believe, to the folly of our Government in insisting upon impossible conditions from the French king, and their shameless want of patriotism in consulting the interests of the Allies rather than of England. The Queen, who for some time had been longing to get rid of her Whig Ministers, did not at once set sail with this breeze. She dismissed the Earl of Sunderland in June, and sent word to her allies that she meant to make no further changes. Their ambassadors, with what was even then resented as an impertinence, congratulated her on this resolution, and then in August she took the momentous step of dismissing Godolphin, and putting the Treasury nominally in commission, but really under the management of Harley. For a few weeks it seems to have been Harley's wish to conduct the administration in concert with the remaining Whig members, but the extreme



Tories, with whom he had been acting, overbore his moderate intentions. They threatened to desert him unless he broke clearly and definitely with the Whigs. In October accordingly the Whigs were all turned out of the Administration, Tories put in their places, Parliament dissolved, and writs issued for new elections. "So sudden and entire a change of the Ministry," Bishop Burnet remarks, "is scarce to be found in our history, especially where men of great abilities had served both with zeal and success." That the Queen should dismiss one or all of her Ministers in the face of a Parliamentary majority excited no surprise; but that the whole Administration should be changed at a stroke from one party to the other was a new and strange thing. The old Earl of Sunderland's suggestion to William III. had not taken root in constitutional practice; this was the fulfilment of it under the gradual pressure of circumstances.

Defoe's conduct while the political balance was rocking, and after the Whig side had decisively kicked the beam, is a curious study. One hardly knows which to admire most, the loyalty with which he stuck to the falling house till the moment of its collapse, or the adroitness with which he escaped from the ruins. Censure of his shiftiness is partly disarmed by the fact that there were so many in that troubled and uncertain time who would have acted like him if they had had the skill. Besides, he acted so steadily and with such sleepless vigilance and energy on the principle that the appearance of honesty is the best policy, that at this distance of time it is not easy to catch him tripping, and if we refuse to be guided by the opinion of his contemporaries, we almost inevitably fall victims to his incomparable

plausibility. Deviations in his political writings from the course of the honest patriot are almost as difficult to detect as flaws in the verisimilitude of *Robinson Crusoe* or the *Journal of the Plague*.

During the two months' interval between the substitution of Dartmouth for Sunderland and the fall of Godolphin, Defoe used all his powers of eloquence and argument to avert the threatened changes in the Ministry, and keep the Tories out. He had a personal motive for this, he confessed. "My own share in the ravages they shall make upon our liberties is like to be as severe as any man's, from the rage and fury of a party who are in themselves implacable, and whom God has not been pleased to bless me with a talent to flatter and submit to." Of the dismissed minister Sunderland, with whom Defoe had been in personal relations during the negotiations for the Union, he spoke in terms of the warmest praise, always with a formal profession of not challenging the Queen's judgment in discharging her servant. "My Lord Sunderland," he said, "leaves the Ministry with the most unblemished character that ever I read of any statesman in the world." "I am making no court to my Lord Sunderland. The unpolished author of this paper never had the talent of making his court to the great men of the age." But where is the objection against his conduct? Not a dog of the party can bark against him. "They cannot show me a man of their party that ever did act like him, or of whom they can say we should believe he would if he had the opportunity." The Tories were clamouring for the dismissal of all the other Whigs. High Church addresses to the Queen were pouring in, claiming to represent the sense of the nation, and hinting an absolute want of

confidence in the Administration. Defoe examined the conduct of the Ministers severally and collectively, and demanded where was the charge against them, where the complaint, where the treasure misapplied?

As for the sense of the nation, there was one sure way of testing this better than any got-up addresses, namely, the rise or fall of the public credit. The public stocks fell immediately on the news of Sunderland's dismissal, and were only partially revived upon Her Majesty's assurance to the Directors of the Bank that she meant to keep the Ministry otherwise unchanged. A rumour that Parliament was to be dissolved had sent them down again. If the public credit is thus affected by the mere apprehension of a turn of affairs in England, Defoe said, the thing itself will be a fatal blow to it. The coy Lady Credit had been wavering in her attachment to England; any sudden change would fright her away altogether. As for the pooh-pooh cry of the Tories that the national credit was of no consequence, that a nation could not be in debt to itself, and that their moneyed men would come forward with nineteen shillings in the pound for the support of the war, Defoe treated this claptrap with proper ridicule.

But in spite of all Defoe's efforts, the crash came. On the 10th of August the Queen sent to Godolphin for the Treasurer's staff, and Harley became her Prime Minister. How did Defoe behave then? The first two numbers of the *Review* after the Lord Treasurer's fall are among the most masterly of his writings. He was not a small, mean, timid time-server and turncoat. He faced about with bold and steady caution, on the alert to give the lie to anybody who dared to accuse him of facing about at all. He frankly admitted that he was

in a quandary what to say about the change that had taken place. "If a man could be found that could sail north and south, that could speak truth and falsehood, that could turn to the right hand and the left, all at the same time, he would be the man, he would be the only proper person that should now speak." Of one thing only he was certain. "We are sure honest men go out." As for their successors, "it is our business to hope, and time must answer for those that come in. If Tories, if Jacobites, if Highfliers, if madmen of any kind are to come in, I am against them; I ask them no favour, I make no court to them, nor am I going about to please them." But the question was, what was to be done in the circumstances? Defoe stated plainly two courses, with their respective dangers. To cry out about the new Ministry was to ruin public credit. To profess cheerfulness was to encourage the change and strengthen the hands of those that desired to push it farther. On the whole, for himself he considered the first danger the most to be dreaded of the two. Therefore he announced his intention of devoting his whole energy to maintaining the public credit, and advised all true Whigs to do likewise. "Though I don't like the crew, I won't sink the ship. I'll do my best to save the ship. I'll pump and heave and haul, and do anything I can, though he that pulls with me were my enemy. The reason is plain. We are all in the ship, and must sink or swim together."

What could be more plausible? What conduct more truly patriotic? Indeed, it would be difficult to find fault with Defoe's behaviour, were it not for the rogue's protestations of inability to court the favour of great men, and his own subsequent confessions in his *Appeal*

*to Honour and Justice*, as to what took place behind the scenes. Immediately on the turn of affairs he took steps to secure that connexion with the Government, the existence of which he was always denying. The day after Godolphin's displacement, he tells us, he waited on him, and "humbly asked his lordship's direction what course he should take." Godolphin at once assured him, in very much the same words that Harley had used before, that the change need make no difference to him; he was the Queen's servant, and all that had been done for him was by Her Majesty's special and particular direction; his business was to wait till he saw things settled, and then apply himself to the Ministers of State, to receive Her Majesty's commands from them. Thereupon Defoe resolved to guide himself by the following principle:—

"It occurred to me immediately, as a principle for my conduct, that it was not material to me what ministers Her Majesty was pleased to employ; my duty was to go along with every Ministry, so far as they did not break in upon the Constitution, and the laws and liberties of my country; my part being only the duty of a subject, viz. to submit to all lawful commands, and to enter into no service which was not justifiable by the laws; to all which I have exactly obliged myself."

Defoe was thus, as he says, providentially cast back upon his original benefactor. That he received any consideration, pension, gratification, or reward for his services to Harley, "except that old appointment which Her Majesty was pleased to make him," he strenuously denied. The denial is possibly true, and it is extremely probable that he was within the truth when he protested in the most solemn manner that he had never

"received any instructions, directions, orders, or let them call it what they will, of that kind, for the writing of any part of what he had written, or any materials for the putting together, for the forming any book or pamphlet whatsoever, from the said Earl of Oxford, late Lord Treasurer, or from any person by his order or direction, since the time that the late Earl of Godolphin was Lord Treasurer." Defoe declared that "in all his writing, he ever capitulated for his liberty to speak according to his own judgment of things," and we may easily believe him. He was much too clever a servant to need instructions.

His secret services to Harley in the new elections are probably buried in oblivion. In the *Review* he pursued a strain which to the reader who does not take his articles in connexion with the politics of the time, might appear to be thoroughly consistent with his advice to the electors on previous occasions. He meant to confine himself, he said at starting, rather to the manner of choosing than to the persons to be chosen, and he never denounced bribery, intimidation, rioting, rabbling, and every form of interference with the electors' freedom of choice, in more energetic language. As regarded the persons to be chosen, his advice was as before, to choose moderate men—men of sense and temper, not men of fire and fury. But he no longer asserted, as he had done before, the exclusive possession of good qualities by the Whigs. He now recognised that there were hot Whigs as well as moderate Whigs, moderate Tories as well as hot Tories. It was for the nation to avoid both extremes and rally round the men of moderation, whether Whig or Tory. "If we have a Tory Highflying Parliament, we Tories are undone.

If we have a hot Whig Parliament, we Whigs are undone."

The terms of Defoe's advice were unexceptionable, but the Whigs perceived a change from the time when he declared that if ever we have a Tory Parliament, the nation is undone. It was as if a Republican writer after the *coup d'état* of the 16th May, 1877, had warned the French against electing extreme Republicans, and had echoed the Marshal-President's advice to give their votes to moderate men of all parties. Defoe did not increase the conviction of his party loyalty when a Tory Parliament was returned, by trying to prove that whatever the new members might call themselves they must inevitably be Whigs. He admitted in the most unqualified way that the elections had been disgracefully riotous and disorderly, and lectured the constituencies freely on their conduct. "It is not," he said, "a Free Parliament that you have chosen. You have met, mobbed, rabbled, and thrown dirt at one another, but election by mob is no more free election than Oliver's election by a standing army. Parliaments and rabbles are contrary things." Yet he had hopes of the gentlemen who had been thus chosen.

"I have it upon many good grounds, as I think I told you, that there are some people who are shortly to come together, of whose character, let the people that send them up think what they will, when they come thither, they will not run the mad length that is expected of them; they will act upon the Revolution principle, keep within the circle of the law, proceed with temper, moderation, and justice, to support the same interest we have all carried on—and this I call being Whiggish, or acting as Whigs.

"I shall not trouble you with further examining why they will be so, or why they will act thus; I think it is so plain

from the necessity of the Constitution and the circumstances of things before them, that it needs no further demonstration—they will be Whigs, they must be Whigs; there is no remedy, for the Constitution is a Whig.”

The new members of Parliament must either be Whigs or traitors, for everybody who favours the Protestant succession is a Whig, and everybody who does not is a traitor. Defoe used the same ingenuity in playing upon words in his arguments in support of the public credit. Every true Whig, he argued, in the *Review* and in separate essays, was bound to uphold the public credit, for to permit it to be impaired was the surest way to let in the Pretender. The Whigs were accused of withdrawing their money from the public stocks, to mark their distrust of the Government. “Nonsense,” Defoe said, “in that case they would not be Whigs.” Naturally enough, as the *Review* now practically supported a Ministry in which extreme Tories had the predominance, he was upbraided for having gone over to that party. “Why, gentlemen,” he retorted, “it would be more natural for you to think I am turned Turk than High-flier; and to make me a Mahometan would not be half so ridiculous as to make me say the Whigs are running down credit, when on the contrary I am still satisfied if there were no Whigs at this time, there would hardly be any such thing as credit left among us.” “If the credit of the nation is to be maintained, we must all act as Whigs, because credit can be maintained upon no other foot. Had the doctrine of non-resistance of tyranny been voted, had the Prerogative been exalted above the Law, and property subjected to absolute will, would Parliament have voted the funds? Credit supposes Whigs lending



and a Whig Government borrowing. It is nonsense to talk of credit and passive submission."

Had Defoe confined himself to lecturing those hot Whigs who were so afraid of the secret Jacobitism of Harley's colleagues that they were tempted to withdraw their money from the public stocks, posterity, unable to judge how far these fears were justified, and how far it was due to a happy accident that they were not realized, might have given him credit for sacrificing partisanship to patriotism. This plea could hardly be used for another matter in which, with every show of reasonable fairness, he gave a virtual support to the Ministry. We have seen how he spoke of Marlborough, and Godolphin's management of the army and the finances when the Whigs were in office. When the Tories came in, they at once set about redeeming their pledges to inquire into the malversation of their predecessors. Concerning this proceeding, Defoe spoke with an approval which, though necessarily guarded in view of his former professions of extreme satisfaction, was none the less calculated to recommend.

"Inquiry into miscarriages in things so famous and so fatal as war and battle is a thing so popular that no man can argue against it; and had we paid well, and hanged well, much sooner, as some men had not been less in a condition to mistake, so some others might not have been here to find fault. But it is better late than never; when the inquiry is set about heartily, it may be useful on several accounts, both to unravel past errors and to prevent new. For my part, as we have for many years past groaned for want of justice upon wilful mistakes, yet, in hopes some of the careful and mischievous designing gentlemen may come in for a share, I am glad the work is begun."

With equal good humour and skill in leaving open a double interpretation, he commented on the fact that the new Parliament did not, as had been customary, give a formal vote of thanks to Marlborough for his conduct of his last campaign.

"We have had a mighty pother here in print about rewarding of generals. Some think great men too much rewarded, and some think them too little rewarded. The case is so nice, neither side will bear me to speak my mind; but I am persuaded of this, that there is no general has or ever will merit great things of us, but he has received and will receive all the grateful acknowledgments he OUGHT to expect."

But his readers would complain that he had not defined the word "ought." That, he said, with audacious pleasantry, he left to them. And while they were on the subject of mismanagement, he would give them a word of advice which he had often given them before. "While you bite and devour one another, you are all mismanagers. Put an end to your factions, your tumults, your rabbles, or you will not be able to make war upon anybody." Previously, however, his way of making peace at home was to denounce the High-fliers. He was still pursuing the same object, though by a different course, now that the leaders of the High-fliers were in office, when he declared that "those Whigs who say that the new Ministry is entirely composed of Tories and High-fliers are fool-Whigs." The remark was no doubt perfectly true, but yet if Defoe had been thoroughly consistent he ought at least, instead of supporting the Ministry on account of the small moderate element it contained, to have urged its purification from dangerous ingredients.

This, however, it must be admitted, he also did, though indirectly and at a somewhat later stage, when Harley's tenure of the Premiership was menaced by Highfliers who thought him much too lukewarm a leader. A "cave," the famous October Club, was formed in the autumn of 1711, to urge more extreme measures upon the ministry against Whig officials, and to organize a High Church agitation throughout the country. It consisted chiefly of country squires, who wished to see members of the late Ministry impeached, and the Duke of Marlborough dismissed from the command of the army. At Harley's instigation Swift wrote an "advice" to these hot partisans, beseeching them to have patience and trust the Ministry, and everything that they wished would happen in due time. Defoe sought to break their ranks by a direct onslaught in his most vigorous style, denouncing them in the *Review* as Jacobites in disguise and an illicit importation from France, and writing their "secret history," "with some friendly characters of the illustrious members of that honourable society" in two separate tracts. This skirmish served the double purpose of strengthening Harley against the reckless zealots of his party, and keeping up Defoe's appearance of impartiality. Throughout the fierce struggle of parties, never so intense in any period of our history as during those years when the Constitution itself hung in the balance, it was as a True born Englishman first and a Whig and Dissenter afterwards, that Defoe gave his support to the Tory Ministry. It may not have been his fault; he may have been most unjustly suspected; but nobody at the time would believe his protestations of independence. When his former High-flying persecutor, the Earl of Nottingham, went over to the Whigs and

with their acquiescence, or at least without their active opposition, introduced another Bill to put down Occasional Conformity, Defoe wrote trenchantly against it. But even then the Dissenters, as he loudly lamented, repudiated his alliance. The Whigs were not so much pleased on this occasion with his denunciations of the persecuting spirit of the High Churchmen, as they were enraged by his stinging taunts levelled at themselves for abandoning the Dissenters to their persecutors. The Dissenters must now see, Defoe said, that they would not be any better off under a Low Church ministry than under a High Church ministry. But the Dissenters, considering that the Whigs were too much in a minority to prevent the passing of the Bill, however willing to do so, would only see in their professed champion an artful supporter of the men in power.

A curious instance has been preserved of the estimate of Defoe's character at this time.<sup>1</sup> M. Mesnager, an agent sent by the French King to sound the Ministry and the country as to terms of peace, wanted an able pamphleteer to promote the French interest. The Swedish Resident recommended Defoe, who had just issued a tract entitled, *Reasons why this Nation ought to put an end to this expensive War*. Mesnager was delighted with the tract, at once had it translated into French and circulated through the Netherlands, employed the Swede to treat with Defoe, and sent him a hundred pistoles by way of earnest. Defoe kept the pistoles, but told the Queen, M. Mesnager recording that though "he missed his aim in this person, the money perhaps was not

<sup>1</sup> I doubt whether it adds to the credibility of the story in all points that the minutes of M. Mesnager's Negotiations were "translated," and probably composed by Defoe himself. See p. 139.

wholly lost ; for I afterwards understood that the man was in the service of the state, and that he had let the Queen know of the hundred pistoles he had received ; so I was obliged to sit still, and be very well satisfied that I had not discovered myself to him, for it was not our season yet." The anecdote at once shows the general opinion entertained of Defoe, and the fact that he was less corruptible than was supposed. There can be little doubt that our astute intriguer would have outwitted the French emissary if he had not been warned in time, pocketed his bribes, and wormed his secrets out of him for the information of the Government.

During Godolphin's Ministry, Defoe's one had been to reason with the nation against too impatient a longing for peace. Let us have peace by all means, had been his text, but not till honourable terms have been secured, and meantime the war is going on as prosperously as any but madmen can desire. He repeatedly challenged adversaries who compared what he wrote then with what he wrote under the new Ministry, to prove him guilty of inconsistency. He stood on safe ground when he made this challenge, for circumstances had changed sufficiently to justify any change of opinion. The plans of the Confederates were disarranged by the death of the Emperor, and the accession of his brother, the Archduke Charles, to the vacant crown. To give the crown of Spain in these new circumstances to the Archduke, as had been the object of the Allies when they began the war, would have been as dangerous to the balance of power as to let Spain pass to Louis's grandson, Philip of Anjou. It would be more dangerous, Defoe argued ;

and by far the safest course would be to give Spain to Philip and his posterity, who "would be as much Spaniards in a very short time, as ever Philip II. was or any of his other predecessors." This was the main argument which had been used in the latter days of King William against going to war at all, and Defoe had then refuted it scornfully; but circumstances had changed, and he not only adopted it, but also issued an essay "proving that it was always the sense both of King William and of all the Confederates, and even of the Grand Alliance itself, that the Spanish monarchy should never be united in the person of the Emperor." Partition the Spanish dominions in Europe between France and Germany, and the West Indies between England and Holland—such was Defoe's idea of a proper basis of peace.

But while Defoe expounded in various forms the conditions of a good peace, he devoted his main energy to proving that peace under some conditions was a necessity. He dilated on the enormous expense of the war, and showed by convincing examples that it was ruining the trade of the country. Much that he said was perfectly true, but if he had taken M. Mesnager's bribes and loyally carried out his instructions, he could not more effectually have served the French King's interests than by writing as he did at that juncture. The proclaimed necessity under which England lay to make peace, offered Louis an advantage which he was not slow to take. The proposals which he made at the Congress of Utrecht, and which he had ascertained would be accepted by the English Ministry and the Queen, were not unjustly characterised by the indignant Whigs as being such as he might have made

at the close of a successful war. The territorial concessions to England and Holland were insignificant; the States were to have the right of garrisoning certain barrier-towns in Flanders, and England was to have some portions of Canada. But there was no mention of dividing the West Indies between them—the West Indies were to remain attached to Spain. It was the restoration of their trade that was their main desire in these great commercial countries, and even that object Louis agreed to promote in a manner that seemed, according to the ideas of the time, to be more to his own advantage than to theirs. In the case of England, he was to remove prohibitions against our imports, and in return we engaged to give the French imports the privileges of the most favoured nations. In short, we were to have free trade with France, which the commercial classes of the time looked upon as a very doubtful blessing.

It is because Defoe wrote in favour of this free trade that he is supposed to have been superior to the commercial fallacies of the time. But a glance at his arguments shows that this is a very hasty inference. It was no part of Defoe's art as a controversialist to seek to correct popular prejudices; on the contrary, it was his habit to take them for granted as the bases of his arguments, to work from them as premisses towards his conclusion. He expressly avowed himself a prohibitionist in principle :—

“ I am far from being of their mind who say that all prohibitions are destructive to trade, and that wise nations, the Dutch, make no prohibitions at all.

“ Where any nation has, by the singular blessing of God, a produce given to their country from which such a

manufacture can be made as other nations cannot be without, and none can make that produce but themselves, it would be distraction in that nation not to prohibit the exportation of that original produce till it is manufactured."

He had been taunted with flying in the face of what he had himself said in King William's time in favour of prohibition. But he boldly undertakes to prove that prohibition was absolutely necessary in King William's time, and not only so, but that "the advantages we may make of taking off a prohibition now, are all founded upon the advantages we did make of laying on a prohibition then; that the same reason which made a prohibition then the best thing, makes it now the maddest thing a nation could do or ever did in the matter of trade." In King William's time, the balance of trade was against us to the extent of 850,000*l.*, in consequence of the French King's laying extravagant duties upon the import of all our woollen manufactures.

"Whoever thinks that by opening the French trade I should mean . . . that we should come to trade with them 850,000*l.* *per annum* to our loss, must think me as mad as I think him for suggesting it; but if, on the contrary, I prove that as we traded then 850,000*l.* a year to our loss, we can trade now with them 600,000*l.* to our gain, then I will venture to draw this consequence, that we are distracted, speaking of our trading wits, if we do not trade with them."

In a preface to the Eighth Volume of the *Review* (July 29, 1712), Defoe announced his intension of discontinuing the publication, in consequence of the tax then imposed on newspapers. We can hardly suppose that this was his real motive, and as a matter of fact the *Review*, whose death had been announced, reappeared in



due course in the form of a single leaf, and was published in that form till the 11th of June, 1713. By that time a new project was on foot which Defoe had frequently declared his intention of starting, a paper devoted exclusively to the discussion of the affairs of trade. The *Review* at one time had declared its main subject to be trade, but had claimed a liberty of digression under which the main subject had all but disappeared. At last, however, in May, 1713, when popular excitement and hot Parliamentary debates were expected on the Commercial Treaty with France, an exclusively trading paper was established, entitled *Mercator*. Defoe denied being the author—that is, conductor or editor of this paper—and said that he had not power to put what he would into it; which may have been literally true. Every number, however, bears traces of his hand or guidance; *Mercator* is identical in opinions, style, and spirit with the *Review*, differing only in the greater openness of its attacks upon the opposition of the Whigs to the Treaty of Commerce. Party spirit was so violent that summer, after the publication of the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, that Defoe was probably glad to shelter himself under the responsibility of another name; he had flaunted the cloak of impartial advice till it had become a thing of shreds and patches.

To prove that the balance of trade, in spite of a prevailing impression to the contrary, not only might be, but had been, on the side of England, was the chief purpose of *Mercator*. The Whig *Flying Post* chaffed *Mercator* for trying to reconcile impossibilities, but *Mercator* held stoutly on with an elaborate apparatus of comparative tables of exports and imports, and ingenious

schemes for the development of various branches of the trade with France. Defoe was too fond of carrying the war into the enemy's country, to attack prohibitions or the received doctrine as to the balance of trade in principle; he fought the enemy spiritedly on their own ground. "Take a medium of three years for above forty years past, and calculate the exports and imports to and from France, and it shall appear the balance of trade was always on the English side, to the loss and disadvantage of the French." It followed, upon the received commercial doctrines, that the French King was making a great concession in consenting to take off high duties upon English goods. This was precisely what Defoe was labouring to prove. "The French King in taking off the said high duties ruins all his own manufactures." The common belief was that the terms of peace would ruin English manufacturing industry; full in the teeth of this, Defoe, as was his daring custom, flung the paradox of the extreme opposite. On this occasion he acted purely as a party writer. That he was never a free-trader, at least in principle, will appear from the following extract from his *Plan of the English Commerce*, published in 1728:—

"Seeing trade then is the fund of wealth and power, we cannot wonder that we see the wisest Princes and States anxious and concerned for the increase of the commerce and trade of their subjects, and of the growth of the country; anxious to propagate the sale of such goods as are the manufacture of their own subjects, and that employs their own people; especially of such as keep the money of their dominions at home; and on the contrary, for prohibiting the importation from abroad of such things as are the product of other countries, and of the labour of other people, or which carry money back in return, and not merchandise in exchange.

"Nor can we wonder that we see such Princes and States endeavouring to set up such manufactures in their own countries, which they see successfully and profitably carried on by their neighbours, and to endeavour to procure the materials proper for setting up those manufactures by all just and possible methods from other countries.

"Hence we cannot blame the French or Germans for endeavouring to get over the British wool into their hands, by the help of which they may bring their people to imitate our manufactures, which are so esteemed in the world, as well as so gainful at home.

"Nor can we blame any foreign nation for prohibiting the use and wearing of our manufactures, if they can either make them at home, or make any which they can shift with in their stead.

"The reason is plain. 'Tis the interest of every nation to encourage their own trade, to encourage those manufactures that will employ their own subjects, consume their own growth of provisions, as well as materials of commerce, and such as will keep their money or species at home.

'Tis from this just principle that the French prohibit the English woollen manufacture, and the English again prohibit, or impose a tax equal to a prohibition, on the French silks, paper, linen, and several other of their manufactures. 'Tis from the same just reason in trade that we prohibit the wearing of East India wrought silks, printed calicoes, &c.; that we prohibit the importation of French brandy, Brazil sugars, and Spanish tobacco; and so of several other things."

## CHAPTER VII.

### DIFFICULTIES IN RE-CHANGING SIDES.

DEFOE's unwearied zeal in the service of Harley had excited the bitterest resentment among his old allies, the Whigs. He often complained of it, more in sorrow than in anger. He had no right to look for any other treatment; it was a just punishment upon him for seeking the good of his country without respect of parties. An author that wrote from principle had a very hard task in those dangerous times. If he ventured on the dangerous precipice of telling unbiassed truth, he must expect martyrdom from both sides. This resignation of the simple single-minded patriot to the pains and penalties of honesty, naturally added to the rage of the party with whose factious proceedings he would have nothing to do; and yet it has always been thought an extraordinary instance of party spite that the Whigs should have instituted a prosecution against him, on the alleged ground that a certain remarkable series of Tracts were written in favour of the Pretender. Towards the end of 1712 Defoe had issued *A Seasonable Warning and Caution against the Insinuations of Papists and Jacobites in favour of the Pretender*. No charge of

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Jacobitism could be made against a pamphlet containing such a sentence as this :—

“Think, then, dear Britons! what a King this Pretender must be! a papist by inclination; a tyrant by education; a Frenchman by honour and obligation;—and how long will your liberties last you in this condition? And when your liberties are gone, how long will your religion remain? When your hands are tied; when armies bind you; when power oppresses you; when a tyrant disarms you; when a Popish French tyrant reigns over you; by what means or methods can you pretend to maintain your Protestant religion?”

A second pamphlet, *Hannibal at the Gates*, strongly urging party union and the banishment of factious spirit, was equally unmistakable in tone. The titles of the following three of the series were more startling :—*Reasons against the Succession of the House of Hanover—And what if the Pretender should come? or Some considerations of the advantages and real consequences of the Pretender's possessing the Crown of Great Britain—An Answer to a Question that nobody thinks of, viz. But what if the Queen should die?* The contents, however, were plainly ironical. The main reason against the Succession of the Prince of Hanover was that it might be wise for the nation to take a short turn of a French, Popish, hereditary-right régime in the first place as an emetic. Emetics were good for the health of individuals, and there could be no better preparative for a healthy constitutional government than another experience of arbitrary power. Defoe had used the same ironical argument for putting Tories in office in 1708. The advantages of the Pretender's possessing the Crown were that we should be saved from all further danger of

a war with France, and should no longer hold the exposed position of a Protestant State among the great Catholic Powers of Europe. The point of the last pamphlet of the series was less distinct; it suggested the possibility of the English people losing their properties, their estates, inheritance, lands, goods, lives, and liberties, unless they were clear in their own minds what course to take in the event of the Queen's death. But none of the three Tracts contain anything that could possibly be interpreted as a serious argument in favour of the Pretender. They were all calculated to support the Succession of the Elector of Hanover. Why, then, should the Whigs have prosecuted the author? It was a strange thing, as Defoe did not fail to complain, that they should try to punish a man for writing in their own interest.

The truth, however, is that although Defoe afterwards tried to convince the Whig leaders that he had written these pamphlets in their interest, they were written in the interest of Harley. They were calculated to recommend that Minister to Prince George, in the event of his accession to the English throne. We see this at once when we examine their contents by the light of the personal intrigues of the time. Harley was playing a double game. It was doubtful who the Queen's successor would be, and he aimed at making himself safe in either of the two possible contingencies. Very soon after his accession to power in 1710, he made vague overtures for the restoration of the Stuarts under guarantees for civil and religious liberty. When pressed to take definite steps in pursuance of this plan, he deprecated haste, and put off and put off, till the Pretender's adherents lost patience. All the time he was making

protestations of fidelity to the Court of Hanover. The increasing vagueness of his promises to the Jacobites seems to show that, as time went on, he became convinced that the Hanoverian was the winning cause. No man could better advise him as to the feeling of the English people than Defoe, who was constantly perambulating the country on secret services, in all probability for the direct purpose of sounding the general opinion. It was towards the end of 1712, by which time Harley's shilly-shallying had effectually disgusted the Jacobites, that the first of Defoe's series of Anti-Jacobite tracts appeared. It professed to be written by An Englishman at the Court of Hanover, which affords some ground, though it must be confessed slight, for supposing that Defoe had visited Hanover, presumably as the bearer of some of Harley's assurances of loyalty. The *Seasonable Warning and Caution* was circulated, Defoe himself tells us, in thousands among the poor people by several of his friends. Here was a fact to which Harley could appeal as a circumstantial proof of his zeal in the Hanoverian cause. Whether Defoe's Anti-Jacobite tracts really served his benefactor in this way, can only be matter of conjecture. However that may be, they were upon the surface written in Harley's interest. The warning and caution was expressly directed against the insinuations that the Ministry were in favour of the Pretender. All who made these insinuations were assumed by the writer to be Papists, Jacobites, and enemies of Britain. As these insinuations were the chief war-cry of the Whigs, and we now know that they were not without foundation, it is easy to understand why Defoe's pamphlets, though Anti-Jacobite, were resented by the party in whose interest he had formerly written. He excused

himself afterwards by saying that he was not aware of the Jacobite leanings of the Ministry; that none of them ever said one word in favour of the Pretender to him; that he saw no reason to believe that they did favour the Pretender. As for himself, he said, they certainly never employed him in any Jacobite intrigue. He defied his enemies to "prove that he ever kept company or had any society, friendship, or conversation with any Jacobite. So averse had he been to the interest and the people, that he had studiously avoided their company on all occasions." Within a few months of his making these protestations, Defoe was editing a Jacobite newspaper under secret instructions from a Whig Government. But this is anticipating.

That an influential Whig should have set on foot a prosecution of Defoe as the author of "treasonable libels against the House of Hanover," although the charge had no foundation in the language of the incriminated pamphlets, is intelligible enough. The Whig party writers were delighted with the prosecution, one of them triumphing over Defoe as being caught at last, and put "in Lob's pound," and speaking of him as "the vilest of all the writers that have prostituted their pens either to encourage faction, oblige a party, or serve their own mercenary ends." But that the Court of Queen's Bench, before whom Defoe was brought—with some difficulty, it would appear, for he had fortified his house at Newington like Robinson Crusoe's castle—should have unanimously declared his pamphlets to be treasonable, and that one of them, on his pleading that they were ironical, should have told him it was a kind of irony for which he might come to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, is not so easy to understand, unless we suppose



that in these tempestuous times, judges like other men were powerfully swayed by party feeling. It is possible, however, that they deemed the mere titles of the pamphlets offences in themselves, disturbing cries raised while the people were not yet clear of the forest of anarchy, and still subject to dangerous panics—offences of the same nature as if a man should shout fire in sport in a crowded theatre. Possibly, also, the severity of the Court was increased by Defoe's indiscretion in commenting upon the case in the *Review*, while it was still *sub judice*. At any rate he escaped punishment. The Attorney-General was ordered to prosecute him, but before the trial came off Defoe obtained a pardon under the royal seal.

The Whigs were thus balked of revenge upon their renegade. Their loyal writers attributed Defoe's pardon to the secret Jacobitism of the Ministry—quite wrongly—as we have just seen he was acting for Harley as a Hanoverian and not as a Jacobite. Curiously enough, when Defoe next came before the Queen's Bench, the instigator of the prosecution was a Tory, and the Government was Whig, and he again escaped from the clutches of the law by the favour of the Government. Till Mr. William Lee's remarkable discovery fourteen years ago of certain letters in Defoe's handwriting in the State Paper Office, it was generally believed that on the death of Queen Anne, the fall of the Tory Administration, and the complete discomfiture of Harley's trimming policy, the veteran pamphleteer and journalist, now fifty-three years of age, withdrew from political warfare, and spent the evening of his life in the composition of those works of fiction which have made his name immortal. His biographers had

misjudged his character and underrated his energy. When Harley fell from power, Defoe sought service under the Whigs. He had some difficulty in regaining their favour, and when he did obtain employment from them, it was of a kind little to his honour.

In his *Appeal to Honour and Justice*, published early in 1715, in which he defended himself against the charges copiously and virulently urged of being a party-writer, a hireling, and a turncoat, and explained everything that was doubtful in his conduct by alleging the obligations of gratitude to his first benefactor Harley, Defoe declared that since the Queen's death he had taken refuge in absolute silence. He found, he said, that if he offered to say a word in favour of the Hanoverian settlement, it was called fawning and turning round again, and therefore he resolved to meddle neither one way nor the other. He complained sorrowfully that in spite of this resolution, and though he had not written one book since the Queen's death, a great many things were called by his name. In that case, he had no resource but to practise a Christian spirit and pray for the forgiveness of his enemies. This was Defoe's own account, and it was accepted as the whole truth, till Mr. Lee's careful research and good fortune gave a different colour to his personal history from the time of Harley's displacement.<sup>1</sup>

During the dissensions in the last days of the Queen which broke up the Tory Ministry, *Mercator* was dropped.

<sup>1</sup> In making mention of Mr. Lee's valuable researches and discoveries, I ought to add that his manner of connecting the facts for which I am indebted to him, and the construction he puts upon them, is entirely different from mine. For the view here implied of Defoe's character and motives, Mr. Lee is in no way responsible.

Defoe seems immediately to have entered into communication with the printer of the Whig *Flying Post*, one William Hurt. The owner of the *Post* was abroad at the time, but his managers, whether actuated by personal spite or reasonable suspicion, learning that Hurt was in communication with one whom they looked upon as their enemy, decided at once to change their printer. There being no copyright in newspaper titles in those days, Hurt retaliated by engaging Defoe to write another paper under the same title, advertising that, from the arrangements he had made, readers would find the new *Flying Post* better than the old. It was in his labours on this sham *Flying Post*, as the original indignantly called it in an appeal to Hurt's sense of honour and justice against the piracy, that Defoe came into collision with the law. His new organ was warmly loyal. On the 14th of August it contained a highly-coloured panegyric of George I., which alone would refute Defoe's assertion that he knew nothing of the arts of the courtier. His Majesty was described as a combination of more graces, virtues, and capacities than the world had ever seen united in one individual, a man "born for council and fitted to command the world." Another number of the *Flying Post*, a few days afterwards, contained an attack on one of the few Tories among the Lords of the Regency, nominated for the management of affairs till the King's arrival. During Bolingbroke's brief term of ascendancy, he had despatched the Earl of Anglesey on a mission to Ireland. The Earl had hardly landed at Dublin when news followed him of the Queen's death, and he returned to act as one of the Lords Regent. In the *Flying Post* Defoe asserted that the object of his journey to Ireland was "to new model

the Forces there, and particularly to break no less than seventy of the honest officers of the army, and to fill up their places with the tools and creatures of Con. Phipps, and such a rabble of cutthroats as were fit for the work that they had for them to do." That there was some truth in the allegation is likely enough; Sir Constantine Phipps was, at least, shortly afterwards dismissed from his offices. But Lord Anglesey at once took action against it as a scandalous libel. Defoe was brought before the Lords Justices, and committed for trial.

He was liberated, however, on bail, and in spite of what he says about his resolution not to meddle on either side, made an energetic use of his liberty. He wrote *The Secret History of One Year*—the year after William's accession—vindicating the King's clemency towards the abettors of the arbitrary government of James, and explaining that he was compelled to employ many of them by the rapacious scrambling of his own adherents for places and pensions. The indirect bearing of this tract is obvious. In October three pamphlets came from Defoe's fertile pen; an *Advice to the People of England* to lay aside feuds and faction, and live together under the new King like good Christians; and two parts, in quick succession, of a *Secret History of the White Staff*. This last work was an account of the circumstances under which the Treasurer's White Staff was taken from the Earl of Oxford, and put his conduct in a favourable light, exonerating him from the suspicion of Jacobitism, and affirming—not quite accurately, as other accounts of the transaction seem to imply—that it was by Harley's advice that the Staff was committed to the Earl of Shrewsbury. One would be glad to accept this

as proof of Defoe's attachment to the cause of his disgraced benefactor; yet Harley, as he lay in the Tower awaiting his trial on an impeachment of high treason, issued a disclaimer concerning the *Secret History* and another pamphlet, entitled, *An Account of the Conduct of Robert, Earl of Oxford*. These pamphlets, he said, were not written with his knowledge or by his direction or encouragement; "on the contrary, he had reason to believe from several passages therein contained that it was the intention of the author, or authors, to do him a prejudice." This disclaimer may have been dictated by a wish not to appear wanting in respect to his judges; at any rate Defoe's *Secret History* bears no trace on the surface of a design to prejudice him by its recital of facts. *An Appeal to Honour and Justice* was Defoe's next production. While writing it, he was seized with a violent apoplectic fit, and it was issued with a Conclusion by the Publisher, mentioning this circumstance, explaining that the pamphlet was consequently incomplete, and adding: "If he recovers, he may be able to finish what he began; if not, it is the opinion of most that know him that the treatment which he here complains of, and some others that he would have spoken of, have been the apparent cause of his disaster." There is no sign of incompleteness in the *Appeal*; and the Conclusion by the Publisher, while the author lay "in a weak and languishing condition, neither able to go on nor likely to recover, at least in any short time," gives a most artistic finishing stroke to it. Defoe never interfered with the perfection of it after his recovery, which took place very shortly. The *Appeal* was issued in the first week of January; before the end of the month the indomitable writer was ready with a Third Part of the

*Secret History*, and a reply to Atterbury's *Advice to the Freeholders of England* in view of the approaching elections. A series of tracts written in the character of a Quaker quickly followed, one rebuking a Dissenting preacher for inciting the new Government to vindictive severities, another rebuking Sacheverell for hypocrisy and perjury in taking the oath of abjuration, a third rebuking the Duke of Ormond for encouraging Jacobite and High Church mobs. In March Defoe published his *Family Instructor*, a book of 450 pages; in July, his *History, by a Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service, of the Wars of Charles XII.*

Formidable as the list of these works seems, it does not represent more than Defoe's average rate of production for thirty years of his life. With grave anxieties added to the strain of such incessant toil, it is no wonder that nature should have raised its protest in an apoplectic fit. Even nature must have owned herself vanquished, when she saw this very protest pressed into the service of the irresistible and triumphant worker. All the time he was at large upon bail, awaiting his trial. The trial took place in July, 1715, and he was found guilty. But sentence was deferred till next term. October came round, but Defoe did not appear to receive his sentence. He had made his peace with the Government, upon "capitulations" of which chance has preserved the record in his own handwriting. He represented privately to Lord Chief Justice Parker that he had always been devoted to the Whig interest, and that any seeming departure from it had been due to errors of judgment, not to want of attachment. Whether the Whig leaders believed this representation we do not know, but they agreed to pardon "all former mistakes"

if he would now enter faithfully into their service. Though the Hanoverian succession had been cordially welcomed by the steady masses of the nation, the Mar Rebellion in Scotland and the sympathy shown with this movement in the south, warned them that their enemies were not to be despised. There was a large turbulent element in the population, upon which agitators might work with fatal effect. The Jacobites had still a hold upon the Press, and the past years had been fruitful of examples of the danger of trying to crush sedition with the arm of the law. Prosecution had been proved to be the surest road to popularity. It occurred therefore that Defoe might be useful if he still passed as an opponent of the Government, insinuated himself as such into the confidence of Jacobites, obtained control of their publications, and nipped mischief in the bud. It was a dangerous and delicate service, exposing the emissary to dire revenge if he were detected, and to suspicion and misconstruction from his employers in his efforts to escape detection. But Defoe, delighting in his superior wits, and happy in the midst of dangerous intrigues, boldly undertook the task.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### LATER JOURNALISTIC LABOURS.

FOR the discovery of this "strange and surprising" chapter in Defoe's life, which clears up much that might otherwise have been disputable in his character, the world is indebted solely to Mr. William Lee. Accident put Mr. Lee on the right scent, from which previous biographers had been diverted by too literal and implicit a faith in the arch-deceiver's statements, and too comprehensive an application of his complaint that his name was made the hackney title of the times, upon which all sorts of low scribblers fathered their vile productions. Defoe's secret services on Tory papers exposed him, as we have seen, to misconstruction. Nobody knew this better than himself, and nobody could have guarded against it with more sleepless care. In the fourth year of King George's reign a change took place in the Ministry. Lord Townshend was succeeded in the Home Secretary's office by Lord Stanhope. Thereupon Defoe judged it expedient to write to a private secretary, Mr. de la Faye, explaining at length his position. This letter along with five others, also designed to prevent misconstruction by his employers, lay in the State Paper Office till the year 1864, when



the whole packet fell into the hands of Mr. Lee. The following succinct fragment of autobiography is dated April 26, 1718.

"Though I doubt not but you have acquainted my Lord Stanhope with what humble sense of his lordship's goodness I received the account you were pleased to give me, that my little services are accepted, and that his lordship is satisfied to go upon the foot of former capitulations, &c.; yet I confess, Sir, I have been anxious upon many accounts, with respect as well to the service itself as my own safety, lest my lord may think himself ill-served by me, even when I have best performed my duty.

"I thought it therefore not only a debt to myself, but a duty to his lordship, that I should give his lordship a short account, as clear as I can, how far my former instructions empowered me to act, and in a word what this little piece of service is, for which I am so much a subject of his lordship's present favour and bounty.

"It was in the Ministry of my Lord Townshend, when my Lord Chief Justice Parker, to whom I stand obliged for the favour, was pleased so far to state my case, that notwithstanding the misrepresentations under which I had suffered, and notwithstanding some mistakes which I was the first to acknowledge, I was so happy as to be believed in the professions I made of a sincere attachment to the interest of the present Government, and, speaking with all possible humility, I hope I have not dishonoured my Lord Parker's recommendation.

"In considering, after this, which way I might be rendered most useful to the Government, it was proposed by my Lord Townshend that I should still appear as if I were, as before, under the displeasure of the Government, and separated from the Whigs; and that I might be more serviceable in a kind of disguise than if I appeared openly; and upon this foot a weekly paper, which I was at first directed to write, in opposition to a scandalous paper called the *Shift Shifted*, was laid aside, and the first thing I engaged in was a monthly book

called *Mercurius Politicus*, of which presently. In the interval of this, Dyer, the *News-Letter* writer, having been dead, and Dormer, his successor, being unable by his troubles to carry on that work, I had an offer of a share in the property, as well as in the management of that work.

"I immediately acquainted my Lord Townshend of it, who, by Mr. Buckley, let me know it would be a very acceptable piece of service; for that letter was really very prejudicial to the public, and the most difficult to come at in a judicial way in case of offence given. My lord was pleased to add, by Mr. Buckley, that he would consider my service in that case, as he afterwards did.

"Upon this I engaged in it; and that so far, that though the property was not wholly my own, yet the conduct and government of the style and news was so entirely in me, that I ventured to assure his lordship the sting of that mischievous paper should be entirely taken out, though it was granted that the style should continue Tory as it was, that the party might be amused and not set up another, which would have destroyed the design, and this part I therefore take entirely on myself still.

"This went on for a year, before my Lord Townshend went out of the office; and his lordship, in consideration of this service, made me the appointment which Mr. Buckley knows of, with promise of a further allowance as service presented.

"My Lord Sunderland, to whose goodness I had many years ago been obliged, when I was in a secret commission sent to Scotland, was pleased to approve and continue this service, and the appointment annexed; and with his lordship's approbation, I introduced myself, in the disguise of a translator of the foreign news, to be so far concerned in this weekly paper of *Mist's* as to be able to keep it within the circle of a secret management, also prevent the mischievous part of it; and yet neither *Mist*, or any of those concerned with him, have the least guess or suspicion by whose direction I do it.

"But here it becomes necessary to acquaint my lord (as I hinted to you, Sir), that this paper, called the *Journal*, is not

in myself in property, as the other, only in management; with this express difference, that if anything happens to be put in without my knowledge, which may give offence, or if anything slips my observation which may be ill-taken, his lordship shall be sure always to know whether he has a servant to reprove or a stranger to correct.

"Upon the whole, however, this is the consequence, that by this management, the weekly *Journal*, and *Dormer's Letter*, as also the *Mercurius Politicus*, which is in the same nature of management as the *Journal*, will be always kept (mistakes excepted) to pass as Tory papers, and yet be disabled and enervated, so as to do no mischief or give any offence to the Government."

Others of the tell-tale letters show us in detail how Defoe acquitted himself of his engagements to the Government—bowing, as he said, in the house of Rimmon. In one he speaks of a traitorous pamphlet which he has stopped at the press, and begs the Secretary to assure his superiors that he has the original in safe keeping, and that no eye but his own has seen it. In another he apologizes for an obnoxious paragraph which had crept into *Mist's Journal*, avowing that "Mr. Mist did it, after I had looked over what he had gotten together," that he [Defoe] had no concern in it, directly or indirectly, and that he thought himself obliged to notice this, to make good what he said in his last, viz. that if any mistake happened, Lord Stanhope should always know whether he had a servant to reprove or a stranger to punish. In another he expresses his alarm at hearing of a private suit against Morpew, the printer of the *Mercurius Politicus*, for a passage in that paper, and explains, first, that the obnoxious passage appeared two years before, and was consequently covered by a capitulation giving him indemnity for

all former mistakes; secondly, that the thing itself was not his, neither could any one pretend to charge it on him, and consequently it could not be adduced as proof of any failure in his duty. In another letter he gives an account of a new treaty with Mist. "I need not trouble you," he says, "with the particulars, but in a word he professes himself convinced that he has been wrong, that the Government has treated him with lenity and forbearance, and he solemnly engages to me to give no more offence. The liberties Mr. Buckley mentioned, viz. to seem on the same side as before, to rally the *Flying Post*, the Whig writers, and even the word 'Whig,' &c., and to admit foolish and trifling things in favour of the Tories. This, as I represented it to him, he agrees is liberty enough, and resolves his paper shall, for the future, amuse the Tories, but not affront the Government." If Mist should break through this understanding, Defoe hopes it will be understood that it is not his fault; he can only say that the printer's resolutions of amendment seem to be sincere.

"In pursuance also of this reformation, he brought me this morning the enclosed letter, which, indeed, I was glad to see, because, though it seems couched in terms which might have been made public, yet has a secret gall in it, and a manifest tendency to reproach the Government with partiality and injustice, and (as it acknowledges expressly) was written to serve a present turn. As this is an earnest of his just intention, I hope he will go on to your satisfaction.

"Give me leave, Sir, to mention here a circumstance which concerns myself, and which, indeed, is a little hardship upon me, viz. that I seem to merit less, when I intercept a piece of barefaced treason at the Press, than when I stop such a letter as the enclosed; because one seems to be of a kind which no man would dare to meddle with. But I would

persuade myself, Sir, that stopping such notorious things is not without its good effect, particularly because, as it is true that some people are generally found who do venture to print anything that offends, so stopping them here is some discouragement and disappointment to them, and they often die in our hands.

"I speak this, Sir, as well on occasion of what you were pleased to say upon that letter which I sent you formerly about *Killing no Murder*, as upon another with verses in it, which Mr. Mist gave me yesterday; which, upon my word, is so villainous and scandalous that I scarce dare to send it without your order, and an assurance that my doing so shall be taken well, for I confess it has a peculiar insolence in it against His Majesty's person which (as blasphemous words against God) are scarce fit to be repeated."

In the last of the series (of date June 13, 1718), Defoe is able to assure his employers that "he believes the time is come when the journal, instead of affronting and offending the Government, may many ways be made serviceable to the Government; and he has Mr. M. so absolutely resigned to proper measures for it, that he is persuaded he may answer for it."

Following up the clue afforded by these letters, Mr. Lee has traced the history of *Mist's Journal* under Defoe's surveillance. Mist did not prove so absolutely resigned to proper measures as his supervisor had begun to hope. On the contrary, he had frequent fits of refractory obstinacy, and gave a good deal of trouble both to Defoe and to the Government. Between them, however, they had the poor man completely in their power. When he yielded to the importunity of his Jacobite correspondents, or kicked against the taunts of the Whig organs about his wings being clipped,—they, no more than he, knew how—his secret controllers

had two ways of bringing him to reason. Sometimes the Government prosecuted him, wisely choosing occasions for their displeasure on which they were likely to have popular feeling on their side. At other times Defoe threatened to withdraw and have nothing more to do with the *Journal*. Once or twice he carried this threat into execution. His absence soon told on the circulation, and Mist entreated him to return, making promises of good behaviour for the future. Further, Defoe commended himself to the gratitude of his unconscious dupe by sympathising with him in his troubles, undertaking the conduct of the paper while he lay in prison, and editing two volumes of a selection of *Miscellany Letters* from its columns. At last, however, after eight years of this partnership, during which Mist had no suspicion of Defoe's connexion with the Government, the secret somehow seems to have leaked out. Such at least is Mr. Lee's highly probable explanation of a murderous attack made by Mist upon his partner.

Defoe, of course, stoutly denied Mist's accusations, and published a touching account of the circumstances, describing his assailant as a lamentable instance of ingratitude. Here was a man whom he had saved from the gallows, and befriended at his own risk in the utmost distress, turning round upon him, "basely using, insulting, and provoking him, and at last drawing his sword upon his benefactor." Defoe disarmed him, gave him his life, and sent for a surgeon to dress his wounds. But even this was not enough. Mist would give him nothing but abuse of the worst and grossest nature. It almost shook Defoe's faith in human nature. Was there ever such ingratitude known before? The most curious thing is that Mr. Lee, who has brought all

these facts to light, seems to share Defoe's ingenuous astonishment at this "strange instance of ungrateful violence," and conjectures that it must have proceeded from imaginary wrong of a very grievous nature, such as a suspicion that Defoe had instigated the Government to prosecute him. It is perhaps as well that it should have fallen to so loyal an admirer to exhume Defoe's secret services and public protestations; the record might otherwise have been rejected as incredible.

Mr. Lee's researches were not confined to Defoe's relations with *Mist* and his journal, and the other publications mentioned in the precious letter to Mr. de la Faye. Once assured that Defoe did not withdraw from newspaper-writing in 1715, he ransacked the journals of the period for traces of his hand and contemporary allusions to his labours. A rich harvest rewarded Mr. Lee's zeal. Defoe's individuality is so marked that it thrusts itself through every disguise. A careful student of the *Review*, who had compared it with the literature of the time, and learnt his peculiar tricks of style and vivid ranges of interest, could not easily be at fault in identifying a composition of any length. Defoe's incomparable clearness of statement would alone betray him; that was a gift of nature which no art could successfully imitate. Contemporaries also were quick at recognising their Proteus in his many shapes, and their gossip gives a strong support to internal evidence, resting as it probably did on evidences which were not altogether internal. Though Mr. Lee may have been rash sometimes in quoting little scraps of news as Defoe's, he must be admitted to have established that, prodigious as was the number and extent of the veteran's separate publications during the reign of the First George, it was also the

most active period of his career as a journalist. Managing *Mist* and writing for his journal would have been work enough for an ordinary man, but Defoe founded, conducted, and wrote for a host of other newspapers—the monthly *Mercurius Politicus*, an octavo of sixty-four pages (1716—1720); the weekly *Dormer's Newsletter* (written, not printed, 1716—1718); the *Whitcomb Evening Post* (a tri-weekly quarto sheet, established 1718); the *Daily Post* (a daily single leaf, folio, established 1719); and *Applebee's Journal* (with which his connexion began in 1720 and ended in 1726).

The contributions to these newspapers which Mr. Lee has assigned, with great judgment it seems to me, to Defoe, range over a wide field of topics, from piracy and highway robberies to suicide and the Divinity of Christ. Defoe's own test of a good writer was that he should at once please and serve his readers, and he kept this double object in view in his newspaper writings, as much as in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, and the *Family Instructor*. Great as is the variety of subjects in the selections which Mr. Lee has made upon internal evidence, they are all of them subjects in which Defoe showed a keen interest in his acknowledged works. In providing amusement for his readers he did not soar above his age in point of refinement; and in providing instruction, he did not fall below his age in point of morality and religion. It is a notable circumstance that one of the marks by which contemporaries traced his hand was "the little art he is truly master of, of forging a story and imposing it on the world for truth." Of this he gave a conspicuous instance in *Mist's Journal* in an account of the marvellous blowing up of the island of St. Vincent, which in circumstantial invention and



force of description must be ranked among his masterpieces. But Defoe did more than embellish stories of strange events for his newspapers. He was a master of journalistic art in all its branches, and a fertile inventor and organizer of new devices. It is to him, Mr. Lee says, and his researches entitle him to authority, that we owe the prototype of the leading article, a Letter Introductory, as it became the fashion to call it, written on some subject of general interest and placed at the commencement of each number. The writer of this Letter Introductory was known as the "author" of the paper.

Another feature in journalism which Defoe greatly helped to develop, if he did not actually invent, was the Journal of Society. In the *Review* he had provided for the amusement of his readers by the device of a Scandal Club, whose transactions he professed to report. But political excitement was intense throughout the whole of Queen Anne's reign; Defoe could afford but small space for scandal, and his Club was often occupied with fighting his minor political battles. When, however, the Hanoverian succession was secured, and the land had rest from the hot strife of parties, light gossip was more in request. Newspapers became less political, and their circulation extended from the coffee-houses, inns, and ale-houses to a new class of readers. "They have of late," a writer in *Applebee's Journal* says in 1725, "been taken in much by the women, especially the political ladies, to assist at the tea-table." Defoe seems to have taken an active part in making *Mist's Journal* and *Applebee's Journal*, both Tory organs, suitable for this more frivolous section of the public. This fell in with his purpose of

diminishing the political weight of these journals, and at the same time increased their sale. He converted them from rabid party agencies into registers of domestic news and vehicles of social disquisitions, sometimes grave, sometimes gay in subject, but uniformly bright and spirited in tone.

The raw materials of several of Defoe's elaborate tales, such as *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*, are to be found in the columns of *Mist's* and *Applebee's*. In connexion with *Applebee's* more particularly, Defoe went some way towards anticipating the work of the modern Special Correspondent. He apparently interviewed distinguished criminals in Newgate, and extracted from them the stories of their lives. Part of what he thus gathered he communicated to *Applebee*; sometimes, when the notoriety of the case justified it, he drew up longer narratives and published them separately as pamphlets. He was an adept in the art of puffing his own productions, whether books or journals. It may be doubted whether any American editor ever mastered this art more thoroughly than Defoe. Nothing, for instance, could surpass the boldness of Defoe's plan for directing public attention to his narrative of the robberies and escapes of Jack Sheppard. He seems to have taken a particular interest in this daring gaol-breaker. Mr. Lee, in fact, finds evidence that he had gained Sheppard's affectionate esteem. He certainly turned his acquaintance to admirable account. He procured a letter for *Applebee's Journal* from Jack, with "kind love," and a copy of verses of his own composition. Both letter and verses probably came from a more practised pen, but, to avert suspicion, the original of the letter was declared to be on view at Applebee's, and

"well known to be in the handwriting of John Sheppard." Next Defoe prepared a thrilling narrative of Jack's adventures, which was of course described as written by the prisoner himself, and printed at his particular desire. But this was not all. The artful author further arranged that when Sheppard reached his place of execution, he should send for a friend to the cart as he stood under the gibbet, and deliver a copy of the pamphlet as his last speech and dying confession. A paragraph recording this incident was duly inserted in the newspapers. It is a crowning illustration of the inventive daring with which Defoe practised the tricks of his trade.

One of Defoe's last works in connection with journalism was to write a prospectus for a new weekly periodical, the *Universal Spectator*, which was started by his son-in-law, Henry Baker, in October 1728. There is more than internal and circumstantial evidence that this prospectus was Defoe's composition. When Baker retired from the paper five years afterwards, he drew up a list of the articles which had appeared under his editorship, with the names of the writers attached. This list has been preserved, and from it we learn that the first number, containing a prospectus and an introductory essay on the qualifications of a good writer, was written by Defoe. That experienced journalist naturally tried to give an air of novelty to the enterprise. "If this paper," the first sentence runs, "was not intended to be what no paper at present is, we should never attempt to crowd in among such a throng of public writers as at this time oppress the town." In effect the scheme of the *Universal Spectator* was to revive the higher kind of periodical essays which made

the reputation of the earlier *Spectator*. Attempts to follow in the wake of Addison and Steele had for so long ceased to be features in journalism; their manner had been so effectually superseded by less refined purveyors of light literature—Defoe himself going heartily with the stream—that the revival was opportune, and in point of fact proved successful, the *Universal Spectator* continuing to exist for nearly twenty years. It shows how quickly the *Spectator* took its place among the classics, that the writer of the prospectus considered it necessary to deprecate a charge of presumption in seeming to challenge comparison.

“ Let no man envy us the celebrated title we have assumed, or charge us with arrogance, as if we bid the world expect great things from us. Must we have no power to please, unless we come up to the full height of those inimitable performances? Is there no wit or humour left because they are gone? Is the spirit of the *Spectators* all lost, and their mantle fallen upon nobody? Have they said all that can be said? Has the world offered no variety, and presented no new scenes, since they retired from us? Or did they leave off, because they were quite exhausted, and had no more to say? ”

Defoe did not always speak so respectfully of the authors of the *Spectator*. If he had been asked why they left off, he would probably have given the reason contained in the last sentence, and backed his opinion by contemptuous remarks about the want of fertility in the scholarly brain. He himself could have gone on producing for ever; he was never gruelled for lack of matter, had no nice ideas about manner, and was sometimes sore about the superior respectability of those who had. But here he was on business, addressing people

who looked back regretfully from the vulgarity of *Mist's* and *Applebee's* to the refinement of earlier periodicals, and making a bid for their custom. A few more sentences from his advertisement will show how well he understood their prejudices :—

“ The main design of this work is, to turn your thoughts a little off from the clamour of contending parties, which has so long surfeited you with their ill-timed politics, and restore your taste to things truly superior and sublime.

