FACES IN THE FIRE

F·W·BOREHAM

www.pgdp.net

The Project Gutenberg EBook of Faces in the Fire, by Frank W. Boreham

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with
almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or
re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included
with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org/license

Title: Faces in the Fire
       And Other Fancies

Author: Frank W. Boreham

Release Date: February 16, 2013 [EBook #42105]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FACES IN THE FIRE ***

Produced by David Wilson and the Online Distributed
Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was
produced from images generously made available by The
Internet Archive/American Libraries.)

Original scans are taken from: http://archive.org/details/facesinfireother00boreiala

FACES IN THE FIRE

FACES IN THE FIRE
AND
OTHER FANCIES

BY

F. W. BOREHAM

AUTHOR OF
‘THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL,’ ‘THE SILVER SHADOW,’ ‘MUSHROOMS ON THE MOOR,’ ‘THE GOLDEN MILESTONE,’ ‘MOUNTAINS IN THE MIST,’ ‘THE LUGGAGE OF LIFE,’
ETC., ETC.



THE ABINGDON PRESS
NEW YORK CINCINNATI

CONTENTS

PART I

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE BABY AMONG THE BOMBSHELLS	13
II.	STRAWBERRIES AND CREAM	24
III.	THE CONQUEST OF THE CRAGS	36
IV.	LINOLEUM	46
V.	THE EDITOR	57
VI.	THE PEACEMAKER	68
VII.	NOTHING	79
VIII.	THE ANGEL AND THE IRON GATE	89
IX.	SHORT CUTS	98

PART II

I.	THE POSTMAN	113
II.	CRYING FOR THE MOON	123
III.	OUR LOST ROMANCES	134
IV.	A FORBIDDEN DISH	144
V.	AN OLD MAID’S DIARY	153
VI.	THE RIVER	163
VII.	FACES IN THE FIRE	172
VIII.	THE MENACE OF THE SUNLIT HILL	184
IX.	AMONG THE ICEBERGS	196

PART III

I.	A BOX OF TIN SOLDIERS	207
II.	LOVE, MUSIC, AND SALAD	216
III.	THE FELLING OF THE TREE	227
IV.	SPOIL!	237
V.	A PHILOSOPHY OF FANCY-WORK	247
VI.	A PAIR OF BOOTS	256

VII. CHRISTMAS BELLS 265

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

IT was a chilling experience, that first glimpse of New Zealand! Hour after hour the great ship held on her way up the Cook Straits amidst scenery that made me shudder and that scowled me out of countenance. Rugged, massive, inhospitable, and bare, how sternly those wild and mountainous landscapes contrasted with the quiet beauty that I had surveyed from the same decks as the ship had dropped down Channel! I shaded my eyes with my hands and swept the strange horizon at every point, but nowhere could I see a sign of habitation —no man; no beast; no sheltering roof; no winding road; no welcoming column of smoke! And when, in the twilight of that still autumn evening, I at length descended the gangway, and set foot for the first time on the land of my adoption, I found myself—twelve thousand miles from home—in a country in which not a soul knew me, and in which I knew no single soul. It was not an exhilarating sensation.

That was on March 11, 1895—twenty-one years ago to-night. Those one-and-twenty years have been almost evenly divided between the old manse at Mosgiel, in New Zealand, and my present Tasmanian home. As I sit here, and let my memory play among the years, I smile at the odd way in which these southern lands have belied that first austere impression. In my fire to-night I see such crowds of faces—the faces of those with whom I have laughed and cried, and camped and played, and worked and worshipped in the course of these one-and-twenty years. There are fancy-faces, too; the folk of other latitudes; the faces I have never seen; the friends my pen has brought me. I cannot write to all to-night; so I set aside this book as a memento of the times we have spent together. If, by good hap, it reaches any of them, let them regard it as a shake of the hand for the sake of auld lang syne. And if, in addition to cementing old friendships, it creates new ones, how doubly happy I shall be!

FRANK W. BOREHAM.

HOBART, TASMANIA.

PART I

13

I

THE BABY AMONG THE BOMBSHELLS

EVERYTHING depends on keeping up the supply of bombshells. It will be a sad day for us all when there are no more bombs to burst, no more shocks to be sustained, no more sensations to be experienced, no more thrills to be enjoyed. Fancy being condemned to reside in a world that is bankrupt of astonishments, a world that no longer has it in its power to startle you, a world that has nothing up its sleeve! It would be like occupying a seat at a conjuring entertainment at which the conjurer had exhausted all his tricks, but did not like to tell you so! When I was a small boy I used to be mildly amused by the antics of a performing bear that occasionally visited our locality. A sickly-looking foreigner led the poor brute by a string. Its claws were cut, and its teeth drawn. By dint of a few kicks and cuffs it was persuaded to dance a melancholy kind of jig, and then shamble round with a basket in search of a few half-pence. I remember distinctly that, as I watched the unhappy creature's dismal performance, I tried to imagine what the animal would have looked like had no cruel captor removed him from his native lair. The mental contrast was a very painful one. Yet it was not half so painful as the contrast between the world as it is and a world that had run out of bombshells. A world that could no longer surprise us would be a world with its claws cut and its teeth drawn. Half the fun of waking up in the morning is the feeling that you have come upon a day that is brand new, a day that the world has never seen before, a day that is certain to do things that no other day has ever done. Half the pleasure of welcoming a new-born baby is the absolute certainty that here you have a packet of amazing surprises. An individuality is here; a thing that never was before; you cannot argue from any other child to this one; the only thing that you can predict with confidence about this child is that it will do things that were never done, or never done in the same way, since this old world of ours began. Here is novelty, originality, an infinity of bewildering possibility. Each mother thinks that there never was a baby like her baby; and most certainly there never was. As long as the stock of days keeps up, and as long as the supply of babies does not peter out, there will be no lack of bombshells. I visited the other day the ruins of an

14

15

old prison. I saw among other things the dark cells in which, in the bad old days, prisoners languished in solitary confinement. Charles Reade and other writers have told us how, in those black holes, convicts adopted all kinds of ingenious expedients to secure themselves against losing their reason in the desolate darkness. They tossed buttons about and groped after them; they tore up their clothes and counted the pieces; they did a thousand other things, and went mad in spite of all their pains. Now what is this horror of the darkness? Let us analyse it. Wherein does it differ from blindness? Why did insanity overtake these solitary men? The horror of the darkness was not fear. A child dreads the dark because he thinks that wolves and hobgoblins infest it. But these men had no such terrors. The thing that unbalanced them was the maddening monotony of the darkness. Nothing happened. In the light something happens every second. A thousand impressions are made upon the mind in the course of every minute. Each sensation, though it be of no more importance than the buzz of a fly at the window-pane, the flutter of a paper to the floor, or the sound of a footfall on the street, represents a surprise. It is a mental jolt. It transfers the attention from one object to an entirely different one. We pass in less than a second from the buzz of the fly to the flutter of the paper, and again from the flutter of the paper to the sound of the footfall. Any man who could count the separate objects that occupied his attention in the course of a single moment would be astonished at their variety and multiplicity. But in the dark cell there are no sensations. The eye cannot see; the ear cannot hear. Not one of the senses is appealed to. The mind is accustomed to flit from sensation to sensation like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, but infinitely faster. But in this dark cell it languishes like a captive butterfly in a cardboard box. If you hold me under water I shall die, because my lungs can no longer do the work they have always been accustomed to do. In the dark cell the mind finds itself in the same predicament. It is drowned in inky air. The mind lives on sensations; but here there are no sensations. And if the world gets shorn of its surprise-power, it will become a maddening place to live in. We only exist by being continually startled. We are kept alive by the everlasting bursting of bombshells.

I am not so much concerned, however, with the ability of the world to afford us a continuous series of thrills as with my own capacity to be surprised. The tendency is to lose the power of astonishment. I am told that, in battle, the moment in which a man finds himself for the first time under fire is a truly terrifying experience. But after awhile the new-comer settles down to it, and, with shells bursting all around him, he goes about his tasks as calmly as on

parade. This idiosyncrasy of ours may be a very fine thing under such circumstances, but under other conditions it has the gravest elements of danger. As I sit here writing, a baby crawls upon the floor. It is good fun watching him. He plays with the paper band that fell from a packet of envelopes. He puts it round his wrist like a bracelet. He tears it, and lo, the bracelet of a moment ago is a long ribbon of coloured paper. He is astounded. His wide-open eyes are a picture. The telephone rings. He looks up with approval. Anything that rings or rattles is very much to his taste. I go over to his new-found toy, and begin talking to it. He is dumbfounded. My altercation with the telephone completely bewilders him. Whilst I am thus occupied, he moves towards my vacant chair. He tries to pull himself up by it, but pulls it over on to himself. The savagery of the thing appals him; he never dreamed of an attack from such a source. In what a world of wonder is he living! Bombs are bursting all around him all day long. A baby's life must be a thrillingly sensational affair.

But the pity of it is that he will grow out of it. He may be surrounded with the most amazing contrivances on every hand, but the wonder of it will make little or no appeal to him. He will be like the soldier in the trenches who no longer notices the roar and crash of the shells. When Livingstone set out for England in 1856, he determined to take with him Sekwebu, the leader of his African escort. But when the party reached Mauritius, the poor African was so bewildered by the steamers and other marvels of civilization that he went mad, threw himself into the sea, and was seen no more. I only wish that an artist had sketched the scene upon which poor Sekwebu gazed so nervously as he stood on the deck of the *Frolic* that day sixty years ago. I suspect that the 'marvels of civilization' that so terrified him would appear to us to be very ramshackle and antiquated affairs. We lie back in our sumptuous motor-cars and yawn whilst surrounded on every hand with astonishments compared with which the things that Sekwebu saw are not worthy to be compared. That is the tragic feature of the thing. In the midst of marvels we tend to become blasé. It is not that we are occupying a seat at a conjuring entertainment at which the conjurer has exhausted all his tricks, and does not like to tell you so. On the contrary, it is like occupying a seat at a conjuring entertainment and falling fast asleep just as the performer is getting to his most baffling and masterly achievements. I like to watch this baby of mine among his bombshells. The least thing electrifies him. What a sensational world this would be if I could only contrive to retain unspoiled that childish capacity for wonder!

I shall be told that it is the baby's ignorance that makes him so susceptible to sensation. It is nothing of the kind. Ignorance does not create wonder; it

destroys it. I walked along a track through the bush one day in company with two men. One was a naturalist; the other was an ignoramus. Twenty times at least the naturalist swooped down upon some curious grass, some novel fern, or some rare orchid. The walk that morning was, to his knowing eyes, as sensational as a hair-raising film at a cinematograph. But to my other companion it was absolutely uneventful, and the only thing at which he wondered was the enthusiasm of our common friend. When Alfred Russel Wallace was gathering in South America his historic collection of botanical and zoological specimens, the natives of the Amazon Valley thought him mad. He paid them handsomely to catch creatures for which they could discover no use at all. To him the great forests of Bolivia and Brazil were alive with sensation. They fascinated and enthralled him. But the black men could not understand it. They saw no reason for his rapture. Yet his wonder was not the outcome of ignorance; it was the outcome of knowledge. Depend upon it, the more I learn, the more sensational the world will become. If I can only become wise enough I may recapture the glorious amazements of the baby among his bombshells.

Now let me come to a very practical application. Half the art of life lies in possessing effective explosives and in knowing how to use them. In the best of his books, Jack London tells us that the secret of White Fang's success in fighting other dogs was his power of surprise. 'When dogs fight there are usually preliminaries—snarlings and bristlings, and stiff-legged struttings. But White Fang omitted these. He gave no warning of his intention. He rushed in and snapped and slashed on the instant, without notice, before his foe could prepare to meet him. Thus he exhibited the value of surprise. A dog taken off its guard, its shoulder slashed open, or its ear ripped in ribbons before it knew what was happening, was a dog half whipped.' Here is the strategy of surprise in the wild. Has it nothing to teach me? I think it has. I remember going for a walk one evening in New Zealand, many years ago, with a minister whose name was at one time famous throughout the world. I was just beginning then, and was hungry for ideas. I shall never forget that, towards the close of our conversation, my companion stopped, looked me full in the face, and exclaimed with tremendous emphasis, 'Keep up your surprise-power, my dear fellow; the pulpit must never, never lose its power of startling people!' I have very often since recalled that memorable walk; and the farther I leave the episode across the years behind me the more the truth of that fine saying gains upon my heart.

Let me suggest a really great question. Is it enough for a preacher to preach the truth? In a place where I was quite unknown, I turned into a church one day and enjoyed the rare luxury of hearing another man preach. But, much as I

appreciated the experience, I found, when I came out, that the preacher had started a rather curious line of thought. He was a very gracious man; it was a genuine pleasure to have seen and heard him. And yet there seemed to be a something lacking. The sermon was absolutely without surprise. Every sentence was splendidly true, and yet not a single sentence startled me. There was no sting in it. I seemed to have heard it all over and over and over again; I could even see what was coming. Surely it is the preacher's duty to give the truth such a setting, and present it in such a way, that the oldest truths will appear newer than the latest sensations. He must arouse me from my torpor; he must compel me to open my eyes and pull myself together; he must make me sit up and think. 'Keep up your surprise-power, my dear fellow,' said my companion that evening in the bush, speaking out of his long and rich experience.

'The pulpit,' he said, 'must never, never lose its power of startling people!' The preacher, that is to say, must keep up his stock of explosives. The Bishop of London declared the other day that the Church is suffering from too much 'dearly beloved brethren.' She would be better judiciously to mix it with a few bombshells.

And yet, after all, I suppose it was largely my own fault that the sermon of which I have spoken seemed to me to be so ineffective. There are tremendous astonishments in the Christian evangel which, however baldly stated, should fire my sluggish soul with wonder, and fill it with amazement. The fact that I listened so blandly shows that I have become blasé. I am like the soldier in the trenches who no longer notices the bursting shells about him. I am like the auditor who occupies a seat at the conjuring entertainment, but has fallen asleep just as the thing is getting sensational.

In one of his latest books, Harold Begbie gives us a fine picture of John Wyclif reading from his own translation of the Bible to those who had never before listened to those stately and wonderful cadences. The hearers look at each other with wide-open eyes, and are almost incredulous in their astonishment. Every sentence is a sensation. They can scarcely believe their ears. They are like the baby on the floor. The simplicities startle them. If only I can renew the romance of my childhood, and recapture that early sense of wonder, the world will suddenly become as marvellous as the prince's palace in the fairy stories, and the ministry of the Church will become life's most sensational sensation.

24

II

STRAWBERRIES AND CREAM

STRAWBERRIES are delicious, as every one knows. ‘It may be,’ says Dr. Boteler, a quaint old English writer, ‘it may be that God could make a better berry than a strawberry, but most certainly He never did.’ Yes, strawberries are delicious; but I am not going to write about strawberries. Cream is also very nice, very nice indeed; but nothing shall induce me to write about cream. I have promised myself a chapter, neither on *strawberries* nor on *cream*, but on *strawberries and cream*. The distinction, as I shall endeavour to show, is a vitally important one. Now the theme was suggested on this wise. I was walking through the city this afternoon, when I met a gentleman from whom, only this morning, I received an important letter. We shook hands, and were just plunging into the subject-matter of his letter when a tall policeman reminded us of the illegality of loitering on the pavement. Yet it was too hot to walk about.

25‘Come in here,’ my companion suggested, pointing to a café near by, ‘and have a cup of afternoon tea.’

‘No, thank you,’ I replied, ‘I had a cup not long ago.’

‘Well, strawberries and cream, then?’

The temptation was too strong for me; he had touched a vulnerable point; and I succumbed. The afternoon was very oppressive; the restaurant looked invitingly cool; a quiet corner among the ferns seemed to beckon us; and the strawberries and cream, daintily served, soon completed our felicity.

Strawberries and cream! It is an odd conjunction when you come to think of it. The gardener goes off to his well-kept beds and brings back a big basket, lined with cabbage leaves, and filled to the brim with fine fresh strawberries. The maid slips off to the dairy and returns with a jug of rich and foamy cream. To what different realms they belong! The gardener lives, moves, and has his being in one world; the milkmaid spends her life in quite another. The cream belongs to the animal kingdom; the strawberries to the vegetable kingdom. But here, on these pretty little plates in the fern-grot are the gardener’s world and the milkmaid’s world beautifully blended. Here, on the table before us, are the

26

animal and the vegetable kingdom perfectly supplementing and completing each other. It is another phase of the wonder which suggested the nursery rhyme:

Flour of England, fruit of Spain,
Met together in a shower of rain.

Empires confront each other within the compass of a plum-pudding; continents salute each other in a tea-cup; the great subdivisions of the universe greet each other in a plate of strawberries and cream. What *ententes*, and *rapprochements*, and international conferences take place every day among the plates and dishes that adorn our tables!

It is a thousand pities that we have no authentic record of the discoverer of strawberries and cream. For ages the world enjoyed its strawberries, and for ages the world enjoyed its cream. But strawberries and cream was an unheard-of mixture. Then there dawned one of the great days of this planet's little story, a day that ought to have been carefully recorded and annually commemorated. History, as it is written, betrays a sad lack of perspective. It has no true sense of proportion. There came a fateful day on which some audacious dietetic adventurer took the cream that had been brought from his dairy, poured it on the strawberries that had been plucked from his garden, and discovered with delight that the whole was greater than the sum of all its parts. Yet of that memorable day the historian takes no notice. With the amours of kings, the intrigues of courts, and the squabbles of statesmen he has filled countless pages; yet only in very rare instances have these things contributed to the sum of human happiness anything comparable to the pleasures afforded by strawberries and cream. We have never done justice to the intellectual prowess of the men who first tried some of the mixtures that are to us a matter of course. Salt and potatoes, for example. I heard the other day of a little girl who defined salt as 'that which makes potatoes very nasty if you have none of it with them.' It is not a bad definition. But, surely, something is due to the memory of the man who discovered that the insipidity might be removed, and the potato be made a staple article of diet, by the simple addition of a pinch of salt! Then, too, there are the men who found out that horseradish is the thing to eat with roast beef; that apple sauce lends an added charm to a joint of pork; that red currant jelly enhances the flavour of jugged hare; that mint sauce blends beautifully with lamb; that boiled mutton is all the better for caper sauce; and that butter is the natural corollary of bread. 'The man of superior intellect,' says Tennyson, in vindication of his weakness for boiled beef and new potatoes,

‘knows what is good to eat.’ And George Gissing in a reference to these selfsame new potatoes, adds a corroborative word. ‘Our cook,’ he says, ‘when dressing these new potatoes, puts into the saucepan a sprig of mint. This is genius. Not otherwise could the flavour of the vegetable be so perfectly, yet so delicately, emphasized. The mint is there, and we know it; yet our palate knows only the young potato.’ There have been thousands of statues erected to the memory of men who have done far less to promote the happiness of mankind than did any of these. Every great invention is preceded by thousands and thousands of fruitless attempts. Think of the nauseous conglomerations that must have been tried and tasted, not without a shudder, before these happy combinations were at length launched upon the world. Think of the jeers of derision that greeted the first announcement of these preposterous concoctions! Imagine the guffaws when a man told his companions that he had been eating red currant jelly with jugged hare! Imagine the nameless dietetic atrocities that that ingenious epicure must have perpetrated before he hit upon his ultimate triumph! I have not the initiative to attempt it. I lack the splendid daring of the pioneer. In a thousand years’ time men will smack their lips over all kinds of mixtures of which I should shudder to hear. I am content to go on eating this by itself and that by itself, just as for ages men were content to eat strawberries by themselves and cream by itself, never dreaming that this thing and that thing as much belong to each other as do strawberries and cream.

Now this genius for mixing things is one of the hall-marks of our humanity. Strawberry leaves are part of the crest of a duchess; but strawberries and cream might be regarded as a suitable crest for the race. Man is an animal, but he is more than an animal; and he proves his superiority by mixing things. His poorer relatives of the brute creation never do it. They eat strawberries, and they are fond of cream; but it would never have occurred to any one of them to mix the strawberries with the cream. An animal, even the most intelligent and domesticated animal, will eat one thing and then he will eat another thing; but the idea of mixing the first thing with the second thing before eating either never enters into his comprehension.

The strawberries and cream represent, therefore, in a pleasant and attractive way, our human genius for mixing things. There is nothing surprising about it. Indeed, it is eminently fitting and characteristic. For we are ourselves such extraordinary medlies. Let any man think his way back across the ages, and mark the ingredients that have woven themselves into his make-up, and he will not be surprised at the extraordinary miscellany of passions that he sometimes discovers within the recesses of his own soul. ‘I remember,’ Rudyard Kipling

makes the Thames to say:

... I remember, like yesterday,
The earliest Cockney who came my way,
When he pushed through the forest that lined the Strand,
With paint on his face and a club in his hand.
He was death to feather and fin and fur,
He trapped my beavers at Westminster,
He netted my salmon, he hunted my deer,
He killed my herons off Lambeth Pier;
He fought his neighbour with axes and swords,
Flint or bronze, at my upper fords,
While down at Greenwich for slaves and tin
The tall Phoenician ships stole in.

Men of the island caves mixed their blood with men of the great continental forests. It was an extraordinary agglomeration.

Norseman and Negro and Gaul and Greek
Drank with the Britons in Barking Creek,
And the Romans came with a heavy hand,
And bridged and roaded and ruled the land,
And the Roman left and the Danes blew in—
And that's where your history books begin!

Is it any wonder that sometimes I feel, mingling with the emotions inspired by a recent communion service, the savagery of some long-forgotten caveman ancestor? Civilization is so very young, and barbarism was so very old, that it is not surprising that I occasionally hark back involuntarily to the days to which my blood was most accustomed. I am an odd mixture considered from any point of view. 'There are very few human actions,' says Mark Rutherford, 'of which it can be said that this or that, taken by itself, produced them. With our inborn tendency to abstract, to separate mentally the concrete into factors which do not exist separately, we are always disposed to assign causes which are too simple. Nothing in nature is propelled or impeded by one force acting alone. There is no such thing, save in the brain of the mathematician. I see no reason why even motives diametrically opposite should not unite in one resulting deed.' Of course not! It is my duty, that is to say, to take myself to pieces as little as possible. It does not really matter how much of my present temperament I got from the communion service, and how much I got from the caveman with the club in his hand. Here I am, a present entity, with the caveman, the tribesman, the Roman, and the Dane all mixed up together in me;

and it is my business, instead of taking the complex mechanism to pieces, to make it, as a united and harmonious whole, do the work for which I have been sent into the world. I am not to talk one moment of the strawberries on my plate, and then, in the next breath, to speak of the cream. It is not so much a matter of strawberries *and* cream as of *strawberriesandcream*.

There is, I fancy, a good deal in that. We are too fond of taking the cream from the strawberries, and the strawberries from the cream. I have on my plate here, not two things, but one thing; and that one thing is *strawberriesandcream*. One of the oldest and one of the silliest mistakes that men have made is their everlasting inclination to divide *strawberries-and-cream* into strawberries *and* cream. Think of the toothless chatter concerning the sexes. Have men or women done most for the world? Is the husband or is the wife most essential to the home? It will be quite time enough to attempt to answer such ridiculous questions when the waitresses at the restaurants begin to ask us whether we will have strawberries *or* cream! In the beginning, we are told, God created man in His own image, male and female created He them. It is not so much a matter of male *and* female: it is *maleandfemale*, just as it is *strawberriesandcream*. The thing takes other forms. Which do you prefer—summer or winter? As though we should appreciate summer if we never had a winter, or winter if we never had a summer! Is song or speech the most effective evangelistic agency? As though there would be anything to sing about if the gospel had never been preached! Or anything worth preaching if the gospel had never set anybody singing! It is so very ridiculous to try to separate the strawberries from the cream. Miss Rosaline Masson, in commenting upon Wordsworth's beautiful sonnet on Westminster Bridge, says that it is the outcome of Dorothy Wordsworth's divine power of perception and her brother's divine power of expression. But who would dare to take the sonnet to pieces and say how much is Dorothy's, and how much is William's? It is Dorothy's and William's. It is strawberries and cream.

I always feel extremely sorry for the man who tries to move a vote of thanks at the close of a pleasant and successful function. Not for worlds could I be persuaded to attempt it. It is a most difficult and complicated business, and I should collapse utterly. It consists in taking the whole performance to pieces and allocating the praise. So much for the decorators; so much for the singers; so much for the elocutionists; so much for the speakers; so much for the chairman; so much for the pianist; so much for the secretary; and so on. To me it would be like furnishing a statistical table on leaving the restaurant showing how much of my enjoyment I owed to the strawberries and how much to the

cream. Dissection is not in my line. I only know that I thoroughly enjoyed the *strawberriesandcream*.

In selecting strawberries and cream as emblems of the mixed things of life, I fancy that my choice is a particularly happy one. That cream must be mixed with other foods goes without saying; and in Shakespeare's most notable reference to strawberries it is the same peculiarity that seems to have impressed him. He has a very pleasing allusion to the facility with which the strawberry mixes with other things. The passage occurs at the beginning of *King Henry the Fifth*. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely are discussing the new king. They are astonished at the change which has overtaken him since his accession. As a prince he was wild and dissolute, and broke his father's heart. But, as soon as he became king, he instantly sent for his boon-companions, told them that he intended by God's good grace to live an entirely new life, and begged them to follow his example. As the Archbishop of Canterbury puts it:

The breath no sooner left his father's body
But that his wildness, mortified in him,
Seemed to die, too. Yea, at that very moment.
Consideration like an angel came,
And whipped the offending Adam out of him.
Leaving his body as a paradise,
To envelop and contain celestial spirits.

To which the Bishop of Ely replies:

The strawberry grows underneath the nettle,
And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best,
Neighboured by fruit of baser quality.

It is a suggestive passage, considered from any point of view We live mixed lives in a mixed world, and we do not come upon the strawberries by themselves or all at once. We may find strawberries to-morrow where we can discover nothing but stinging-nettles to-day 'Madcap Harry' was not the only son whose life at first yielded nothing but nettles that stung and lacerated his father's soul, and yet afterwards produced strawberries that were the delight, not only of the Church, but of the world at large.

III

THE CONQUEST OF THE CRAGS

I WAS strolling one still evening along a lonely New Zealand shore, when I made a grim discovery that has often set me thinking. I had been walking along the wet and crinkled sands, the tide being out, and had amused myself with the shells and the seaweed that had been left lying about by the receding waters. There is always a peculiar charm about such a stroll. It holds such infinite possibilities. One seems to be exploiting the surprise-packet of the universe. Jane Barlow, in her *Bogland Studies*, makes one of her characters say:

What use is one's life widout chances? Ye've always a chance wid the tide;
For ye never can tell what 'twill take in its head to strew round on the shore;
Maybe driftwood, or grand bits of boards that come handy for splicing an oar,
Or a crab skytin' back o'er the shine o' the wet; sure, whatever ye've found,
It's a sort of diversion them whiles when ye've starvin' and strelin' around.

Absorbed in so delightful an occupation the passage of time escaped my attention, until suddenly I noticed that twilight was rapidly falling, and I thought of my return. Before retracing my steps, however, I sat down for a moment's rest among the sand-dunes. The possibility of making a discovery among those arid mounds did not occur to me. But, as I sat absent-mindedly poking the soft sand with my stick, I suddenly struck something hard. I proceeded to dig it out, and found a couple of human skulls. They adorn the top shelf of my book-case before me at this moment. They always look down upon me as I write. I often catch myself leaning back in my chair, staring up at them, and trying to read their secret. Who were they, I wonder, these two bony companions of mine? Two Maoris finishing, among the lonely dunes, their last fierce fatal feud? Two travellers, hopelessly lost, who threw themselves down here to die? A couple of sailors, whose ship had struck the cruel reefs out yonder, and whose bodies were tossed up here by the pitiless waves? A pair of lovers trapped by the treacherous tide? I cannot tell. What a tantalizing mystery they seem to hold, as they grin down at me from this high shelf of mine! It is part of the ghostly sense of mystery that always haunts the sea and its tragedies.