“ In order to this, we shall endeavour to present you with such subjects as are capable, if well handled, both to divert and to instruct you ; such as shall render conversation pleasant, and help to make mankind agreeable to one another.

“ As for our management of them, not to promise too much for ourselves, we shall only say we hope, at least, to make our work acceptable to everybody, because we resolve, if possible to displease nobody.

“ We assure the world, by way of negative, that we shall engage in no quarrels, meddle with no parties, deal in no scandal, nor endeavour to make any men merry at the expense of their neighbours. In a word, we shall set nobody together by the ears. And though we have encouraged the ingenious world to correspond with us by letters, we hope they will not take it ill, that we say beforehand, no letters will be taken notice of by us which contain any personal reproaches, intermeddle with family breaches, or tend to scandal or indecency of any kind.

“ The current papers are more than sufficient to carry on all the dirty work the town can have for them to do ; and what with party strife, politics, poetic quarrels, and all the other consequences of a wrangling age ; they are in no danger of wanting employment ; and those readers who delight in such things, may divert themselves there. But our views, as is said above, lie another way ”

Good writing is what Defoe promises the readers of the *Universal Spectator*, and this leads him to

consider what particular qualifications go to the composition, or in a word, "what is required to denominate a man a *good writer*." His definition is worth quoting as a statement of his principles of composition.

"One says this is a polite author; another says, that is an excellent *good-writer*; and generally we find some oblique strokes pointed sideways at themselves; intimating that whether we think fit to allow it or not, they take themselves to be very *good writers*. And, indeed, I must excuse them their vanity; for if a poor author had not some good opinion of himself, especially when under the discouragement of having nobody else to be of his mind, he would never write at all; nay, he could not; it would take off all the little dull edge that his pen might have on it before, and he would not be able to say one word to the purpose.

"Now whatever may be the lot of this paper, be that as common fame shall direct, yet without entering into the enquiry who writes better, or who writes worse, I shall lay down one specific, by which you that read shall impartially determine who are, or are not, to be called *good writers*. In a word, the character of a good writer, wherever he is to be found, is this, viz., that he writes so as to please and serve at the same time.

"If he writes to *please*, and not to *serve*, he is a flatterer and a hypocrite; if to *serve* and not to *please*, he turns cynic and satirist. The first deals in smooth falsehood, the last in rough scandal; the last may do some good, though little; the first does no good, and may do mischief, not a little; the last provokes your rage, the first provokes your pride; and in a word either of them is hurtful rather than useful. But the writer that strives to be useful, writes to *serve* you, and at the same time, by an imperceptible art, draws you on to be pleased also. He represents truth with plainness, virtue with praise; he even reprehends with a softness that carries the force of a satire without the salt of it; and he insensibly screws himself into your good opinion, that as his writings merit your regard, so they fail not to obtain it.

“This is part of the character by which I define a good writer; I say ’tis but part of it, for it is not a half sheet that would contain the full description; a large volume would hardly suffice it. His fame requires, indeed, a very good writer to give it due praise; and for that reason (and a good reason too) I go no farther with it.”

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PLACE OF DEFOE'S FICTIONS IN HIS LIFE.

THOSE of my readers who have thought of Defoe only as a writer of stories which young and old still love to read, must not be surprised that so few pages of this little book should be left for an account of his work in that field. No doubt Defoe's chief claim to the world's interest is that he is the author of *Robinson Crusoe*. But there is little to be said about this or any other of Defoe's tales in themselves. Their art is simple, unique, incommunicable, and they are too well known to need description. On the other hand, there is much that is worth knowing and not generally known about the relation of these works to his life, and the place that they occupy in the sum total of his literary activity. Hundreds of thousands since Defoe's death, and millions in ages to come, would never have heard his name but for *Robinson Crusoe*. To his contemporaries the publication of that work was but a small incident in a career which for twenty years had claimed and held their interest. People in these days are apt to imagine, because Defoe wrote the most fascinating of books for children, that he was himself simple, child-like, frank, open, and unsuspecting. He has been so described by



more than one historian of literature. It was not so that he appeared to his contemporaries, and it is not so that he can appear to us when we know his life, unless we recognise that he took a child's delight in beating with their own weapons the most astute intriguers in the most intriguing period of English history.

Defoe was essentially a journalist. He wrote for the day, and for the greatest interest of the greatest number of the day. He always had some ship sailing with the passing breeze, and laden with a useful cargo for the coast upon which the wind chanced to be blowing. If the Tichborne trial had happened in his time, we should certainly have had from him an exact history of the boyhood and surprising adventures of Thomas Castro, commonly known as Sir Roger, which would have come down to us as a true record, taken, perhaps, by the chaplain of Portland prison from the convict's own lips. It would have had such an air of authenticity, and would have been corroborated by such an array of trustworthy witnesses, that nobody in later times could have doubted its truth. Defoe always wrote what a large number of people were in a mood to read. All his writings, with so few exceptions that they may reasonably be supposed to fall within the category, were *pièces de circonstance*. Whenever any distinguished person died or otherwise engaged public attention, no matter how distinguished, whether as a politician, a criminal, or a divine, Defoe lost no time in bringing out a biography. It was in such emergencies that he produced his memoirs of Charles XII., Peter the Great, Count Patkul, the Duke of Shrewsbury, Baron de Goertz, the Rev. Daniel Williams, Captain Avery the King of the Pirates, Dominique Cartouche, Rob Roy, Jonathan

Wild, Jack Sheppard, Duncan Campbell. When the day had been fixed for the Earl of Oxford's trial for high treason, Defoe issued the fictitious *Minutes of the Secret Negotiations of Mons. Mesnager* at the English Court during his ministry. We owe the *Journal of the Plague in 1665* to a visitation which fell upon France in 1721, and caused much apprehension in England. The germ which in his fertile mind grew into *Robinson Crusoe* fell from the real adventures of Alexander Selkirk, whose solitary residence of four years on the island of Juan Fernandez was a nine days' wonder in the reign of Queen Anna. Defoe was too busy with his politics at the moment to turn it to account; it was recalled to him later on, in the year 1719, when the exploits of famous pirates had given a vivid interest to the chances of adventurers in far-away islands on the American and African coasts. The *Life, Adventures, and Piracies of the famous Captain Singleton*, who was set on shore in Madagascar, traversed the continent of Africa from east to west past the sources of the Nile, and went roving again in the company of the famous Captain Avery, was produced to satisfy the same demand. Such biographies as those of *Moll Flanders* and the *Lady Roxana* were of a kind, as he himself illustrated by an amusing anecdote, that interested all times and all professions and degrees; but we have seen to what accident he owed their suggestion and probably part of their materials. He had tested the market for such wares in his *Journals of Society*.

In following Defoe's career, we are constantly reminded that he was a man of business, and practised the profession of letters with a shrewd eye to the main chance. He scoffed at the idea of practising it with any other

object, though he had aspirations after immortal fame as much as any of his more decorous contemporaries. Like Thomas Fuller, he frankly avowed that he wrote "for some honest profit to himself." Did any man, he asked, do anything without some regard to his own advantage? Whenever he hit upon a profitable vein, he worked it to exhaustion, putting the ore into various shapes to attract different purchasers. *Robinson Crusoe* made a sensation; he immediately followed up the original story with a Second Part, and the Second Part with a volume of *Serious Reflections*. He had discovered the keenness of the public appetite for stories of the supernatural, in 1706, by means of his *True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal*.<sup>1</sup> When, in 1720, he undertook to write the life of the popular fortune-teller, Duncan Campbell—a puff which illustrates almost better than anything else Defoe's extraordinary ingenuity in putting a respectable face upon the most disreputable materials—he had another proof of the avidity with which people run to hear marvels. He followed up this clue with *A System of Magic, or a History of the Black Art; The Secrets of the Invisible World disclosed, or a Universal History of Apparitions*; and a humorous *History of the Devil*, in which last work he subjected *Paradise Lost*, to which Addison had drawn attention

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lee has disposed conclusively of the myth that this tale was written to promote the sale of a dull book by one Drelinecourt on the *Fear of Death*, which Mrs. Veal's ghost earnestly recommended her friend to read. It was first published separately as a pamphlet without any reference to Drelinecourt. It was not printed with Drelinecourt's *Fear of Death* till the fourth edition of that work, which was already popular. Further, the sale of Drelinecourt does not appear to have been increased by the addition of Defoe's pamphlet to the book, and of Mrs. Veal's recommendation to the pamphlet.

by his papers in the *Spectator*, to very sharp criticism. In his books and pamphlets on the Behaviour of Servants, and his works of more formal instruction, the *Family Instructor*, the *Plan of English Commerce*, the *Complete English Tradesman*, the *Complete English Gentleman* (his last work, left unfinished and unpublished), he wrote with a similar regard to what was for the moment in demand.

Defoe's novel-writing thus grew naturally out of his general literary trade, and had not a little in common with the rest of his abundant stock. All his productions in this line, his masterpiece, *Robinson Crusoe*, as well as what Charles Lamb calls his "secondary novels," *Captain Singleton*, *Colonel Jack*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana*, were manufactured from material for which he had ascertained that there was a market; the only novelty lay in the mode of preparation. From writing biographies with real names attached to them, it was but a short step to writing biographies with fictitious names. Defoe is sometimes spoken of as the inventor of the realistic novel; realistic biography would, perhaps, be a more strictly accurate description. Looking at the character of his professed records of fact, it seems strange that he should ever have thought of writing the lives of imaginary heroes, and should not have remained content with "forging stories and imposing them on the world for truth" about famous and notorious persons in real life. The purveyors of news in those days could use without fear of detection a licence which would not be tolerated now. They could not, indeed, satisfy the public appetite for news without taking liberties with the truth. They had not special correspondents in all parts of the world, to fill their pages with reports from the spot of things seen and heard. The public had acquired

the habit of looking to the press, to periodical papers and casual books and pamphlets, for information about passing events and prominent men before sufficient means had been organized for procuring information which should approximate to correctness. In such circumstances, the temptation to invent and embellish was irresistible. "Why," a paragraph-maker of the time is made to say, "If we will write nothing but truth, we must bring you no news; we are bound to bring you such as we can find." Yet it was not lies but truth that the public wanted as much as they do now. Hence arose the necessity of fortifying reports with circumstantial evidence of their authenticity. Nobody rebuked unprincipled news-writers more strongly than Defoe, and no news-writer was half as copious in his guarantees for the accuracy of his information. When a report reached England that the island of St. Vincent had been blown into the air, Defoe wrote a description of the calamity, the most astonishing thing that had happened in the world "since the Creation, or at least since the destruction of the earth by water in the general Deluge," and prefaced his description by saying :—

"Our accounts of this come from so many several hands and several places that it would be impossible to bring the letters all separately into this journal; and when we had done so, or attempted to do so, would leave the story confused, and the world not perfectly informed. We have therefore thought it better to give the substance of this amazing accident in one collection; making together as full and as distinct an account of the whole as we believe it possible to come at by any intelligence whatsoever, and at the close of this account we shall give some probable guesses at the natural cause of so terrible an operation."

Defoe carried the same system of vouching for the truth of his narratives by referring them to likely

sources, into pamphlets and books which really served the purpose of newspapers, being written for the gratification of passing interests. The History of the Wars of Charles XII., which Mr. Lee ascribes to him, was written "by a Scots gentleman, in the Swedish service." The short narrative of the life and death of Count Patkul was "written by the Lutheran Minister who assisted him in his last hours, and faithfully translated out of a High Dutch manuscript." M. Mesnager's minutes of his negotiations were "written by himself," and "done out of French." Defoe knew that the public would read such narratives more eagerly if they believed them to be true, and ascribed them to authors whose position entitled them to confidences. There can be little doubt that he drew upon his imagination for more than the title-pages. But why when he had so many eminent and notorious persons to serve as his subjects, with all the advantage of bearing names about which the public were already curious, did he turn to the adventures of new and fictitious heroes and heroines? One can only suppose that he was attracted by the greater freedom of movement in pure invention; he made the venture with *Robinson Crusoe*, it was successful, and he repeated it. But after the success of *Robinson Crusoe*, he by no means abandoned his old fields. It was after this that he produced autobiographies and other *prima facie* authentic lives of notorious thieves and pirates. With all his records of heroes, real or fictitious, he practised the same devices for ensuring credibility. In all alike he took for granted that the first question people would ask about a story was whether it was true. the novel, it must be remembered, was then in its infancy, and Defoe, as we shall presently see, imagined,

probably not without good reason, that his readers would disapprove of story-telling for the mere pleasure of the thing, as an immorality.

In writing for the entertainment of his own time, Defoe took the surest way of writing for the entertainment of all time. Yet if he had never chanced to write *Robinson Crusoe*, he would now have a very obscure place in English literature. His "natural infirmity of homely plain writing," as he humorously described it, might have drawn students to his works, but they ran considerable risk of lying in utter oblivion. He was at war with the whole guild of respectable writers who have become classics; they despised him as an illiterate fellow, a vulgar huckster, and never alluded to him except in terms of contempt. He was not slow to retort their civilities; but the retorts might very easily have sunk beneath the waters, while the assaults were preserved by their mutual support. The vast mass of Defoe's writings received no kindly aid from distinguished contemporaries to float them down the stream; everything was done that bitter dislike and supercilious indifference could do to submerge them. *Robinson Crusoe* was their sole life buoy.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the vitality of *Robinson Crusoe* is a happy accident, and that others of Defoe's tales have as much claim in point of merit to permanence. *Robinson Crusoe* has lived longest, because it lives most, because it was detached as it were from its own time and organized for separate existence. It is the only one of Defoe's tales that shows what he could do as an artist. We might have seen from the others that he had the genius of a great artist; here we have the possibility realized, the convincing proof of accomplished work.

*Moll Flanders* is in some respects superior as a novel. Moll is a much more complicated character than the simple, open-minded, manly mariner of York; a strangely mixed compound of craft and impulse, selfishness and generosity—in short, a thoroughly bad woman, made bad by circumstances. In tracing the vigilant resolution with which she plays upon human weakness, the spasms of compunction which shoot across her wily designs, the selfish afterthoughts which paralyse her generous impulses, her fits of dare-devil courage and uncontrollable panic, and the steady current of good-humoured satisfaction with herself which makes her chuckle equally over mishaps and successes, Defoe has gone much more deeply into the springs of action, and sketched a much richer page in the natural history of his species than in *Robinson Crusoe*. True, it is a more repulsive page, but that is not the only reason why it has fallen into comparative oblivion, and exists now only as a parasite upon the more popular work. It is not equally well constructed for the struggle of existence among books. No book can live for ever which is not firmly organized round some central principle of life, and that principle in itself imperishable. It must have a heart and members: the members must be soundly compacted and the heart superior to decay. Compared with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders* is only a string of diverting incidents, the lowest type of book organism, very brilliant while it is fresh and new, but not qualified to survive competitors for the world's interest. There is no unique creative purpose in it to bind the whole together; it might be cut into pieces, each capable of wriggling amusingly by itself. The gradual corruption of the heroine's virtue, which is the encompassing scheme of the tale, is too thin



as well as too common an artistic envelope; the incidents burst through it at so many points that it becomes a shapeless mass. But in *Robinson Crusoe* we have real growth from a vigorous germ. The central idea round which the tale is organized, the position of a man cast ashore on a desert island, abandoned to his own resources, suddenly shot beyond help or counsel from his fellow-creatures, is one that must live as long as the uncertainty of human life.

The germ of *Robinson Crusoe*, the actual experience of Alexander Selkirk, went floating about for several years, and more than one artist dallied with it, till it finally settled and took root in the mind of the one man of his generation most capable of giving it a home and working out its artistic possibilities. Defoe was the only man of letters in his time who might have been thrown on a desert island without finding himself at a loss what to do. The art required for developing the position in imagination was not of a complicated kind, and yet it is one of the rarest of gifts. Something more was wanted than simply conceiving what a man in such a situation would probably feel and probably do. Above all, it was necessary that his perplexities should be unexpected, and his expedients for meeting them unexpected; yet both perplexities and expedients so real and life-like that, when we were told them, we should wonder we had not thought of them before. One gift was indispensable for this, however many might be accessory, the genius of circumstantial invention—not a very exalted order of genius, perhaps, but quite as rare as any other intellectual prodigy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Leslie Stephen seems to me to underrate the rarity of this peculiar gift in his brilliant essay on Defoe's Novels in *Hours in a Library*.

Defoe was fifty-eight years old when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*. If the invention of plausible circumstances is the great secret in the art of that tale, it would have been a marvellous thing if this had been the first instance of its exercise, and it had broken out suddenly in a man of so advanced an age. When we find an artist of supreme excellence in any craft, we generally find that he has been practising it all his life. To say that he has a genius for it, means that he has practised it, and concentrated his main force upon it, and that he has been driven irresistibly to do so by sheer bent of nature. It was so with Defoe and his power of circumstantial invention, his unrivalled genius for "lying like truth." For years upon years of his life it had been his chief occupation. From the time of his first connexion with Harley, at least, he had addressed his countrymen through the press, and had perambulated the length and breadth of the land in assumed characters and on factitious pretexts. His first essay in that way in 1704, when he left prison in the service of the Government, appealing to the general compassion because he was under government displeasure, was skilful enough to suggest great native genius if not extensive previous practice. There are passages of circumstantial invention in the *Review*, as ingenious as anything in *Robinson Crusoe*; and the mere fact that at the end of ten years of secret service under successive Governments, and in spite of a widespread opinion of his untrustworthiness, he was able to pass himself off for ten years more as a Tory with Tories and with the Whig Government as a loyal servant, is a proof of sustained ingenuity of invention greater than many volumes of fiction.

Looking at Defoe's private life, it is not difficult to

understand the peculiar fascination which such a problem as he solved in *Robinson Crusoe* must have had for him. It was not merely that he had passed a life of uncertainty, often on the verge of precipices, and often saved from ruin by a buoyant energy which seems almost miraculous; not merely that, as he said of himself in one of his diplomatic appeals for commiseration,

"No man hath tasted differing fortunes more,  
For thirteen times have I been rich and poor."

But when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, it was one of the actual chances of his life, and by no means a remote one, that he might be cast all alone on an uninhabited island. We see from his letters to De la Faye how fearful he was of having "mistakes" laid to his charge by the Government in the course of his secret services. His former changes of party had exposed him, as he well knew, to suspicion. A false step, a misunderstood paragraph, might have had ruinous consequences for him. If the Government had prosecuted him for writing anything offensive to them, refusing to believe that it was put in to amuse the Tories, transportation might very easily have been the penalty. He had made so many enemies in the Press that he might have been transported without a voice being raised in his favour, and the mob would not have interfered to save a Government spy from the Plantations. Shipwreck among the islands of the West Indies was a possibility that stood not far from his own door, as he looked forward into the unknown, and prepared his mind as men in dangerous situations do for the worst. When he drew up for Moll Flanders and her husband a list of the things necessary for starting life in a new country. or when he described Colonel

Jack's management of his plantation in Virginia, the subject was one of more than general curiosity to him ; and when he exercised his imagination upon the fate of Robinson Crusoe, he was contemplating a fate which a few movements of the wheel of Fortune might make his own.

But whatever it was that made the germ idea of *Robinson Crusoe* take root in Defoe's mind, he worked it out as an artist. Artists of a more emotional type might have drawn much more elaborate and affecting word-pictures of the mariner's feelings in various trying situations, gone much deeper into his changing moods, and shaken our souls with pity and terror over the solitary castaway's alarms and fits of despair. Defoe's aims lay another way. His Crusoe is not a man given to the luxury of grieving. If he had begun to pity himself, he would have been undone. Perhaps Defoe's imaginative force was not of a kind that could have done justice to the agonies of a shipwrecked sentimentalist ; he has left no proof that it was ; but if he had represented Crusoe bemoaning his misfortunes, brooding over his fears, or sighing with Ossianic sorrow over his lost companions and friends, he would have spoiled the consistency of the character. The lonely man had his moments of panic and his days of dejection, but they did not dwell in his memory. Defoe no doubt followed his own natural bent, but he also showed true art in confining Crusoe's recollections as closely as he does to his efforts to extricate himself from difficulties that would have overwhelmed a man of softer temperament. The subject had fascinated him, and he found enough in it to engross his powers without travelling beyond its limits for diverting episodes, as he does more

or less in all the rest of his tales. The diverting episodes in *Robinson Crusoe* all help the verisimilitude of the story.

When, however, the ingenious inventor had completed the story artistically, carried us through all the outcast's anxieties and efforts, and shown him triumphant over all difficulties, prosperous, and again in communication with the outer world, the spirit of the literary trader would not let the finished work alone. The story, as a work of art, ends with Crusoe's departure from the island, or at any rate with his return to England. Its unity is then complete. But Robinson Crusoe at once became a popular hero, and Defoe was too keen a man of business to miss the chance of further profit from so lucrative a vein. He did not mind the sneers of hostile critics. They made merry over the trifling inconsistencies in the tale. How, for example, they asked, could Crusoe have stuffed his pockets with biscuits when he had taken off all his clothes before swimming to the wreck? How could he have been at such a loss for clothes after those he had put off were washed away by the rising tide, when he had the ship's stores to choose from? How could he have seen the goat's eyes in the cave when it was pitch dark? How could the Spaniards give Friday's father an agreement in writing, when they had neither paper nor ink? How did Friday come to know so intimately the habits of bears, the bear not being a denizen of the West Indian islands? On the ground of these and such-like trifles, one critic declared that the book seems calculated for the mob, and will not bear the eye of a rational reader, and that "all but the very canaille are satisfied of the worthlessness of the performance." Defoe, we may

suppose, was not much moved by these strictures, as edition after edition of the work was demanded. He corrected one or two little inaccuracies, and at once set about writing a Second Part, and a volume of *Serious Reflections* which had occurred to Crusoe amidst his adventures. These were purely commercial excrescences upon the original work. They were popular enough at the time, but those who are tempted now to accompany Crusoe in his second visit to his island and his enterprising travels in the East, agree that the Second Part is of inferior interest to the first, and very few now read the *Serious Reflections*.

The *Serious Reflections*, however, are well worth reading in connexion with the author's personal history. In the preface we are told that *Robinson Crusoe* is an allegory, and in one of the chapters we are told why it is an allegory. The explanation is given in a homily against the vice of talking falsely. By talking falsely the moralist explains that he does not mean telling lies, that is, falsehoods concocted with an evil object; these he puts aside as sins altogether beyond the pale of discussion. But there is a minor vice of falsehood which he considers it his duty to reprove, namely, telling stories, as too many people do, merely to amuse. "This supplying a story by invention," he says, "is certainly a most scandalous crime, and yet very little regarded in that part. It is a sort of lying that makes a great hole in the heart, in which by degrees a habit of lying enters in. Such a man comes quickly up to a total disregarding the truth of what he says, looking upon it as a trifle, a thing of no import, whether any story he tells be true or not." How empty a satisfaction is this "purchased at so great an expense as that of conscience, and of a

dishonour done to truth !” And the crime is so entirely objectless. A man who tells a lie, properly so called, has some hope of reward by it. But to lie for sport is to play at shuttlecock with your soul, and load your conscience for the mere sake of being a fool. “With what temper should I speak of those people? What words can express the meanness and baseness of the mind that can do this?” In making this protest against frivolous story-telling, the humour of which must have been greatly enjoyed by his journalistic colleagues, Defoe anticipated that his readers would ask why, if he so disapproved of the supplying a story by invention, he had written *Robinson Crusoe*. His answer was that *Robinson Crusoe* was an allegory, and that the telling or writing a parable or an allusive allegorical history is quite a different case. “I, Robinson Crusoe, do affirm that the story, though allegorical, is also historical, and that it is the beautiful representation of a life of unexampled misfortunes, and of a variety not to be met with in this world.” This life was his own. He explains at some length the particulars of the allegory :—

“Thus the fright and fancies which succeeded the story of the print of a man’s foot, and surprise of the old goat, and the thing rolling on my bed, and my jumping up in a fright, are all histories and real stories ; as are likewise the dream of being taken by messengers, being arrested by officers, the manner of being driven on shore by the surge of the sea, the ship on fire, the description of starving, the story of my man Friday, and many more most natural passages observed here, and on which any religious reflections are made, are all historical and true in fact. It is most real that I had a parrot, and taught it to call me by my name, such a servant a savage and afterwards a Christian, and that his name was called Friday, and that he was ravished from me by force, and died

in the hands that took him, which I represent by being killed ; this is all literally true, and should I enter into discoveries many alive can testify them. His other conduct and assistance to me also have just references in all their parts to the helps I had from that faithful savage in my real solitudes and disasters.

"The story of the bear in the tree, and the fight with the wolves in the snow, is likewise matter of real history ; and in a word, the adventures of Robinson Crusoe are a whole scheme of a life of twenty-eight years spent in the most wandering, desolate, and afflicting circumstances that ever man went through, and in which I have lived so long in a life of wonders in continued storms, fought with the worst kind of savages and man-eaters, by unaccountable surprising incidents ; fed by miracles greater than that of the ravens, suffered all manner of violences and oppressions, injurious reproaches, contempt of men, attacks of devils, corrections from Heaven, and oppositions on earth ; and had innumerable ups and downs in matters of fortune, been in slavery worse than Turkish, escaped by an exquisite management, as that in the story of Xury and the boat of Sallee, been taken up at sea in distress, raised again and depressed again, and that oftener perhaps in one man's life than ever was known before ; shipwrecked often, though more by land than by sea ; in a word, there's not a circumstance in the imaginary story but has its just allusion to a real story, and chimes part for part, and step for step, with the inimitable life of Robinson Crusoe."

But if Defoe had such a regard for the strict and literal truth, why did he not tell his history in his own person ? Why convey the facts allusively in an allegory ? To this question also he had an answer. He wrote for the instruction of mankind, for the purpose of recommending "invincible patience under the worst of misery ; indefatigable application and undaunted resolution under the greatest and most discouraging circumstances."



"Had the common way of writing a man's private history been taken, and I had given you the conduct or life of a man you knew, and whose misfortunes and infirmities perhaps you had sometimes unjustly triumphed over, all I could have said would have yielded no diversion, and perhaps scarce have obtained a reading, or at best no attention ; the teacher, like a greater, having no honour in his own country."

For all Defoe's profession that *Robinson Crusoe* is an allegory of his own life, it would be rash to take what he says too literally. The reader who goes to the tale in search of a close allegory, in minute chronological correspondence with the facts of the alleged original, will find, I expect, like myself, that he has gone on a wild-goose chase. There is a certain general correspondence. Defoe's own life is certainly as instructive as *Crusoe's* in the lesson of invincible patience and undaunted resolution. The shipwreck perhaps corresponds with his first bankruptcy, with which it coincides in point of time, having happened just twenty-eight years before. If Defoe had a real man Friday, who had learnt all his arts till he could practise them as well as himself, the fact might go to explain his enormous productiveness as an author. But I doubt whether the allegory can be pushed into such details. Defoe's fancy was quick enough to give an allegorical meaning to any tale. He might have found in Moll Flanders, with her five marriages and ultimate prostitution, corresponding to his own five political marriages and the dubious conduct of his later years, a closer allegory in some respects than in the life of the shipwrecked sailor. The idea of calling *Robinson Crusoe* an allegory was in all probability an afterthought, perhaps suggested by a derisive parody which had appeared, entitled *The life and strange*

*surprising adventures of Daniel de Foe, of London, Honier, who lived all alone in the uninhabited island of Great Britain, and so forth.*

If we study any writing of Defoe's in connexion with the circumstances of its production, we find that it is many-sided in its purposes, as full of side aims as a nave is full of spokes. These supplementary moral chapters to *Robinson Crusoe*, admirable as the reflections are in themselves, and naturally as they are made to arise out of the incidents of the hero's life, contain more than meets the eye till we connect them with the author's position. Calling the tale an allegory served him in two ways. In the first place, it added to the interest of the tale itself by presenting it in the light of a riddle, which was left but half-revealed, though he declared after such explanation as he gave that "the riddle was now expounded, and the intelligent reader might see clearly the end and design of the whole work." In the second place, the allegory was such an image of his life as he wished for good reasons to impress on the public mind. He had all along, as we have seen, while in the secret service of successive governments, vehemently protested his independence, and called Heaven and Earth to witness that he was a poor struggling, unfortunate, calumniated man. It was more than ever necessary now when people believed him to be under the insuperable displeasure of the Whigs, and he was really rendering them such dangerous service in connexion with the Tory journals, that he should convince the world of his misfortunes and his honesty. The *Serious Reflections* consist mainly of meditations on Divine Providence in times of trouble, and discourses on the supreme importance of honest dealing. They are put

into the mouth of Robinson Crusoe, but the reader is warned that they occurred to the author himself in the midst of real incidents in his own life. Knowing what public repute said of him, he does not profess never to have strayed from the paths of virtue, but he implies that he is sincerely repentant, and is now a reformed character. "Wild wicked Robinson Crusoe does not pretend to honesty himself." He acknowledges his early errors. Not to do so would be a mistaken piece of false bravery. "All shame is cowardice. The bravest spirit is the best qualified for a penitent. He, then, that will be honest, must dare to confess that he has been a knave." But the man that has been sick is half a physician, and therefore he is both well fitted to counsel others, and being convinced of the sin and folly of his former errors, is of all men the least likely to repeat them. Want of courage was not a feature in Defoe's diplomacy. He thus boldly described the particular form of dishonesty with which, when he wrote the description, he was practising upon the unconscious Mr. Mist.

"There is an ugly word called cunning, which is very pernicious to it [honesty], and which particularly injures it by hiding it from our discovery and making it hard to find. This is so like honesty that many a man has been deceived with it, and have taken one for t'other in the markets: nay, I have heard of some who have planted this *wild honesty*, as we may call it, in their own ground, have made use of it in their friendship and dealings, and thought it had been the true plant. But they always lost credit by it, and that was not the worst neither, for they had the loss who dealt with them, and who chaffered for a counterfeit commodity; and we find many deceived so still, which is the occasion there is such an outcry about false friends, and about sharpening and tricking in men's ordinary dealings with the world."

A master-mind in the art of working a man, as Bacon calls it, is surely apparent here. Who could have suspected the moralist of concealing the sins he was inclined to, by exposing and lamenting those very sins? There are other passages in the *Serious Reflections* which seem to have been particularly intended for Mist's edification. In reflecting what a fine thing honesty is, Crusoe expresses an opinion that it is much more common than is generally supposed, and gratefully recalls how often he has met with it in his own experience. He asks the reader to note how faithfully he was served by the English sailor's widow, the Portuguese captain, the boy Xury, and his man Friday. From these allegoric types, Mist might select a model for his own behaviour. When we consider the tone of these *Serious Reflections*, so eminently pious, moral, and unpretending, so obviously the outcome of a wise, simple, ingenuous nature, we can better understand the fury with which Mist turned upon Defoe when at last he discovered his treachery. They are of use also in throwing light upon the prodigious versatility which could dash off a masterpiece in fiction, and, before the printer's ink was dry, be already at work making it a subordinate instrument in a much wider and more wonderful scheme of activity, his own restless life.

It is curious to find among the *Serious Reflections*, a passage which may be taken as an apology for the practices into which Defoe, gradually, we may reasonably believe, allowed himself to fall. The substance of the apology has been crystallized into an aphorism by the author of *Becky Sharp*, but it has been, no doubt, the consoling philosophy of dishonest persons not altogether devoid of conscience in all ages.

"Necessity makes an honest man a knave; and if the world was to be the judge, according to the common received notion, there would not be an honest poor man alive.

"A rich man is an honest man, no thanks to him, for he would be a double knave to cheat mankind when he had no need of it. He has no occasion to prey upon his integrity, nor so much as to touch upon the borders of dishonesty. Tell me of a man that is a very honest man; for he pays everybody punctually, runs into nobody's debt, does no man any wrong; very well, what circumstances is he in? Why, he has a good estate, a fine yearly income, and no business to do. The Devil must have full possession of this man, if he should be a knave; for no man commits evil for the sake of it; even the Devil himself has some farther design in sinning, than barely the wicked part of it. No man is so hardened in crimes as to commit them for the mere pleasure of the fact, there is always some vice gratified; ambition, pride, or avarice makes rich men knaves, and necessity the poor."

This is Defoe's excuse for his backslidings put into the mouth of *Robinson Crusoe*. It might be inscribed also on the threshold of each of his fictitious biographies. Colonel Jack, Moll Flanders, Roxana are not criminals from malice; they do not commit crimes for the mere pleasure of the fact. They all believe that but for the force of circumstances they might have been orderly, contented, virtuous members of society. The Colonel, a London Arab, a child of the criminal regiment, began to steal before he knew that it was not the approved way of making a livelihood. Moll and Roxana were overreached by acts against which they were too weak to cope. Even after they were tempted into taking the wrong turning, they did not pursue the downward road without compunction. Many good people might say of them, "There, but for the grace of God, goes myself." But it was not from the

point of view of a Baxter or a Bunyan that Defoe regarded them, though he credited them with many edifying reflections. He was careful to say that he would never have written the stories of their lives, if he had not thought that they would be useful as awful examples of the effects of bad education and the indulgence of restlessness and vanity; but he enters into their ingenious shifts and successes with a joyous sympathy that would have been impossible if their reckless adventurous living by their wits had not had a strong charm for him. We often find peeping out in Defoe's writings that roguish cynicism which we should expect in a man whose own life was so far from being straightforward. He was too much dependent upon the public acceptance of honest professions to be eager in depreciating the value of the article, but when he found other people protesting disinterested motives, he could not always resist reminding them that they were no more disinterested than the Jack-pudding who avowed that he cured diseases from mere love of his kind. Having yielded to circumstances himself, and finding life enjoyable in dubious paths, he had a certain animosity against those who had maintained their integrity and kept to the highroad, and a corresponding pleasure in showing that the motives of the sinner were not after all so very different from the motives of the saint.

The aims in life of Defoe's thieves and pirates are at bottom very little different from the ambition which he undertakes to direct in the *Complete English Tradesman*, and their maxims of conduct have much in common with this ideal. Self-interest is on the lookout, and Self-reliance at the helm.

"A tradesman behind his counter must have no flesh and blood about him, no passions, no resentment; he must never be angry---no, not so much as seem to be so, if a customer tumbles him five hundred pounds worth of goods, and scarce bids money for anything; nay, though they really come to his shop with no intent to buy, as many do, only to see what is to be sold, and though he knows they cannot be better pleased than they are at some other shop where they intend to buy, 'tis all one; the tradesman must take it, he must place it to the account of his calling, that 'tis his business to be ill-used, and resent nothing; and so must answer as obligingly to those who give him an hour or two's trouble, and buy nothing, as he does to those who, in half the time, lay out ten or twenty pounds. The case is plain; and if some do give him trouble, and do not buy, others make amends, and do buy; and as for the trouble, 'tis the business of the shop."

All Defoe's heroes and heroines are animated by this practical spirit, this thoroughgoing subordination of means to ends. When they have an end in view, the plunder of a house, the capture of a ship, the ensnaring of a dupe, they allow neither passion, nor resentment, nor sentiment in any shape or form to stand in their way. Every other consideration is put on one side when the business of the shop has to be attended to. They are all tradesmen who have strayed into unlawful courses. They have nothing about them of the heroism of sin; their crimes are not the result of ungovernable passion, or even of antipathy to conventional restraints; circumstances and not any law-defying bias of disposition have made them criminals. How is it that the novelist contrives to make them so interesting! Is it because we are a nation of shopkeepers, and enjoy following lines of business which are

a little out of our ordinary routine! Or is it simply that he makes us enjoy their courage and cleverness without thinking of the purposes with which these qualities are displayed! Defoe takes such delight in tracing their bold expedients, their dexterous intriguing and manœuvring, that he seldom allows us to think of anything but the success or failure of their enterprises. Our attention is concentrated on the game, and we pay no heed for the moment to the players or the stakes. Charles Lamb says of *The Complete English Tradesman* that "such is the bent of the book to narrow and to degrade the heart, that if such maxims were as catching and infectious as those of a licentious cast, which happily is not the case, had I been living at that time, I certainly should have recommended to the grand jury of Middlesex, who presented *The Fable of the Bees*, to have presented this book of Defoe's in preference, as of a far more vile and debasing tendency." Yet if Defoe had thrown the substance of this book into the form of a novel, and shown us a tradesman rising by the sedulous practice of its maxims from errand-boy to gigantic capitalist, it would have been hardly less interesting than his lives of successful thieves and tolerably successful harlots, and its interest would have been very much of the same kind, the interest of dexterous adaptation of means to ends.



## CHAPTER X.

### HIS MYSTERIOUS END.

"THE best step," Defoe says after describing the character of a deceitful talker, "such a man can take is to lie on, and this shows the singularity of the crime; it is a strange expression, but I shall make it out; their way is, I say, to lie on till their character is completely known, and then they can lie no longer, for he whom nobody deceives can deceive nobody, and the essence of lying is removed; for the description of a lie is that it is spoken to deceive, or the design is to deceive. Now he that nobody believes can never lie any more, because nobody can be deceived by him."

Something like this seems to have happened to Defoe himself. He touched the summit of his worldly prosperity about the time of the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). He was probably richer than he had been when he enjoyed the confidence of King William, and was busy with projects of manufacture and trade. He was no longer solitary in journalism. Like his hero he had several plantations, and companions to help him in working them. He was connected with four journals, and from this source alone his income must have been considerable. Besides this he was producing separate

works at the rate, on an average, of six a year, as them pamphlets, some of them considerable volumes of them calculated to the wants of the time, and several of them extremely popular, running through three or four editions in as many months. Then he had his salary from the government, which he delicately hints at in one of his extant letters as being overdue. Further, the advertisement of a lost pocket-book in 1726, containing a list of Notes and Bills in which Defoe's name twice appears, seems to show that he still found time for commercial transactions outside literature.<sup>1</sup> Altogether Defoe was exceedingly prosperous, dropped all pretence of poverty, built a large house at Stoke Newington, with stables and pleasure-grounds, and kept a coach.

We get a pleasant glimpse of Defoe's life at this period from the notes of Henry Baker, the naturalist, who married one of his daughters and received his assistance, as we have seen, in starting *The Universal Spectator*. Baker, originally a bookseller, in 1724 set up a school for the deaf and dumb at Newington. There, according to the notes which he left of his courtship, he made the acquaintance of "Mr. Defoe, a gentleman well known by his writings, who had newly built there a very handsome house, as a retirement from London, and amused his time either in the cultivation of a large and pleasant garden, or in the pursuit of his studies, which he found means of making very profitable." Defoe "was now at least sixty years of age, afflicted with the gout and stone, but retained all his mental faculties entire." The diarist goes on to say that he "met usually at the tea-table his three lovely daughters, who were admired for their beauty, their education, and their prudent

<sup>1</sup> *Lee's Life*, vol. i. pp. 406-7.

conduct; and if sometimes Mr. Defoe's disorders made company inconvenient, Mr. Baker was entertained by them either singly or together, and that commonly in the garden when the weather was favourable." Mr. Baker fixed his choice on Sophia, the youngest daughter, and, being a prudent lover, began negotiations about the marriage portion, Defoe's part in which is also characteristic. "He knew nothing of Mr. Defoe's circumstances, only imagined, from his very genteel way of living, that he must be able to give his daughter a decent portion; he did not suppose a large one. On speaking to Mr. Defoe, he sanctioned his proposals, and said he hoped he should be able to give her a certain sum specified; but when urged to the point some time afterwards, his answer was that formal articles he thought unnecessary; that he could confide in the honour of Mr. Baker; that when they talked before, he did not know the true state of his own affairs; that he found he could not part with any money at present; but at his death, his daughter's portion would be more than he had promised; and he offered his own bond as security." The prudent Mr. Baker would not take his bond, and the marriage was not arranged till two years afterwards, when Defoe gave a bond for £500 payable at his death, engaging his house at Newington as security.

Very little more is known about Defoe's family, except that his eldest daughter married a person of the name of Langley, and that he speculated successfully in South Sea Stock in the name of his second daughter, and afterwards settled upon her an estate at Colchester worth £1020. His second son, named Benjamin, became a journalist, was the editor of the *London Journal*, and got into temporary trouble for writing a scandalous

and seditious libel in that newspaper in 1721. A writer in *Applebee's Journal*, whom Mr. Lee identifies with Defoe himself, commenting upon this circumstance, denied the rumour of its being the well-known Daniel Defoe that was committed for the offence. The same writer declared that it was known "that the young Defoe was but a stalking-horse and a tool, to bear the lash and the pillory in their stead, for his wages; that he was the author of the most scandalous part, but was only made sham proprietor of the whole, to screen the true proprietors from justice."

This son does not appear in a favourable light in the troubles which soon after fell upon Defoe, when Mist discovered his connexion with the Government. Foiled in his assault upon him, Mist seems to have taken revenge by spreading the fact abroad, and all Defoe's indignant denials and outcries against Mist's ingratitude do not seem to have cleared him from suspicion. Thenceforth the printers and editors of journals held aloof from him. Such is Mr. Lee's fair interpretation of the fact that his connexion with *Applebee's Journal* terminated abruptly in March, 1726, and that he is found soon after, in the preface to a pamphlet on *Street Robberies*, complaining that none of the journals will accept his communications. "Assure yourself, gentle reader," he says,<sup>1</sup> "I had not published my project in this pamphlet, could I have got it inserted in any of the journals without feeing the journalists or publishers. I cannot but have the vanity to think they might as well have inserted what I send them, *gratis*, as many things I have since seen in their papers. But I have not only had the mortification to find what I sent rejected, but

<sup>1</sup> Lee's *Life*, vol. i. p. 418.

to lose my originals, not having taken copies of what I wrote." In this preface Defoe makes touching allusion to his age and infirmities. He begs his readers to "excuse the vanity of an over-officious old man, if, like Cato, he inquires whether or no before he goes hence and is no more, he can yet do anything for the service of his country." "The old man cannot trouble you long; take, then, in good part his best intentions, and impute his defects to age and weakness."

This preface was written in 1728; what happened to Defoe in the following year is much more difficult to understand, and is greatly complicated by a long letter of his own which has been preserved. Something had occurred, or was imagined by him to have occurred, which compelled him to fly from his home and go into hiding. He was at work on a book to be entitled *The Complete English Gentleman*. Part of it was already in type when he broke off abruptly in September, 1729, and fled. In August, 1730, he sent from a hiding-place, cautiously described as being about two miles from Greenwich, a letter to his son-in-law, Baker, which is our only clue to what had taken place. It is so incoherent as to suggest that the old man's prolonged toils and anxieties had at last shaken his reason, though not his indomitable self-reliance. Baker apparently had written complaining that he was debarred from seeing him. "Depend upon my sincerity for this," Defoe answers, "that I am far from debarring you. On the contrary, it would be a greater comfort to me than any I now enjoy that I could have your agreeable visits with safety, and could see both you and my dear Sophia, could it be without giving her the grief of seeing her father *in tenebris*, and under the load of insupportable sorrows." He gives a

touching description of the griefs which are preying upon his mind.

"It is not the blow I received from a wicked, perjured, and contemptible enemy that has broken in upon my spirit; which, as she well knows, has carried me on through greater disasters than these. But it has been the injustice, unkindness, and, I must say inhuman, dealing of my own son, which has both ruined my family, and in a word has broken my heart. . . . I depended upon him, I trusted him, I gave up my two dear unprovided children into his hands; but he has no compassion, but suffers them and their poor dying mother to beg their bread at his door, and to crave, as it were an alms, what he is bound under hand and seal, besides the most sacred promises, to supply them with, himself at the same time living in a profusion of plenty. It is too much for me. Excuse my infirmity, I can say no more; my heart is too full. I only ask one thing of you as a dying request. Stand by them when I am gone, and let them not be wronged while he is able to do them right. Stand by them as a brother; and if you have anything within you owing to my memory, who have bestowed on you the best gift I have to give, let them not be injured and trampled on by false pretences and unnatural reflections. I hope they will want no help but that of comfort and council; but that they will indeed want, being too easy to be managed by words and promises."

The postscript to the letter shows that Baker had written to him about selling the house, which, it may be remembered, was the security for Mrs. Baker's portion, and had inquired about a policy of assurance. "I wrote you a letter some months ago, in answer to one from you, about selling the house; but you never signified to me whether you received it. I have not the policy of assurance; I suppose my wife, or Hannah, may have it." Baker's ignoring the previous letter

about the house seems to signify that it was unsatisfactory. He apparently wished for a personal interview with Defoe. In the beginning of the present letter Defoe had said that, though far from debarring a visit from his son-in-law, circumstances, much to his sorrow, made it impossible that he could receive a visit from anybody. After the charge against his son, which we have quoted, he goes on to explain that it is impossible for him to go to see Mr. Baker. His family apparently had been ignorant of his movements for some time. "I am at a distance from London in Kent; nor have I a lodging in London, nor have I been at that place in the Old Bailey since I wrote you I was removed from it. At present I am weak, having had some fits of a fever that have left me low." He suggests, indeed, a plan by which he might see his son-in-law and daughter. He could not bear to make them a single flying visit. "Just to come and look at you and retire immediately, 'tis a burden too heavy. The parting will be a price beyond the enjoyment." But if they could find a retired lodging for him at Enfield, "where he might not be known, and might have the comfort of seeing them both now and then, upon such a circumstance he could gladly give the days to solitude to have the comfort of half an hour now and then with them both for two or three weeks." Nevertheless, as if he considered this plan out of the question, he ends with a touching expression of grief that, being near his journey's end, he may never see them again. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that he did not wish to see his son-in-law, and that Baker wished to see him about money matters, and suspected him of evading an interview.

Was this evasion the cunning of incipient madness? Was his concealing his hiding-place from his son-in-law an insane development of that self-reliant caution, which for so many years of his life he had been compelled to make a habit, in the face of the most serious risks? Why did he give such an exaggerated colour to the infamous conduct of his son? It is easy to make out from the passage I have quoted, what his son's guilt really consisted in. Defoe had assigned certain property to the son to be held in trust for his wife and daughters. The son had not secured them in the enjoyment of this provision, but maintained them, and gave them words and promises, with which they were content, that he would continue to maintain them. It was this that Defoe called making them "beg their bread at his door, and crave as if it were an alms" the provision to which they were legally entitled. Why did Defoe vent his grief at this conduct in such strong language to his son-in-law, at the same time enjoining him to make a prudent use of it? Baker had written to his father-in-law making inquiry about the securities for his wife's portion; Defoe answers with profuse expressions of affection, a touching picture of his old age and feebleness, and the imminent ruin of his family through the possible treachery of the son to whom he has entrusted their means of support, and an adjuration to his son-in-law to stand by them with comfort and counsel when he is gone. The inquiry about the securities he dismisses in a postscript. He will not sell the house, and he does not know who has the policy of assurance.

One thing and one thing only shines clearly out of the obscurity in which Defoe's closing years are wrapt—his earnest desire to make provision for those members



of his family who could not provide for themselves. The pursuit from which he was in hiding, was in all probability the pursuit of creditors. We have seen that his income must have been large from the year 1718 or thereabouts, till his utter loss of credit in journalism about the year 1726; but he may have had old debts. It is difficult to explain otherwise why he should have been at such pains, when he became prosperous, to assign property to his children. There is evidence as early as 1720 of his making over property to his daughter Hannah, and the letter from which I have quoted shows that he did not hold his Newington estate in his own name. In this letter he speaks of a perjured contemptible enemy as the cause of his misfortunes. Mr. Lee conjectures that this was Mist, that Mist had succeeded in embroiling him with the Government by convincing them of treachery in his secret services, and that this was the hue and cry from which he fled. But it is hardly conceivable that the Government could have listened to charges brought by a man whom they had driven from the country for his seditious practices. It is much more likely that Mist and his supporters had sufficient interest to instigate the revival of old pecuniary claims against Defoe.

It would have been open to suppose that the fears which made the old man a homeless wanderer and fugitive for the last two years of his life, were wholly imaginary, but for the circumstances of his death. He died of a lethargy on the 26th of April, 1731, at a lodging in Ropemaker's Alley, Moorfields. In September, 1733, as the books in Doctors' Commons show, letters of administration on his goods and chattels were granted to Mary Brooks, widow, a creditrix, after summoning in

official form the next of kin to appear. Now, if Defoe had been driven from his home by imaginary fears, and had baffled with the cunning of insane suspicion the effects of his family to bring him back, there is no apparent reason why they should not have claimed his effects after his death. He could not have died unknown to them, for place and time were recorded in the newspapers. His letter to his son-in-law, expressing the warmest affection for all his family except his son, is sufficient to prevent the horrible notion that he might have been driven forth like Lear by his undutiful children after he had parted his goods among them. If they had been capable of such unnatural conduct, they would not have failed to secure his remaining property. Why, then, were his goods and chattels left to a creditor? Mr. Lee ingeniously suggests that Mary Brooks was the keeper of the lodging where he died, and that she kept his personal property to pay rent and perhaps funeral expenses. A much simpler explanation, which covers most of the known facts without casting any unwarranted reflections upon Defoe's children, is that when his last illness overtook him he was still keeping out of the way of his creditors, and that everything belonging to him in his own name was legally seized. But there are doubts and difficulties attending any explanation.

Mr. Lee has given satisfactory reasons for believing that Defoe did not, as some of his biographers have supposed, die in actual distress. Ropemaker's Alley in Moorfields was a highly respectable street at the beginning of last century; a lodging there was far from squalid. The probability is that Defoe subsisted on his pension from the Government during his last two years of wandering; and suffering though he was from the

infirmities of age, yet wandering was less of a hardship than it would have been to other men, to one who had been a wanderer for the greater part of his life. At the best it was a painful and dreary ending for so vigorous a life; and unless we pitilessly regard it as a retribution for his moral defects, it is some comfort to think that the old man's infirmities and anxieties were not aggravated by the pressure of hopeless and helpless poverty. Nor do I think that he was as distressed as he represented to his son-in-law by apprehensions of ruin to his family after his death, and suspicions of the honesty of his son's intentions. There is a half insane tone about his letter to Mr. Baker, but a certain method may be discerned in its incoherences. My own reading of it is that it was a clever evasion of his son-in-law's attempts to make sure of his share of the inheritance. We have seen how shifty Defoe was in the original bargaining about his daughter's portion, and we know from his novels what his views were about fortune-hunters, and with what delight he dwelt upon the arts of outwitting them. He probably considered that his youngest daughter was sufficiently provided for by her marriage, and he had set his heart upon making provision for her unmarried sisters. The letter seems to me to be evidence, not so much of fears for their future welfare, as of a resolution to leave them as much as he could. Two little circumstances seem to show that, in spite of his professions of affection, there was a coolness between Defoe and his son-in-law. He wrote only the prospectus and the first article for Baker's paper, the *Universal Spectator*, and when he died, Baker contented himself with a simple intimation of the fact.

If my reading of this letter is right, it might stand as

a type of the most strongly marked characteristic in Defoe's political writings. It was a masterly and utterly unscrupulous piece of diplomacy for the attainment of a just and benevolent end. This may appear strange after what I have said about Defoe's want of honesty, yet one cannot help coming to this conclusion in looking back at his political career before his character underwent its final degradation. He was a great, a truly great liar, perhaps the greatest liar that ever lived. His dishonesty went too deep to be called superficial, yet, if we go deeper still in his rich and strangely mixed nature, we come upon stubborn foundations of conscience. Among contemporary comments on the occasion of his death, there was one which gave perfect expression to his political position. "His knowledge of men, especially those in high life (with whom he was formerly very conversant) had weakened his attachment to any political party ; but in the main, he was in the interest of civil and religious liberty, in behalf of which he appeared on several remarkable occasions." The men of the time with whom Defoe was brought into contact, were not good examples to him. The standard of political morality was probably never so low in England as during his lifetime. Places were dependent on the favour of the Sovereign, and the Sovereign's own seat on the throne was insecure ; there was no party cohesion to keep politicians consistent, and every man fought for his own hand. Defoe had been behind the scenes, witnessed many curious changes of service, and heard many authentic tales of jealousy, intrigue, and treachery. He had seen Jacobites take office under William, join zealously in the scramble for his favours, and enter into negotiations with the emissaries of James either upon

some fancied slight, or from no other motive than a desire to be safe, if by any chance the sceptre should again change hands. Under Anne he had seen Whig turn Tory and Tory turn Whig, and had seen statesmen of the highest rank hold out one hand to Hanover and another to St. Germain's. The most single-minded man he had met had been King William himself, and of his memory he always spoke with the most affectionate honour. Shifty as Defoe was, and admirably as he used his genius for circumstantial invention to cover his designs, there was no other statesman of his generation who remained more true to the principles of the Revolution, and to the cause of civil and religious freedom. No other public man saw more clearly what was for the good of the country, or pursued it more steadily. Even when he was the active servant of Harley, and turned round upon men who regarded him as their own, the part which he played was to pave the way for his patron's accession to office under the House of Hanover. Defoe did as much as any one man, partly by secret intrigue, partly through the public press, perhaps as much as any ten men outside those in the immediate direction of affairs, to accomplish the two great objects which William bequeathed to English statesmanship—the union of England and Scotland, and the succession to the United Kingdom of a Protestant dynasty. Apart from the field of high politics, his powerful advocacy was enlisted in favour of almost every practicable scheme of social improvement that came to the front in his time. Defoe cannot be held up as an exemplar of moral conduct, yet if he is judged by the measures that he laboured for, and not by the means that he employed, few Englishmen have lived more

deserving than he of their country's gratitude. He may have been self-seeking and vain-glorious, but in his political life self-seeking and vain-glory were elevated by their alliance with higher and wider aims. Defoe was a wonderful mixture of knave and patriot. Sometimes pure knave seems to be uppermost, sometimes pure patriot, but the mixture is so complex and the energy of the man so restless, that it almost passes human skill to unravel the two elements. The author of *Robinson Crusoe* is entitled to the benefit of every doubt.

THE END.



# English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

STERNE







# STERNE

BY

H. D. TRAILL

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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

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

H. D. T.

BICKLEY, May, 1862.

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# STERNE.

## CHAPTER I.

### BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND EARLY YEARS.

(1713—1724.)

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

Roger Sterne, however, now late ensign of the 34th or Chudleigh's regiment of foot, was after all in less evil



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

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

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

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

The diary of their travels—for the early part of

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

but destined to fall "at the age of three years." On the return of the regiment to Wicklow, Roger Sterne again sent to collect his family round him. "We embarked for Dublin, and had all been cast away by a most violent storm; but, through the intercession of my mother, the captain was prevailed upon to turn back into Wales, where we stayed a month, and at length got into Dublin, and travelled by land to Wicklow, where my father had, for some weeks, given us over for lost." Here a year passed, and another child, Devijahar—so called after the Colonel of the regiment—was born. "From thence we decamped to stay half a year with Mr. Fetherston, a clergyman, about seven miles from Wicklow, who, being a relative of my mother's, invited us to his parsonage at Animo.<sup>1</sup> From thence, again, "we followed the regiment to Dublin," where again "we lay in the barracks a year." In 1722 the regiment was ordered to Carrickfergus. "We all decamped, but got no further than Drogheda; thence ordered to Mullingar, forty miles west, where, by Providence, we stumbled upon a kind relation, a collateral

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

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

There is, as has been observed, a certain mixture of the comic and the pathetic in the life-history of this obscure father of a famous son. His life was clearly not a fortunate one, so far as external circumstances go; but its misfortunes had no sort of consoling dignity about them.

Roger Sterne's lot in the world was not so much an unhappy as an uncomfortable one ; and discomfort earns little sympathy, and absolutely no admiration, for its sufferers. He somehow reminds us of one of those Irish heroes—good-natured, peppery, debt-loaded, light-hearted, shiftless—whose fortunes we follow with mirthful and half-contemptuous sympathy in the pages of Thackeray. He was obviously a typical specimen of that class of men who are destitute alike of the virtues and failings of the "respectable" and successful ; whom many people love and no one respects ; whom everybody pities in their struggles and difficulties, but whom few pity without a smile.

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

"My Uncle Toby." The simplicity of nature and the "kindly sweet disposition" are common to both the ensign of real life and to the immortal Captain Shandy of fiction; but the criticism which professes to find traces of Roger Sterne's "rapid and hasty temper" in my Uncle Toby, is compelled to strain itself considerably. And, on the whole, there seems no reason to believe that Sterne borrowed more from the character of his father than any writer must necessarily, and perhaps unconsciously, borrow from his observation of the moral and mental qualities of those with whom he has come into most frequent contact.

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



many corporals may undoubtedly have contributed much to the vigour and vitality of Toby Shandy and Corporal Trim. So far as the externals of portraiture were concerned, there can be no doubt that his art benefited much from his early military life. His soldiers have the true stamp of the soldier about them in air and language ; and when his captain and corporal fight their Flemish battles over again, we are thoroughly conscious that we are listening, under the dramatic form, to one who must himself have heard many a chapter of the same splendid story from the lips of the very men who had helped to break the pride of the Grand Monarque under Marlborough and Eugene.

## CHAPTER II.

### SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY—HALIFAX AND CAMBRIDGE.

(1723—1738.)

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

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

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

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

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

and stimulants of which each by the grace of nature stood least in need. That their close intimacy was ill-calculated to raise Sterne's reputation in later years may be inferred from the fact that Hall Stevenson afterwards obtained literary notoriety by the publication of *Crazy Tales*, a collection of comic but extremely broad ballads in which his clerical friend was quite unjustly suspected of having had a hand. Mr. Hall was also reported, whether truly or falsely, to have been a member of Wilkes's famous confraternity of Medmenham Abbey; and from this it was an easy step for gossip to advance to the assertion that the Rev. Mr. Sterne had himself been admitted to that unholy order.

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

In January, 1736, Sterne took his B.A. degree, and quitted Cambridge for York, where another of his father's

brothers now makes his appearance as his patron. Dr. Jacques Sterne was the second son of Simon Sterne, of Elvington, and a man apparently of more marked and vigorous character than any of his brothers. What induced him now to take notice of the nephew, whom in boyhood and early youth he had left to the unshared guardianship of his brother, and brother's son, does not appear; but the personal history of this energetic pluralist—Prebendary of Durham, Archdeacon of Cleveland, Canon Residentiary, Precentor, Prebendary, and Archdeacon of York, Rector of Rise, and Rector of Hornsey-cum-Riston—suggests the surmise that he detected qualities in the young Cambridge graduate which would make him useful. For Dr. Sterne was a typical specimen of the Churchman-politician, in days when both components of the compound word meant a good deal more than they do now. The Archdeacon was a devoted Whig, a Hanoverian to the backbone; and he held it his duty to support the Protestant succession, not only by the spiritual but by the secular arm. He was a great electioneerer, as befitted times when the claims of two rival dynasties virtually met upon the hustings, and he took a prominent part in the great Yorkshire contest of the year 1734. His most vigorous display of energy, however, was made, as was natural, in "the '45." The Whig Archdeacon, not then Archdeacon of the East Riding, nor as yet quite buried under the mass of preferments which he afterwards accumulated, seems to have thought that this indeed was the crisis of his fortunes, and that unless he was prepared to die a mere prebendary, canon, and rector of one or two benefices, now was the time to strike a blow for his advancement in the Church. His bustling activity at this trying time was indeed

portentous, and at last took the form of arresting the unfortunate Dr. Burton (the original of Dr. Slop) on suspicion of holding communication with the invading army of the Pretender, then on its march southward from Edinburgh. The suspect, who was wholly innocent, was taken to London and kept in custody for nearly a year before being discharged, after which, by way of a slight redress, a letter of reprimand for his *trop de zèle* was sent by direction of Lord Carteret to the militant dignitary. But the desired end was nevertheless attained, and Dr. Sterne succeeded in crowning the edifice of his ecclesiastical honours.<sup>1</sup>

There can be little doubt that patronage extended by such an uncle to such a nephew, received its full equivalent in some way or other, and indeed the Memoir gives us a clue to the mode in which payment was made. "My uncle," writes Sterne, describing their subsequent rupture, "quarrelled with me because I would not write paragraphs in the newspapers; though he was a party-man, I was not, and detested such dirty work, thinking it beneath me. From that time he became my bitterest enemy." The date of this quarrel cannot be precisely fixed; but we gather from an autograph letter (now in the British

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

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

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



Museum) from Sterne to Archdeacon Blackburne that by the year 1750 the two men had for some time ceased to be on friendly terms. Probably, however, the breach occurred subsequently to the rebellion of '45, and it may be that it arose out of the excess of partisan zeal which Dr. Sterne developed in that year, and which his nephew very likely did not in his opinion sufficiently share. But this is quite consistent with the younger man's having up to that time assisted the elder in his party polemics. He certainly speaks in his "Letters" of his having "employed his brains for an ungrateful person," and the remark is made in a way and in a connexion which seems to imply that the services rendered to his uncle were mainly *literary*. If so his declaration that he "would not write paragraphs in the newspapers," can only mean that he would not go on writing them. Be this as it may, however, it is certain that the Archdeacon for some time found his account in maintaining friendly relations with his nephew, and that during that period he undoubtedly did a good deal for his advancement. Sterne was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Lincoln in March, 1736, only three months after taking his B.A. degree, and took priest's orders in August, 1738, whereupon his uncle immediately obtained for him the living of Sutton-on-the-Forest, into which he was inducted a few days afterwards. Other preferments followed, to be noted hereafter, and it must be admitted that until the quarrel occurred about the "party paragraphs" the Archdeacon did his duty by his nephew after the peculiar fashion of that time. When that quarrel came, however, it seems to have snapped more ties than one, for in the Memoir Sterne speaks of his youngest sister Catherine as "still living, but most unhappily estranged from me by my uncle's wickedness

and her own folly." Of his elder sister Mary, who was born at Lille a year before himself, he records that "she married one Weemans in Dublin, who used her most unmercifully, spent his substance, became a bankrupt, and left my poor sister to shift for herself, which she was able to do but for a few months, for she went to a friend's house in the country and died of a broken heart." Truly an unlucky family.<sup>2</sup> Only three to survive the hardships among which the years of their infancy were passed, and this to be the history of two out of the three survivors!

<sup>2</sup> The mother, Mrs. Sterne, makes her appearance once more for a moment in or about the year 1758. Horace Walpole, and after him Byron, accused Sterne of having "preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother," and the former went so far as to declare "on indubitable authority" that Mrs. Sterne, "who kept a school (in Ireland), having run in debt on account of an extravagant daughter, would have rotted in a gaol if the parents of her scholars had not raised a subscription for her." Even "the indubitable authority," however, does not positively assert—what ever may be meant to be insinuated—that Sterne himself did nothing to assist his mother, and Mr. Fitzgerald justly points out that to pay the whole debts of a bankrupt school might well have been beyond a Yorkshire clergyman's means. Anyhow there is evidence that Sterne at a later date than this was actively concerning himself about his mother's interests. She afterwards came to York, whither he went to meet her; and he then writes to a friend, "I trust my poor mother's affair is by this time ended to our comfort and hers."

## CHAPTER III.

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

(1738—1759.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

its best, and descends to such singular bathos at its worst.

The marriage preluded by this courtship did not take place till Sterne had already been three years vicar of Sutton-on-the-Forest, the benefice which had been procured for him by his uncle the archdeacon; through whose interest also he was appointed successively to two prebends—preferments which were less valuable to him for their emolument than for the ecclesiastical status which they conferred upon him, for the excuse which they gave him for periodical visits to the cathedral city to fulfil the residential conditions of his offices, and for the opportunity thus afforded him of mixing in and studying the society of the Close. Upon his union with Miss Lumley, and, in a somewhat curious fashion, by her means, he obtained in addition the living of Stillington. “A friend of hers in the south had promised her that if she married a clergyman in Yorkshire, when the living became vacant he would make her a compliment of it;” and made accordingly this singular “compliment” was. At Sutton Sterne remained nearly twenty years doing duty at both places, during which time “books, painting, fiddling, and shooting were,” he says, “my chief amusements.” With what success he shot, and with what skill he fiddled, we know not. His writings contain not a few musical metaphors and allusions to music, which seem to indicate a competent acquaintance with its technicalities; but the specimen of his powers as an artist, which Mr. Fitzgerald has reproduced from his illustrations of a volume of poems by Mr. Woodhull, does not dispose one to rate highly his proficiency in this accomplishment. We may expect that after all it was the first-mentioned of his amusements in which he took the

greatest delight, and that neither the brush, the bow, nor the fowling-piece was nearly so often in his hand as the book. Within a few miles of Sutton, at Skelton Castle, an almost unique Roman stronghold since modernized by Gothic hands, dwelt his college-friend John Hall Stevenson, whose well-stocked library contained a choice but heterogeneous collection of books—old French “ana,” and the learning of mediæval doctors—books intentionally and books unintentionally comic, the former of which Sterne read with an only too retentive a memory for their jests, and the latter with an acutely humorous appreciation of their solemn trifling. Later on it will be time to note the extent to which he utilized these results of his widely discursive reading, and to examine the legitimacy of the mode in which he used them: here it is enough to say generally that the materials for many a burlesque chapter of *Tristram Shandy* must have been unconsciously storing themselves in his mind in many an amused hour passed by Sterne in the library of Skelton Castle.

But before finally quitting this part of my subject it may be as well perhaps to deal somewhat at length with a matter which will doubtless have to be many times incidentally referred to in the course of this study, but which I now hope to relieve myself from the necessity of doing more than touch upon hereafter. I refer of course to Sterne's perpetually recurring flirtations. This is a matter almost as impossible to omit from any biography of Sterne, as it would be to omit it from any biography of Goethe. The English humourist did not, it is true, engage in the pastime in the serious, not to say scientific spirit of the German philosopher-post; it was not deliberately made by the former as by the latter to contribute to his artistic development; but it is neverthe-



ceased to be conjugal, and never again resumed that character.

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

As to the nature of Sterne's love-affairs I have come, though not without hesitation, to the conclusion that they were most, if not all of them, what is called, somewhat absurdly, Platonic. In saying this, however, I am by no

means prepared to assert that they would all of them have passed muster before a prosaic and unsentimental British jury as mere indiscretions, and nothing worse. Sterne's relations with Miss Fourmantelle, for instance, assumed at last a profoundly compromising character, and it is far from improbable that the worst construction would have been put upon them by one of the plain-dealing tribunals aforesaid. Certainly a young woman who leaves her mother at York, and comes up to London to reside alone in lodgings where she is constantly being visited by a lover who is himself living *en garçon* in the metropolis, can hardly complain if her imprudence is fatal to her reputation: neither can he if his own suffers in the same way. But as I am not of those who hold that the conventionally "innocent" is the equivalent of the morally harmless in this matter, I cannot regard the question as worth any very minute investigation. I am not sure that the habitual male flirt, who neglects his wife to sit continually languishing at the feet of some other woman, gives much less pain and scandal to others, or does much less mischief to himself and the objects of his adoration, than the thorough-going profligate; and I even feel tempted to risk the apparent paradox, that from the artistic point of view, Sterne lost rather than gained by the generally Platonic character of his amours. For, as it was, the restraint of one instinct of his nature implied the over-indulgence of another which stood in at least as much need of chastenment. If his love-affairs stopped short of the gratification of the senses, they involved a perpetual fondling and caressing of those effeminate sensibilities of his into that condition of hyper-aesthesia which, though Sterne regarded it as the strength, was in reality the weakness, of his art.

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

But before we finally cross the line which separates the life of the obscure country parson from the life of the

famous author, a word or two must be said of that piece of writing which was alluded to a few pages back as the only known exception to the generally "professional" character of all Sterne's compositions of the Pre-Shandian era. This was a piece in the allegoric-satirical style, which, though not very remarkable in itself, may not improbably have helped to determine its author's thoughts in the direction of more elaborate literary efforts. In the year 1758 a dispute had arisen between a certain Dr. Topham, an ecclesiastical lawyer in large local practice, and Dr. Fountayne, the then Dean of York. This dispute had originated in an attempt on the part of the learned civilian, who appears to have been a pluralist of an exceptionally insatiable order, to obtain the reversion of one of his numerous offices for his son, alleging a promise made to him on that behalf by the Archbishop. This promise, which had in fact been given, was legally impossible of performance, and upon the failure of his attempt the disappointed Topham turned upon the Dean, and maintained that by *him* at any rate he had been promised another place of the value of five guineas per annum, and appropriately known as the "Commissaryship of Pickering and Pocklington." This the Dean denied, and thereupon Dr. Topham fired off a pamphlet setting forth the circumstances of the alleged promise, and protesting against the wrong inflicted upon him by its non-performance. At this point Sterne came to Dr. Fountayne's assistance with a sarcastic apologue entitled the "History of a good warm Watchcoat," which had "hung up many years in the parish vestry," and showing how this garment had so excited the cupidity of Trim, the sexton, that "nothing would serve him but he must take it home, to have it converted into a warm under petticoat for his wife and a jerkin for himself against the winter." The

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

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

## CHAPTER IV.

TRISTRAM SHANDY. VOL. I. AND II.

(1759—1760.)

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

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

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

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

with all sorts of out-of-the-way learning constantly tickling his comic sense by its very uselessness; he relished more keenly than any man the solemn futilities of mediæval doctors, and the pedantic indecencies of casuist fathers; and along with all these temptations to an enterprise of the kind upon which he entered, he had been experiencing a steady relaxation of deterrent restraints. He had fallen out with his uncle some years since,<sup>2</sup> and the quarrel had freed him from at least one influence making for clerical propriety of behaviour. His incorrigible levities had probably lost him the countenance of most of his more serious acquaintances; his satirical humour had as probably gained him personal enemies not a few, and it may be that he had gradually contracted something of that "naughty-boy" temper, as we may call it, for which the deliberate and ostentatious repetition of offences has an inexplicable charm. It seems clear, too, that, growth for growth with this spirit of bravado, there had sprung up—in somewhat incongruous companionship, perhaps—a certain sense of wrong. Along with the impulse to give an additional shock to the prejudices he had already offended, Sterne felt impelled to vindicate what he considered the genuine moral worth underlying the indiscretions of the offender. What, then, could better suit him than to compose a novel in which he might give full play to his simious humour, startle more hideously than ever his straiter-laced neighbours, defiantly defend his own character, and caricature

<sup>2</sup> He himself indeed makes a particular point of this in explaining his literary venture. "Now for your desire," he writes to a correspondent in 1759, "of knowing the reason of my turning author? why truly I am tired of employing my brains for other people's advantage. 'Tis a foolish sacrifice I have made for some years for an ungrateful person."—*Letters*, i. 82.



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

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

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

simple-minded soldier; and it was by this curious and half-accidental process that there came to be added to the gallery of English fiction one of the most perfect and delightful portraits that it possesses.

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

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

“*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*” I declare I have considered the wisdom and foundation of it over and over again as dispassionately and charitably as a good Christian can, and after all I can find nothing in it, or make more of it than a non-

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

And, having given this humorous twist to his argument, he glides off into extenuatory matter. He had not even, he protests, made as much as a surgical incision into his victim (Dr. Richard Mead, the friend of Bentley and of Newton, and a physician and physiologist of high repute in his day); he had but just scratched him, and that scarce skin-deep. As to the "droll foible" of Dr. Mead,

which he had made merry with, "it was not first reported (even to the few who can understand the hint) by me, but known before by every chambermaid and footman within the hills of mortality"—a somewhat daring assertion, one would imagine, considering what the droll foible was; and Dr. Mead, continues Sterne, great man as he was, had, after all, not fared worse than "a man of twice his wisdom,"—to wit Solomon, of whom the same remark had been made, that "they were both great men, and like all mortal men had each their ruling passion."

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

The other matter of offence to Sterne's Yorkshire readers was of a much more elaborate kind. In the person of Dr. Slop, the grotesque man-midwife, who was to have assisted, but missed assisting at Tristram's entry into the world, the good people of York were not slow to recognize the physical peculiarities and professional antecedents of Dr. Burton, the local accoucheur, whom Archdeacon Sterne had arrested as a Jacobite. That the portrait was

faithful to anything but the external traits of the original, or was intended to reproduce anything more than these, Sterne afterwards denied; and we have certainly no ground for thinking that Burton had invited ridicule on any other than the somewhat unworthy ground of the curious ugliness of his face and figure. It is most unlikely that his success as a practitioner in a branch of the medical art in which imposture is the most easily detected, could have been earned by mere quackery; and he seems, moreover, to have been a man of learning in more kinds than one. The probability is that the worst that could be alleged against him was a tendency to scientific pedantry in his published writings, which was pretty sure to tickle the fancy of Mr. Sterne. Unscrupulously, however, as he was caricatured, the sensation which appears to have been excited in the county by the burlesque portrait could hardly have been due to any strong public sympathy with the involuntary sitter. Dr. Burton seems, as a suspected Jacobite, to have been no special favourite with the Yorkshire squirearchy in general, but rather the reverse thereof. Ucalegon, however, does not need to be popular to arouse his neighbour's interest in his misfortunes; and the caricature of Burton was doubtless resented on the *proximus ardet* principle by many who feared that their turn was coming next.

To all the complaints and protests which reached him on the subject, Sterne would in any case probably have been indifferent; but he was soon to receive encouragement which would have more than repaid a man of his temper for twice the number of rebukes. For London cared nothing for Yorkshire susceptibilities and Yorkshire fears. Provincial notables might be libelled, and their friends might go in fear of similar treatment, but all that

was nothing to "the town," and *Tristram Shandy* had taken the town by storm. We gather from a passage in the letter above quoted that as early as January 30 the book had "gained the very favourable opinion" of Mr. Garrick, afterwards to become the author's intimate friend; and it is certain that by the time of Sterne's arrival in London, in March, 1760, *Tristram Shandy* had become the rage.

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

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



Yet, though the book as one thus summarizes it, may appear a mere farrago of digressions, it nevertheless, after its peculiar fashion, advances. Such definite purpose as underlies the tricks and grimaces of its author is by degrees accomplished; and before we reach the end of the first volume, the highly humorous if extravagantly idealized figure of Mr. Shandy takes bodily shape and consistency before our eyes. It is a mistake, I think, of Sir Walter Scott's to regard the portrait of this eccentric philosopher as intended for a satire upon perverted and deranged erudition—as the study of a man “whom too much and too miscellaneous learning had brought within a step or two of madness.” Sterne's conception seems to me a little more subtle and less commonplace than that. Mr. Shandy, I imagine, is designed to personify not “crack-brained learning” so much as “theory run mad.” He is possessed by a sort of Demon of the Deductive, ever impelling him to push his premises to new conclusions without ever allowing him time to compare them with the facts. No doubt we are meant to regard him as a learned man; but his son gives us to understand distinctly and very early in the book that his crotchets were by no means those of a weak receptive mind, overladen with more knowledge than it could digest, but rather those of an over-active intelligence, far more deeply and constantly concerned with its own processes than with the thoughts of others. Tristram, indeed, dwells pointedly on the fact that his father's dialectical skill was not the result of training, and that he owed nothing to the logic of the schools. “He was certainly,” says his son, “irresistible both in his orations and disputations,” but that was because “he was born an orator” (*ῥητοδιδασκάλος*). Persuasion hung upon his lips, and the elements of logic

and rhetoric were so blended in him, and withal he had so shrewd a guess at the weaknesses and passions of his respondent that nature might have stood up and said, "This man is eloquent. And yet," continues the filial panegyric,—

He had never read Cicero nor Quintilian de Oratore, nor Aristotle nor Longinus among the ancients, nor Voemius, nor Skioppius, nor Ramus nor Farnaby among the moderns: and what is more astonishing he had never in his whole life the least light or spark of subtilty struck into his mind by one single lecture upon Crackenthorpe or Burgersdicius or any Dutch commentator: he knew not so much as in what the difference of an argument *ad ignorantiam* and an argument *ad hominem* consisted; and when he went up along with me to enter my name at Jesus College, in \* \* \* \*, it was a matter of just wonder with my worthy tutor and two or three fellows of that learned society that a man who knew not so much as the names of his tools should be able to work after that fashion with them.

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

Among the crotchets of this born dialectician was a theory as to the importance of Christian names in determining the future behaviour and destiny of the children to whom they are given; and whatever admixture of jest there might have been in some of his other fancies, in this his son affirms he was absolutely serious. He solemnly maintained the opinion "that there was a strange kind of magic bias which good or bad

names, as he called them, irresistibly impressed upon our character and conduct." How many Cæsars and Pompeys, he would say, by mere inspiration of their names have been rendered worthy of them. And how many, he would add, are there who might have done exceeding well in the world had not their characters and spirits been totally depressed and Nicodemus'd into nothing? He was astonished at parents failing to perceive that "when once a vile name was wrongfully or injudiciously given, 'twas not like a case of a man's character, which when wronged might afterwards be cleared; and possibly some time or other, if not in the man's life, at least after his death, be somehow or other set to rights with the world." This name-giving injury, he would say, "could never be undone; nay, he doubted whether an Act of Parliament could reach it; he knew, as well as you, that the Legislature assumed a power over surnames; but for very strong reasons, which he could give, it had never yet ventured, he would say, to go a step further."

With all this extravagance, however, there was combined an admirable affectation of sobriety. Mr. Shandy would have us believe that he was no blind slave to his theory. He was quite willing to admit the existence of names, which could not affect the character either for good or evil—Jack, Dick, and Tom, for instance; and such the philosopher styled "neutral names," affirming of them "without a satire, that there had been as many knaves and fools at least as wise and good men since the world began, who had indifferently borne them, so that like equal forces acting against each other in contrary directions, he thought they mutually destroyed each others effects; for which reason he would often declare

he would not give a cherrystone to choose among them. Bob, which was my brother's name, was another of these neutral kinds of Christian names which operated very little either way; and as my father happened to be at Epsom when it was given him, he would oftentimes thank heaven it was no worse." Forewarned of this peculiarity of Mr. Shandy's, the reader is, of course, prepared to hear that of all the names in the universe the philosopher had the most unconquerable aversion for Tristram, "the lowest and most contemptible opinion of it of anything in the world." He would break off in the midst of one of his frequent disputes on the subject of names, and "in a spirited epiphonema, or rather erotesis," demand of his antagonist "whether he would take upon him to say he had ever remembered, whether he had ever read, or whether he had ever heard tell of a man called Tristram performing anything great or worth recording. No, he would say. Tristram! the thing is impossible." It only remained that he should have published a book in defence of the belief, and sure enough "in the year sixteen," two years before the birth of his second son, "he was at the pains of writing an expresse dissertation simply upon the word Tristram, showing the world with great candour and modesty the grounds of his great abhorrence to the name." And with this idea Sterne continues to amuse himself at intervals till the end of the chapter.

That he does not so persistently amuse the reader it is, of course, scarcely necessary to say. The jest has not substance enough—few of Sterne's jests have—to stand the process of continual attrition to which he subjects it. But the mere historic gravity with which the various turns of this monomania are recorded—to say nothing of the seldom failing charm of the easy gossiping

style—prevent the thing from ever becoming utterly tiresome. On the whole, however, one begins to grow impatient for more of the same sort as the three admirable chapters on the Rev. Mr. Yorick, and are not sorry to get to the opening of the second volume with its half-tender, half-humorous, and wholly delightful account of Uncle Toby's difficulties in describing the siege operations before Namur, and of the happy chance by which these difficulties made him ultimately the fortunate possessor of a "hobby."

Throughout this volume there are manifest signs of Sterne's unceasing interest in his own creations, and of his increasing consciousness of creative power. Captain Toby Shandy is but just lightly sketched-in in the first volume, while Corporal Trim has not made his appearance on the scene at all; but before the end of the second we know both of them thoroughly within and without. Indeed, one might almost say that in the first half-dozen chapters which so excellently recount the origin of the corporal's fortification scheme, and the wounded officer's delighted acceptance of it, every trait in the simple characters—alike yet so different in their simplicity—of master and of man becomes definitely fixed in the reader's mind. And the total difference between the second and the first volume in point of fulness, variety, and colour is most marked. The artist, the inventor, the master of dialogue, the comic dramatist in fact as distinct from the humorous essayist, would almost seem to have started into being as we pass from the one volume to the other. There is nothing in the drolleries of the first volume—in the broad jests upon Mr. Shandy's crotchets, or even in the subtler humour of the intellectual collision between these crotchets and his brother's plain sense—to indicate the kind of power displayed in that

remarkable colloquy à quatre, which begins with the arrival of Dr. Slop and ends with Corporal Trim's recital of the Sermon on Conscience. Wit, humour, irony, quaint learning, shrewd judgment of men and things, of these Sterne had displayed abundance already ; but it is not in the earlier but in the later half of the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy* that we first become conscious that he is something more than the possessor of all these things : that he is gifted with the genius of creation and has sent forth new beings into that world of immortal shadows which to many of us is more real than our own.

## CHAPTER V.

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

(1760—1762.)

STERNE alighted from the York mail just as Byron "awoke one morning," to "find himself famous." Seldom indeed has any lion so suddenly discovered been pursued so eagerly and by such a distinguished crowd of hunters. The chase was remarkable enough to have left a lasting impression on the spectators; for it was several years after (in 1778) that Dr. Johnson, by way of fortifying his very just remark that "any man who has a name or who has the power of pleasing will be generally invited in London," observed gruffly that "the man Sterne," he was told, "had had engagements for three months." And truly it would appear from abundant evidence that "the man Sterne" gained such a social triumph as might well have turned a stronger head than his. Within twenty-four hours after his arrival, his lodgings in Pall Mall were besieged by a crowd of fashionable visitors; and in a few weeks he had probably made the acquaintance of "everybody who was anybody" in the London society of that day.

How thoroughly he relished the delights of celebrity is

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

with caricature in the next volume of the novel, under the guise of the hero's tutor)—“this vile story, I say, though I then saw both how and where it wounded, I felt little from it at first, or, to speak more honestly (though it ruins my simile), I felt a great deal of pain from it, but affected an air, usual in such accidents, of feeling less than I had.” And he goes on to repudiate, it will be observed, not so much the moral offence of corruption, in receiving money to spare Warburton, as the intellectual solecism of selecting him for ridicule. “What the devil!” he exclaims, “is there no one learned blockhead throughout the schools of misapplied science in the Christian world to make a tutor of for my Tristram—are we so run out of stock that there is no one lumber-headed, muddle-headed, mortar-headed, pudding-head chap among our doctors? . . . but I must disable my judgment by choosing a Warburton.” Later on, in a letter to his friend, Mr. Croft, at Stillington, whom the scandal had reached through a “society journal” of the time, he asks whether people would suppose he would be “such a fool as to fall foul of Dr. Warburton, my best friend, by representing him so weak a man; or by telling such a lie of him as his giving me a purse to buy off the tutorship of Tristram—or that I should be fool enough to own that I had taken a purse for that purpose.” It will be remarked that Sterne does not here deny having received a purse from Warburton, but only his having received it by way of black-mail: and the most mysterious part of the affair is that Sterne did actually receive the strange present of a “purse of gold” from Warburton (whom at that time he did not know nor had ever seen); and that he admits as much in one of his letters to Miss Fourmantelle. “I had a purse of guineas

given me yesterday by a bishop," he writes triumphantly, but without volunteering any explanation of this extraordinary gift. Sterne's letter to Garrick was forwarded, it would seem, to Warburton; and the Bishop thanks Garrick for having procured for him "the confutation of an impertinent story the first moment I heard of it." This, however, can hardly count for much. If Warburton had really wished Sterne to abstain from caricaturing him, he would be as anxious—and for much the same reasons—to conceal the fact as to suppress the caricature. He would naturally have the disclosure of it reported to Sterne for formal contradiction, as in fulfilment of a virtual term in the bargain between them. The epithet of "irrevocable scoundrel" which he afterwards applied to Sterne, is of less importance, as proceeding from Warburton, than it would have been had it come from any one not habitually employing Warburton's peculiar vocabulary; but it at least argues no very cordial feeling on the Bishop's side. And, on the whole, one regrets to feel, as I must honestly confess that I do feel, far less confident of the groundlessness of this rather unpleasant story than could be wished. It is impossible to forget, however, that while the ethics of this matter were undoubtedly less strict in those days than they are—or, at any rate, are recognized as being—in our own, there is nothing in Sterne's character to make us suppose him to have been at all in advance of the morality of his time.

The incumbent-designate did not go down at once to take possession of his temporalities. His London triumph had not yet run its course. The first edition of Vols. I and II. of *Tristram Shandy* was exhausted in some three months. In April, Dodsley brought out a second; and, concurrently with the advertisement of its issue, there

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

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

There is clearly nothing particularly striking in all

that, even conveyed as it is in Sterne's effective, if loose and careless, style; and it is no unfair sample of the whole. The calculation, however, of the author and his shrewd publisher was that, whatever the intrinsic merits or demerits of these sermons, they would "take" on the strength of the author's name; nor, it would seem, was their calculation disappointed. The edition of this series of sermons now lying before me is numbered the sixth, and its date is 1764; which represents a demand for a new edition every nine months or so, over a space of four years. They may, perhaps, have succeeded, too, in partially reconciling a certain serious-minded portion of the public to the author. Sterne evidently hoped that they might; for we find him sending a copy to Warburton, in the month of June, immediately after the publication of the book, and receiving in return a letter of courteous thanks, and full of excellent advice as to the expediency of avoiding scandal by too hazardous a style of writing in future. Sterne, in reply, protests that he would "willingly give no offence to mortal by anything which could look like the least violation of either decency or good manners;" but—and it is an important "but"—he cannot promise to "mutilate everything" in *Tristram* "down to the prudish humour of every particular" (individual), though he will do his best; but, in any case, "laugh, my Lord, I will, and as loudly as I can." And laugh he did, and in such Rabelaisian fashion that the Bishop (somewhat inconsistently for a critic who had welcomed Sterne on the appearance of the first two volumes expressly as the "English Rabelais") remarked of him afterwards with characteristic vigour in a letter to a friend that he fears the fellow is an "irrevocable scoundrel."

The volumes, however, which earned "the fellow" this Episcopal benediction were not given to the world till the next year. At the end of May or beginning of June, 1760, Sterne went to his new home at Coxwold, and his letters soon begin to show him to us at work upon further records of Mr. Shandy's philosophical theory-spinning and the simpler pursuits of his excellent brother. It is probable that this year, 1760, was on the whole the happiest year of Sterne's life. His health, though always feeble, had not yet finally given way; and though the "vile cough" which was to bring him more than once to death's door, and at last to force it open, was already troubling him, he had that within him which made it easy to bear up against all such physical ills. His spirits, in fact, were at their highest. His worldly affairs were going at least as smoothly as they ever went. He was basking in that sunshine of fame which was so delightful to a temperament differing from that of the average Englishman, as does the physique of the Southern races from that of the hardier children of the North; and lastly, he was exulting in a new-born sense of creative power which no doubt made the composition of the earlier volumes of *Tristram* a veritable labour of love.

But the witty division of literary spinners into silk-worms and spiders—those who spin because they are full, and those who do so because they are empty—is not exhaustive. There are human silk-worms who become gradually transformed into spiders—men who begin writing in order to unburden a full imagination, and who, long after that process has been completely performed, continue writing in order to fill an empty belly; and though Sterne did not live long enough to "write himself out," there are certain indications that he would not have



left off writing if and when he felt that this stage of exhaustion had arrived. His artistic impulses were curiously combined with a distinct admixture of the "pot-boiler" spirit; and it was with something of the complacency of an annuitant that he looked forward to giving the public a couple of volumes of *Tristram Shandy* every year as long as they would stand it. In these early days, however, there was no necessity even to discuss the probable period either of the writer's inspiration or of the reader's appetite. At present, the public were as eager to consume more Shandyism as Sterne was ready to produce it: the demand was as active as the supply was easy. By the end of the year Vols. III. and IV. were in the press, and on January 27, 1761, they made their appearance. They had been disposed of in advance to Doddsley for 380*l.*—no bad terms of remuneration in those days; but it is still likely enough that the publisher made a profitable bargain. The new volumes sold freely, and the public laughed at them as heartily as their two predecessors. Their author's vogue in London, whither he went in December, 1760, to superintend publication, was as great during the next spring as it had been in the last. The tide of visitors again set in in all its former force and volume towards the "genteel lodgings." His dinner list was once more full, and he was feasted and flattered by wits, beaux, courtiers, politicians, and titled-lady lion-hunters as sedulously as ever. His letters, especially those to his friends the Crofts, of Stillington, abound, as before, in touches of the same amusing vanity. With how delicious a sense of self-importance must he have written these words, "You made me and my friends very merry with the accounts current at York of my being forbid the Court, but they do not

consider what a considerable person they make of me when they suppose either my going or not going there is a point that ever enters the K.'s head ; and for those about him, I have the honour either to stand so personally well-known to them, or to be so well represented by those of the first rank as to fear no accident of the kind." Amusing, too, is it to note the familiarity, as of an old *habitué* of Ministerial antechambers, with which this country parson discusses the political changes of that interesting year ; though scarcely more amusing perhaps than the solemnity with which his daughter disguises the identity of the new Premier under the title B——e ; and by a similar use of initials attempts to conceal the momentous state secret that the D. of R. had been removed from the place of Groom of the Chambers, and that Sir F. D. had succeeded T. as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Occasionally, however, the interest of his letters changes from personal to public, and we get a glimpse of scenes and personages that have become historical. He was present in the House of Commons at the first grand debate on the German war after the Great Commoner's retirement from office—"the pitched battle," as Sterne calls it, "wherein Mr. P. was to have entered and thrown down the gauntlet" in defence of his military policy. Thus he describes it :—

There never was so full a house—the gallery full to the top—I was there all the day ; when lo ! a political fit of the gout seized the great combatant—he entered not the lists. Beckford got up and begged the House, as he saw not his right honourable friend there, to put off the debate—it could not be done : so Beckford rose up and made a most long, passionate, incoherent speech in defence of the German war, but very severe upon the unfrugal manner it was carried on, in which he addressed him-

self principally to the C[hancellor] of the E[xchequer], and laid him on terribly. . . . Legge answered Beckford very rationally and coolly. Lord N. spoke long. Sir F. D[ashwood] maintained the German war was most pernicious. . . . I & B[arrington] at last got up and spoke half an hour with great plainness and temper, explained many hidden things relating to these accounts in favour of the late K., and told two or three conversations which had passed between the K. and himself relative to these expenses, which cast great honour upon the K.'s character. This was with regard to the money the K. had secretly furnished out of his own pocket to lessen the account of the Hanover-score brought us to discharge. Beckford and Barrington abused all who fought for peace and joined in the cry for it, and Beckford added that the reasons of wishing a peace now were the same as at the peace of Utrecht—that the people behind the curtain could not both maintain the war and their places too, so were for making another sacrifice of the nation to their own interests. After all, the cry for a peace is so general that it will certainly end in one.

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

From the middle of this year, 1761, the scene begins to darken, and from the beginning of the next year onward Sterne's life was little better than a truceless struggle with the disease to which he was destined, prematurely, to succumb. The wretched constitution, which in common with his short-lived brothers and sisters, he had inherited probably from his father, already began to show signs of breaking up. Invalid from the first, it had doubtless been weakened by the hardships of Sterne's early years, and yet further, perhaps, by the excitements and dissipations of his London life; nor was the change from the gaieties of the capital to hard literary labour in a country parsonage calculated to benefit him as much as it might others. Shandy Hall, as he christened his pretty parsonage at Coxwold, and as the house, still standing, is called to this day, soon became irksome to him. The very reaction begotten of unwonted quietude acted on his temperament with a dispiriting rather than a soothing effect. The change from his full and stimulating life in London to the dull round of clerical duties in a Yorkshire village, might well have been depressing to a mind better balanced and ballasted than his. To him, with his light pleasure-loving nature, it was as the return of the school-boy from pantomimes and pony-riding to the more sober delights of Dr. Swishtail's; and, in a letter to Hall Stevenson, Sterne reveals his feelings with all the juvenile frankness of one of the doctor's pupils.

I rejoice you are in London, rest you there in peace; here 'tis the devil. You was a good prophet. I wish myself back again, as you told me I should, but not because a thin, death-doing, pestiferous north-east wind blows in a line directly from Crazy Castle turret fresh upon me in this cuckoldly retreat (for I value the north-east wind and all its powers not a straw), but

the transition from rapid motion to absolute rest was too violent. I should have walked about the streets of York ten days, as a proper medium to have passed through before I entered upon my rest; I stayed but a moment, and I have been here but a few, to satisfy me. I have not managed my miseries like a wise man, and if God for my consolation had not poured forth the spirit of Shandyism unto me, which will not suffer me to think two moments upon any grave subject, I would else just now lay down and die.

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

Apart moreover from Sterne's regrets of London, his country home was becoming from other causes a less pleasant place of abode. His relations with his wife were getting less and less cordial every year. With a perversity sometimes noticeable in the wives of distinguished men, Mrs. Sterne had failed to accept with enthusiasm the rôle of distant and humbly admiring spectator of her brilliant husband's triumphs. Accept it of course she did, being unable, indeed, to help herself; but it is clear that when Sterne returned home after one of his six months' revels in the gaieties of London, his wife, who had been vegetating the while in the retirement of Yorkshire, was not in the habit of welcoming him with effusion. Perceiving so clearly that her husband preferred the world's society to hers, she naturally, perhaps, refused to disguise her preference of her own society to his. Their estrangement, in short, had grown apace, and had already brought them to that stage of mutual indifference which is at once so

comfortable and so hopeless—secure alike against the risk of “scenes” and the hope of reconciliation, shut fast in its exemption from *amantium ira* against all possibility of *redintegratio amoris*. To such perfection indeed had the feeling been cultivated on both sides, that Sterne in the letter above quoted can write of his conjugal relations in this philosophic strain:—

As to matrimony I should be a beast to rail at it, for my wife is easy, but the world is not, and had I stayed from her a second longer it would have been a burning shame—else she declares herself happier without me. But not in anger is this declaration made [the most fatal point, of course, about it], but in pure, sober, good sense, built on sound experience. She hopes you will be able to strike a bargain for me before this twelve-month to lead a bear round Europe, and from this hope from you I verily believe it is that you are so high in her favour at present. She swears you are a fellow of wit, though humorous;<sup>2</sup> a funny, jolly soul, though somewhat splenetic, and (bating the love of women) as honest as gold. How do you like the simile?

There is, perhaps, a touch of affected cynicism in the suggestion that Mrs. Sterne's liking for one of her husband's friends was wholly based upon the expectation that he would rid her of her husband; but mutual indifference must, it is clear, have reached a pretty advanced stage before such a remark could, even half in jest, be possible. And with one more longing lingering look at the scenes which he had quitted for a lot like that

<sup>2</sup> It is curious to note as a point in the chronology of language how exclusive is Sterne's employment of the words “humour,” “humourist,” in their older sense of “whimsicality,” “an eccentric.” The later change in its meaning gives to the word “though” in the above passage an almost comic effect.

of the Duke of Buckingham's dog, upon whom his master pronounced the maledictory wish that "he were married and lived in the country," this characteristic letter concludes :—

Oh, Lord ! now are you going to Ranelagh to-night, and I am sitting sorrowful as the prophet was when the voice cried out to him and said, "What do'st thou here, Elijah ?" 'Tis well that the spirit does not make the same at Coxwold, for unless for the few sheep left me to take care of in the wilderness, I might as well, nay better, be at Mecca. When we find we can, by a shifting of places, run away from ourselves, what think you of a jaunt there before we finally pay a visit to the Vale of Jehoshaphat. As ill a fame as we have, I trust I shall one day or other see you face to face, so tell the two colonels if they love good company to live righteously and soberly *as you do*, and then they will have no doubts or dangers within or without them. Present my best and warmest wishes to them, and advise the eldest to prop up his spirits, and get a rich dowager before the conclusion of the peace. Why will not the advice suit both, *par nobis fratrum* ?

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

The allusions to foreign travel in this letter were made with something more than a jesting intent. Sterne had already begun to be seriously alarmed, and not without reason, about the condition of his health. He shrank from facing another English winter, and meditated a southward flight so soon as he should have finished his fifth and sixth volumes, and seen them safe in the printer's

hands. His publisher he had changed, for what reason is not known, and the firm of Becket and De Hondt had taken the place of Dodsley. Sterne hoped by the end of the year to be free to depart from England, and already he had made all arrangements with his ecclesiastical superiors for the necessary leave of absence. He seems to have been treated with all consideration in the matter. His archbishop, on being applied to, at once excused him from parochial work for a year, and promised, if it should be necessary, to double that term. Fortified with this permission, Sterne bade farewell to his wife and daughter, and betook himself to London with his now completed volumes, at the setting in of the winter. On the 21st of December they made their appearance, and in about three weeks from that date their author left England with the intention of wintering in the South of France. There were difficulties, however, of more kinds than one which had first to be faced—a pecuniary difficulty which Garrick met by a loan of 20*l.*, and a political difficulty for the removal of which Sterne had to employ the good offices of new acquaintance later on. He reached Paris about the 17th of January, 1762, and there met with a reception which interposed, as might have been expected, the most effectual of obstacles to his further progress southward. He was received in Paris with open arms, and stepped at once within the charmed circle of the philosophic salons. Again was the old intoxicating cup presented to his lips—this time, too, with more dexterous than English hands—and again did he drink deeply of it. “My head is turned,” he writes to Garrick, “with what I see, and the unexpected honour I have met with here. *Tristram* was almost as much known here as in London, at least among your men of condition and learning, and



has got me introduced into so many circles (*tis comme à Londres*) I have just now a fortnight's dinners and suppers on my hands." We may venture to doubt whether French politeness had not been in one respect taken somewhat too seriously by the flattered Englishman, and whether it was much more than the name and general reputation of *Tristram*, which was "almost as much known" in Paris as in London. The dinners and suppers, however, were at any rate no figures of speech, but very liberal entertainments, at which Sterne appears to have disported himself with all his usual unclerical *abandon*. "I Shandy it away," he writes in his boyish fashion to Garrick, "fifty times more than I was ever wont, talk more nonsense than ever you heard me talk in all your days, and to all sorts of people. 'Qui le diable est cet homme-là?' said Choiseul, t'other day, 'ce Chevalier Shandy!'" [We might be listening to one of Thackeray's Irish heroes.] "You'll think me as vain as a devil was I to tell you the rest of the dialogue." But there were distinguished Frenchmen who were ready to render to the English author more important services than that of offering him hospitality and flattery. Peace had not been formally concluded between France and England, and the passport with which Sterne had been graciously furnished by Pitt was not of force enough to dispense him from making special application to the French Government for permission to remain in the country. In this request he was influentially backed. "My application," he writes, "to the Count de Choiseul goes on swimmingly, for not only M. Palletière (who by-the-bye sends ten thousand civilities to you and Mrs. G.) has undertaken my affair, but the Count de Limbourg. The Baron d'Holbach has offered any security for the inoffensiveness of my behaviour

in France—"tis more, you rogue ! than you will do." And then the orthodox, or professedly orthodox English divine, goes on to describe the character and habits of his strange new friend. "This Baron is one of the most learned noblemen here, the great protector of wits and of the savans who are no wits, keeps open house three days a week—his house is now as yours was to me, my own—he lives at great expense." Equally communicative is he as to his other great acquaintances. Among these were the Count de Bissie, whom by an "odd incident" (as it seemed to his unsuspecting vanity) "I found reading *Tristram* when I was introduced to him, which I was," he adds (without perceiving the connexion between this fact and the "incident"), "at his desire;" Mr. Fox and Mr. Macartney (afterwards the Lord Macartney of Chinese celebrity); and the Duke of Orleans (not yet *Égalité*) himself, "who has suffered my portrait to be added to the number of some odd men in his collection, and has had it taken most expressively at full length by a gentleman who lives with him." Nor was it only in the delights of society that Sterne was now revelling. He was passionately fond of the theatre, and his letters to Garrick are full of eager criticism of the great French performers, intermingled with flatteries, sometimes rather full-bodied than delicate, of their famous English rival. Of Clairon, in *Iphigénie*, he says "she is extremely great. Would to God you had one or two like her. What a luxury to see you with one of such power in the same interesting scene ! but 'tis too much." Again he writes : "The French comedy I seldom visit ; they act scarce anything but tragedies ; and the Clairon is great, and Mdlle. Dumesnil in some parts still greater than her. Yet I cannot bear preaching—I fancy I got a surfeit of it in my younger days." And in a later letter :

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

And while on this subject of the stage, let us pause for a moment to glance at an incident which connects Sterne with one of the most famous of his French contemporaries:—He has been asked “by a lady of talent”—he tells Garrick, “to read a tragedy, and conjecture if it would do for you? ’Tis from the plan of Diderot; and possibly half a translation of it: *The Natural Son, or the Triumph of Virtue*, in five Acts. It has too much sentiment in it (at least for me); the speeches too long, and savour too much of preaching. This may be a second reason, it is not to my taste—’tis all love, love, love, throughout, without much separation in the characters. So I fear it would not do for your stage, and perhaps for the very reason which recommends it to a French one.” It is curious to see the “adaptator cerebrosuga” at work in those days as in these; though not, in this instance, as it

seems, with as successful results. *The Natural Son*, or *the Triumph of Virtue*, is not known to have reached either English readers or English theatrical audiences. The French original, as we know, fared scarcely better. "It was not until 1771," says Diderot's latest English biographer, "that the directors of the French Comedy could be induced to place *Le Fils Naturel* on the stage. The actors detested their task, and, as we can well believe, went sulkily through parts, which they had not taken the trouble to master. The public felt as little interest in the piece as the actors had done, and after one or two representations, it was put aside."<sup>3</sup>

Another, and it is to be guessed a too congenial acquaintance, formed by Sterne in Paris, was that of Crébillon; and with him he concluded "a convention," unedifying enough whether in jest or earnest: "As soon as I get to Toulouse he has agreed to write me an expostulatory letter upon the indecorums of *T. Shandy*, which is to be answered by recrimination upon the liberties in his own works. These are to be printed together, Crébillon against Sterne, Sterne against Crébillon, —the copy to be sold, and the money equally divided. This is good Swiss-policy," he adds; and the idea (which was never carried out) had certainly the merit of ingenuity, if no other.

The words "as soon as I get to Toulouse," in a letter written from Paris on the 10th of April, might well have reminded Sterne of the strange way in which he had carried out his intention of "wintering in the south." He insists, however, upon the curative effects of his winter of gaiety in Paris. "I am recovered greatly," he says; "and

<sup>3</sup> Morley: "Diderot and the Encyclopedists," ii. 305.

if I could spend one whole winter at Toulouse, I should be fortified in my inner man beyond all danger of relapsing." There was another too for whom this change of climate had become imperatively necessary. For three winters past his daughter Lydia, now fourteen years old, had been suffering severely from asthma, and needed to try "the last remedy of a warmer and softer air." Her father therefore was about to solicit passports for his wife and daughter, with a view to their joining him at once in Paris, whence, after a month's stay, they were to depart together for the south. This application for passports he intended, he said, to make "this week:" and it would seem that the intencion was carried out: but, for reasons explained in a letter which Mr. Fitzgerald was the first to publish, it was not till the middle of the next month that he was able to make preparation for their joining him. From this letter—written to his Archbishop, to request an extension of his leave—we learn that while applying for the passports he was attacked with a fever, "which has ended the worst way it could for me, in a *défluxion* (de) *poitrine*, as the French physicians call it. It is generally fatal to weak lungs, so that I have lost in ten days all I have gained since I came here: and from a relaxation of my lungs have lost my voice entirely, that 'twill be much if I ever quite recover it. This evil sends me directly to Toulouse, for which I set out from this place directly my family arrives." Evidently there was no time to be lost, and a week after the date of this letter we find him in communication with Mrs. and Miss Sterne, and making arrangements for what was, in those days, a somewhat formidable undertaking—the journey of two ladies from the north of England to the centre of France. The correspondence which ensued may be said to give us the

last pleasant glimpse of Sterne's relations with his wife. One can hardly help suspecting, of course, that it was his solicitude for the safety and comfort of his much-loved daughter that mainly inspired the affectionate anxiety which pervades these letters to Mrs. Sterne; but their writer is, at the very least, entitled to credit for allowing no difference of tone to reveal itself in the terms in which he speaks of wife and child. And whichever of the two he was mainly thinking of, there is something very engaging in the thoughtful minuteness of his instructions to the two women travellers, the earnestness of his attempts to inspire them with courage for their enterprise, and the sincere fervour of his many commendations of them to the Divine keeping. The mixture of "canny" counsel and pious invocation has frequently a droll effect: as when the advice to "give the custom-house officers what I told you, and at Calais more, if you have much Scotch snuff;" and "to drink small Rhenish to keep you cool, that is if you like it," is rounded off by the ejaculation "So God in Heaven prosper and go along with you!" Letter after letter did he send them, full of such reminders as that "they have bad pins and vile needles here," that it would be advisable to bring with them a strong bottle-screw, and a good stout copper-teakettle; till at last, in the final words of preparation, his language assumes something of the solemnity of a general addressing his army on the eve of a well-nigh desperate enterprise: "Pluck up your spirits,—trust in God, in me, and yourselves; with this, was you put to it, you would encounter all these difficulties ten times told. Write instantly, and tell me you triumph over all fears—tell me Lydia is better, and a help-mate to you. You say she grows like me: let her show me she does so in her

contempt of small dangers, and fighting against the apprehensions of them, which is better still."

At last this anxiously awaited journey was taken; and, on Thursday, July 7, Mrs. Sterne and her daughter arrived in Paris. Their stay there was not long—not much extended, probably, beyond the proposed week. For Sterne's health had, some ten days before the arrival of his family, again given him warning to depart quickly. He had but a few weeks recovered from the fever of which he spoke in his letter to the Archbishop, when he again broke a blood-vessel in his lungs. It happened in the night, and "finding in the morning that I was likely to bleed to death, I sent immediately," he says, in a sentence which quaintly brings out the paradox of contemporary medical treatment, "for a surgeon to bleed me at both arms. This saved me,"—i.e. did not kill me,—“and, with lying speechless three days, I recovered upon my back in bed: the breach healed, and in a week after I got out.” But the weakness which ensued, and the subsequent “hurrying about,” no doubt as cicerone of Parisian sights to his wife and daughter, “made me think it high time to haste to Toulouse.” Accordingly, about the 20th of the month, and “in the midst of such heats that the oldest Frenchman never remembers the like,” the party set off by way of Lyons and Montpellier for their Pyrenean destination. Their journey seems to have been a journey of many mischances, extraordinary discomfort, and incredible length: and it is not till the second week in August that we again take up the broken thread of his correspondence. Writing to Mr. Foley, his banker in Paris, on the 14th of that month, he speaks of its having taken him three weeks to reach Toulouse; and adds, that “in our journey we suffered so much from the

heats, it gives me pain to remember it. I never saw a cloud from Paris to Nîmes half as broad as at twenty-four sols piece. Good God, we were toasted, roasted, grilled, stewed, carbonaded, on one side or other, all the way: and being all done through (*assez cuits*) in the day, we were eat up at night by bugs and other unswept-out vermin, the legal inhabitants, if length of possession give right, at every inn on the way." A few miles from Beaucaire he broke a hind wheel of his carriage, and was obliged in consequence "to sit five hours on a gravelly road without one drop of water, or possibility of getting any;" and here, to mend the matter, he was cursed with "two dough-hearted fools" for postillions, who "fell a-crying 'nothing was to be done!'" and could only be recalled to a worthier and more helpful mood by Sterne's "pulling off his coat and waistcoat," and "threatening to thrash them both within an inch of their lives."

The longest journey, however, must come to an end: and the party found much to console them at Toulouse for the miseries of travel. They were fortunate enough to secure one of those large old comfortable houses which were, and, here and there, perhaps, still are to be hired on the outskirts of provincial towns, at a rent which would now be thought absurdly small; and Sterne writes in terms of high complacency of his temporary abode. "Excellent," "well furnished," "elegant beyond anything I ever looked for," are some of the expressions of praise which it draws from him: he observes with pride that the "very great *salle à compagnie* is as large as Baron d'Holbach's:" and he records with great satisfaction, as well he might, that for the use of this and of a country house two miles out of town, "besides the enjoyment of gardens, which the landlord engaged to



keep in order," he was to pay no more than thirty pounds a year. "All things," he adds, "are cheap in proportion : so we shall live here for very very little."

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

## CHAPTER VI

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

(1762—1765.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"*Tecum habita et noris quam sit tibi curta supplex;*"

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

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

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



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

His short stay in Paris was marked by two incidents, —trifling in themselves, but too characteristic of the man to be omitted. Lord Hertford, the British ambassador, had just taken a magnificent hotel in Paris, and Sterne was asked to preach the first sermon in its chapel. The message was brought him, he writes, "when I was

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

"David was disposed to make a little merry with the parson, and in return the parson was equally disposed to make a little merry with the infidel. We laughed at one another, and the company laughed with us both." It would be absurd, of course, to identify Sterne's latitudinarian *bonhomie* with the higher order of tolerance; but many a more confirmed and notorious Gallio than the clerical humourist would have assumed prudish airs of orthodoxy in such a presence, and the incident, if it does not raise one's estimate of Sterne's dignity, displays him to us as laudably free from hypocrisy.

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

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

these affairs. Therefore, as a man may do worse things, the plain English of all which is, that I am going to leave a few poor sheep in the wilderness for fourteen days, and from pride and naughtiness of heart to go see what is doing at Scarborough, steadfastly meaning afterwards to lead a new life and strengthen my faith. Now some folks say there is much company there, and some say not; and I believe there is neither the one nor the other, but will be both if the world will have patience for a month or so." Of his work he has not much to say: "I go on not rapidly but well enough with my Uncle Toby's amours. There is no sitting and cudgelling one's brains whilst the sun shines bright. 'Twill be all over in six or seven weeks; and there are dismal weeks enow after to endure suffocation by a brimstone fireside." He was anxious that his boon companion should join him at Scarborough; but that additional pleasure was denied him, and he had to content himself with the usual gay society of the place. Three weeks, it seems, were passed by him in this most doubtfully judicious form of bodily and mental relaxation—weeks which he spent, he afterwards writes, in "drinking the waters, and receiving from them marvellous strength, had I not debilitated it as fast as I got it by playing the good fellow with Lord Granby and Co. too much." By the end of the month he was back again at Coxwold, "returned to my Philosophical Hut to finish *Tristram*, which I calculate will be ready for the world about Christmas, at which time I decamp from hence and fix my head-quarters at London for the winter, unless my cough pushes me forward to your metropolis" (he is writing to Foley, in Paris), "or that I can persuade some *gros milord* to make a trip to you." Again, too, in this letter we get another glimpse

at that thoroughly desentimentalized "domestic interior" which the sentimentalist's household had long presented to the view. Writing to request a remittance of money to Mrs. Sterne at Montauban—a duty which, to do him justice, he seems to have very watchfully observed—Sterne adds his solicitation to Mr. Foley to "do something equally essential to rectify a mistake in the mind of your correspondent there, who, it seems, gave her a hint not long ago 'that she was separated from me for life.' Now as this is not true in the first place, and may fix a disadvantageous impression of her to those she lives amongst, 'twould be unmerciful to let her or my daughter suffer by it. So do be so good as to undeceive him; for in a year or two she purposes (and I expect it with impatience from her) to rejoin me."

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

Shorter in length than any of the preceding instalments, and filled out as it was, even so, by a process of what would now be called "book-making," this issue will yet bear comparison, I think, with the best of its prede-

cessors. Its sketches of travel, though destined to be surpassed in vigour and freedom of draftsmanship, by the *Sentimental Journey*, are yet excellent, and their very obvious want of connexion with the story—if story it can be called—is so little felt, that we almost resent the head-and-ears introduction of Mr. Shandy and his brother, and the corporal, in apparent concession to the popular prejudice in favour of some sort of coherence between the various parts of a narrative. The first seventeen chapters are perhaps as freshly delightful reading as anything in Sterne. They are literally filled and brimming over with the exhilaration of travel: written, or at least prepared for writing, we can clearly see, under the full intoxicant effect which a bewildering succession of new sights and sounds will produce, in a certain measure, upon the coolest of us, and which would set a head like Sterne's in an absolute whirl. The contagion of his high spirits is, however, irresistible; and putting aside all other and more solid qualities in them, these chapters are, for mere fun—for that kind of clever nonsense which only wins by perfect spontaneity, and which so promptly makes ashamed the moment spontaneity fails—unsurpassed by anything of the same kind from the same hand. How strange then that, with so keen an eye for the humorous, so sound and true a judgment in the highest qualities of humour, Sterne should think it possible for any one who has outgrown what may be called the dirty stage of boyhood to smile at the story which begins a few chapters afterwards—that of the Abbess and Novice of the Convent of Andouillets. The adult male person is not so much shocked at the coarseness of this story, as astounded at the bathos of its introduction. It is as though some matchless connoisseur in wine, after having a hundred

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

of outline and translucency of atmosphere : though there, unfortunately, the resemblance ends. Sterne's manner of saying what we now leave unsaid, is as unlike Chaucer's, and as unlike for the worse, as it can possibly be.

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

"Upon what account?" said I.

"Tis upon the part of the king," said the commissary, heaving up his shoulders.

"My good friend," quoth I, "as sure as I am I, and you are you—"

"And who are you?" he said.

"Don't puzzle me," said I. "But it is an indubitable verity," I continued, addressing myself to the commissary, changing



only the form of my asseveration, "that I owe the King of France nothing but my good-will, for he is a very honest man, and I wish him all the health and pastime in the world."

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

"But I don't go by land," said I.

"You may, if you please," replied the commissary.

"Your most obedient servant," said I, making him a low bow.

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

"Sir," said I, collecting myself, "it is not my intension to take post."

"But you may," said he, persisting in his first reply. "You may if you choose."

"And I may take salt to my pickled herring if I choose.<sup>1</sup> But I do not choose."

"But you must pay for it, whether you do or no."

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

"Ay, for the salt," said I, "I know."

"And for the post, too," added he.

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

"C'est tout égal—'tis all one," said he.

"Bon Dieu! What! pay for the way I go and for the way I do not go?"

"C'est tout égal," replied the commissary.

"The devil it is!" said I. "But I will go to ten thousand Bastilles first. O, England! England! thou land of liberty and climate of good-sense! thou tenderest of mothers, and gentlest of nurses!" cried I, kneeling upon one knee as I was beginning my apostrophe—when the director of Madame L. Blanc's conscience coming in at that instant, and seeing a person in black, with a face as pale as ashes, at his devotions, asked if I stood in want of the aids of the church.

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

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

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

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

"Excuse me," said the commissary, "the spirit of the ordinance is this, that if you set out with an intention of running post from Paris to Avignon, &c., you shall not change that intention or mode of travelling without first satisfying the

fermiers for two posts further than the place you repent at; and 'tis founded," continued he, "upon this, that the revenues are not to fall short through your fickleness."

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

And so the peace was made.

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

With the close of this volume the shadowy Tristram disappears altogether from the scene; and even the clearly-sketched figures of Mr. and Mrs. Shandy recede somewhat into the background. The courtship of my uncle Toby forms the whole *motif*, and indeed almost the entire substance of the next volume. Of this famous episode in the novel a great deal has been said and written, and much of the praise bestowed upon it is certainly deserved. The artful coqueries of the fascinating widow, and the gradual capitulation of the captain, are studied with admirable power of humorous insight, and described with infinite grace and skill. But there is perhaps no episode in the novel which brings out what may be called the perversity of Sterne's animalism in a more exasperating way. It is not so much the amount of this element, as the time, place, and manner in which it makes its presence felt. The senses must of course play their part in all love affairs, except those of the angels—or the triangles; and such writers as Byron, for instance, are quite free from the charge of over-spiritualizing their description of the passion. Yet

\* Thackeray: *English Humourists*, vol. x. p. 568, ed. 1879.

one might safely say, that there is far less to repel a healthy mind in the poet's account of the amour of Juan and Haidee than is to be found in many a passage in this volume. It is not merely that one is the poetry and the other the prose of the sexual passion : the distinction goes deeper, and points to a fundamental difference of attitude towards their subject in the two writers' minds.

The success of this instalment of *Tristram Shandy* appears to have been slightly greater than that of the preceding one. Writing from London, where he was once more basking in the sunshine of social popularity, to Garrick, then in Paris, he says (March 16, 1765), "I have had a lucrative campaign here. Shandy sells well," and "I am taxing the public with two more volumes of sermons, which will more than double the gains of Shandy. It goes into the world with a prancing list *de toute la noblesse*, which will bring me in three hundred pounds, exclusive of the sale of the copy." The list was indeed extensive and distinguished enough to justify the curious epithet which he applies to it ; but the cavalcade of noble names continued to "prance" for some considerable time without advancing. Yet he had good reasons, according to his own account, for wishing to push on their publication. His personage-house at Sutton had just been burnt down through the carelessness of one of his curate's household, with a loss to Sterne of some 350*l*. "As soon as I can," he says, "I must rebuild it, but I lack the means at present." Nevertheless, the new sermons continued to hang fire. Again, in April he describes the subscription list as "the most splendid list which ever pranced before a book since subscription came into fashion ;" but though the volumes which it was to usher into the world were then spoken of as about

to be printed "very soon," he has again in July to write of them only as "forthcoming in September, though I fear not in time to bring them with me" to Paris. And as a matter of fact, they do not seem to have made their appearance until after Sterne had quitted England on his second and last Continental journey. The full subscription list may have had the effect of relaxing his energies ; but the subscribers had no reason to complain when, in 1766, the volumes at last appeared.