On the land, when disaster occurs, all the wreckage is left to tell its own tale; but on the ocean Fate instantly obliterates all her tracks. The magnificent vessel lurches over, plunges with a roar into the deep, and the waves close over the frightful ruin. Compared with the silence of the sea, the Sphinx is voluble. The deep, dark, icy ocean-bed guards its secrets, and guards them well.

Sometimes, however, it is more easy to read the riddle. Here in Tasmania, within easy reach of this quiet study of mine, there is a battle-field that I love to visit. It extends for miles and miles, and the whole place is strewn with the wreckage that tells of the titanic conflict. I do not mean that the place is littered with dead men's bones. It was a far finer and a far fiercer fight than men could have waged, and it lasted longer than any war recorded in the annals of history. It is the battle-field on which the land fought the sea. It is a rocky and precipitous coast. Sometimes I like to walk along the top of the cliff, and look down upon the pile of massive boulders that lie tumbled in picturesque and bewildering confusion about the beach below. Or, at low tide, I like to make my way among those monstrous piles of broken rock that lie, higgledy-piggledy, all along the shore. What a fight it was, day and night, summer and winter, year in and year out, age after age! Occasionally the attack slackened down, and the rippling waters merely lapped softly against the rocks. But there was no real truce. The sea was only gathering up its forces in secret for the majestic assault that was to come. Then the great breakers came rushing in, like regiments of cavalry in full career, and each huge wave hurled itself upon the crags with such fury that the spray dashed up sky high.

It was a titanic struggle, and the waters won. That is the extraordinary thing —the waters won. The water seems so soft, so yielding, so fluid, and the rocks seem so impregnable, so adamantine, so immutable. Yet the waters always win. The land makes no impression on the sea; but the sea grinds the land to powder. I know that the sea is often spoken of as the natural emblem of all that is fickle and changeful; but it is a pure illusion. There are, of course superficial variations of tone and tint and temper; but, as compared with the kaleidoscopic changes that overtake the land, the ocean is eternally and everywhere the same. It, and not the rocks, is the symbol of immutability. 'Look at the sea!' exclaims Max Pemberton, in *Red Morn*. 'How I love it! I like to think that those great rolling waves will go leaping by a thousand years from now. There is never any change about the sea. You never come back to it and say, "How it's changed!" or "Who's been building here?" or "Where's the old place I loved?" No; it is always the same. I suppose if one stood here for a million years the sea would not be different. You're quite sure of it, and it never disappoints you.' The land,

on the contrary, is for ever changing. Man is always working his transformations, and Nature is toiling to the same end.

‘When the Romans came to England,’ says Frank Buckland, the naturalist, ‘Julius Caesar probably looked upon an outline of cliff very different from that which holds our gaze to-day. First there comes a sun-crack along the edge of the cliff; the rain-water gets into the crack; then comes the frost. The rain-water in freezing expands, and by degrees wedges off a great slice of chalk cliff; down this tumbles into the water; and Neptune sets his great waves to work to tidy up the mess.’ No man can know the veriest rudiments of geology without recognizing that it is the land, and not the sea, that is constantly changing. We may visit some historic battle-field to-day, and, finding it a network of bustling streets and crowded alleys, may hopelessly fail to repeople the scene with the battalions that wheeled and charged, wavered and rallied, there in the brave days of old. But when, from the deck of a steamer, I surveyed the blue and tossing waters off Cape Trafalgar, I knew that I was gazing upon the scene just as it presented itself to the eye of Nelson on the day of his immortal victory and glorious death more than a century ago.

Now, beneath this triumph of the ocean—the triumph that leaves the land in fragments whilst the sea itself sustains no injury—there lies a deeper significance than at first appears. Job saw it. No elusive secret, lurking in the universe around him, escaped his restless eye. ‘The waters wear the stones!’ he cried, and it was a shout of victory that rose from his heart when he said it. ‘The waters wear the stones,’ he exclaimed, ‘and Thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth.’ It is the death-knell of the material. It is the triumph of the eternal. A little child looks upon the great granite cliffs, and it seems impossible that the lapping waves can ever pound them to pieces. But they do. And in the same way, Job says, man seems so impregnable, and the world so mighty, that it appears a thing incredible that God can finally prevail. But He shall. The quiet waters conquer the frowning cliffs at length. The walls of Jericho fall down. This is the victory that overcometh the world.

And so here on this battle-field where the land and the sea fought for mastery, I find Job sitting, and he interprets for me the paean that the waves are singing. It is the laughter of their triumph. ‘The waters wear away the stones.’ That was the heartening message that gave to Spain one of her very greatest teachers. St. Isidore of Seville was only a boy at the time. He found his lessons hard to learn. Study was a drudgery, and he was tempted to give up. The huge obstacles against which he, like the waves at the base of the cliff, was beating out his life seemed adamantine. So he ran away from school. But in the heat of

the day he sat down to rest beside a little spring that trickled over a rock. He noticed that the water fell in drops, and only one drop at a time; yet those drops had worn away a large stone. It reminded him of the tasks he had forsaken, and he returned to his desk. Diligent application overcame his dullness, and made him one of the first scholars of his time. He never forgot the drops of water, dripping, dripping, dripping on the rock that they were conquering. ‘Those drops of water,’ says his biographer, ‘gave to Spain a brilliant historian, and to the Church a famous doctor.’

It is always the gentle things of life that conquer us. ‘The moving waters’—to quote Keats’ beautiful phrase—

> The moving waters at their priest-like task
> Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores’

wear down the towering cliffs along the coast. It is Aesop’s fable of the North Wind and the sun over again. The North Wind, with its violence and bluster, only makes the traveller button his coat the tighter. It is the genial warmth of the sun that makes him take it off. It is always by gentleness that the adamantine world is mastered. That is one of life’s most lovely secrets. We are not ruled as much as we think by parliaments and commandments and enactments. The proportion of our lives that is governed by such things is very small. But the proportion that is dominated by gentler and more winsome forces is very great. The voices that sway us with a regal authority are soft and tender voices, the voices of those whose genial goodness compels us to love them. The imperial tones to which we capitulate unconditionally are very rarely stern official tones. Who does not remember how, in *The Rosary*, the Hon. Jane Champion asks Garth Dalmain why he does not marry? And Garth tells her of old Margery, his childhood’s friend and nurse, now his housekeeper and general mender and tender—old Margery, with her black satin apron, lawn kerchief, and lavender ribbons. ‘No doubt, Miss Champion, it will seem absurd to you that I should sit here on the duchess’s lawn and confess that I have been held back from proposing marriage to the women I most admired because of what would have been my old nurse’s opinion of them.’ Yet so it invariably is. Our servants are often our masters. Life’s loftiest authorities never derive their sanctions from rank, office, or station. The soul has enthronements and coronations of its own. A little child often leads it. A Carpenter becomes its king. Out of Nazareth comes the Conqueror of the World. The pure and cleansing waters wear down the giant crags at the last.

But with purity and gentleness must go patience. The lapping waters do not

reduce the rocky strata at a blow. It is always by means of patience that the finest conquests are won. Who that has read Jack London's *Call of the Wild* will ever forget the great fight at the end of the book between Buck, the dog hero, and the huge bull-moose? 'Three hundredweight more than half a ton he weighed, the old bull; he had lived a long, strong life, full of fight and struggle, and at the end he faced death at the teeth of a creature whose head did not reach beyond his great knuckled knees!' How was it done? 'There is a patience in the wild,' Jack London says, 'a patience dogged, tireless, persistent as life itself'; and it was by means of this patience that Buck brought down his stately antlered prey. 'Night and day, Buck never left him, never gave him a moment's rest, never permitted him to browse on the leaves of the trees or the shoots of the young birch or willow. Nor did he give the old bull one single opportunity to slake his burning thirst in the slender, trickling streams they crossed.' For four days Buck hung pitilessly at the huge beast's heels, and at the end of the fourth day he pulled the bull-moose down. Buck looked so little, but he wore the monarch out. The waters seem so feeble, but they beat the rocks to powder. It is thus that the foolish things of this world always confound the wise; the weak things conquer the mighty; and the things that are not bring to naught the things that are.

46

IV

LINOLEUM

TRUE love is never utilitarian. I am well aware that, in novels and in plays, the fair heroine considerately falls in love with the brave man who, at a critical moment, saves her from a watery grave or from the lurid horrors of a burning building. It is very good of the lady in the novel. I admire the gratitude which prompts her romantic affection, and, nine times out of ten, my judgement cordially approves her taste. I know, too, that, in fiction, the sick or wounded hero invariably falls desperately in love with the devoted nurse whose patient and untiring attention ensures his recovery. It is very good of the hero. Again I say, I admire his gratitude and almost invariably endorse his choice. But it must be distinctly understood that this sort of thing is strictly confined to novels and theatricals. In real life, men and women do not fall in love out of gratitude. As a matter of fact, I am much more likely to fall in love with somebody for whom I have done something than with somebody who has done something for me.

47I was talking the other day with a nurse in a children's hospital. It is a heartbreaking business, she told me. 'You get into the way of nursing them, and comforting them, and playing with them, and mothering them, until you feel that they belong to you. And then, just as you have come to love the little thing as though he were your own, out he goes. And he always goes out with his father or his mother, clapping his hands for very joy at the excitement of going home, and you are left with a big lump in your throat, and perhaps a tear in your eye, at the thought that you will never see him again!' Clearly, therefore, we do not fall in love as a matter of gratitude. The people who cling to us and depend upon us are much more likely to win our hearts than the people who have placed us under an obligation to them. If, instead of telling us that the heroine fell in love with the man who had saved her from drowning, the novelist had told us that the man who risked his life by plunging into the river fell in love with the white and upturned face as he laid it gently on the bank; or if, instead of telling us that the patient fell in love with the nurse, he had told us that the nurse fell in love with the patient upon whom she had lavished such beautiful devotion, he would have been much more true to nature and to real

48

life. It is indisputable, of course, that, the rescuer having fallen in love with the rescued, she may soon discover his secret, and, since love begets love, reciprocate his affection. It is equally true that, the nurse having conceived so tender a passion for her patient, he may soon read the meaning of the light in her eye and of the tone in her voice, and feel towards her as she first felt towards him. But that is quite another matter, and is beside our point at present. Just now, I am only concerned with challenging the novelist's unwarrantable assumption that we fall in love out of gratitude. We do nothing of the kind. Love, I repeat, is never utilitarian. We may fall hopelessly in love with a thing that is of very little use to us; and we may feel no sentimental attractions at all towards a thing that is almost indispensable. If any man dares to dispute these conclusions, I shall simply produce a roll of linoleum in support of my arguments, and he will be promptly crushed beneath the weight of argument that the linoleum will furnish.

The linoleum is the most conspicuous feature of the domestic establishment. It is impertinent, self-assertive, and loud. If you visit a house in which there is a linoleum, the thing rushes at you, and you see it even before the front door has been opened. Every minister who spends his afternoons in knocking at people's doors knows exactly what I mean. The very sound of the knock tells you a good deal. Such sounds are of three kinds. There is the echoing and reverberating knock that tells you of bare boards; there is the dead and sombre thud that tells of linoleum on the floor; and there is the softened and muffled tap that tells of a hall well carpeted. And so I say that the linoleum—if there be one—rushes at you, and you seem to see it even before the door has been opened. Perhaps it is this immodesty on its part that prevents your liking it. It is always with the coy, shy, modest things that we fall in love most readily.

But however that may be, the fact remains. Since this queer old world of ours began, men and women have fallen in love with all sorts of strange things; but there is no record of any man or woman yet having really fallen in love with a roll of linoleum. Of everything else about the house you get very fond. I can understand a man shedding tears when his arm-chair has to go to the sale-room or the scrap-heap. Robert Louis Stevenson once told the story of his favourite chair until he moved his schoolboy audience to tears! And everybody knows how Dickens makes you laugh and cry at the drollery and pathos with which, in all his books, he invests chairs, tables, clocks, pictures, and every other article of furniture. I fancy I should feel life to be less worth living if I were deprived of some of the household odds and ends with which all my felicity seems to be mysteriously associated. But I cannot conceive of myself as yielding to even a

momentary sensation of tenderness over the sale, destruction, or exchange of any of the linoleums. I feel perfectly certain that neither Stevenson nor Dickens would ever have felt an atom of sentiment concerning linoleum. Yet why? Few things about the house are more serviceable. I could point offhand to a hundred things no one of which has earned its right to a place in the home one-hundredth part as nobly as has the linoleum. Yet I am very fond of each of those hundred things, whilst I am not at all fond of the linoleum. I appreciate it, but I do not love it. So there it is! Said I not truly that love is never utilitarian? We grow fond of things because we grow fond of things; we never grow fond of things simply because they are of use to us.

But we cannot in decency let the matter rest at that. There must be some reason for the failure of the linoleum to stir my affections. Why does it alone, among my household goods and chattels, kindle no warmth within my soul? The linoleum is both pretty and useful; what more can I want? Many things pretty, but not useful, have swept me off my feet. Many things useful, but not pretty, have captivated my heart. And more than once things neither pretty nor useful have completely enslaved me. Yet here is the linoleum, both pretty and useful, and I feel for it no fondness whatsoever; I remain as cold as ice, and as hard as adamant. Why is it? To begin with, I fancy the pattern has something to do with it. I do not now refer to any particular pattern; but to all the linoleum patterns that were ever designed. Those endless squares and circles and diamonds and stars! Could anything be more repelling? Here, for instance, on the linoleum, I find a star. I know at once that if I look I shall see hundreds of similar stars. They will all be in perfectly straight lines, not one a quarter of an inch out of its place. They will all be mathematically equidistant; they will be of exactly the same size, of identically the same colour, and their angles will all point in precisely the same direction. If the stars in the firmament above us were arranged on the same principle, they would drive us mad. The beauty of it is that, *there*, one star differeth from another star in glory. But on the linoleum they do nothing of the sort.

Or perhaps the pattern is a floral one. It thinks to coax me into a feeling that I am in the garden among the roses, the rhododendrons, or the chrysanthemums. But it is a hopeless failure. Whoever saw roses, rhododendrons, or chrysanthemums, all of exactly the same size, of precisely the same colour, and hanging in rows at mathematically identical levels? The beauty of the garden is that having looked at *this* rose, I am the more eager to see *that* one; having admired *this* chrysanthemum, I am the more curious to mark the variety presented by *the next*. No two are precisely the same. And because this infinite

diversity is the essential charm both of the heavens above and of the earth beneath, I am shocked and repelled by the monotony of the pattern on the linoleum. In the old days it was customary to plaster the walls, even of sick-rooms, with papers of patterns equally pronounced, and many a poor patient was tortured almost to death by the glaring geometrical abominations. The doctor said that the sufferer was to be kept perfectly quiet; yet the pattern on the wall is allowed to scream at him and shout at him from night until morning, and from morning until night. He has counted those awful stars or roses, perpendicularly, horizontally, diagonally, from right to left, from left to right, from top to bottom, and from bottom to top, until the hideous monstrosities are reproduced in frightful duplicate upon the fevered tissues of his throbbing brain. He may close his eyes, but he sees them still. It was a form of torture worthy of an inquisitor-general. The pattern on the linoleum is happily not quite so bad. When we are ill we do not see it; and when we are well we may to some extent avoid it. Not altogether; for even if we do not look at it, we have an uncanny feeling that it is there. Between the hearthrug and the table I catch sight of the bright flaunting head of a scarlet poppy, or of the tossing petals of a huge chrysanthemum, and my imagination instantly flashes to my mind the horrible impression of tantalizing rows of exactly similar blossoms running off with mathematical precision in every conceivable direction.

For some reason or other we instinctively recoil from these monotonous regularities. I once heard a friend observe that the average woman would rather marry a man whose life was painfully irregular than a man whose life was painfully regular. It may have been an over-statement of the case; but there is something in it. We fall in love with good people, and we fall in love with bad people; but with the man who is ‘too proper,’ and the woman who is ‘too straight-laced,’ we very, very rarely fall in love. It is the problem of Tennyson’s ‘Maud.’ As a girl Maud was irregular—and lovable.

Maud, with her venturous climbings and tumbles and childish escapes,
Maud, the delight of the village, the ringing joy of the Hall,
Maud, with her sweet purse-mouth when my father dangled the grapes,
Maud, the beloved of my mother, the moon-faced darling of all.

But later on Maud was regular—and as unattractive as linoleum.

... Maud, she has neither savour nor salt,
But a cold and clear-cut face, as I found when her carriage passed,
Perfectly beautiful: let it be granted her: where is the fault?
All that I saw (for her eyes were downcast, not to be seen)
Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,

Dead perfection, no more.

Shall I be told that this is high doctrine, and hard to bear, this doctrine of the lovableness of irregularity? I think not. Towering above all our biographies, as snowclad heights tower above dusty little molehills, there stands the life-story of One who, alone among the sons of men, was altogether good. It is the most charming and the most varied life-story that has ever been written since this little world began. Its lovely deeds and graceful speech, its tender pathos and its awful tragedy, have won the hearts of men all over the world, and all down the ages. But find monotony there if you can! It is like a sky full of stars or a field of fairest flowers. The life that repels, as the linoleum repels, by the very severity of its regularity, has something wrong with it somewhere.

If I have outraged the sensibilities of any well-meaning champion of a geometrical and mathematical and linoleum-like regularity, let me hasten to conciliate him! I know that even regularity—the regularity of the linoleum pattern—may have its advantages. Dr. George MacDonald, in *Robert Falconer*, says that ‘there is a well-authenticated story of a notorious convict who was reformed by entering, in one of the colonies, a church where the matting along the aisle was of the same pattern as that in the church to which he had gone with his mother as a boy.’ Bravo! It is pleasant, extremely pleasant, to find that even monotony has its compensations. Let me but get to know my ‘too proper’ and ‘straight-laced’ friends a little better, and I shall doubtless discover even there a few redeeming features.

But, for all that, the linoleum is cold; and we do not fall in love with cold things. A volcano is a much more dangerous affair than an iceberg; but it is much more easy to fall in love with the things that make you shudder than with the things that make you shiver. That was the trouble with Maud, she was so chilly and chilling; her ‘cold and clear-cut face, faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null!’ And that is precisely the trouble with every system of religion, morality, or philosophy—save one—that has ever been presented to the minds of men. Plato and Aristotle and Marcus Aurelius were splendid, simply splendid; but they were frigid, frigid as Maud, and their counsels of perfection could never have enchained my heart. Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed—the stars of the East—were wonderful, but oh, so cold! I turn from these icy regularities to the lovely life I have already mentioned. And, to use Whittier’s expressive word, it is ‘warm.’

Yes, warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;

And faith has yet its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

‘*Warm*’ ... ‘*love*’ ... here are words that touch my soul to tears. ‘We love Him because *He first loved us*.’ The monotony and frigidity of the linoleum have given way to the beauty and the brightness of flowery fields all bathed in summer sunshine.

V

THE EDITOR

I APPROACH my present theme with considerable diffidence, for reasons obvious and for reasons obscure. For one thing, I was for some years an editor myself, and I cannot satisfy myself that the experiment was even a moderate success. Everything went splendidly, so far as I was concerned, as long as I wrote everything myself; but I was terribly pestered by other people. They worried me year in and year out, morning, noon, and night. They would insist on sending me manuscripts that I had neither the grace to accept nor the courage to decline. They wrote the most learned treatises, the most pathetic stories, and the most affecting little sonnets. The latter, they explained, were for Poet's Corner. They actually deluged me with letters, intended for publication, dealing with all sorts of subjects in which I took not the slightest glimmer of interest. They sometimes even presumed, in some carping or captious way, to criticize or review things that I had myself written—as though such things were open to question! At other times they wrote to applaud the sentiments I had expressed

—as though I needed their corroboration! They were an awful nuisance. The stupid thing was only a monthly, and how they imagined that there would be any room for *their* contributions, by the time I had been a whole month writing, passes my comprehension. Then came the awakening, and it was a rude one. I suddenly realized that I was a fraud, a delusion, and a snare. I was not an editor at all. I was simply masquerading, playing a great game of bluff and make-believe. As a matter of fact, I was nothing more than an objectionably garrulous contributor who had gained possession of the editor's sanctum, usurped the editor's authority, and commandeered the editor's chair. I felt so ashamed of myself that I precipitately fled, and, although I have several times since been invited to assume editorial responsibilities, I have shown my profound respect for journalism by politely but firmly declining. It does not at all follow that, because a man can make a few bricks, he can therefore build a mansion. A chemist may be very clever at making up prescriptions, but that does not prove his ability to prescribe.

During the years to which I have referred, that paper really had no editor. An

editor would have done three things. He would have written a few wise words himself. He would have pitilessly repressed my unconscionable volubility. And he would have given the public the benefit of some of those carefully prepared contributions which I, with savage satisfaction, hurled into the waste-paper basket. It would have been a good thing for the paper if the editorials had been so few and so brief that people could have been reasonably expected to read them. They would then have attached to them the gravity and authority that such contributions should normally carry. And it would have been good for the world in general, and for me in particular, if liberal quantities of my manuscript had been substitutionally sacrificed in redemption of some of those rolls of paper, whose destruction I now deplore, which I consigned to limbo with so light a heart. Since then I have had a fairly wide experience of editors, and the years have increased my respect. ‘O Lord,’ an up-country suppliant once exclaimed at the week-night prayer-meeting, ‘O Lord, the more I sees of other people the more I likes myself!’ I do not quite share the good man’s feeling, at any rate so far as editors are concerned. The more I have seen of the ways of other editors the less am I pleased with the memory of my own attempt. The way in which these other editors have treated my own manuscript makes me blush for very shame as I remember my editorial intolerance of such packages. Very occasionally an editor has found it necessary to delete some portion of my contribution, and, nine times out of ten, I have admired the perspicacity which detected the excrescence and strengthened the whole by removing the part. I say nine times out of ten; but I hint at the tenth case in no spirit of resentment or bitterness. I am young yet, and the years may easily teach me that, even in the instances that still seem doubtful to me, I am under a deep and lasting obligation to the editorial surgery.

The editor is the emblem of all those potent, elusive, invisible forces that control our human destinies. We are clearly living in an edited world. We may not always agree with the editor; it would be passing strange if we did. We may see lots of things admitted that we, had we been editor, would have vigorously excluded. The venom of the cobra, the cruelty of the wolf, the anguish of a sickly babe, and the flaunting shame of the street corner; had I been editor I should have ruthlessly suppressed all these contributions. But my earlier experience of editorship haunts my memory to warn me. I was too fond of rejecting things in those days. I was too much attached to the waste-paper basket. And I have been sorry for it ever since. And perhaps when I have lived a few aeons longer, and have had experience of more worlds than one, I shall feel ashamed of my present inclination to doubt the editor’s wisdom. Knowing

as little as I know, I should certainly have rejected these contributions with scorn and impatience. The fangs of the viper, the teeth of the crocodile, and all things hideous and hateful, I should have intolerantly excluded. And, some ages later, with the experience of a few millenniums and the knowledge of many worlds to guide me, I should have lamented my folly, even as I now deplore my old editorial exclusiveness.

And, on the other hand, we sometimes catch a glimpse of the editor's waste-paper basket, and the revelation is an astounding one. The waste of the world is terrific. And among these rejected manuscripts I see some most exquisitely beautiful things. The other day, not far from here, a snake bit a little girl and killed her. Now here was a curious freak of editorship! On the editor's table there lay two manuscripts. There was the snake—a loathsome, scaly brute, with wicked little eyes and venomous fangs, a thing that made your flesh creep to look at it. And there was the little girl, a sweet little thing with curly hair and soft blue eyes, a thing that you could not see without loving. Had I been there, I should have tried to kill the snake and save the child. That is to say, I should have accepted the child-manuscript, and rejected the snake-manuscript. But the editor does exactly the opposite. The snake-manuscript is accepted; the horrid thing glides through the bush at this moment as a recognized part of the scheme of the universe. The child-manuscript is rejected; it is thrown away; have we not seen it, like a crumpled poem, in the editor's waste-paper basket? How differently I should have acted had I been editor! And then, when I afterwards reviewed my editorship, as I to-day review that other editorship of mine, I should have seen that I was wrong. And that reflection makes me very thankful that I am not the editor. We shall yet come to see, in spite of all present appearances to the contrary, that the editor adopted the kindest, wisest, best course with each of the manuscripts presented. We shall see

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
  That not one life shall be destroyed,
  Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
  That not a moth with vain desire
  Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

Everybody feels at liberty to criticize the Editor; but, depend upon it, when all the information is before us that is before Him, we shall see that our paltry

judgement was very blind. And we shall recognize with profound admiration that we have been living in a most skilfully edited world.

For, after all, that is the point. The Editor knows so much more than I do. He has eyes and ears in the ends of the earth. His sanctum seems so remote from everything, and yet it is an observatory from which He beholds all the drama of the world's great throbbing life. When I was a boy I was very fond of a contrivance that was called a camera-obscura. I usually found it among the attractions of a seaside town. You paid a penny, entered a room, and sat down beside a round white table. The operator followed, and closed the door. The place was then in total darkness; you could not see your hand before you. It seemed incredible that in this black hole one could get a clearer view of all that was happening in the neighbourhood than was possible out in the sunlight. Yet, as soon as the lens above you was opened, the whole scene appeared like a moving coloured photograph on the white table. The waves breaking on the beach; the people strolling on the promenade; everything was faithfully depicted there. Not a dog could wag his tail but there, in the darkness, you saw him do it. An observer who watched you enter, and saw the door close after you, could be certain that now, for awhile, you were cut off from everything. And yet, as a fact, you only went into the darkness that you might see the whole scene in the more perfect perspective. What is this but the editor's sanctum? He enters it and, to all appearances, he leaves the world behind him as he does so. But it is a mere illusion. He enters it that he may see the whole world more clearly from its quiet seclusion.

In the same way, when I look round upon the world, and see the things that are allowed to happen, the Editor seems fearfully aloof. He seems to have gone into His heaven and closed the door behind Him. 'Clouds and darkness are round about Him,' says the psalmist. And if clouds and darkness are round about Him, is it any wonder that His vision is obscure? If clouds and darkness are round about Him, is it any wonder that He acts so strangely? If clouds and darkness are round about Him, is it any wonder that He rejects the child-manuscript and accepts the snake-manuscript? And yet, and yet; what if the darkness that envelops Him be the darkness of the camera-obscura? The psalmist declares that it is just because clouds and darkness are round about Him that righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His throne. It is a darkness that obscures Him from me without in the slightest degree concealing me from Him.

So there the editor sits in his seclusion. Nobody is so unobtrusive. You may read your paper, day after day, year in and year out, without even discovering

the editor’s name. You would not recognize him if you met him on the street. He may be young or old, tall or short, stout or slim, dark or fair, shabby or genteel—you have no idea. There is something strangely mysterious about the elusive individuality of that potent personage who every day draws so near to you, and yet of whom you know so little. One of these days I shall be invited to preach a special sermon to editors, and, in view of so dazzling an opportunity, I have already selected my text. I shall speak of that Ideal Servant of Humanity of whom the prophet tells. ‘He shall not scream, nor be loud, nor advertise Himself,’ Isaiah says, ‘but He shall never break a bruised reed nor quench a smouldering wick.’ That would make a great theme for a sermon to editors. There He is, so mysterious and yet so mighty; so remote and yet so omniscient; so invisible and yet so eloquent; so slow to obtrude Himself and yet so swift to discern any flickering spark of genius in others. He shall not advertise Himself nor quench a single smouldering wick.