The reception given to the first batch of sermons which Sterne had published was quite favourable enough to encourage a repetition of the experiment. He was shrewd enough, however, to perceive that on this second occasion a somewhat different sort of article would be required. In the first flush of *Tristram Shandy's* success, and in the first piquancy of the contrast between the grave profession of the writer and the unbounded licence of the book, he could safely reckon on as large and curious a public for *any* sermons whatever from the pen of Mr. Yorick. There was no need that the humourist in his pulpit should at all resemble the humourist at his desk ; or, indeed, that he should be in any way an impressive or commanding figure. The great desire of the world was to know what he *did* resemble in this new and incongruous position. Men wished to see what the queer, aly face looked like over a velvet cushion, in the assurance that the sight would be a strange and interesting one at any rate. Five years afterwards, however, the case was different. The public then had already had one set of sermons, and had discovered that the humorous Mr. Sterne was not a very different man in the pulpit from the dullest and most decorous of his brethren. Such discoveries as these are instructive to make, but not attractive to dwell upon ; and Sterne was

fully alive to the probability that there would be no great demand for a volume of sermons which should only illustrate for the second time the fact that he could be as common-place as his neighbour. He saw that in future the Rev. Mr. Yorick must a little more resemble the author of *Tristram Shandy* and it is not improbable, that from 1760 onwards he composed his parochial sermons with especial attention to this mode of qualifying them for republication. There is, at any rate, no slight critical difficulty in believing that the bulk of the sermons of 1766 can be assigned to the same literary period as the sermons of 1761. The one set seems as manifestly to belong to the post-Shandian as the other does to the pre-Shandian era; and in some indeed of the apparently later productions the daring quaintness of style and illustration is carried so far that, except for the fact that Sterne had no time to spare for the composition of sermons not intended for professional use, one would have been disposed to believe that they neither were nor were meant to be delivered from the pulpit at all.<sup>2</sup> Throughout all of them, however, Sterne's new-found literary power displays itself in a vigour of expression and vivacity of illustration which at least serve to make the sermons of 1766 considerably more entertaining reading than those of 1761. In the first of the later series, for instance—the sermon on Shimei—a discourse in which there are no very noticeable sallies of unclerical humour, the quality of liveliness is very conspicuously present. The preacher's view of the character of Shimei, and of his behaviour to David, is hardly that, perhaps, of a competent historical critic, and in

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Fitzgerald, indeed, asserts as a fact that some at least of these sermons were actually composed in the capacity of *littérateur* and not of divine,—for the press and not for the pulpit.

treating of the Benjamite's insults to the King of Israel he appears to take no account of the blood-feud between the house of David and the clan to which the railer belonged ; just as in commenting on Shimei's subsequent and most abject submission to the victorious monarch, Sterne lays altogether too much stress upon conduct which is indicative, not so much of any exceptional meanness of disposition, as of the ordinary suppleness of the Oriental put in fear of his life. However, it makes a more piquant and dramatic picture to represent Shimei as a type of the wretch of insolence and servility compact, with a tongue ever ready to be loosed against the unfortunate, and a knee ever ready to be bent to the strong. And thus he moralizes on his conception :—

There is not a character in the world which has so bad an influence upon it as this of Shimei. While power meets with honest checks, and the evils of life with honest refuge, the world will never be undone ; but thou, Shimei, hast sapped it at both extremes : for thou corruptest prosperity, and 'tis thou who hast broken the heart of poverty. And so long as worthless spirits can be ambitious ones, 'tis a character we never shall want. Oh ! it infests the court, the camp, the cabinet. it infests the church. Go where you will, in every quarter, in every profession, you see a Shimei following the wheels of the fortunate through thick mire and clay. Haste, Shimei, haste ! or thou wilt be undone for ever. Shimei girdeth up his loins, and speedeth after him. Behold the hand which governs everything takes the wheel from his chariot, so that he who driveth, driveth on heavily. Shimei doubles his speed ; but 'tis the contrary way : he flies like the wind over a sandy desert. . . . Stay Shimei ! 'tis your patron, your friend, your benefactor, the man who has saved you from the dunghill. 'Tis all one to Shimei. Shimei is the barometer of every man's fortune ; marks the rise and fall of it, with all the variations from scorching hot to

freezing cold upon his countenance that the simile will admit of.<sup>4</sup> Is a cloud upon thy affairs? See, it hangs over Shimei's brow! Hast thou been spoken for to the king or the captain of the host without success? Look not into the Court Calendar, the vacancy is filled in Shimei's face. Art thou in debt, though not to Shimei? No matter. The worst officer of the law shall not be more insolent. What, then, Shimei, is the fault of poverty so black? is it of so general concern that thou and all thy family must rise up as one man to reproach it? When it lost everything, did it lose the right to pity too? Or did he who maketh poor as well as maketh rich strip it of its natural powers to mollify the heart and supple the temper of your race? Trust me you have much to answer for. It is this treatment which it has ever met with from spirits like yours, which has gradually taught the world to look upon it as the greatest of evils, and shun it as the worst disgrace. And what is it, I beseech you, what is it that men will not do to keep clear of so sore an imputation and punishment? Is it not to fly from this that he rises early, late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness? that he plots, contrives, swears, lies, shuffles, puts on all shapes, tries all garments, wears them with this or that side outward, just as it may favour his escape?

And though the sermon ends in orthodox fashion, with an assurance that, in spite of the Shimeis by whom we are surrounded, it is in our power to "lay the foundation of our peace (where it ought to be) within our own hearts," yet the preacher can, in the midst of his earlier reflections, permit himself the quaintly pessimistic outburst: "O Shimei! would to Heaven, when thou wast slain, that all thy family had been slain with thee, and not one of thy resemblance left! But ye have multiplied

<sup>4</sup> Which are not many in the case of a barometer.



exceedingly, and replenished the earth; and if I prophecy rightly, ye will in the end subdue it.

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

Alas! How shall he tell his story?

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

All this, it must be admitted, is pretty lively for a sermon. But hear the reverend gentleman once more, in

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

But you will send an able pilot with your son—a scholar.

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

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

Let me observe in the first place, that company which is really good is very rare and very shy. But you have surmounted this difficulty, and procured him the best letters of recommendation to the most eminent and respectable in every capital. And I answer that he will obtain all by them which courtesy strictly stands obliged to pay on such occasions, but no more. There is

nothing in which we are so much deceived as in the advantages proposed from our connexions and discourse with the literati, &c., in foreign parts, especially if the experiment is made before we are matured by years or study. Conversation is a traffic; and if you enter it without some stock of knowledge to balance the account perpetually betwixt you, the trade drops at once; and this is the reason, however it may be boasted to the contrary, why travellers have so little (especially good) conversation with the natives, owing to their suspicion, or perhaps conviction, that there is nothing to be extracted from the conversation of young itinerants, worth the trouble of their bad language, or the interruption of their visits.

Very true, no doubt, and excellently well put; but we seem to have got some distance, in spirit at any rate, from Luke xv. 18: and it is with somewhat too visible effect, perhaps, that Sterne forces his way back into the orthodox routes of pulpit disquisition. The youth, disappointed with his reception by "the literati," &c., seeks "an easier society; and as bad company is always ready, and ever lying in wait, the career is soon finished, and the poor prodigal returns—the same object of pity with the prodigal in the Gospel." Hardly a good enough "tag," perhaps, to reconcile the ear to the "And now to," &c., as a fitting close to this pointed little essay in the style of the Chesterfield Letters. There is much internal evidence to show that this so-called sermon was written either after Sterne's visit to, or during his stay in France; and there is strong reason, I think, to suppose that it was in reality neither intended for a sermon, nor actually delivered from the pulpit.

No other of his sermons has quite so much vivacity as this. But in the famous discourse upon an unlucky text—the sermon preached at the chapel of the English

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VII

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

(1765—1768.)

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

Plenipo," he continued his journey to Rome. Here, and at Naples, he passed the winter of 1765—1766 :<sup>1</sup> and prolonged his stay in Italy until the ensuing spring was well advanced. In the month of May he was again on his way home through France, and had had a meeting after two years' separation from them, with his wife and daughter. His account of it to Hall Stevenson is curious : "Never man," he writes, "has been such a wild goose chase after his wife as I have been. After having sought her in five or six different towns, I found her at last in Franche Comté. Poor woman !" he adds, "she was very cordial, &c." The &c. is charming. But her cordiality had evidently no tendency to deepen into any more impassioned sentiment, for she "begged to stay another year or so." As to "my Lydia," the real cause we must suspect of Sterne's having turned out of his road, she, he says, "pleases me much. I found her greatly improved in everything I wished her." As to himself : "I am most unaccountably well, and most accountably nonsensical. 'Tis at least a proof of good spirits, which is a sign and token, in these latter days, that I must take up my pen. In faith, I think I shall die with it in my hand ; but I shall live these ten years, my Antony, notwithstanding the fears of my wife, whom I left most melancholy on that account." The "fears" and the melancholy were, alas ! to be justified, rather than the "good spirits," and the shears of Atropos were to close, not in ten years, but in

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



little more than twenty months, upon that fragile thread of life.

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

<sup>1</sup> There can be few admirers of Sterne's genius who would not gladly believe, whenever they find it possible, to Mr. Fitzgerald's very indulgent estimate of his disposition. But this is only one of

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

Meanwhile, the idyll of Captain Shandy's love-making was gradually approaching completion: and there are signs to be met with—in the author's correspondence, that is to say, and not in the work itself—that he was somewhat impatient to be done with it, at any rate for the time. "I shall publish," he says, "late in this year; and the next I shall begin a new work of four volumes, which when finished, I shall continue *Tristram*, with fresh spirit." The new work in four volumes (not destined to get beyond one) was of course the *Sentimental Journey*. His ninth volume of *Tristram Shandy* was finished by the end of the year, and at Christmas he came up to London, after his usual practice, to see to its publication and enjoy the honours of its reception. The book passed duly through the press, and in the last days of January was issued the announcement of its immediate appearance. Of the character of its welcome I can find no other evidence than that of Sterne himself, in a letter addressed to M. Panchaud some fortnight after the book appeared. "'Tis liked the best of all here;" but, with whatever accuracy this may have expressed the complimentary opinion of friends, or even the well-considered judgment of critics, one can hardly believe that it enjoyed anything like the vogue of the former volumes. Sterne, however, many instances in which the clarity of the biographer appears to me to be, if the expression may be permitted, unconscionable. I can, at any rate, find no warrant whatever in the above passage for the too kindly suggestion that "Sterne was actually negotiating a journey to Paris as 'bear-leader' to a young nobleman (an odious office to which he had special aversion), in order that he might with economy fly over to Avignon."

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* To this period of Sterne's life, it may here be remarked, is to be assigned the dog-Latin letter ("and very sad dog-Latin too")

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

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

so justly animadverted upon by Thackeray, and containing a passage of which M<sup>de</sup>me. De Medaille, it is to be charitably hoped, had no suspicion of the meaning. Mr. Fitzgerald, through an oversight in translation, and understanding Sterne to say that he himself, and not his correspondent, Hall Stevenson, was "*quadraginta et plus annos natus*," has referred it to an earlier date. The point, however, is of no great importance, as the untranslatable passage in the letter would be little less unseemly in 1754 or 1755 than in 1768, at the beginning of which year, since the letter is addressed from London to Hall Stevenson, then in Yorkshire, it must, in fact, have been written.

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

Meanwhile, however, that fragile abode of sentiment-



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

like it in one respect, for she will be in one kingdom while I am in another." Thus was this matter settled, and by the 1st of January Sterne had arrived in London for the last time, with the first two volumes of the *Sentimental Journey*. He took up his quarters at the lodgings in Bond Street (No. 41), which he had occupied during his stay in town the previous year, and entered at once upon the arrangements for publication. These occupied two full months, and on the 27th of February the last work, as it was destined to be, of the Rev. Mr. Yorick was issued to the world.

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

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

The favour, however, with which the *Sentimental Journey* was received abroad, and which it still enjoys (the last French translation is very recent), is, as Mr. Fitzgerald says, “worthily merited, if grace, nature, true sentiment, and exquisite dramatic power be qualities that are to find a welcome. And apart,” he adds, “from these

attractions it has a unique charm of its own, a flavour, so to speak, a fragrance that belongs to that one book alone. Never was there such a charming series of complete little pictures, which for delicacy seem like the series of medallions done on Sèvres china which we sometimes see in old French cabinet. . . . The figures stand out brightly, and in what number and variety! Old Calais, with its old inn; M. Dessein, the monk, one of the most artistic figures on literary canvas; the charming French lady whom M. Dessein shut into the carriage with the traveller; the *débonnaire* French captain, and the English traveller returning, touched in with only a couple of strokes; La Fleur, the valet; the pretty French glove-seller, whose pulse the Sentimental one felt; her husband, who passed through the shop and pulled off his hat to Monsieur for the honour he was doing him; the little maid in the book-seller's shop, who put her little present *à part*; the charming Greuze 'grisset,' who sold him the ruffles; the reduced chevalier selling *patés*; the groups of beggars at Montreuil; the *faible* Count de Bissie, who read Shakespeare; and the crowd of minor *croquis*—postillions landlords, notaries, soldiers, abbés, *précieuses*, maids—merely touched, but touched with wonderful art, make up a surprising collection of distinct and graphic characters."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### LAST DAYS AND DEATH.

(1768.)

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

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

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

The physician says I am better. . . . God knows, for I feel myself sadly wrong, and shall, if I recover, be a long while of gaining strength. Before I have gone through half the letter, I must stop to rest my weak hand a dozen times. Mr. James was so good as to call upon me yesterday. I felt emotions not to be described at the sight of him, and he overjoyed me by talking a great deal of you. Do, dear Mrs. James, entreat him to come to-morrow or next day, for perhaps I have not many days or hours to live. I want to ask a favour of him, if I find myself worse, that I shall beg of you if in this wrestling I come off conqueror. My spirits are fled. It is a bad omen; do not weep, my dear lady. Your tears are too precious to be shed for me.

Bottle them up, and may the cork never be drawn. Dearest, kindest, gentlest, and best of women ! may health, peace, and happiness prove your handmaids. If I die, cherish the remembrance of me, and forget the follies which you so often condemned, which my heart, not my head, betrayed me into. Should my child, my Lydia, want a mother, may I hope you will (if she is left parentless) take her to your bosom ? You are the only woman on earth I can depend upon for such a benevolent action. I wrote to her a fortnight ago, and told her what, I trust, she will find in you. Mr. James will be a father to her. . . . Commend me to him, as I now commend you to that Being who takes under his care the good and kind part of the world. Adieu, all grateful thanks to you and Mr. James.—From your affectionate friend,

L. STERNE.

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



him, the Duke of Roxburghe, the Earl of March, the Earl of Ossory, the Duke of Grafton, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Hume, and a Mr. James." Many, if not most, of the party therefore were personal friends of the man who lay dying in the street hard by, and naturally enough the conversation turned on his condition. "'John,' said my master," the narrative continues, "'go and inquire how Mr. Sterne is to-day.'" Macdonald did so; and, in language which seems to bear the stamp of truth upon it, he thus records the grim story which he had to report to the assembled guests on his return. "I went to Mr. Sterne's lodgings; the mistress opened the door. I inquired how he did; she told me to go up to the nurse. I went into the room, and he was just a-dying. I waited ten minutes; but in five he said, 'Now it is come.' He put up his hand as if to stop a blow, and died in a minute. The gentlemen were all very sorry, and lamented him very much."

Thus, supported by a hired nurse, and under the curious eyes of a stranger, Sterne breathed his last. His wife and daughter were far away; the convivial associates "who were all very sorry and lamented him very much," were for the moment represented only by "John;" and the shocking tradition goes that the alien hands by which the "dying eyes were closed," and the "decent limbs composed," remunerated themselves for the pious office by abstracting the gold sleeve-links from the dead man's wrists. One may hope indeed that this last circumstance is to be rejected as sensational legend, but even without it the story of Sterne's death seems sad enough, no doubt. Yet it is, after all, only by contrast with the excited gaiety of his daily life in London, that his end appears so forlorn. From many a "set of residential chambers," from many of the old and silent inns of the lawyers, departures as

lonely, or lonelier, are being made around us in London every year : the departures of men not necessarily kinless or friendless, but living solitary lives, and dying before their friends or kindred can be summoned to their bedsides. Such deaths no doubt are often contrasted in conventional pathos with that of the husband and father surrounded by a weeping wife and children ; but the more sensible among us construct no tragedy out of a mode of exit which must have many times entered as at least a possibility into the previous contemplation of the dying man. And except, as has been said, that Sterne associates himself in our minds with the perpetual excitements of lively companionship, there would be nothing particularly melancholy in his end. This is subject, of course, to the assumption that the story of his landlady having stolen the gold sleeve-links from his dead body may be treated as mythical ; and, rejecting this story, there seems no good reason for making much ado about the manner of his death. Of friends, as distinguished from mere dinner-table acquaintances, he seems to have had but few in London : with the exception of the Jameses, one knows not with certainty of any ; and the Jameses do not appear to have neglected him in the illness which neither they nor he suspected to be his last. Mr. James had paid him a visit but a day or two before the end came : and it may very likely have been upon his report of his friend's condition that the message of inquiry was sent from the dinner-table at which he was a guest. No doubt Sterne's flourish in *Tristram Shandy* about his preferring to die at an inn, untroubled by the spectacle of "the concern of my friends, and the last services of wiping my brows and smoothing my pillow," was a mere piece of bravado : and the more probably so because the reflection is appropriated

almost bodily from Bishop Burnet, who quotes it as a frequent observation of Archbishop Leighton. But considering that Sterne was in the habit of passing nearly half of each year alone in London lodgings, the realization of his wish does not strike me, I confess, as so dramatically impressive a coincidence as it is sometimes represented.

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

in which Sterne's remains were laid. But, wherever the grave really was, the body interred in it, according to the strange story to which I have referred, is no longer there. That story goes: that two days after the burial, on the night of the 24th of March, the corpse was stolen by body-snatchers, and by them disposed of to M. Collignon, Professor of Anatomy at Cambridge; that the Professor invited a few scientific friends to witness a demonstration, and that among these was one who had been acquainted with Sterne, and who fainted with horror on recognizing in the already partially dissected "subject," the features of his friend. So at least this very gruesome and Poe-like legend runs: but it must be confessed that all the evidence which Mr. Fitzgerald has been able to collect in its favour is of the very loosest and vaguest description. On the other hand, it is of course only fair to recollect that, in days when respectable surgeons and grave scientific Professors had to depend upon the assistance of law-breakers for the prosecution of their studies and teachings, every effort would naturally be made to hush up any such unfortunate affair. There is, moreover, independent evidence to the fact that similar desecrations of this grave-yard had of late been very common; and that at least one previous attempt to check the operations of the "resurrection-men" had been attended with peculiarly infelicitous results. In the *St. James's Chronicle* for November 26th, 1767, we find it recorded that "the Burying Ground in Oxford Road, belonging to the Parish of St. George's, Hanover Square, having been lately robbed of several dead bodies, a Watcher was placed there, attended by a large mastiff Dog; notwithstanding which, on Sunday night last, some Villains found means to steal out another dead Body, and carried off the very Dog."

Body-snatchers so adroit and determined as to contrive to make additional profit out of the actual means taken to prevent their depredations, would certainly not have been deterred by any considerations of prudence from attempting the theft of Sterne's corpse. There was no such ceremony about his funeral as would lead them to suppose that the deceased was a person of any importance, or one whose body could not be stolen without a risk of creating undesirable excitement. On the whole, therefore, it is impossible to reject the body-snatching story as certainly fabulous, though its truth is far from being proved; and though I can scarcely myself subscribe to Mr. Fitzgerald's view, that there is a "grim and lurid Shandyism" about the scene of dissection, yet if others discover an appeal to their sense of humour in the idea of Sterne's body being dissected after death, I see nothing to prevent them from holding that hypothesis as a "pious opinion."

## CHAPTER IX.

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

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

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

fifty years afterwards that these daring robberies were detected, or at any rate revealed to the world : and with an irony which Sterne himself would have appreciated, it was reserved for a sincere admirer of the humourist to play the part of detective. In 1812 Dr. John Ferriar published his *Illustrations of Sterne*, and the prefatory sonnet, in which he solicits pardon for his too minute investigations, is sufficient proof of the curiously reverent spirit in which he set about his damaging task.

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

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

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



"Martinus Scriblerus"); but though he has appropriated bodily the passage in which Friar John attributes the beauty of his nose to the pectoral conformation of his nurse, he may be said to have constructively acknowledged the debt in a reference to one of the characters in the Rabelaisian dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

Upon Beroalde, again, upon D'Aubigné, and upon Bouchet he has made no direct and *verbatim* depre-dations. From Bruscambille he seems to have taken little or nothing but the not very valuable idea of the tedious buffoonery of Vol. iii. c. 80, et seq. : and to Scarron he perhaps owed the incident of the dwarf at the theatre in the *Sentimental Journey*, an incident which, it must be owned, he vastly improved in the taking. All this, however, does not amount to very much, and it is only when we come to Dr. Ferriar's collations of *Tristram Shandy* with the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, that we begin to understand what feats Sterne was capable of as a plagiarist. He must, to begin with, have relied with cynical confidence on the conviction that famous writers are talked about and not read ; for he sets to work with the scissors upon Burton's first page. "Man, the most excellent and noble creature of the world, the principal

<sup>1</sup> "There is no cause but one," said my uncle Toby, "why one man's nose is longer than another, but because that God pleases to have it so." "That is Grangousier's solution," said my father. "'Tis He," continued my uncle Toby, "who makes us all, and frames and puts us together in such forms . . . and for such ends as is agreeable to his infinite wisdom."—*Tristram Shandy*, vol. iii. c. 41. "Par ce, repondit Grangousier, qu'ainsi Dieu l'a voulu, lequel nous fait en cette forme et cette fin selon divin arbitre."—*Rabelais*, book i. c. 41. In another place, however (vol. viii. c. 8), Sterne has borrowed a whole passage from this French humourist without any acknowledgment at all.

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

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

A poor decayed kinsman of his sets upon him by the way,

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

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

in all his jollity, and runs begging, bareheaded, by him, conjuring him by those former bonds of friendship, alliance, consanguinity, &c., "Uncle, cousin, brother, father, show some pity for Christ's sake, pity a sick man, an old man," &c.; he cares not—ride on: pretend sickness, inevitable loss of limbs, plead suretyship or shipwreck, fire, common calamities, show thy wants and imperfections, take God and all his angels to witness . . . put up a supplication to him in the name of a thousand orphans, an hospital, a spittle, a prison, as he goes by . . . ride on.

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

"When Agrippina was told of her son's death," says Sterne, "Tacitus informs us that, not being able to moderate her passions, she abruptly broke off her work." Tacitus does, it is true, inform us of this. But it was undoubtedly Burton (*Anat. Mel.* 213) who informed Sterne of it. So, too, when Mr. Shandy goes on to remark upon death that "'Tis an inevitable chance—the first statute in Magna Charta—it is an everlasting Act of Parliament, my dear brother—all must die," the agreement of his views with those of Burton, who had himself said of death, "'Tis an inevitable chance—the first statute in Magna Charta—an everlasting Act of Parliament—all must die,"<sup>4</sup> is even textually exact.

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

<sup>4</sup> Burton: *Anat. Mel.*, p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

Burton :—

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

Sterne:—

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

"Kingdoms and provinces, cities and towns," continues Burton, "have their periods, and are consumed." "Kingdoms and provinces, and town and cities," exclaims Mr. Shandy, throwing the sentence, like the "born orator" his son considered him, into the rhetorical interrogative, "have they not their periods?" "Where," he proceeds, "is Troy, and Mycenæ, and Thebes, and Delos and Persepolis, and Agrigentum? What is become, brother Toby, of Nineveh and Babylon, of Cyzicum and Mytilene? The fairest towns that ever the sun rose upon" (and all, with the curious exception of Mytilene, enumerated by Burton) "are now no more." And then the famous consolatory letter from Servius Sulpicius to Cicero on the death of Tullia is laid under contribution—Burton's rendering of the Latin being followed almost word for word. "Returning out of Asia," declaims Mr. Shandy, "when I sailed from Ægina towards Megara" (when can this have been?

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

Not that this is Sterne's only raid upon the quaint old writer of whom he has here made such free use. Several

other instances of word for word appropriation might be quoted from this and the succeeding volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. The apostrophe to "blessed health" in c. xxxiii. of Vol. V. is taken direct from the *Anatomy of Melancholy*; so is the phrase, "he has a gourd for his head and a pippin for his heart," in c. ix.; so is the jest about Franciscus Ribera's computation of the amount of cubic space required by the souls of the lost; so is Hilarion the hermit's comparison of his body with its unruly passions to a kicking ass. And there is a passage in the *Sentimental Journey*, the "Fragment in the Abderitana," which shows, Dr. Ferriar thinks, though it does not seem to me to show conclusively, that Sterne was unaware that what he was taking from Burton had been previously taken by Burton from Lucian.

There is more excuse, in the opinion of the author of the *Illustrations* for the literary thefts of the preacher, than for those of the novelist; since in sermons, Dr. Ferriar observes drily, "the principal matter must consist of repetitions." But it can hardly, I think, be admitted that the kind of "repetitions" to which Sterne had recourse in the pulpit—or, at any rate, in compositions ostensibly prepared for the pulpit—are quite justifiable. Professor Jebb has pointed out, in a recent volume of this series, that the description of the tortures of the Inquisition, which so deeply moved Corporal Trim in the famous Sermon on Conscience, was really the work of Bentley; but Sterne has pilfered more freely from a divine more famous as a preacher than the great scholar whose words he appropriated on that occasion. "Then shame and grief go with her," he exclaims in his singular sermon on "The Levite and his Concubine;" "and wherever she seeks a shelter, may the hand of justice shut the door against her!"

an exclamation which is taken, as no doubt indeed was the whole suggestion of the somewhat strange subject, from the *Contemplations* of Bishop Hall. And so, again, we find in Sterne's sermon the following :—

Mercy well becomes the heart of all Thy creatures ! but most of Thy servant, a Levite, who offers up so many daily sacrifices to Thee for the transgressions of Thy people. But to little purpose, he would add, have I served at Thy altar, where my business was to sue for mercy, had I not learned to practise it.

And in Hall's *Contemplations* the following :—

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

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

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

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

There is no small cruelty in the picking out of a time for mischief : that word would scarce gall at one season

which at another killeth. The same shaft flying with the wind pierces deep, which against it can hardly find strength to stick upright.

But enough of these *pièces de conviction*. Indictments for plagiarism are often too hastily laid: but there can be no doubt, I should imagine, in the mind of any reasonable being upon the evidence here cited, that the offence in this case is clearly proved. Nor, I think, can there be much question as to its moral complexion. For the pilferings from Bishop Hall, at any rate, no shadow of excuse can, so far as I can see, be alleged. Sterne could not possibly plead any better justification for borrowing Hall's thoughts and phrases and passing them off upon his hearers or readers as original, than he could plead for claiming the authorship of one of the bishop's benevolent actions and representing himself to the world as the doer of the good deed. In the actual as in the hypothetical case there is a dishonest appropriation by one man of the credit—in the former case the intellectual, in the latter the moral credit—belonging to another: the offence in the actual case being aggravated by the fact that it involves a fraud upon the purchaser of the sermon, who pays money for what he may already have in his library. The plagiarisms from Burton stand upon a slightly different, though not I think a much more defensible footing. For in this case it has been urged, that Sterne, being desirous of satirizing pedantry, was justified in resorting to the actually existent writings of an antique pedant of real life; and that since Mr. Shandy could not be made to talk more like himself than Burton talked like him, it was artistically lawful to put Burton's exact words into Mr. Shandy's mouth. It makes a difference, it may be said, that Sterne is not here speaking in his



own person, as he is in his *Sermons*, but in the person of one of his characters. This casuistry, however, does not seem to me to be sound. Even as regards the passages from ancient authors, which, while quoting them from Burton, he tacitly represents to his readers as taken from his own stores of knowledge, the excuse is hardly sufficient; while as regards the original reflections of the author of the *Anatomy of Melancholy* it obviously fails to apply at all. And in any case there could be no necessity for the omission to acknowledge the debt. Even admitting that no more characteristic reflections could have been composed for Mr. Shandy than were actually to be found in Burton, art is not so exacting a mistress as to compel the artist to plagiarize against his will. A scrupulous writer, being also as ingenious as Sterne, could have found some means of indicating the source from which he was borrowing without destroying the dramatic illusion of the scene.

But it seems clear enough that Sterne himself was troubled by no conscientious qualms on this subject. Perhaps the most extraordinary instance of literary effrontery which was ever met with is the passage in Vol. V. c. 1, which even that seasoned detective Dr. Ferriar is startled into pronouncing "singular." Burton had complained that writers were like apothecaries, who "make new mixtures every day," by "pouring out of one vessel into another." "We weave," he said, "the same web still, twist the same rope again and again." And Sterne *incolumi gravitate* asks: "Shall we for ever make new books as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another! Are we for ever to be twisting and untwisting the same rope, for ever on the same track, for ever at the same pace?" And this he

writes, with the scissors actually opened in his hand for the almost bodily abstraction of the passage beginning, "Man, the most excellent and noble creature of the world!" Surely this denunciation of plagiarism by a plagiarist on the point of setting to work could only have been written by a man who looked upon plagiarism as a good joke.

Apart however from the moralities of the matter, it must in fairness be admitted that in most cases Sterne is no servile copyist. He appropriates other men's thoughts and phrases, and with it of course the credit for the wit, the truth, the vigour or the learning which characterizes them; but he is seldom found, in *Tristram Shandy* at any rate, to have transferred them to his own pages out of a mere indolent inclination to save himself the trouble of composition. He takes them less as substitutes than as groundwork for his own invention,—as so much material for his own inventive powers to work upon; and those powers do generally work upon them with conspicuous skill of elaboration. The series of cuttings, for instance, which he makes from Burton, on the occasion of Bobby Shandy's death, are woven into the main tissue of the dialogue with remarkable ingenuity and naturalness; and the bright strands of his own unborrowed humour fly flashing across the fabric at every transit of the shuttle. Or to change the metaphor, we may say that in almost every instance the jewels that so glitter in their stolen setting were cut and set by Sterne himself. Let us allow that the most expert of lapidaries is not justified in stealing his settings; but let us still not forget that the *jewels* are his, or permit our disapproval of his laxity of principle to make us unjust to his consummate skill.

## CHAPTER X.

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

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

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

To attempt a precise and final distinction between these two last-named qualities in Sterne or any one else would be no very hopeful task perhaps; but those who

have a keen perception of either find no great difficulty in discriminating, as a matter of feeling, between the two. And what is true of the qualities themselves is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the men by whom they have been most conspicuously displayed. Some wits have been humourists also; nearly all humourists have been also wits; yet the two fall on the whole into tolerably well-marked classes, and the ordinary uncritical judgment would probably enable most men to state with sufficient certainty the class to which each famous name in the world's literature belongs. Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Molière, Swift, Fielding, Lamb, Richter, Carlyle: widely as these writers differ from each other in style and genius, the least skilled reader would hardly need to be told that the list which includes them all is a catalogue of humourists. And Cicero, Lucian, Pascal, Voltaire, Congreve, Pope, Sheridan, Courier, Sydney Smith—this, I suppose, would be recognized at once as an enumeration of wits. Some of these humourists, like Fielding, like Richter, like Carlyle, are always, or almost always, humourists alone. Some of these wits, like Pascal, like Pope, like Courier, are wits with no or but slight admixture of humour; and in the classification of these there is of course no difficulty at all. But even with the wits who very often give us humour also, and with the humourists who as often delight us with their wit, we seldom find ourselves in any doubt as to the real and more essential affinities of each. It is not by the wit which he has infused into his talk, so much as by the humour with which he has delineated the character, that Shakespeare has given his Falstaff an abiding place in our memories. It is not the repartees of Benedick and Beatrice, but the immortal fatuity of Dogberry that the name of *Much*

*Ado about Nothing* recalls. None of the verbal quips of Touchstone tickle us like his exquisite patronage of William and the fascination which he exercises over the melancholy Jacques. And it is the same throughout all Shakespeare. It is of the humours of Bottom and Lance, and Shallow, and Sly, and Aguecheek; it is of the laughter that treads upon the heels of horror and pity and awe, as we listen to the Porter in *Macbeth*, to the Grave-digger in *Hamlet*, to the Fool in *Lear*—it is of these that we think when we think of Shakespeare in any other but his purely poetic mood. Whenever, that is to say, we think of him as anything but a poet, we think of him not as a wit, but as a humourist. So, too, it is not the dagger-thrusts of the *Drapier's Letters*, but the broad ridicule of the *Voyage to Laputa*, the savage irony of the *Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*, that we associate with the name of Swift. And conversely, it is the cold epigrammatic glitter of Congreve's dialogue, the fizz and crackle of the fireworks which Sheridan serves out with indiscriminating hand to the most insignificant of his characters,—it is this which stamps the work of these dramatists with characteristics far more marked than any which belong to them in right of humorous portraiture of human foibles or ingenious invention of comic incident.

The place of Sterne is unmistakably among writers of the former class. It is by his humour—his humour of character, his dramatic as distinct from his critical descriptive *personal* humour, though of course he possesses this also as all humourists must, that he lives and will live. In *Tristram Shandy* as in the *Sermons* there is a sufficiency of wit, and considerably more than a sufficiency of humorous reflection, innuendo and persiflage; but it is the

actors in his almost plotless drama who have established their creator in his niche in the Temple of Fame. We cannot indeed be sure that what has given him his hold upon posterity is what gave him his popularity with his contemporaries. On the contrary, it is perhaps more probable that he owed his first success with the public of his day to those eccentricities which are for us a little too consciously eccentric—those artifices which fail a little too conspicuously in the *ars celandi artem*. But however these tricks may have pleased in days when such tricks were new, they much more often weary than divert us now; and I suspect that many a man whose delight in the Corporal and his master, in Bridget and her mistresses, is as fresh as ever, declines to accompany their creator in those perpetual digressions into nonsense or semi-nonsense the fashion of which Sterne borrowed from Rabelais without Rabelais's excuse for adopting it. To us of this day the real charm and distinction of the book is due to the marvellous combination of vigour and subtlety in its portrayal of character, and in the purity and delicacy of its humour. Those last two apparently paradoxical substantives are chosen advisedly, and employed as the most convenient way of introducing that disagreeable question which no commentator on Sterne can possibly shirk, but which every admirer of Sterne must approach with reluctance. There is of course a sense in which Sterne's humour—if indeed we may bestow that name on the form of jocularity to which I refer—is the very reverse of pure and delicate: a sense in which it is impure and indelicate in the highest degree. On this it is necessary, however briefly, to touch; and to the weighty and many-counted indictment which may be framed against Sterne on this head, there

is of course but one possible plea—the plea of guilty. Nay, the plea must go further than a mere admission of the offence; it must include an admission of the worst motive, the worst spirit as animating the offender. It is not necessary to my purpose, nor doubtless congenial to the taste of the reader, that I should enter upon any critical analysis of this quality in the author's work, or compare him in this respect with the two other great humourists who have been the worst offenders in the same way. In one of those highly interesting criticisms of English literature which, even when they most conspicuously miss the mark, are so instructive to Englishmen, M. Taine has instituted an elaborate comparison, very much, I need hardly say, to the advantage of the latter, between the indecency of Swift and that of Rabelais—that “good giant,” as his countryman calls him, “who rolls himself joyously about on his dunghill, thinking no evil.” And no doubt the world of literary moralists will always be divided upon the question—one mainly of national temperament—whether mere animal spirits or serious satiric purpose is the best justification for offences against cleanliness. It is of course only the former theory, if either, which could possibly avail Sterne, and it would need an unpleasantly minute analysis of this characteristic in his writings to ascertain how far M. Taine's eloquent defence of Rabelais could be made applicable to his case. But the inquiry, one is glad to think, is as unnecessary as it would be disagreeable; for, unfortunately for Sterne, he must be condemned on a *quantitative* comparison of indecency, whatever may be his fate when compared with these other two great writers as regards the quality of their respective transgressions. There can be no denying, I mean, that Sterne is of all



writers the most permeated and penetrated with impurity of thought and suggestion ; that in no other writer is its latent presence more constantly felt, even if there be any in whom it is more often openly obtruded. The unclean spirit pursues him everywhere, disfiguring his scenes of humour, demoralizing his passages of serious reflection, debasing even his sentimental interludes. His coarseness is very often as great a blot on his art as on his morality—a thing which can very rarely be said of either Swift or Rabelais ; and it is sometimes so distinctly fatal a blemish from the purely literary point of view, that one is amazed at the critical faculty which could have tolerated its presence.

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

of which the external setting is of the simplest possible character, while the humour is of that deepest and most penetrative kind which springs from the eternal incongruities of human nature, the ever-recurring cross-purposes of human lives.

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

dissimilarities to obscure for them the inward and essential resemblances of things, must often, I think, have experienced from one of the Shandy dialogues the same sort of impression that they derive from some of the most nobly humorous colloquies between the knight and his squire, and must have been conscious through all outward differences of key and tone of a common element in each. It is of course a resemblance of *relations*, and not of personalities : for though there is something of the Knight of La Mancha in Mr. Shandy, there is nothing of Sancho about his brother. But the serio-comic game of cross-purposes is the same between both couples ; and what one may call the irony of human intercourse, is equally profound, and pointed with equal subtlety, in each. In the Spanish romance of course it is not likely to be missed. It is enough in itself that the deranged brain which takes windmills for giants, and carriers for knights, and Rosinante for a Bucephalus, has fixed upon Sancho Panza—the crowning proof of its mania—as the fitting squire of a knight errant ! To him—to this compound of somnolence, shrewdness, and good nature—to this creature with no more tincture of romantic idealism than a wine-skin, the knight addresses, without misgiving, his lofty dissertations on the glories and the duties of chivalry—the squire responding after his fashion. And thus these two hold converse, contentedly incomprehensible to each other, and with no suspicion that they are as incapable of interchanging ideas as the inhabitants of two different planets. With what heart-stirring mirth, and yet with what strangely deeper feeling of the infinite variety of human nature, do we follow their converse throughout ! Yet Quixote and Sancho are not more life-like and human, nor nearer together at one point, and farther

apart at another, than are Walter Shandy and his brother. The squat little Spanish peasant is not more gloriously incapable of following the chivalric vagaries of his master than the simple soldier is of grasping the philosophic crotchets of his brother. Both couples are in sympathetic contact absolute and complete at one point: at another they are "poles asunder" both of them. And in both contrasts there is that sense of futility and failure, of alienation and misunderstanding—that element of underlying pathos in short, which so strangely gives its keenest salt to humour. In both alike there is the same suggestion of the Infinite of disparity bounding the finite of resemblance—of the Incommensurable in man and nature beside which all minor uniformities sink into insignificance.

The pathetic element which underlies and deepens the humour is of course produced in the two cases in two exactly opposite ways. In both cases it is a picture of human simplicity—of a noble and artless nature out of harmony with its surroundings, which moves us; but whereas in the Spanish romance the simplicity is that of the *incompris*, in the English novel it is that of the man with whom the *incompris* consorts. If there is pathos as well as humour, and deepening the humour, in the figure of the distraught knight-errant talking so hopelessly over the head of his attached squire's morality, so too there is pathos, giving depth to the humour of the eccentric philosopher, shooting so hopelessly wide of the intellectual appreciation of the most affectionate of brothers. One's sympathy perhaps is even more strongly appealed to in the latter than in the former case, because the effort of the good Captain to understand is far greater than that of the Don to make himself understood, and the concern of

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

From the broad and deep humour of this central conception of contrast, flow as from a head-water innumerable rills of comedy, through many and many a

page of dialogue; but not, of course, from this source alone. Uncle Toby is ever delightful, even when his brother is not near him as his foil: the faithful corporal brings out another side of his character, upon which we linger with equal pleasure of contemplation: the allurements of the Widow Wadman reveal him to us in yet another—but always in a captivating aspect. There is too, one need hardly say, an abundance of humour, of a high, though not the highest order, in the minor characters of the story—in Mrs. Shandy, in the fascinating widow, and even, under the coarse lines of the physical caricature, in the keen little Catholic, Slop himself. But it is in Toby Shandy alone that humour reaches that supreme level which it is only capable of attaining when the collision of contrasted qualities in a human character produce a corresponding conflict of the emotions of mirth and tenderness in the minds of those who contemplate it.

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

What then were his notions of true "sentiment" in literature? We have seen elsewhere that he repeats, it would appear unconsciously, and commends the canon

which Horace propounds to the tragic poet, in the words,—

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

And that canon is sound enough, no doubt, in the sense in which it was meant, and in its relation to the person to whom it was addressed. A tragic drama, peopled with heroes who set forth their woes in frigid and unimpassioned verse, will unquestionably leave its audience as cold as itself. Nor is this true of drama alone. All *poetry* indeed, whether dramatic or other, presupposes a sympathetic unity of emotion between the poet and those whom he addresses ; and to this extent it is obviously true that *he* must feel before they can. Horace, who was (what every literary critic is not) a man of the world and an observer of human nature, did not of course mean that this capacity for feeling was all, or even the chief part of the poetic faculty. He must have seen many an "intense" young Roman make that pathetic error of the young in all countries and of all periods—the error of mistaking the capacity of emotion for the gift of expression. He did, however, undoubtedly mean that a poet's power of affecting others presupposes passion in himself ; and as regards the poet he was right. But his criticism takes no account whatever of one form of appeal to the emotions which has been brought by later art to a high pitch of perfection, but with which the personal feeling of the artist has not much more to do than the "passions" of an auctioneer's clerk have to do with the compilation of his inventory. A poet himself, Horace wrote for poets : to him the pathetic implied the ideal, the imaginative, the rhetorical ; he lived before the age of Realism and the Realists, and would scarcely have comprehended either the man or the method

if he could have come across them. Had he done so, however, he would have been astonished to find his canon reversed, and to have perceived that the primary condition of the Realist's success, and the distinctive note of those writers who have pressed genius into the service of Realism, is that they do *not* share—that they are unalterably and ostentatiously free from—the emotions to which they appeal in their readers. A fortunate accident has enabled us to compare the treatment which the world's greatest tragic poet and its greatest master of realistic tragedy have respectively applied to virtually the same subject; and the two methods are never likely to be again so impressively contrasted as in *King Lear* and *Le Père Goriot*. But, in truth, it must be impossible for any one who feels Balzac's power not to feel also how it is heightened by Balzac's absolute calm—a calm entirely different from that stern composure which was merely a point of style and not an attitude of the heart with the old Greek tragedians—a calm which, unlike theirs, insulates, so to speak, and is intended to insulate the writer, to the end that his individuality, of which only the electric current of sympathy ever makes a reader conscious, may disappear, and the characters of the drama stand forth the more life-like from the complete concealment of the hand that moves them.

Of this kind of art Horace, as has been said, knew nothing, and his canon only applies to it by the rule of contraries. Undoubtedly, and in spite of the marvels which one great genius has wrought with it, it is a form lower than the poetic—essentially a prosaic, and in many or most hands an unimaginative form of art; but for this very reason, that it demands nothing of its average practitioner but a keen eye for facts great and small, and



a knack of graphically recording them, it has become a far more commonly and successfully cultivated form of art than any other. As to the question who are its practitioners, it would, of course, be the merest dogmatism to commit oneself to any attempt at rigid classification in such a matter. There are few if any writers who can be described without qualification either as Realists or as Idealists. Nearly all of them, probably, are Realists at one moment and in one mood, and Idealists at other moments and in other moods. All that need be insisted on is that the methods of the two forms of art are essentially distinct, and that artistic failure must result from any attempt to combine them; for, whereas the primary condition of success in the one case is that the reader should feel the sympathetic presence of the writer, the primary condition of success in the other is that the writer should efface himself from the reader's consciousness altogether. And it is, I think, the defiance of these conditions which explains why so much of Sterne's deliberately pathetic writing is, from the artistic point of view, a failure. It is this which makes one feel so much of it to be strained and unnatural, and which brings it to pass that some of his most ambitious efforts leave the reader indifferent, or even now and then contemptuous. In those passages of pathos in which the effect is distinctly sought by realistic means, Sterne is perpetually ignoring the "self-denying ordinance" of his adopted method—perpetually obtruding his own individuality, and begging us, as it were, to turn from the picture to the artist, to cease gazing for a moment at his touching creation, and to admire the fine feeling, the exquisitely sympathetic nature of the man who created it. No doubt, as we must in fairness remember, it was part of his "humour"—in

Ancient Pistol's sense of the word—to do this ; it is true, no doubt (and a truth which Sterne's most famous critic was too prone to ignore) that his sentiment is not always *meant* for serious ;<sup>1</sup> nay, the very word "sentimental" itself, though in Sterne's day, of course, it had acquired but a part of its present disparaging significance, is a sufficient proof of that. But there are, nevertheless, plenty of passages, both in *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*, where the intention is wholly and unmixedly pathetic—where the smile is not for a moment meant to compete with the tear, which are nevertheless, it must be owned, complete failures, and failures traceable with much certainty, or so it seems to me, to the artistic error above-mentioned.

In one famous case, indeed, the failure can hardly be described as other than ludicrous. The figure of the distraught Maria of Moulines is tenderly drawn ; the accessories of the picture—her goat, her dog, her pipe, her song to the Virgin—though a little theatrical perhaps, are skilfully touched in ; and so long as the Sentimental Traveller keeps our attention fixed upon her and them the scene prospers well enough. But after having bidden us duly note how "the tears trickled down her

<sup>1</sup> Surely it was not so meant, for instance, in the passage about the *désobligeante*, which had been "standing so many months unpitied in the corner of Monsieur Dessein's coach-yard. Much, indeed, was not to be said for it, but something might ; and when a few words will rescue Misery out of her distress, I hate the man who can be a churl of them." "Does anybody," asks Thackeray in strangely matter-of-fact fashion, "believe that this is a real sentiment ? that this luxury of generosity, this gallant rescue of Misery—out of an old cab—is genuine feeling ?" Nobody, we should say. But, on the other hand, does anybody—or did anybody before Thackeray—suggest that it was meant to pass for genuine feeling ? Is it not an obvious piece of mock pathetic ?

cheeks," the Traveller continues: "I sat down close by her, and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell, with my handkerchief. I then steeped it in my own—and then in hers—and then in mine—and then I wiped hers again; and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion." The reader of this may well ask himself in wonderment whether he is really expected to make a third in the lachrymose group. We look at the passage again, and more carefully, to see if after all we may not be intended to laugh, and not to cry at it; but on finding, as clearly appears, that we actually *are* intended to cry at it, the temptation to laugh becomes almost irresistible. We proceed, however, to the account of Maria's wanderings to Rome and back, and we come to the pretty passage which follows:—

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

But then follows more whimpering:—

Nature melted within me [continues Sterne] as I said this; and Maria observing, as I took out my handkerchief, that it was steeped too much already to be of use, would needs go wash

it in the stream. And where will you dry it, Maria? said I. I'll dry it in my bosom, said she; 'twill do me good. And is your heart still so warm, Maria? said I. I touched upon the string on which hung all her sorrows. She looked with wistful disorder for some time in my face; and then, without saying anything, took her pipe and played her service to the Virgin.

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

the author of the illusion insists on thrusting himself between ourselves and the scene.

But in truth this whole episode of *Maria of Moulines* was, like more than one of Sterne's efforts after the pathetic, condemned to failure from the very conditions of its birth. These abortive efforts are no natural growth of his artistic genius; they proceed rather from certain morbidly stimulated impulses of his moral nature which he forced his artistic genius to subserve. He had true pathetic power, simple yet subtle, at his command; but it visited him unsought, and by inspiration from without. It came when he was in the dramatic and not in the introspective mood; when he was thinking honestly of his characters and not of himself. But he was unfortunately too prone—and a long course of moral self-indulgence had confirmed him in it—to the habit of caressing his own sensibilities; and the result of this was always to set him upon one of those attempts to be pathetic of malice prepense of which *Maria of Moulines* is one example, and the too celebrated dead donkey of *Nampont* another. "It is agreeably and skilfully done, that dead jackass," writes Thackeray; "like *M. de Soubise's* cook on the campaign, Sterne dresses it, and serves it up quite tender, and with a very piquante sauce. But tears, and fine feelings, and a white pocket-handkerchief, and a funeral sermon, and horses and feathers, and a procession of mutes, and a hearse with a dead donkey inside. Paha! Mountebank! I'll not give thee one penny-piece for that trick, donkey and all." That is vigorous ridicule, and not wholly undeserved; but on the other hand, not entirely deserved. There is less of artistic trick, it seems to me, and more of natural foible, about Sterne's literary sentiment than Thackeray was

ever willing to believe; and I can find nothing worse, though nothing better, in the dead ass of Nampont than in Maria of Moulines. I do not think there is any conscious simulation of feeling in this Nampont scene: it is that the feeling itself is overstrained—that, Sterne, hugging as usual his own sensibilities, mistook their value in expression for the purposes of art. The Sentimental Traveller does not obtrude himself to the same extent as in the scene at Moulines: but a little consideration of the scene will show how much Sterne relied on the mere presentment of the fact that here was an unfortunate peasant who had lost his dumb companion, and here a tender-hearted gentleman looking on and pitying him. As for any attempts to bring out by objective dramatic touches, either the grievousness of the bereavement or the grief of the mourner, such attempts as are made to do this are either commonplace, or “one step in advance” of the sublime. Take this for instance: “The mourner was sitting upon a stone bench at the door, with his ass’s pannel and its bridle on one side, which he took up from time to time, then laid them down, looked at them, and shook his head. He then took the crust of bread out of his wallet again, as if to eat it: held it some time in his hand, then laid it upon the bit of his ass’s bridle—looked wistfully at the little arrangement he had made—and then gave a sigh. The simplicity of his grief drew numbers about him,” &c. Simplicity indeed of a marvellous sort which could show itself by so extraordinary a piece of acting as this! Is there any critic who candidly thinks it natural—I do not mean in the sense of mere everyday probability, but of conformity to the laws of human character? Is it true that in any country, among any people however emotional,

grief—real, unaffected, un-selfconscious grief—ever did or ever could display itself by such a trick as that of laying a piece of bread on the bit of a dead ass's bridle? Do we not feel that if we had been on the point of offering comfort or alms to the mourner, and saw him go through this extraordinary piece of pantomime, we should have buttoned up our hearts and our pockets forthwith? Sentiment again sails very near the wind of the ludicrous in the reply to the traveller's remark that the mourner had been a merciful master to the dead ass. "Alas!" the latter says, "I thought so when he was alive, but now that he is dead I think otherwise. I fear the weight of *myself* and *my afflictions* have been too much for him." And the scene ends flatly enough with the scrap of morality. "Shame on the world!" said I to myself. Did we love each other as this poor soul loved his ass, 'twould be something."

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

Lyons in the seventh volume of *Tristram Shandy*. And yet what an astonishing difference between the two sketches !

'Twas a poor ass, who had just turned in with a couple of large panniers upon his back, to collect eleemosynary turnip-tops and cabbage-leaves, and stood dubious with his two fore-feet on the inside of the threshold, and with his two hinder feet towards the street, as not knowing very well whether he would go in or no. Now, 'tis an animal (be in what hurry I may) I cannot bear to strike. There is a patient endurance of sufferings wrote so unaffectedly in his looks and carriage, which pleads so mightily for him that it always disarms me, and to that degree that I do not like to speak unkindly to him; on the contrary, meet him where I will, in town or country, in cart or under panniers, whether in liberty or bondage, I have ever something civil to say to him on my part; and as one word begets another (if he has as little to do as I) I generally fall into conversation with him; and surely never is my imagination so busy as in framing his responses from the etchings of his countenance--and where those carry me not deep enough, in flying from my own heart into his, and feeling what is natural for an ass to think, as well as a man, upon the occasion. . . . Come, Honesty ! said I, seeing it was impracticable to pass betwixt him and the gate, art thou for coming in or going out ? The ass twisted his head round, to look up the street. Well, replied I, we'll wait a minute for thy driver. He turned his head thoughtfully about, and looked wistfully the opposite way. I understand thee perfectly, answered I; if thou takest a wrong step in this affair he will cudgel thee to death. Well, a minute is but a minute, and if it saves a fellow-creature a drubbing, it shall not be set down as ill spent. He was eating the stem of an artichoke as this discourse went on, and in the little peevish contentions of nature betwixt hunger and uneavouriness, had dropped it out of his mouth half a dozen times, and picked it up again. God help thee, Jack ! said I, thou hast a bitter breakfast on't, and many a bitter day's labour, and many a bitter blow, I fear, for its



wages—'tis all, all bitterness to thee, whatever life is to others. And now thy mouth, if one knew the truth of it, is as bitter, I dare say, as soot (for he had cast aside the stem), and thou hast not a friend perhaps in all this world that will give thee a macaroon. In saying this, I pulled out a paper of 'em, which I had just purchased, and gave him one; and, at this moment that I am telling it, my heart smites me that there was more of pleasantry in the conceit of seeing how an ass would eat a macaroon, than of benevolence in giving him one, which presided in the act. When the ass had eaten his macaroon, I pressed him to come in. The poor beast was heavy loaded, his legs seemed to tremble under him, he hung rather backwards, and as I pulled at his halter it broke short in my hand. He looked up pensive in my face. "Don't thrash me with it; but, if you will, you may." "If I do," said I, "I'll be d——d."

Well might Thackeray say of this passage that, "the critic who refuses to see in it wit, humour, pathos, a kind nature speaking, and a real sentiment, must be hard indeed to move and to please." It is, in truth, excellent; and its excellence is due to its possessing nearly every one of those qualities, positive and negative, which the two other scenes above quoted are without. The author does not here obtrude himself, does not importune us to admire his exquisitely compassionate nature: on the contrary, he at once amuses us and enlists our sympathies by that subtly humorous piece of self-analysis, in which he shows how large an admixture of curiosity was contained in his benevolence. The incident, too, is well chosen. No forced concurrence of circumstances brings it about: it is such as any man might have met with anywhere in his travels, and it is handled in a simple and manly fashion. The reader is *with* the writer *throughout*: and their common mood of half-humorous pity is sustained, unforced, but unbroken from first to last.

One can hardly say as much for another of the much

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

There was a frankness in my uncle Toby, not the effect of familiarity, but the cause of it, which let you at once into his soul, and showed you the goodness of his nature. To this there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, superadded, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him; so that, before my uncle Toby had half finished the kind offers he was making to the father, had the son insensibly pressed up close to his knees, and had taken hold of the breast of his coat, and was pulling it towards him. The blood and spirits of Le Fevre, which were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart, rallied back; the film forsook his eyes for a moment; he looked up wishfully in my uncle Toby's face, then cast a look upon his boy;—and that ligament, fine as it was, was never broken.

How excellent all that is! and how perfectly would the scene have ended had it closed with the tender and

poetic image which thus describes the dying soldier's commendation of his orphan boy to the care of his brother-in-arms ! But what of this, which closes the scene in fact ?

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

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

The sum in fact of the whole matter appears to be, that the sentiment on which Sterne so prided himself—the acute sensibilities which he regarded with such extraordinary complacency, were, as has been before observed, the weakness and not the strength of his pathetic style. When Sterne the artist is uppermost, when he is surveying his characters with that penetrating eye of his, and above all when he is allowing his subtle and tender humour to play upon them unrestrained, he can touch the springs of compassionate emotion in us with a potent and unerring hand. But when Sterne the man is uppermost—when he is looking inward and not outward, contemplating his own feelings instead of those of his personages, his cunning fails him altogether. He is at his best in pathos, when he is most the humourist : or rather, we may almost say his pathos is never good unless when it is closely interwoven with his humour. In this of course there is nothing at all surprising. The only marvel is, that a man who was such a master of the humorous in its highest and deepest sense, should seem to have so little understood how near together lie the sources of tears and laughter on the very way-side of man's mysterious life.

## CHAPTER XI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Taken altogether, however, his place in English letters

is hard to fix, and his tenure in human memory hard to determine. Hitherto he has held his own, with the great writers of his era, but it has been in virtue, as I have attempted to show, of a contribution to the literary possessions of mankind which is as uniquely limited in amount as it is exceptionally perfect in quality. One cannot but feel that, as regards the sum of his titles to recollection, his name stands far below either of those other two which in the course of the last century added themselves to the highest rank among the classics of English humour. Sterne has not the abounding life and the varied human interest of Fielding: and to say nothing of his vast intellectual inferiority to Swift, he never so much as approaches those problems of everlasting concernment to man which Swift handles with so terrible a fascination. Certainly no enthusiastic Gibbon of the future is ever likely to say of Sterne's "pictures of human manners," that they will "outlive the palace of the Escurial and the Imperial Eagle of the House of Austria." Assuredly no one will ever find in *this* so-called English antitype of the Curé of Meudon, any of the deeper qualities of that gloomy and commanding spirit which has been finely compared to the "soul of Rabelais *habitant in sicco*." Nay, to descend even to minor aptitudes, Sterne cannot tell a story as Swift and Fielding can tell one: and his work is not assured of life as *Tom Jones* and *Gulliver's Travels*, considered as stories alone, would be assured of it—even if the one were stripped of its cheerful humour, and the other disarmed of its savage allegory. And hence it might be rash to predict that Sterne's days will be as long in the land of literary memory as the two great writers aforesaid. Ranked, as he still is, among "English classics," he undergoes, I

suspect, even more than an English classic's ordinary share of reverential neglect. Among those who talk about him, he has, I should imagine, fewer readers than Fielding, and very much fewer than Swift. Nor is he likely to increase their number as time goes on, but rather perhaps the contrary. Indeed the only question is whether with the lapse of years he will not, like other writers as famous in their day, become yet more of a mere name. For there is still, of course, a further stage to which he may decline. That object of so much empty mouth-honour, the English classic of the last and earlier centuries, presents himself for classification under three distinct categories. There is the class who are still read in a certain measure, though in a much smaller measure than is pretended, by the great body of ordinarily well-educated men. Of this class, the two authors whose names I have already cited, Swift and Fielding, are typical examples; and it may be taken to include Goldsmith also. Then comes the class of those whom the ordinarily well-educated public, whatever they may pretend, read really very little or not at all: and in this class we may couple Sterne with Addison, with Smollett, and, except of course as to Robinson Crusoe—unless, indeed, our *blase* boys have outgrown him among other pleasures of boyhood—with Defoe. But below this there is yet a third class of writers, who are not only read by none but the critic, the connoisseur, or the historian of literature, but are scarcely read even by them, except from curiosity, or “in the way of business.” The type of this class is Richardson: and one cannot, I say, help asking whether he will hereafter have Sterne as a companion of his dusty solitude. Are *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey* destined to descend from the second

class into the third—from the region of partial into that of total neglect, and to have their portion with *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Sir Charles Grandison*? The unbounded vogue which they enjoyed in their time will not save them: for sane and sober critics compared Richardson in his day to Shakespeare, and Diderot broke forth into prophetic rhapsodies upon the immortality of his works which to us in these days have become absolutely pathetic in their felicity of falsified prediction. Seeing, too, that a good three-fourths of the attractions which won Sterne his contemporary popularity are now so much dead weight of dead matter, and that the vital residuum is in amount so small, the fate of Richardson might seem to be but too close behind him. Yet it is difficult to believe that this fate will ever quite overtake him. His sentiment may have mostly ceased—it probably has ceased, to stir any emotion at all in these days; but there is an imperishable element in his humour. And though the circle of his readers may have no tendency to increase, one can hardly suppose that a charm, which those who still feel it feel so keenly, will ever entirely cease to captivate; or that time can have any power over a perfume which so wonderfully retains the pungent freshness of its fragrance after the lapse of a hundred years.

THE END.

# English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

HAWTHORNE





# HAWTHORNE

BY

HENRY JAMES, JUN<sup>r</sup>.

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**HAWTHORNE**



# HAWTHORNE.

## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY YEARS.

It will be necessary, for several reasons, to give this short sketch the form rather of a critical essay than of a biography. The data for a life of Nathaniel Hawthorne are the reverse of copious, and even if they were abundant they would serve but in a limited measure the purpose of the biographer. Hawthorne's career was probably as tranquil and uneventful a one as ever fell to the lot of a man of letters ; it was almost strikingly deficient in incident, in what may be called the dramatic quality. Few men of equal genius and of equal eminence can have led on the whole a simpler life. His six volumes of Note-Books illustrate this simplicity ; they are a sort of monument to an unagitated fortune. Hawthorne's career had few vicissitudes or variations ; it was passed for the most part in a small and homogeneous society, in a provincial, rural community ; it had few perceptible points of contact with what is called the world, with public events, with the manners of his

time, even with the life of his neighbours. Its literary incidents are not numerous. He produced, in quantity, but little. His works consist of four novels and the fragment of another, five volumes of short tales, a collection of sketches, and a couple of story-books for children. And yet some account of the man and the writer is well worth giving. Whatever may have been Hawthorne's private lot, he has the importance of being the most beautiful and most eminent representative of a literature. The importance of the literature may be questioned, but at any rate, in the field of letters, Hawthorne is the most valuable example of the American genius. That genius has not, as a whole, been literary; but Hawthorne was on his limited scale a master of expression. He is the writer to whom his countrymen most confidently point when they wish to make a claim to have enriched the mother-tongue, and, judging from present appearances, he will long occupy this honourable position. If there is something very fortunate for him in the way that he borrows an added relief from the absence of competitors in his own line and from the general flatness of the literary field that surrounds him, there is also, to a spectator, something almost touching in his situation. He was so modest and delicate a genius that we may fancy him appealing from the lonely honour of a representative attitude—perceiving a painful incongruity between his imponderable literary baggage and the large conditions of American life. Hawthorne on the one side is so subtle and slender and unpretending, and the American world on the other is so vast and various and substantial, that it might seem to the author of *The Scarlet Letter* and the *Mosses from an Old Manse*, that we render him a

poor service in contrasting his proportions with those of a great civilization. But our author must accept the awkward as well as the graceful side of his fame; for he has the advantage of pointing a valuable moral. This moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion. American civilization has hitherto had other things to do than to produce flowers, and before giving birth to writers it has wisely occupied itself with providing something for them to write about. Three or four beautiful talents of trans-Atlantic growth are the sum of what the world usually recognises, and in this modest nosegay the genius of Hawthorne is admitted to have the rarest and sweetest fragrance.

His very simplicity has been in his favour; it has helped him to appear complete and homogeneous. To talk of his being national would be to force the note and make a mistake of proportion; but he is, in spite of the absence of the realistic quality, intensely and vividly local. Out of the soil of New England he sprang—in a crevice of that immitigable granite he sprouted and bloomed. Half of the interest that he possesses for an American reader with any turn for analysis must reside in his latent New England savour; and I think it no more than just to say that whatever entertainment he may yield to those who know him at a distance, it is an almost indispensable condition of properly appreciating him to have received a personal impression of the manners, the morals, indeed of the very climate, of the great region of which the remarkable city of Boston is the metropolis. The cold, bright



air of New England seems to blow through his pages, and these, in the opinion of many people, are the medium in which it is most agreeable to make the acquaintance of that tonic atmosphere. As to whether it is worth while to seek to know something of New England in order to extract a more intimate quality from *The House of Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*, I need not pronounce; but it is certain that a considerable observation of the society to which these productions were more directly addressed is a capital preparation for enjoying them. I have alluded to the absence in Hawthorne of that quality of realism which is now so much in fashion, an absence in regard to which there will of course be more to say; and yet I think I am not fanciful in saying that he testifies to the sentiments of the society in which he flourished almost as pertinently (proportions observed) as Balzac and some of his descendants—M<sup>r</sup>. Flaubert and Zola—testify to the manners and morals of the French people. He was not a man with a literary theory; he was guiltless of a system, and I am not sure that he had ever heard of Realism, this remarkable compound having (although it was invented some time earlier) come into general use only since his death. He had certainly not proposed to himself to give an account of the social idiosyncrasies of his fellow-citizens, for his touch on such points is always light and vague, he has none of the apparatus of an historian, and his shadowy style of portraiture never suggests a high standard of accuracy. Nevertheless he virtually offers the most vivid reflection of New England life that has found its way into literature. His value in this respect is not diminished by the fact that he has not attempted

to portray the usual Yankee of comedy, and that he has been almost culpably indifferent to his opportunities for commemorating the variations of colloquial English that may be observed in the New World. His characters do not express themselves in the dialect of the *Biglow Papers*—their language indeed is apt to be too elegant, too delicate. They are not portraits of actual types, and in their phraseology there is nothing imitative. But none the less, Hawthorne's work savours thoroughly of the local soil—it is redolent of the social system in which he had his being.

This could hardly fail to be case, when the man himself was so deeply rooted in the soil. Hawthorne sprang from the primitive New England stock; he had a very definite and conspicuous pedigree. He was born at Salem, Massachusetts, on the 4th of July, 1804, and his birthday was the great American festival, the anniversary of the Declaration of national Independence.<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne was in his disposition an unqualified and unflinching American; he found occasion to give us the measure of the fact during the seven years that he spent in Europe toward the close of his life; and this was no more than proper on the part of a man who had enjoyed

<sup>1</sup> It is proper that before I go further I should acknowledge my large obligations to the only biography of our author, of any considerable length, that has been written—the little volume entitled *A Study of Hawthorne*, by Mr. George Parsons Lathrop, the son-in-law of the subject of the work. (Boston, 1876.) To this ingenious and sympathetic sketch, in which the author has taken great pains to collect the more interesting facts of Hawthorne's life, I am greatly indebted. Mr. Lathrop's work is not pitched in the key which many another writer would have chosen, and his tone is not to my sense the truly critical one; but without the help afforded by his elaborate essay, the present little volume could not have been prepared.

the honour of coming into the world on the day on which of all the days in the year the great Republic enjoys her acutest fit of self-consciousness. Moreover, a person who has been ushered into life by the ringing of bells and the booming of cannon (unless indeed he be frightened straight out of it again by the uproar of his awakening) receives by this very fact an injunction to do something great, something that will justify such striking natal accompaniments. Hawthorne was by race of the clearest Puritan strain. His earliest American ancestors (who wrote the name "Hathorne" —the shape in which it was transmitted to Nathaniel, who inserted the *w*,) was the younger son of a Wiltshire family, whose residence, according to a note of our author's in 1837, was "Wigcastle, Wigton." Hawthorne, in the note in question, mentions the gentleman who was at that time the head of the family; but it does not appear that he at any period renewed acquaintance with his English kinsfolk. Major William Hathorne came out to Massachusetts in the early years of the Puritan settlement; in 1635 or 1636, according to the note to which I have just alluded; in 1630 according to information presumably more accurate. He was one of the band of companions of the virtuous and exemplary John Winthrop, the almost lifelong royal Governor of the young colony, and the brightest and most amiable figure in the early Puritan annals. How amiable William Hathorne may have been I know not, but he was evidently of the stuff of which the citizens of the Commonwealth were best advised to be made. He was a sturdy fighting man, doing solid execution upon both the inward and outward enemies of the State. The latter were the savages, the former

the Quakers ; the energy expended by the early Puritans in resistance to the tomahawk not weakening their disposition to deal with spiritual dangers. They employed the same—or almost the same—weapons in both directions ; the flintlock and the halberd against the Indians, and the cat-o'-nine-tails against the heretics. One of the longest, though by no means one of the most successful, of Hawthorne's shorter tales (*The Gentle Boy*) deals with this pitiful persecution of the least aggressive of all schismatic bodies. William Hathorne, who had been made a magistrate of the town of Salem, where a grant of land had been offered him as an inducement to residence, figures in New England history as having given orders that "Anne Coleman and four of her friends" should be whipped through Salem, Boston, and Dedham. This Anne Coleman, I suppose, is the woman alluded to in that fine passage in the Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, in which Hawthorne pays a qualified tribute to the founder of the American branch of his race :—

"The figure of that first ancestor, invested by family tradition with a dim and dusky grandeur, was present to my boyish imagination as far back as I can remember. It still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past, which I scarcely claim in reference to the present, phase of the town. I seem to have a stronger claim to a residence here on account of this grave, bearded, sable-cloaked and steeple-crowned progenitor—who came so early, with his Bible and his sword, and trod the unworn street with such a stately port, and make so large a figure as a man of war and peace—a stronger claim than for myself, whose name is seldom heard and my face hardly known. He was a soldier, legislator, judge ; he was a ruler in the church ; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter

persecutor, as witness the Quakers, who have remembered him in their histories, and relate an incident of his hard severity towards a woman of their sect which will last longer, it is to be feared, than any of his better deeds, though these were many."

William Hathorne died in 1681; but those hard qualities that his descendant speaks of were reproduced in his son John, who bore the title of Colonel, and who was connected, too intimately for his honour, with that deplorable episode of New England history, the persecution of the so-called Witches of Salem. John Hathorne is introduced into the little drama entitled *The Salem Farms* in Longfellow's *New England Tragedies*. I know not whether he had the compensating merits of his father, but our author speaks of him, in the continuation of the passage I have just quoted, as having made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may be said to have left a stain upon him. "So deep a stain, indeed," Hawthorne adds, characteristically, "that his old dry bones in the Charter Street burial-ground must still retain it, if they have not crumbled utterly to dust." Readers of *The House of the Seven Gables* will remember that the story concerns itself with a family which is supposed to be overshadowed by a curse launched against one of its earlier members by a poor man occupying a lowlier place in the world, whom this ill-advised ancestor had been the means of bringing to justice for the crime of witchcraft. Hawthorne apparently found the idea of the history of the Pyncheons in his own family annals. His witch-judging ancestor was reported to have incurred a malediction from one of his victims, in consequence of which the prosperity of the race faded

utterly away. "I know not," the passage I have already quoted goes on, "whether these ancestors of mine bethought themselves to repent and ask pardon of Heaven for their cruelties, or whether they are now groaning under the heavy consequences of them in another state of being. At all events, I, the present writer, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them—as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race for some time back would argue to exist—may be now and henceforth removed." The two first American Hathornes had been people of importance and responsibility; but with the third generation the family lapsed into an obscurity from which it emerged in the very person of the writer who begs so gracefully for a turn in its affairs. It is very true, Hawthorne proceeds, in the Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, that from the original point of view such lustre as he might have contrived to confer upon the name would have appeared more than questionable.

"Either of these stern and black-browed Puritans would have thought it quite a sufficient retribution for his sins that after so long a lapse of years the old trunk of the family tree, with so much venerable moss upon it, should have borne, as its topmost bough, an idler like myself. No aim that I have ever cherished would they recognise as laudable; no success of mine, if my life, beyond its domestic scope, had ever been brightened by success, would they deem otherwise than worthless, if not positively disgraceful. 'What is he?' murmurs one grey shadow of my forefathers to the other. 'A writer of story-books! What kind of a business in life, what manner of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day and generation, may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!' Such

are the compliments bandied between my great grandsires and myself across the gulf of time! And yet, let them scorn me as they will, strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine."

In this last observation we may imagine that there was not a little truth. Poet and novelist as Hawthorne was, sceptic and dreamer and little of a man of action, late-coming fruit of a tree which might seem to have lost the power to bloom, he was morally, in an appreciative degree, a chip of the old block. His forefathers had crossed the Atlantic for conscience' sake, and it was the idea of the urgent conscience that haunted the imagination of their so-called degenerate successor. The Puritan strain in his blood ran clear—there are passages in his Diaries, kept during his residence in Europe, which might almost have been written by the grimmest of the old Salem worthies. To him as to them, the consciousness of *sin* was the most importunate fact of life, and if they had undertaken to write little tales, this baleful substantive, with its attendant adjective, could hardly have been more frequent in their pages than in those of their fanciful descendant. Hawthorne had moreover in his composition, contemplator and dreamer as he was, an element of simplicity and rigidity, a something plain and masculine and sensible, which might have kept his black-browed grandsires on better terms with him than he admits to be possible. However little they might have appreciated the artist, they would have approved of the man. The play of Hawthorne's intellect was light and capricious, but the man himself was firm and rational. The imagination was profane, but the temper was not degenerate.

The "dreary and unprosperous condition" that he

speaks of in regard to the fortunes of his family is an allusion to the fact that several generations followed each other on the soil in which they had been planted, that during the eighteenth century a succession of Hathornes trod the simple streets of Salem without ever conferring any especial lustre upon the town or receiving, presumably, any great delight from it. A hundred years of Salem would perhaps be rather a dead-weight for any family to carry, and we venture to imagine that the Hathornes were dull and depressed. They did what they could, however, to improve their situation; they trod the Salem streets as little as possible. They went to sea, and made long voyages; seamanship became the regular profession of the family. Hawthorne has said it in charming language. "From father to son, for above a hundred years, they followed the sea; a grey-headed shipmaster, in each generation, retiring from the quarter-deck to the homestead, while a boy of fourteen took the hereditary place before the mast, confronting the salt spray and the gale which had blustered against his sire and grandsire. The boy also, in due time, passed from the fore-castle to the cabin, spent a tempestuous manhood, and returned from his world-wanderings to grow old and die and mingle his dust with the natal earth." Our author's grandfather, Daniel Hathorne, is mentioned by Mr. Lathrop, his biographer and son-in-law, as a hardy privateer during the war of Independence. His father, from whom he was named, was also a shipmaster, and he died in foreign lands, in the exercise of his profession. He was carried off by a fever, at Surinam, in 1808. He left three children, of whom Nathaniel was the only boy. The boy's mother, who had been a Miss Manning,



came of a New England stock almost as long-established as that of her husband ; she is described by our author's biographer as a woman of remarkable beauty, and by an authority whom he quotes, as being "a minute observer of religious festivals," of "feasts, fasts, new-moons, and Sabbaths." Of feasts the poor lady in her Puritanic home can have had but a very limited number to celebrate ; but of new-moons, she may be supposed to have enjoyed the usual, and of Sabbaths even more than the usual, proportion.

In quiet provincial Salem, Nathaniel Hawthorne passed the greater part of his boyhood, as well as many years of his later life. Mr. Lathrop has much to say about the ancient picturesqueness of the place, and about the mystic influences it would project upon such a mind and character as Hawthorne's. These things are always relative, and in appreciating them everything depends upon the point of view. Mr. Lathrop writes for American readers, who in such a matter as this are very easy to please. Americans have as a general thing a hungry passion for the picturesque, and they are so fond of local colour that they contrive to perceive it in localities in which the amateurs of other countries would detect only the most neutral tints. History, as yet, has left in the United States but so thin and impalpable a deposit that we very soon touch the hard substratum of nature ; and nature herself, in the western world, has the peculiarity of seeming rather crude and immature. The very air looks new and young ; the light of the sun seems fresh and innocent, as if it knew as yet but few of the secrets of the world and none of the weariness of shining ; the vegetation has the appearance of not having reached its

majority. A large juvenility is stamped upon the face of things, and in the vividness of the present, the past, which died so young and had time to produce so little, attracts but scanty attention. I doubt whether English observers would discover any very striking trace of it in the ancient town of Salem. Still, with all respect to a York and a Shrewsbury, to a Toledo and a Verona, Salem has a physiognomy in which the past plays a more important part than the present. It is of course a very recent past; but one must remember that the dead of yesterday are not more alive than those of a century ago. I know not of what picturesqueness Hawthorne was conscious in his respectable birthplace; I suspect his perception of it was less keen than his biographer assumes it to have been; but he must have felt at least that of whatever complexity of earlier life there had been in the country, the elm-shadowed streets of Salem were a recognisable memento. He has made considerable mention of the place, here and there, in his tales; but he has nowhere dilated upon it very lovingly, and it is noteworthy that in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the only one of his novels of which the scene is laid in it, he has by no means availed himself of the opportunity to give a description of it. He had of course a filial fondness for it—a deep-seated sense of connection with it; but he must have spent some very dreary years there, and the two feelings, the mingled tenderness and rancour, are visible in the Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*.

“The old town of Salem,” he writes,—“my native place, though I have dwelt much away from it, both in boyhood and in maturer years—possesses, or did possess, a hold on my affections, the force of which I have never realized during my

seasons of actual residence here. Indeed, so far as the physical aspect is concerned, with its flat, unvaried surface, covered chiefly with wooden houses, few or none of which pretend to architectural beauty; its irregularity, which is neither picturesque nor quaint, but only tame; its long and lazy street, lounging wearisomely through the whole extent of the peninsula, with Gallows Hill and New Guinea at one end, and a view of the almshouse at the other—such being the features of my native town it would be quite as reasonable to form a sentimental attachment to a disarranged chequer-board."

But he goes on to say that he has never divested himself of the sense of intensely belonging to it—that the spell of the continuity of his life with that of his predecessors has never been broken. "It is no matter that the place is joyless for him; that he is weary of the old wooden houses, the mud and the dust, the dead level of site and sentiment, the chill east wind, and the chilliest of social atmospheres;—all these and whatever faults besides he may see or imagine, are nothing to the purpose. The spell survives, and just as powerfully as if the natal spot were an earthly paradise." There is a very American quality in this perpetual consciousness of a spell on Hawthorne's part; it is only in a country where newness and change and brevity of tenure are the common substance of life, that the fact of one's ancestors having lived for a hundred and seventy years in a single spot would become an element of one's morality. It is only an imaginative American that would feel urged to keep reverting to this circumstance, to keep analysing and cunningly considering it.

The Salem of to-day has, as New England towns go, a physiognomy of its own, and in spite of Hawthorne's analogy of the disarranged draught-board, it is a

decidedly agreeable one. The spreading elms in its streets, the proportion of large, square, honourable-looking houses, suggesting an easy, copious material life, the little gardens, the grassy waysides, the open windows, the air of space and salubrity and decency, and above all the intimation of larger antecedents—these things compose a picture which has little of the element that painters call depth of tone, but which is not without something that they would admit to be style. To English eyes the oldest and most honourable of the smaller American towns must seem in a manner primitive and rustic; the shabby, straggling, village-quality appears marked in them, and their social tone is not unnaturally inferred to bear the village stamp. Village-like they are, and it would be no gross incivility to describe them as large, respectable, prosperous, democratic villages. But even a village, in a great and vigorous democracy, where there are no overshadowing squires, where the "county" has no social existence, where the villagers are conscious of no superincumbent strata of gentility, piled upwards into vague regions of privilege—even a village is not an institution to accept of more or less graceful patronage; it thinks extremely well of itself, and is absolute in its own regard. Salem is a sea-port, but it is a sea-port deserted and decayed. It belongs to that rather melancholy group of old coast-towns, scattered along the great sea-face of New England, and of which the list is completed by the names of Portsmouth, Plymouth, New Bedford, Newburyport, Newport—superannuated centres of the traffic with foreign lands, which have seen their trade carried away from them by the greater cities. As Hawthorne says, their ventures have gone "to swell, needlessly and

imperceptibly, the mighty flood of commerce at New York or Boston." Salem, at the beginning of the present century, played a great part in the Eastern trade; it was the residence of enterprising shipowners who despatched their vessels to Indian and Chinese seas. It was a place of large fortunes, many of which have remained, though the activity that produced them has passed away. These successful traders constituted what Hawthorne calls "the aristocratic class." He alludes in one of his slighter sketches (*The Sister Years*) to the sway of this class and the "moral influence of wealth" having been more marked in Salem than in any other New England town. The sway, we may believe, was on the whole gently exercised, and the moral influence of wealth was not exerted in the cause of immorality. Hawthorne was probably but imperfectly conscious of an advantage which familiarity had made stale—the fact that he lived in the most democratic and most virtuous of modern communities. Of the virtue it is but civil to suppose that his own family had a liberal share; but not much of the wealth, apparently, came into their way. Hawthorne was not born to a patrimony, and his income, later in life, never exceeded very modest proportions.

Of his childish years there appears to be nothing very definite to relate, though his biographer devotes a good many graceful pages to them. There is a considerable sameness in the behaviour of small boys, and it is probable that if we were acquainted with the details of our author's infantine career we should find it to be made up of the same pleasures and pains as that of many ingenuous lads for whom fame has had nothing in keeping.

The absence of precocious symptoms of genius is on the whole more striking in the lives of men who have distinguished themselves than their juvenile promise; though it must be added that Mr. Lathrop has made out, as he was almost in duty bound to do, a very good case in favour of Hawthorne's having been an interesting child. He was not at any time what would be called a sociable man, and there is therefore nothing unexpected in the fact that he was fond of long walks in which he was not known to have had a companion. "Juvenile literature" was but scantily known at that time, and the enormous and extraordinary contribution made by the United States to this department of human happiness was locked in the bosom of futurity. The young Hawthorne, therefore, like many of his contemporaries, was constrained to amuse himself, for want of anything better, with the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Faery Queen*. A boy may have worse company than Bunyan and Spenser, and it is very probable that in his childish rambles our author may have had associates of whom there could be no record. When he was nine years old he met with an accident at school which threatened for a while to have serious results. He was struck on the foot by a ball and so severely lamed that he was kept at home for a long time, and had not completely recovered before his twelfth year. His school, it is to be supposed, was the common day-school of New England—the primary factor in that extraordinarily pervasive system of instruction in the plainer branches of learning, which forms one of the principal ornaments of American life. In 1818, when he was fourteen years old, he was taken by his mother to live in the house of an uncle, her brother, who was established in the town

of Raymond, near Lake Sebago, in the State of Maine. The immense State of Maine, in the year 1818, must have had an even more magnificently natural character than it possesses at the present day, and the uncle's dwelling, in consequence of being in a little smarter style than the primitive structures that surrounded it, was known by the villagers as Manning's Folly. Mr. Lathrop pronounces this region to be of a "weird and woodsy" character; and Hawthorne, later in life, spoke of it to a friend as the place where "I first got my cursed habits of solitude." The outlook, indeed, for an embryonic novelist, would not seem to have been cheerful; the social dreariness of a small New England community lost amid the forests of Maine, at the beginning of the present century, must have been consummate. But for a boy with a relish for solitude there were many natural resources, and we can understand that Hawthorne should in after years have spoken very tenderly of this episode. "I lived in Maine like a bird of the air, so perfect was the freedom I enjoyed." During the long summer days he roamed, gun in hand, through the great woods, and during the moonlight nights of winter, says his biographer, quoting another informant, "he would skate until midnight, all alone, upon Sebago Lake, with the deep shadows of the icy hills on either hand."

In 1819 he was sent back to Salem to school, and in the following year he wrote to his mother, who had remained at Raymond (the boy had found a home at Salem with another uncle), "I have left school and have begun to fit for college under Benjm. L. Oliver, Lawyer. So you are in danger of having one learned man in your family. . . . I get my lessons at home and recite them

to him (Mr. Oliver) at seven o'clock in the morning. . . . Shall you want me to be a Minister, Doctor, or Lawyer? A Minister I will not be." He adds, at the close of this epistle—"O how I wish I was again with you, with nothing to do but to go a-gunning! But the happiest days of my life are gone." In 1821, in his seventeenth year, he entered Bowdoin College, at Brunswick, Maine. This institution was in the year 1821—a quarter of a century after its foundation—a highly honourable, but not a very elaborately organized, nor a particularly impressive, seat of learning. I say it was not impressive, but I immediately remember that impressions depend upon the minds receiving them; and that to a group of simple New England lads, upwards of sixty years ago, the halls and groves of Bowdoin, neither dense nor lofty though they can have been, may have seemed replete with Academic stateliness. It was a homely, simple, frugal, "country college," of the old-fashioned American stamp; exerting within its limits a civilizing influence, working, amid the forests and the lakes, the log-houses and the clearings, toward the amenities and humanities and other collegiate graces, and offering a very sufficient education to the future lawyers, merchants, clergymen, politicians, and editors, of the very active and knowledge-loving community that supported it. It did more than this—it numbered poets and statesmen among its undergraduates, and on the roll-call of its sons it has several distinguished names. Among Hawthorne's fellow-students was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who divides with our author the honour of being the most distinguished of American men of letters. I know not whether Mr. Longfellow was especially intimate with Hawthorne at this period



(they were very good friends later in life), but with two of his companions he formed a friendship which lasted always. One of these was Franklin Pierce, who was destined to fill what Hawthorne calls "the most august position in the world." Pierce was elected President of the United States in 1852. The other was Horatio Bridge, who afterwards served with distinction in the Navy, and to whom the charming prefatory letter of the collection of tales published under the name of *The Snow Image*, is addressed. "If anybody is responsible at this day for my being an author it is yourself. I know not whence your faith came; but while we were lads together at a country college—gathering blueberries in study-hours under those tall Academic pines; or watching the great logs as they tumbled along the current of the Androscoggin; or shooting pigeons and grey squirrels in the woods; or bat-fowling in the summer twilight; or catching trout in that shadowy little stream which, I suppose, is still wandering riverward through the forest—though you and I will never cast a line in it again—two idle lads, in short (as we need not fear to acknowledge now), doing a hundred things the Faculty never heard of, or else it had been worse for us—still it was your prognostic of your friend's destiny that he was to be a writer of fiction." That is a very pretty picture, but it is a picture of happy urchins at school, rather than of undergraduates "panting," as Macaulay says, "for one and twenty." Poor Hawthorne was indeed thousands of miles away from Oxford and Cambridge; that touch about the blueberries and the logs on the Androscoggin tells the whole story, and strikes the note, as it were, of his circumstances. But if the pleasures at Bowdoin were not expensive, so

neither were the penalties. The amount of Hawthorne's collegiate bill for one term was less than 4*l.*, and of this sum more than 9*s.* was made up of fines. The fines, however, were not heavy. Mr. Lathrop prints a letter addressed by the President to "Mrs. Elizabeth C. Hathorne," requesting her co-operation with the officers of this college, "in the attempt to induce your son faithfully to observe the laws of this institution." He has just been fined fifty cents for playing cards for money during the preceding term. "Perhaps he might not have gamed," the Professor adds, "were it not for the influence of a student whom we have dismissed from college." The biographer quotes a letter from Hawthorne to one of his sisters, in which the writer says, in allusion to this remark, that it is a great mistake to think that he has been led away by the wicked ones. "I was fully as willing to play as the person he suspects of having enticed me, and would have been influenced by no one. I have a great mind to commence playing again, merely to show him that I scorn to be seduced by another into anything wrong." There is something in these few words that accords with the impression that the observant reader of Hawthorne gathers of the personal character that underlay his duskily-sportive imagination—an impression of simple manliness and transparent honesty.

He appears to have been a fair scholar, but not a brilliant one; and it is very probable that as the standard of scholarship at Bowdoin was not high, he graduated none the less comfortably on this account. Mr. Lathrop is able to testify to the fact, by no means a surprising one, that he wrote verses at college, though the few stanzas that the biographer quotes are not

such as to make us especially regret that his rhyming mood was a transient one.

"The ocean hath its silent caves,  
Deep, quiet and alone.  
Though there be fury on the waves,  
Beneath them there is none."

That quatrain may suffice to decorate our page. And in connection with his college days I may mention his first novel, a short romance entitled *Fanshawe*, which was published in Boston in 1828, three years after he graduated. It was probably also written after that event, but the scene of the tale is laid at Bowdoin (which figures under an altered name), and Hawthorne's attitude with regard to the book, even shortly after it was published, was such as to assign it to this boyish period. It was issued anonymously, but he so repented of his venture that he annihilated the edition, of which, according to Mr. Lathrop, "not half a dozen copies are now known to be extant." I have seen none of these rare volumes, and I know nothing of *Fanshawe* but what the writer just quoted relates. It is the story of a young lady who goes in rather an odd fashion to reside at "Harley College" (equivalent of Bowdoin), under the care and guardianship of Dr. Malmoth, the President of the institution, a venerable, amiable, unworldly, and henpecked scholar. Here she becomes very naturally an object of interest to two of the students; in regard to whom I cannot do better than quote Mr. Lathrop. One of these young men "is Edward Wolcott, a wealthy, handsome, generous, healthy young fellow from one of the seaport towns; and the other Fanshawe, the hero, who is a poor but ambitious recluse, already passing into a decline

through overmuch devotion to books and meditation. Fanshawe, though the deeper nature of the two, and intensely moved by his new passion, perceiving that a union between himself and Ellen could not be a happy one, resigns the hope of it from the beginning. But circumstances bring him into intimate relation with her. The real action of the book after the preliminaries, takes up only some three days, and turns upon the attempt of a man named Butler to entice Ellen away under his protection, then marry her, and secure the fortune to which she is heiress. This scheme is partly frustrated by circumstances, and Butler's purpose towards Ellen thus becomes a much more sinister one. From this she is rescued by Fanshawe, and knowing that he loves her, but is concealing his passion, she gives him the opportunity and the right to claim her hand. For a moment the rush of desire and hope is so great that he hesitates; then he refuses to take advantage of her generosity, and parts with her for a last time. Ellen becomes engaged to Wolcott, who had won her heart from the first; and Fanshawe, sinking into rapid consumption, dies before his class graduates." The story must have had a good deal of innocent lightness; and it is a proof of how little the world of observation lay open to Hawthorne, at this time, that he should have had no other choice than to make his little drama go forward between the rather naked walls of Bowdoin, where the presence of his heroine was an essential incongruity. He was twenty-four years old, but the "world," in its social sense, had not disclosed itself to him. He had, however, already, at moments, a very pretty writer's touch, as witness this passage, quoted by Mr. Lathrop, and which is worth

transcribing. The heroine has gone off with the nefarious Butler, and the good Dr. Melmoth starts in pursuit of her, attended by young Wolcott.

"'Alas, youth, these are strange times,' observed the President, 'when a doctor of divinity and an undergraduate set forth, like a knight-errant and his squire, in search of a stray damsel. Methinks I am an epitome of the church militant, or a new species of polemical divinity. Pray Heaven, however, there be no such encounter in store for us; for I utterly forgot to provide myself with weapons.'

"'I took some thought for that matter, reverend knight,' replied Edward, whose imagination was highly tickled by Dr. Melmoth's chivalrous comparison.

"'Aye, I see that you have girded on a sword,' said the divine. 'But wherewith shall I defend myself? my hand being empty except of this golden-headed staff, the gift of Mr. Langton.'

"'One of these, if you will accept it,' answered Edward, exhibiting a brace of pistols, 'will serve to begin the conflict before you join the battle hand to hand.'

"'Nay, I shall find little safety in meddling with that deadly instrument, since I know not accurately from which end proceeds the bullet,' said Dr. Melmoth. 'But were it not better, since we are so well provided with artillery, to betake ourselves, in the event of an encounter, to some stone wall or other place of strength?'

"'If I may presume to advise,' said the squire, 'you, as being most valiant and experienced, should ride forward, lance in hand (your long staff serving for a lance), while I annoy the enemy from afar.'

"'Like Teucer, behind the shield of Ajax,' interrupted Dr. Melmoth, 'or David with his stone and sling. No, no, young man; I have left unfinished in my study a learned treatise, important not only to the present age, but to posterity, for whose sake I must take heed to my safety. But, lo! who rides yonder?'"

On leaving college Hawthorne had gone back to live at Salem.

## CHAPTER II.

### EARLY MANHOOD.

THE twelve years that followed were not the happiest or most brilliant phase of Hawthorne's life; they strike me indeed as having had an altogether peculiar dreariness. They had their uses; they were the period of incubation of the admirable compositions which eventually brought him reputation and prosperity. But of their actual aridity the young man must have had a painful consciousness; he never lost the impression of it. Mr. Lathrop quotes a phrase to this effect from one of his letters, late in life. "I am disposed to thank God for the gloom and chill of my early life, in the hope that my share of adversity came then, when I bore it alone." And the same writer alludes to a touching passage in the *English Note-Books*, which I shall quote entire:—

"I think I have been happier this Christmas (1854) than ever before—by my own fireside, and with my wife and children about me—more content to enjoy what I have, less anxious for anything beyond it, in this life. My early life was perhaps a good preparation for the declining half of life; it having been such a blank that any thereafter would compare favourably with it. For a long, long while, I have occasionally

been visited with a singular dream ; and I have an impression that I have dreamed it ever since I have been in England. It is, that I am still at college, or, sometimes, even, at school—and there is a sense that I have been there unconscionably long, and have quite failed to make such progress as my contemporaries have done ; and I seem to meet some of them with a feeling of shame and depression that broods over me as I think of it, even when awake. This dream, recurring all through these twenty or thirty years, must be one of the effects of that heavy seclusion in which I shut myself up for twelve years after leaving college, when everybody moved onward and left me behind. How strange that it should come now, when I may call myself famous and prosperous !—when I am happy too."

The allusion here is to a state of solitude which was the young man's positive choice at the time—or into which he drifted at least under the pressure of his natural shyness and reserve. He was not expansive, he was not addicted to experiments and adventures of intercourse, he was not, personally, in a word, what is called sociable. The general impression of this silence-loving and shade-seeking side of his character is doubtless exaggerated, and, in so far as it points to him as a sombre and sinister figure, is almost ludicrously at fault. He was silent, diffident, more inclined to hesitate, to watch and wait and meditate, than to produce himself, and fonder, on almost any occasion, of being absent than of being present. This quality betrays itself in all his writings. There is in all of them something cold and light and thin, something belonging to the imagination alone, which indicates a man but little disposed to multiply his relations, his points of contact, with society. If we read the six volumes of Note-Books with an eye to the evidence of this unsocial side

of his life, we find it in sufficient abundance. But we find at the same time that there was nothing unamiable or invidious in his shyness, and above all that there was nothing preponderantly gloomy. The qualities to which the Note-Books most testify are, on the whole, his serenity and amenity of mind. They reveal these characteristics indeed in an almost phenomenal degree. The serenity, the simplicity, seem in certain portions almost child-like; of brilliant gaiety, of high spirits, there is little; but the placidity and evenness of temper, the cheerful and contented view of the things he notes, never belie themselves. I know not what else he may have written in this copious record, and what passages of gloom and melancholy may have been suppressed; but as his Diaries stand, they offer in a remarkable degree the reflection of a mind whose development was not in the direction of sadness. A very clever French critic, whose fancy is often more lively than his observation is deep, M. Emile Montégut, writing in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in the year 1860, invents for our author the appellation of "Un Romancier Pessimiste." Superficially speaking, perhaps, the title is a happy one; but only superficially. Pessimism consists in having morbid and bitter views and theories about human nature; not in indulging in shadowy fancies and conceits. There is nothing whatever to show that Hawthorne had any such doctrines or convictions; certainly, the note of depression, of despair, of the disposition to undervalue the human race, is never sounded in his Diaries. These volumes contain the record of very few convictions or theories of any kind; they move with curious evenness, with a charming, graceful flow, on a level which lies above that of a man's



philosophy. They adhere with such persistence to this upper level that they prompt the reader to believe that Hawthorne had no appreciable philosophy at all—no general views that were in the least uncomfortable. They are the exhibition of an unperplexed intellect. I said just now that the development of Hawthorne's mind was not towards sadness; and I should be inclined to go still further, and say that his mind proper—his mind in so far as it was a repository of opinions and articles of faith—had no development that it is of especial importance to look into. What had a development was his imagination—that delicate and penetrating imagination which was always at play, always entertaining itself, always engaged in a game of hide and seek in the region in which it seemed to him that the game could best be played—among the shadows and substructions, the dark-based pillars and supports, of our moral nature. Beneath this movement and ripple of his imagination—as free and spontaneous as that of the sea surface—lay directly his personal affections. These were solid and strong, but, according to my impression, they had the place very much to themselves.

His innocent reserve, then, and his exaggerated, but by no means cynical, relish for solitude, imposed themselves upon him, in a great measure, with a persistency which helped to make the time a tolerably arid one—so arid a one indeed that we have seen that in the light of later happiness he pronounced it a blank. But in truth, if these were dull years, it was not all Hawthorne's fault. His situation was intrinsically poor—poor with a poverty that one almost hesitates to look into. When we think of what the conditions of intellectual life, of taste, must have been in a small New England town

fifty years ago ; and when we think of a young man of beautiful genius, with a love of literature and romance, of the picturesque, of style and form and colour, trying to make a career for himself in the midst of them, compassion for the young man becomes our dominant sentiment, and we see the large dry village picture in perhaps almost too hard a light. It seems to me then that it was possibly a blessing for Hawthorne that he was not expansive and inquisitive, that he lived much to himself and asked but little of his *milieu*. If he had been exacting and ambitious, if his appetite had been large and his knowledge various, he would probably have found the bounds of Salem intolerably narrow. But his culture had been of a simple sort—there was little of any other sort to be obtained in America in those days, and though he was doubtless haunted by visions of more suggestive opportunities, we may safely assume that he was not to his own perception the object of compassion that he appears to a critic who judges him after half a century's civilization has filtered into the twilight of that earlier time. If New England was socially a very small place in those days, Salem was a still smaller one ; and if the American tone at large was intensely provincial, that of New England was not greatly helped by having the best of it. The state of things was extremely natural, and there could be now no greater mistake than to speak of it with a redundancy of irony. American life had begun to constitute itself from the foundations ; it had begun to *be*, simply ; it was at an immeasurable distance from having begun to enjoy. I imagine there was no appreciable group of people in New England at that time proposing to itself to enjoy life ; this was not an undertaking for

which any provision had been made, or to which any encouragement was offered. Hawthorne must have vaguely entertained some such design upon destiny ; but he must have felt that his success would have to depend wholly upon his own ingenuity. I say he must have proposed to himself to enjoy, simply because he proposed to be an artist, and because this enters inevitably into the artist's scheme. There are a thousand ways of enjoying life, and that of the artist is one of the most innocent. But for all that, it connects itself with the idea of pleasure. He proposes to give pleasure, and to give it he must first get it. Where he gets it will depend upon circumstances, and circumstances were not encouraging to Hawthorne.

He was poor, he was solitary, and he undertook to devote himself to literature in a community in which the interest in literature was as yet of the smallest. It is not too much to say that even to the present day it is a considerable discomfort in the United States not to be "in business." The young man who attempts to launch himself in a career that does not belong to the so-called practical order ; the young man who has not, in a word, an office in the business-quarter of the town, with his name painted on the door, has but a limited place in the social system, finds no particular bough to perch upon. He is not looked at askance, he is not regarded as an idler ; literature and the arts have always been held in extreme honour in the American world, and those who practise them are received on easier terms than in other countries. If the tone of the American world is in some respects provincial, it is in none more so than in this matter of the exaggerated *homage rendered to authorship*. *The gentleman or the*

lady who has written a book is in many circles the object of an admiration too indiscriminating to operate as an encouragement to good writing. There is no reason to suppose that this was less the case fifty years ago; but fifty years ago, greatly more than now, the literary man must have lacked the comfort and inspiration of belonging to a class. The best things come, as a general thing, from the talents that are members of a group; every man works better when he has companions working in the same line, and yielding the stimulus of suggestion, comparison, emulation. Great things of course have been done by solitary workers; but they have usually been done with double the pains they would have cost if they had been produced in more genial circumstances. The solitary worker loses the profit of example and discussion; he is apt to make awkward experiments; he is in the nature of the case more or less of an empiric. The empiric may, as I say, be treated by the world as an expert; but the drawbacks and discomforts of empiricism remain to him, and are in fact increased by the suspicion that is mingled with his gratitude, of a want in the public taste of a sense of the proportions of things. Poor Hawthorne, beginning to write subtle short tales at Salem, was empirical enough; he was one of, at most, some dozen Americans who had taken up literature as a profession. The profession in the United States is still very young, and of diminutive stature; but in the year 1830 its head could hardly have been seen above ground. It strikes the observer of to-day that Hawthorne showed great courage in entering a field in which the honours and emoluments were so scanty as the profits of authorship must have been at that time. I have said that in

the United States at present authorship is a pedestal, and literature is the fashion ; but Hawthorne's history is a proof that it was possible, fifty years ago, to write a great many little masterpieces without becoming known. He begins the preface to the *Twice-Told Tales* by remarking that he was "for many years the obscurest man of letters in America." When once this work obtained recognition, the recognition left little to be desired. Hawthorne never, I believe, made large sums of money by his writings, and the early profits of these charming sketches could not have been considerable ; for many of them, indeed, as they appeared in journals and magazines, he had never been paid at all ; but the honour, when once it dawned—and it dawned tolerably early in the author's career—was never thereafter wanting. Hawthorne's countrymen are solidly proud of him, and the tone of Mr. Lathrop's *Study* is in itself sufficient evidence of the manner in which an American story-teller may in some cases look to have his eulogy pronounced.

Hawthorne's early attempt to support himself by his pen appears to have been deliberate ; we hear nothing of those experiments in counting-houses or lawyers' offices, of which a permanent invocation to the Muse is often the inconsequent sequel. He began to write, and to try and dispose of his writings ; and he remained at Salem apparently only because his family, his mother and his two sisters, lived there. His mother had a house, of which during the twelve years that elapsed until 1838, he appears to have been an inmate. Mr. Lathrop learned from his surviving sister that after publishing *Fanshawe* he produced a group of short stories entitled *Seven Tales of my Native Land*, and that

this lady retained a very favourable recollection of the work, which her brother had given her to read. But it never saw the light; his attempts to get it published were unsuccessful, and at last, in a fit of irritation and despair, the young author burned the manuscript.

There is probably something autobiographic in the striking little tale of *The Devil in Manuscript*. "They have been offered to seventeen publishers," says the hero of that sketch in regard to a pile of his own lucubrations.

"It would make you stare to read their answers. . . . One man publishes nothing but school-books; another has five novels already under examination; . . . another gentleman is just giving up business, on purpose, I verily believe, to avoid publishing my book. In short, of all the seventeen booksellers, only one has vouchsafed even to read my tales; and he—a literary dabbler himself, I should judge—has the impertinence to criticise them, proposing what he calls vast improvements, and concluding, after a general sentence of condemnation, with the definitive assurance that he will not be concerned on any terms. . . . But there does seem to be one righteous man among these seventeen unrighteous ones, and he tells me, fairly, that no American publisher will meddle with an American work—seldom if by a known writer, and never if by a new one—unless at the writer's risk."

But though the *Seven Tales* were not printed, Hawthorne proceeded to write others that were; the two collections of the *Twice-Told Tales*, and the *Snow Image*, are gathered from a series of contributions to the local journals and the annuals of that day. To make these three volumes, he picked out the things he thought the best. "Some very small part," he says of what remains, "might yet be rummaged out (but it would not

be worth the trouble), among the dingy pages of fifteen or twenty-years-old periodicals, or within the shabby morocco covers of faded *Souvenirs*." These three volumes represent no large amount of literary labour for so long a period, and the author admits that there is little to show "for the thought and industry of that portion of his life." He attributes the paucity of his productions to a "total lack of sympathy at the age when his mind would naturally have been most effervescent." "He had no incitement to literary effort in a reasonable prospect of reputation or profit; nothing but the pleasure itself of composition, an enjoyment not at all amiss in its way, and perhaps essential to the merit of the work in hand, but which in the long run will hardly keep the chill out of a writer's heart, or the numbness out of his fingers." These words occur in the preface attached in 1851 to the second edition of the *Twice-Told Tales*; *à propos* of which I may say that there is always a charm in Hawthorne's prefaces which makes one grateful for a pretext to quote from them. At this time *The Scarlet Letter* had just made his fame, and the short tales were certain of a large welcome; but the account he gives of the failure of the earlier edition to produce a sensation (it had been published in two volumes, at four years apart), may appear to contradict my assertion that, though he was not recognised immediately, he was recognised betimes. In 1850, when *The Scarlet Letter* appeared, Hawthorne was forty-six years old, and this may certainly seem a long-delayed popularity. On the other hand, it must be remembered that he had not appealed to the world with any great energy. The *Twice-Told Tales*, charming as they are, do not constitute a very massive literary pedestal. As

soon as the author, resorting to severer measures, put forth *The Scarlet Letter*, the public ear was touched and charmed, and after that it was held to the end. "Well it might have been!" the reader will exclaim. "But what a grievous pity that the dulness of this same organ should have operated so long as a deterrent, and by making Hawthorne wait till he was nearly fifty to publish his first novel, have abbreviated by so much his productive career!" The truth is, he cannot have been in any very high degree ambitious; he was not an abundant producer, and there was manifestly a strain of generous indolence in his composition. There was a loveable want of eagerness about him. Let the encouragement offered have been what it might, he had waited till he was lapsing from middle-life to strike his first noticeable blow; and during the last ten years of his career he put forth but two complete works, and the fragment of a third.

It is very true, however, that during this early period he seems to have been very glad to do whatever came to his hand. Certain of his tales found their way into one of the annuals of the time, a publication endowed with the brilliant title of *The Boston Token and Atlantic Souvenir*. The editor of this graceful repository was S. G. Goodrich, a gentleman who, I suppose, may be called one of the pioneers of American periodical literature. He is better known to the world as Mr. Peter Parley, a name under which he produced a multitude of popular school-books, story-books, and other attempts to vulgarize human knowledge and adapt it to the infant mind. This enterprising purveyor of literary wares appears, incongruously enough, to have been Hawthorne's earliest protector, if protection is



the proper word for the treatment that the young author received from him. Mr. Goodrich induced him in 1836 to go to Boston to edit a periodical in which he was interested, *The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*. I have never seen the work in question, but Hawthorne's biographer gives a sorry account of it. It was managed by the so-called Bewick Company, which "took its name from Thomas Bewick, the English restorer of the art of wood engraving, and the magazine was to do his memory honour by his admirable illustrations. But in fact it never did any one honour, nor brought any one profit. It was a penny popular affair, containing condensed information about innumerable subjects, no fiction, and little poetry. The woodcuts were of the crudest and most frightful sort. It passed through the hands of several editors and several publishers. Hawthorne was engaged at a salary of five hundred dollars a year; but it appears that he got next to nothing, and did not stay in the position long." Hawthorne wrote from Boston in the winter of 1836: "I came here trusting to Goodrich's positive promise to pay me forty-five dollars as soon as I arrived; and he has kept promising from one day to another, till I do not see that he means to pay at all. I have now broke off all intercourse with him, and never think of going near him. . . . I don't feel at all obliged to him about the editorship, for he is a stockholder and director in the Bewick Company . . . and I defy them to get another to do for a thousand dollars, what I do for five hundred."—"I make nothing," he says in another letter, "of writing a history or biography before dinner." Goodrich proposed to him to write a *Universal History* for the use of schools,

offering him a hundred dollars for his share in the work. Hawthorne accepted the offer and took a hand—I know not how large a one—in the job. His biographer has been able to identify a single phrase as our author's. He is speaking of George IV: "Even when he was quite a young man this King cared as much about dress as any young coxcomb. He had a great deal of taste in such matters, and it is a pity that he was a King, for he might otherwise have made an excellent tailor." The *Universal History* had a great vogue and passed through hundreds of editions; but it does not appear that Hawthorne ever received more than his hundred dollars. The writer of these pages vividly remembers making its acquaintance at an early stage of his education—a very fat, stumpy-looking book, bound in boards covered with green paper, and having in the text very small woodcuts, of the most primitive sort. He associates it to this day with the names of Sesostris and Semiramis whenever he encounters them, there having been, he supposes, some account of the conquests of these potentates that would impress itself upon the imagination of a child. At the end of four months, Hawthorne had received but twenty dollars—four pounds—for his editorship of the *American Magazine*.

There is something pitiful in this episode, and something really touching in the sight of a delicate and superior genius obliged to concern himself with such paltry undertakings. The simple fact was that for a man attempting at that time in America to live by his pen, there were no larger openings; and to live at all Hawthorne had, as the phrase is, to make himself small. This cost him less, moreover, than it would have cost a more copious and strenuous genius, for his modesty

was evidently extreme, and I doubt whether he had any very ardent consciousness of rare talent. He went back to Salem, and from this tranquil standpoint, in the spring of 1837, he watched the first volume of his *Twice-Told Tales* come into the world. He had by this time been living some ten years of his manhood in Salem, and an American commentator may be excused for feeling the desire to construct, from the very scanty material that offers itself, a slight picture of his life there. I have quoted his own allusions to its dulness and blankness, but I confess that these observations serve rather to quicken than to depress my curiosity. A biographer has of necessity a relish for detail; his business is to multiply points of characterisation. Mr. Lathrop tells us that our author "had little communication with even the members of his family. Frequently his meals were brought and left at his locked door, and it was not often that the four inmates of the old Herbert Street mansion met in family circle. He never read his stories aloud to his mother and sisters. . . It was the custom in this household for the several members to remain very much by themselves; the three ladies were perhaps nearly as rigorous recluses as himself, and, speaking of the isolation which reigned among them, Hawthorne once said, 'We do not even live at our house!'" It is added that he was not in the habit of going to church. This is not a lively picture, nor is that other sketch of his daily habits much more exhilarating, in which Mr. Lathrop affirms that though the statement that for several years "he never saw the sun" is entirely an error, yet it is true that he stirred little abroad all day and "seldom chose to walk in the town except at night." In the dusky hours he took walks of many miles along the

coast, or else wandered about the sleeping streets of Salem. These were his pastimes, and these were apparently his most intimate occasions of contact with life. Life, on such occasions, was not very exuberant, as any one will reflect who has been acquainted with the physiognomy of a small New England town after nine o'clock in the evening. Hawthorne, however, was an inveterate observer of small things, and he found a field for fancy among the most trivial accidents. There could be no better example of this happy faculty than the little paper entitled "Night Sketches," included among the *Twice-Told Tales*. This small dissertation is about nothing at all, and to call attention to it is almost to overrate its importance. This fact is equally true, indeed, of a great many of its companions, which give even the most appreciative critic a singular feeling of his own indiscretion—almost of his own cruelty. They are so light, so slight, so tenderly trivial, that simply to mention them is to put them in a false position. The author's claim for them is barely audible, even to the most acute listener. They are things to take or to leave—to enjoy, but not to talk about. Not to read them would be to do them an injustice (to read them is essentially to relish them), but to bring the machinery of criticism to bear upon them would be to do them a still greater wrong. I must remember, however, that to carry this principle too far would be to endanger the general validity of the present little work—a consummation which it can only be my desire to avert. Therefore it is that I think it permissible to remark that in Hawthorne, the whole class of little descriptive effusions directed upon common things, to which these just-mentioned Night Sketches belong, have a greater

charm than there is any warrant for in their substance. The charm is made up of the spontaneity, the personal quality, of the fancy that plays through them, its mingled simplicity and subtlety, its purity and its *bonhomie*. The Night Sketches are simply the light, familiar record of a walk under an umbrella, at the end of a long, dull, rainy day, through the sloppy, ill-paved streets of a country town, where the rare gas-lamps twinkle in the large puddles, and the blue jars in the druggist's window shine through the vulgar drizzle. One would say that the inspiration of such a theme could have had no great force, and such doubtless was the case; but out of the Salem puddles, nevertheless, springs, flower-like, a charming and natural piece of prose.

I have said that Hawthorne was an observer of small things, and indeed he appears to have thought nothing too trivial to be suggestive. His Note Books give us the measure of his perception of common and casual things, and of his habit of converting them into *memoranda*. These Note-Books, by the way—this seems as good a place as any other to say it—are a very singular series of volumes; I doubt whether there is anything exactly corresponding to them in the whole body of literature. They were published—in six volumes, issued at intervals—some years after Hawthorne's death, and no person attempting to write an account of the romancer could afford to regret that they should have been given to the world. There is a point of view from which this may be regretted; but the attitude of the biographer is to desire as many documents as possible. I am thankful, then, as a biographer, for the Note-Books, but I am obliged to

confess that, though I have just re-read them carefully, I am still at a loss to perceive how they came to be written—what was Hawthorne's purpose in carrying on for so many years this minute and often trivial chronicle. For a person desiring information about him at any cost, it is valuable; it sheds a vivid light upon his character, his habits, the nature of his mind. But we find ourselves wondering what was its value to Hawthorne himself. It is in a very partial degree a register of impressions, and in a still smaller sense a record of emotions. Outward objects play much the larger part in it; opinions, convictions, ideas pure and simple, are almost absent. He rarely takes his Note-Book into his confidence or commits to its pages any reflections that might be adapted for publicity; the simplest way to describe the tone of these extremely objective journals is to say that they read like a series of very pleasant, though rather dullish and decidedly formal, letters, addressed to himself by a man who, having suspicions that they might be opened in the post, should have determined to insert nothing compromising. They contain much that is too futile for things intended for publicity; whereas, on the other hand, as a receptacle of private impressions and opinions, they are curiously cold and empty. They widen, as I have said, our glimpse of Hawthorne's mind (I do not say that they elevate our estimate of it), but they do so by what they fail to contain, as much as by what we find in them. Our business for the moment, however, is not with the light that they throw upon his intellect, but with the information they offer about his habits and his social circumstances.

I know not at what age he began to keep a diary; the first entries in the American volumes are of the

summer of 1835. There is a phrase in the preface to his novel of *Transformation*, which must have lingered in the minds of many Americans who have tried to write novels and to lay the scene of them in the western world. "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land." The perusal of Hawthorne's American Note-Books operates as a practical commentary upon this somewhat ominous text. It does so at least to my own mind; it would be too much perhaps to say that the effect would be the same for the usual English reader. An American reads between the lines—he completes the suggestions—he constructs a picture. I think I am not guilty of any gross injustice in saying that the picture he constructs from Hawthorne's American diaries, though by no means without charms of its own, is not, on the whole, an interesting one. It is characterised by an extraordinary blankness—a curious paleness of colour and paucity of detail. Hawthorne, as I have said, has a large and healthy appetite for detail, and one is therefore the more struck with the lightness of the diet to which his observation was condemned. For myself, as I turn the pages of his journals, I seem to see the image of the crude and simple society in which he lived. I use these epithets, of course, not invidiously, but descriptively; if one desire to enter as closely as possible into Hawthorne's situation, one must endeavour to reproduce his circumstances. We are struck with the large number of elements that were absent from them,

and the coldness, the thinness, the blankness, to repeat my epithet, present themselves so vividly that our foremost feeling is that of compassion for a romancer looking for subjects in such a field. It takes so many things, as Hawthorne must have felt later in life, when he made the acquaintance of the denser, richer, warmer European spectacle—it takes such an accumulation of history and custom, such a complexity of manners and types, to form a fund of suggestion for a novelist. If Hawthorne had been a young Englishman, or a young Frenchman of the same degree of genius, the same cast of mind, the same habits, his consciousness of the world around him would have been a very different affair; however obscure, however reserved, his own personal life, his sense of the life of his fellow-mortals would have been almost infinitely more various. The negative side of the spectacle on which Hawthorne looked out, in his contemplative saunterings and reveries, might, indeed, with a little ingenuity, be made almost ludicrous; one might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbey, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class—no Epsom nor Ascot! Some such list as that



might be drawn up of the absent things in American life—especially in the American life of forty years ago, the effect of which, upon an English or a French imagination, would probably as a general thing be appalling. The natural remark, in the almost lurid light of such an indictment, would be that if these things are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a good deal remains; what it is that remains—that is his secret, his joke, as one may say. It would be cruel, in this terrible denudation, to deny him the consolation of his national gift, that “American humour” of which of late years we have heard so much.

But in helping us to measure what remains, our author's Diaries, as I have already intimated, would give comfort rather to persons who might have taken the alarm from the brief sketch I have just attempted of what I have called the negative side of the American social situation, than to those reminding themselves of its fine compensations. Hawthorne's entries are to a great degree accounts of walks in the country, drives in stage-coaches, people he met in taverns. The minuteness of the things that attract his attention and that he deems worthy of being commemorated is frequently extreme, and from this fact we get the impression of a general vacancy in the field of vision. “Sunday evening, going by the jail, the setting sun kindled up the windows most cheerfully; as if there were a bright, comfortable light within its darksome stone wall.” “I went yesterday with Monsieur S—— to pick raspberries. He fell through an old log-bridge, thrown over a hollow; looking back, only his head and shoulders appeared through the rotten logs and among the bushes.—A shower coming on, the rapid running of a

little barefooted boy, coming up unheard, and dashing swiftly past us, and showing us the soles of his naked feet as he ran adown the path and up the opposite side." In another place he devotes a page to a description of a dog whom he saw running round after its tail; in still another he remarks, in a paragraph by itself—"The aromatic odor of peat-smoke, in the sunny autumnal air is very pleasant." The reader says to himself that when a man turned thirty gives a place in his mind—and his inkstand—to such trifles as these, it is because nothing else of superior importance demands admission. Everything in the Notes indicates a simple, democratic, thinly-composed society; there is no evidence of the writer finding himself in any variety or intimacy of relations with any one or with anything. We find a good deal of warrant for believing that if we add that statement of Mr. Lathrop's about his meals being left at the door of his room, to rural rambles of which an impression of the temporary phases of the local apple-crop were the usual, and an encounter with an organ-grinder, or an eccentric dog, the rarer, outcome, we construct a rough image of our author's daily life during the several years that preceded his marriage. He appears to have read a good deal, and that he must have been familiar with the sources of good English we see from his charming, expressive, slightly self-conscious, cultivated, but not too cultivated, style. Yet neither in these early volumes of his Note-Books, nor in the later, is there any mention of his reading. There are no literary judgments or impressions—there is almost no allusion to works or to authors. The allusions to individuals of any kind are indeed much less numerous than one might have expected; there is little psychology,

little description of manners. We are told by Mr. Lathrop that there existed at Salem during the early part of Hawthorne's life "a strong circle of wealthy families," which "maintained rigorously the distinctions of class," and whose "entertainments were splendid, their manners magnificent." This is a rather pictorial way of saying that there were a number of people in the place—the commercial and professional aristocracy, as it were—who lived in high comfort and respectability, and who, in their small provincial way, doubtless had pretensions to be exclusive. Into this delectable company Mr. Lathrop intimates that his hero was free to penetrate. It is easy to believe it, and it would be difficult to perceive why the privilege should have been denied to a young man of genius and culture, who was very good-looking (Hawthorne must have been in these days, judging by his appearance later in life, a strikingly handsome fellow), and whose American pedigree was virtually as long as the longest they could show. But in fact Hawthorne appears to have ignored the good society of his native place almost completely; no echo of its conversation is to be found in his tales or his journals. Such an echo would possibly not have been especially melodious, and if we regret the shyness and stiffness, the reserve, the timidity, the suspicion, or whatever it was, that kept him from knowing what there was to be known, it is not because we have any very definite assurance that his gains would have been great. Still, since a beautiful writer was growing up in Salem, it is a pity that he should not have given himself a chance to commemorate some of the types that flourished in the richest soil of the place. Like almost all people who possess in a strong degree the story-

telling faculty, Hawthorne had a democratic strain in his composition and a relish for the commoner stuff of human nature. Thoroughly American in all ways, he was in none more so than in the vagueness of his sense of social distinctions and his readiness to forget them if a moral or intellectual sensation were to be gained by it. He liked to fraternize with plain people, to take them on their own terms, and put himself if possible into their shoes. His Note-Books, and even his tales, are full of evidence of this easy and natural feeling about all his unconventional fellow-mortals—this imaginative interest and contemplative curiosity—and it sometimes takes the most charming and graceful forms. Commingled as it is with his own subtlety and delicacy, his complete exemption from vulgarity, it is one of the points in his character which his reader comes most to appreciate—that reader I mean for whom he is not as for some few, a dusky and malarious genius.