There are two great moments in the history of a manuscript. The first is the moment of its preparation; the second is the moment of its appearance. And in between the two comes the editor’s censorship and revision. I said just now that I had noticed that editorial emendations are almost invariably distinct improvements. The article as it appears is better than the article as it left my hands. Now let me think. I spoke a moment ago of the child-manuscript and the snake-manuscript; but what about myself? Am not I too a manuscript, and shall I not also fall into the Editor’s hands? What about all the blots, and the smudges, and the erasures, and the alterations? Will they all be seen when I appear, *when I appear*? The Editor sees to that. The Editor will take care that none of the smudges on this poor manuscript shall be seen when I appear. ‘For we know,’ says one of the Editor’s most intimate friends, ‘we know that *when we appear* we shall be like Him—without spot or wrinkle or any such thing!’ It is a great thing to know that, before I appear, I shall undergo the Editor’s revision.

Charlie was very excited. His father was a sailor. The ship was homeward bound, and dad would soon be home. Thinking so intently and exclusively of his father’s coming, Charlie determined to carve out a ship of his own. He took a block of wood, and set to work. But the wood was hard, and the knife was blunt, and Charlie’s fingers were very small.

‘Dad may be here when you wake up in the morning, Charlie!’ his mother said to him one night.

That night Charlie took his ship and his knife to bed with him. When his father came at midnight Charlie was fast asleep, the blistered hand on the

counterpane not far from the knife and the ship. The father took the ship, and, with his own strong hand, and his own sharp knife, it was soon a trim and shapely vessel. Charlie awoke with the lark next morning, and, proudly seizing his ship, he ran to greet his father; and it is difficult to say which of the two was the more proud of it. It is an infinite comfort to know that, however blotted and blurred this poor manuscript may be when I lay down my pen at night, the Editor will see to it that I have nothing to be ashamed of *when I appear* in the morning.

VI

THE PEACEMAKER

THINGS had come to a pretty pass up at Corinth, when Paul felt it incumbent upon him to write to the members of the Church, imploring them to be reconciled to God. ‘Now then,’ Paul said to those recalcitrant believers, ‘now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ’s stead, *be ye reconciled to God*.’ I used to wonder what he can possibly have meant; but now I think I understand.

I

Claudius was wealthy. He dwelt in a beautiful house on the top of a hill, on the eastern side of the city of Corinth. From his spacious balconies he looked down upon the blue, blue waters of the Adriatic as they lapped caressingly the sands of the bay on the one side, and on the spreading sapphire of the island-studded Aegean gleaming most charmingly upon the other. Away in the distance he commanded a magnificent prospect, and could clearly make out the towers and domes of Athens as they pierced the sky on the far horizon. The

Acropolis could be seen distinctly. It was a delightful home, delightfully situated. Claudius was a member of the Church; but he was not very happy about it. Claudius had prospered amazingly of late years, and his prosperity had involved him in commercial and social entanglements from which it would be very difficult now to escape. The life that Claudius had set before himself in the early days of his spiritual experience seemed to him later on like a beautiful dream. That is to say, it seemed to him like a dream when he thought about it; but he did not think about it more often than he could help. Claudius knew perfectly well that the life of which he used to dream was worth some sacrifice; and he knew that he was really the poorer, and not the richer, for having abandoned that radiant ideal. He occasionally attended the assembly of worshippers, it is true; but he derived small satisfaction from the exercise. It seemed like exposing his poor withered, emaciated soul to the limelight; and he saw with a start how starved and famished it had become. And so the inner

experience of poor Claudius became a perpetual battle-ground. At times the old dream seemed within an ace of being victorious. He was more than half inclined to break away from all his later entanglements, and to renew the ardour of his youthful aspirations. But he had scarcely reached this devout determination when the glamour of his later life once more began to dazzle him. Alluring invitations, temptingly phrased, poured in upon him. It is horrid to be discourteous! How could he bring himself to offend people from whom he had received nothing but kindness? Surely a man owes something to the proprieties of life! And so the fight went on. But in the depths of his secret soul Claudius knew that that fight was a fight between Claudius on the one hand and God on the other. He knew, too, that in that stern conflict Claudius was altogether wrong, and God was altogether right. And he knew that, if he persisted in the unequal struggle, nothing but shame and humiliation awaited him. Claudius knew it, and Paul knew it. Paul knew it, and proffered his good offices as mediator. ‘Now then,’ he wrote, with Claudius in his eye, ‘now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ’s stead, *be ye reconciled to God*.’ And the words brought to the heart of poor Claudius just such a surge of vehement emotion as a lover feels at the prospect of once more embracing the beloved form with which he had so angrily and hastily parted.

II

Polonius and Phebe were in a very different case. Polonius dwelt close to the city in order to be near his work, and his windows commanded no view of any kind. He was not a slave, but sometimes he said bitterly that the slaves were as happy as he. The world had gone hardly with Polonius. The stars in their courses seemed to be fighting against him. He had tried hard to be brave, but circumstances sometimes conspire against courage. Polonius, in spite of the most commendable endeavours, was poor; yet if poverty had been his only misfortune he could have borne it with a smile. But, in addition to poverty, troubles came thick and fast upon him. Like Claudius, he was a member of the church at Corinth; and it was in connexion with his labours of love for the sanctuary that he had first met Phebe. She was young and fair in those days, and her loveliness was glorified by her devotion. But his love for her had fallen upon her tender spirit like a malediction. It was as though his fondness for his sweet young wife had woven a malignant spell about her early womanhood. He would have died a thousand deaths to make her happy; yet since first they

linked their lives they had known nothing but incessant struggle and ceaseless grief. Phebe herself had been ill again and again. Four little children had stolen like sunbeams into their home; only, like sunbeams, to vanish again, and give place to tempests of tears. Then came a long blank; and they fancied they were doomed to spend the rest of their sad lives childlessly. But, at length, to their unspeakable delight, their little home once more resounded with the shout of baby merriment and the patter of baby footsteps. It was as if the four children who had perished had bequeathed to this new treasure all the affection that they had excited in the breasts of their poor parents. And then, after seven happy years, it too faded and died. Polonius and Phebe were broken-hearted. Never again, they said, would they go to the assembly at Corinth. How could they believe in the love of God after this? And so their hearts grew hard, and their souls were soured, and all sweetness departed from their spirits.

There is a story very like this in our own literature. In the old house at Kettering, Andrew Fuller was lying ill in one room, whilst his only surviving daughter—a child of six—lay at the point of death in the next. He tried hard to reconcile himself and his poor wife to the impending calamity. But their spirits revolted. The thought that, after having buried first one child and then another, this one too might be snatched from them was more than they could bear. But, 'on Tuesday, May 30,' says Fuller in his diary, 'on Tuesday, May 30, as I lay ill in bed in another room, I heard a whispering. I inquired, and all were silent! All were silent!—but all is well. *I feel reconciled to God*.' That is a fine saying. '*I feel reconciled to God*.' But poor Polonius and Phebe could as yet enter no such brave words in their domestic record. 'Wherefore,' writes Paul, with a thought, perhaps, of Polonius and Phebe, 'wherefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, *be ye reconciled to God*.' And when Polonius and Phebe heard that touching appeal they resolved no longer to kick against the pricks. 'Renew my will,' they prayed, anticipating the language of a later hymn:

Renew my will from day to day;
Blend it with Thine; and take away
All that now makes it hard to say,
'Thy will be done!'

And, like Andrew Fuller and his wife at Kettering, Polonius and his wife at Corinth were able to say, '*I feel reconciled to God*.'

III

To the south of Corinth, just where the great main road begins to ascend the ridge of the mountains, lived Julia. Julia was a widow, comfortably circumstanced. Her husband had died years before, leaving her with the charge of their one young son. And as the days had gone by, and time had sprinkled strands of silver into Julia's hair, she had built her hopes more and more upon the future of her boy. Julia's husband had died before either he or she had so much as heard the name of Jesus. But after his death Paul came over from Athens to Corinth in the course of that first memorable visit to Europe, and Julia had been among his earliest converts. After her conversion Julia often thought of her husband, and was ill at ease. But, like a wise woman, she determined to work for the things that remained rather than to weep over those that were lost to her. And so she devoted all her love, and all her thought, and all her energy, and all her time to her little son. When Paul's first letter to the Christians at Corinth was read to the church, she caught a phrase about being 'baptized for the dead.' She did not quite know what Paul meant by the words; but at any rate she would try to instil into the heart of her boy the lovely faith that she felt certain her husband would cheerfully have embraced. And wonderfully she succeeded. The boy listened with eyes wide open to the tender stories that Julia told him, and his heart acknowledged their profound significance. At the same age at which Jesus went with Mary to the Temple, and was found in the midst of the doctors, young Amplius went with Julia up to the church at Corinth, and was found in the midst of the deacons.

From the very first the soul of Amplius prospered. He was like those trees of which the psalmist sings which, 'planted in the courts of the Lord, flourish in the house of our God.' From the time of his baptism and reception into the sacred fellowship, the child Amplius grew, like the child Jesus, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. Then, after about six years of happy Christian experience, Amplius confided a wonderful secret to Julia. He told her that he had resolved, with her consent, to devote himself to the sacred office of the ministry. And at that word the soul of Julia died within her. She knew what those early preachers and teachers had suffered. She knew of the martyrdom of all those first apostles. She had heard that even Paul himself had been 'in journeyings often, in perils of rivers and in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen and in perils of the heathen, in perils of the city and in perils of the desert, in perils of the sea and in perils among false brethren.' And Julia's heart failed her as she thought of Amplius faced by such dangers. Moreover, Julia had other plans for Amplius. She had fondly dreamed of him as holding a great place in the city of Corinth. When she

had seen rulers and governors performing exalted functions on State occasions, she had said within herself, ‘Some day, perhaps, Amplius will wear those robes,’ or ‘Some day, perhaps, Amplius will make that speech.’ And now all such dreams were rudely shattered. Her son would fain be a minister, an outcast, perhaps even a martyr. And at that thought the soul of Julia rebelled, and she began to fight against God.

There is a case like this, also, in our own literature. Grey Hazelrigg was the only child of Lady Hazelrigg, of Carlton Hall. Her ladyship intended her son for the army, but he failed to pass the tests. She then sent him to Cambridge University. There he came under deep religious influences. He began, as opportunities presented themselves, to preach the gospel. His efforts met with immediate acceptance, and he wrote to his astonished mother to say that he desired to become a minister of the old Strict Baptist Communion! The request struck Carlton Hall like a thunderbolt, and the spirit of Lady Hazelrigg rose in instant revolt. But Grey prayed in secret, and preached in public, and pleaded with his mother whenever a suitable opportunity occurred. Then came an experience of which, the Rev. W. Y. Fullerton says, he spoke with sparkling eyes seventy years afterwards. He was on a journey when his mind was suddenly and strangely arrested by the words of Jeremiah, ‘Verily, it shall be well with Thy remnant.’ He took it to refer to Lady Hazelrigg’s opposition to his call; and, surely enough, ‘the very next letter that he received from his mother bore the joyful tidings that she was, as she herself phrased it, *reconciled to God*.’ Mr. Grey Hazelrigg lived to be nearly a hundred, and his work, both as a writer and a preacher, will be remembered in England with thankfulness for many a day to come. There can be no doubt, therefore, that, in those earlier days, Lady Hazelrigg was fighting against God. And there can be no doubt, either, that, in those early days, Julia was fighting against God. And therefore Paul wrote as he did, perhaps with Julia specially in mind. ‘Now then,’ he said, ‘we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ’s stead, *be ye reconciled to God*.’ And, like Lady Hazelrigg, Julia made her peace with God, and her son adorned the Christian ministry for many a long day.

IV

‘*Be ye reconciled to God*’—Paul the Peacemaker wrote to the Christians at Corinth. It is vastly important. We so easily drift away from early attachments and early friendships; and even the divine friendship is not immune from this

cruel and heartless treatment. We drift away from it, and must needs be reconciled. '*Be ye reconciled to God*,' says Paul the Peacemaker 'for unless you yourselves are reconciled to God, how can you reconcile to God those who are without?' How can I reconcile hearts that are alienated if, between either of those hearts and mine, there exists some embarrassing estrangement? '*Be ye reconciled to God*,' said Paul the Peacemaker to the church at Corinth, for he knew that the Church's ministry of reconciliation would stand stultified and useless so long as the Church herself was out of touch with her Lord.

79

VII

NOTHING

NATURE, they say, abhors a vacuum. For the life of me, I do not know why. But then, for the matter of that, I do not know why I myself love many of the things that I love, and loathe many of the things that I abhor. Nature, however, is not usually capricious. Some deep policy generally prompts her strange behaviour. I must go into this matter a little more carefully. First of all, what is a vacuum? What is Nothing?

I was at a prize distribution not long ago, and as I came out into the street I came upon a little chap crying as though his heart would break. He was quite alone. His parents had not thought it worth their while to accompany him to the function, and thus show their interest in his school life. Perhaps it was owing to the same lack of sympathy on their part that he was among the few boys who were bearing home no prize.

'Hullo, sonny,' I exclaimed,'what's the matter?'

'*Oh, nothing!*' he replied, between his sobs.

'Then what on earth are you crying for?'

'*Oh, nothing!*' he repeated.

80I respected his delicacy, and probed no farther into the cause of his discomfiture, but I had collected further evidence of my contention that there is more in Nothing than you would suppose. Nor had I gone far before still further corroboration greeted me. For, at the top of the street, I came upon a group of lads in the centre of which was a boy with a very handsome prize. I paused and admired it.

'And what was this for?' I asked.

'*Oh, nothing!*' he answered, with a blush.

'But, my dear fellow, you must have done something to deserve it!'

'*Oh, it was nothing!*' he reiterated, and it was from his companions that I obtained the information that I sought. But here again it was made clear to me that there is a good deal in Nothing. Nothing is worth thinking about. It is a

huge mistake to take things at their face value. Nothing may sometimes represent a modest contrivance for hiding everything; and we must not allow ourselves to be deceived.

An old tradition assures us that, on the sudden death of one of Frederick the Great's chaplains, a certain candidate showed himself most eager for the vacant post. The king told him to proceed to the royal chapel and to preach an impromptu sermon on a text that he would find in the pulpit on arrival. When the critical moment arrived, the preacher opened the sealed packet, and found it —*blank*! Not a word or pen-mark appeared! With a calm smile the clergyman cast his eyes over the congregation, and then said, 'Brethren, here is Nothing. Blessed is he whom Nothing can annoy, whom Nothing can make afraid or swerve from his duty. We read that God from Nothing made all things. And yet look at the stupendous majesty of His infinite creation! And does not Job tell us that Nothing is the foundation of everything? "He hangeth the world upon Nothing," the patriarch declares.' The candidate then proceeded to elaborate the wonder and majesty of that creation that emanated from Nothing, and depended on Nothing. I need scarcely add that Frederick bestowed upon so ingenious a preacher the vacant chaplaincy. And in the years that followed he became one of the monarch's most intimate friends and most trusted advisers.

We must not, however, fly to the opposite extreme, and make too much of Nothing. For the odd thing is that, twice at least in her strange and chequered history, the Church has fallen in love with members of the Nothing family, and, after the fashion of lovers, has completely lost her head over them. On the first occasion she became deeply enamoured of Doing Nothing, and on the second occasion she went crazy over Having-Nothing. I must tell of these amorous exploits one at a time. The adoration of Doing-Nothing had a great vogue at one stage of the Church's history. Who that has once read the thirty-seventh chapter of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*—the chapter on 'The Origin, Progress, and Effects of the Monastic Life'—will ever cease to be haunted by the weird, fantastic spectacle therein presented? Men suddenly took it into their heads that the only way of serving God was by doing nothing. They swarmed out into the deserts, and lived solitary lives. They took vows of perpetual silence, and ceased to speak; they ate only the most disgusting food; they lived the lives of wild beasts. 'Even sleep, the last refuge of the unhappy, was rigorously measured; the vacant hours rolled heavily on, without business and without pleasure; and, before the close of each day, the tedious progress of the sun was repeatedly accursed.' Here was an amazing phenomenon. It was, of course, only a passing fancy, the merest piece of coquetry on the Church's part. It is

unthinkable that she thought seriously of Doing-Nothing, and of settling down with him for the rest of her natural life. The glamour of this casual flirtation soon wore off. The Church discovered to her mortification that there was nothing in Nothing. Saint Anthony, of Alexandria, who felt that the life of the city was too full of incitement to frivolity and pleasure, fled to the desert, to escape from these temptations. He became a hermit. But he gave it up, and returned to Alexandria. The abominable imaginations that haunted his mind in the solitude were far more loathsome and degrading than anything he had experienced in the busy city. Fra Angelico, who also fell in love with Doing-Nothing, says that he heard the flapping of the wings of unclean things about his lonely cell. And Francis Xavier has told us of the seven terrible days that he spent in the tomb of Thomas at Malabar. ‘All around me,’ he says, ‘malignant devils prowled incessantly, and wrestled with me with invisible but obscene hands.’ It is the old story, there is nothing in Nothing; and he who falls in love with any member of that family will live to regret the adventure. I remember being greatly impressed by a sentence or two in Nansen’s *Farthest North*. He is describing the maddening monotony of the interminable Arctic night. ‘Ah!’ he exclaims suddenly, ‘life’s peace is said to be found by holy men in the desert. Here indeed is desert enough; *but peace!*—of that I know nothing. I suppose it is the holiness that is lacking.’ The explorer was simply discovering that there is nothing in Nothing but what you yourself take into it.

One would have supposed that, after this heart-breaking affair with Doing-Nothing, the Church would have been on her guard against all members of the Nothing family. But no! she was deceived a second time—in this instance by the wiles of Having-Nothing. I allude, of course, to the story of the Mendicant Orders. We all know how Francis d’Assisi fell in love with Poverty. One day, to the consternation of his friends, they received a letter from the gay young soldier, telling them of his intention to lead an entirely new life. ‘I am thinking of taking a wife more beautiful, more rich, more pure than you could ever imagine.’ The wife was the Lady Poverty; and Giotto, in a fresco at Assisi, has represented Francis placing the ring on the finger of his bride. The feminine figure is crowned with roses, but she is arrayed in rags, and her feet are bruised with stones and torn with briars. Francis borrowed the tattered and filthy garments of a beggar, and sought alms at the street corners that he might enter into the secret of poverty; and then he and Dominic founded those orders of mendicant monks which became one of the most potent missionary forces of the Middle Ages.

But once again the Church found out that her affections were being played

with. There is no more virtue in Having-Nothing than in Doing-Nothing. They are both good-for-nothing. It may be that some of us would be better men if we had less money; but then, others of us would be better men if we had more. It may be that, here and there, you may find a Silas Marner who has been saved by sudden poverty from miserly greed and hardening self-absorption. But, for one such case, it would be easy to point to hundreds of men who have been driven by poverty from the ways of honour, and to hundreds of women who have been forced by poverty from the paths of virtue. It all comes back to this: there is nothing in Nothing. Doing-Nothing and Having-Nothing are deceivers —the pair of them; and the Church must not be beguiled by their blandishments. Work and money are both good things. Even William Law saw that. His *Serious Call* has often almost made a monk of me, but a sudden flash of common sense always breaks from the page just in time. ‘There are two things,’ he says in his fine chapter on ‘The Wise and Pious Use of an Estate,’ ‘there are two things which, of all others, most want to be under a strict rule, and which are the greatest blessings both to ourselves and others, when they are rightly used. These two things are our time and our money. These talents are the continual means and opportunities of doing good.’ Beware, that is to say, of Doing-Nothing, of Having-Nothing, and of the whole family of Nothings. It is not for nothing that Nature abhors them.

And now it suddenly comes home to me that I am playing on the very verge of a tremendous truth. There is nothing in Nothing. Let me remember that when next I am at death-grips with temptation! Cupid is said to have complained to Jupiter that he could never seize the Muses because he could never find them idle. And I suppose that our everyday remark that ‘Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do’ has its origin in the same idea. John Locke, the great philosopher, used to say that, in the hour of temptation, he preferred any company rather than his own. If possible, he sought the companionship of children. Anything rather than Nothing. It reminds us of Hannibal. The great Carthaginian led his troops up the Alpine passes, but he found that the heights were strongly held by the Romans. Attack was out of the question. Hannibal watched closely one night, however, and discovered that, under cover of darkness, the enemy withdrew for the night to the warmer valley on the opposite slope. Next night, therefore, Hannibal led his troops to the heights, and, when the Roman general approached in the morning, he found that the tables had been turned upon him. There is always peril in vacancy. The uncultivated garden brings forth weeds. The unoccupied mind becomes the devil’s playground. The vacant soul is a lost soul. There is nothing in Nothing.

But for the greatest illustration of my present theme I must betake me to Mark Rutherford. The incident occurred at the most sunless and joyless stage of Mark's career. From all his wretchedness he sought relief in Nothing. He kept his own company, wandered about the fields, abandoned himself to moods, and lost himself in vague and insoluble problems. But one day a strange thing happened. 'I was walking along under the south side of a hill, which was a great place for butterflies, when I saw a man, apparently about fifty years old, coming along with a butterfly net.' They soon chummed up. 'He told me that he had come seven miles that morning to that spot, because he knew that it was haunted by one particular species of butterfly; and, as it was a still, bright day, he hoped to find a specimen.' At first Mark Rutherford felt a kind of contempt for a man who could give himself up to so childish a pastime. But, later on, he heard his story. Years before he had married a delicate girl, of whom he was devotedly fond. She died in childbirth, leaving him completely broken. And, by some inscrutable mystery of fate, the child grew up to be a cripple, horribly deformed, inexpressibly hideous, as ugly as an ape, as lustful as a satyr, and as ferocious as a tiger! The son, after many years, died in a mad-house; and the horror of it all nearly consigned his poor father to a similar asylum. 'During those dark days,' he told Mark Rutherford, 'I went on *gazing gloomily into dark emptiness*, till all life became nothing for me.' *Gazing into emptiness*, mark you! Then there swept across this aching void of nothingness a beautiful butterfly! It caught his fancy, interested him, filled the gap, and saved his reason from uttermost collapse. He began collecting butterflies. He was no longer *gazing into emptiness*. And the moral of the incident is stated in a single sentence. 'Men should not be too curious in analysing and condemning any means which Nature devises to save them from themselves, whether it be coins, old books, curiosities, fossils, or butterflies.'

'Any means which Nature devises.' We are back to Nature again.

'Nature abhors a vacuum'; it was at that point that we set out.

I see now that Nature is right, after all. I can never be saved by Nothing. The abstract will never satisfy me. I want something; aye, more, I want *Some One*; and until I find *Him* my restless soul calls down all the echoing corridors of Nothingness, 'Oh that I knew *where I might find Him*!'

89

VIII

THE ANGEL AND THE IRON GATE

IT is of no use arguing against an iron gate. There it stands—chained and padlocked, barred and bolted—right across your path, and you can neither coax nor cow it into yielding. So was it with Peter on the night of his miraculous escape from prison. ‘Herod,’ we are told, ‘killed James with the sword, and, because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take Peter also.’ There he lay, ‘sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains, whilst the keepers before the door kept the prison.’ He expected that his next visitor would be the headsman; and whilst he waited for the *executioner*, there came an *angel*! This sort of thing happens fairly often. They are sitting round the fire, and the lady in the arm-chair is talking of her sailor-son.

‘Ah!’ she says, ‘I haven’t heard of him for over a year now, and I begin to think that I shall never hear again.’

There is a sharp ring at the bell. She starts.

90 ‘Something tells me,’ she continues, ‘that this is a message to say that the ship is lost, and that I shall never see my boy again.’

Even whilst she speaks the door is opened, and her last syllable is scarcely uttered before she is folded in the sailor’s arms.

The principle holds true to the very end. It is a sick-room, and the pale wan face of the patient looks very weary.

‘Oh, how I dread death!’ she says; ‘I cannot bear to think that I must die.’

An hour later the door of the unseen opens to her, and there stands on the threshold, not Death, but *Life Everlasting*!

Peter very, very often waits for the executioner, and welcomes an angel.

I

During the next few moments Peter scarcely knew whether he was in the body or out of the body. Was he alive or was he dead? Was he waking or was

he dreaming? ‘He wist not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision.’ He walked like a man with his head in the clouds. Doors were opening; chains were falling; he seemed to be living in a land of enchantment, a world of magic. But the iron gate put an end to all illusion. ‘They came to the iron gate,’ and, as I said a moment ago, an iron gate is a very difficult thing to argue with. The iron gate represents the return to reality. After our most radiant spiritual experiences we come abruptly to the humdrum and the commonplace. It was Mary’s Sunday evening out. Mary, you must know, is a housemaid in a big boarding establishment, and her life is by no means an easy one. But Mary is also a member of the Church. On Sunday she was in her favourite seat. Perhaps it was that she was specially hungry for some uplifting word, or perhaps it was that the message was peculiarly suitable to her condition; but, be that as it may, the service that night seemed to carry poor Mary to the very gate of heaven. The Communion Service that followed completed her ecstasy, and Mary seemed scarcely to touch the pavement with her feet as she hurried home. She fell asleep crooning to herself the hymn with which the service closed:

O Love, that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

She knew nothing more until, in the chilly dark of the morning, the alarum clock screamed at her to jump up, clean the cold front steps, dust the great silent rooms, and light the copper-fire. ‘And she came to the iron gate.’ There come points in life at which poetry merges into the severest prose; romance yields to reality; the miracle of the open prison is succeeded by the menace of the iron gate.

II

As long as Peter had an iron gate before him, he had an angel beside him. It was not until the iron gate had been safely negotiated that ‘forthwith the angel departed from him.’ Mary made a mistake when she fancied that she had left all the glory behind her. The angel is with us more often than we think. A devout Jew, in bidding you farewell, will always use a plural pronoun. And if you ask for whom, besides yourself, his blessing is intended, he will reply that it is for you and for *the angel over your shoulder*. We are too fond of fancying that the

angel is only with us when the chains are miraculously falling from off our feet, and when the doors are miraculously opening before our faces. We are too slow to believe that the angel is still by our side when we emerge into the night and come to the iron gate. It is a very ancient heathen superstition. ‘There came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, because the Syrians have said, “The Lord is God of the *hills*, but He is not God of the *valleys*,” therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord.’ We are always assuming that He is the God of the mountaintops, and that He leaves us to thread the darksome valleys alone; and our assumption is a cruel and unjust one. As long as Peter had an iron gate before him, he had an angel beside him.

III

The converse, however, is equally true. As long as Peter had an angel beside him, he had an iron gate ahead of him. Angels do not walk by our sides for fun. ‘Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?’ If there is an angel by my side, depend upon it, there is work that only an angel can do in front of me. Mary’s radiant experience that Sunday evening was directly and intimately related with the brazen yell of the alarum clock on Monday morning. It was not intended as a mere temporary elevation of the spirit, but as an assurance of a gracious presence—a presence that should never be withdrawn as long as a need existed. It is part of the infinite pathos of life that we misinterpret our visions. Jacob beheld his staircase leading from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. And straightway, as he prepared to leave, he began to say good-bye to the angels! ‘Surely,’ he exclaimed, ‘the Lord is in *this place*! How dreadful is *this place*! *This* is none other but the house of God, and *this* is the gate of heaven! And he called the name of *that place* Bethel!’ And thus he missed the whole meaning of the beatific vision. The vision was to warn him of the perils that awaited him, and to assure him that ‘behold, I am with thee in *all places* whither thou goest.’