But even if he had had, personally, as many pretensions as he had few, he must in the nature of things have been more or less of a consenting democrat, for democracy was the very key-stone of the simple social structure in which he played his part. The air of his journals and his tales alike are full of the genuine democratic feeling. This feeling has by no means passed out of New England life; it still flourishes in perfection in the great stock of the people, especially in rural communities; but it is probable that at the present hour a writer of Hawthorne's general fastidiousness would not express it quite so artlessly. "A shrewd gentlewoman, who kept a tavern in the town," he says, in *Chippings with a Chisel*, "was anxious to obtain two or three gravestones for the deceased members of her

family, and to pay for these solemn commodities by taking the sculptor to board." This image of a gentlewoman keeping a tavern and looking out for boarders, seems, from the point of view to which I allude, not at all incongruous. It will be observed that the lady in question was shrewd; it was probable that she was substantially educated, and of reputable life, and it is certain that she was energetic. These qualities would make it natural to Hawthorne to speak of her as a gentlewoman; the natural tendency in societies where the sense of equality prevails, being to take for granted the high level rather than the low. Perhaps the most striking example of the democratic sentiment in all our author's tales, however, is the figure of Uncle Venner, in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Uncle Venner is a poor old man in a brimless hat and patched trousers, who picks up a precarious subsistence by rendering, for a compensation, in the houses and gardens of the good people of Salem, those services that are known in New England as "chores." He carries parcels, splits firewood, digs potatoes, collects refuse for the maintenance of his pigs, and looks forward with philosophic equanimity to the time when he shall end his days in the almshouse. But in spite of the very modest place that he occupies in the social scale, he is received on a footing of familiarity in the household of the far-descended Miss Pyncheon; and when this ancient lady and her companions take the air in the garden of a summer evening, he steps into the estimable circle and mingles the smoke of his pipe with their refined conversation. This obviously is rather imaginative—Uncle Venner is a creation with a purpose. He is an original, a natural moralist, a philosopher; and Hawthorne, who knew perfectly what he

was about in introducing him—Hawthorne always knew perfectly what he was about—wished to give in his person an example of humorous resignation and of a life reduced to the simplest and homeliest elements, as opposed to the fantastic pretensions of the antiquated heroine of the story. He wished to strike a certain exclusively human and personal note. He knew that for this purpose he was taking a licence; but the point is that he felt he was not indulging in any extravagant violation of reality. Giving in a letter, about 1830, an account of a little journey he was making in Connecticut, he says, of the end of a seventeen miles' stage, that "in the evening, however, I went to a Bible-class with a very polite and agreeable gentleman, whom I afterwards discovered to be a strolling tailor of very questionable habits."

Hawthorne appears on various occasions to have absented himself from Salem, and to have wandered somewhat through the New England States. But the only one of these episodes of which there is a considerable account in the Note-Books is a visit that he paid in the summer of 1837 to his old college mate, Horatio Bridge, who was living upon his father's property in Maine, in company with an eccentric young Frenchman, a teacher of his native tongue, who was looking for pupils among the northern forests. I have said that there was less psychology in Hawthorne's Journals than might have been looked for; but there is nevertheless a certain amount of it, and nowhere more than in a number of pages relating to this remarkable "Monsieur S." (Hawthorne, intimate as he apparently became with him, always calls him "Monsieur," just as throughout all his Diaries he invariably speaks

of all his friends, even the most familiar, as "Mr." He confers the prefix upon the unconventional Thoreau, his fellow-woodman at Concord, and upon the emancipated brethren at Brook Farm.) These pages are completely occupied with Monsieur S., who was evidently a man of character, with the full complement of his national vivacity. There is an elaborate effort to analyse the poor young Frenchman's disposition, something conscientious and painstaking, respectful, explicit, almost solemn. These passages are very curious as a reminder of the absence of the off-hand element in the manner in which many Americans, and many New Englanders especially, make up their minds about people whom they meet. This, in turn, is a reminder of something that may be called the importance of the individual in the American world; which is a result of the newness and youthfulness of society and of the absence of keen competition. The individual counts for more, as it were, and, thanks to the absence of a variety of social types and of settled heads under which he may be easily and conveniently pigeon-holed, he is to a certain extent a wonder and a mystery. An Englishman, a Frenchman—a Frenchman above all—judges quickly, easily, from his own social standpoint, and makes an end of it. He has not that rather chilly and isolated sense of moral responsibility which is apt to visit a New Englander in such processes; and he has the advantage that his standards are fixed by the general consent of the society in which he lives. A Frenchman, in this respect, is particularly happy and comfortable, happy and comfortable to a degree which I think is hardly to be over-estimated; his standards being the most definite in the world, the most easily and

promptly appealed to, and the most identical with what happens to be the practice of the French genius itself. The Englishman is not quite so well off, but he is better off than his poor interrogative and tentative cousin beyond the seas. He is blessed with a healthy mistrust of analysis, and hair-splitting is the occupation he most despises. There is always a little of the Dr. Johnson in him, and Dr. Johnson would have had woefully little patience with that tendency to weigh moonbeams which in Hawthorne was almost as much a quality of race as of genius; albeit that Hawthorne has paid to Boswell's hero (in the chapter on "Lichfield and Uttoxeter," in his volume on England), a tribute of the finest appreciation. American intellectual standards are vague, and Hawthorne's countrymen are apt to hold the scales with a rather uncertain hand and a somewhat agitated conscience.



## CHAPTER III.

### EARLY WRITINGS.

THE second volume of the *Twice-Told Tales* was published in 1845, in Boston; and at this time a good many of the stories which were afterwards collected into the *Mosses from an Old Manse* had already appeared, chiefly in *The Democratic Review*, a sufficiently flourishing periodical of that period. In mentioning these things I anticipate; but I touch upon the year 1845 in order to speak of the two collections of *Twice-Told Tales* at once. During the same year Hawthorne edited an interesting volume, the *Journals of an African Cruiser*, by his friend Bridge, who had gone into the Navy and seen something of distant waters. His biographer mentions that even then Hawthorne's name was thought to bespeak attention for a book, and he insists on this fact in contradiction to the idea that his productions had hitherto been as little noticed as his own declaration that he remained "for a good many years the obscurest man of letters in America," might lead one, and has led many people, to suppose "In this dismal chamber FAME was won," he writes in Salem in 1836.

And we find in the *Note-Books* (1840), this singularly beautiful and touching passage :—

“ Here I sit in my old accustomed chamber, where I used to sit in days gone by. . . . Here I have written many tales—many that have been burned to ashes, many that have doubtless deserved the same fate. This claims to be called a haunted chamber, for thousands upon thousands of visions have appeared to me in it; and some few of them have become visible to the world. If ever I should have a biographer, he ought to make great mention of this chamber in my memoirs, because so much of my lonely youth was wasted here, and here my mind and character were formed; and here I have been glad and hopeful, and here I have been despondent. And here I sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all—at least till I were in my grave. And sometimes it seems to me as if I were already in the grave, with only life enough to be chilled and benumbed. But oftener I was happy—at least as happy as I then knew how to be, or was aware of the possibility of being. By and by the world found me out in my lonely chamber and called me forth—not indeed with a loud roar of acclamation, but rather with a still small voice—and forth I went, but found nothing in the world I thought preferable to my solitude till now. . . . And now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could never break through the viewless bolts and bars; for if I had sooner made my escape into the world, I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart might have become callous by rude encounters with the multitude. . . . But living in solitude till the fulness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth and the freshness of my heart. . . . I used to think that I could imagine all passions, all feelings, and states of the heart and mind; but how little did I know! . . . Indeed, we are but shadows; we are not endowed with real life, and all that

seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream—till the heart be touched. That touch creates us—then we begin to be—thereby we are beings of reality and inheritors of eternity.”

There is something exquisite in the soft philosophy of this little retrospect, and it helps us to appreciate it to know that the writer had at this time just become engaged to be married to a charming and accomplished person, with whom his union, which took place two years later, was complete and full of happiness. But I quote it more particularly for the evidence it affords that, already in 1840, Hawthorne could speak of the world finding him out and calling him forth, as of an event tolerably well in the past. He had sent the first of the *Twice-Told* series to his old college friend, Longfellow, who had already laid, solidly, the foundation of his great poetic reputation, and at the time of his sending it had written him a letter from which it will be to our purpose to quote a few lines :—

“ You tell me you have met with troubles and changes. I know not what these may have been ; but I can assure you that trouble is the next best thing to enjoyment, and that there is no fate in the world so horrible as to have no share in either its joys or sorrows. For the last ten years I have not lived, but only dreamed of living. It may be true that there may have been some unsubstantial pleasures here in the shade, which I might have missed in the sunshine, but you cannot conceive how utterly devoid of satisfaction all my retrospects are. I have laid up no treasure of pleasant remembrances against old age ; but there is some comfort in thinking that future years may be more varied, and therefore more tolerable, than the past. You give me more credit than I deserve in supposing that I have led a studious life. I have indeed turned over a good many books, but in so desultory a

way that it cannot be called study, nor has it left me the fruits of study. . . . I have another great difficulty in the lack of materials; for I have seen so little of the world that I have nothing but thin air to concoct my stories of, and it is not easy to give a life-like semblance to such shadowy stuff. Sometimes, through a peephole, I have caught a glimpse of the real world, and the two or three articles in which I have portrayed these glimpses please me better than the others."

It is more particularly for the sake of the concluding lines that I have quoted this passage; for evidently no portrait of Hawthorne at this period is at all exact which fails to insist upon the constant struggle which must have gone on between his shyness and his desire to know something of life; between what may be called his evasive and his inquisitive tendencies. I suppose it is no injustice to Hawthorne to say that on the whole his shyness always prevailed; and yet, obviously, the struggle was constantly there. He says of his *Twice-Told Tales*, in the preface, "They are not the talk of a secluded man with his own mind and heart (had it been so they could hardly have failed to be more deeply and permanently valuable,) but his attempts, and very imperfectly successful ones, to open an intercourse with the world." We are speaking here of small things, it must be remembered—of little attempts, little sketches, a little world. But everything is relative, and this smallness of scale must not render less apparent the interesting character of Hawthorne's efforts. As for the *Twice-Told Tales* themselves, they are an old story now; every one knows them a little, and those who admire them particularly have read them a great many times. The writer of this sketch belongs to the latter class, and he has been trying to forget his familiarity

with them, and ask himself what impression they would have made upon him at the time they appeared, in the first bloom of their freshness, and before the particular Hawthorne-quality, as it may be called, had become an established, a recognised and valued, fact. Certainly, I am inclined to think, if one had encountered these delicate, dusky flowers in the blossomless garden of American journalism, one would have plucked them with a very tender hand; one would have felt that here was something essentially fresh and new; here, in no extraordinary force or abundance, but in a degree distinctly appreciable, was an original element in literature. When I think of it, I almost envy Hawthorne's earliest readers; the sensation of opening upon *The Great Carbuncle*, *The Seven Vagabonds*, or *The Threelfold Destiny* in an American annual of forty years ago, must have been highly agreeable.

Among these shorter things (it is better to speak of the whole collection, including the *Snow Image*, and the *Mosses from an Old Manse* at once) there are three sorts of tales, each one of which has an original stamp. There are, to begin with, the stories of fantasy and allegory—those among which the three I have just mentioned would be numbered, and which on the whole, are the most original. This is the group to which such little masterpieces as *Malvin's Burial*, *Rappaccini's Daughter*, and *Young Goodman Brown* also belong—these two last perhaps representing the highest point that Hawthorne reached in this direction. Then there are the little tales of New England history, which are scarcely less admirable, and of which *The Grey Champion*, *The Maypole of Merry Mount*, and the four beautiful *Legends of the Province House*, as

they are called, are the most successful specimens. Lastly come the slender sketches of actual scenes and of the objects and manners about him, by means of which, more particularly, he endeavoured "to open an intercourse with the world," and which, in spite of their slenderness, have an infinite grace and charm. Among these things *A Rill from the Town Pump*, *The Village Uncle*, *The Toll-Gatherer's Day*, the *Chippings with a Chisel*, may most naturally be mentioned. As we turn over these volumes we feel that the pieces that spring most directly from his fancy, constitute, as I have said (putting his four novels aside), his most substantial claim to our attention. It would be a mistake to insist too much upon them; Hawthorne was himself the first to recognise that. "These fitful sketches," he says in the preface to the *Mosses from an Old Manse*, "with so little of external life about them, yet claiming no profundity of purpose—so reserved even while they sometimes seem so frank—often but half in earnest, and never, even when most so, expressing satisfactorily the thoughts which they profess to image—such trifles, I truly feel, afford no solid basis for a literary reputation." This is very becomingly uttered; but it may be said, partly in answer to it, and partly in confirmation, that the valuable element in these things was not what Hawthorne put into them consciously, but what passed into them without his being able to measure it—the element of simple genius, the quality of imagination. This is the real charm of Hawthorne's writing—this purity and spontaneity and naturalness of fancy. For the rest, it is interesting to see how it borrowed a particular colour from the other faculties that lay near it—how the imagination, in this capital son of the old

Puritans, reflected the hue of the more purely moral part, of the dusky, overshadowed conscience. The conscience, by no fault of its own, in every genuine offshoot of that sombre lineage, lay under the shadow of the sense of *sin*. This darkening cloud was no essential part of the nature of the individual; it stood fixed in the general moral heaven under which he grew up and looked at life. It projected from above, from outside, a black patch over his spirit, and it was for him to do what he could with the black patch. There were all sorts of possible ways of dealing with it; they depended upon the personal temperament. Some natures would let it lie as it fell, and contrive to be tolerably comfortable beneath it. Others would groan and sweat and suffer; but the dusky blight would remain, and their lives would be lives of misery. Here and there an individual, irritated beyond endurance, would throw it off in anger, plunging probably into what would be deemed deeper abysses of depravity. Hawthorne's way was the best, for he contrived, by an exquisite process, best known to himself, to transmute this heavy moral burden into the very substance of the imagination, to make it evaporate in the light and charming fumes of artistic production. But Hawthorne, of course, was exceptionally fortunate; he had his genius to help him. Nothing is more curious and interesting than this almost exclusively *imported* character of the sense of sin in Hawthorne's mind; it seems to exist there merely for an artistic or literary purpose. He had ample cognizance of the Puritan conscience; it was his natural heritage; it was reproduced in him; looking into his soul, he found it there. But his relation to it was only, as one may say, intellectual; it was not moral and

theological. He played with it and used it as a pigment; he treated it, as the metaphysicians say, objectively. He was not discomposed, disturbed, haunted by it, in the manner of its usual and regular victims, who had not the little postern door of fancy to slip through, to the other side of the wall. It was, indeed, to his imaginative vision, the great fact of man's nature; the light element that had been mingled with his own composition always clung to this rugged prominence of moral responsibility, like the mist that hovers about the mountain. It was a necessary condition for a man of Hawthorne's stock that if his imagination should take licence to amuse itself, it should at least select this grim precinct of the Puritan morality for its play-ground. He speaks of the dark disapproval with which his old ancestors, in the case of their coming to life, would see him trifling himself away as a storyteller. But how far more darkly would they have frowned could they have understood that he had converted the very principle of their own being into one of his toys!

It will be seen that I am far from being struck with the justice of that view of the author of the *Twice-Told Tales*, which is so happily expressed by the French critic to whom I alluded at an earlier stage of this essay. To speak of Hawthorne, as M. Emile Montégut does, as a *romancier pessimiste*, seems to me very much beside the mark. He is no more a pessimist than an optimist, though he is certainly not much of either. He does not pretend to conclude, or to have a philosophy of human nature; indeed, I should even say that at bottom he does not take human nature as hard as he may seem to do. "His bitterness," says M. Montégut, "is



without abatement, and his bad opinion of man is without compensation. . . . His little tales have the air of confessions which the soul makes to itself; they are so many little slaps which the author applies to our face." This, it seems to me, is to exaggerate almost immeasurably the reach of Hawthorne's relish of gloomy subjects. What pleased him in such subjects was their picturesqueness, their rich duakiness of colour, their chiaroscuro; but they were not the expression of a hopeless, or even of a predominantly melancholy, feeling about the human soul. Such at least is my own impression. He is to a considerable degree ironical—this is part of his charm—part even, one may say, of his brightness; but he is neither bitter nor cynical—he is rarely even what I should call tragical. There have certainly been story-tellers of a gayer and lighter spirit; there have been observers more humorous, more hilarious—though on the whole Hawthorne's observation has a smile in it oftener than may at first appear; but there has rarely been an observer more serene, less agitated by what he sees and less disposed to call things deeply into question. As I have already intimated, his Note-Books are full of this simple and almost childlike serenity. That dusky pre-occupation with the misery of human life and the wickedness of the human heart which such a critic as M. Emile Montégut talks about, is totally absent from them; and if we may suppose a person to have read these Diaries before looking into the tales, we may be sure that such a reader would be greatly surprised to hear the author described as a disappointed, disdainful genius. "This marked love of cases of conscience," says M. Montégut, "this taciturn, scornful cast of mind, this habit of seeing sin everywhere and hell

always gaping open, this dusky gaze bent always upon a damned world and a nature draped in mourning, these lonely conversations of the imagination with the conscience, this pitiless analysis resulting from a perpetual examination of one's self, and from the tortures of a heart closed before men and open to God—all these elements of the Puritan character have passed into Mr. Hawthorne, or to speak more justly, have *filtered* into him, through a long succession of generations." This is a very pretty and very vivid account of Hawthorne, superficially considered; and it is just such a view of the case as would commend itself most easily and most naturally to a hasty critic. It is all true indeed, with a difference; Hawthorne was all that M. Montégut says, *minus* the conviction. The old Puritan moral sense, the consciousness of sin and hell, of the fearful nature of our responsibilities and the savage character of our Taskmaster—these things had been lodged in the mind of a man of Fancy, whose fancy had straightway begun to take liberties and play tricks with them—to judge them (Heaven forgive him!) from the poetic and æsthetic point of view, the point of view of entertainment and irony. This absence of conviction makes the difference; but the difference is great.

Hawthorne was a man of fancy, and I suppose that in speaking of him it is inevitable that we should feel ourselves confronted with the familiar problem of the difference between the fancy and the imagination. Of the larger and more potent faculty he certainly possessed a liberal share; no one can read *The House of the Seven Gables* without feeling it to be a deeply imaginative work. But I am often struck, especially in the shorter tales, of which I am now chiefly speaking, with

a kind of small ingenuity, a taste for conceits and analogies, which bears more particularly what is called the fanciful stamp. The finer of the shorter tales are redolent of a rich imagination.

"Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of witch-meeting? Be it so, if you will; but, alas, it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown! a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate, man, did he become from the night of that fearful dream. On the Sabbath-day, when the congregation were singing a holy psalm, he could not listen, because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit, with power and fervid eloquence, and with his hand on the open Bible of the sacred truth of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown grow pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers. Often, awaking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith; and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away. And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children, and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbours not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom."

There is imagination in that, and in many another passage that I might quote; but as a general thing I should characterise the more metaphysical of our author's short stories as graceful and felicitous conceits. They seem to me to be qualified in this manner by the very fact that they belong to the province of allegory. Hawthorne, in his metaphysical moods, is nothing if not allegorical, and allegory, to my sense, is quite one of the

lighter exercises of the imagination. Many excellent judges, I know, have a great stomach for it; they delight in symbols and correspondences, in seeing a story told as if it were another and a very different story. I frankly confess that I have as a general thing but little enjoyment of it and that it has never seemed to me to be, as it were, a first-rate literary form. It has produced assuredly some first-rate works; and Hawthorne in his younger years had been a great reader and devotee of Bunyan and Spenser, the great masters of allegory. But it is apt to spoil two good things—a story and a moral, a meaning and a form; and the taste for it is responsible for a large part of the forcible-feeble writing that has been inflicted upon the world. The only cases in which it is endurable is when it is extremely spontaneous, when the analogy presents itself with eager promptitude. When it shows signs of having been groped and fumbled for, the needful illusion is of course absent and the failure complete. Then the machinery alone is visible, and the end to which it operates becomes a matter of indifference. There was but little literary criticism in the United States at the time Hawthorne's earlier works were published; but among the reviewers Edgar Poe perhaps held the scales the highest. He at any rate rattled them loudest, and pretended, more than any one else, to conduct the weighing-process on scientific principles. Very remarkable was this process of Edgar Poe's, and very extraordinary were his principles; but he had the advantage of being a man of genius, and his intelligence was frequently great. His collection of critical sketches of the American writers flourishing in what M. Taine would call his *milieu* and *moment*, is very curious and

interesting reading, and it has one quality which ought to keep it from ever being completely forgotten. It is probably the most complete and exquisite specimen of *provincialism* ever prepared for the edification of men. Poe's judgments are pretentious, spiteful, vulgar; but they contain a great deal of sense and discrimination as well, and here and there, sometimes at frequent intervals, we find a phrase of happy insight imbedded in a patch of the most fatuous pedantry. He wrote a chapter upon Hawthorne, and spoke of him on the whole very kindly; and his estimate is of sufficient value to make it noticeable that he should express lively disapproval of the large part allotted to allegory in his tales—in defence of which, he says, "however, or for whatever object employed, there is scarcely one respectable word to be said. . . . The deepest emotion," he goes on, "aroused within us by the happiest allegory as allegory, is a very, very imperfectly satisfied sense of the writer's ingenuity in overcoming a difficulty we should have preferred his not having attempted to overcome. . . . One thing is clear, that if allegory ever establishes a fact, it is by dint of overturning a fiction;" and Poe has furthermore the courage to remark that the *Pilgrim's Progress* is a "ludicrously overrated book." Certainly, as a general thing, we are struck with the ingenuity and felicity of Hawthorne's analogies and correspondences; the idea appears to have made itself at home in them easily. Nothing could be better in this respect than *The Snow-Image* (a little masterpiece), or *The Great Carbuncle*, or *Doctor Heidegger's Experiment*, or *Rappaccini's Daughter*. But in such things as *The Birth-Mark* and *The Bosom-Serpent*, we are struck with something stiff and mechanical, slightly

incongruous, as if the kernel had not assimilated its envelope. But these are matters of light impression, and there would be a want of tact in pretending to discriminate too closely among things which all, in one way or another, have a charm. The charm—the great charm—is that they are glimpses of a great field, of the whole deep mystery of man's soul and conscience. They are moral, and their interest is moral; they deal with something more than the mere accidents and conventionalities, the surface occurrences of life. The fine thing in Hawthorne is that he cared for the deeper psychology, and that, in his way, he tried to become familiar with it. This natural, yet fanciful familiarity with it, this air, on the author's part, of being a confirmed *habitué* of a region of mysteries and subtleties, constitutes the originality of his tales. And then they have the further merit of seeming, for what they are, to spring up so freely and lightly. The author has all the ease, indeed, of a regular dweller in the moral, psychological realm; he goes to and fro in it, as a man who knows his way. His tread is a light and modest one, but he keeps the key in his pocket.

His little historical stories all seem to me admirable; they are so good that you may re-read them many times. They are not numerous, and they are very short; but they are full of a vivid and delightful sense of the New England past; they have, moreover, the distinction, little tales of a dozen and fifteen pages as they are, of being the only successful attempts at historical fiction that have been made in the United States. Hawthorne was at home in the early New England history; he had thumbed its records and he had breathed its air, in whatever odd receptacles this somewhat pungent compound

still lurked. He was fond of it, and he was proud of it, as any New Englander must be, measuring the part of that handful of half-starved fanatics who formed his earliest precursors, in laying the foundations of a mighty empire. Hungry for the picturesque as he always was, and not finding any very copious provision of it around him, he turned back into the two preceding centuries, with the earnest determination that the primitive annals of Massachusetts should at least *appear* picturesque. His fancy, which was always alive, played a little with the somewhat meagre and angular facts of the colonial period and forthwith converted a great many of them into impressive legends and pictures. There is a little infusion of colour, a little vagueness about certain details, but it is very gracefully and discreetly done, and realities are kept in view sufficiently to make us feel that if we are reading romance, it is romance that rather supplements than contradicts history. The early annals of New England were not fertile in legend, but Hawthorne laid his hands upon everything that would serve his purpose, and in two or three cases his version of the story has a great deal of beauty. *The Grey Champion* is a sketch of less than eight pages, but the little figures stand up in the tale as stoutly, at the least, as if they were propped up on half a dozen chapters by a dryer annalist, and the whole thing has the merit of those cabinet pictures in which the artist has been able to make his persons look the size of life. Hawthorne, to say it again, was not in the least a realist—he was not to my mind enough of one; but there is no genuine lover of the good city of Boston but will feel grateful to him for his courage in attempting to recount the “traditions” of Washington Street, the main thoroughfare of the Puritan capital.

The four *Legends of the Province House* are certain shadowy stories which he professes to have gathered in an ancient tavern lurking behind the modern shop-fronts of this part of the city. The Province House disappeared some years ago, but while it stood it was pointed to as the residence of the Royal Governors of Massachusetts before the Revolution. I have no recollection of it, but it cannot have been, even from Hawthorne's account of it, which is as pictorial as he ventures to make it, a very imposing piece of antiquity. The writer's charming touch, however, throws a rich brown tone over its rather shallow venerableness; and we are beguiled into believing, for instance, at the close of *Howe's Masquerade* (a story of a strange occurrence at an entertainment given by Sir William Howe, the last of the Royal Governors, during the siege of Boston by Washington), that "superstition, among other legends of this mansion, repeats the wondrous tale that on the anniversary night of Britain's discomfiture the ghosts of the ancient governors of Massachusetts still glide through the Province House. And last of all comes a figure shrouded in a military cloak, tossing his clenched hands into the air and stamping his iron-shod boots upon the freestone steps, with a semblance of feverish despair, but without the sound of a foot-tramp." Hawthorne had, as regards the two earlier centuries of New England life, that faculty which is called now-a-days the historic consciousness. He never sought to exhibit it on a large scale; he exhibited it indeed on a scale so minute that we must not linger too much upon it. His vision of the past was filled with definite images—images none the less definite that they were concerned with events as shadowy as this dramatic passing away of the last of



King George's representatives in his long loyal but finally alienated colony.

I have said that Hawthorne had become engaged in about his thirty-fifth year; but he was not married until 1842. Before this event took place he passed through two episodes which (putting his falling in love aside) were much the most important things that had yet happened to him. They interrupted the painful monotony of his life, and brought the affairs of men within his personal experience. One of these was moreover in itself a curious and interesting chapter of observation, and it fructified, in Hawthorne's memory, in one of his best productions. How urgently he needed at this time to be drawn within the circle of social accidents, a little anecdote related by Mr. Lathrop in connection with his first acquaintance with the young lady he was to marry, may serve as an example. This young lady became known to him through her sister, who had first approached him as an admirer of the *Twice-Told Tales* (as to the authorship of which she had been so much in the dark as to have attributed it first, conjecturally, to one of the two Miss Hathornes); and the two Miss Peabodys, desiring to see more of the charming writer, caused him to be invited to a species of *conversations* at the house of one of their friends, at which they themselves took care to be punctual. Several other ladies, however, were as punctual as they, and Hawthorne presently arriving, and seeing a bevy of admirers where he had expected but three or four, fell into a state of agitation, which is vividly described by his biographer. He "stood perfectly motionless, but with the look of a sylvan creature on the point of fleeing away . . . . He was stricken with dismay; his face lost colour and took

on a warm paleness . . . his agitation was very great; he stood by a table and, taking up some small object that lay upon it, he found his hand trembling so that he was obliged to lay it down." It was desirable, certainly, that something should occur to break the spell of a diffidence that might justly be called morbid. There is another little sentence dropped by Mr. Lathrop in relation to this period of Hawthorne's life, which appears to me worth quoting, though I am by no means sure that it will seem so to the reader. It has a very simple and innocent air, but to a person not without an impression of the early days of "culture" in New England, it will be pregnant with historic meaning. The elder Miss Peabody, who afterwards was Hawthorne's sister-in-law and who acquired later in life a very honourable American fame as a woman of benevolence, of learning, and of literary accomplishment, had invited the Miss Hathornes to come to her house for the evening, and to bring with them their brother, whom she wished to thank for his beautiful tales. "Entirely to her surprise," says Mr. Lathrop, completing thereby his picture of the attitude of this remarkable family toward society—"entirely to her surprise they came. She herself opened the door, and there, before her, between his sisters, stood a splendidly handsome youth, tall and strong, with no appearance whatever of timidity, but instead, an almost fierce determination making his face stern. This was his resource for carrying off the extreme inward tremor which he really felt. His hostess brought out Flaxman's designs for Dante, just received from Professor Felton, of Harvard, and the party made an evening's entertainment out of them." This last sentence is the one I allude to; and were it not for

fear of appearing too fanciful I should say that these few words were, to the initiated mind, an unconscious expression of the lonely frigidity which characterized most attempts at social recreation in the New England world some forty years ago. There was at that time a great desire for culture, a great interest in knowledge, in art, in aesthetics, together with a very scanty supply of the materials for such pursuits. Small things were made to do large service; and there is something even touching in the solemnity of consideration that was bestowed by the emancipated New England conscience upon little wandering books and prints, little echoes and rumours of observation and experience. There flourished at that time in Boston a very remarkable and interesting woman, of whom we shall have more to say, Miss Margaret Fuller by name. This lady was the apostle of culture, of intellectual curiosity, and in the peculiarly interesting account of her life, published in 1852 by Emerson and two other of her friends, there are pages of her letters and diaries which narrate her visits to the Boston Athenæum and the emotions aroused in her mind by turning over portfolios of engravings. These emotions were ardent and passionate—could hardly have been more so had she been prostrate with contemplation in the Sistine Chapel or in one of the chambers of the Pitti Palace. The only analogy I can recall to this earnestness of interest in great works of art at a distance from them, is furnished by the great Goethe's elaborate study of plaster-casts and pencil-drawings at Weimar. I mention Margaret Fuller here because a glimpse of her state of mind—her vivacity of desire and poverty of knowledge—helps to define the situation. The situation lives for a moment

in those few words of Mr. Lathrop's. The initiated mind, as I have ventured to call it, has a vision of a little unadorned parlour, with the snow-drifts of a Massachusetts winter piled up about its windows, and a group of sensitive and serious people, modest votaries of opportunity, fixing their eyes upon a bookful of Flaxman's attenuated outlines.

At the beginning of the year 1839 he received, through political interest, an appointment as weigher and gauger in the Boston Custom-house. Mr. Van Buren then occupied the Presidency, and it appears that the Democratic party, whose successful candidate he had been, rather took credit for the patronage it had bestowed upon literary men. Hawthorne was a Democrat, and apparently a zealous one; even in later years, after the Whigs had vivified their principles by the adoption of the Republican platform, and by taking up an honest attitude on the question of slavery, his political faith never wavered. His Democratic sympathies were eminently natural, and there would have been an incongruity in his belonging to the other party. He was not only by conviction, but personally and by association, a Democrat. When in later years he found himself in contact with European civilisation, he appears to have become conscious of a good deal of latent radicalism in his disposition; he was oppressed with the burden of antiquity in Europe, and he found himself sighing for lightness and freshness and facility of change. But these things are relative to the point of view, and in his own country Hawthorne cast his lot with the party of conservatism, the party opposed to change and freshness. The people who found something musty and mouldy in his literary productions would have regarded

this quite as a matter of course; but we are not obliged to use invidious epithets in describing his political preferences. The sentiment that attached him to the Democracy was a subtle and honourable one, and the author of an attempt to sketch a portrait of him, should be the last to complain of this adjustment of his sympathies. It falls much more smoothly into his reader's conception of him than any other would do; and if he had had the perversity to be a Republican, I am afraid our ingenuity would have been considerably taxed in devising a proper explanation of the circumstance. At any rate, the Democrats gave him a small post in the Boston Custom-house, to which an annual salary of \$1,200 was attached, and Hawthorne appears at first to have joyously welcomed the gift. The duties of the office were not very congruous to the genius of a man of fancy; but it had the advantage that it broke the spell of his cursed solitude, as he called it, drew him away from Salem, and threw him, comparatively speaking, into the world. The first volume of the *American Note-Books* contains some extracts from letters written during his tenure of this modest office, which indicate sufficiently that his occupations cannot have been intrinsically gratifying.

"I have been measuring coal all day," he writes, during the winter of 1840, "on board of a black little British schooner, in a dismal dock at the north end of the city. Most of the time I paced the deck to keep myself warm; for the wind (north-east, I believe) blew up through the dock as if it had been the pipe of a pair of bellows. The vessel lying deep between two wharves, there was no more delightful prospect, on the right hand and on the left, than the posts and timbers, half immersed in the water and covered with ice, which the rising and falling of successive tides had

left upon them, so that they looked like immense icicles. Across the water, however, not more than half a mile off, appeared the Bunker's Hill Monument, and what interested me considerably more, a church-steeple, with the dial of a clock upon it, whereby I was enabled to measure the march of the weary hours. Sometimes I descended into the dirty little cabin of the schooner, and warmed myself by a red-hot stove, among biscuit-barrels, pots and kettles, sea-chests, and innumerable lumber of all sorts—my olfactories meanwhile being greatly refreshed with the odour of a pipe, which the captain, or some one of his crew, was smoking. But at last came the sunset, with delicate clouds, and a purple light upon the islands; and I blessed it, because it was the signal of my release."

A worse man than Hawthorne would have measured coal quite as well, and of all the dismal tasks to which an unremunerated imagination has ever had to accommodate itself, I remember none more sordid than the business depicted in the foregoing lines. "I pray," he writes some weeks later, "that in one year more I may find some way of escaping from this unblest Custom-house; for it is a very grievous thralldom. I do detest all offices; all, at least, that are held on a political tenure, and I want nothing to do with politicians. Their hearts wither away and die out of their bodies. Their consciences are turned to india-rubber, or to some substance as black as that and which will stretch as much. One thing, if no more, I have gained by my Custom-house experience—to know a politician. It is a knowledge which no previous thought or power of sympathy could have taught me; because the animal, or the machine rather, is not in nature." A few days later he goes on in the same strain:—

"I do not think it is the doom laid upon me of murdering so many of the brightest hours of the day at the Custom-

house that makes such havoc with my wits, for here I am again trying to write worthily . . . yet with a sense as if all the noblest part of man had been left out of my composition, or had decayed out of it since my nature was given to my own keeping. . . . Never comes any bird of Paradise into that dismal region. A salt or even a coal-ship is ten million times preferable ; for there the sky is above me, and the fresh breeze around me, and my thoughts having hardly anything to do with my occupation, are as free as air. Nevertheless . . . it is only once in a while that the image and desire of a better and happier life makes me feel the iron of my chain ; for after all a human spirit may find no insufficiency of food for it, even in the Custom-house. And with such materials as these I do think and feel and learn things that are worth knowing, and which I should not know unless I had learned them there ; so that the present position of my life shall not be quite left out of the sum of my real existence. . . . It is good for me, on many accounts, that my life has had this passage in it. I know much more than I did a year ago. I have a stronger sense of power to act as a man among men. I have gained worldly wisdom, and wisdom also that is not altogether of this world. And when I quit this earthly career where I am now buried, nothing will cling to me that ought to be left behind. Men will not perceive, I trust, by my look or the tenor of my thoughts and feelings, that I have been a Custom-house officer."

He says, writing shortly afterwards, that "when I shall be free again, I will enjoy all things with the fresh simplicity of a child of five years old. I shall grow young again, made all over anew. I will go forth and stand in a summer shower, and all the worldly dust that has collected on me shall be washed away at once, and my heart will be like a bank of fresh flowers for the weary to rest upon."

This forecast of his destiny was sufficiently exact. A year later, in April 1841, he went to take up his abode

in the socialistic community of Brook Farm. Here he found himself among fields and flowers and other natural products—as well as among many products that could not very justly be called natural. He was exposed to summer showers in plenty; and his personal associations were as different as possible from those he had encountered in fiscal circles. He made acquaintance with Transcendentalism and the Transcendentalists.



## CHAPTER IV.

### BROOK FARM AND CONCORD.

THE history of the little industrial and intellectual association which formed itself at this time in one of the suburbs of Boston has not, to my knowledge, been written; though it is assuredly a curious and interesting chapter in the domestic annals of New England. It would of course be easy to overrate the importance of this ingenious attempt of a few speculative persons to improve the outlook of mankind. The experiment came and went very rapidly and quietly, leaving very few traces behind it. It became simply a charming personal reminiscence for the small number of amiable enthusiasts who had had a hand in it. There were degrees of enthusiasm, and I suppose there were degrees of amiability; but a certain generous brightness of hope and freshness of conviction pervaded the whole undertaking and rendered it, morally speaking, important to an extent of which any heed that the world in general ever gave to it is an insufficient measure. Of course it would be a great mistake to represent the episode of Brook Farm as directly related to the manners and morals of the New England world in general—and in especial to those of the prosperous, opulent, comfortable

part of it. The thing was the experiment of a coterie—it was unusual, unfashionable, unsuccessful. It was, as would then have been said, an amusement of the Transcendentalists—a harmless effusion of Radicalism. The Transcendentalists were not, after all, very numerous; and the Radicals were by no means of the vivid tinge of those of our own day. I have said that the Brook Farm community left no traces behind it that the world in general can appreciate; I should rather say that the only trace is a short novel, of which the principal merits reside in its qualities of difference from the affair itself. *The Blithedale Romance* is the main result of Brook Farm; but *The Blithedale Romance* was very properly never recognised by the Brook Farmers as an accurate portrait of their little colony.

Nevertheless, in a society as to which the more frequent complaint is that it is monotonous, that it lacks variety of incident and of type, the episode, our own business with which is simply that it was the cause of Hawthorne's writing an admirable tale, might be welcomed as a picturesque variation. At the same time, if we do not exaggerate its proportions, it may seem to contain a fund of illustration as to that phase of human life with which our author's own history mingled itself. The most graceful account of the origin of Brook Farm is probably to be found in these words of one of the biographers of Margaret Fuller: "In Boston and its vicinity, several friends, for whose character Margaret felt the highest honour, were earnestly considering the possibility of making such industrial, social, and educational arrangements as would simplify economies, combine leisure for study with healthful and honest toil, avert unjust collisions of caste, equalise

refinements, awaken generous affections, diffuse courtesy, and sweeten and sanctify life as a whole." The reader will perceive that this was a liberal scheme, and that if the experiment failed, the greater was the pity. The writer goes on to say that a gentleman, who afterwards distinguished himself in literature (he had begun by being a clergyman), "convinced by his experience in a faithful ministry that the need was urgent for a thorough application of the professed principles of Fraternity to actual relations, was about staking his all of fortune, reputation, and influence, in an attempt to organize a joint-stock company at Brook Farm." As Margaret Fuller passes for having suggested to Hawthorne the figure of Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*, and as she is probably, with one exception, the person connected with the affair who, after Hawthorne, offered most of what is called a personality to the world, I may venture to quote a few more passages from her Memoirs—a curious, in some points of view almost a grotesque, and yet, on the whole, as I have said, an extremely interesting book. It was a strange history and a strange destiny, that of this brilliant, restless, and unhappy woman—this ardent New Englander, this impassioned Yankee, who occupied so large a place in the thoughts, the lives, the affections, of an intelligent and appreciative society, and yet left behind her nothing but the memory of a memory. Her function, her reputation, were singular, and not altogether reassuring: she was a talker, she was *the* talker, she was the genius of talk. She had a magnificent, though by no means an unmitigated, egotism; and in some of her utterances it is difficult to say whether pride or humility prevails—as for instance when she writes that she feels "that there

is plenty of room in the Universe for my faults, and as if I could not spend time in thinking of them when so many things interest me more." She has left the same sort of reputation as a great actress. Some of her writing has extreme beauty, almost all of it has a real interest, but her value, her activity, her sway (I am not sure that one can say her charm), were personal and practical. She went to Europe, expanded to new desires and interests, and, very poor herself, married an impoverished Italian nobleman. Then, with her husband and child, she embarked to return to her own country, and was lost at sea in a terrible storm, within sight of its coasts. Her tragical death combined with many of the elements of her life to convert her memory into a sort of legend, so that the people who had known her well, grew at last to be envied by later comers. Hawthorne does not appear to have been intimate with her; on the contrary, I find such an entry as this in the *American Note Books* in 1841: "I was invited to dine at Mr. Bancroft's yesterday, with Miss Margaret Fuller; but Providence had given me some business to do; for which I was very thankful!" It is true that, later, the lady is the subject of one or two allusions of a gentler cast. One of them indeed is so pretty as to be worth quoting:—

"After leaving the book at Mr. Emerson's, I returned through the woods, and, entering Sleepy Hollow, I perceived a lady reclining near the path which bends along its verge. It was Margaret herself. She had been there the whole afternoon, meditating or reading, for she had a book in her hand with some strange title which I did not understand and have forgotten. She said that nobody had broken her solitude, and was just giving utterance to a theory that no inhabitant of Concord ever visited Sleepy Hollow, when we saw a

group of people entering the sacred precincts. Most of them followed a path which led them away from us; but an old man passed near us, and smiled to see Margaret reclining on the ground and me standing by her side. He made some remark upon the beauty of the afternoon, and withdrew himself into the shadow of the wood. Then we talked about autumn, and about the pleasures of being lost in the woods, and about the crows, whose voices Margaret had heard; and about the experiences of early childhood, whose influence remains upon the character after the recollection of them has passed away; and about the sight of mountains from a distance, and the view from their summits; and about other matters of high and low philosophy."

It is safe to assume that Hawthorne could not on the whole have had a high relish for the very positive personality of this accomplished and argumentative woman, in whose intellect high noon seemed ever to reign, as twilight did in his own. He must have been struck with the glare of her understanding, and, mentally speaking, have scowled and blinked a good deal in conversation with her. But it is tolerably manifest, nevertheless, that she was, in his imagination, the starting-point of the figure of Zenobia; and Zenobia is, to my sense, his only very definite attempt at the representation of a character. The portrait is full of alteration and embellishment; but it has a greater reality, a greater abundance of detail, than any of his other figures, and the reality was a memory of the lady whom he had encountered in the Roxbury pastoral or among the wood-walks of Concord, with strange books in her hand and eloquent discourse on her lips. *The Blithedale Romance* was written just after her unhappy death, when the reverberation of her talk would lose much of its harshness. In fact, however, very much

the same qualities that made Hawthorne a Democrat in politics—his contemplative turn and absence of a keen perception of abuses, his taste for old ideals, and loitering paces, and muffled tones—would operate to keep him out of active sympathy with a woman of the so-called progressive type. We may be sure that in women his taste was conservative.

It seems odd, as his biographer says, "that the least gregarious of men should have been drawn into a socialistic community;" but although it is apparent that Hawthorne went to Brook Farm without any great Transcendental fervour, yet he had various good reasons for casting his lot in this would-be happy family. He was as yet unable to marry, but he naturally wished to do so as speedily as possible, and there was a prospect that Brook Farm would prove an economical residence. And then it is only fair to believe that Hawthorne was interested in the experiment, and that though he was not a Transcendentalist, an Abolitionist, or a Fourierite, as his companions were in some degree or other likely to be, he was willing, as a generous and unoccupied young man, to lend a hand in any reasonable scheme for helping people to live together on better terms than the common. The Brook Farm scheme was, as such things go, a reasonable one; it was devised and carried out by shrewd and sober-minded New Englanders, who were careful to place economy first and idealism afterwards, and who were not afflicted with a Gallic passion for completeness of theory. There were no formulas, doctrines, dogmas; there was no interference whatever with private life or individual habits, and not the faintest adumbration of a re-arrangement of that difficult business known as the

relations of the sexes. The relations of the sexes were neither more nor less than what they usually are in American life, excellent ; and in such particulars the scheme was thoroughly conservative and irreproachable. Its main characteristic was that each individual concerned in it should do a part of the work necessary for keeping the whole machine going. He could choose his work and he could live as he liked ; it was hoped, but it was by no means demanded, that he would make himself agreeable, like a gentleman invited to a dinner-party. Allowing, however, for everything that was a concession to worldly traditions and to the laxity of man's nature, there must have been in the enterprise a good deal of a certain freshness and purity of spirit, of a certain noble credulity and faith in the perfectibility of man, which it would have been easier to find in Boston in the year 1840, than in London five-and-thirty years later. If that was the era of Transcendentalism, Transcendentalism could only have sprouted in the soil peculiar to the general locality of which I speak—the soil of the old New England morality, gently raked and refreshed by an imported culture. The Transcendentalists read a great deal of French and German, made themselves intimate with George Sand and Goethe, and many other writers ; but the strong and deep New England conscience accompanied them on all their intellectual excursions, and there never was a so-called “movement” that embodied itself, on the whole, in fewer eccentricities of conduct, or that borrowed a smaller licence in private deportment. Henry Thoreau, a delightful writer, went to live in the woods ; but Henry Thoreau was essentially a sylvan personage and would not have been, however

the fashion of his time might have turned, a man about town. The brothers and sisters at Brook Farm ploughed the fields and milked the cows ; but I think that an observer from another clime and society would have been much more struck with their spirit of conformity than with their *dérèglements*. Their ardour was a moral ardour, and the lightest breath of scandal never rested upon them, or upon any phase of Transcendentalism.

A biographer of Hawthorne might well regret that his hero had not been more mixed up with the reforming and free-thinking class, so that he might find a pretext for writing a chapter upon the state of Boston society forty years ago. A needful warrant for such regret should be, properly, that the biographer's own personal reminiscences should stretch back to that period and to the persons who animated it. This would be a guarantee of fulness of knowledge and, presumably, of kindness of tone. It is difficult to see, indeed, how the generation of which Hawthorne has given us, in *Blithedale*, a few portraits, should not at this time of day be spoken of very tenderly and sympathetically. If irony enter into the allusion, it should be of the lightest and gentlest. Certainly, for a brief and imperfect chronicler of these things, a writer just touching them as he passes, and who has not the advantage of having been a contemporary, there is only one possible tone. The compiler of these pages, though his recollections date only from a later period, has a memory of a certain number of persons who had been intimately connected, as Hawthorne was not, with the agitations of that interesting time. Something of its interest adhered to them still—something of its aroma clung to their garments ; there was something



about them which seemed to say that when they were young and enthusiastic, they had been initiated into moral mysteries, they had played at a wonderful game. Their usual mark (it is true I can think of exceptions) was that they seemed excellently good. They appeared unstained by the world, unfamiliar with worldly desires and standards, and with those various forms of human depravity which flourish in some high phases of civilisation ; inclined to simple and democratic ways, destitute of pretensions and affectations, of jealousies, of cynicism, of snobbishness. This little epoch of fermentation has three or four drawbacks for the critic—drawbacks, however, that may be overlooked by a person for whom it has an interest of association. It bore, intellectually, the stamp of provincialism ; it was a beginning without a fruition, a dawn without a noon ; and it produced, with a single exception, no great talents. It produced a great deal of writing, but (always putting Hawthorne aside, as a contemporary but not a sharer) only one writer in whom the world at large has interested itself. The situation was summed up and transfigured in the admirable and exquisite Emerson. He expressed all that it contained, and a good deal more, doubtless, besides ; he was the man of genius of the moment ; he was the Transcendentalist *par excellence*. Emerson expressed, before all things, as was extremely natural at the hour and in the place, the value and importance of the individual, the duty of making the most of one's self, of living by one's own personal light and carrying out one's own disposition. He reflected with beautiful irony upon the exquisite impudence of those institutions which claim to have appropriated the truth, and to dole it out in propor-

tionate morsels, in exchange for a subscription. He talked about the beauty and dignity of life, and about every one who is born into the world being born to the whole, having an interest and a stake in the whole. He said "all that is clearly due to-day is not to lie," and a great many other things which it would be still easier to present in a ridiculous light. He insisted upon sincerity and independence and spontaneity, upon acting in harmony with one's nature, and not conforming and compromising for the sake of being more comfortable. He urged that a man should await his call, his finding the thing to do which he should really believe in doing, and not be urged by the world's opinion to do simply the world's work. "If no call should come for years, for centuries, then I know that the want of the Universe is the attestation of faith by my abstinence. . . . If I cannot work, at least I need not lie." The doctrine of the supremacy of the individual to himself, of his originality and, as regards his own character, *unique* quality, must have had a great charm for people living in a society in which introspection, thanks to the want of other entertainment, played almost the part of a social resource.

In the United States, in those days, there were no great things to look out at (save forests and rivers); life was not in the least spectacular; society was not brilliant; the country was given up to a great material prosperity, a homely *bourgeois* activity, a diffusion of primary education and the common luxuries. There was therefore, among the cultivated classes, much relish for the utterances of a writer who would help one to take a picturesque view of one's internal possibilities, and to find in the landscape of the soul all sorts of fine

sunrise and moonlight effects. "Meantime, while the doors of the temple stand open, night and day, before every man, and the oracles of this truth cease never, it is guarded by one stern condition; this, namely—it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction but provocation that I can receive from another soul." To make one's self so much more interesting would help to make life interesting, and life was probably, to many of this aspiring congregation, a dream of freedom and fortitude. There were faulty parts in the Emersonian philosophy; but the general tone was magnificent; and I can easily believe that, coming when it did and where it did, it should have been drunk in by a great many fine moral appetites with a sense of intoxication. One envies, even, I will not say the illusions, of that keenly sentient period, but the convictions and interests—the moral passion. One certainly envies the privilege of having heard the finest of Emerson's orations poured forth in their early newness. They were the most poetical, the most beautiful productions of the American mind, and they were thoroughly local and national. They had a music and a magic, and when one remembers the remarkable charm of the speaker, the beautiful modulation of his utterance, one regrets in especial that one might not have been present on a certain occasion which made a sensation, an era—the delivery of an address to the Divinity School of Harvard University, on a summer evening in 1838. In the light, fresh American air, unthickened and undarkened by customs and institutions established, these things, as the phrase is, told.

Hawthorne appears, like his own Miles Coverdale, to have arrived at Brook Farm in the midst of one of

those April snow-storms which, during the New England spring, occasionally diversify the inaction of the vernal process. Miles Coverdale, in *The Blithedale Romance*, is evidently as much Hawthorne as he is any one else in particular. He is indeed not very markedly any one, unless it be the spectator, the observer; his chief identity lies in his success in looking at things objectively and spinning uncommunicated fancies about them. This indeed was the part that Hawthorne played socially in the little community at West Roxburg. His biographer describes him as sitting "silently, hour after hour, in the broad old-fashioned hall of the house, where he could listen almost unseen to the chat and merriment of the young people, himself almost always holding a book before him, but seldom turning the leaves." He put his hand to the plough and supported himself and the community, as they were all supposed to do, by his labour; but he contributed little to the hum of voices. Some of his companions, either then or afterwards, took, I believe, rather a gruesome view of his want of articulate enthusiasm, and accused him of coming to the place as a sort of intellectual vampire, for purely psychological purposes. He sat in a corner, they declared, and watched the inmates when they were off their guard, analysing their characters, and dissecting the amiable ardour, the magnanimous illusions, which he was too cold-blooded to share. In so far as this account of Hawthorne's attitude was a complaint, it was a singularly childish one. If he was at Brook Farm without being of it, this is a very fortunate circumstance from the point of view of posterity, who would have preserved but a slender memory of the affair if our author's fine novel

had not kept the topic open. The complaint is indeed almost so ungrateful a one as to make us regret that the author's fellow-communists came off so easily. They certainly would not have done so if the author of *Blithedale* had been more of a satirist. Certainly, if Hawthorne was an observer, he was a very harmless one; and when one thinks of the queer specimens of the reforming genus with which he must have been surrounded, one almost wishes that, for our entertainment, he had given his old companions something to complain of in earnest. There is no satire whatever in the *Romance*; the quality is almost conspicuous by its absence. Of portraits there are only two; there is no sketching of odd figures—no reproduction of strange types of radicalism; the human background is left vague. Hawthorne was not a satirist, and if at Brook Farm he was, according to his habit, a good deal of a mild sceptic, his scepticism was exercised much more in the interest of fancy than in that of reality.

There must have been something pleasantly bucolic and pastoral in the habits of the place during the fine New England summer; but we have no retrospective envy of the denizens of Brook Farm in that other season which, as Hawthorne somewhere says, leaves in those regions, "so large a blank—so melancholy a deathspot—in lives so brief that they ought to be all summertime." "Of a summer night, when the moon was full," says Mr. Lathrop, "they lit no lamps, but sat grouped in the light and shadow, while sundry of the younger men sang old ballads, or joined Tom Moore's songs to operatic airs. On other nights there would be an original essay or poem read aloud, or else a play of Shakespeare, with the parts distributed to different

members; and these amusements failing, some interesting discussion was likely to take their place. Occasionally, in the dramatic season, large delegations from the farm would drive into Boston, in carriages and waggons, to the opera or the play. Sometimes, too, the young women sang as they washed the dishes in the Hive; and the youthful yeomen of the society came in and helped them with their work. The men wore blouses of a checked or plaided stuff, belted at the waist, with a broad collar folding down about the throat, and rough straw hats; the women, usually, simple calico gowns and hats." All this sounds delightfully Arcadian and innocent, and it is certain that there was something peculiar to the clime and race in some of the features of such a life; in the free, frank, and stainless companionship of young men and maidens, in the mixture of manual labour and intellectual flights—dish-washing and æsthetics, wood-chopping and philosophy. Wordsworth's "plain living and high thinking" were made actual. Some passages in Margaret Fuller's journals throw plenty of light on this. (It must be premised that she was at Brook Farm as an occasional visitor; not as a labourer in the Hive.)

"All Saturday I was off in the woods. In the evening we had a general conversation, opened by me, upon Education, in its largest sense, and on what we can do for ourselves and others. I took my usual ground:—The aim is perfection; patience the road. Our lives should be considered as a tendency, an approximation only. . . . Mr. R. spoke admirably on the nature of loyalty. The people showed a good deal of the *sans-culotte* tendency in their manners, throwing themselves on the floor, yawning, and going out when they had heard enough. Yet as the majority differ with me, to begin with—that being the reason this subject was chosen—they

showed on the whole more interest and deference than I had expected. As I am accustomed to deference, however, and need it for the boldness and animation which my part requires, I did not speak with as much force as usual. . . . Sunday.—A glorious day; the woods full of perfume; I was out all the morning. In the afternoon Mrs. R. and I had a talk. I said my position would be too uncertain here, as I could not work. — said 'they would all like to work for a person of genius,' . . . 'Yes,' I told her; 'but where would be my repose when they were always to be judging whether I was worth it or not? . . . Each day you must prove yourself anew.' . . . We talked of the principles of the community. I said I had not a right to come, because all the confidence I had in it was as an *experiment* worth trying, and that it was part of the great wave of inspired thought. . . . We had valuable discussion on these points. All Monday morning in the woods again. Afternoon, out with the drawing party; I felt the evils of the want of conventional refinement, in the impudence with which one of the girls treated me. She has since thought of it with regret, I notice; and by every day's observation of me will see that she ought not to have done it. In the evening a husking in the barn . . . a most picturesque scene . . . I stayed and helped about half an hour, and then took a long walk beneath the stars. Wednesday . . . In the evening a conversation on Impulse . . . I defended nature, as I always do;—the spirit ascending through, not superseding, nature. But in the scale of Sense, Intellect, Spirit, I advocated the claims of Intellect, because those present were rather disposed to postpone them. On the nature of Beauty we had good talk. — seemed in a much more reverent humour than the other night, and enjoyed the large plans of the universe which were unrolled . . . Saturday.—Well, good-bye, Brook Farm. I know more about this place than I did when I came; but the only way to be qualified for a judge of such an experiment would be to become an active, though unimpassioned, associate in trying it. . . . The girl who was so rude to me stood waiting, with a timid air, to bid me good-bye."

The young girl in question cannot have been Hawthorne's charming Priscilla; nor yet another young lady, of a most humble spirit, who communicated to Margaret's biographers her recollections of this remarkable woman's visits to Brook Farm; concluding with the assurance that "after a while she seemed to lose sight of my more prominent and disagreeable peculiarities, and treated me with affectionate regard."

Hawthorne's farewell to the place appears to have been accompanied with some reflections of a cast similar to those indicated by Miss Fuller; in so far at least as we may attribute to Hawthorne himself some of the observations that he fathers upon Miles Coverdale. His biographer justly quotes two or three sentences from *The Blithedale Romance*, as striking the note of the author's feeling about the place. "No sagacious man," says Coverdale, "will long retain his sagacity if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning to the settled system of things, to correct himself by a new observation from that old standpoint." And he remarks elsewhere that "it struck me as rather odd that one of the first questions raised, after our separation from the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world, should relate to the possibility of getting the advantage over the outside barbarians in their own field of labour. But to tell the truth, I very soon became sensible that, as regarded society at large, we stood in a position of new hostility rather than new brotherhood." He was doubtless oppressed by the "sultry heat of society," as he calls it in one of the jottings in the Note-Books. "What would a man do if he were compelled to live always in the sultry heat of society, and could never bathe himself in



cool solitude?" His biographer relates that one of the other Brook Farmers, wandering afield one summer's day, discovered Hawthorne stretched at his length upon a grassy hill-side, with his hat pulled over his face, and every appearance, in his attitude, of the desire to escape detection. On his asking him whether he had any particular reason for this shyness of posture—"Too much of a party up there!" Hawthorne contented himself with replying, with a nod in the direction of the Hiva. He had nevertheless for a time looked forward to remaining indefinitely in the community; he meant to marry as soon as possible and bring his wife there to live. Some sixty pages of the second volume of the American Note-Books are occupied with extracts from his letters to his future wife and from his journal (which appears however at this time to have been only intermittent), consisting almost exclusively of descriptions of the simple scenery of the neighbourhood, and of the state of the woods and fields and weather. Hawthorne's fondness for all the common things of nature was deep and constant, and there is always something charming in his verbal touch, as we may call it, when he talks to himself about them. "Oh," he breaks out, of an October afternoon, "the beauty of grassy slopes, and the hollow ways of paths winding between hills, and the intervals between the road and wood-lots, where Summer lingers and sits down, strewing dandelions of gold and blue asters as her parting gifts and memorials!" He was but a single summer at Brook Farm; the rest of his residence had the winter-quality.

But if he returned to solitude, it was henceforth to be as the French say, a *solitude à deux*. He was married in

July 1842, and betook himself immediately to the ancient village of Concord, near Boston, where he occupied the so-called *Manse* which has given the title to one of his collections of tales, and upon which this work, in turn, has conferred a permanent distinction. I use the epithets "ancient" and "near" in the foregoing sentence, according to the American measurement of time and distance. Concord is some twenty miles from Boston, and even to-day, upwards of forty years after the date of Hawthorne's removal thither, it is a very fresh and well-preserved looking town. It had already a local history when, a hundred years ago, the larger current of human affairs flowed for a moment around it. Concord has the honour of being the first spot in which blood was shed in the war of the Revolution; here occurred the first exchange of musket-shots between the King's troops and the American insurgents. Here, as Emerson says in the little hymn which he contributed in 1836 to the dedication of a small monument commemorating this circumstance—

"Here once the embattled farmers stood,  
And fired the shot heard round the world."

The battle was a small one, and the farmers were not destined individually to emerge from obscurity; but the memory of these things has kept the reputation of Concord green, and it has been watered, moreover, so to speak, by the life-long presence there of one of the most honoured of American men of letters—the poet from whom I just quoted two lines. Concord is indeed in itself decidedly verdant, and is an excellent specimen of a New England village of the riper sort. At the time of Hawthorne's first going there it must have been an even better specimen than to-day,—more homogeneous,

more indigenous, more absolutely democratic. Forty years ago the tide of foreign immigration had scarcely begun to break upon the rural strongholds of the New England race; it had at most begun to splash them with the salt Hibernian spray. It is very possible, however, that at this period there was not an Irishman in Concord; the place would have been a village community operating in excellent conditions. Such a village community was not the least honourable item in the sum of New England civilisation. Its spreading elms and plain white houses, its generous summers and ponderous winters, its immediate background of promiscuous field and forest, would have been part of the composition. For the rest, there were the selectmen and the town-meetings, the town-schools and the self-governing spirit, the rigid morality, the friendly and familiar manners, the perfect competence of the little society to manage its affairs itself. In the delightful introduction to the *Mosses*, Hawthorne has given an account of his dwelling, of his simple occupations and recreations, and of some of the characteristics of the place. The Manse is a large, square wooden house, to the surface of which—even in the dry New England air, so unfriendly to mosses and lichens and weather-stains, and the other elements of a picturesque complexion—a hundred and fifty years of exposure have imparted a kind of tone, standing just above the slow-flowing Concord river, and approached by a short avenue of over-arching trees. It had been the dwelling-place of generations of Presbyterian ministers, ancestors of the celebrated Emerson, who had himself spent his early manhood and written some of his most beautiful essays there. "He used," as Hawthorne says, "to watch the

Assyrian dawn, and Paphian sunset and moonrise, from the summit of our eastern hill." From its clerical occupants the place had inherited a mild mustiness of theological association—a vague reverberation of old Calvinistic sermons, which served to deepen its extramundane and somnolent quality. The three years that Hawthorne passed here were, I should suppose, among the happiest of his life. The future was indeed not in any special manner assured; but the present was sufficiently genial. In the *American Note-Books* there is a charming passage (too long to quote) descriptive of the entertainment the new couple found in renovating and re-furnishing the old personage, which, at the time of their going into it, was given up to ghosts and cobwebs. Of the little drawing-room, which had been most completely reclaimed, he writes that "the shade of our departed host will never haunt it; for its aspect has been as completely changed as the scenery of a theatre. Probably the ghost gave one peep into it, uttered a groan, and vanished for ever." This departed host was a certain Doctor Ripley, a venerable scholar, who left behind him a reputation of learning and sanctity which was reproduced in one of the ladies of his family, long the most distinguished woman in the little Concord circle. Doctor Ripley's predecessor had been, I believe, the last of the line of the Emerson ministers—an old gentleman who, in the earlier years of his pastorate, stood at the window of his study (the same in which Hawthorne handled a more irresponsible quill) watching, with his hands under his long coat-tails, the progress of Concord fight. It is not by any means related, however, I should add, that he waited for the conclusion to make up his mind which was the righteous cause.

Hawthorne had a little society (as much, we may infer, as he desired), and it was excellent in quality. But the pages in the Note-Books which relate to his life at the Manse, and the introduction to the *Mosses*, make more of his relations with vegetable nature, and of his customary contemplation of the incidents of wood-path and way-side, than of the human elements of the scene; though these also are gracefully touched upon. These pages treat largely of the pleasures of a kitchen-garden, of the beauty of summer-squashes, and of the mysteries of apple raising. With the wholesome aroma of apples (as is indeed almost necessarily the case in any realistic record of New England rural life) they are especially pervaded; and with many other homely and domestic emanations; all of which derive a sweetness from the medium of our author's colloquial style. Hawthorne was silent with his lips; but he talked with his pen. The tone of his writing is often that of charming talk—ingenious, fanciful, slow-flowing, with all the lightness of gossip, and none of its vulgarity. In the preface to the tales written at the Manse he talks of many things, and just touches upon some of the members of his circle—especially upon that odd genius, his fellow-villager, Henry Thoreau. I said a little way back that the New England Transcendental movement had suffered in the estimation of the world at large from not having (putting Emerson aside) produced any superior talents. But any reference to it would be ungenerous which should omit to pay a tribute in passing to the author of *Walden*. Whatever question there may be of his talent, there can be none, I think, of his genius. It was a slim and crooked one; but it was eminently personal. He was imperfect, unfinished, inartistic; he was worse

than provincial—he was parochial; it is only at his best that he is readable. But at his best he has an extreme natural charm, and he must always be mentioned after those Americans—Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, Motley—who have written originally. He was Emerson's independent moral man made flesh—living for the ages, and not for Saturday and Sunday; for the Universe, and not for Concord. In fact, however, Thoreau lived for Concord very effectually, and by his remarkable genius for the observation of the phenomena of woods and streams, of plants and trees, and beasts and fishes, and for flinging a kind of spiritual interest over these things, he did more than he perhaps intended toward consolidating the fame of his accidental human sojourn. He was as shy and ungregarious as Hawthorne; but he and the latter appear to have been sociably disposed towards each other, and there are some charming touches in the preface to the *Mosses* in regard to the hours they spent in boating together on the large, quiet Concord river. Thoreau was a great voyager, in a canoe which he had constructed himself, and which he eventually made over to Hawthorne, and as expert in the use of the paddle as the Red men who had once haunted the same silent stream. The most frequent of Hawthorne's companions on these excursions appears, however, to have been a local celebrity—as well as Thoreau a high Transcendentalist—Mr. Ellery Channing, whom I may mention, since he is mentioned very explicitly in the preface to the *Mosses*, and also because no account of the little Concord world would be complete which should omit him. He was the son of the distinguished Unitarian moralist, and, I believe, the intimate friend of Thoreau, whom he resembled in

having produced literary compositions more esteemed by the few than by the many. He and Hawthorne were both fishermen, and the two used to ~~not~~ <sup>row</sup> themselves afloat in the summer afternoons. "Strange and happy times were those," exclaims the more distinguished of the two writers, "when we cast aside all irksome forms and strait-laced habitudes, and delivered ourselves up to the free air, to live like the Indians or any less conventional race, during one bright semi-circle of the sun. Rowing our boat against the current, between wide meadows, we turned aside into the Assabeth. A more lovely stream than this, for a mile above its junction with the Concord, has never flowed on earth—nowhere indeed except to lave the interior regions of a poet's imagination. . . . It comes flowing softly through the midmost privacy and deepest heart of a wood which whispers it to be quiet; while the stream whispers back again from its sedgy borders, as if river and wood were hushing one another to sleep. Yes; the river sleeps along its course and dreams of the sky and the clustering foliage. . . ." While Hawthorne was looking at these beautiful things, or, for that matter, was writing them, he was well out of the way of a certain class of visitants whom he alludes to in one of the closing passages of this long Introduction. "Never was a poor little country village infested with such a variety of queer, strangely-dressed, oddly-behaved mortals, most of whom took upon themselves to be important agents of the world's destiny, yet were simply bores of a very intense character." "These hobgoblins of flesh and blood," he says in a preceding paragraph, "were attracted thither by the wide-spreading influence of a great original thinker who had his

earthly abode at the opposite extremity of our village. . . . People that had lighted on a new thought or a thought they fancied new, came to Emerson, as the finder of a glittering gem hastens to a lapidary, to ascertain its quality and value." And Hawthorne enumerates some of the categories of pilgrims to the shrine of the mystic counsellor, who as a general thing was probably far from abounding in their own sense (when this sense was perverted), but gave them a due measure of plain practical advice. The whole passage is interesting, and it suggests that little Concord had not been ill-treated by the fates—with "a great original thinker" at one end of the village, an exquisite teller of tales at the other, and the rows of New England elms between. It contains moreover an admirable sentence about Hawthorne's pilgrim-haunted neighbour, with whom, "being happy," as he says, and feeling therefore "as if there were no question to be put," he was not in metaphysical communion. "It was good nevertheless to meet him in the wood-paths, or sometimes in our avenue, with that pure intellectual gleam diffused about his presence, like the garment of a shining one; and he so quiet, so simple, so without pretension, encountering each man alive as if expecting to receive more than he could impart!" One may without indiscretion risk the surmise that Hawthorne's perception of the "shining" element in his distinguished friend was more intense than his friend's appreciation of whatever luminous property might reside within the somewhat dusky envelope of our hero's identity as a collector of "mosses." Emerson, as a sort of spiritual sun-worshipper, could have attached but a moderate value to Hawthorne's cat-like faculty of seeing in the dark.



"As to the daily course of our life," the latter writes in the spring of 1843, "I have written with pretty commendable diligence, averaging from two to four hours a day; and the result is seen in various magazines. I might have written more if it had seemed worth while, but I was content to earn only so much gold as might suffice for our immediate wants, having prospect of official station and emolument which would do away with the necessity of writing for bread. These prospects have not yet had their fulfilment; and we are well content to wait, for an office would inevitably remove us from our present happy home—at least from an outward home; for there is an inner one that will accompany us wherever we go. Meantime, the magazine people do not pay their debts; so that we taste some of the inconveniences of poverty. It is an annoyance, not a trouble." And he goes on to give some account of his usual habits. (The passage is from his Journal, and the account is given to himself, as it were, with that odd, unfamiliar explicitness which marks the tone of this record throughout.) "Every day I trudge through snow and sleet to the village, look into the post-office, and spend an hour at the reading-room; and then return home, generally without having spoken a word to any human being. . . . In the way of exercise I saw and split wood, and physically I was never in a better condition than now." He adds a mention of an absence he had lately made. "I went alone to Salem, where I resumed all my bachelor habits for nearly a fortnight, leading the same life in which ten years of my youth flitted away like a dream. But how much changed was I! At last I had got hold of a reality which never could be taken from me. It was

good thus to get apart from my happiness for the sake of contemplating it."

These compositions, which were so unpunctually paid for, appeared in the *Democratic Review*, a periodical published at Washington, and having, as our author's biographer says, "considerable pretensions to a national character." It is to be regretted that the practice of keeping its creditors waiting should, on the part of the magazine in question, have been thought compatible with these pretensions. The foregoing lines are a description of a very monotonous but a very contented life, and Mr. Lathrop justly remarks upon the dissonance of tone of the tales Hawthorne produced under these happy circumstances. It is indeed not a little of an anomaly. The episode of the Manse was one of the most agreeable he had known, and yet the best of the *Mosses* (though not the greater number of them) are singularly dismal compositions. They are redolent of M. Montégut's pessimism. "The reality of sin, the pervasiveness of evil," says Mr. Lathrop, "had been but slightly insisted upon in the earlier tales: in this series the idea bursts up like a long-buried fire, with earth-shaking strength, and the pits of hell seem yawning beneath us." This is very true (allowing for Mr. Lathrop's rather too emphatic way of putting it); but the anomaly is, I think, on the whole, only superficial. Our writer's imagination, as has been abundantly conceded, was a gloomy one; the old Puritan sense of sin, of penalties to be paid, of the darkness and wickedness of life, had, as I have already suggested, passed into it. It had not passed into the parts of Hawthorne's nature corresponding to those occupied by the same horrible vision of things in his

ancestors; but it had still been determined to claim this later comer as its own, and since his heart and his happiness were to escape, it insisted on setting its mark upon his genius—upon his most beautiful organ, his admirable fancy. It may be said that when his fancy was strongest and keenest, when it was most itself, then the dark Puritan tinge showed in it most richly; and there cannot be a better proof that he was not the man of a sombre *parti-pris* whom M. Montégut describes, than the fact that these duskiest flowers of his invention sprang straigh from the soil of his happiest days. This surely indicates that there was but little direct connection between the products of his fancy and the state of his affections. When he was lightest at heart, he was most creative, and when he was most creative, the moral picturesqueness of the old secret of mankind in general and of the Puritans in particular, most appealed to him—the secret that we are really not by any means so good as a well-regulated society requires us to appear. It is not too much to say, even, that the very condition of production of some of these unamiable tales would be that they should be superficial, and, as it were, insincere. The magnificent little romance of *Young Goodman Brown*, for instance, evidently means nothing as regards Hawthorne's own state of mind, his conviction of human depravity and his consequent melancholy; for the simple reason that if it meant anything, it would mean too much. Mr. Lathrop speaks of it as a "terrible and lurid parable;" but this, it seems to me, is just what it is not. It is not a parable, but a picture, which is a very different thing. What does M. Montégut make, one would ask, from the point

of view of Hawthorne's pessimism, of the singularly objective and unpreoccupied tone of the Introduction to the *Old Manes*, in which the author speaks from himself, and in which the cry of metaphysical despair is not even faintly sounded !

We have seen that when he went into the village he often came home without having spoken a word to a human being. There is a touching entry made a little later, bearing upon his mild taciturnity. "A cloudy veil stretches across the abyss of my nature. I have, however, no love of secrecy and darkness. I am glad to think that God sees through my heart, and if any angel has power to penetrate into it, he is welcome to know everything that is there. Yes, and so may any mortal who is capable of full sympathy, and therefore worthy to come into my depths. But he must find his own way there ; I can neither guide nor enlighten him." It must be acknowledged, however, that if he was not able to open the gate of conversation, it was sometimes because he was disposed to slide the bolt himself. "I had a purpose," he writes, shortly before the entry last quoted, "if circumstances would permit, of passing the whole term of my wife's absence without speaking a word to any human being." He beguiled these incommunicative periods by studying German, in Tieck and Bürger, without apparently making much progress ; also in reading French, in Voltaire and Rabelais. "Just now," he writes, one October noon, "I heard a sharp tapping at the window of my study, and, looking up from my book (a volume of Rabelais), behold, the head of a little bird, who seemed to demand admittance." It was a quiet life, of course, in which these diminutive incidents seemed noteworthy ; and what is noteworthy

here to the observer of Hawthorne's contemplative simplicity, is the fact that though he finds a good deal to say about the little bird (he devotes several lines more to it) he makes no remark upon Rabelais. He had other visitors than little birds, however, and their demands were also not Rabelaisian. Thoreau comes to see him, and they talk "upon the spiritual advantages of change of place, and upon the *Dial*, and upon Mr. Alcott, and other kindred or concatenated subjects." Mr. Alcott was an arch-transcendentalist, living in Concord, and the *Dial* was a periodical to which the illuminated spirits of Boston and its neighbourhood used to contribute. Another visitor comes and talks "of Margaret Fuller, who, he says, has risen perceptibly into a higher state since their last meeting." There is probably a great deal of Concord five and-thirty years ago in that little sentence!

## CHAPTER V.

### THE THREE AMERICAN NOVELS.

THE prospect of official station and emolument which Hawthorne mentions in one of those paragraphs from his Journals which I have just quoted, as having offered itself and then passed away, was at last, in the event, confirmed by his receiving from the administration of President Polk the gift of a place in the Custom-house of his native town. The office was a modest one, and "official station" may perhaps appear a magniloquent formula for the functions sketched in the admirable Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne's duties were those of Surveyor of the port of Salem, and they had a salary attached, which was the important part; as his biographer tells us that he had received almost nothing for the contributions to the *Democratic Review*. He bade farewell to his ex-personage and went back to Salem in 1846, and the immediate effect of his ameliorated fortune was to make him stop writing. None of his Journals of the period from his going to Salem to 1850 have been published; from which I infer that he even ceased to journalise. *The Scarlet Letter* was not written till 1849. In the delightful prologue to that work, entitled *The Custom house*, he

embodies some of the impressions gathered during these years of comparative leisure (I say of leisure because he does not intimate in this sketch of his occupations that his duties were onerous). He intimates, however, that they were not interesting, and that it was a very good thing for him, mentally and morally, when his term of service expired—or rather when he was removed from office by the operation of that wonderful “rotatory” system which his countrymen had invented for the administration of their affairs. This sketch of the Custom-house is, as simple writing, one of the most perfect of Hawthorne’s compositions, and one of the most gracefully and humorously autobiographic. It would be interesting to examine it in detail, but I prefer to use my space for making some remarks upon the work which was the ultimate result of this period of Hawthorne’s residence in his native town; and I shall, for convenience’ sake, say directly afterwards what I have to say about the two companions of *The Scarlet Letter*—*The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. I quoted some passages from the prologue to the first of these novels in the early pages of this essay. There is another passage, however, which bears particularly upon this phase of Hawthorne’s career, and which is so happily expressed as to make it a pleasure to transcribe it—the passage in which he says that “for myself, during the whole of my Custom-house experience, moonlight and sunshine, and the glow of the fire-light, were just alike in my regard, and neither of them was of one whit more avail than the twinkle of a tallow candle. An entire class of susceptibilities, and a gift connected with them—of no great richness or value, but the best I had—was gone from me.” He goes on to say that he believes that

he might have done something if he could have made up his mind to convert the very substance of the commonplace that surrounded him into matter of literature.

"I might, for instance, have contented myself with writing out the narratives of a veteran shipmaster, one of the inspectors, whom I should be most ungrateful not to mention; since scarcely a day passed that he did not stir me to laughter and admiration by his marvellous gift as a story-teller. . . . Or I might readily have found a more serious task. It was a folly, with the materiality of this daily life pressing so intrusively upon me, to attempt to fling myself back into another age; or to insist on creating a semblance of a world out of airy matter. . . . The wiser effort would have been, to diffuse thought and imagination through the opaque substance of to-day, and thus make it a bright transparency . . . to seek resolutely the true and indestructible value that lay hidden in the petty and wearisome incidents and ordinary characters with which I was now conversant. The fault was mine. The page of life that was spread out before me was dull and commonplace, only because I had not fathomed its deeper import. A better book than I shall ever write was there. . . . These perceptions came too late. . . . I had ceased to be a writer of tolerably poor tales and essays, and had become a tolerably good Surveyor of the Customs. That was all. But, nevertheless, it is anything but agreeable to be haunted by a suspicion that one's intellect is dwindling away, or exhaling, without your consciousness, like ether out of phial; so that at every glance you find a smaller and less volatile residuum."

As, however, it was with what was left of his intellect after three years' evaporation, that Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, there is little reason to complain of the injury he suffered in his Surveyorship.

His publisher, Mr. Fields, in a volume entitled *Yesterdays with Authors*, has related the circumstances in which Hawthorne's masterpiece came into the world.



"In the winter of 1849, after he had been ejected from the Custom-house, I went down to Salem to see him and inquire after his health, for we heard he had been suffering from illness. He was then living in a modest wooden house. . . . I found him alone in a chamber over the sitting-room of the dwelling, and as the day was cold he was hovering near a stove. We fell into talk about his future prospects, and he was, as I feared I should find him, in a very desponding mood." His visitor urged him to bethink himself of publishing something, and Hawthorne replied by calling his attention to the small popularity his published productions had yet acquired, and declaring that he had done nothing and had no spirit for doing anything. The narrator of the incident urged upon him the necessity of a more hopeful view of his situation, and proceeded to take leave. He had not reached the street, however, when Hawthorne hurried to overtake him, and, placing a roll of MS. in his hand, bade him take it to Boston, read it, and pronounce upon it. "It is either very good or very bad," said the author; "I don't know which." "On my way back to Boston," says Mr. Fields, "I read the germ of *The Scarlet Letter*; before I slept that night I wrote him a note all aglow with admiration of the marvellous story he had put into my hands, and told him that I would come again to Salem the next day and arrange for its publication. I went on in such an amazing state of excitement, when we met again in the little house, that he would not believe I was really in earnest. He seemed to think I was beside myself, and laughed sadly at my enthusiasm." Hawthorne, however, went on with the book and finished it, but it appeared only a year later. His biographer quotes a

passage from a letter which he wrote in February, 1850, to his friend Horatio Bridge. "I finished my book only yesterday; one end being in the press at Boston, while the other was in my head here at Salem, so that, as you see, my story is at least fourteen miles long. . . My book, the publisher tells me, will not be out before April. He speaks of it in tremendous terms of approbation, so does Mrs. Hawthorne, to whom I read the conclusion last night. It broke her heart, and sent her to bed with a grievous headache—which I look upon as a triumphant success. Judging from the effect upon her and the publisher, I may calculate on what bowlers call a ten-strike. But I don't make any such calculation." And Mr. Lathrop calls attention, in regard to this passage, to an allusion in the English Note-Books (September 14, 1855). "Speaking of Thackeray, I cannot but wonder at his coolness in respect to his own pathos, and compare it to my emotions when I read the last scene of *The Scarlet Letter* to my wife, just after writing it—tried to read it rather, for my voice swelled and heaved as if I were tossed up and down on an ocean as it subsides after a storm. But I was in a very nervous state then, having gone through a great diversity of emotion while writing it, for many months."

The work has the tone of the circumstances in which it was produced. If Hawthorne was in a sombre mood, and if his future was painfully vague, *The Scarlet Letter* contains little enough of gaiety or of hopefulness. It is densely dark, with a single spot of vivid colour in it; and it will probably long remain the most consistently gloomy of English novels of the first order. But I just now called it the author's masterpiece, and I imagine it will continue to be, for other generations than ours, his

most substantial title to fame. The subject had probably lain a long time in his mind, as his subjects were apt to do; so that he appears completely to possess it, to know it and feel it. It is simpler and more complete than his other novels; it achieves more perfectly what it attempts, and it has about it that charm, very hard to express, which we find in an artist's work the first time he has touched his highest mark—a sort of straightness and naturalness of execution, an unconsciousness of his public, and freshness of interest in his theme. It was a great success, and he immediately found himself famous. The writer of these lines, who was a child at the time, remembers dimly the sensation the book produced, and the little shudder with which people alluded to it, as if a peculiar horror were mixed with its attractions. He was too young to read it himself, but its title, upon which he fixed his eyes as the book lay upon the table, had a mysterious charm. He had a vague belief indeed that the "letter" in question was one of the documents that come by the post, and it was a source of perpetual wonderment to him that it should be of such an unaccustomed hue. Of course it was difficult to explain to a child the significance of poor Hester Prynne's blood-coloured A. But the mystery was at last partly dispelled by his being taken to see a collection of pictures (the annual exhibition of the National Academy), where he encountered a representation of a pale, handsome woman, in a quaint black dress and a white coif, holding between her knees an elfish-looking little girl, fantastically dressed and crowned with flowers. Embroidered on the woman's breast was a great crimson A, over which the child's fingers, as she glanced strangely out of the picture, were maliciously playing. I was

told that this was Hester Prynne and little Pearl, and that when I grew older I might read their interesting history. But the picture remained vividly imprinted on my mind; I had been vaguely frightened and made uneasy by it; and when, years afterwards, I first read the novel, I seemed to myself to have read it before, and to be familiar with its two strange heroines. I mention this incident simply as an indication of the degree to which the success of *The Scarlet Letter* had made the book what is called an actuality. Hawthorne himself was very modest about it; he wrote to his publisher, when there was a question of his undertaking another novel, that what had given the history of Hester Prynne its "vogue" was simply the introductory chapter. In fact, the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* was in the United States a literary event of the first importance. The book was the finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth in the country. There was a consciousness of this in the welcome that was given it—a satisfaction in the idea of America having produced a novel that belonged to literature, and to the forefront of it. Something might at last be sent to Europe as exquisite in quality as anything that had been received, and the best of it was that the thing was absolutely American; it belonged to the soil, to the air; it came out of the very heart of New England.

It is beautiful, admirable, extraordinary; it has in the highest degree that merit which I have spoken of as the mark of Hawthorne's best things—an indefinable purity and lightness of conception, a quality which in a work of art affects one in the same way as the absence of grossness does in a human being. His fancy, as I just now said, had evidently brooded over the subject

for a long time; the situation to be represented had disclosed itself to him in all its phases. When I say in all its phases, the sentence demands modification; for it is to be remembered that if Hawthorne laid his hand upon the well-worn theme, upon the familiar combination of the wife, the lover, and the husband, it was after all but to one period of the history of these three persons that he attached himself. The situation is the situation after the woman's fault has been committed, and the current of expiation and repentance has set in. In spite of the relation between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, no story of love was surely ever less of a "love story." To Hawthorne's imagination the fact that these two persons had loved each other too well was of an interest comparatively vulgar; what appealed to him was the idea of their moral situation in the long years that were to follow. The story indeed is in a secondary degree that of Hester Prynne; she becomes, really, after the first scene, an accessory figure; it is not upon her the *dénouement* depends. It is upon her guilty lover that the author projects most frequently the cold, thin rays of his fitfully-moving lantern, which makes here and there a little luminous circle, on the edge of which hovers the livid and sinister figure of the injured and retributive husband. The story goes on for the most part between the lover and the husband—the tormented young Puritan minister, who carries the secret of his own lapse from pastoral purity locked up beneath an exterior that commands itself to the reverence of his flock, while he sees the softer partner of his guilt standing in the full glare of exposure and humbling herself to the misery of atonement—between this more

wretched and pitiable culprit, to whom dishonour would come as a comfort and the pillory as a relief, and the older, keener, wiser man, who, to obtain satisfaction for the wrong he has suffered, devises the infernally ingenious plan of conjoining himself with his wronger, living with him, living upon him, and while he pretends to minister to his hidden ailment and to sympathise with his pain, revels in his unsuspected knowledge of these things and stimulates them by malignant arts. The attitude of Roger Chillingworth, and the means he takes to compensate himself—these are the highly original elements in the situation that Hawthorne so ingeniously treats. None of his works are so impregnated with that after-sense of the old Puritan consciousness of life to which allusion has so often been made. If, as M. Montégut says, the qualities of his ancestors *filtered* down through generations into his composition, *The Scarlet Letter* was, as it were, the vessel that gathered up the last of the precious drops. And I say this not because the story happens to be of so-called historical cast, to be told of the early days of Massachusetts and of people in steeple-crowned hats and sad-coloured garments. The historical colouring is rather weak than otherwise; there is little elaboration of detail, of the modern realism of research; and the author has made no great point of causing his figures to speak the English of their period. Nevertheless, the book is full of the moral presence of the race that invented Hester's penance—diluted and complicated with other things, but still perfectly recognisable. Puritanism, in a word, is there, not only objectively, as Hawthorne tried to place it there, but subjectively as well. Not, I mean, in his judgment of his characters,

in any harshness of prejudice, or in the obtrusion of a moral lesson ; but in the very quality of his own vision, in the tone of the picture, in a certain coldness and exclusiveness of treatment.

The faults of the book are, to my sense, a want of reality and an abuse of the fanciful element—of a certain superficial symbolism. The people strike me not as characters, but as representatives, very picturesquely arranged, of a single state of mind ; and the interest of the story lies, not in them, but in the situation, which is insistently kept before us, with little progression, though with a great deal, as I have said, of a certain stable variation ; and to which they, out of their reality, contribute little that helps it to live and move. I was made to feel this want of reality, this over-ingenuity, of *The Scarlet Letter*, by chancing not long since upon a novel which was read fifty years ago much more than to-day, but which is still worth reading—the story of *Adam Blair*, by John Gibson Lockhart. This interesting and powerful little tale has a great deal of analogy with Hawthorne's novel—quite enough, at least, to suggest a comparison between them ; and the comparison is a very interesting one to make, for it speedily leads us to larger considerations than simple resemblances and divergences of plot.

Adam Blair, like Arthur Dimmesdale, is a Calvinistic minister who becomes the lover of a married woman, is overwhelmed with remorse at his misdeed, and makes a public confession of it ; then expiates it by resigning his pastoral office and becoming a humble tiller of the soil, as his father had been. The two stories are of about the same length, and each is the masterpiece

(putting aside of course, as far as Lockhart is concerned, the *Life of Scott*) of the author. They deal alike with the manners of a rigidly theological society, and even in certain details they correspond. In each of them, between the guilty pair, there is a charming little girl; though I hasten to say that Sarah Blair (who is not the daughter of the heroine but the legitimate offspring of the hero, a widower) is far from being as brilliant and graceful an apparition as the admirable little Pearl of *The Scarlet Letter*. The main difference between the two tales is the fact that in the American story the husband plays an all-important part, and in the Scottish plays almost none at all. *Adam Blair* is the history of the passion, and *The Scarlet Letter* the history of its sequel; but nevertheless, if one has read the two books at a short interval, it is impossible to avoid confronting them. I confess that a large portion of the interest of *Adam Blair*, to my mind, when once I had perceived that it would repeat in a great measure the situation of *The Scarlet Letter*, lay in noting its difference of tone. It threw into relief the passionless quality of Hawthorne's novel, its element of cold and ingenious fantasy, its elaborate imaginative delicacy. These things do not precisely constitute a weakness in *The Scarlet Letter*; indeed, in a certain way they constitute a great strength; but the absence of a certain something warm and straightforward, a trifle more grossly human and vulgarly natural, which one finds in *Adam Blair*, will always make Hawthorne's tale less touching to a large number of even very intelligent readers, than a love-story told with the robust, synthetic pathos which served Lockhart so well. His novel is not of the first rank (I should call it an excellent



second-rate one), but it borrows a charm from the fact that his vigorous, but not strongly imaginative, mind was impregnated with the reality of his subject. He did not always succeed in rendering this reality; the expression is sometimes awkward and poor. But the reader feels that his vision was clear, and his feeling about the matter very strong and rich. Hawthorne's imagination, on the other hand, plays with his theme so incessantly, leads it such a dance through the moonlighted air of his intellect, that the thing cools off, as it were, hardens and stiffens, and, producing effects much more exquisite, leaves the reader with a sense of having handled a splendid piece of silversmith's work. Lockhart, by means much more vulgar, produces at moments a greater illusion, and satisfies our inevitable desire for something, in the people in whom it is sought to interest us, that shall be of the same pitch and the same continuity with ourselves. Above all, it is interesting to see how the same subject appears to two men of a thoroughly different cast of mind and of a different race. Lockhart was struck with the warmth of the subject that offered itself to him, and Hawthorne with its coldness; the one with its glow, its sentimental interest—the other with its shadow, its moral interest. Lockhart's story is as decent, as severely draped, as *The Scarlet Letter*; but the author has a more vivid sense than appears to have imposed itself upon Hawthorne, of some of the incidents of the situation he describes; his tempted man and tempting woman are more actual and personal; his heroine in especial, though not in the least a delicate or a subtle conception, has a sort of credible, visible, palpable property, a vulgar roundness and relief, which are lacking

to the dim and chastened image of Hester Prynne. But I am going too far ; I am comparing simplicity with subtlety, the usual with the refined. Each man wrote as his turn of mind impelled him, but each expressed something more than himself. Lockhart was a dense, substantial Briton, with a taste for the concrete, and Hawthorne was a thin New Englander, with a miasmatic conscience.

In *The Scarlet Letter* there is a great deal of symbolism ; there is, I think, too much. It is overdone at times, and becomes mechanical ; it ceases to be impressive, and grazes triviality. The idea of the mystic A which the young minister finds imprinted upon his breast and eating into his flesh, in sympathy with the embroidered badge that Hester is condemned to wear, appears to me to be a case in point. This suggestion should, I think, have been just made and dropped ; to insist upon it and return to it, is to exaggerate the weak side of the subject. Hawthorne returns to it constantly, plays with it, and seems charmed by it ; until at last the reader feels tempted to declare that his enjoyment of it is puerile. In the admirable scene, so superbly conceived and beautifully executed, in which Mr. Dimmesdale, in the stillness of the night, in the middle of the sleeping town, feels impelled to go and stand upon the scaffold where his mistress had formerly enacted her dreadful penance, and then, seeing Hester pass along the street, from watching at a sick-bed, with little Pearl at her side, calls them both to come and stand there beside him—in this masterly episode the effect is almost spoiled by the introduction of one of these superficial conceits. What leads up to it is very fine—so fine that I cannot do better than quote it

as a specimen of one of the striking pages of the book.

"But before Mr. Dimmesdale had done speaking, a light gleamed far and wide over all the muffled sky. It was doubtless caused by one of those meteors which the night-watcher may so often observe burning out to waste in the vacant regions of the atmosphere. So powerful was its radiance that it thoroughly illuminated the dense medium of cloud, betwixt the sky and earth. The great vault brightened, like the dome of an immense lamp. It showed the familiar scene of the street with the distinctness of mid-day, but also with the awfulness that is always imparted to familiar objects by an unaccustomed light. The wooden houses, with their jutting stories and quaint gable-peaks; the doorsteps and thresholds, with the early grass springing up about them; the garden-plots, black with freshly-turned earth; the wheel-track, little worn, and, even in the market-place, margined with green on either side;—all were visible, but with a singularity of aspect that seemed to give another moral interpretation to the things of this world than they had ever borne before. And there stood the minister, with his hand over his heart; and Hester Prynne, with the embroidered letter glimmering on her bosom; and little Pearl, herself a symbol, and the connecting-link between these two. They stood in the noon of that strange and solemn splendour, as if it were the light that is to reveal all secrets, and the daybreak that shall unite all that belong to one another."

That is imaginative, impressive, poetic; but when, almost immediately afterwards, the author goes on to say that "the minister looking upward to the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter—the letter *A*—marked out in lines of dull red light," we feel that he goes too far and is in danger of crossing the line that separates the sublime from its intimate neighbour. We are tempted to say that this is not

moral tragedy, but physical comedy. In the same way, too much is made of the intimation that Hester's badge had a scorching property, and that if one touched it one would immediately withdraw one's hand. Hawthorne is perpetually looking for images which shall place themselves in picturesque correspondence with the spiritual facts with which he is concerned, and of course the search is of the very essence of poetry. But in such a process discretion is everything, and when the image becomes importunate it is in danger of seeming to stand for nothing more serious than itself. When Hester meets the minister by appointment in the forest, and sits talking with him while little Pearl wanders away and plays by the edge of the brook, the child is represented as at last making her way over to the other side of the woodland stream, and disporting herself there in a manner which makes her mother feel herself. "in some indistinct and tantalising manner, estranged from Pearl; as if the child, in her lonely ramble through the forest, had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together, and was now vainly seeking to return to it." And Hawthorne devotes a chapter to this idea of the child's having, by putting the brook between Hester and herself, established a kind of spiritual gulf, on the verge of which her little fantastic person innocently mocks at her mother's sense of bereavement. This conception belongs, one would say, quite to the lighter order of a story-teller's devices, and the reader hardly goes with Hawthorne in the large development he gives to it. He hardly goes with him either, I think, in his extreme predilection for a small number of vague ideas which are represented by such terms as "sphere" and "sympathies."

Hawthorne makes too liberal a use of these two substantives; it is the solitary defect of his style; and it counts as a defect partly because the words in question are a sort of specialty with certain writers immeasurably inferior to himself.

I had not meant, however, to expatiate upon his defects, which are of the slenderest and most venial kind. *The Scarlet Letter* has the beauty and harmony of all original and complete conceptions, and its weaker spots, whatever they are, are not of its essence; they are mere light flaws and inequalities of surface. One can often return to it; it supports familiarity and has the inexhaustible charm and mystery of great works of art. It is admirably written. Hawthorne afterwards polished his style to a still higher degree, but in his later productions—it is almost always the case in a writer's later productions—there is a touch of mannerism. In *The Scarlet Letter* there is a high degree of polish, and at the same time a charming freshness; his phrase is less conscious of itself. His biographer very justly calls attention to the fact that his style was excellent from the beginning; that he appeared to have passed through no phase of learning how to write, but was in possession of his means from the first of his handling a pen. His early tales, perhaps, were not of a character to subject his faculty of expression to a very severe test, but a man who had not Hawthorne's natural sense of language would certainly have contrived to write them less well. This natural sense of language—this turn for saying things lightly and yet touchingly, picturesquely yet simply, and for infusing a gently colloquial tone into matter of the most unfamiliar import, he had evidently cultivated with great assiduity.

I have spoken of the anomalous character of his Note-Books—of his going to such pains often to make a record of incidents which either were not worth remembering or could be easily remembered without its aid. But it helps us to understand the Note-Books if we regard them as a literary exercise. They were compositions, as school boys say, in which the subject was only the pretext, and the main point was to write a certain amount of excellent English. Hawthorne must at least have written a great many of these things for practice, and he must often have said to himself that it was better practice to write about trifles, because it was a greater tax upon one's skill to make them interesting. And his theory was just, for he has almost always made his trifles interesting. In his novels his art of saying things well is very positively tested, for here he treats of those matters among which it is very easy for a blundering writer to go wrong—the subtleties and mysteries of life, the moral and spiritual maze. In such a passage as one I have marked for quotation from *The Scarlet Letter* there is the stamp of the genius of style.

"Hester Prynne, gazing steadfastly at the clergyman, felt a dreary influence come over her, but wherefore or whence she knew not, unless that he seemed so remote from her own sphere and utterly beyond her reach. One glance of recognition she had imagined must needs pass between them. She thought of the dim forest with its little dell of solitude, and love, and anguish, and the mossy tree-trunk, where, sitting hand in hand, they had mingled their sad and passionate talk with the melancholy murmur of the brook. How deeply had they known each other then! And was this the man? She hardly knew him now! He, moving proudly past, enveloped as it were in the rich music, with the procession of majestic and venerable fathers; he, so unattainable in his worldly

position, and still more so in that far vista in his unsympathising thoughts, through which she now beheld him! Her spirit sank with the idea that all must have been a delusion, and that vividly as she had dreamed it, there could be no real bond betwixt the clergyman and herself. And thus much of woman there was in Hester, that she could scarcely forgive him—least of all now, when the heavy footstep of their approaching fate might be heard, nearer, nearer, nearer!—for being able to withdraw himself so completely from their mutual world, while she groped darkly, and stretched forth her cold hands, and found him not!"

*The House of the Seven Gables* was written at Lenox, among the mountains of Massachusetts, a village nestling, rather loosely, in one of the loveliest corners of New England, to which Hawthorne had betaken himself after the success of *The Scarlet Letter* became conspicuous, in the summer of 1850, and where he occupied for two years an uncomfortable little red house which is now pointed out to the inquiring stranger. The inquiring stranger is now a frequent figure at Lenox, for the place has suffered the process of lionisation. It has become a prosperous watering place, or at least (as there are no waters), as they say in America, a summer-resort. It is a brilliant and generous landscape, and thirty years ago a man of fancy, desiring to apply himself, might have found both inspiration and tranquillity there. Hawthorne found so much of both that he wrote more during his two years of residence at Lenox than at any period of his career. He began with *The House of the Seven Gables*, which was finished in the early part of 1851. This is the longest of his three American novels, it is the most elaborate, and in the judgment of some persons it is the finest. It is a rich, delightful, imaginative work, larger and more various than its companions,

and full of all sorts of deep intentions, of interwoven threads of suggestion. But it is not so rounded and complete as *The Scarlet Letter*; it has always seemed to me more like a prologue to a great novel than a great novel itself. I think this is partly owing to the fact that the subject, the *donnée*, as the French say, of the story, does not quite fill it out, and that we get at the same time an impression of certain complicated purposes on the author's part, which seem to reach beyond it. I call it larger and more various than its companions, and it has indeed a greater richness of tone and density of detail. The colour, so to speak, of *The House of the Seven Gables* is admirable. But the story has a sort of expansive quality which never wholly fructifies, and as I lately laid it down, after reading it for the third time, I had a sense of having interested myself in a magnificent fragment. Yet the book has a great fascination, and of all of those of its author's productions which I have read over while writing this sketch, it is perhaps the one that has gained most by re-perusal. If it be true of the others that the pure, natural quality of the imaginative strain is their great merit, this is at least as true of *The House of the Seven Gables*, the charm of which is in a peculiar degree of the kind that we fail to reduce to its grounds—like that of the sweetness of a piece of music, or the softness of fine September weather. It is vague, indefinable, ineffable; but it is the sort of thing we must always point to in justification of the high claim that we make for Hawthorne. In this case of course its vagueness is a drawback, for it is difficult to point to ethereal beauties; and if the reader whom we have wished to inoculate with our admiration inform us after looking a while that he



perceives nothing in particular, we can only reply that, in effect, the object is a delicate one.

*The House of the Seven Gables* comes nearer being a picture of contemporary American life than either of its companions; but on this ground it would be a mistake to make a large claim for it. It cannot be too often repeated that Hawthorne was not a realist. He had a high sense of reality—his Note-Books superabundantly testify to it; and fond as he was of jotting down the items that make it up, he never attempted to render exactly or closely the actual facts of the society that surrounded him. I have said—I began by saying—that his pages were full of its spirit, and of a certain reflected light that springs from it; but I was careful to add that the reader must look for his local and national quality between the lines of his writing and in the indirect testimony of his tone, his accent, his temper, of his very omissions and suppressions. *The House of the Seven Gables* has, however, more literal actuality than the others, and if it were not too fanciful an account of it, I should say that it renders, to an initiated reader, the impression of a summer afternoon in an elm-shadowed New England town. It leaves upon the mind a vague correspondence to some such reminiscence, and in stirring up the association it renders it delightful. The comparison is to the honour of the New England town, which gains in it more than it bestows. The shadows of the elms, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, are exceptionally dense and cool; the summer afternoon is peculiarly still and beautiful; the atmosphere has a delicious warmth, and the long daylight seems to pause and rest. But the mild provincial quality is there, the mixture of shabbiness and

freshness, the paucity of ingredients. The end of an old race—this is the situation that Hawthorne has depicted, and he has been admirably inspired in the choice of the figures in whom he seeks to interest us. They are all figures rather than characters—they are all pictures rather than persons. But if their reality is light and vague, it is sufficient, and it is in harmony with the low relief and dimness of outline of the objects that surround them. They are all types, to the author's mind, of something general, of something that is bound up with the history, at large, of families and individuals, and each of them is the centre of a cluster of those ingenious and meditative musings, rather melancholy, as a general thing, than joyous, which melt into the current and texture of the story and give it a kind of moral richness. A grotesque old spinster, simple, childish, penniless, very humble at heart, but rigidly conscious of her pedigree; an amiable bachelor, of an epicurean temperament and an enfeebled intellect, who has passed twenty years of his life in penal confinement for a crime of which he was unjustly pronounced guilty; a sweet-natured and bright-faced young girl from the country, a poor relation of these two ancient decrepitudes, with whose moral mustiness her modern freshness and soundness are contrasted; a young man still more modern, holding the latest opinions, who has sought his fortune up and down the world, and, though he has not found it, takes a genial and enthusiastic view of the future: these, with two or three remarkable accessory figures, are the persons concerned in the little drama. The drama is a small one, but as Hawthorne does not put it before us for its own superficial sake, for the dry facts of the case, but for something in it which he

holds to be symbolic and of large application, something that points a moral and that it behoves us to remember, the scenes in the rusty wooden house whose gables give its name to the story, have something of the dignity both of history and of tragedy. Miss Hephzibah Pyncheon, dragging out a disappointed life in her paternal dwelling, finds herself obliged in her old age to open a little shop for the sale of penny toys and gingerbread. This is the central incident of the tale, and, as Hawthorne relates it, it is an incident of the most impressive magnitude and most touching interest. Her dishonoured and vague-minded brother is released from prison at the same moment, and returns to the ancestral roof to deepen her perplexities. But, on the other hand, to alleviate them, and to introduce a breath of the air of the outer world into this long unventilated interior, the little country cousin also arrives, and proves the good angel of the feebly distracted household. All this episode is exquisite—admirably conceived, and executed with a kind of humorous tenderness, an equal sense of everything in it that is picturesque, touching, ridiculous, worthy of the highest praise. Hephzibah Pyncheon, with her near-sighted scowl, her rusty joints, her antique turban, her map of a great territory to the eastward which ought to have belonged to her family, her vain terrors and scruples and resentments, the inaptitude and repugnance of an ancient gentlewoman to the vulgar little commerce which a cruel fate has compelled her to engage in—Hephzibah Pyncheon is a masterly picture. I repeat that she is a picture, as her companions are pictures; she is a charming piece of descriptive writing, rather than a dramatic exhibition. But she is described, like her companions too, so subtly

and lovingly that we enter into her virginal old heart and stand with her behind her abominable little counter. Clifford Pyncheon is a still more remarkable conception, though he is perhaps not so vividly depicted. It was a figure needing a much more subtle touch, however, and it was of the essence of his character to be vague and unemphasised. Nothing can be more charming than the manner in which the soft, bright, active presence of Phoebe Pyncheon is indicated, or than the account of her relations with the poor dimly sentient kinsman for whom her light-handed sisterly offices, in the evening of a melancholy life, are a revelation of lost possibilities of happiness. "In her aspect," Hawthorne says of the young girl, "there was a familiar gladness, and a holiness that you could play with, and yet reverence it as much as ever. She was like a prayer offered up in the homeliest beauty of one's mother-tongue. Fresh was Phoebe, moreover, and airy, and sweet in her apparel; as if nothing that she wore—neither her gown, nor her small straw bonnet, nor her little kerchief, any more than her snowy stockings—had ever been put on before; or if worn, were all the fresher for it, and with a fragrance as if they had lain among the rose-buds." Of the influence of her maidenly salubrity upon poor Clifford, Hawthorne gives the prettiest description, and then, breaking off suddenly, renounces the attempt in language which, while pleading its inadequacy, conveys an exquisite satisfaction to the reader. I quote the passage for the sake of its extreme felicity, and of the charming image with which it concludes.

"But we strive in vain to put the idea into words. No adequate expression of the beauty and profound pathos with which it impresses us is attainable. This being, made only

for happiness, and heretofore so miserably failing to be happy—his tendencies so hideously thwarted that some unknown time ago, the delicate springs of his character, never morally or intellectually strong, had given way, and he was now imbecile—this poor forlorn voyager from the Islands of the Blest, in a frail bark, on a tempestuous sea, had been flung by the last mountain-wave of his shipwreck, into a quiet harbour. There, as he lay more than half lifeless on the strand, the fragrance of an earthly rose-bud had come to his nostrils, and, as odours will, had summoned up reminiscences or visions of all the living and breathing beauty amid which he should have had his home. With his native susceptibility of happy influences, he inhales the slight ethereal rapture into his soul, and expires ! ”

I have not mentioned the personage in *The House of the Seven Gables* upon whom Hawthorne evidently bestowed most pains, and whose portrait is the most elaborate in the book ; partly because he is, in spite of the space he occupies, an accessory figure, and partly because, even more than the others, he is what I have called a picture rather than a character. Judge Pyncheon is an ironical portrait, very richly and broadly executed, very sagaciously composed and rendered—the portrait of a superb, full-blown hypocrite, a large-based, full-nurtured Pharisee, bland, urbane, impressive, diffusing about him a “sultry” warmth of benevolence, as the author calls it again and again, and basking in the noontide of prosperity and the consideration of society ; but in reality hard, gross, and ignoble. Judge Pyncheon is an elaborate piece of description, made up of a hundred admirable touches, in which satire is always winged with fancy, and fancy is linked with a deep sense of reality. It is difficult to say whether Hawthorne followed a model in describing Judge

Pyncheon ; but it is tolerably obvious that the picture is an impression—a copious impression—of an individual. It has evidently a definite starting-point in fact, and the author is able to draw, freely and confidently, after the image established in his mind. Holgrave, the modern young man, who has been a Jack-of-all-trades and is at the period of the story a daguerreotypist, is an attempt to render a kind of national type—that of the young citizen of the United States whose fortune is simply in his lively intelligence, and who stands naked, as it were, unbiased and unencumbered alike, in the centre of the far-stretching level of American life. Holgrave is intended as a contrast ; his lack of traditions, his democratic stamp, his condensed experience, are opposed to the desiccated prejudices and exhausted vitality of the race of which poor feebly cowering, rusty-jointed Hephzibah is the most heroic representative. It is perhaps a pity that Hawthorne should not have proposed to himself to give the old Pyncheon-qualities some embodiment which would help them to balance more fairly with the elastic properties of the young daguerreotypist—should not have painted a lusty conservative to match his strenuous radical. As it is, the mustiness and mouldiness of the tenants of the House of the Seven Gables crumble away rather too easily. Evidently, however, what Hawthorne designed to represent was not the struggle between an old society and a new, for in this case he would have given the old one a better chance ; but simply, as I have said, the shrinkage and extinction of a family. This appealed to his imagination ; and the idea of long perpetuation and survival always appears to have filled him with a kind of horror and disapproval. Conservative, in a

certain degree, as he was himself, and fond of retrospect and quietude and the mellowing influences of time, it is singular how often one encounters in his writings some expression of mistrust of old houses, old institutions, long lines of descent. He was disposed apparently to allow a very moderate measure in these respects, and he condemns the dwelling of the Pyncheons to disappear from the face of the earth because it has been standing a couple of hundred years. In this he was an American of Americans; or rather he was more American than many of his countrymen, who, though they are accustomed to work for the short run rather than the long, have often a lurking esteem for things that show the marks of having lasted. I will add that Holgrave is one of the few figures, among those which Hawthorne created, with regard to which the absence of the realistic mode of treatment is felt as a loss. Holgrave is not sharply enough characterised; he lacks features; he is not an individual, but a type. But my last word about this admirable novel must not be a restrictive one. It is a large and generous production, pervaded with that vague hum, that indefinable echo, of the whole multitudinous life of man, which is the real sign of a great work of fiction.

After the publication of *The House of the Seven Gables*, which brought him great honour, and, I believe, a tolerable share of a more ponderable substance, he composed a couple of little volumes for children—*The Wonder-Book*, and a small collection of stories entitled *Tanglewood Tales*. They are not among his most serious literary titles, but if I may trust my own early impression of them, they are among the most charming literary services that have been rendered to children.

in an age (and especially in a country) in which the exactions of the infant mind have exerted much too palpable an influence upon literature. Hawthorne's stories are the old Greek myths, made more vivid to the childish imagination by an infusion of details which both deepen and explain their marvels. I have been careful not to read them over, for I should be very sorry to risk disturbing in any degree a recollection of them that has been at rest since the appreciative period of life to which they are addressed. They seem at that period enchanting, and the ideal of happiness of many American children is to lie upon the carpet and lose themselves in *The Wonder-Book*. It is in its pages that they first make the acquaintance of the heroes and heroines of the antique mythology, and something of the nursery fairy-tale quality of interest which Hawthorne imparts to them always remains.

I have said that Lenox was a very pretty place, and that he was able to work there Hawthorne proved by composing *The House of the Seven Gables* with a good deal of rapidity. But at the close of the year in which this novel was published he wrote to a friend (Mr. Fields, his publisher,) that "to tell you a secret I am sick to death of Berkshire, and hate to think of spending another winter here. . . . The air and climate do not agree with my health at all, and for the first time since I was a boy I have felt languid and dispirited. . . . O that Providence would build me the merest little shanty, and mark me out a rood or two of garden ground, near the sea-coast!" He was at this time for a while out of health; and it is proper to remember that though the Massachusetts Berkshire, with its mountains and lakes was charming during the ardent American



summer, there was a reverse to the medal, consisting of December snows prolonged into April and May. Providence failed to provide him with a cottage by the sea; but he betook himself for the winter of 1852 to the little town of West Newton, near Boston, where he brought into the world *The Blithedale Romance*.

This work, as I have said, would not have been written if Hawthorne had not spent a year at Brook Farm, and though it is in no sense of the word an account of the manners or the inmates of that establishment, it will preserve the memory of the ingenious community at West Roxbury for a generation unconscious of other reminders. I hardly know what to say about it save that it is very charming; this vague, unanalytic epithet is the first that comes to one's pen in treating of Hawthorne's novels, for their extreme amenity of form invariably suggests it; but if on the one hand it claims to be uttered, on the other it frankly confesses its inconclusiveness. Perhaps, however, in this case, it fills out the measure of appreciation more completely than in others, for *The Blithedale Romance* is the lightest, the brightest, the liveliest, of this company of unhumorous fictions.

The story is told from a more joyous point of view—from a point of view comparatively humorous—and a number of objects and incidents touched with the light of the profane world—the vulgar, many-coloured world of actuality, as distinguished from the crepuscular realm of the writer's own reveries—are mingled with its course. The book indeed is a mixture of elements, and it leaves in the memory an impression analogous to that of an April day—an alternation of brightness and shadow, of broken sun-patches and sprinkling clouds.

Its dénouement is tragical—there is indeed nothing so tragical in all Hawthorne, unless it be the murder of Miriam's persecutor by Donatello, in *Transformation*, as the suicide of Zenobia; and yet on the whole the effect of the novel is to make one think more agreeably of life. The standpoint of the narrator has the advantage of being a concrete one; he is no longer, as in the preceding tales, a disembodied spirit, imprisoned in the haunted chamber of his own contemplations, but a particular man, with a certain human grossness.

Of Miles Coverdale I have already spoken, and of its being natural to assume that in so far as we may measure this lightly indicated identity of his, it has a great deal in common with that of his creator. Coverdale is a picture of the contemplative, observant, analytic nature, nursing its fancies, and yet, thanks to an element of strong good sense, not bringing them up to be spoiled children; having little at stake in life, at any given moment, and yet indulging, in imagination, in a good many adventures; a portrait of a man, in a word, whose passions are slender, whose imagination is active, and whose happiness lies, not in doing, but in perceiving—half a poet, half a critic, and all a spectator. He is contrasted, excellently, with the figure of Hollingsworth, the heavily treading Reformer, whose attitude with regard to the world is that of the hammer to the anvil, and who has no patience with his friend's indifferences and neutralities. Coverdale is a gentle sceptic, a mild cynic; he would agree that life is a little worth living—or worth living a little; but would remark that, unfortunately, to live little enough, we have to live a great deal. He confesses to a want of earnestness, but in reality he is evidently an excellent

fellow, to whom one might look, not for any personal performance on a great scale, but for a good deal of generosity of detail. "As Hollingsworth once told me, I lack a purpose," he writes, at the close of his story. "How strange! He was ruined, morally, by an overplus of the same ingredient the want of which, I occasionally suspect, has rendered my own life all an emptiness. I by no means wish to die. Yet were there any cause in this whole chaos of human struggle, worth a sane man's dying for, and which my death would benefit, then—provided, however, the effort did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble—methinks I might be bold to offer up my life. If Kossuth, for example, would pitch the battle-field of Hungarian rights within an easy ride of my abode, and choose a mild sunny morning, after breakfast, for the conflict, Miles Coverdale would gladly be his man, for one brave rush upon the levelled bayonets. Further than that I should be loth to pledge myself."

The finest thing in *The Blithedale Romance* is the character of Zenobia, which I have said elsewhere strikes me as the nearest approach that Hawthorne has made to the complete creation of a *person*. She is more concrete than Hester or Miriam, or Hilda or Phoebe; she is a more definite image, produced by a greater multiplicity of touches. It is idle to inquire too closely whether Hawthorne had Margaret Fuller in his mind in constructing the figure of this brilliant specimen of the strong-minded class and endowing her with the genius of conversation; or, on the assumption that such was the case, to compare the image at all strictly with the model. There is no strictness in the representation by novelists of persons who have struck them in life,

and there can in the nature of things be none. From the moment the imagination takes a hand in the game, the inevitable tendency is to divergence, to following what may be called new scents. The original gives hints, but the writer does what he likes with them, and imports new elements into the picture. If there is this amount of reason for referring the wayward heroine of *Blithedale* to Hawthorne's impression of the most distinguished woman of her day in Boston, that Margaret Fuller was the only literary lady of eminence whom there is any sign of his having known, that she was proud, passionate, and eloquent, that she was much connected with the little world of Transcendentalism out of which the experiment of Brook Farm sprung, and that she had a miserable end and a watery grave—if these are facts to be noted on one side, I say; on the other, the beautiful and sumptuous Zenobia, with her rich and picturesque temperament and physical aspects, offers many points of divergence from the plain and strenuous invalid who represented feminine culture in the suburbs of the New England metropolis. This picturesqueness of Zenobia is very happily indicated and maintained; she is a woman, in all the force of the term, and there is something very vivid and powerful in her large expression of womanly gifts and weaknesses. Hollingsworth is, I think, less successful, though there is much reality in the conception of the type to which he belongs—the strong willed, narrow-hearted apostle of a special form of redemption for society. There is nothing better in all Hawthorne than the scene between him and Coverdale, when the two men are at work together in the field (piling stones on a dyke), and he gives it to his companion to choose whether he

will be with him or against him. It is a pity, perhaps, to have represented him as having begun life as a blacksmith, for one grudges him the advantage of so logical a reason for his roughness and hardness.

"Hollingsworth scarcely said a word, unless when repeatedly and pertinaciously addressed. Then indeed he would glare upon us from the thick shrubbery of his meditations, like a tiger out of a jungle, make the briefest reply possible, and betake himself back into the solitude of his heart and mind . . . His heart, I imagine, was never really interested in our socialist scheme, but was for ever busy with his strange, and as most people thought, impracticable plan for the reformation of criminals through an appeal to their higher instincts. Much as I liked Hollingsworth, it cost me many a groan to tolerate him on this point. He ought to have commenced his investigation of the subject by committing some huge sin in his proper person, and examining the condition of his higher instincts afterwards."

The most touching element in the novel is the history of the grasp that this barbarous fanatic has laid upon the fastidious and high-tempered Zenobia, who, disliking him and shrinking from him at a hundred points, is drawn into the gulf of his omnivorous egotism. The portion of the story that strikes me as least felicitous is that which deals with Priscilla and with her mysterious relation to Zenobia—with her mesmeric gifts, her clairvoyance, her identity with the Veiled Lady, her divided subjection to Hollingsworth and Westervelt, and her numerous other graceful but fantastic properties—her Sibylline attributes, as the author calls them. Hawthorne is rather too fond of Sibylline attributes—a taste of the same order as his disposition, to which I have already alluded, to talk about spheres and sympathies. As the action advances,

in *The Blithedale Romance*, we get too much out of reality, and cease to feel beneath our feet the firm ground of an appeal to our own vision of the world, our observation. I should have liked to see the story concern itself more with the little community in which its earlier scenes are laid, and avail itself of so excellent an opportunity for describing unhackneyed specimens of human nature. I have already spoken of the absence of satire in the novel, of its not aiming in the least at satire, and of its offering no grounds for complaint as an invidious picture. Indeed the brethren of Brook Farm should have held themselves slighted rather than misrepresented, and have regretted that the admirable genius who for a while was numbered among them should have treated their institution mainly as a perch for starting upon an imaginative flight. But when all is said about a certain want of substance and cohesion in the latter portions of *The Blithedale Romance*, the book is still a delightful and beautiful one. Zenobia and Hollingsworth live in the memory, and even Priscilla and Coverdale, who linger there less importunately, have a great deal that touches us and that we believe in. I said just now that Priscilla was infelicitous; but immediately afterwards I open the volume at a page in which the author describes some of the out-of-door amusements at Blithedale, and speaks of a foot-race across the grass, in which some of the slim young girls of the society joined. "Priscilla's peculiar charm in a foot-race was the weakness and irregularity with which she ran. Growing up without exercise, except to her poor little fingers, she had never yet acquired the perfect use of her legs. Setting buoyantly forth therefore, as if no rival less swift than Atalanta could compete

with her, she ran falteringly, and often tumbled on the grass. Such an incident—though it seems too slight to think of—was a thing to laugh at, but which brought the water into one's eyes, and lingered in the memory after far greater joys and sorrows were wept out of it, as antiquated trash. Priscilla's life, as I beheld it, was full of trifles that affected me in just this way." That seems to me exquisite, and the book is full of touches as deep and delicate.