‘*All places!*’ said the Vision.

‘This place! *this place!* THIS PLACE!’ said Jacob.

And so he journeyed on towards his iron gate, pitifully ignorant of the meaning of the golden dream. Life’s ecstasies are warnings, premonitions, danger-signals. Even in the experience of the Holiest, the open heavens and the voice from the excellent glory immediately preceded the grim struggle with the

tempter in the wilderness. Paul had his vision; he saw the Man of Macedonia; and he followed the gleam—to bonds, stripes, and imprisonment. Bunyan knew what he was doing when he placed the Palace Beautiful, with all its sweet hospitalities and delightful ministries, immediately before that dark Valley of Humiliation in which Christian struggled with Apollyon. When we hear angels' voices speaking, when we find our fetters falling, when we see our jail doors opening, be very sure that outside, outside, there is a dark night and an iron gate!

IV

But there is always this about it. Although the radiant vision is a premonition of the coming struggle, it is also an augury concerning that struggle. Opening doors are an earnest of opening gates. It is inconceivable that I shall be miraculously delivered from my dungeon, with its guards and its chains, and then be baulked by an iron gate out there in the blackness of the night. It is inconceivable that here, at the Communion Service, God should draw so near to the spirit of this young housemaid, and then leave her to face alone the drudgery of Monday morning. If Mary is half as wise as I take her to be, she will answer the scream of the clock with a song. She went to bed singing; why not get up singing? She crooned to herself on retiring the hymn that had followed her from the Communion Table. Let her sing in the morning quite another tune:

His love, in time past, forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink,
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.

The voice of the angel, the falling of fetters, and the opening of doors are all designed to brace us for the dark night and the iron gate.

V

'The iron gate opened to them.' Of course it did. Who could suppose that the prison doors had been opened by angel's hands, only that the prisoner might be caught like a rat in a trap outside? 'The iron gate opened to them *of its own accord*.' It did look like it. During my twelve years at Mosgiel, I often went through the great woollen factory. The machines were marvellous—simply

marvellous. As you watched the needles slip in and out, or stood beside the loom and saw the pattern grow, it really looked as though the things were bewitched. They seemed to be doing it all ‘of their own accord.’ But one day the manager said, ‘Would you care to see the power-house?’ And he took me away from the busy looms to another building altogether, and there I saw the huge engines that drove everything. Neither looms nor needles really work ‘of their own accord.’ Nor do iron gates. A few minutes after the gates had opened, and the angel had vanished, Peter ‘came to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, where many were gathered together praying.’ And then Peter understood by what power the iron gates had opened, just as I understood, when I saw the engine-room, how the great looms worked.

The prayer-meeting may not be artistic. For the matter of that I saw very little in the power-room of the factory that appealed to the sense of the aesthetic within me; but when angels visit prisons, and iron gates swing open of their own accord, there must be a driving-force at work somewhere. And Peter only discovered it when he suddenly broke in upon a midnight prayer-meeting.

IX

SHORT CUTS

WE dearly love a short cut. Even in childhood we resolved the discovery of short cuts into a kind of juvenile science. There was the gap in the hedge, or the low part of the wall, by which we could pass, by means of a squeeze or a clamber, into the romantic territory of our next-door neighbour. With what fine scorn we inwardly derided the ridiculous behaviour of our parents when, in visiting that selfsame neighbour, they marched with solemn mien out through the front gate, along the public highway and in through the front gate of the house next door! It took *them* five mortal minutes to reach a spot that, by a stoop or a bound, *we* could have reached in as many seconds! Then there was the dusty track through the bush to the jetty; and the footpath across the fields to the church. And with what wild excitement we hailed a short cut to school! When some adventurous spirit discovered that, by going up a certain right-of-way, and climbing a certain fence, we could approach the school playground from a new and undreamed-of direction, our transports knew no bounds. It was not the lazy gratification of having invented a labour-saving device; it was the stately joy of the explorer. Half the romance of life was bound up with those short cuts. The trysts of courtship were kept at the stiles by which those surreptitious footways were intersected. The most delightful walks we ever enjoyed were the strolls along those uncharted by-paths. It may have been for the sake of brevity and a smart passage that they were first brought into existence; yet it was not to their brevity, in the last resort, that they owed their peculiar charm. The gap through the hedge; the clamber over the wall; the track through the bush to the jetty; the footpath across the fields to the church; and the right-of-way by which we took the school in the rear—these appealed to a certain deep human instinct that asserted itself within us; and, dissemblers as we were, we just made-believe that we pursued these courses in order to conserve our energies and to save our time.

And thus we got into the habit. Whether it was a good habit or a bad habit depends largely upon the realm to which we applied it. In my own case, it worked disastrously—at least at times. Since I left school, for instance, I have

always been considered good at figures. Generally speaking, you have but to state your problem, and I can furnish you with the solution. In business—commercial and ecclesiastical—this faculty has served me in excellent stead. But at school it was of very little use to me. And I find it of very little use when I undertake to coach my children in anticipation of approaching examinations. For at school the teacher not only propounded the problem, and received my answer; he went another step. He asked me how I had arrived at that conclusion; and at that stage of the ordeal I invariably collapsed. He was there to teach me the rules; and I had as much contempt for the rules as I had for the route by which my grave and reverend parents made their way to our neighbour's door. I was content to squeeze through the gap or to jump over the wall. The teacher was there to show me the road to the jetty; I scorned the road, and approached the jetty by the track through the bush. I could see no sense in either roads or rules if you could reach your destination more expeditiously without them. But, to pass abruptly from the microscopic to the magnificent, history furnishes me with a quite dramatic and most convincing demonstration of my point. In his *Up From Slavery*, Mr. Booker Washington illustrates this tendency again and again. The slaves were freed. But it is one thing to be free, and quite another thing to be worthy of the rights of freemen. With one voice the black people cried out for education. 'This experience of a whole race going to school for the first time presents,' says Mr. Washington, 'one of the most interesting studies that has ever occurred in connexion with the development of any race.' But many of the people were advanced in years. To begin at the beginning and attain to knowledge gradually seemed a tedious process. It was like the round-about path from our front door to that of our next-door neighbour. The black people woke up late to the consciousness of their racial possibilities; and, like most people who wake up late, they spent the morning of their freedom in a desperate hurry. Here is a young coloured man, 'sitting down in a one-room cabin, with grease on his clothing, filth all around him, and weeds in the yard and garden, engaged in studying a French grammar!' On another occasion, Mr. Washington 'had to take a student who had been studying cube-root and banking and discount and explain to him that the wisest thing for him to do first was thoroughly to master the multiplication-table!' There is much more to the same effect. The black race made a frantic effort to run before it had learned to walk. 'I felt,' says Mr. Booker Washington, 'that the conditions were a good deal like those of an old coloured man, during the days of slavery, who wanted to learn how to play on the guitar. In his desire to take guitar lessons he applied to one of his young masters to teach him; but the young man, not having much faith in the ability of the slave to master the

guitar, sought to discourage him by saying, “Uncle Jake, I will give you guitar lessons; but, Jake, I will have to charge you three dollars for the first lesson, two dollars for the second lesson, and one dollar for the third lesson. But I will charge you only twenty-five cents for the last lesson.” To which Uncle Jake answered, “All right, boss, I hires you on dem terms. But, boss, I wants yer to be sure an’ give me dat las’ lesson first!”’ Here we have the imposing spectacle, not by any means destitute of pathos, of an entire race seeking to reach its destiny by a short cut.

But it is a mistake. For that ebullition of juvenile depravity which disfigured my school-days I do now repent in dust and ashes. I was wrong; there can be no doubt about that. There is a place in this world for rules and roads as well as for gaps and tracks. I know now that my parents were right in approaching our neighbour’s door by way of the public thoroughfare. Life has taught me, among other things, that short cuts have their perils. It is the old story of the Gordian knot over again. The Phrygians, as everybody knows, were in grave perplexity, and consulted the oracle. The oracle assured them that all their troubles would cease as soon as they chose for their king the first man they met driving in his chariot to the temple of Jupiter. Leaving the sacred building, they set out along the road and soon met Gordius, whom they accordingly elected king. Gordius drove on to the temple, to return thanks for his elevation, and to consecrate his chariot to the service of the gods. When the chariot stood in the temple courts it was observed that the pole was fastened to the yoke by a knot of bark so artfully contrived that the ends could not be seen. The oracle then declared that whosoever should untie this Gordian knot should be ruler over Asia. Alexander the Great approached, but, finding himself unable to untie the knot, he drew his sword and cut it. And the ancients said that it was because he had cut the knot instead of untying it that his dominion was so transitory and so brief. I fancy that, if we look into it a little, we shall find that half our troubles arise from our bad habit of cutting the knots that we ought to patiently untie.

Take our politics, by way of example. It is much more easy to sit back in our chairs and pour the vials of our criticism on the powers-that-be than to make any sensible contribution to the well-being of the State. A case in point occurs in Mark Rutherford’s *Clara Hopgood*. Baruch and Dennis are discussing those old social problems that men have discussed since first this world began. Dennis was enlarging upon the inequalities and iniquities of social and industrial life, when Baruch broke in with the pertinent and practical question: ‘But what would you do for them?’

‘Ah, that beats me!’ replied Dennis. ‘I would hang somebody, but I don’t

know who it ought to be!’

Precisely! To *cut* the knot with a sword is so easy—and so ineffective; to *untie* it is so difficult—and so rich in consequence. The politics that consist of sentencing to summary execution statesmen from whom we differ are within the intellectual reach of most of us; and in that particular brand of politics, therefore, most of us occasionally indulge. But the politics that consist in really grappling with the knotty problems, with a view to discovering some means of ameliorating human misery, provide us with a much more formidable task. Who has intellect sufficiently clear, and fingers sufficiently deft, to essay the untying of the Gordian knot? The empire of the world awaits the coming of that patient and persistent man.

Or look at another example. I often feel that very little of the oratory expended on Protestant platforms really touches the mark. It gets nowhere. The real question at issue is most pitifully begged. It may, of course, be diplomatic to keep people well informed concerning the social evils that thrive in Roman Catholic countries. It may, perhaps, be permissible to emphasize the abuses that exist within the pale of the Roman Catholic Church. But a devout and intelligent Roman Catholic, listening to such an utterance, would, after making a reasonable allowance for rhetorical exaggeration admit the truth of all that had been said, and go home to weep, and, perhaps, to pray over it. Many of those who have passed over from Protestant communions to the Roman Catholic Church have travelled very widely and observed very closely. They are not ignorant. Newman sobbed over the seamy side of Romanism before he made the plunge. ‘I have never disguised,’ he wrote, ‘that there are actual circumstances in the Church of Rome which pain me much; we do not look toward Rome as believing that its communion is infallible.’ Then, with his eyes wide open to all the facts on which our orators dilate so luridly, he took the fatal step. And again he wrote, ‘There is a divine life among us, clearly manifested, in spite of all our disorders, which is as great a note of the Church as any can be.’

Now what was that divine note? Everything hinges upon that. And unless our Protestant speakers are prepared to face *that* issue they may as well remain by their own firesides, lounge in their cosiest chairs, wear their warmest slippers, and enjoy the latest novels. It is only at this point that sincere and groping minds can be helpfully influenced. The whole question is one of Authority. We dearly love a lord. There is no escaping that fundamental fact. Every day Protestant sheep stray into Roman Catholic pastures because there they can actually see the shepherd and actually feel his crook. The Roman Church, with

its hoary traditions, its encrusted ritual, and its antique associations, crystallizes itself into a single voice. It possesses an enthroned incarnation. It has a Pope. Romanism is like a pine-tree. It towers to a pinnacle. All its branches converge upon the topmost bough. Protestantism is like a palm. Its summit consists of a great cluster of graceful fronds, but no one is uppermost. Romanism is the adoration of the topmost twig. In the person of the highest official, confused ears catch the accent of authority for which they hunger. Here they find the music of majesty. And they nestle their aching heads in the lap of a Church that will sternly command their trustfulness and firmly insist upon implicit obedience. Thereafter they need think no more. 'In the midst of our difficulties,' wrote Newman, 'I have one ground of hope, just one stay, but, as I think, a sufficient one. It serves me in the stead of all arguments whatever; it hardens me against criticism; it supports me if I begin to despond; and to it I ever come round. It is the decision of the Holy See; Saint Peter has spoken.' Here the weary brain finds rest. Here is the Gordian knot, so trying to the fingers, cut swiftly with a sword. Here is the discovery of a short cut that may save the tired feet many a long and dreary trudge.

The temptation meets us at every turn. And it is because that temptation is so general that it figures so prominently in the Temptation in the wilderness. He was tempted in all points like as we are; and therefore He was tempted to take short cuts. This is the essence of that weird and terrible story. It is notable that all the three things that Jesus was tempted to acquire were good things, things to be desired, things that He was destined to possess. But the whole point of the record is that He was tempted to make His way to the bread and the angels and the kingdoms by means of short cuts. Now this is vastly significant. It is significant because, when you come to think of it, nearly all the things that *we* are tempted to acquire are good things. The temptation consists in the suggestion that we should possess ourselves of those good things prematurely or illicitly. We are urged to make short cuts to our legitimate goal. Jesus was tempted to cut the Gordian knot, and to thus obtain an immediate but fleeting hold on the objects of His just desire. He rejected the proposal. He preferred patiently to untie the knot, and thus to make Himself king of all kingdoms for ever and for ever.

Of the perils attending short cuts John Bunyan is our chief expositor. Wherever a dangerous but alluring footpath breaks off from the high-road, a statue of Mr. Worldly Wiseman ought to be erected. For it was Mr. Worldly Wiseman that first got the poor pilgrim into such sore trouble. Mr. Worldly Wiseman knew a short cut to the Celestial City. Christian took that short cut—

the footpath over the hills and through the village of Morality—and dearly did he pay for his folly. And yet it is difficult to blame him. Poor Christian was heavily burdened, and every inch that could be saved was a consideration. Evangelist had clearly directed him, it is true; but then, if Mr. Worldly Wiseman knew a short cut, why not take it? ‘Let him who has no such burden as this poor pilgrim had cast the first stone at Christian; I cannot,’ says Dr. Alexander Whyte. ‘If one who looked like a gentleman came to me to-night and told me how I could on the spot get to a peace of conscience never to be lost again, and how I could get a heart to-night that would never any more plague and pollute me, I should be mightily tempted to forget what all my former teachers had told me, and try this new gospel.’ Exactly! The temptation to cut the Gordian knot is very alluring. The advice to get-rich-quick, or to get-good-quick, or to get-there-quick, is very acceptable. But by his story of the short cut, and the anguish that followed, Bunyan has taught us that the longest way round is often the shortest way home. There is sound sense in the song that bids us ‘take time to be holy.’ The short cut that avoids the wicket-gate and the Cross is merely a blind lane from which we shall return sooner or later with blistered feet and broken hearts.

PART II

I

THE POSTMAN

I MUST say a good word for the postman. He occupies so large a place in most of our lives that, as a matter of common courtesy, the least we can do is to recognize his value and importance. Others may not feel as I do, but I confess that I bless the postman every day of my life. Not that I am so fond of receiving letters, for I bless him with equal fervency whether he calls or whether he passes. I know that in this respect I am hopelessly illogical. If I am pleased to see the postmen pass the gate, I ought, if strictly logical, to be sorry to see him enter it. And, contrariwise, if the sight of the postman coming up the path affords me gratification, the spectacle of his passing my gate ought to fill me with disappointment. But I am *not* logical, never was, and never shall be. The best things in the world are hopelessly illogical—motherhood for example. A mother sits in the arm-chair by the fire, even as I write. She is chattering away to her baby. She knows perfectly well that the baby doesn't understand a word she says. Knowing that she would, if she were logical, give up talking to the child. But, just because she is so hopelessly illogical, she prattles away as though the baby could understand every word. It is a way mothers have, and we love them all the better for it. An illogical lady is a very lovable affair; but who ever fell in love with a syllogism? Robert Louis Stevenson is the most lovable of all our English writers, and the most illogical. Here is an entry from his diary, by way of illustration. 'A little Irish girl,' he writes, 'is now reading my book aloud to her sister at my elbow. They chuckle, and I feel flattered; anon they yawn, and I am indifferent; such a wisely conceived thing is vanity.' Just so. And why not? There is a higher wisdom than the wisdom of logic. If Stevenson had been logical, he would have felt elated by the chuckles and crushed by the yawns. But he knew better, and so do I. If the postman passes my door, I heave a sigh of relief that I have no letters to answer; it is almost as good as being granted a half-holiday. Am I therefore to be angry when the postman enters the gate, and accept his letters with a grunt? Not at all. In that case I throw my logic over the hedge for the edification of my next-door neighbour, and feel pleased that some of my friends are thinking of me. I greet

the postman with a smile, and try to make him feel that he has rendered me an appreciable service, as indeed he has.

I am writing on the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Anthony Trollope, and I fancy that it is the thought of Trollope and his extraordinary work that has set me scribbling about the postman. For Trollope was much more than a novelist. He was, in a sense, the prince of British postmen, and the forerunner of Rowland Hill and Henniker Heaton. To a far greater extent than we sometimes dream, we owe the efficiency of our modern postal service to Anthony Trollope. But before he died he became the victim of serious misgivings. He feared that we were losing the art of letter-writing. He produced a bundle of his mother's love-letters. 'In no novel of Richardson's or Miss Burney's,' he declared, 'is there a correspondence so sweet, so graceful, and so well expressed. What girl now studies the words with which she shall address her lover, or seeks to charm him with grace of diction?' And this lamentation was penned, mark you, years and years ago, before cheap telegrams and picture post cards had become the normal means of communication!

I suppose the real trouble is that we have allowed the amazing development of our commercial correspondence to corrupt the character of our private letter-writing. We indite all our letters in the phraseology of the business college. We write briefly, tersely, pointedly, and, most abominable of all, by return of post. I should like to write a separate chapter in vigorous denunciation of the prompt reply. Private letters should never be hastily answered. If my friend replies instantly to my long, familiar letter, he gives me the painful impression that he wants to be rid of me, and is unwilling to have on his mind the thought of the letter he owes me. One of these days I shall start a new society to be called the 'Wait a Week Society.' Its members will be solemnly pledged to wait at least a week before replying to their private letters. There are strong and subtle reasons for taking such a vow. First of all, private letters should be easy, leisurely, chatty, and should only be written when one is in the mood, or when, for some reason, the person to whom it is addressed is specially in one's thoughts. To this, it may be replied that one is never so much in the mood to write to a friend as when he has just received a letter from that friend. But the argument is fallacious. He is a very happy letter-writer indeed who can write me a long, free, chatty letter without saying anything that will rub me the wrong way or with which I shall disagree. During the first twenty-four hours after receiving his letter, *those* are the things that are most emphatically impressed upon my mind. If I reply within twenty-four hours, my letter to my friend will deal largely with those disputatious and controversial points, and the inevitable

result will be that *the whole* of my letter will grate upon him just as *part* of his letter has grated upon me. But if, as president of my own society, I wait a week before replying to his letter, I shall see things in their true perspective, and write him a long and breezy letter in which the things that vexed me find no place at all. I am often asked, What is the unpardonable sin? The only sin that I can never pardon is the sin of writing angry letters. I can forgive a man for *speaking* hastily; I have a temper myself. But to deliberately commit one's spite to paper is to become guilty of an amazing atrocity and to degrade at the same time the postman's high and solemn office.

I bless the postman because he can do for me, and do better than I could do, so many delicate things. I regard the postman as a faithful and indispensable assistant. It often falls to a minister's lot to approach people, and especially young people, on the most delicate and important subjects. Upon their decisions much of their future happiness and usefulness will depend. I must therefore go about the business with the utmost care. But if I go to that young man and abruptly introduce the matter to him, I at once put him in a false position, and greatly imperil my chance of success. We are face to face; I have spoken to him, and he, in common decency, must speak to me. It would be a thousand times better if, having opened my heart to him, I could withdraw before he uttered a single word. But as it is, I have forced him into a position in which he must say something. His judgement is not ripe, his mind is not made up, the whole subject is new to him, and yet my indiscretion has placed him in such a position that he is compelled to commit himself. He must say something without due consideration; I stand there, like a highway-robber, with my pistol pointed at his brow, and he must give me *words*. I may not want his words immediately; and he may wish he need not give his words immediately; but we are both the victims of a situation which I have foolishly precipitated. He speaks; and however he may guard his utterance, his final decision will inevitably be compromised by those hasty and immature sentences.

The evidence must be perfectly overwhelming that will lead a man to reverse a decision once made. And here am I, his would-be friend and helper, forcing him into a position from which he will find it very difficult to extricate himself. I meant to do him good, and I have done him incalculable harm. I meant to be his friend, and I have become his enemy. So true is it that evil is wrought from want of thought as well as want of heart.

Now see how much better the postman manages the matter. I sit down at my desk and write exactly what I want to say. I am not under any necessity to complete a sentence until I can do so to my own perfect satisfaction. I can

pause to consider the exact word that I wish to employ. And if, when it is written, my letter does not please me, I can tear it up without his being any the wiser, and write it all over again. I am not driven to impromptu utterance or careless phraseology. I am free of the inevitable effect upon my expression produced by the presence of another person. I am not embarrassed by the embarrassment that he feels on being approached on so vital a theme. I am cool, collected, leisurely, and free. And the advantages that come to me in inditing the letter are shared by him in receiving it. He is alone, and therefore entirely himself. He is not disconcerted by the presence of an interviewer. He owes nothing to etiquette or ceremony. He has the advantage of having the case stated to him as forcefully and as well as I am able to state it. He can read at ease and in silence without the awkward feeling that, in one moment, he must make some sort of reply. If he is vexed at my intrusion into his private affairs, he has time to recover from his displeasure and to reflect that I am moved entirely by a desire for his welfare. If he is flattered at my attention, he has time to fling aside such superficial considerations and to face the issue on its merits. The matter sinks into his soul; becomes part of his normal life and thought; and, by the time we meet, he is prepared to talk it over without embarrassment, without personal feeling, and without undue reserve. In such matters—and they are among the most important matters with which a minister is called to deal—the postman is able to render me invaluable assistance.

There is something positively sacramental about the postman. For the letters that he carries have no value in themselves; they are simply paper and ink. They are precious only so far as they reveal the heart of the sender to the heart of the receiver. Here, for instance, is a letter for a young lady. She is at the door before the bell has ceased its ringing. She greets the postman with a smile, and blushes as she glances at the familiar handwriting. As soon as the postman has closed the gate after him, she hurries down to the summer-house, her favourite retreat, to read her letter. But she is not alone. Bruno, her big collie, goes bounding after his mistress. She reads the first pages of the letter, and allows the sheet to slip from her lap to the ground, whilst she proceeds to devour the following pages. And as the fluttering missive lies upon the floor of the summer-house, Bruno examines it. A dog’s eyes are sharper than a girl’s eyes; yet how little the dog sees! He sees a piece of white paper covered with black marks—sees perhaps more in that respect than she does—yet he sees nothing, and less than nothing, for all that. For she sees, not the black marks on the white paper, but the very heart of one who worships her. She is gazing so intently into the soul of her lover that she does not notice whether the ‘t’s’ are

crossed, or the ‘i’s’ dotted. To her the letter is a sacramental thing; its value lies not in itself, but in the revelation that it makes to her.

And it is because the postman spends his whole life among just such sacramental things that we welcome and honour him. We have an amiable way of transferring to the messenger the welcome that we accord to the message. Jessie Pope describes the joy of a mother on receiving a wire from her soldier-boy that he will soon be back again from the front.

‘*Home at six-thirty to-day.*’
Oh, what a tumult of joy!
Growing suspense flies away,
God bless that telegraph-boy!

God bless that telegraph-boy! Exactly. And that is why we honour the postman. The messenger always shares in the welcome given to the message How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! We ministers often share in the postman’s benediction. We are welcomed and honoured and loved, not so much for our own sake as for the sake of the great, glad message that we bear. The heart leaps up to the message and blesses the messenger. God bless the telegraph-boy! God bless the postman!

123

II

CRYING FOR THE MOON

LET it be distinctly understood that nothing that I shall now say is addressed to the crowd. To the crowd it would probably do more harm than good. It is intended only for a single individual; and he, I think, will understand. I am told that there is a unique secret by means of which a wireless message from the British Navy can be transmitted to the Admiralty Office without risk of interception. At the Admiralty a superlatively sensitive and superlatively secret instrument is most carefully attuned to the instrument of the battleship from which the message is expected. Then, when all is ready, every wireless operator in the Grand Fleet pulls out all the stops and bangs on all the keys of his instrument, and the inevitable result is the creation of a din that is almost deafening to all listeners at ordinary receivers. But through the crash and the tumult the specially delicate instrument at the Admiralty Office can distinctly hear its mate, and the priceless syllables penetrate the thunder of senseless sound without the slightest loss or leakage. I am about to attempt a similar
124 experiment. I have a message for a certain man. It is important that he, and he alone, should get it. It would do untold damage if it were heard at other receivers. Let him therefore take some pains to attune his instrument to mine.

Now it is usual, and it is altogether good, to encourage people to entertain lofty ambitions, high ideals, and great expectations. It is a most necessary injunction, and I have not a word to say against it. It stirs the blood like a trumpet-blast. It rouses us like a challenge. But, however excellent the medicine may be, it cannot be expected to suit every ailment. No one drug is a panacea for all our human ills. And even the stimulating tonic to which I have referred does not at all meet the need of the man for whom I am now prescribing. John Sheergood is a friend of mine, and a really capital fellow. But I should not call him a happy man. His trouble is that his ambitions are too lofty, his expectations too great, and his ideals, in a sense, too high. He is crying for the moon, and breaking his heart because he can’t get it. I am profoundly sorry for this morbid friend of mine, and should dearly like to comfort him. His ideal is perfection, nothing less; and whenever he falls short

125

of it he is in the depths of despair. If, as a student, he entered for a competition, he felt that he was in disgrace unless he secured the very first place. If he sat for an examination, he counted every mark short of the coveted hundred per cent. as an indelible stain upon his character. He is in abject misery unless he can strike twelve at every hour of the day. I both admire him and pity him at the same time. His parents once told me that when he was a very small boy he contracted measles. The illness went hardly with him, and left him frail and debilitated. The doctor ordered a prolonged holiday by the seaside, with plenty of good food, plenty of fresh air, and, above all, plenty of bathing. He was only a little fellow, and when he approached the bathing-sheds for the first time his father accompanied him.

‘I don’t want to go in, dad,’ he cried appealingly; ‘it’s cold, and I’m cold, and I don’t like it!’

‘It will make you grow up into a big man, sonny!’ his father replied persuasively.

Now this touched Jack on a very tender spot, for, although his father was tall, and he himself cherished an inordinate admiration for tall men, he was himself almost ridiculously small. He had several times contrasted himself with other small boys of the same age, and had felt shockingly humiliated.

‘Will it really, dad; honour bright?’ he asked anxiously, carefully scrutinizing his father’s face.

‘It will indeed, sonny; that is why the doctor ordered it.’