After writing it, Hawthorne went back to live in Concord, where he had bought a small house in which, apparently, he expected to spend a large portion of his future. This was in fact the dwelling in which he passed that part of the rest of his days that he spent in his own country. He established himself there before going to Europe, in 1853, and he returned to the Wayside, as he called his house, on coming back to the United States seven years later. Though he actually occupied the place no long time, he had made it his property, and it was more his own home than any of his numerous provisional abodes. I may therefore quote a little account of the house which he wrote to a distinguished friend, Mr. George Curtis.

"As for my old house, you will understand it better after spending a day or two in it. Before Mr. Alcott took it in hand, it was a mean-looking affair, with two peaked gables; no suggestiveness about it, and no venerableness, although from the style of its construction it seems to have survived beyond its first century. He added a porch in front, and a central peak, and a piazza at each end, and painted it a rusty olive hue, and invested the whole with a modest picturesqueness; all which improvements, together with its situation at the foot of a wooded hill, make it a place that one notices and remembers for a few moments after passing. Mr. Alcott

expended a good deal of taste and some money (to no great purpose) in forming the hillside behind the house into terraces, and building arbours and summer-houses of rough stems and branches and trees, on a system of his own. They must have been very pretty in their day, and are so still, although much decayed, and shattered more and more by every breeze that blows. The hillside is covered chiefly with locust trees, which come into luxuriant blossom in the month of June, and look and smell very sweetly, intermixed with a few young elms, and white pines and infant oaks — the whole forming rather a thicket than a wood. Nevertheless, there is some very good shade to be found there. I spend delectable hours there in the hottest part of the day, stretched out at my lazy length, with a book in my hand, or some unwritten book in my thoughts. There is almost always a breeze stirring along the sides or brow of the hill. From the hill-top there is a good view along the extensive level surfaces and gentle hilly outlines, covered with wood, that characterise the scenery of Concord. . . . I know nothing of the history of the house except Thoreau's telling me that it was inhabited, a generation or two ago, by a man who believed he should never die. I believe, however, he is dead; at least, I hope so; else he may probably reappear and dispute my title to his residence."

As Mr. Lathrop points out, this allusion to a man who believed he should never die is "the first intimation of the story of *Septimius Felton*." The scenery of that romance, he adds, "was evidently taken from the Wayside and its hill." *Septimius Felton* is in fact a young man who, at the time of the war of the Revolution, lives in the village of Concord, on the Boston road, at the base of a woody hill which rises abruptly behind his house, and of which the level summit supplies him with a promenade continually mentioned in the course of the tale. Hawthorne used to exercise



himself upon this picturesque eminence, and, as he conceived the brooding Septimius to have done before him, to betake himself thither when he found the limits of his dwelling too narrow. But he had an advantage which his imaginary hero lacked; he erected a tower as an adjunct to the house, and it was a jocular tradition among his neighbours, in allusion to his attributive tendency to evade rather than hasten the coming guest, that he used to ascend this structure and scan the road for provocations to retreat.

In so far, however, as Hawthorne suffered the penalties of celebrity at the hands of intrusive fellow-citizens, he was soon to escape from this honourable incommodity. On the 4th of March, 1853, his old college-mate and intimate friend, Franklin Pierce, was installed as President of the United States. He had been the candidate of the Democratic party, and all good Democrats, accordingly, in conformity to the beautiful and rational system under which the affairs of the great Republic were carried on, begun to open their windows to the golden sunshine of Presidential patronage. When General Pierce was put forward by the Democrats, Hawthorne felt a perfectly loyal and natural desire that his good friend should be exalted to so brilliant a position, and he did what was in him to further the good cause, by writing a little book about its hero. His *Life of Franklin Pierce* belongs to that class of literature which is known as the "campaign biography," and which consists of an attempt, more or less successful, to persuade the many-headed monster of universal suffrage that the gentleman on whose behalf it is addressed is a paragon of wisdom and virtue. Of Hawthorne's little book there is nothing particular

to say, save that it is in very good taste, that he is a very fairly ingenious advocate, and that if he claimed for the future President qualities which rather faded in the bright light of a high office, this defect of proportion was essential to his undertaking. He dwelt chiefly upon General Pierce's exploits in the war with Mexico (before that, his record, as they say in America, had been mainly that of a successful country lawyer), and exercised his descriptive powers so far as was possible in describing the advance of the United States troops from Vera Cruz to the city of the Montezumas. The mouth-pieces of the Whig party spared him, I believe, no reprobation for "prostituting" his exquisite genius; but I fail to see anything reprehensible in Hawthorne's lending his old friend the assistance of his graceful quill. He wished him to be President—he held afterwards that he filled the office with admirable dignity and wisdom—and as the only thing he could do was to write, he fell to work and wrote for him. Hawthorne was a good lover and a very sufficient partisan, and I suspect that if Franklin Pierce had been made even less of the stuff of a statesman, he would still have found in the force of old associations an injunction to hail him as a ruler. Our hero was an American of the earlier and simpler type—the type of which it is doubtless premature to say that it has wholly passed away, but of which it may at least be said that the circumstances that produced it have been greatly modified. The generation to which he belonged, that generation which grew up with the century, witnessed during a period of fifty years the immense, uninterrupted material development of the young Republic; and when one thinks of the scale on

which it took place, of the prosperity that walked in its train and waited on its course, of the hopes it fostered and the blessings it conferred, of the broad morning sunshine, in a word, in which it all went forward, there seems to be little room for surprise that it should have implanted a kind of superstitious faith in the grandeur of the country, its duration, its immunity from the usual troubles of earthly empires. This faith was a simple and uncritical one, enlivened with an element of genial optimism, in the light of which it appeared that the great American state was not as other human institutions are, that a special Providence watched over it, that it would go on joyously for ever, and that a country whose vast and blooming bosom offered a refuge to the strugglers and seekers of all the rest of the world, must come off easily, in the battle of the ages. From this conception of the American future the sense of its having problems to solve was blissfully absent; there were no difficulties in the programme, no looming complications, no rocks ahead. The indefinite multiplication of the population, and its enjoyment of the benefits of a common-school education and of unusual facilities for making an income—this was the form in which, on the whole, the future most vividly presented itself, and in which the greatness of the country was to be recognised of men. There was indeed a faint shadow in the picture—the shadow projected by the “peculiar institution” of the Southern States; but it was far from sufficient to darken the rosy vision of most good Americans, and above all, of most good Democrats. Hawthorne alludes to it in a passage of his *life of Pierce*, which I will quote not only as a hint of the trouble that was in

store for a cheerful race of men, but as an example of his own easy-going political attitude.

"It was while in the lower house of Congress that Franklin Pierce took that stand on the Slavery question from which he has never since swerved by a hair's breadth. He fully recognised by his votes and his voice, the rights pledged to the South by the Constitution. This, at the period when he declared himself, was an easy thing to do. But when it became more difficult, when the first imperceptible murmur of agitation had grown almost to a convulsion, his course was still the same. Nor did he ever shun the obloquy that sometimes threatened to pursue the Northern man who dared to love that great and sacred reality—his whole united country—better than the mistiness of a philanthropic theory."

This last invidious allusion is to the disposition, not infrequent at the North, but by no means general, to set a decisive limit to further legislation in favour of the cherished idiosyncrasy of the other half of the country. Hawthorne takes the license of a sympathetic biographer in speaking of his hero's having incurred obloquy by his conservative attitude on the question of Slavery. The only class in the American world that suffered in the smallest degree, at this time, from social persecution, was the little band of Northern Abolitionists, who were as unfashionable as they were indiscreet—which is saying much. Like most of his fellow-countrymen, Hawthorne had no idea that the respectable institution which he contemplated in impressive contrast to humanitarian "mistiness," was presently to cost the nation four long years of bloodshed and misery, and a social revolution as complete as any the world has seen. When this event occurred, he was

therefore proportionately horrified and depressed by it : it cut from beneath his feet the familiar ground which had long felt so firm, substituting a heaving and quaking medium in which his spirit found no rest. Such was the bewildered sensation of that earlier and simpler generation of which I have spoken ; their illusions were rudely dispelled, and they saw the best of all possible republics given over to fratricidal carnage. This affair had no place in their scheme, and nothing was left for them but to hang their heads and close their eyes. The subsidence of that great convulsion has left a different tone from the tone it found, and one may say that the Civil War marks an era in the history of the American mind. It introduced into the national consciousness a certain sense of proportion and relation, of the world being a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed, the future more treacherous, success more difficult. At the rate at which things are going, it is obvious that good Americans will be more numerous than ever ; but the good American, in days to come, will be a more critical person than his complacent and confident grandfather. He has eaten of the tree of knowledge. He will not, I think, be a sceptic, and still less, of course, a cynic ; but he will be, without discredit to his well-known capacity for action, an observer. He will remember that the ways of the Lord are inscrutable, and that this is a world in which everything happens ; and eventualities, as the late Emperor of the French used to say, will not find him intellectually unprepared. The good American of which Hawthorne was so admirable a specimen was not critical, and it was perhaps for this reason

that Franklin Pierce seemed to him a very proper President.

The least that General Pierce could do in exchange for so liberal a confidence was to offer his old friend one of the numerous places in his gift. Hawthorne had a great desire to go abroad and see something of the world, so that a consulate seemed the proper thing. He never stirred in the matter himself, but his friends strongly urged that something should be done; and when he accepted the post of consul at Liverpool there was not a word of reasonable criticism to be offered on the matter. If General Pierce, who was before all things good natured and obliging, had been guilty of no greater indiscretion than to confer this modest distinction upon the most honourable and discreet of men of letters, he would have made a more brilliant mark in the annals of American statesmanship. Liverpool had not been immediately selected, and Hawthorne had written to his friend and publisher, Mr. Fields, with some humorous vagueness of allusion to his probable expatriation.

"Do make some inquiries about Portugal; as, for instance, in what part of the world it lies, and whether it is an empire, a kingdom, or a republic. Also, and more particularly, the expenses of living there, and whether the Minister would be likely to be much pestered with his own countrymen. Also, any other information about foreign countries would be acceptable to an inquiring mind."

It would seem from this that there had been a question of offering him a small diplomatic post; but the emoluments of the place were justly taken into account, and it is to be supposed that those of the consulate at Liverpool were at least as great as the salary of the American

representative at Lisbon. Unfortunately, just after Hawthorne had taken possession of the former post, the salary attached to it was reduced by Congress, in an economical hour, to less than half the sum enjoyed by his predecessors. It was fixed at 7,500 dollars (£1,500); but the consular fees, which were often copious, were an added resource. At midsummer then, in 1853, Hawthorne was established in England.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ENGLAND AND ITALY.

HAWTHORNE was close upon fifty years of age when he came to Europe—a fact that should be remembered when those impressions which he recorded in five substantial volumes (exclusive of the novel written in Italy), occasionally affect us by the rigidity of their point of view. His Note-Books, kept during his residence in England, his two winters in Rome, his summer in Florence, were published after his death; his impressions of England, sifted, revised, and addressed directly to the public, he gave to the world shortly before this event. The tone of his European Diaries is often so fresh and unsophisticated that we find ourselves thinking of the writer as a young man, and it is only a certain final sense of something reflective and a trifle melancholy that reminds us that the simplicity which is on the whole the leading characteristic of their pages, is, though the simplicity of inexperience, not that of youth. When I say inexperience, I mean that Hawthorne's experience had been narrow. His fifty years had been spent, for much the larger part, in small American towns—Salem, the Boston of forty years ago, Concord, Lenox, West Newton—and he had led exclusively what one may call a



village-life. This is evident, not at all directly and superficially, but by implication and between the lines, in his desultory history of his foreign years. In other words, and to call things by their names, he was exquisitely and consistently provincial. I suggest this fact not in the least in condemnation, but, on the contrary, in support of an appreciative view of him. I know nothing more remarkable, more touching, than the sight of this odd, youthful-elderly mind, contending so late in the day with new opportunities for learning old things, and on the whole profiting by them so freely and gracefully. The Note-Books are provincial, and so, in a greatly modified degree, are the sketches of England, in *Our Old Home*; but the beauty and delicacy of this latter work are so interwoven with the author's air of being remotely outside of everything he describes, that they count for more, seem more themselves, and finally give the whole thing the appearance of a triumph, not of initiation, but of the provincial point of view itself.

I shall not attempt to relate in detail the incidents of his residence in England. He appears to have enjoyed it greatly, in spite of the deficiency of charm in the place to which his duties chiefly confined him. His confinement, however, was not unbroken, and his published journals consist largely of minute accounts of little journeys and wanderings, with his wife and his three children, through the rest of the country; together with much mention of numerous visits to London, a city for whose dusky immensity and multitudinous interest he professed the highest relish. His Note-Books are of the same cast as the two volumes of his *American Diaries*, of which I have given some account—chiefly occupied with external matters, with the accidents of

daily life, with observations made during the long walks (often with his son), which formed his most valued pastime. His office, moreover, though Liverpool was not a delectable home, furnished him with entertainment as well as occupation, and it may almost be said that during these years he saw more of his fellow-countrymen, in the shape of odd wanderers, petitioners, and inquirers of every kind, than he had ever done in his native land. The paper entitled "Consular Experiences," in *Our Old Home*, is an admirable recital of these observations, and a proof that the novelist might have found much material in the opportunities of the consul. On his return to America, in 1860, he drew from his journal a number of pages relating to his observations in England, re-wrote them (with, I should suppose, a good deal of care), and converted them into articles which he published in a magazine. These chapters were afterwards collected, and *Our Old Home* (a rather infelicitous title), was issued in 1863. I prefer to speak of the book now, however, rather than in touching upon the closing years of his life, for it is a kind of deliberate *résumé* of his impressions of the land of his ancestors. "It is not a good or a weighty book," he wrote to his publisher, who had sent him some reviews of it, "nor does it deserve any great amount of praise or censure. I don't care about seeing any more notices of it." Hawthorne's appreciation of his own productions was always extremely just; he had a sense of the relations of things, which some of his admirers have not thought it well to cultivate; and he never exaggerated his own importance as a writer. *Our Old Home* is not a weighty book; it is decidedly a light one. But when he says it is not a good one, I

hardly know what he means, and his modesty at this point is in excess of his discretion. Whether good or not, *Our Old Home* is charming—it is most delectable reading. The execution is singularly perfect and ripe; of all his productions it seems to be the best written. The touch, as musicians say, is admirable; the lightness, the fineness, the felicity of characterisation and description, belong to a man who has the advantage of feeling delicately. His judgment is by no means always sound; it often rests on too narrow an observation. But his perception is of the keenest, and though it is frequently partial, incomplete, it is excellent as far as it goes. The book gave but limited satisfaction, I believe, in England, and I am not sure that the failure to enjoy certain manifestations of its sportive irony, has not chilled the appreciation of its singular grace. That English readers, on the whole, should have felt that Hawthorne did the national mind and manners but partial justice, is, I think, conceivable; at the same time that it seems to me remarkable that the tender side of the book, as I may call it, should not have carried it off better. It abounds in passages more delicately appreciative than can easily be found elsewhere, and it contains more charming and affectionate things than, I should suppose, had ever before been written about a country not the writer's own. To say that it is an immeasurably more exquisite and sympathetic work than any of the numerous persons who have related their misadventures in the United States have seen fit to devote to that country, is to say but little, and I imagine that Hawthorne had in mind the array of English voyagers—Mrs. Trollope, Dickens, Marryat, Basil Hall, Miss Martineau, Mr. Grattan—when he

reflected that everything is relative and that, as such books go, his own little volume observed the amenities of criticism. He certainly had it in mind when he wrote the phrase in his preface relating to the impression the book might make in England. "Not an Englishman of them all ever spared America for courtesy's sake or kindness; nor, in my opinion, would it contribute in the least to any mutual advantage and comfort if we were to besmear each other all over with butter and honey." I am far from intending to intimate that the vulgar instinct of recrimination had anything to do with the restrictive passages of *Our Old Home*; I mean simply that the author had a prevision that his collection of sketches would in some particulars fail to please his English friends. He professed, after the event, to have discovered that the English are sensitive, and as they say of the Americans, for whose advantage I believe the term was invented, thin-skinned. "The English critics," he wrote to his publisher, "seem to think me very bitter against their countrymen, and it is perhaps natural that they should, because their self-conceit can accept nothing short of indiscriminate adulation; but I really think that Americans have much more cause than they to complain of me. Looking over the volume I am rather surprised to find that whenever I draw a comparison between the two people, I almost invariably cast the balance against ourselves." And he writes at another time:—"I received several private letters and printed notices of *Our Old Home* from England. It is laughable to see the innocent wonder with which they regard my criticisms, accounting for them by jaundice, insanity, jealousy, hatred, on my part, and never admitting the least suspicion that there may

be a particle of truth in them. The monstrosity of their self-conceit is such that anything short of unlimited admiration impresses them as malicious caricature. But they do me great injustice in supposing that I hate them. I would as soon hate my own people." The idea of his hating the English was of course too puerile for discussion; and the book, as I have said, is full of a rich appreciation of the finest characteristics of the country. But it has a serious defect—a defect which impairs its value, though it helps to give consistency to such an image of Hawthorne's personal nature as we may by this time have been able to form. It is the work of an outsider, of a stranger, of a man who remains to the end a mere spectator (something less even than an observer), and always lacks the final initiation into the manners and nature of a people of whom it may most be said, among all the people of the earth, that to know them is to make discoveries. Hawthorne freely confesses to this constant exteriority, and appears to have been perfectly conscious of it. "I remember," he writes in the sketch of "A London Suburb," in *Our Old Home*, "I remember to this day the dreary feeling with which I sat by our first English fireside and watched the chill and rainy twilight of an autumn day darkening down upon the garden, while the preceding occupant of the house (evidently a most unamiable personage in his lifetime), scowled inhospitably from above the mantel-piece, as if indignant that an American should try to make himself at home there. Possibly it may appease his sulky shade to know that I quitted his abode as much a stranger as I entered it." The same note is struck in an entry in his journal, of the date of October 6th, 1854.

"The people, for several days, have been in the utmost anxiety, and latterly in the highest exultation, about Sebastopol—and all England, and Europe to boot, have been fooled by the belief that it had fallen. This, however, now turns out to be incorrect; and the public visage is somewhat grim in consequence. I am glad of it. In spite of his actual sympathies, it is impossible for an American to be otherwise than glad. Success makes an Englishman intolerable, and already, on the mistaken idea that the way was open to a prosperous conclusion of the war, the *Times* had begun to throw out menaces against America. I shall never love England till she sues to us for help, and, in the meantime, the fewer triumphs she obtains, the better for all parties. An Englishman in adversity is a very respectable character; he does not lose his dignity, but merely comes to a proper conception of himself. . . . I seem to myself like a spy or traitor when I meet their eyes, and am conscious that I neither hope nor fear in sympathy with them, although they look at me in full confidence of sympathy. Their heart 'knoweth its own bitterness,' and as for me, being a stranger and an alien, I 'intermeddle not with their joy.'"

This seems to me to express very well the weak side of Hawthorne's work—his constant mistrust and suspicion of the society that surrounded him, his exaggerated, painful, morbid national consciousness. It is, I think, an indisputable fact that Americans are, as Americans, the most self-conscious people in the world, and the most addicted to the belief that the other nations of the earth are in a conspiracy to undervalue them. They are conscious of being the youngest of the great nations, of not being of the European family, of being placed on the circumference of the circle of civilisation rather than at the centre, of the experimental element not having as yet entirely dropped out of their great political undertaking. The sense of this relativity,

in a word, replaces that quiet and comfortable sense of the absolute, as regards its own position in the world, which reigns supreme in the British and in the Gallic genius. Few persons, I think, can have mingled much with Americans in Europe without having made this reflection, and it is in England that their habit of looking askance at foreign institutions—of keeping one eye, as it were, on the American personality, while with the other they contemplate these objects—is most to be observed. Add to this that Hawthorne came to England late in life, when his habits, his tastes, his opinions, were already formed, that he was inclined to look at things in silence and brood over them gently, rather than talk about them, discuss them, grow acquainted with them by action; and it will be possible to form an idea of our writer's detached and critical attitude in the country in which it is easiest, thanks to its aristocratic constitution, to the absence of any considerable public fund of entertainment and diversion, to the degree in which the inexhaustible beauty and interest of the place are private property, demanding constantly a special introduction—in the country in which, I say, it is easiest for a stranger to remain a stranger. For a stranger to cease to be a stranger he must stand ready, as the French say, to pay with his person; and this was an obligation that Hawthorne was indisposed to incur. Our sense, as we read, that his reflections are those of a shy and susceptible man, with nothing at stake, mentally, in his appreciation of the country, is therefore a drawback to our confidence; but it is not a drawback sufficient to make it of no importance that he is at the same time singularly intelligent and discriminating, with a faculty of feeling delicately and justly,

which constitutes in itself an illumination. There is a passage in the sketch entitled *About Warwick* which is a very good instance of what was probably his usual state of mind. He is speaking of the aspect of the High Street of the town.

"The street is an emblem of England itself. What seems new in it is chiefly a skilful and fortunate adaptation of what such a people as ourselves would destroy. The new things are based and supported on sturdy old things, and derive a massive strength from their deep and immemorial foundations, though with such limitations and impediments as only an Englishman could endure. But he likes to feel the weight of all the past upon his back; and moreover the antiquity that overburdens him has taken root in his being, and has grown to be rather a hump than a pack, so that there is no getting rid of it without tearing his whole structure to pieces. In my judgment, as he appears to be sufficiently comfortable under the mouldy accretion, he had better stumble on with it as long as he can. He presents a spectacle which is by no means without its charm for a disinterested and unincumbered observer."

There is all Hawthorne, with his enjoyment of the picturesque, his relish of chiaroscuro, of local colour, of the deposit of time, and his still greater enjoyment of his own dissociation from these things, his "disinterested and unincumbered" condition. His want of incumbrances may seem at times to give him a somewhat naked and attenuated appearance, but on the whole he carries it off very well. I have said that *Our Old Home* contains much of his best writing, and on turning over the book at hazard, I am struck with his frequent felicity of phrase. At every step there is something one would like to quote—something excellently well said. These things are often of the



lighter sort, but Hawthorne's charming diction lingers in the memory—almost in the ear. I have always remembered a certain admirable characterisation of Doctor Johnson, in the account of the writer's visit to Lichfield—and I will preface it by a paragraph almost as good, commemorating the charms of the hotel in that interesting town.

"At any rate I had the great, dull, dingy, and dreary coffee-room, with its heavy old mahogany chairs and tables, all to myself, and not a soul to exchange a word with except the waiter, who, like most of his class in England, had evidently left his conversational abilities uncultivated. No former practice of solitary living, nor habits of reticence, nor well-tested self-dependence for occupation of mind and amusement, can quite avail, as I now proved, to dissipate the ponderous gloom of an English coffee-room under such circumstances as these, with no book at hand save the county directory, nor any newspaper but a torn local journal of five days ago. So I buried myself, betimes, in a huge heap of ancient feathers (there is no other kind of bed in these old inns), let my head sink into an unsubstantial pillow, and slept a stifled sleep, compounded of the night-troubles of all my predecessors in that same unrestful couch. And when I awoke, the odour of a bygone century was in my nostrils—a faint, elusive smell, of which I never had any conception before crossing the Atlantic."

The whole chapter entitled "Lichfield and Uttoxeter" is a sort of graceful tribute to Samuel Johnson, who certainly has nowhere else been more tenderly spoken of.

"Beyond all question I might have had a wiser friend than he. The atmosphere in which alone he breathed was dense; his awful dread of death showed how much muddy imperfection was to be cleansed out of him, before he could be

capable of spiritual existence; he meddled only with the surface of life, and never cared to penetrate further than to ploughshare depth; his very sense and sagacity were but a one-eyed clear-sightedness. I laughed at him, sometimes standing beside his knee. And yet, considering that my native propensities were toward Fairy Land, and also how much yeast is generally mixed up with the mental sustenance of a New Englander, it may not have been altogether amiss, in those childish and boyish days, to keep pace with this heavy-footed traveller and feed on the gross diet that he carried in his knapsack. It is wholesome food even now! And then, how English! Many of the latent sympathies that enabled me to enjoy the Old Country so well, and that so readily amalgamated themselves with the American ideas that seemed most adverse to them, may have been derived from, or fostered and kept alive by, the great English moralist. Never was a descriptive epithet more nicely appropriate than that! Doctor Johnson's morality was as English an article as a beef-steak."

And for mere beauty of expression I cannot forbear quoting this passage about the days in a fine English summer:—

"For each day seemed endless, though never wearisome. As far as your actual experience is concerned, the English summer day has positively no beginning and no end. When you awake, at any reasonable hour, the sun is already shining through the curtains; you live through unnumbered hours of Sabbath quietude, with a calm variety of incident softly etched upon their tranquil lapse; and at length you become conscious that it is bedtime again, while there is still enough daylight in the sky to make the pages of your book distinctly legible. Night, if there be any such season, hangs down a transparent veil through which the bygone day beholds its successor; or if not quite true of the latitude of London, it may be soberly affirmed of the more northern parts of the island that To-morrow is born before its Yesterday is dead. They exist together in the golden

twilight, where the decrepit old day dimly discerns the face of the ominous infant; and you, though a mere mortal, may simultaneously touch them both, with one finger of recollection and another of prophecy."

The Note-Books, as I have said, deal chiefly with the superficial aspect of English life, and describe the material objects with which the author was surrounded. They often describe them admirably, and the rural beauty of the country has never been more happily expressed. But there are inevitably a great many reflections and incidental judgments, characterisations of people he met, fragments of psychology and social criticism, and it is here that Hawthorne's mixture of subtlety and simplicity, his interfusion of genius with what I have ventured to call the provincial quality, is most apparent. To an American reader this later quality, which is never grossly manifested, but pervades the Journals like a vague natural perfume, an odour of purity and kindness and integrity, must always, for a reason that I will touch upon, have a considerable charm; and such a reader will accordingly take an even greater satisfaction in the Diaries kept during the two years Hawthorne spent in Italy; for in these volumes the element I speak of is especially striking. He resigned his consulate at Liverpool towards the close of 1857—whether because he was weary of his manner of life there and of the place itself, as may well have been, or because he wished to anticipate supersession by the new government (Mr. Buchanan's) which was just establishing itself at Washington, is not apparent from the slender sources of information from which these pages have been compiled. In the month of January of the following year he betook himself with

his family to the Continent, and, as promptly as possible, made the best of his way to Rome. He spent the remainder of the winter and the spring there, and then went to Florence for the summer and autumn; after which he returned to Rome and passed a second season. His Italian Note-Books are very pleasant reading, but they are of less interest than the others, for his contact with the life of the country, its people and its manners, was simply that of the ordinary tourist—which amounts to saying that it was extremely superficial. He appears to have suffered a great deal of discomfort and depression in Rome, and not to have been on the whole in the best mood for enjoying the place and its resources. That he did, at one time and another, enjoy these things keenly is proved by his beautiful romance, *Transformation*, which could never have been written by a man who had not had many hours of exquisite appreciation of the lovely land of Italy. But he took it hard, as it were, and suffered himself to be painfully discomposed by the usual accidents of Italian life, as foreigners learn to know it. His future was again uncertain, and during his second winter in Rome he was in danger of losing his elder daughter by a malady which he speaks of as a trouble “that pierced to my very vitals.” I may mention, with regard to this painful episode, that Franklin Pierce, whose presidential days were over, and who, like other ex-presidents, was travelling in Europe, came to Rome at the time, and that the Note-Books contain some singularly beautiful and touching allusions to his old friend’s gratitude for his sympathy, and enjoyment of his society. The sentiment of friendship has on the whole been so much less commemorated in literature than might have been expected from the

place it is supposed to hold in life, that there is always something striking in any frank and ardent expression of it. It occupied, in so far as Pierce was the object of it, a large place in Hawthorne's mind, and it is impossible not to feel the manly tenderness of such lines as these :—

"I have found him here in Rome, the whole of my early friend, and even better than I used to know him ; a heart as true and affectionate, a mind much widened and deepened by the experience of life. We hold just the same relation to one another as of yore, and we have passed all the turning-off places, and may hope to go on together, still the same dear friends, as long as we live. I do not love him one whit the less for having been President, nor for having done me the greatest good in his power ; a fact that speaks eloquently in his favour, and perhaps says a little for myself. If he had been merely a benefactor, perhaps I might not have borne it so well ; but each did his best for the other, as friend for friend."

The Note-Books are chiefly taken up with descriptions of the regular sights and "objects of interest," which we often feel to be rather perfunctory and a little in the style of the traditional tourist's diary. They abound in charming touches, and every reader of *Transformation* will remember the delightful colouring of the numerous pages in that novel, which are devoted to the pictorial aspects of Rome. But we are unable to rid ourselves of the impression that Hawthorne was a good deal bored by the importunity of Italian art, for which his taste, naturally not keen, had never been cultivated. Occasionally, indeed, he breaks out into explicit sighs and groans, and frankly declares that he washes his hands of it. Already, in England, he had made the discovery that he could easily feel overdosed with such things,

"Yesterday," he wrote in 1856, "I went out at about twelve and visited the British Museum; an exceedingly tiresome affair. It quite crushes a person to see so much at once, and I wandered from hall to hall with a weary and heavy heart, wishing (Heaven forgive me!) that the Elgin marbles and the frieze of the Parthenon were all burnt into lime, and that the granite Egyptian statues were hewn and squared into building stones."

The plastic sense was not strong in Hawthorne; there can be no better proof of it than his curious aversion to the representation of the nude in sculpture. This aversion was deep-seated; he constantly returns to it, exclaiming upon the incongruity of modern artists making naked figures. He apparently quite failed to see that nudity is not an incident, or accident, of sculpture, but its very essence and principle; and his jealousy of undressed images strikes the reader as a strange, vague, long-dormant heritage of his straight-laced Puritan ancestry. Whenever he talks of statues he makes a great point of the smoothness and whiteness of the marble—speaks of the surface of the marble as if it were half the beauty of the image; and when he discourses of pictures, one feels that the brightness or dinginess of the frame is an essential part of his impression of the work—as he indeed somewhere distinctly affirms. Like a good American, he took more pleasure in the productions of Mr. Thompson and Mr. Brown, Mr. Powers and Mr. Hart, American artists who were plying their trade in Italy, than in the works which adorned the ancient museums of the country. He suffered greatly from the cold, and found little charm in the climate, and during the weeks of winter that followed his arrival in Rome, he sat shivering

by his fire and wondering why he had come to such a land of misery. Before he left Italy he wrote to his publisher—"I bitterly detest Rome, and shall rejoice to bid it farewell for ever; and I fully acquiesce in all the mischief and ruin that has happened to it, from Nero's conflagration downward. In fact, I wish the very site had been obliterated before I ever saw it." Hawthorne presents himself to the reader of these pages as the last of the old-fashioned Americans—and this is the interest which I just now said that his compatriots would find in his very limitations. I do not mean by this that there are not still many of his fellow-countrymen (as there are many natives of every land under the sun,) who are more susceptible of being irritated than of being soothed by the influences of the Eternal City. What I mean is that an American of equal value with Hawthorne, an American of equal genius, imagination, and, as our forefathers said, sensibility, would at present inevitably accommodate himself more easily to the idiosyncrasies of foreign lands. An American as cultivated as Hawthorne, is now almost inevitably more cultivated, and, as a matter of course, more Europeanised in advance, more cosmopolitan. It is very possible that in becoming so, he has lost something of his occidental savour, the quality which excites the goodwill of the American reader of our author's Journals for the dislocated, depressed, even slightly bewildered diarist. Absolutely the last of the earlier race of Americans Hawthorne was, fortunately, probably far from being. But I think of him as the last specimen of the more primitive type of men of letters; and when it comes to measuring what he succeeded in being, in his unadulterated form, against what he failed of being,

the positive side of the image quite extinguishes the negative. I must be on my guard, however, against incurring the charge of cherishing a national consciousness as acute as I have ventured to pronounce his own.

Out of his mingled sensations, his pleasure and his weariness, his discomforts and his reveries, there sprang another beautiful work. During the summer of 1858, he hired a picturesque old villa on the hill of Bellosguardo, near Florence, a curious structure with a crenelated tower, which, after having in the course of its career suffered many vicissitudes and played many parts, now finds its most vivid identity in being pointed out to strangers as the sometime residence of the celebrated American romancer. Hawthorne took a fancy to the place, as well he might, for it is one of the loveliest spots on earth, and the great view that stretched itself before him contains every element of beauty. Florence lay at his feet with her memories and treasures; the olive covered hills bloomed around him, studded with villas as picturesque as his own; the Apennines, perfect in form and colour, disposed themselves opposite, and in the distance, along its fertile valley, the Arno wandered to Pisa and the sea. Soon after coming hither he wrote to a friend in a strain of high satisfaction :—

“It is pleasant to feel at last that I am really away from America—a satisfaction that I never really enjoyed as long as I stayed in Liverpool, where it seemed to be that the quintessence of nasal and hand-shaking Yankeedom was gradually filtered and sublimated through my consulate, on the way outward and homeward. I first got acquainted with my own countrymen there. At Rome too it was not much better. But here in Florence, and in the summer-time, and in this secluded villa, I have escaped out of all my old tracks, and



am really remote. I like my present residence immensely. The house stands on a hill, overlooking Florence, and is big enough to quarter a regiment, inasmuch that each member of the family, including servants, has a separate suite of apartments, and there are vast wildernesses of upper rooms into which we have never yet sent exploring expeditions. At one end of the house there is a moss-grown tower, haunted by owls and by the ghost of a monk who was confined there in the thirteenth century, previous to being burnt at the stake in the principal square of Florence. I hire this villa, tower and all, at twenty-eight dollars a month; but I mean to take it away bodily and clap it into a romance, which I have in my head, ready to be written out."

This romance was *Transformation*, which he wrote out during the following winter in Rome, and re-wrote during the several months that he spent in England, chiefly at Leamington, before returning to America. The Villa Montauto figures, in fact, in this tale as the castle of Monte-Beni, the patrimonial dwelling of the hero. "I take some credit to myself," he wrote to the same friend, on returning to Rome, "for having sternly shut myself up for an hour or two every day, and come to close grips with a romance which I have been trying to tear out of my mind." And later in the same winter he says—"I shall go home, I fear, with a heavy heart, not expecting to be very well contented there.

. . . If I were but a hundred times richer than I am, how very comfortable I could be! I consider it a great piece of good fortune that I have had experience of the discomforts and miseries of Italy, and did not go directly home from England. Anything will seem like a Paradise after a Roman winter." But he got away at last, late in the spring, carrying his novel with him, and the book was published, after, as I say, he had worked it

over, mainly during some weeks that he passed at the little watering-place of Redcar, on the Yorkshire coast, in February of the following year. It was issued primarily in England; the American edition immediately followed. It is an odd fact that in the two countries the book came out under different titles. The title that the author had bestowed upon it did not satisfy the English publishers, who requested him to provide it with another; so that it is only in America that the work bears the name of *The Marble Faun*. Hawthorne's choice of this appellation is, by the way, rather singular, for it completely fails to characterize the story, the subject of which is the living faun, the faun of flesh and blood, the unfortunate Donatello. His marble counterpart is mentioned only in the opening chapter. On the other hand Hawthorne complained that *Transformation* "gives one the idea of Harlequin in a pantomime." Under either name, however, the book was a great success, and it has probably become the most popular of Hawthorne's four novels. It is part of the intellectual equipment of the Anglo-Saxon visitor to Rome, and is read by every English-speaking traveller who arrives there, who has been there, or who expects to go.

It has a great deal of beauty, of interest and grace; but it has to my sense a slighter value than its companions, and I am far from regarding it as the masterpiece of the author, a position to which we sometimes hear it assigned. The subject is admirable, and so are many of the details; but the whole thing is less simple and complete than either of the three tales of American life, and Hawthorne forfeited a precious advantage in ceasing to tread his native soil. Half the virtue of

*The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* is in their local quality; they are impregnated with the New England air. It is very true that Hawthorne had no pretension to pourtray actualities and to cultivate that literal exactitude which is now the fashion. Had this been the case, he would probably have made a still graver mistake in transporting the scene of his story to a country which he knew only superficially. His tales all go on more or less "in the vague," as the French say, and of course the vague may as well be placed in Tuscany as in Massachusetts. It may also very well be urged in Hawthorne's favour here, that in *Transformation* he has attempted to deal with actualities more than he did in either of his earlier novels. He has described the streets and monuments of Rome with a closeness which forms no part of his reference to those of Boston and Salem. But for all this he incurs that penalty of seeming factitious and unauthoritative, which is always the result of an artist's attempt to project himself into an atmosphere in which he has not a transmitted and inherited property. An English or a German writer (I put poets aside) may love Italy well enough, and know her well enough, to write delightful fictions about her; the thing has often been done. But the productions in question will, as novels, always have about them something second rate and imperfect. There is in *Transformation* enough beautiful perception of the interesting character of Rome, enough rich and eloquent expression of it, to save the book, if the book could be saved; but the style, what the French call the *genre*, is an inferior one, and the thing remains a charming romance with intrinsic weaknesses.

Allowing for this, however, some of the finest pages in

all Hawthorne are to be found in it. The subject, as I have said, is a particularly happy one, and there is a great deal of interest in the simple combination and opposition of the four actors. It is noticeable that in spite of the considerable length of the story, there are no accessory figures; Donatello and Miriam, Kenyon and Hilda, exclusively occupy the scene. This is the more noticeable as the scene is very large, and the great Roman background is constantly presented to us. The relations of these four people are full of that moral picturesqueness which Hawthorne was always looking for; he found it in perfection in the history of Donatello. As I have said, the novel is the most popular of his works, and every one will remember the figure of the simple, joyous, sensuous young Italian, who is not so much a man as a child, and not so much a child as a charming, innocent animal, and how he is brought to self-knowledge and to a miserable conscious manhood, by the commission of a crime. Donatello is rather vague and impalpable; he says too little in the book, shows himself too little, and falls short, I think, of being a creation. But he is enough of a creation to make us enter into the situation, and the whole history of his rise, or fall, whichever one chooses to call it—his tasting of the tree of knowledge and finding existence complicated with a regret—is unfolded with a thousand ingenious and exquisite touches. Of course, to make the interest complete, there is a woman in the affair, and Hawthorne has done few things more beautiful than the picture of the unequal complicity of guilt between his immature and dimly-puzzled hero, with his clinging, unquestioning, unexacting devotion, and the dark, powerful, more widely-seeing feminine nature of Miriam. Deeply

touching is the representation of the manner in which these two essentially different persons—the woman intelligent, passionate, acquainted with life, and with a tragic element in her own career; the youth ignorant, gentle, unworldly, brightly and harmlessly natural—are equalised and bound together by their common secret, which insulates them, morally, from the rest of mankind. The character of Hilda has always struck me as an admirable invention—one of those things that mark the man of genius. It needed a man of genius and of Hawthorne's imaginative delicacy, to feel the propriety of such a figure as Hilda's and to perceive the relief it would both give and borrow. This pure and somewhat rigid New England girl, following the vocation of a copyist of pictures in Rome, unacquainted with evil and untouched by impurity, has been accidentally the witness, unknown and unsuspected, of the dark deed by which her friends, Miriam and Donatello, are knit together. This is *her* revelation of evil, her loss of perfect innocence. She has done no wrong, and yet wrongdoing has become a part of her experience, and she carries the weight of her detested knowledge upon her heart. She carries it a long time, saddened and oppressed by it, till at last she can bear it no longer. If I have called the whole idea of the presence and effect of Hilda in the story a trait of genius, the purest touch of inspiration is the episode in which the poor girl deposits her burden. She has passed the whole lonely summer in Rome, and one day, at the end of it, finding herself in St. Peter's, she enters a confessional, strenuous daughter of the Puritans as she is, and pours out her dark knowledge into the bosom of the Church—then comes away with her conscience lightened, not a whit

the less a Puritan than before. If the book contained nothing else noteworthy but this admirable scene, and the pages describing the murder committed by Donatello under Miriam's eyes, and the ecstatic wandering, afterwards, of the guilty couple, through the "blood-stained streets of Rome," it would still deserve to rank high among the imaginative productions of our day.

Like all of Hawthorne's things, it contains a great many light threads of symbolism, which shimmer in the texture of the tale, but which are apt to break and remain in our fingers if we attempt to handle them. These things are part of Hawthorne's very manner—almost, as one might say, of his vocabulary; they belong much more to the surface of his work than to its stronger interest. The fault of *Transformation* is that the element of the unreal is pushed too far, and that the book is neither positively of one category nor of another. His "moonshiny romance," he calls it in a letter; and, in truth, the lunar element is a little too pervasive. The action wavers between the streets of Rome, whose literal features the author perpetually sketches, and a vague realm of fancy, in which quite a different verisimilitude prevails. This is the trouble with Donatello himself. His companions are intended to be real—if they fail to be so, it is not for want of intention; whereas he is intended to be real or not, as you please. He is of a different substance from them; it is as if a painter, in composing a picture, should try to give you an impression of one of his figures by a strain of music. The idea of the modern faun was a charming one; but I think it a pity that the author should not have made him more definitely modern, without reverting so much to his mythological properties and antecedents, which are

very gracefully touched upon, but which belong to the region of picturesque conceits, much more than to that of real psychology. Among the young Italians of to day there are still plenty of models for such an image as Hawthorne appears to have wished to present in the easy and natural Donatello. And since I am speaking critically, I may go on to say that the art of narration, in *Transformation*, seems to me more at fault than in the author's other novels. The story straggles and wanders, is dropped and taken up again, and towards the close lapses into an almost fatal vagueness.

## CHAPTER VII

### LAST YEARS.

OF the four last years of Hawthorne's life there is not much to tell that I have not already told. He returned to America in the summer of 1860, and took up his abode in the house he had bought at Concord before going to Europe, and of which his occupancy had as yet been brief. He was to occupy it only four years. I have insisted upon the fact of his being an intense American, and of his looking at all things, during his residence in Europe, from the standpoint of that little clod of western earth which he carried about with him as the good Mohammedan carries the strip of carpet on which he kneels down to face towards Mecca. But it does not appear, nevertheless, that he found himself treading with any great exhilaration the larger section of his native soil upon which, on his return, he disembarked. Indeed, the closing part of his life was a period of dejection, the more acute that it followed directly upon seven years of the happiest opportunities he was to have known. And his European residence had been brightest at the last; he had broken almost completely with those habits of extreme seclusion into which he was to relapse on his return to Concord. "You would be



stricken dumb," he wrote from London, shortly before leaving it for the last time, "to see how quietly I accept a whole string of invitations, and, what is more, perform my engagements without a murmur. . . . The stir of this London life, somehow or other," he adds in the same letter, "has done me a wonderful deal of good, and I feel better than for months past. This is strange, for if I had my choice I should leave undone almost all the things I do." "When he found himself once more on the old ground," writes Mr. Lathrop, "with the old struggle for subsistence staring him in the face again, it is not difficult to conceive how a certain degree of depression would follow." There is indeed not a little sadness in the thought of Hawthorne's literary gift, light, delicate, exquisite, capricious, never too abundant, being charged with the heavy burden of the maintenance of a family. We feel that it was not intended for such grossness, and that in a world ideally constituted he would have enjoyed a liberal pension, an assured subsistence, and have been able to produce his charming prose only when the fancy took him.

The brightness of the outlook at home was not made greater by the explosion of the Civil War in the spring of 1861. These months, and the three years that followed them, were not a cheerful time for any persons but army-contractors; but over Hawthorne the war-cloud appears to have dropped a permanent shadow. The whole affair was a bitter disappointment to him, and a fatal blow to that happy faith in the uninterruptedness of American prosperity which I have spoken of as the religion of the old-fashioned American in general, and the old-fashioned Democrat in particular. It was not a propitious time for cultivating the Muse;

when history herself is so hard at work, fiction has little left to say. To fiction, directly, Hawthorne did not address himself; he composed first, chiefly during the year 1862, the chapters of which our *Our Old Home* was afterwards made up. I have said that, though this work has less value than his purely imaginative things, the writing is singularly good, and it is well to remember, to its greater honour, that it was produced at a time when it was painfully hard for a man of Hawthorne's cast of mind to fix his attention. The air was full of battle-smoke, and the poet's vision was not easily clear. Hawthorne was irritated, too, by the sense of being to a certain extent, politically considered, in a false position. A large section of the Democratic party was not in good odour at the North; its loyalty was not perceived to be of that clear strain which public opinion required. To this wing of the party Franklin Pierce had, with reason or without, the credit of belonging; and our author was conscious of some sharpness of responsibility in defending the illustrious friend of whom he had already made himself the advocate. He defended him manfully, without a grain of concession, and described the ex-President to the public (and to himself), if not as he was, then as he ought to be. *Our Old Home* is dedicated to him, and about this dedication there was some little difficulty. It was represented to Hawthorne that as General Pierce was rather out of fashion, it might injure the success, and, in plain terms, the sale of his book. His answer (to his publisher), was much to the point.

"I find that it would be a piece of poltroonery in me to withdraw either the dedication or the dedicatory letter. My long and intimate personal relations with Pierce render the

dedication altogether proper, especially as regards this book, which would have had no existence without his kindness; and if he is so exceedingly unpopular that his name ought to sink the volume, there is so much the more need that an old friend should stand by him. I cannot, merely on account of pecuniary profit or literary reputation, go back from what I have deliberately felt and thought it right to do; and if I were to tear out the dedication I should never look at the volume again without remorse and shame. As for the literary public, it must accept my book precisely as I think fit to give it, or let it alone. Nevertheless I have no fancy for making myself a martyr when it is honourably and conscientiously possible to avoid it; and I always measure out heroism very accurately according to the exigencies of the occasion, and should be the last man in the world to throw away a bit of it needlessly. So I have looked over the concluding paragraph and have amended it in such a way that, while doing what I know to be justice to my friend, it contains not a word that ought to be objectionable to any set of readers. If the public of the North see fit to ostracise me for this, I can only say that I would gladly sacrifice a thousand or two dollars, rather than retain the good-will of such a herd of dolts and mean-spirited scoundrels."

The dedication was published, the book was eminently successful, and Hawthorne was not ostracised. The paragraph under discussion stands as follows:—"Only this let me say, that, with the record of your life in my memory, and with a sense of your character in my deeper consciousness, as among the few things that time has left as it found them, I need no assurance that you continue faithful for ever to that grand idea of an irrevocable Union which, as you once told me, was the earliest that your brave father taught you. For other men there may be a choice of paths—for you but one; and it rests among my certainties that no man's loyalty

is more steadfast, no man's hopes or apprehensions on behalf of our national existence more deeply heartfelt, or more closely intertwined with his possibilities of personal happiness, than those of Franklin Pierce." I know not how well the ex-President liked these lines, but the public thought them admirable, for they served as a kind of formal profession of faith, on the question of the hour, by a loved and honoured writer. That some of his friends thought such a profession needed is apparent from the numerous editorial ejaculations and protests appended to an article describing a visit he had just paid to Washington, which Hawthorne contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* for July, 1862, and which, singularly enough, has not been reprinted. The article has all the usual merit of such sketches on Hawthorne's part—the merit of delicate, sportive feeling, expressed with consummate grace—but the editor of the periodical appears to have thought that he must give the antidote with the poison, and the paper is accompanied with several little notes disclaiming all sympathy with the writer's political heresies. The heresies strike the reader of to-day as extremely mild, and what excites his emotion, rather, is the questionable taste of the editorial commentary, with which it is strange that Hawthorne should have allowed his article to be encumbered. He had not been an Abolitionist before the War, and that he should not pretend to be one at the eleventh hour, was, for instance, surely a piece of consistency that might have been allowed to pass. "I shall not pretend to be an admirer of old John Brown," he says, in a page worth quoting, "any further than sympathy with Whittier's excellent ballad about him may go; nor did I expect ever to shrink so

unutterably from any apophthegm of a sage whose happy lips have uttered a hundred golden sentences"—the allusion here, I suppose, is to Mr. Emerson—"as from that saying (perhaps falsely attributed to so honoured a name), that the death of this blood-stained fanatic has 'made the Gallows as venerable as the Cross!' Nobody was ever more justly hanged. He won his martyrdom fairly, and took it fairly. He himself, I am persuaded (such was his natural integrity), would have acknowledged that Virginia had a right to take the life which he had staked and lost; although it would have been better for her, in the hour that is fast coming, if she could generously have forgotten the criminality of his attempt in its enormous folly. On the other hand, any common-sensible man, looking at the matter un sentimentally, must have felt a certain intellectual satisfaction in seeing him hanged, if it were only in requital of his preposterous miscalculation of possibilities." Now that the heat of that great conflict has passed away, this is a capital expression of the saner estimate, in the United States, of the dauntless and deluded old man who proposed to solve a complex political problem by stirring up a servile insurrection. There is much of the same sound sense, interfused with light, just appreciable irony, in such a passage as the following:—

"I tried to imagine how very disagreeable the presence of a Southern army would be in a sober town of Massachusetts; and the thought considerably lessened my wonder at the cold and shy regards that are cast upon our troops, the gloom, the sullen demeanour, the declared, or scarcely hidden, sympathy with rebellion, which are so frequent here. It is a strange thing in human life that the greatest errors both of

men and women often spring from their sweetest and most generous qualities ; and so, undoubtedly, thousands of warm-hearted, generous, and impulsive persons have joined the Rebels, not from any real zeal for the cause, but because, between two conflicting loyalties, they chose that which necessarily lay nearest the heart. There never existed any other Government against which treason was so easy, and could defend itself by such plausible arguments, as against that of the United States. The anomaly of two allegiances, (of which that of the State comes nearest home to a man's feelings, and includes the altar and the hearth, while the General Government claims his devotion only to an airy mode of law, and has no symbol but a flag,) is exceedingly mischievous in this point of view ; for it has converted crowds of honest people into traitors, who seem to themselves not merely innocent but patriotic, and who die for a bad cause with a quiet conscience as if it were the best. In the vast extent of our country—too vast by far to be taken into one small human heart—we inevitably limit to our own State, or at farthest, to our own little section, that sentiment of physical love for the soil which renders an Englishman, for example, so intensely sensitive to the dignity and well-being of his little island, that one hostile foot, treading anywhere upon it, would make a bruise on each individual breast. If a man loves his own State, therefore, and is content to be ruined with her, let us shoot him, if we can, but allow him an honourable burial in the soil he fights for."

To this paragraph a line of deprecation from the editor is attached ; and indeed from the point of view of a vigorous prosecution of the war it was doubtless not particularly pertinent. But it is interesting as an example of the way an imaginative man judges current events—trying to see the other side as well as his own, to feel what his adversary feels, and present his view of the case.

But he had other occupations for his imagination

than putting himself into the shoes of unappreciative Southerners. He began at this time two novels, neither of which he lived to finish, but both of which were published, as fragments, after his death. The shorter of these fragments, to which he had given the name of *The Dolliver Romance*, is so very brief that little can be said of it. The author strikes, with all his usual sweetness, the opening notes of a story of New England life, and the few pages which have been given to the world contain a charming picture of an old man and a child.

The other rough sketch—it is hardly more—is in a manner complete; it was unfortunately deemed complete enough to be brought out in a magazine as a serial novel. This was to do it a great wrong, and I do not go too far in saying that poor Hawthorne would probably not have enjoyed the very bright light that has been projected upon this essentially crude piece of work. I am at a loss to know how to speak of *Septimius Felton*, or the *Elixir of Life*; I have purposely reserved but a small space for doing so, for the part of discretion seems to be to pass it by lightly. I differ therefore widely from the author's biographer and son-in-law in thinking it a work of the greatest weight and value, offering striking analogies with Goethe's *Faust*; and still more widely from a critic whom Mr. Lathrop quotes, who regards a certain portion of it as "one of the very greatest triumphs in all literature." It seems to me almost cruel to pitch in this exalted key one's estimate of the rough first draught of a tale in regard to which the author's premature death operates, virtually, as a complete renunciation of pretensions. It is plain to any reader that *Septimius Felton*, as it stands, with its roughness, its gaps, its mere allusiveness and slightness of

treatment, gives us but a very partial measure of Hawthorne's full intention; and it is equally easy to believe that this intention was much finer than anything we find in the book. Even if we possessed the novel in its complete form, however, I incline to think that we should regard it as very much the weakest of Hawthorne's productions. The idea itself seems a failure, and the best that might have come of it would have been very much below *The Scarlet Letter* or *The House of the Seven Gables*. The appeal to our interest is not felicitously made, and the fancy of a potion, to assure eternity of existence, being made from the flowers which spring from the grave of a man whom the distiller of the potion has deprived of life, though it might figure with advantage in a short story of the pattern of the *Twice-Told Tales*, appears too slender to carry the weight of a novel. Indeed, this whole matter of elixirs and potions belongs to the fairy-tale period of taste, and the idea of a young man enabling himself to live forever by concocting and imbibing a magic draught, has the misfortune of not appealing to our sense of reality or even to our sympathy. The weakness of *Septimius Felton* is that the reader cannot take the hero seriously—a fact of which there can be no better proof than the element of the ridiculous which inevitably mingles itself in the scene in which he entertains his lady-love with a prophetic sketch of his occupations during the successive centuries of his earthly immortality. I suppose the answer to my criticism is that this is allegorical, symbolic, ideal; but we feel that it symbolises nothing substantial, and that the truth—whatever it may be—that it illustrates, is as moonshiny, to use Hawthorne's own expression, as "the



allegory itself. Another fault of the story is that a great historical event—the war of the Revolution—is introduced in the first few pages, in order to supply the hero with a pretext for killing the young man from whose grave the flower of immortality is to sprout, and then drops out of the narrative altogether, not even forming a background to the sequel. It seems to me that Hawthorne should either have invented some other occasion for the death of his young officer, or else, having struck the note of the great public agitation which overhung his little group of characters, have been careful to sound it through the rest of his tale. I do wrong, however, to insist upon these things, for I fall thereby into the error of treating the work as if it had been cast into its ultimate form and acknowledged by the author. To avoid this error I shall make no other criticism of details, but content myself with saying that the idea and intention of the book appear, relatively speaking, feeble, and that even had it been finished it would have occupied a very different place in the public esteem from the writer's masterpieces.

The year 1864 brought with it for Hawthorne a sense of weakness and depression from which he had little relief during the four or five months that were left him of life. He had his engagement to produce *The Dolliver Romance*, which had been promised to the subscribers of the *Atlantic Monthly* (it was the first time he had undertaken to publish a work of fiction in monthly parts), but he was unable to write, and his consciousness of an unperformed task weighed upon him, and did little to dissipate his physical inertness. "I have not yet had courage to read the Dolliver proof-sheet," he wrote to his publisher in December, 1863 ;

"but will set about it soon, though with terrible reluctance, such as I never felt before. I am most grateful to you," he went on, "for protecting me from that visitation of the elephant and his cub. If you happen to see Mr. —, of L—, a young man who was here last summer, pray tell him anything that your conscience will let you, to induce him to spare me another visit, which I know he intended. I really am not well, and cannot be disturbed by strangers, without more suffering than it is worth while to endure." A month later he was obliged to ask for a further postponement. "I am not quite up to writing yet, but shall make an effort as soon as I see any hope of success. You ought to be thankful that (like most other broken-down authors) I do not pester you with decrepit pages, and insist upon your accepting them as full of the old spirit and vigour. That trouble perhaps still awaits you, after I shall have reached a further stage of decay. Seriously, my mind has, for the time, lost its temper and its fine edge, and I have an instinct that I had better keep quiet. Perhaps I shall have a new spirit of vigour if I wait quietly for it; perhaps not." The winter passed away, but the "new spirit of vigour" remained absent, and at the end of February he wrote to Mr. Fields that his novel had simply broken down, and that he should never finish it. "I hardly know what to say to the public about this abortive romance, though I know pretty well what the case will be. I shall never finish it. Yet it is not quite pleasant for an author to announce himself, or to be announced, as finally broken down as to his literary faculty. . . . I cannot finish it unless a great change comes over me; and if I make too great an effort to do so, it will be my

death; not that I should care much for that, if I could fight the battle through and win it, thus ending a life of much smoulder and a scanty fire, in a blaze of glory. But I should smother myself in mud of my own making. . . . I am not low-spirited, nor fanciful, nor freakish, but look what seem to me realities in the face, and am ready to take whatever may come. If I could but go to England now, I think that the sea-voyage and the 'old Home' might set me all right."

But he was not to go to England; he started three months later upon a briefer journey, from which he never returned. His health was seriously disordered, and in April, according to a letter from Mrs. Hawthorne, printed by Mr. Fields, he had been "miserably ill." His feebleness was complete; he appears to have had no definite malady, but he was, according to the common phrase, failing. General Pierce proposed to him that they should make a little tour together among the mountains of New Hampshire, and Hawthorne consented, in the hope of getting some profit from the change of air. The northern New England spring is not the most genial season in the world, and this was an indifferent substitute for the resource for which his wife had, on his behalf, expressed a wish—a visit to "some island in the Gulf Stream." He was not to go far; he only reached a little place called Plymouth, one of the stations of approach to the beautiful mountain scenery of New Hampshire, when, on the 18th of May, 1864, death overtook him. His companion, General Pierce, going into his room in the early morning, found that he had breathed his last during the night—had passed away, tranquilly, comfortably, without a sign or a sound, in his sleep. This happened at the hotel of

the place—a vast white edifice, adjacent to the railway station, and entitled the Pemigewasset House. He was buried at Concord, and many of the most distinguished men in the country stood by his grave.

He was a beautiful, natural, original genius, and his life had been singularly exempt from worldly preoccupations and vulgar efforts. It had been as pure, as simple, as unsophisticated, as his work. He had lived primarily in his domestic affections, which were of the tenderest kind; and then—without eagerness, without pretension, but with a great deal of quiet devotion—in his charming art. His work will remain; it is too original and exquisite to pass away; among the men of imagination he will always have his niche. No one has had just that vision of life, and no one has had a literary form that more successfully expressed his vision. He was not a moralist, and he was not simply a poet. The moralists are weightier, denser, richer, in a sense; the poets are more purely inconclusive and irresponsible. He combined in a singular degree the spontaneity of the imagination with a haunting care for moral problems. Man's conscience was his theme, but he saw it in the light of a creative fancy which added, out of its own substance, an interest, and, I may almost say, an importance.

THE END.

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