Poor little Jack submitted with a wry face to the process of disrobing, and, with a shiver, bravely approached the water. Summoning all his reserves of courage, he waded in until the water was up to his knees, to his waist, and at last to his neck. The excruciating part of the ordeal was by this time over; and, for the sake of the benefit so confidently promised him, he tolerated the caress of the waves for the next five minutes. Then he rushed out of the water. As soon as he was beyond the reach of the foam he stopped abruptly, surveyed himself carefully from top to toe, and straightway burst into tears. His mother, who was sitting knitting on the beach, at once ran to his assistance.

‘Why, whatever’s the matter, Jack? What are you crying for?’

‘Oh, mum, just look how wee I am! And dad said that if I went into the water it would make a big man of me!’

He has often since joined in the laugh, whenever the story of his childish adventure has been related in his hearing. But it is worth recording as being so eminently characteristic of him. He has never outgrown that boyish peculiarity.

He is always setting his heart on instantaneous maturity. He seems to think that the world should have been built on a sort of Jack-and-the-beanstalk principle. He is continually sowing seeds overnight, and feeling depressed if he cannot gather the fruit as soon as he wakes in the morning. Many of us have watched the Indian conjurer sow the seed of a mango-tree; throw a cloth over the pot; mutter mysterious charms and incantations; and then hit the cloth. And, behold, a full-grown mango-tree! He replaces the cloth, mutters further incantations, again removes the covering, and, lo, the mango-tree is in full flower! And when a third time he uncovers the plant, the mango-tree stands forth, every bough freighted with a heavy load of fruit! I have no idea as to how the trick is done. I only know that poor John Sheergood seems to be everlastingly lamenting the misfortune that ordained him to any existence other than that of an Indian conjurer. He is grievously disappointed, not because he was born with no silver spoon in his mouth, but because he was born with no magic wand in his hand. His mango-trees come to fruition very, very slowly. John believes in quick returns and lightning changes; and he is irritated and annoyed by the tardiness of that old-fashioned process called growth. It is good for a man to have lofty ideals; but I am sure that John Sheergood would be a happier man, and make us all more happy, if he would only break himself of his inveterate habit of crying for the moon.

In justice to John I am bound to say that, as on the sands years ago, his principal disappointment is with himself. I have done my best to persuade him that a man should be infinitely patient with himself. Nothing is to be gained by getting out of temper with yourself. You may scold yourself and scourge yourself unmercifully; but I doubt if it does much good. A man must win his self-respect; and you can only learn to respect yourself by being very gentle and very considerate and very patient with yourself. A man’s self-culture is his first and principal charge; and he will never succeed unless he both loves himself and treats himself lovingly. A man should be as gentle with himself as a gardener is with his orchids; as a nurse is with her patient; as a mother is with her troublesome child. A gardener who lost all patience with his delicate plants; a nurse who treated her poor patient peevishly; or a mother who met ill-temper with ill-temper could only expect to fail. I have urged John Sheergood to treat himself with a softer hand, and to greet himself with a smile. I lent him Henry Drummond’s lovely essay on *The Lilies*, taking the precaution, before doing so, to underline the following sentences: ‘Growth must be spontaneous. A boy not only grows without trying, but he cannot grow if he tries. The man who struggles in agony to grow makes the church into a workshop when God meant

it to be a beautiful garden.' There is a good deal in the chapter that will have a special interest for my poor self-castigated friend.

But, although his lash falls principally upon his own back, he is not the only sufferer. I shall never forget when, as a young fellow, he joined the church. His conversion was a very radiant experience, and, in the ecstasy of it all, he formed a brightly rose-tinted conception of what the fellowship of the church must be. The idea of being admitted to the society of numbers of people as happy as himself! They would be able to tell of experiences as glorious as his own; they would be sure to congratulate him on his inexpressible joy, and to help him in relation to the difficulties that beset his daily path. They would encourage him by their sympathy and stimulate him by their example. Their conversation would illumine for him the sacred page; their vivid testimonies to answered prayer would give him greater confidence in approaching the Throne of Grace; the very atmosphere that he expected to breathe would, he felt sure, inflame his own devotion to the highest and holiest things.

He has often since told me of his disillusionment. It happened to be a wet night when he was received into membership, and there were fewer members present than were usually there. As soon as the service was over they broke up into knots. He overheard one group discussing a wedding; and heard a man with a strident voice say that it was a beastly night to be out without an umbrella. But nobody took any notice of John, and he left the building. To complete his discomfiture he mistook the step as he passed out of the church and stumbled awkwardly into the street. 'The whole thing was an awful come-down,' he told me afterwards, 'the greatest surprise I had ever known. I felt as if the bottom had dropped out of everything.' He got over it, of course; and learned by happy experience that the people who treated him so coyly on that memorable night are not half as bad as they seemed. Many of them are now among his dearest and most intimate friends; whilst even with the man who growled at the weather he has since spent some really delightful times. One of the oddest things in life is the dread that some people feel of appearing as good as they really are. And John has found out now that, in spite of the cold douche administered to him that night, there is in the church a glow of genuine enthusiasm and a wealth of spirituality that in those days he never suspected. But it did not reveal itself all at once. The best things never do. And because the church did not put on her beautiful garments as soon as he entered, John was mortified and confounded. He felt just as he felt that day on the sands when he discovered with disgust that, under the spell of the sea, he had not immediately assumed gigantic proportions. As I say, he has got over it now, and

smiles at it, just as he smiles when his adventure by the seaside is recounted.

He was a great favourite in the church, but his ingrained peculiarity betrayed itself with unfailing regularity in one particular direction. Oddly enough, in view of his own experience, he was a little severe with new members. I do not mean that he treated them coldly or distantly; nobody was more genial. But he expected too much of them. He was disappointed unless the convert of yesterday proved himself the full-blown saint of to-day. To satisfy him, they had to be raw recruits one day and hardened veterans the next. It was merely another phase of his Jack-and-the-beanstalk philosophy. It was the magician and the mango-tree over again. In a way it was very fine to see how he grieved over the slightest lapse on the part of these new members. The smallest inconsistency in their behaviour filled him with remorse, and he was afflicted with the gravest suspicions as to our wisdom in welcoming such people into fellowship. He failed, it seemed to me, to distinguish between the raw material and the finished article. The Church evidently had some very raw material in her membership when the Pauline Epistles were written; and it is a mercy for John that he was not born some centuries earlier.

John afterwards left us and entered the ministry. We were exceedingly sorry to lose him. A man more generally honoured, respected, and beloved I have seldom seen. The church was distinctly poorer after he left, although we were all glad that he had given himself to so great a work. But he carried his old characteristic up the pulpit steps with him. He has often told me the story of that first sermon and the way it was received. Such confidences between one minister and another are sacred, and I shall not betray this one. But I never hear John refer to that experience without thinking of Mark Rutherford. In his Autobiography, Mark Rutherford tells how, on settling at his first pastorate, he put all his soul into his first sermon. He was elated by the solemnity and grandeur of his calling, and spoke out of the very depths of his heart. ‘After the service was over,’ he says, ‘I went down into the vestry. Nobody came near me but the chapel-keeper, who *said that it was raining*, and immediately went away to put out the lights and shut up the building. I had no umbrella, and there was nothing for it but to walk home in the wet. When I got to my lodgings I found that my supper, consisting of bread and cheese, was on the table, but there was no fire. I was overwrought, and paced about for hours in hysterics. All that I had been preaching seemed the merest vanity.’ And so on. John Sheergood’s experience was not unlike it. It was the sudden descent from the glowingly romantic ideal to the brutally prosaic reality. It nearly killed John just as it nearly killed Mark Rutherford. But he is getting over it. He is learning

gradually, I think, that a minister can only get the best out of his people by being very patient with them, just as the people can only get the best out of their minister by being very patient with him. The world has evidently been built that way. Jack and the beanstalk is only a fairy-story and the mango-tree is a piece of Oriental trickery; there is no room for such prodigies in a world like this. Like the lilies, we begin in a very modest way, and grow very slowly; we must therefore exercise infinite patience with each other. I have fancied lately that some inkling of this has at length entered into the mind even of John Sheergood, and he has seemed a very much happier man in consequence.

134

III

OUR LOST ROMANCES

THERE are few days in a girl's life more critical than the day on which the sawdust streams from the mangled carcase of her dearest doll. It is a day of bitter disillusionment, a day in which a philosophy of some kind is painfully born. The doll came into the home amidst all the excitements of a birthday. It was instantly invested with every attribute of personality. The task of naming it was as solemn a function as the business of naming a baby. And when the choice had been made, and the name selected, that name was as unalterable as though it had been officially recorded at Somerset House. By that name it was greeted with delight every morning; by that name it was hushed to sleep every night; by that name it was introduced to other dolls, as well as to less important people; and by that name it was addressed a hundred times a day. The doll has suffered accidents and illnesses after the fashion of fleshier folk; but such misadventures, as is the way with humans, has only rendered her more dear. But now an accident has happened, surpassing in seriousness all previous
135 misfortunes. The thing has come to pieces! The girl has a shapeless rag in her hand; the floor is all powdered with sawdust; and her face is a spectacle for men and angels. I say again that this is an extremely critical day in a girl's life, and upon the way in which she negotiates this passage in her history a good deal will eventually depend.

I do not quite know why I have made the feminine element so prominent in my introduction. Boys are just the same. They affect to deride a girl's ridiculous weakness in cherishing so great a tenderness for a doll; but, for all their supercilious airs, they have illusions of their own. Dr. Samuel Johnson has told us how, as a boy, he consulted the oracle as to his future fortunes. If some issue were hanging in the balance—a game to be played, or an examination to be taken—he would endeavour to wrest from the unseen the secret that it held. He would note a particular stick or stone on the path before him; and then, with face turned skywards, he would walk towards it. If he trod on the object which he had chosen, he took it as a sign that he would win the game or pass the examination that was causing him such uneasiness. If, on the other hand, he

136

stepped clean over it, he interpreted it as a sinister prediction of disaster. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes confesses to a similar weakness. ‘As for all manner of superstitious observances,’ says the autocrat of the Breakfast Table, ‘I used to think I must have been peculiar in having such a list of them; but I now believe that half the children of the same age go through the same experience. No Roman soothsayer ever had such a catalogue of omens as I found in the Sibylline leaves of my childhood. That trick of throwing a stone at a tree and attaching some mighty issues to hitting or missing, which you will find mentioned in one or more biographies, I well remember.’ And Dr. Holmes goes on to give us a good deal more in the same strain.

But, although they do not record it, there must have come to both Dr. Johnson and Dr. Holmes a day very similar to that on which the sawdust streamed from the mutilated doll. What about the day on which young Samuel Johnson, his scrofulous face and screwed-up eyes turned skywards, strode along the path towards the selected talisman, stepped plump upon it, and then lost the game that followed after all? And what about the day on which young Oliver Wendell Holmes, impatiently awaiting his father’s return from Boston, wondered if his parent would bring him the pocket-knife for which he had so long and loudly clamoured? But there, not fifty yards away, was a tree; and here, at his feet, was a stone. ‘If I hit it, he’ll bring it; if I miss it, he won’t!’ he cried; and, taking more than usually careful aim, he threw the stone, and missed! But the pocket-knife was in his father’s handbag all the same! Boys or girls, men or women, it matters not; there come into our lives great and memorable days when we have to take farewell of our illusions. Our romances leave us. There comes a Christmas Day on which, to our uttermost bewilderment, we discover the secret history of Santa Claus. And very much will depend upon the way in which we face such sensational and eye-opening experiences.

We go through life leaving these shattered romances behind us. Our track is marked by the spatter of burst bubbles. What then? And in answer to that ‘What then?’ the obvious temptation is the temptation to cynicism. Since the doll has turned out to be a mere matter of sawdust and rags, since the talisman on the footpath told a lie, since the oracle of tree and stone deceived us, we make up our minds to fling to the scrap-heap such cherished beliefs as we still retain. We go in for a severe weeding out of everything that is imaginative, everything that is mystical, everything that is romantic. Life resolves itself into a dreary wilderness of matter-of-fact, an arid desert of common sense. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes was wiser. Referring to his oracular stone-throwing and

the rest of it, he says, ‘I won’t swear that I have not some tendency to these unwise practices even at this present date. With these follies mingled sweet delusions, which I loved so well that I would not outgrow them, even when it required a voluntary effort to put a momentary trust in them.’ It is a pity to sweep all our rainbow-tinted romances out of life simply because one of them has been reduced to the terms of rag and sawdust.

There stands before me as I write Sir John Millais’ great picture of ‘Bubbles.’ Both the picture and the experience that it portrays are wonderfully familiar. The curly head; the upturned face; the entire absorption of the little bubble-blower in the shining balls that he is hurling into space; the half-formed hope that this one, at least, may not sputter out and become an unbeautiful splash of soapsuds on the floor; the wistful half-expectancy that now, at last, he has created a lovely globe that shall float on and on, like a little fairy-world, for ever and for evermore. It is all in the picture, as every beholder has observed; and it is all in life. It is the first tragedy of infancy; it is the last tragedy of age. Bubbles; bubbles; bubbles; and yet what would the world be without bubbles? They burst, of course; but we are the happier for having blown them! Our dreams may never come true; but it’s lovely to dream! Illusions are part of life’s treasure-trove. When they go, they leave nothing behind them. When we lose them, we lose everything. It is almost better to become criminal than to become cynical. To be criminal implies an evil hand; but to be cynical reveals a very evil heart. It is a thousand times better to be blowing bubbles that, though fragile, are very fair than to move sulkily about the world telling all the blowers of bubbles that their beautiful bubbles must burst. ‘I want to forget!’ cried the poor little ‘Lady of the Decoration.’ ‘I want to begin life again as a girl with a few illusions!’ Every fool knows that bubbles must burst. The man who feels it necessary to tell this to everybody proves, not that he possesses the gift of prophecy, but that he lacks the saving grace of common sense. The world would clearly be very much the poorer, and not one scrap the richer, if no bubbles were left in it. It is altogether wholesome to have a fair stock of illusions.

But at this point two serious questions press for answer. If illusions are so good, why do they fail us? Why are our bubbles permitted to burst? The question answers itself. If all the bubbles that had ever been blown were still floating about the world, there would be nothing so commonplace as bubbles. That is why the era of miracles ceased. It was a very romantic phase in the Church’s childhood, and it answers to the superstitious element in our own. But we may easily exaggerate its value. If the age of miracles had been indefinitely

lengthened, the effect would have been the same as if all the bubbles became everlasting. If all the bubbles that had ever been blown were with us still, who to-day would want to blow bubbles? And if miracles had once become commonplace, their charm and significance would have instantly vanished. ‘I am persuaded,’ Martin Luther sagely declares, ‘that if Moses had continued his working of miracles in Egypt for two or three years, the people would have been so accustomed thereunto, and would have so lightly esteemed them, that they would have thought no more of the miracles of Moses than we think of the sun or the moon.’ It would not be hard to prove that even the miracles of the New Testament tended to lose their effect. The amazement of the disciples at beholding what they took to be a ghost on the water is attributed to the fact that ‘they considered not the miracle of the loaves’ which had taken place a few hours earlier. A miracle was already so much a matter of course that the memory no longer treasured it as something phenomenal. No pains were taken to investigate its significance. It would have been a tragedy unspeakable if the miraculous element in the faith had become universally contemptible. As the eagle carefully builds the nest in which her eaglets are to see the light, and afterwards as carefully destroys it so that they may be forced to fly, so our illusions are made for our enjoyment, and then dashed to pieces under our very eyes. Our childhood was enriched beyond calculation by the fine romances that gave it such bright colours; and, in exactly the same way, the childhood of the Church was glorified by the wonder-workings of a Hand Invisible.

And the other question is this: What shall we do when our illusions leave us? When the doll turns out to be sawdust and rag, when the youthful oracle speaks falsely, when the bubble bursts, what then? And again the answer is obvious. Why, to be sure, if one romance fails us, we must get a better, that is all! Any man who has not been soured by cynicism will confess that the romantic tints in the skein of life have deepened, rather than faded, as the years passed on. Surely, surely, the romance of youth was a lovelier thing than the romance of childhood! When a girl feels how silly it is to play with dolls, she begins to think of other things that will more appreciate her fondling. When a boy sees that it is senseless to throw stones at trees as a means of deciding his destiny, he takes to tossing precious stones and pretty trinkets in quite other directions, but with pretty much the same end in view. And so the romance of life—if life be well managed—increases with the years, until, by the time we become grandfathers and grandmothers, the world seems too wonderful for us, and we stand and gaze bewildered at all its abounding surprises. Everything depends on filling up the gaps. As soon as the sawdust streams out of the doll, as soon as

the futility of the oracle stands exposed, we must make haste to fill the vacant place with something better.

Long, long ago there were a few Jewish Christians who felt just as a girl feels when the component parts of her dearest doll suddenly fall asunder, just as Samuel Johnson felt when the talisman prophesied falsely, just as Oliver Wendell Holmes felt when he saw that he could trust his oracle no more. They felt—those Hebrew believers—that everything had gone from them. ‘To how great splendour,’ says Dr. Meyer, ‘had they been accustomed—marble courts, throngs of white-robed Levites, splendid vestments, the state and pomp of symbol, ceremonial and choral psalm! And to what a contrast were they reduced—a meeting in some hall, or school, with the poor, afflicted, and persecuted members of a despised and hated sect!’ But the writer of the epistle addressed to them makes it his—or her—principal aim to point out that it is all a mistake. Just as a girl’s richest romance follows upon the disillusionment of the terrible sawdust, so the wealthiest spiritual heritage of these Jewish Christians comes to them in place of the things that they were inclined to lament. ‘For,’ says the writer, ‘ye have come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.’ And whoever finds himself the heir of so fabulous a wealth can well afford to smile at all his earlier disappointments.

144

IV

A FORBIDDEN DISH

I

I WAS at Wedge Bay. It was raining. Wondering what I should do, I remembered the great caves along the shore. For ages the waves had been at work scooping out for me a place of refuge for such a day as this. I put on my coat, slipped a novel in the pocket, and set off along the sands. I soon found a sheltered spot in which I was able to defy the weather, and to watch the waves or read my book just as the fancy took me. As a matter of fact, I had not much to read. The book was Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*, and the bookmark was already near the end. I read therefore until, in the very climax of the tragic close, I suddenly came upon a text. Or perhaps it was less a text than a reference to a text, casually uttered in a moment of great excitement by one of the principal characters in the story. But it acted on my mind as the lever at the switch acts upon the oncoming railway train. In a flash, the novel and all its thrilling interest were left 145 far behind, and I was flying along an entirely new track. And here are the words that so adroitly changed the current of my thought:

'"Oh, if there be judgement in heaven, thou hast well deserved it," said Foster, "and wilt meet it! Thou hast destroyed her by means of her best affections—*it is a seething of the kid in the mother's milk*."'

Almost involuntarily I closed the book, slipped it back into my pocket, and sat looking out to sea lost in a brown but interesting study.

II

'*Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk!*' The striking prohibition occurs three times—twice in the Book of Exodus, and once in the Book of Deuteronomy. I do not know on what principle we assess the relative value and importance of texts; but, surely, a great commandment, thrice emphatically reiterated, ought not to be treated as beneath our notice. I find that the interdict

applies primarily to an ancient Eastern custom. All nations have their own idea as to the special delicacy of certain viands. We British people fancy lamb and sucking-pig, and feel no shame in destroying the tiny creatures as soon as they are born. The predilection of the Arab was for a new-born kid; and when he wished to adorn his table with a particularly toothsome morsel, it was his habit to serve up the kid boiled in milk taken from the mother. It was against this favourite and familiar dish that the stern and repeated prohibition was launched. I do not know if there was any practical or utilitarian reason, based on hygienic or medical grounds, for the emphatic decree. Perhaps, or perhaps not. Some of the old commandments relating to animals seem to have been framed for no other purpose than to inculcate a certain gentleness and courtesy in our attitude towards these poorer relatives of ours. 'Thou shalt not kill a cow and her calf on the same day'; 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn'; and so on. It is difficult to see any real reason why the ewe and her lamb, or the cow and her calf, should not go to the shambles together. But it was strictly forbidden. And similarly, '*Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.*' The finer feelings are certainly shocked at the thought of the cow and the calf going together to the slaughter, and at the idea of boiling the newly born and newly slain kid in the milk of its mother; and the most obvious moral seems to be that we are not to treat the creatures of the field and the forest in any way that grates and jars upon those finer instincts. As I sat watching the foam playing with the strands of seaweed, it seemed to me that, if ever I am asked to preach in support of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, I should have here a theme all ready to my hand. And I felt glad that I had read *Kenilworth*.

III

But the prohibition goes much farther than that. It enshrines a tremendous principle, a principle that is nowhere else so clearly stated. Sir Walter Scott evidently saw that; and no exposition could be clearer than his. The circumstances were, briefly, these. The Countess of Leicester was a prisoner. Just outside her room at the castle was a trapdoor. It was supported by iron bolts; but it was so arranged that even if the bolts were drawn, the trapdoor would still be held in its place by springs. Yet the weight of a mouse would cause it to yield and to precipitate its burden into the vault below. Varney and Foster decided to draw these bolts so that, if the Countess attempted to escape, the trap would destroy her. Later on, Foster heard the tread of a horse in the court-yard, and then a whistle similar to that which was the Earl's usual signal.

The next moment the Countess's chamber opened, and instantly the trapdoor gave way. There was a rushing sound, a heavy fall, a faint groan, and all was over! At the same instant Varney called in at the window, 'Is the bird caught? Is the deed done?' Deep down in the vault Foster could see a heap of white clothes, like a snowdrift. It flashed upon him that the noise that he had heard was not the Earl's signal at all, but merely Varney's imitation, designed to deceive the Countess and lure her to her doom. She had rushed out to welcome her husband, and had miserably perished. In his indignation, Foster turned upon Varney. 'Oh, if there be judgement in heaven, thou hast deserved it,' he said, 'and wilt meet it! Thou hast destroyed her by means of her best affections. *It is a seething of the kid in the mother's milk!'*

At that touchstone the inner meaning of the interdict stands revealed. The mother's milk is Nature's beautiful provision for the life and sustenance of the kid. Thou shalt not pervert that which was intended to be a ministry of life into an instrument of destruction. The wifely instinct that led the Countess to rush forth to welcome her lord was one of the loveliest things in her womanhood, and Varney used it as the agency by which he destroyed her. She was lured to her doom by means of her best affections. Charles Lamb points out, in his *Tales from Shakespeare*, that Iago compassed the death of the fair Desdemona in precisely the same way. 'So mischievously did this artful villain lay his plots to turn the gentle qualities of this innocent lady into her destruction and make a net for her out of her own goodness to entrap her!' It is this that the prohibition forbids. Thou shalt not take the most sacred things in life and apply them to base and ignoble ends. *Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.*

IV

The possibilities of application are simply infinite. There is nothing high and holy that cannot be converted into an engine of destruction. A girl is fond of music. The impulse is a lofty and admirable one. But it may easily be used to lure her away from the best things into a life of frivolity, voluptuousness, and sensation. A boy is fond of Nature. He loves to climb the mountain, row on the river, or scour the bush. Nothing could be better. But if it leads him to forsake the place of worship, to forget God, to fling to the winds the faith of his boyhood, and to settle down to a life of animalism and materialism, he has been destroyed by means of his best affections. Or take our love of society and of revelry. There are few things more enjoyable than to sit by the fireside, or on the beach, with a few really congenial companions, to talk, and tell stories, and

recall old times; to laugh, to eat, and to drink together. Talking and laughing and eating and drinking seem inseparable at such times. And yet out of that human, and therefore divine, impulse see the evils that arise! Look at our great national drink curse, with its tale of squalor and misery and shame! Did these men mean to be drunkards when first they entered the gaily lit bar-room? Nothing was farther from their minds. They were following a true instinct—the desire for companionship and congenial society. They have been lured to their doom, like Sir Walter Scott's heroine, by means of their best affections.

V

And what about Love? Love is a lovely thing, or why should we be so fond of love-stories? The love of a man for a maid, and the love of a maid for a man, are surely among the very sweetest and most sacred things in life. No story is so fascinating as the story of a courtship. And that is good, altogether good. Every man who has won the affection of a true, sweet, beautiful girl feels that a new sanction has entered into life. He is conscious of a new stimulus towards purity and goodness. And every girl who has won the heart of a good, brave, great-hearted man feels that life has become a grander and a holier thing for her. As Shakespeare says:

> Indeed I know
> Of no more subtle master under heaven
> Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
> Not only to keep down the base in man,
> But to teach high thoughts and amiable words,
> And courtliness, and the desire for fame,
> And love of truth, and all that makes a man.

Lord Lytton illustrates this magic force in his *Last Days of Pompeii*. He tells us that Glaucus, the Athenian, 'had seen Ione, bright, pure, unsullied, in the midst of the gayest and most profligate gallants of Pompeii, charming rather than awing the boldest into respect, and changing the very nature of the most sensual and the least ideal as, by her intellectual and refining spells, she reversed the fable of Circe, and converted the animals into men.' Here, then, is something altogether good. It is clearly designed to minister new life to all who come beneath its spell. And yet the sordid fact remains that, through the degradation of this same high and holy impulse, thousands of young people make sad shipwreck.

VI

But of all things designed to minister life to the world, the Cross is the greatest and most awful. Its possibilities of regeneration are simply infinite; and in its case the danger is therefore all the greater. ‘We preach Christ crucified,’ wrote Paul, ‘unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.’ It is the most urgent and insistent note of the New Testament that a man may convert into the instrument of his condemnation and destruction that awful sacrifice which was designed for his redemption. It is the sin of sins; the sin unpardonable; the sin so impressively forbidden by that ancient and thrice reiterated commandment whose significance Sir Walter Scott pointed out to me in the cave by the side of the sea.

V

AN OLD MAID'S DIARY

Christmas Eve, 1973. Christmas-time once more! The season strangely stirs the memory, and the ghosts of Christmases long gone by haunt my solitary soul to-night. Somehow, a feeling creeps over me that this Christmas will be my last. Am I sorry? Yes, one cannot help feeling sorry, for life is very sweet. On the whole, I have been happy, and have, I think, done good. But oh, the loneliness! And every year has made it more unbearable. The friends of my girlhood have married, or gone away, or died, and each Christmas has made this desperate loneliness more hard to endure. Did God mean women to come into the world, to feel as I have felt, to long as I have longed, and then, after all, to die as I must die? None of the things for which women seem to be made have come to me. And now I have no husband to shelter me; no daughters to close my eyes; no tall sons to bear this poor body to its burial. I have pretended to satisfy myself by mothering other people's children; but it was cruel comfort, and often only made my heart to ache the more. And now it is nearly over; I have come to my very last Christmas. I have always loved to sit by the fire for a few minutes before lighting the lamp; and to-night as I do so something reminds me of the old days long gone by.

This little room, neat and cosy, but so quiet and so lonely, somehow brings back to my mind a dream that I had as a girl. Was it one dream, or was it several? Dear me, how the memory begins to piece it all together when once it gets a start! I wonder if I can trace it in my journal? I have always kept a journal—just for company. It runs into several big volumes now, and the handwriting has strangely altered with the years. I shall tear them all up and burn them to-morrow; it will be one way of spending my last Christmas! I have said things to this old journal of mine that a woman could not say to any soul alive. It has done me good just to tell these old books all about it. But my dream or dreams; when did they come? It must be sixty years ago, although, despite my loneliness, it really does not seem so long. But it can be no less, for it was in the days of the Great War. The war broke out in 1914—I was eighteen then!—but my dream came months afterwards when things were at their worst.

It must have been in 1915. I remember that I had been watching the men in khaki. Everybody seemed to be going to the front. My brothers went; the tradesmen who called for orders; the men who served us in the shops; everybody was enlisting. All our menfolk had become soldiers. And, thinking about all this, I dreamed. I wonder if I entered it in my journal? And, if so, I wonder if I can find it? Yes; here it is. Ah, I thought so. It was a series of dreams; night after night for a week, Sunday alone excepted. I don't know why no dream came on Sunday. I will copy these six entries here, so that I can destroy the old volumes with their secrets without making an end of this. The dreams began on Monday.

* * * * *

Tuesday, October 5, 1915. I had such a strange dream last night. I thought I was at the front. Whether I was a nurse or not I have no idea; but you never know such things in dreams. Anyhow, I was there. I saw Fred and Charlie in the trenches as plainly as I have ever seen anything, and Tom the butcher-boy, and the young fellow who used to bring the groceries. And with them, and evidently on the best of terms with them, I saw a tall fellow with fair hair—such a gentlemanly fellow!—and after I had seen him I seemed to have no eyes for the others. If I looked to Fred, he only pointed to the boy with the fair hair. If I turned to Charlie, he nodded to the lad with the fair hair. Tom and the grocer's assistant did the same. And then the fellow with the fair hair looked up, and I saw his face—such a handsome face! He smiled—such a lovely smile!—and I felt myself blush. My confusion awoke me; and I knew it was a dream.

Wednesday, October 6, 1915. Would you believe it, you credulous old journal, I dreamed of my white-haired boy again last night! Isn't it silly? He was home from the war, wounded, but well again. And we were being married; only think of it! I can see it all now as plainly as I can see the white page before me as I write. The commotion at home; the drive to the church; the church itself; the ceremony; how plain it all was! Fred was best man; my white-haired boy evidently had no brothers. Jessie, my own sweet little sister, was my bridesmaid, although she looked a good deal older. It seemed funny to see her with her hair up, and with long skirts. The church seemed full of soldiers. Everybody who had known him, served with him, camped with him, or fought

with him, simply worshipped him. At weddings I have always looked at the bride, and taken very little notice of the bridegroom. But at our wedding everybody was looking at my white-haired boy—so tall, so handsome, so fine—like a knight out of one of the tales of chivalry. And I was glad that they were all looking at him. And I was so happy, oh, so very, very happy! I was happy to think that everybody was so proud of my white-haired boy. And I was still more happy to think that my white-haired boy was mine, my very, very own. I was so happy that I cried, cried as though my heart would break for joy and pride and thankfulness. And my crying must have awakened me, for when I sat up and stared round my old bedroom in surprise there were tears in my eyes still. I wonder if I shall ever dream of my bridegroom again?

Thursday, October 7, 1915. I did; I really did! I dreamed of him again! I saw the home in which we lived, a beautiful, beautiful home. I do not mean that it was big, but that it was sweet and comfortable, and everything so nice! I thought that he was walking with me on the lawn. He was older, a good bit older; I should think twice as old as when I first saw him in the trenches. But he was still the same, still tall, still fair, and oh, such a perfect gentleman! What care he took of me! How proud and devoted he seemed! And how he gloried in the children! For I thought we had children, five of them! The eldest and the youngest were boys, Arthur, so like his father as I saw him first, and the youngest, Harry, such a romp! The three girls, too, were the light of his eyes and the brightness of his life. What times we all had together! I saw him once scampering across the fields with the children, whilst I sat among the cowslips knitting and awaiting the return of my merry madcaps. I saw him sitting with the rest of us around the fire in winter, whilst he told tales of the things that he did at the war. How the boys listened, almost worshipping! And again I saw him on the Sunday at the church. He sat next the aisle. I was so happy in being beside him, with the children on my right. What more, I wondered, could any woman want to fill her cup up to the brim? And, wondering, I awoke.

Friday, October 8, 1915. My dreams are getting to be like parts of a serial story. How real my white-haired boy seems to be! He has come into my life, and I cannot believe that he is only a dream-thing. I went for a walk yesterday with mother and Jessie, and they said I was silent and absent-minded. The truth was that I was thinking about him, yet how could I tell them? Nobody knows but my journal and myself. And last night—it seems scarcely possible—I saw

him again! It was not quite so nice, for I thought we were very old. He was no longer tall and erect, but slightly bent, though stately still. And I leaned heavily upon his arm. And the children came, and brought their children—such a lot of them there seemed to be. He grew as young as ever in playing with these troops of happy little people. And for them there was no fun like a game with grandpapa. And as I sat and watched them, I liked to think that all these boys and girls would have something of him about them, and would grow up to cherish his dear memory as their ideal of all that a Christian gentleman should be. And sometimes I thought of their children, and their children's children, till I saw, floating before my fancy, hundreds and thousands of children yet to be; and I speculated idly as to how far his fine influence would carry down these coming generations. And once more I awoke.

Saturday, October 9, 1915. Oh, my journal, my journal! I dreamed of my white-haired boy again! How I wish I never had! If only I had always been able to think of him as I saw him on Wednesday night and Thursday! I was once more at the war. You know what funny things dreams are. In the trenches I again saw Fred and Charlie and Tom the butcher-boy, and the young fellow who used to bring the groceries. But this time they were all in action; when I saw them before they were resting. The air was heavy with battle-smoke; the great guns roared and reverberated; shells screamed and burst about me. It was like night, although I knew that it was daytime. As I stood and watched—looking for somebody—four Red Cross men passed me. They were bearing a stretcher, and on the stretcher was a mangled form. His face was hidden by his arm, half lying across his eyes. A strange impulse seized me. I sprang forward, raised his arm in the semi-darkness; there was a sudden flash caused by I know not what, and in the light of that fearful and revealing flash I recognized my white-haired boy! I trudged beside the stretcher to the hospital, knowing neither what I did nor what I said. And when we reached the hospital, my white-haired boy was dead! My white-haired boy, my white-haired boy, my white-haired boy was dead! Oh that I had never dreamed again!

Sunday, October 10, 1915. I dreamed once more, but not of my white-haired boy. I dreamed of myself; pity me that I had nothing better to dream of! I am only a girl; but in my dream I saw myself an old woman, old and lonely! Oh, so very, very lonely! I was sitting, I thought, in the dusk beside a bright and cheery fire in a neat and cosy little room. Neat and cosy, but oh, so lonely; and I felt

sorry for myself, very sorry. For the self that I saw in my dream was a sad old self, a disappointed old self, a self that had fought bravely against being soured, but a self that had, after all, only partly succeeded. It was not a nice dream; the nice dreams that I had earlier in the week will never come again. No, it was not a nice dream, and I awoke feeling uneasy and unhappy; and my head was aching.

* * * * *

Christmas Eve, 1973. And so, with a shaky, withered hand, I have copied into the last pages of my journal the entries that I made in the first of these old volumes. What did they mean, those dreams that came to me so long ago? Was there a white-haired boy at the war, a white-haired boy who, if there had been no war, or if just one cruel shell had failed to explode, would have been the glory of my life and the father of my children? But there *was* a war, and the fatal shell *did* burst, and my white-haired boy and I never met, *never met.* The five happy children—those two fine boys and the three lovely girls—will never now gladden these dim old eyes of mine. Those troops of grandchildren, and those hosts of unborn generations that I saw in my happy fancy, will never leave the land of dreams and alight on this old world. In the days of the war, I remember how people wept with the widows, and sorrowed with the mothers whose brave sons were stricken down. And, God knows, none of that sympathy was wasted. Oh, it was heart-breaking to see the lusty women who would never see their husbands again; and the broken mothers who would never even have the poor consolation of visiting the graves of their fallen sons. And I was only a girl, a girl of nineteen. And nobody wept with me. I did not even weep for myself. Nobody knew about my white-haired boy. I did not know. But I know now. Yes, *I know now*. And God knows; I pillow my poor tired old head on that, God knows, *God knows*! And so this, then, is to be my last Christmas! Ah, well, so be it! And perhaps—who can tell?—perhaps, in a world where we women shall know neither wars, nor weddings, nor widowhood, I shall before next Christmas have found the face of my girlish dreams!

VI

THE RIVER

IT is my great good fortune to dwell on the green and picturesque banks of a broad and noble river. ‘Rivers,’ says an old Spanish proverb which Izaak Walton quotes with a fine smack of approval, ‘rivers were made for wise men to contemplate and for fools to pass by without consideration.’ Let us beware lest we fall beneath the Spaniard’s lash. For myself, I can at least affirm that I never saunter beside these blue, fast-flowing waters without feeling that the lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places. It is wonderful how, after awhile, the winding river seems to weave itself into the very texture and fabric of one’s life. You stroll by it, bathe in it, row on it, fish in it, until every rock and every bank, every crag and every cliff, every twist and every bay, every deep and every shallow, takes its place among the intimacies and fond familiarities of life. It is one of the wonders of the world that this little island in the southern seas should pour into the Pacific so many fine majestic streams. And here,

beside the lordliest of them all, I have made my home. It is good to stand on these green banks, to survey the great expanse of gleaming waters, and to see the stately ships glide in and out. I often think of that early morning when John Forster found Carlyle standing beside the Thames at Chelsea, lost in an evident reverie of admiration. ‘I should as soon have thought of assaulting him as of addressing him,’ says Forster. To be sure! We do lots of things in this life of which we have no reason to be ashamed, things that are indeed altogether to our credit, yet in the performance of which we do not care to be discovered. It would be a sad old world, for example, if love-making went out of fashion; but no man cares to be caught in the act, for all that. Carlyle was caught making love to the Thames, as I have often made love to the Derwent, and he keenly resented the intrusion. ‘He abruptly turned away,’ adds the offender, ‘and moved across the roadway toward Cheyne Row, with that curious slow shuffle habitual with him, and I saw him no more.’

Why, my very Bible seems a new book as I ponder its pages by the banks of the Derwent. What a different story the Old Testament would have had to tell if Jerusalem had stood by the side of a river like this! The Jews never forgave the

frowning Providence that denied to their fair city a river. They heard how Babylon stood proudly surveying the shining waters of the Euphrates, how Nineveh was beautified by the lordly Tigris, how Thebes glittered in stately grandeur on the Nile, and how Rome sat in state beside the Tiber; and they were consumed with envy because no broad river protected them from their foes, and bore to their gates the wealthy merchandise of many lands. I never noticed until I dwelt by these blue waters how all the Psalms and prophecies are coloured by this phase of Judean life. The prophets were for ever dreaming of the river; the psalmists were for ever singing of the river. Nothing delighted the people like a vision, such as visited Ezekiel, of a broad river rushing out from Jerusalem. No greater or more glowing message ever reached the disconsolate and riverless people than when Isaiah proclaimed, 'The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby!' Jehovah, that is to say, shall impart to Jerusalem all the advantages of a river without any of its attendant dangers. Many a faithless river, by bearing the destroyer on its bosom to the city gates, had proved the undoing of the people after all. But no such fate shall overwhelm Jerusalem. And, hearing this, the riverless city was comforted.

It is recorded of the Right. Hon. John Burns that, in the days when he was President of the Local Government Board, he found himself strolling on the Terrace of the House of Commons, surveying, with all the transports of a born Londoner, the shining waters of the Thames. His reverie was, however, rudely interrupted by a supercilious American who was inclined to regard with scornful contempt the object of Mr. Burns' ecstatic admiration. 'After all,' the American demanded, 'what is it but a ditch compared with the Missouri or the Mississippi?' This was more than even a Cabinet Minister could be expected to stand. 'The Missouri and the Mississippi!' Mr. Burns exclaimed in a fine burst of patriotic indignation. 'The Missouri and the Mississippi are water, sir, and nothing but water; but that,' pointing to the Thames, '*that*, sir, is liquid history, *liquid history*!' Yes, Mr. Burns is quite right. The Thames has a glory of its own among the world's historic streams, although it is only a matter of degree. All rivers are liquid history. The records of the world's great rivers constitute themselves, to all intents and purposes, the history of the race. To take a single illustration, it is obvious that the student who has mastered the history and hydrography of the Niger, the Congo, the Zambesi, the Orange, and the Nile has little more to learn about Africa. From the times of which Herodotus writes, when Cyrus lost his temper with the Tigris, and turned it out of its channel for drowning one of his sacred white horses, rivers have loomed very largely in the

annals of human history. Indeed, Professor Shailer Mathews, in *The Making of To-morrow*, says that there never was, until recent times, a nation that did not paddle or sail its way into history. Civilization, he says, got its first start on water. ‘In the early days rivers were thoroughfares, and they continued to be thoroughfares until the middle of last century. Even the United States was born on water. It was easier to get to New Orleans from Montreal by way of the Mississippi than overland.’ One has only to conjure up the wealthy historical traditions that cluster about the names of the Euphrates and the Nile, the Indus and the Volga, the Rhine and the Danube, the Tiber and the Thames, in order to convince himself that the records of the world’s great waterways are inextricably interwoven with the annals of the human race.

We cannot, however, disguise from ourselves the fact that the affection that we feel for our rivers is not based solely, or even primarily, on utilitarian considerations. Nobody supposes that it is the navigable qualities of the Ganges that have led the Hindus to believe that to die on its banks, or to drink before death of its waters, is to secure to themselves everlasting felicity. Yet, when we attempt to account in so many words for the fascination of the river, the task becomes intricate and difficult. Macaulay spent his thirty-eighth birthday on the banks of the Rhone, and transferred his impressions to his journal. ‘I was delighted,’ he says, ‘by my first sight of the blue, rushing, healthful-looking river. I thought, as I wandered along the quay, of the singular love and veneration which rivers excite in those who live on their banks; of the feeling of the Hindus about the Ganges, of the Hebrews about the Jordan, of the Egyptians about the Nile, of the Romans about the Tiber, and of the Germans about the Rhine. Is it that rivers have, in a greater degree than almost any other inanimate object, the appearance of animation, and something resembling character? They are sometimes slow and dark-looking; sometimes fierce and impetuous; sometimes bright, dancing, and almost flippant.’ However that may be, the fact itself remains; and it is surprising that our literature does not more adequately reflect this marked peculiarity. Macaulay himself felt the lack, and dreamed of writing a great epic poem on the Thames. ‘I wonder,’ he said, ‘that no poet has thought of writing such a poem. Surely there is no finer subject of the sort than the whole course of the river from Oxford downwards.’ But a century has gone by and the poem has not been penned. Shakespeare dwelt beside the Avon; Goethe loved to stroll among the willows on the banks of the Lahn; Coleridge was born, and spent the most impressionable years of his life in the beautiful valley of the Otter. And one of the tenderest idylls of our literary history is the picture of Wordsworth wandering hand in hand with

Dorothy among the most delightful river scenery of which even England can boast. Yet, beyond a few sonnets and snippets, nothing came of it all. Neither the laughing little streams nor the more majestic and historic waterways have ever yet found their laureates.

But there are compensations. If the bards have been strangely and unaccountably irresponsive to the music of the waters, our great prose writers have caught its murmur and its meaning. Two particularly, John Bunyan and Rudyard Kipling, have given us the classics of the river. Bunyan's river—the river that all the pilgrims had to cross—is too familiar to need more than the merest mention. And as for Mr. Kipling, he, like Bunyan, is a writer of both poetry and prose. As a poet he has failed to do justice to the river, as all the poets have failed. He has given us a snippet, as all the poets have done. He makes the Thames tells its own tale, and a wonderful tale it is.

I remember the bat-winged lizard birds,
The Age of Ice and the mammoth herds;
And the giant tigers that stalked them down
Through Regent's Park into Camden Town;
And I remember like yesterday
The earliest Cockney who came my way,
When he pushed through the forest that lined the Strand,
With paint on his face and a club in his hand.

But I forgave Kipling for not having repaired the omission of the older poets when I read *Kim*. *Kim* is the greatest story of a river that has ever been written. Who can forget the old lama and his long, long search for the River? Buddha, he thought, once took a bow and fired an arrow from its string, and, where that arrow fell, there sprang up a river 'whose nature, by our Lord's beneficence, is that whoso bathes in it washes away all taint and speckle of sin.' And so, through Mr. Kipling's four hundred vivid pages, there wanders the old lama, through city and rice-fields, over hills and across plains, asking, always asking, one everlasting question: 'The River; the River of the Arrow; the River that can cleanse from Sin; where is the River? Where, oh, where is the River?' All India, all the world seems to enter into that ceaseless cry. It is the deepest, oldest, latest cry of the universal heart: 'The River; the River of the Arrow; the River that can cleanse from Sin; where is the River? Where, oh, where is the River?' And it is the Church's unspeakable privilege to take the old lama's hand and to point his sparkling eyes to the cleansing fountains.

VII

FACES IN THE FIRE

IT was half-past ten! I had no idea it was so late! Our little camp was pitched about four miles up Captain's Gully, under the massive shelter of Bulman's Ridge. It had been a perfect, cloudless day; all our excursions—fishing, shooting, botanizing, and the rest—had been crowned with delightful success; and after supper we sat round the great camp fire, talking. We talked, of course, of the only things ever discussed around camp fires—old times and old faces. I was struck with the number of sentences that began '*I remember once*——.' Then, one by one, the others stole away to their tents—those little white tents that had looked like stray snowflakes in a wilderness of bush whenever we caught sight of them from the hills in the daytime, yet which seemed all the world to us at night. One by one, with a 'Here's off!' or a 'So long!' the others had slipped quietly away, and the fire and I were at last left to ourselves. How still it all was! Now and then I heard the queer cry of a mopoke up the gully; and once there was the swish of a bough beneath the leap of a 'possum. But, save for these, I could hear no sound but the subdued hissing and rumbling of the logs as they crumpled up in the fire before me. I remained for awhile, looking into the glowing embers; and there, in the dying fire, the faces of my companions all came back to me. And not theirs alone; for I saw, too, the old familiar faces of which we had been chatting, and a hundred others as well. It was then that I was startled by the 'possum in the branches overhead. I looked at my watch; it was half-past ten; and I too turned my back on the fire that had revealed so much. And I wondered, as I moved away to my tent, why, by the side of the fire, we always think of the Past, dream of the Past, talk of the Past. Why do our yesterdays all spring to new and glorious life when the flickering flames are lighting up our faces?

Our camp broke up a day or two later; and all such thoughts seemed to have died with the fire that gave them birth. But, oddly enough, they returned to me this morning. For, when I arose, I was conscious of a distinct snap of winter in the atmosphere; and when I entered the study I discovered that the divinity who presides over such matters had lit the first fire of another year. I saluted it with

pleasure, not merely for the sake of the comfort it promised me, but for its own sake. I greeted it as one greets an old and trusted friend. On this side of the world we scarcely know what winter means, and we are therefore in danger of underestimating the historic value of the fire. We can produce nothing in Australia worthy of comparison with those stern winters with which Northern and Western writers have made us so familiar. We are accustomed to a literature which pours in upon us from high Northern latitudes, and which describes, with a picturesque realism that evokes a sympathetic shiver, the glacial snowdrifts that, for weeks on end, lie deep along the hedgerows; the hapless bird that falls, frozen to death, from the leafless bough; the rabbit that perishes of slow starvation in its wretched burrow; and the fish that floats in stupor beneath the very ice that furnishes the skater's paradise. But whilst, to us, snow and ice are things of imagination or of memory, I felt thankful this morning, as I knelt down like some old fire-worshipper and warmed my numb hands at the cheerful blaze, that this Tasmanian winter of ours has just enough sting in it to preserve in me a lively appreciation of this ancient and honourable institution.

For the fireside is sanctified by a great and glorious tradition. It enshrines all that is most mystical and most wonderful in our civilization. In his pictures of the forest, Jack London again and again emphasizes the magic effect of the fireside even on the creatures of the wild. When White Fang, the wolf, saw the tongues of flame and clouds of smoke that arose from beneath the Indian's hands, he was mystified. It seemed to him a sign of some divinity in man of which he knew nothing. It drew him as by some mesmeric influence. 'He crawled several steps towards the flame. His nose touched it.' And when he felt the pain it seemed as if an angry deity had smitten him.

In *The Call of the Wild*, Jack London returns to the same idea. Buck, the great dog, was a creature of the wild, and sometimes the yearning for the wild swept over him with almost irresistible authority. What was it that kept him from bounding off into the forest and shaking the dust of civilization from his paws for ever? It was because 'faithfulness and devotion, things born of fire and roof,' had been developed within him. He had sprawled on the hearth before John Thornton's fire; had looked up hungrily into John Thornton's face; had learned to love his master more than life itself; and to the fireside of his master he was bound by invisible chains that he could not snap. 'Deep in the forest,' says Jack London, 'a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire and the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest, and on and on, he knew not where or why; nor did he wonder where or why, the call

sounding imperiously, deep in the forest. But as often as he gained the soft unbroken earth and the green shade, the love for John Thornton drew him back to the fire again.' The fire; it is always the fire. The fire seems, even to the brutes, to be the emblem of the genius of our humanity.

For the triumph of humanity is the creation of home; and the soul of the home is the fireside. The luxurious summer evenings, with their wide range of out-of-door allurements, tend to discount the attractions of the home, and to depreciate the value of domestic intercourse. We return from business and rush out again for recreation. But winter furnishes a salutary corrective. When the day's work is done, and the home is once reached, everything conspires to enhance its seductive charms. Outside, the dark and the cold, the bleak wind and the driving rain, threaten multiple discomforts to the gadabout who dares to venture forth; whilst within, the blazing fire, the cheerful hum of table talk, and the genial hospitalities of home make their most resistless appeal amidst the wintriest conditions. Was it not for this reason that the fire came to be regarded for centuries as the natural emblem of domestic felicity? In the days before matches were invented, when the lighting of a fire was a much more laborious business than it is to-day, the first fire in the home of a newly married pair was started by the bearing of a burning brand from each of the homes from which bride and bridegroom came. It was intended as a kind of ritual. The communication of the flame from the old hearths which they had left to the new one which they had established was designed to symbolize the perpetuation of all that was worthiest and most sacred in the homes from which the young people had come. It was the transfer of the Past—that radiant and tender Past that saluted me from the glowing embers of my camp fire in the gully—to the roseate and unborn future.

But although it was in my solitude that the fire in Captain's Gully spoke to me, the fire is no lover of loneliness. It is the very emblem of hospitality, and there are few graces more attractive. We boast that an Englishman's home is his castle, and we do all that legislation can accomplish to make that castle impregnable and inviolate. We close the door, and draw the blinds, and we feel that we have effectually shut the whole world out. And yet when a friend looks in, we suddenly discover that our happiness consists, not in barring and bolting the heavy front door, but in flinging it wide open. We seat him in the best chair; we bring out the best dainties from the cupboard, the best books from the shelves, and the best stories from the treasure-house of memory. The fire crackles, cheeks glow, and eyes sparkle as the genial conversation grows in interest and surprise. Nor is the pleasure by any means the monopoly of the

host; the guest shares it to the full. What is more exhilarating or satisfying than an evening spent round a good fire with a few kindred spirits in whose company one is perfectly at home? You can speak or be silent, just as the mood takes you. You have not to labour to be entertaining if you feel that you have nothing to say; nor need you struggle to restrain yourself if you feel in the humour to talk. You have not to weigh every word as you instinctively do in the presence of less familiar or less trusted companions. You eat the fruit that is handed round, or decline it, just as the whim of the moment dictates, feeling under no obligation either way. You are entirely at your ease. Sometimes the one conversation holds the entire group, and the semi-circle listens, interested or amused, to the tale that one member of the cluster is telling. At other times the party automatically divides itself into knots; the gentlemen, it may be, breaking into politics or business, and the ladies comparing notes on more enticing themes. The fire blazes; the buzz of conversation rises and falls, sinks and swells. Occasionally the attention is so concentrated on the subdued voice of one speaker that scarcely a sound is audible outside the door; a moment later the argument is so exciting, or the laughing so boisterous, that everybody seems to be shouting at the same time. The gramophone, and all such adventitious aids to the tolerable passage of a leaden evening, are never so much as thought of. Even the piano is left out in the cold. Every moment is crowded with the flush of unalloyed delight. And when the last guest has vanished, and the house seems silent and empty, it suddenly occurs to you that the great chief guest whom you have been entertaining, or who has been entertaining you, was the Past, the radiant and glorified Past. The phrase that we heard so often in Captain's Gully, the '*I remember once*——,' has been the key-note of the evening's gossip.

For the fact is that the fireside, whether in Captain's Gully in summer-time or at home in dead of winter, is a sort of magic observatory, a kind of camera-obscura. Outside, the world is wrapped in impenetrable darkness. But the kindly glow of the fire stimulates the memory, spurs the imagination, and brings back all our lost loves and all our veiled landscapes in a beautified and idealized form. The lonely man sees faces in the fire; but there are other things as well. The springs and summers that haunt our fancy as we talk of them beside a roaring fire are the blithest and gayest seasons that the world has ever known. Never was sky so blue, or earth so fair, or sun so bright, or air so sweet as the sky and the earth, the sun and the air, that we contemplate from our coign of vantage by the side of the fire. The fragrance of the hawthorn in the hedgerow; the humming of the bees along the bank; the carolling of birds in the

tree-tops; the bleating of the lambs across the meadows,—these never appear so alluring as when we view them from the wonderful observatory at the fireside. Dean Hole tells with what sadness he used to pluck the last roses of summer. And then, he says, ‘the chill evenings come, curtains are drawn, and bright fires glow. Then who is so happy as the rose-grower with the new catalogues before him?’ He sits by his fire and talks lovingly of the roses that he grew in the summer that has vanished, and his eyes light up with enthusiasm as he thinks of the still fairer blossoms of the summer that will soon be here. And so two summer-times sit by his hearth at mid-winter, and he revels in the company of each of them.

It is ever so. The crackling of the logs wakes up the slumbering Past, and it all comes back to us. As soon as a man gets his feet on the fender he instinctively thinks of old times and old companions. The flames have destroyed much; but they also revive much. They bring back to us our yesterdays; they bring back, indeed, the lordly yesterdays of the remotest, stateliest antiquity. Surely that was the idea in Macaulay’s mind when he wrote ‘Horatius’:

And in the nights of winter,
When the cold north winds blow,
And the long howling of the wolves
Is heard amidst the snow;
When round the lonely cottage
Roars loud the tempest’s din,
And the good logs of Algidus
Roar louder yet within;

When the oldest cask is opened,
And the largest lamp is lit;
When the chestnuts glow in the embers,
And the kid turns on the spit;
When young and old in circle
Around the firebrands close;
When the girls are weaving baskets,
And the lads are shaping bows;

When the goodman mends his armour,
And trims his helmet’s plume;
When the goodwife’s shuttle merrily
Goes flashing through the loom,—
With weeping and with laughter
Still is the story told,

How well Horatius kept the bridge
In the brave days of old.

Now, when I come to think of it, is it any wonder that the days of auld lang syne, and the old familiar faces, should all come back in the flames? For the scientists tell me that this study-fire of mine is simply the radiance of far-back ages suddenly released for my present comfort. Long before a single black-fellow prowled about these vast Australian solitudes, the sun bathed this huge continent in apparently superfluous brightness. But the sun knew what it was doing. The coalbeds gathered up and stored that sunshine through centuries of centuries. The black men came; and the white men came; and here at last am I! I need that sunshine of ages long gone by. The miner digs for it; brings it to the surface; sends it to my study; and, lo, I am this very morning warming my numb fingers at its genial glow!

And so the match with which I light a fire, either in the camp away up in the bush, or in this quiet study at home, is nothing less than the wand of a magician! At the barred and bolted doors of the irrecoverable Past I tap with that small wand and cry, ‘Open, Sesame!’ And, lo, a miracle is straightway wrought! The doors that have been closed for years, perhaps for ages, swing suddenly open, and the sunshine comes streaming out! That match liberates the imprisoned brightness. The scientists say so, and I can easily believe it. For this is the essential glory of the fireside. All the sunniest memories rush to mind as we cluster round the hearth. All the sunniest experiences of the dead and buried years spring to vigorous life once more. All the sunniest faces—the dear, familiar faces of the long ago—smile at us again from out the glowing embers. And perhaps—who shall say?—perhaps some thought like this haunted the minds of a prophet of the Old Testament and an apostle of the New when, greatly daring, they declared that ‘our God is a consuming fire!’ Did they mean that, when we see Him as He is, all the holiest and sweetest and most precious treasure of the Past will be more our own? Did they mean that in Him the sunshine of all the ages will again salute us?

184

VIII

THE MENACE OF THE SUNLIT HILL

I AM writing on the six hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Dante. The poet was born in 1265; I am writing in 1915. Six hundred and fifty years represent a tremendous slice of history; and these six hundred and fifty years span a chasm between two specially notable crises in the annals of this little world. Dante was born in a year of battle and of tumult, of fierce dissension and of bitter strife. It was a year that decided the destinies of empires and changed the face of Europe. Such a year, too, is this in which I write, and, writing, look down the long, long avenue of the centuries that intervene. This morning, however, I am not concerned with the story of revolution and of conflict, of political convulsions and of nations at war. Such a study would have fascinations of its own; but I deliberately leave it that I may contemplate the secret history of a great, a noble, and a tender soul. Edward FitzGerald tells us that he and Tennyson were one day looking in a shop window in Regent Street.
185 They saw a long row of busts, among which were those of Goethe and Dante. The poet and his friend studied them closely and in silence. At last FitzGerald spoke. ‘What is it,’ he asked, ‘which is present in Dante’s face and absent from Goethe’s?’ The poet answered, ‘*The divine!*’ Now how did that divine element come into Dante’s life? He has himself told us. Has the spiritual autobiography of Dante, as revealed to us in the introductory lines of his *Inferno*, ever taken that place among our devotional classics to which it is justly entitled? Surely the pathos, the insight, and the exquisite simplicity of that first page are worthy of comparison with the choicest treasures of Bunyan or of Wesley, of Brainerd or of Fox. Let us glance at it.

I

I have heard many evangelists preach on such texts as: ‘The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.’ It was necessary, of course, that they should explain to their audiences what they meant by this lost condition. Wisely enough, they have usually had recourse to illustration. The child lost in

a London crowd; the ship lost on a trackless sea; the sheep lost among the lonely hills; the traveller lost in the endless bush,—all these have been exploited again and again. From literature, one of the best illustrations is the moving story of Enoch Arden. When poor Enoch returns from his long sojourn on the desolate island, he finds that his wife, giving him up for dead, has married Philip, and that his children worship their new father. It is the garrulous old woman at the inn who tells him, never dreaming that she is speaking to Enoch. Says she:

‘Enoch, poor man, was cast away and lost!’
He, shaking his grey head pathetically,
Repeated, muttering, ‘Cast away and lost!’
Again in deeper inward whispers, ‘Lost!’

But none of these illustrations are as good as Dante’s. He opens by describing the emotions with which, at the age of thirty-five, his soul awoke. He was lost!

In the midway of this our mortal life,
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray,
Gone from the path direct: and e’en to tell
It were no easy task, how savage wild
That forest, how robust and rough its growth,
Which to remember only, my dismay
Renews, in bitterness not far from death.

Neither Bunyan’s pilgrim in his City of Destruction, nor his City of Mansoul beleaguered by fierce foes, is quite so human or quite so convincing as this weird scene in the forest. The gloom, the loneliness, the silence, and the absence of all hints as to a way out of his misery; these make up a scene that combines all the elements of adventure with all the elements of reality. Dante was lost, and knew it.

II

The poet cannot tell us by what processes he became entangled in this jungle. ‘How first I entered it I scarce can say.’ But it does not very much matter. The way by which he escaped is the thing that concerns us; and to this theme he bravely addresses himself. In his description of his earliest sensations in the dark forest, several things are significant. He clearly regarded it as a very great gain, for example, to have discovered that he was lost. ‘I found me,’ he says, ‘I found me in a gloomy wood, astray.’ Those three words, ‘*I found me*,’ remind

us of nothing so much as the record of the prodigal, ‘And he came to himself.’ I am pleased to notice that it is of the incomparable story of the prodigal that Dante’s opening confession reminds most of his expositors. Thus, Mr. A. G. Ferress Howell, in his valuable little monograph on Dante, observes that this finding of himself ‘shows that he has got to the point reached by the prodigal son when he said, “I will arise and go to my father.” He found, that is to say, that he had altogether missed the true object of life. The wild and trackless wood,’ Mr. Howell goes on to observe, ‘represents the world as it was in 1300. Why was it wild and trackless? Because the guides appointed to lead men to *temporal felicity* in accordance with the teachings of Philosophy, and to eternal felicity in accordance with the teachings of Revelation—the Emperor and the Pope—were both of them false to their trust.’ So here was poor Dante, only knowing that he was hopelessly lost; and unable to discover among the undergrowth about him any suggestion of a way to safety.

III

Suddenly the Vision Beautiful breaks upon him. He stumbles blindly through the forest until he arrives at the base of a sunlit mountain:

... a mountain’s foot I reached, where closed
The valley that had pierced my heart with dread.
I looked aloft, and saw his shoulders broad
Already vested with that planet’s beam
Who leads all wanderers safe through every way.

The hill is, of course, the life he fain would live—steep and difficult, but free from the mists of the valley and the entanglements of the wood. And is it not illumined by the Sun of Righteousness—‘Who leads all wanderers safe through every way’? He stepped out from the valley and cheerfully commenced the ascent. And then his troubles began. One after the other, wild beasts barred his way and dared him to persist. His path was beset with the most terrible difficulties. Now here, if anywhere, the poet betrays that spiritual insight, that flash of genuine mysticism, that entitles him to rank with the great masters. For whilst he wandered in the murky wood no ravenous beasts assailed him. There, life, however unsatisfying, was at least free from conflict. But as soon as he essayed to climb the sunlit hill his way was challenged. It is a very ancient problem. The psalmist marvelled that, whilst the wicked around him enjoyed a most profound and unruffled tranquillity, his life was so full of perplexity and trouble. John Bunyan was arrested by the same inscrutable mystery. Why

should he, in his pilgrim progress, be so storm-beaten and persecuted, whilst the people who abandoned themselves to folly enjoyed unbroken ease? I have often thought of the problem when out shooting. The dog invariably ignores the dead birds and devotes all his energy to the fluttering things that are struggling to escape. In the stress of the experience itself, however, such comfortable thoughts do not occur to us, and it seems passing strange that, whilst our days in the wood were undisturbed by hungry eyes or gleaming fangs, our attempt to climb the sunlit hill should bring about us a host of unexpected enemies. Many a young and eager convert, fancying that the Christian life meant nothing but rapture, has been startled by the discovery of the beasts of prey awaiting him.

IV

And such beasts! Trouble seemed to succeed trouble; difficulty followed on the heels of difficulty; peril came hard upon peril.

> Scarce the ascent
> Began, when, lo! a panther, nimble, light,
> And covered with a speckled skin, appeared,
> Nor when it saw me, vanished, rather strove
> To check my onward going; that ofttimes
> With purpose to retrace my steps I turned.

He had scarcely recovered from the shock, and driven this peril from his path, when

> ... a new dread succeeded, for in view
> A lion came, 'gainst me, as it appeared,
> With his head held aloft and hunger-mad.
> That e'en the air was fear-struck. A she-wolf
> Was at his heels, who in her leanness seemed
> Full of all wants, and many a land hath made
> Disconsolate ere now. She with such fear
> O'erwhelmed me, at the sight of her appalled,
> That of the height all hope I lost.

The panther, the lion, and the wolf; that is very suggestive, and we must look into this striking symbolism a little more closely.

V

The three fierce creatures that challenged Dante's ascent of the sunlit hill represent evils of various kinds and characters. If a man cannot be deterred by one form of temptation, another will speedily present itself. It is, as the old prophet said, 'as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.' If one form of evil is unsuccessful, another instantly replaces it. If the panther is driven off, the lion appears; and if the lion is vanquished, the lean wolf takes its place. But there is more than this hidden in the poet's parable. Did Dante intend to set forth no subtle secret by placing the three beasts in that order? Most of his expositors agree that he meant the panther to represent *Lust*, the lion to represent *Pride*, and the wolf to represent *Avarice*. Lust is the besetting temptation of youth, and therefore the panther comes first. Pride is the sin to which we succumb most easily in the full vigour of life. We have won our spurs, made a way for ourselves in the world, and the glamour of our triumph is too much for us. And Avarice comes, not exactly in age, but just after the zenith has been passed. The beasts were not equidistant. The lion came some time after the panther had vanished; but the wolf crept at the lion's heels. What a world of meaning is crowded into that masterly piece of imagery! Assuming that this interpretation be sound, two other suggestions immediately confront us; and we must lend an ear to each of them in turn.

VI

The three creatures differed in character. The panther was *beautiful*; the lion was *terrible*; the wolf was *horrible*. Although the poet knew full well the cruelty and deadliness of the crouching panther's spring, he was compelled to admire the creature's exquisite beauty. 'The hour,' he says,

> The hour was morning's prime, and on his way.
> Aloft the sun ascended with those stars
> That with him rose, when Love divine first moved
> Those its fair works; so that with joyous hope
> All things conspire to fill me, the gay skin
> Of that swift animal, the matin dawn.
> And the sweet season.

The lion, on the other hand, is the symbol of majesty and terror. But the lean she-wolf was positively horrible. Her hungry eyes, her gleaming fangs, her panting sides, filled the beholder with loathing. 'Her leanness seemed full of all wants.' The poet says that the very sight of her o'erwhelmed and appalled him.

Dante himself confessed that, of the three, he regarded the last as by far the worst of these three brutal foes. Now I fancy that, in the temptations that respectively assail youth, maturity, and decline, I have noticed these same characteristics. As a rule, the sins of youth are beautiful sins. The appeals to youthful vice are invariably defended on aesthetic grounds. The boundary-line that divides high art from indecency is a very difficult one to define. And it is so difficult to define because the blandishments to which youth succumbs are for the most part the blandishments of beauty. Like the panther, vice is cruel and pitiless; yet the glamour of it is so fair that it 'blends with the matin dawn and the sweet season.' The sins that bring down the strong man, on the other hand, are not so much beautiful as terrible. The man in his prime goes down before those terrific onslaughts that the forces of evil know so well how to organize and muster. They are not lovely; they are leonine. And is it not true that the temptations that work havoc in later life are as a rule unalluring, hideous, and difficult to understand? The world is thunderstruck. It seems so incomprehensible that, after having survived his struggle with the beauteous panther and the terrible lion, a man of such mettle should yield to a lean and ugly wolf!

VII

The other thing is this: there is a distinction in method, a difference in approach, distinguishing these three beasts. The panther crouches, springs suddenly upon its unsuspecting prey, and relies on the advantage of surprise. Such are the sins of youth. 'Alas,' as George Macdonald so tersely says,

Alas, how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too deep, or a kiss too long,
There follows a mist and a weeping rain.
And life is never the same again.

The lion meets you in the open, and relies upon his strength. The wolf simply persists. He follows your trail day after day. You see his wicked eyes, like fireflies, stabbing the darkness of the night. He relies not upon surprise or strength, but on wearing you down at the last. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth—having beaten off the *panther*—beware of the *lion* and the *wolf*. And, still more imperatively, let him that thinketh he standeth—having vanquished both the *panther* and the lion—take heed lest he fall at last to the grim and frightful persistence of the lean *she-wolf*. It is just six hundred and

fifty years to-day since Dante was born; but, as my pen has been whispering these things to me, the centuries have fallen away like a curtain that is drawn. I have saluted across the ages a man of like passions with myself, and his brave spirit has called upon mine to climb the sunlit hill in spite of everything.

IX

AMONG THE ICEBERGS

NOT so very long ago, and not so very far from this Tasmanian home of mine, I beheld a spectacle that took me completely by surprise, and even now baffles my best endeavours to describe it. I was on board a fine steamship four days out from Hobart. In the early afternoon, as I was rising from a brief siesta, I was startled by a voice exclaiming excitedly, ‘Oh, do come and see such a splendid iceberg!’ I confess that at first I entertained the notion with a liberal allowance of caution. I was afflicted with very grave suspicions. At sea, folk are apt to forget the calendar, and every day in the year has an awkward way of getting itself mistaken for the first of April. But the manifest earnestness of my informant bore down before it all base doubts, and I was sufficiently convinced to hurry up to the promenade deck. I looked eagerly far out to port, and then to starboard, but nothing was to be seen! It was the old story of ‘water, water everywhere!’ My suspicions returned in an aggravated form. Indignantly I sought out my informant, and peremptorily demanded production of the

promised iceberg. ‘It’s dead ahead,’ he replied calmly, ‘and can therefore only be seen as yet from the bows.’ To the bows I accordingly hastened, and there I found a crowd, comprising both passengers and crew, already congregated.

And surely enough, I then and there beheld the most magnificent and awe-inspiring natural phenomenon upon which these eyes ever rested. Right ahead of the ship there loomed up on the far horizon what appeared, under an overcast, leaden sky, to be a fair-sized island, with a high and rocky coast. In the distance stood a tall, rugged peak, as of a mountain towering up like a monarch coldly proud of his desolate island realm. The whole stood out strikingly gloomy and forbidding against the distant eastern skyline. But, hey, presto! even as we watched it, in less time than it takes to tell, a wonderful transformation scene was enacted before our eyes. Suddenly, from over the stern, the sun shone out, flinging all its radiant splendours on the colossal object of our undivided attention.

In the twinkling of an eye, as if by magic, that which but a second ago might have passed for a barren rocky island was transformed into a brilliant mass of

dazzling whiteness. Everything seemed to have been transfigured. A fairyland of pearly palaces, flashing with diamonds and emeralds, could not have eclipsed its glories now! There it still stood, indescribably terrible and grand, right in our track, as though daring us to approach any nearer to its gleaming purities. And as the sunlight refracted about it, all the colours of the rainbow seemed to play around its brow. Moreover, the genial warmth produced another wonder. For, under its benign influence, the glittering peaks gave off columns of vapour. They seemed to smoke like volcanoes.

In the mellow summer sun,
The icebergs, one by one,
Caught a spark of quickening fire,
Every turret smoked a censer,
Every pinnacle a pyre.

The wonder grew upon us as we watched. And yet, straight on, our good ship held her way, her course unaltered and her speed unabated, as if, fascinated by the majestic beauty before her, she were eager to dash herself to pieces at the feet of such pure and awful loveliness. Ever greater and ever more splendid it appeared as the distance lessened between us and it, until we really seemed to be approaching an almost perilous proximity. Then, of a sudden, the ship swerved to the north-ward, and we ran by within a few hundred yards of the icy monster. Who could help recalling the adventure of Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner'?

And now there came both mist and snow,
  And it grew wondrous cold,
And ice, mast high, came floating by
  As green as emerald.

And through the drifts, the snowy clifts
  Did send a dismal sheen,
Nor shapes of men, nor beasts we ken.
  The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
  The ice was all around,
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
  Like noises in a swound.

Or Tennyson's lovely simile, wherein he says that we ourselves are like

Floating lonely icebergs, our crests above the ocean,

With deeply submerged portions united by the sea.

Then once again the fickle sun veiled his face, and that which had appeared at first as a rocky island in mid-ocean, and afterwards as a flashing palace of crystals, now assumed a dulled whiteness as of one huge mass of purest chalk.

The heavy southern seas were dashing angrily against it, seeming jealously to resent its escape from their own frozen dominions. And the great clouds of spray which, as a consequence, were hurled into mid-air gave an added grandeur to a spectacle that seemed to need no supplementary charms. For miles around, the sea was strewn with enormous masses of floating ice, some as large as an ordinary two-story house, and all of the most fantastic shapes, which had apparently swarmed off from the main berg. One long row of these, stretching out from the monster right across the ship's course, looked for a moment not unlike a great ice-reef connected with the berg, and caused no little anxiety until the line of apparent peril had been safely negotiated. When we were clean abreast, a gun was fired from the bridge of the steamer, in order, I understand, to ascertain from the rapidity and volume of the echo the approximate distance, and, by deduction, the size of our polar acquaintance. Nor were there wanting those who were sanguine enough to expect that the atmospheric vibration set in operation by the explosion might finish the work of dislocation which any cracks or fissures had already begun, and bring down at least some tottering peaks or pinnacles. Sir John Franklin, in one of his northern voyages, saw this feat accomplished. But, if any of my companions expected to witness a similar phenomenon, they had reckoned without their host. The unaffected dignity of the sullen monster mocked our puny effort to bring about his downfall. Hercules scorned the ridiculous weapons of the pigmies! The dull booming of the gun started a thousand weird echoes on the desolate ice. They snarled out their remonstrance at our intrusion upon their wonted solitude, and then again lapsed sulkily into silence. The temperature dropped instantly, and I recalled a famous saying of Dr. Thomas Guthrie's, whose life I had just been reading. In one of his speeches, before the Synod of Angus and Mearns, he said, 'I know of churches that would be all the better of some little heat. *An iceberg of a minister* has been floated in among them, and they have cooled down to something below zero.' '*An iceberg of a minister!*' I think of the nipping air on board when our ship was in the midst of the ice; and the memory of it makes me shiver! '*An iceberg of a minister!*' God, in His great mercy, save me from being such a minister as that!

The long-sustained excitement to which these events had given rise had scarcely begun to subside when the cry arose, 'An iceberg on the starboard

bow!’ This, in its turn, was speedily succeeded by ‘Another!’ Then, ‘An iceberg on the port bow!’ And yet once more ‘Another!’ till we were literally surrounded by icebergs. At tea-time we could peep through the saloon portholes at no fewer than five of these polar giants. Although most of them were larger than our first acquaintance—at least one of them being about three miles in length—none of these later appearances succeeded in arousing the same degree of enthusiasm as that with which we hailed the advent of the first. For one thing, the charm of novelty had, of course, begun to wear off. And, for another, they were of a less romantic shape, most of them being perfectly flat, as though some great polar plain were being broken up and we were being favoured with the superfluous territory in casual instalments. And, by the way, speaking of the shape of icebergs, I am told that the icebergs of the two hemispheres are quite different in shape, the Arctic bergs being irregular in outline, with lofty pinnacles and glittering domes, while the Antarctic bergs are, generally speaking, flat-topped, and of less fantastic form. The delicate traceries of the far North do not reflect themselves in the sturdier and more matter-of-fact monsters of the South. The appearance of icebergs in such numbers, of such dimensions, in these latitudes, and at this time of the year, constitutes, I am credibly informed, a very unusual if not, indeed, a quite unique experience. The theory was freely advanced that some volcanic disturbance had visited the polar regions and had dislodged these massive fragments. However that may be, we were not at all sorry that it had fallen to our happy lot to behold a spectacle of such sublimity. And when we reflected that less than one-tenth of each mass was visible above the water-line, we were able to form a more adequate appreciation of the stupendous proportions of our gigantic neighbours. Reflecting upon this aspect of the matter, I remembered to have heard, in my college days, a popular London preacher make excellent use of this phenomenon. ‘When,’ he said impressively, ‘when you are tempted to judge sin from its superficial appearance, and to judge it leniently, remember that sins are like icebergs—*the greater part of them is out of sight*!’

A certain amount of anxiety was felt, I confess, by most of us as night cast her sable mantle over sea and ice. To admire an iceberg in broad daylight is one thing; to be racing on amidst a crowd of them by night is quite another. Ice, however, casts around it a weird, warning light of its own, which makes its presence perceptible even in the darkest night. So all night long the good ship sped bravely on her ocean track, and all night long the captain himself kept cold and sleepless vigil on the bridge. When morning broke, three fresh icebergs were to be seen away over the stern. But we had now shaped a more

northerly course; and we therefore waved adieu to these magnificent monsters which we were so delighted to have seen, and scarcely less pleased to have left. They will doubtless have melted from existence long before they will have melted from our memories.

Yes, they will have melted! And that reminds me of another famous saying of the great Dr Thomas Guthrie, a saying which is peculiarly to the point just now. ‘The existence,’ he said, ‘of the Mohammedan power in Turkey is just a question of time. Its foundations are year by year wearing away, like that of an iceberg which has floated into warm seas, and, as happens with that creation of a cold climate, it will by-and-by become top-heavy, the centre of gravity being changed, and it will topple over! What a commotion then!’ Ah! what a commotion, to be sure!

They will have melted! Silly things! They grew weary of that realm of white and stainless purity to which they once belonged; they broke away from their old connexions and set out upon their long, long drift. They drifted on and on towards the milder north; on and on towards warmer seas; on and on towards the balmy breath and ceaseless sunshine of the tropics. And, in return, the sunshine destroyed them. Yes, the sunshine destroyed them. I have seen something very much like it in the Church and in the world. ‘Therefore,’ says a great writer, who had himself felt the fatal lure of too-much-sunshine, ‘therefore let us take the more steadfast hold of the things which we have heard, lest at any time we drift away from them.’ It is a tragedy of no small magnitude when, like the iceberg, a man is lured by sparkling summer seas to his own undoing.

PART III

I

A BOX OF TIN SOLDIERS

No philosophy is worth its salt unless it can make a boy forget that he has the toothache; and the philosophy which I am about to introduce has triumphantly survived that exacting ordeal. That Jack had the toothache everybody knew. The expression of his anguish resounded dismally through the neighbourhood; the evidence of it was visible in his swollen and distorted countenance. Poor Jack! All the standard cures—old-fashioned and new-fangled—had been tried in vain; all but one. It was that one that at last relieved the pain, and it is of that one that I now write. It happened that Jack was within a week of his birthday. His parents, who are busy people, might easily have overlooked that interesting circumstance had not Jack chanced to allude to it at every opportune and inopportune moment during the previous month or so. Indeed, to guard against accidents, Jack had enlivened the conversation at the breakfast-table morning by morning with really ingenious conjectures as to the presents by which his personal friends might conceivably accompany their congratulations. His expressions of disappointment in certain supposititious cases, and of unbounded delight in others, was quite affecting.

Now Jack's father is afflicted by a wholesome dread of shopping. If a purchase must needs be made, Jack's mother has to make it. But Jack's mother labours under one severe disability. As Jack himself often tells her—and certainly he ought to know—she doesn't understand boys. The difficulty is therefore surmounted on this wise. Jack's mother visits the emporium; carefully avoids all those goods and chattels of which she has heard her son speak with such withering disdain; selects eight or ten of the articles that he has chanced to mention in tones of undisguised approval; orders these to be sent on approval at an hour at which Jack will be sure to be at school; and leaves to her husband the responsibility of making the final decision. Now this unwieldy parcel was still lying under the bed in the spare room on that fateful morning when Jack became smitten with toothache. Every other nostrum having failed, the mind of Jack's mother strangely turned to the toys beneath the bed. A woman's mind is an odd piece of mechanism, and works in strange ways. No doctor under the

sun would dream of prescribing a box of tin soldiers as a remedy for toothache; yet the mind of Jack's mother fastened upon that box of tin soldiers. It was just as cheap as some of the other remedies to which they had so desperately resorted; and it could not possibly be less efficacious. And there would still be plenty of toys to choose from for the birthday present. Out came the box of soldiers, and off went Jack in greatest glee. Half an hour later his mother found him in the back garden. He had dug a trench two inches deep, piling up the earth in protective heaps in front of it. All along the trench stood the little tin soldiers heroically defying the armies of the universe. And the toothache was ancient history!

Jack managed to get his little tin soldiers into a tiny two-inch trench; but, as a matter of serious fact, those diminutive warriors have occupied a really great place in the story of this little world. Bagehot somewhere draws a pathetic picture of crowds of potential authors who, having the time, the desire, and the ability to write, are yet unable for the life of them to think of anything to write about. Let one of these unfortunates bend his unconsecrated energies to the writing of a book on the influence of toys in the making of men. Only the other day an antiquarian, digging away in the neighbourhood of the Pyramids, came upon an old toy-chest. Here were dolls, and soldiers, and wooden animals, and, indeed, all the playthings that make up the stock-in-trade of a modern nursery. It is pleasant to think of those small Egyptians in the days of the Pharaohs amusing themselves with the selfsame toys that beguiled our own childhood. It is pleasant to think of the place of the toy-chest in the history of the world from that remote time down to our own.

But I must not be deflected into a discussion of the whole tremendous subject of toys. I must stick to these little tin soldiers. And these small metallic warriors cut a really brave figure in our history. Some of the happiest days in Robert Louis Stevenson's happy life were the days that he spent as a boy in his grandfather's manse at Colinton. 'That was my golden age!' he used to say. He never forgot the rickety old phaeton that drove into Edinburgh to fetch him; the lovely scenery on either side of the winding country road; or the excited welcome that always awaited him when he drove up to the manse door. But most vividly of all he remembered the box of tin soldiers; the marshalling of huge armies on the great mahogany table; the play of strategy; the furious combat; and the final glorious victory. The old gentleman sat back in his spacious arm-chair, cracking his nuts and sipping his wine, whilst his imaginative little grandson in his velvet suit controlled the movements of armies and the fates of empires. The love of those little tin soldiers never

forsook him. Later on, at Davos, an exile from home, fighting bravely against that terrible malady that had marked him as its prey, it was to the little tin soldiers that he turned for comfort. ‘The tin soldiers most took his fancy,’ says Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, ‘and the war game was constantly improved and elaborated, until, from a few hours, a war took weeks to play, and the critical operations in the attic monopolized half our thoughts. On the floor a map was roughly drawn in chalks of different colours, with mountains, rivers, towns, bridges, and roads in two colours. The mimic battalions marched and countermarched, changed by measured evolutions from column formation into line, with cavalry screens in front and massed supports behind in the most approved military fashion of to-day. It was war in miniature, even to the making and destruction of bridges; the entrenching of camps; good and bad weather, with corresponding influence on the roads; siege and horse artillery, proportionately slow, as compared with the speed of unimpeded foot, and proportionately expensive in the upkeep; and an exacting commissariat added the last touch of verisimilitude.’ Those little tin soldiers marched up and down the whole of Robert Louis Stevenson’s life. They were with him in boyhood at Colinton; they were with him in maturity at Davos; and they were in at the death. For, in the familiar house at Vailima, the house on the top of the hill, the house from which his gentle spirit passed away, there was one room dedicated to the little tin soldiers. The great coloured map monopolized the floor, and the tiny regiments marched or halted at their frail commander’s will.

One could multiply examples almost endlessly. We need not have followed Robert Louis Stevenson half-way round the world. We might have visited Ireland and seen Mr. Parnell’s box of toys. Everybody knows the story of his victory over his sister. Fanny commanded one division of tin soldiers on the nursery floor; Charles led the opposing force. Each general was possessed of a popgun, and swept the serried lines of the enemy with this terrible weapon. For several days the war continued without apparent advantage being gained by either side. But one day everything was changed. Strange as it may seem, Fanny’s soldiers fell by the score and by the hundred, while those commanded by her brother refused to waver even when palpably hit. This went on until Fanny’s army was utterly annihilated. But Charles confessed, an hour later, that, before opening fire that morning, he had taken the precaution to glue the feet of his soldiers to the nursery floor! Did somebody discover in those war games at Colinton, Davos, and Vailima a reflection, as in a mirror, of the adventurous spirit of Robert Louis Stevenson? Or, even more clearly, did somebody see, in that famous fight on the nursery floor at Avondale, a forecast

of the great Irish leader's passionate fondness for outwitting his antagonists and overwhelming his bewildered foe?

Then let us glance at one other picture, and we shall see what we shall see! We are in Russia now. It is at the close of the seventeenth century. Yonder is a boy of whom the world will one day talk till its tongue is tired. They will call him Peter the Great. See, he gathers together all the boys of the neighbourhood and plays with them. Plays—but at what? 'He plays soldiers, of course,' says Waliszewski, 'and, naturally, he was in command. Behold him, then, at the head of a regiment! Out of this childish play rose that mighty creation, the Russian army. Yes,' our Russian author goes on to exclaim, 'yes, this double point of departure—the pseudo-naval games on the lake of Pereislavl, and the pseudo-military games on the Preobrajenskoie drill-ground—led to the double goal—the Conquest of the Baltic and the Battle of Poltava!' Yes, to these, and to how much else? When Jack cures his toothache with a box of soldiers, who knows what world-shaking evolutions are afoot?

And now the time has come to make a serious investigation. Why is Jack—taking Jack now as the federal head and natural representative of Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles Stewart Parnell, Peter the Great, and all the boys who ever were, are, or will be—why is Jack so inordinately fond of a box of soldiers? By what magic have those tiny tin campaigners the power to exorcise the agonies of toothache? Now look; the answer is simple, and it is twofold. The small metallic warriors appeal to the innate love of *Conquest* and to the innate love of *Command*. And in that innate love of Conquest is summed up all Jack's future relationship to his foes. And in that innate love of Command is summed up all his future relationship to his friends. For long, long ago, in the babyhood of the world, God spoke to man for the first time. And in that very first sentence, God said, 'Subdue the earth and have dominion!' 'Subdue!'—that is Conquest; 'have dominion!'—that is Command. And since the first man heard those martial words, 'Subdue and have dominion!' the passions of the conqueror and the commander have tingled in the blood of the race. They have been awakened in Jack by the box of soldiers. He feels that he is born to fight, born to struggle, born to overcome, born to triumph, born to command. And that fighting instinct will never really desert him. It will follow him, as it followed Stevenson, from infancy to death. He may put it to evil uses. He may fight the wrong people, or fight the wrong things. But that only shows how vital a business is his training. A naval officer has to spend half his time familiarizing himself with the appearance of all our British battleships, in all lights and at all angles, so that he may never be misled, amidst the confusion of battle, into opening fire upon his

comrades. As Jack looks up to us from his little two-inch trenches, his innocent eyes seem to appeal eloquently for similar tuition.

‘Teach me what those forces are that I have to *conquer*,’ he seems to say, ‘then teach me what forces I have to *command*, and I will spend all my days in the Holy War.’

And, depend upon it, if we can show Jack how to bend to his will all the mysterious forces at his disposal, and to recognize at a glance all the alien forces that are ranged against him, we shall see him one day among the conquerors who, with songs of victory on their lips and with palms in their hands, share the rapture of the world’s last triumph.

216

II

LOVE, MUSIC, AND SALAD

IT seems an odd mixture at first glance; but it isn't mine. Mr. Wilkie Collins is responsible for the amazing hotch-potch. 'What do you say,' he asks in *The Moonstone*, 'what do you say when our county member, growing hot, at cheese and salad time, about the spread of democracy in England, burst out as follows: "If we once lose our ancient safeguards, Mr. Blake, I beg to ask you, what have we got left?" And what do you say to Mr. Franklin answering, from the Italian point of view, "*We have got three things left, sir—Love, Music, and Salad*"'? I confess that, when first I came upon this curious conglomeration, I thought that Mr. Franklin meant Love, Music, and Salad to stand for a mere incomprehensible confusion, a meaningless jumble. I examined the sentence a second time, however, and began to suspect that there was at least some method in his madness. And now that I scrutinize it still more closely, I feel ashamed of my first hasty judgement. I can see that Love, Music, and Salad are the
217 fundamental elements of the solar system; and, as Mr. Franklin suggests, so long as they are left to us we can afford to smile at any political convulsions that may chance to overtake us.

Love, Music, and Salad are the three biggest things in life. Mr. Franklin has not only outlined the situation with extraordinary precision, but he has placed these three basic factors in their exact scientific order. Love comes first. Indeed, we only come because Love calls for us. We find it waiting with outstretched arms on arrival. It smothers our babyhood with kisses, and hedges our infancy about with its ceaseless ministry of doting affection. Love is the beginning of everything; I need not labour that point. Where there is no love there is neither music nor salad, nor anything else worth writing about.

Mr. Franklin was indisputably right in putting Love first, and immediately adding Music. You cannot imagine Love without Music. I am hoping that one of these days one of our philosophers will give us a book on the language that does not need learning. There is room for a really fine volume on that captivating theme. Henry Drummond has a most fascinating and characteristic essay on *The Evolution of Language*; but from my present standpoint it is sadly
218

disappointing. From first to last Drummond works on the assumption that human language is a thing of imitation and acquisition. The foundation of it all, he tells us, is in the forest. Man heard the howl of the dog, the neigh of the horse, the bleat of the lamb, the stamp of the goat; and he deliberately copied these sounds. He noticed, too, that each animal has sounds specially adapted for particular occasions. One monkey, we are told, utters at least six different sounds to express its feelings; and Darwin discovered four or five modulations in the bark of the dog. ‘There is the bark of eagerness, as in the chase; that of anger, as well as growling; the yelp or howl of despair, as when shut up; the baying at night; the bark of joy, as when starting on a walk with his master; and the very distinct one of demand or supplication, as when wishing for a door or window to be opened.’ Drummond appears to assume that primitive man listened to these sounds and copied them, much as a child speaks of the bow-wow, the moo-moo, the quack-quack, the tick-tick, and the puff-puff. But in all this we leave out of our reckoning one vital factor. The most expressive language that we ever speak is the language that we never learned. As Darwin himself points out, there are certain simple and vivid feelings which we express, and express with the utmost clearness, but without any kind of reference to our higher intelligence. ‘Our cries of pain, fear, surprise, anger, together with their appropriate actions, and the murmur of a mother to her beloved child, are more expressive than any words.’

Is not this a confession of the fact that the soul, in its greatest moments, speaks a language, not of imitation or of acquisition, but one that it brought with it, a language of its own? The language that we learn varies according to nationality. The speech of a Chinaman is an incomprehensible jargon to a Briton; the utterance of a Frenchman is a mere riot of sound to a Hindu. The language that we learn is affected even by dialects, so that a man in one English county finds it by no means easy to interpret the speech of a visitor from another. It is even affected by rank and position; the speech of the plough-boy is one thing, the speech of the courtier is quite another. So confusing is the language that we learn! But let a man speak in the language that needs no learning; and all the world will understand him. The cry of a child in pain is the same in Iceland as in India, in Hobart as in Timbuctoo! The soft and wordless crooning of a mother as she lulls her babe to rest; the scream of a man in mortal anguish; the sudden outburst of uncontrollable laughter; the sigh of regret; the titter of amusement; and the piteous cry of a broken heart,—these know neither nationality nor rank nor station. They are the same in castle as in cottage; in Tasmania as in Thibet; in the world’s first morning as in the world’s last night.

The most expressive language, the only language in which the soul itself ever really speaks, is a language without alphabet or grammar. It needs neither to be learned nor taught, for all men speak it, and all men understand.

Was that, consciously or subconsciously, at the back of Mr. Franklin's mind when he put Music next to Love? Certain it is that, in that unwritten language which is greater than all speech, Music is the natural expression of Love. Why is there music in the grove and the forest? It is because love is there. The birds never sing so sweetly as during the mating season. For awhile the male bird hovers about the person of his desired bride, and pours out an incessant torrent of song in the fond hope of one day winning her; and when his purpose is achieved, he goes on singing for very joy that she is his. And afterwards he 'gallantly perches near the little home, pouring forth his joy and pride, sweetly singing to his mate as she sits within the nest, patiently hatching her brood.' Both in men and women it is at the approach of the love-making age that the voice suddenly develops, and it is when the deepest chords in the soul are first struck that the richest and fullest notes can be sung.

Music, then, is the natural concomitant of Love. That is why most of our songs are love-songs. If a man is in love he can no more help singing than a bird can help flying. You cannot love anything without singing about it. Men love God; that is why we have hymn-books. Men love women; that is why we have ballads. Men love their country; that is why we have national anthems and patriotic airs.

But the stroke of genius in Mr. Franklin lay in the addition of the Salad. If he had contented himself with Love and Music, he would have uttered a truth, and a great truth; but it would have been a commonplace truth. As it is, he lifts the whole thing into the realm of brilliance—and reality. For, after all, of what earthly use are Love and Music unless they lead to Salad? When to Love and Music Mr. Franklin shrewdly added Salad, he put himself in line with the greatest philosophers of all time. Bishop Butler told us years ago that if we allow emotions which are designed to lead to action to become excited, and no action follows, the very excitation of that emotion without its appropriate response leaves the heart much harder than it was before. And, more recently, our brilliant Harvard Professor, Dr. William James, has warned us that it is a very damaging thing for the mind to receive an *impression* without giving that impression an adequate and commensurate *expression*. If you go to a concert, he says, and hear a lovely song that deeply moves you, you ought to pay some poor person's tram fare on the way home. It is a natural as well as a psychological law. The earth, for example, receives the impression represented

by the fall of autumn leaves, the descent of sap from the bough, and the widespread decay of wintry desolation. But she hastens to give expression to this impression by all the wealth and plenitude of her glorious spring array.

The New Testament gives us a great story which exactly illustrates my point. It is a very graceful and tender record, full of Love and Music, but containing also something more than Love and Music. For when Dorcas died all the widows stood weeping in the chamber of death, showing the coats that Dorcas had made while she was yet with them. Dorcas was a Jewess. At one time she had been taught to regard the name of Jesus as a thing to be abhorred and accursed. But later on a wonderful experience befell her. Could she ever forget the day on which, amidst a whirl of spiritual bewilderment and a tempest of spiritual emotion, she had discovered, in the very Messiah whom once she had despised, her Saviour and her Lord? It was a day never to be forgotten, a day full of Love and Music. How could she produce an expression adequate to that wonderful impression? Not in words; for she was not gifted with speech. Yet an expression must be found. It would have been a fatal thing for the delicate soul of Dorcas if so turgid a flood of feeling had found no apt and natural outlet. And in that crisis she thought of her needle. She expressed her love for the Lord in the occupation most familiar to her. It was a kind of storage of energy. Dorcas wove her love for her Lord into every stitch, and a tender thought into every stitch, and a fervent prayer into every stitch. And that spiritual storage escaped through warm coats and neat garments into the hearts and homes of these widows and poor folk along the coast, and they learned the depth and tenderness of the divine love from the deft finger-tips of Dorcas.

Salad is the natural and fitting outcome of Love and Music. I have already confessed that when first I came upon the triune conjunction I thought it rather an incongruous medley, a strange hotch-potch, an ill-assorted company. That is the worst of judging things in a hurry. The eye does the work of the brain, and does it badly. It is a common failing of ours. Look at the torrent of toothless jokes that have been directed at the contrast between the romance of courtship and the domestic realities that follow. The former, according to the traditional estimate, consists of billing and cooing, of fervent protestations and radiant dreams, of romantic loveliness and honeyed phrases. The latter, according to the same traditional view, consists of struggle and anxiety, of drudgery and menial toil, of broken nights with tiresome children, of nerve-racking anxiety and an endless sequence of troubles. He who looks at life in this way makes precisely the same mistake that I myself made when I first saw Mr. Franklin’s Love, Music, and Salad, and thought it a higgledy-piggledy hotch-potch. It is

nothing of the kind. Love naturally leads to Music; and Love and Music naturally lead to Salad. Courtship leads to the cradle and the kitchen, it is true; but both cradle and kitchen are glorified and consecrated by the courtship that has gone before. Our English homes, take them for all in all, are the loveliest things in the world.

The merry homes of England!
Around their hearths by night,
What gladsome looks of household love
Meet in the ruddy light!
There woman’s voice flows forth in song,
Or childhood’s tale is told;
Or lips move tunefully along
Some glorious page of old.

Here is a picture of Love, Music, and Salad in perfect combination. And what a secret lies behind it! The fact is that the heathen world has nothing at all corresponding to our English sweethearting. Men and women are thrown into each other’s arms by barter, by compact, by conquest, and in a thousand ways. In one land a man buys his bride; in another he fights as the brutes do for the mate of his fancy; in yet another he takes her without seeing her, it was so ordained. Only in a land that has felt the spell of the influence of Jesus would sweethearting, as we know it, be possible. The pure and charming freedom of social intercourse; the liberty to yield to the mystic magnetism that draws the one to the other, and the other to the one; the coy approach; the shy exchanges; the arm-in-arm walks, and the heart-to-heart talks; the growing admiration; the deepening passion; culminating at last in the fond formality of the engagement and the rapture of ultimate union; in what land, unsweetened by the power of the gospel, would such a procedure be possible? And the consequence is that our homes stand in such striking contrast to the homes of heathen peoples. ‘There are no homes in Asia!’ Mr. W. H. Seward, the American statesman, exclaimed sadly, fifty years ago. It is scarcely true now, for Christ is gaining on Asia every day; and the missionaries confess that the greatest propagating power that the gospel possesses is the gracious though silent witness of the Christian homes. Human life is robbed of all animalism and baseness when true love enters. And there is no true love apart from the highest love of all.

Salad may seem a prosaic thing to follow on the heels of Love and Music; but the salad that has been prepared by fingers that one thinks it heaven to kiss is tinged and tinctured with the flavour of romance. All through life, Love makes life’s Music. All through life, Love and Music lead to Salad. And, all

through life, Love and Music glorify the Salad to which they lead. They transmute it by this magic into such a dish as many a king has sighed for all his days, but sighed in vain.

227

III

THE FELLING OF THE TREE

I WAS strolling with some friends up a lovely avenue in the bush this afternoon, when a quite unexpected experience befell us. On either side of the narrow track the tall trees jostled each other at such close quarters that, when we looked up, only a ribbon of sky could be seen above our heads. The tree-tops almost arched over us. Straight before us was a hill surmounted by a number of gigantic blue-gums, only one or two of which were visible in the limited section of the landscape which the foliage about us permitted us to survey. As we sauntered leisurely along the leafy path, thinking of anything but the objects immediately surrounding us, we were suddenly startled by a loud and ominous creaking and straining. Looking hastily up, we saw one of the giant trees falling, and describing in its fall an enormous arc against the clear sky ahead of us. What a crash as the toppling monster strikes the tree-tops among which it falls! What a thud as the huge thing hits the ground! What a roar as it rolls over the hill, bearing down all lesser growths before it! Our first impression was that the
228 tree had been reduced by natural forces; but we soon discovered that it had been deliberately destroyed! The men were already at work upon a second magnificent fellow; and we waited until he too was prostrate.

Nothing in the solar system suggests such a mixture of emotion as the felling of a great tree. In a way, it is pleasant and exhilarating, or why was Mr. Gladstone so fond of the exercise? And why were we so eager to stay until the second tree was down? Richard Jefferies, who hated to destroy things, and often could not bring himself to pull the trigger of his gun, nevertheless felt the fascination of the axe. ‘Much as I admired the timber about the Chace,’ he says, ‘I could not help sometimes wishing to have a chop at it. The pleasure of felling trees is never lost. In youth, in manhood, so long as the arm can wield the axe, the enjoyment is equally keen. As the heavy tool passes over the shoulder, the impetus of the swinging motion lightens the weight, and something like a thrill passes through the sinews. Why is it so pleasant to strike? What secret instinct is it that makes the delivery of a blow with axe or hammer so exhilarating?’ What indeed! For certainly a wild delight makes the heart beat faster, and sends

229

the blood bounding through the veins, as one sees the axes flash, the chips fly, the gash grow deeper, and notices at last the first slow movement of the glorious tree.

And yet I confess that, mixed with this pungent sense of pleasure, there was a still deeper emotion. The thing seems so irreparable. It is easy enough to destroy these monarchs of the bush, but who can restore them to their former grandeur? It must have been this sense of sadness that led Beaconsfield—Gladstone's famous protagonist—to ordain in his will that none of his beloved trees at Hughenden should ever be cut down. How long had these trees stood here, these two giants that had been in a few moments reduced to humiliating horizontality? I cannot tell. They must have been here when all these hills and valleys were peopled only by the aboriginals. They saw the black man prowl about the bush. From the hill here, overlooking the bay, they must have seen Captain Cook's ships cast anchor down the stream. They watched the coming of the white men; they saw the convict ships arrive with their dismal freight of human wretchedness; they witnessed the swift and tragic extermination of the native race; they beheld a nation spring into being at their feet! Did the great trees know that, as the white men exterminated the black men, so the white men would exterminate *them*? Did they feel that the coming of those strange vessels up the bay sealed their own doom? Before the new-comers could build their homes, or lay out their farms, or plant their orchards, they must make war on the trees with fire and axe. Homes and nations can only be built by sacrifice, and the trees are the innocent victims.

I suppose that the sadness arises partly from the fact that the forest is Man's oldest and most faithful friend, and one towards whom he is inclined to turn with ever-increasing reverence and affection as the years go by. With the advance of the years we all turn wistfully back to the things that charmed our infancy, and the race obeys that selfsame primal law. Almost every nation on the face of the earth traces its history back to the forest primaeval. From the forest we sprang; and by the forest we were originally sustained. And even when at length the primitive race issued from those leafy recesses and devoted itself to agriculture and to commerce, men still regarded their ancient fastnesses as the storehouse from which they drew everything that was essential to their progress and development. Man found the forest his warehouse, his factory, his armoury, his all. With logs that he felled in the bush he built his first primitive home; out of branches that he tore from the trees he fashioned his first implements and tools; and when the tranquillity that brooded over his pastoral simplicity was broken by the shout of discord and the noise of tumult, it was to

those selfsame woods that he rushed for his first crude weapons of defence. Architecture, agriculture, invention, and military ingenuity have each of them made enormous strides since then; but it was in the bush that each of these potent makers of our destiny was born. And did not John Smeaton confess that he borrowed from the graceful curve of the oak as it rises from the ground the main idea that characterized the construction of the Eddystone lighthouse? Whenever the architect, the farmer, the inventor, or the soldier desires to visit the scenes amidst which his craft spent its earliest infancy, it will be to the forest primaeval that he will turn his steps. Of medicine, too, the same may be said; for, in those long and leisured days of sylvan quiet, men learned the secrets of the bark and discovered the healing virtues that slept in the swaying leaves; and straightway the forest became a pharmacy. When, exhausted by his labour, or enervated by unaccustomed conditions, his health failed him, Man resorted for his first drugs and tonics to his ancient home among the trees. Indeed, he still returns to the forest to be nursed and tended in his hour of sickness.

Those who have read Gene Stratton Porter's *Harvester* know what wonders lurk in the woods. The Harvester lived away in the forest, and from bark and gum and sap and leaf he collected the tonics and anodynes and stimulants that he sold to the chemists in the great cities. And after awhile every tree that he felled seemed to him such a wealthy store of healing virtue that, when he began to think of his dream-girl and his future home, he could scarcely bring himself to build his cabin out of logs that were so overflowing with medicinal properties. He was in love, and all the tumultuous emotions awakened by that great experience were surging through his veins; and yet it seemed to him an act of sacrilege to cut chairs and tables out of such sacred things as trees! He apologetically explained the delicacy of the situation to each oak and ash before lifting his axe against it.

'You know how I hate to kill you!' he said to the first one he felled. 'But it must be legitimate, you know, for a man to take enough trees to build a home. And no other house is possible for a creature of the woods but a cabin, is it? The birds use the material they find here; and surely I have a right to do the same. Nothing else would serve, at least for me. I was born and reared here, and I've always loved you!'

But for all that, he felt, as the fragrant chips flew in all directions, just as a man might feel who killed a pet lamb for the table; and the Harvester could scarcely reconcile himself to his iconoclastic work. In Medicine Woods he had learned the awful sanctity of the forest, the forest that was the home and nurse

and mother of us all, and it seemed to him a dreadful thing to slay a tree. Frazer tells us in his *Golden Bough* that the Ojibwa Indians very rarely cut down green or living trees; they fancy that it puts the poor things to such pain. And some of their medicine men aver that, with their mysterious powers of hearing, they have heard the wailing and the screaming of the trees beneath the axe. Mr. Adams, too, in his *Israel's Ideal*, has reminded us that, in Eastern Africa, the destruction of the cocoanut-tree is regarded as a form of matricide, since that tree gives men life and nourishment as a mother does her child. The early Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plutarch, watching the rustling of the leaves and the swaying of the graceful branches, came to the conclusion that trees are sentient things possessed of living souls. And, in his *Tales for Children*, Tolstoy makes as pathetic a scene out of the death of a great tree as many a novelist makes out of the death of a gallant hero.

Now it must have been out of this strange feeling—this dim consciousness of a sacredness that haunted the leafy solitudes—that Man came to regard the forest with superstitious gratitude and veneration. The bush represented to him the source of all his supplies, the reservoir that met all his demands, the means of all healing, and the very fountain of life. And so he plunged into the depths of the forest and erected his temples there; in its shady groves he reared his solemn altars; in its leafy glades he built his shrines; and the imagery of the forest wove itself into the vocabulary of his devotion. The representation of a sacred tree occurs repeatedly, carved upon the stony ruins of Egyptian, Assyrian, and Phoenician temples, and Herodotus more than once remarks upon the frequency of tree-worship among the ancient peoples. Pliny, too, marvelled at the reverence which the Druids felt for the oak, and, in a scarcely less degree, for the holly, the ash, and the birch. And what stirring passages those are in which George Borrow describes the weird rites and dark symbolism of the gipsies as they worshipped at dead of night in the fearsome recesses of the pine forests of Spain!

It is really not surprising that this haunting sense of sanctity in the woods should lead Man to worship there. Even Emerson felt that—

> The Gods talk in the breath of the woods,
> They talk in the shaken pine.

And the Harvester himself found the forest to be instinct with moral and spiritual potencies. 'You not only discover miracles and marvels in the woods,' he said, 'but you get the greatest lessons taught in all the world ground into you early and alone—courage, caution, and patience.' Here, then, we have the trees

as teachers and preachers, and many a man has learned the deepest lessons of his life at the feet of these shrewd and silent philosophers. What about Brother Lawrence, whose *Practice of the Presence of God* has become one of the Church's classics? 'The first time I saw Brother Lawrence,' writes his friend, 'was upon August 3, 1666. He told me that God had done him a singular favour in his conversion at the age of eighteen. It happened in this way. One winter morning, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and that after that the flowers and fruit would appear, he received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul.' What God could do for the leafless tree, he thought, He could also do for him.

Milton tells us that the forest, which has played so large a part in the development of this world, will flourish also in the next.

> In heaven the trees
> Of life ambrosial fruitage bear, and vines
> Yield nectar.

And, having all this in mind, is it not pleasant to notice that the very last chapter of the Bible tells of the tree that waves by the side of the river of life? There is something sacramental about trees. George Gissing says that Odysseus cutting down the olive in order to build for himself a home is a picture of man performing a supreme act of piety. 'Through all the ages,' he says, 'that picture must retain its profound significance.' The trees of Medicine Woods yielded up their life to the Harvester's axe, that he and his dream-girl might dwell in security and bliss. And, on a green hill far away without a city wall, another tree was cut down years ago, that it might represent to all men everywhere the means of grace and the hope of glory. And even more than all the other trees, the leaves of *that* tree are for the healing of the nations.

237

IV

SPOIL!

WE were sitting round the fire last night when a boy came rushing up the street shouting, ‘The latest war news.’ I went to the door, bought a paper, and settled down again to read it. All at once the word ‘siege’ caught my eye, and, after glancing over the cablegram to which it referred, I lay back in the chair and allowed my mind to roam among the romantic recollections that the great word had suggested. I thought of the Siege of Lucknow in the East, of the Siege of Mexico in the West, and of the Siege of Londonderry midway between. Who that has once read the thrilling narratives of these famous exploits can resist the temptation occasionally to set his fancy free to revisit the scenes of those tremendous struggles? My reverie was rudely interrupted.

‘Run along, Wroxie, dear, it’s past bedtime!’ a maternal voice from the opposite chair suddenly expostulated.

‘But, mother, I *must* do my Scripture-lesson, and I’ve *nearly* finished!’

238 ‘What have you to do, Wroxie?’ I inquired, appointing myself arbitrator on the instant.

‘I have to learn these eight verses of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm!’

‘Well, read them aloud to us, and then run off to bed!’ I commanded.

She read. I am afraid I had no ears for any of the later verses. For among the very first words that she read were these: ‘*I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil*.’ I had read those familiar words hundreds of times, but it was like passing a closed door. But to-night my memories of the great historic sieges supplied me with the key. ‘As one that findeth great *spoil*’ ... ‘findeth great *spoil*’ ... ‘great *spoil*.’ That one word ‘*spoil*’ supplied me with the magic key. I applied it; the door flew open; and I saw *that* in the text which I had never seen before. The lesson came to an end; the girlish tones subsided; the reader kissed me good-night, and scampered off to bed, her mother leaving the room in her company; and I was left once more to my own imaginings.

But my fancy flew in quite a fresh direction. The text had done for my imprisoned mind what Noah did for the imprisoned dove. It had opened a

239

window of escape, and I was at liberty to go where I had never been before. ‘*Spoil!*’—at the sound of that magic word the doors of truth swung open as the great door of the robbers’ dungeon in *The Forty Thieves* yielded to the sound of ‘Open, Sesame!’ A landscape may be mirrored in a dewdrop; and here, in this arresting phrase, I suddenly discovered all the picturesque colour and stirring movement of a great siege. I saw the bastions and the drawbridges; the fortified walls and the frowning ramparts; the lofty parapets and the stately towers. I watched the fierce assault of the besiegers and the tumultuous sally of the garrison. I heard the clash and din of strife. I marked the long, grim struggle against impending starvation. And then, at last, I saw the white flag flown. The proud city has fallen; the garrison has surrendered; the gates are thrown open to the investing forces; and the conqueror rides triumphantly in to seize his splendid prize! His followers fall eagerly upon their booty, and grasp with greedy hands at every glint of treasure that presents itself to their rapacious eyes. Spoil; *spoil*; SPOIL! ‘I rejoice at Thy Word as *one that findeth great spoil*!’

I

Now the most notable point about this metaphor is that the city only yields up its treasure after long resistance. The besieger does not find the city waiting with open gates to welcome him. It slams those gates in his face; bars, bolts, and barricades them; and settles down to keep him at bay as long as possible. The stubbornness of its brave resistance lends an added sweetness to the final triumph of its conqueror; but, whilst it lasts, that resistance is very baffling and vexatious. All the best things in life follow the same strange law. See how the soil resists the farmer! It stiffens itself against his approach, so that only in the sweat of his brow can he plough and harrow it. It garrisons itself with swarms of insect pests, so that his attempts to subjugate it shall be rendered as ineffective and unfruitful as possible. It extends eager hospitality to every noxious seed that falls upon its surface. It encourages all the farmer’s enemies, and fights against all his allies. Labour makes the harvest sweeter, it is true; but whilst it is in progress it is none the less exhausting. It is only by breaking down the obstinate resistance of the unwilling soil that the farmer achieves the golden triumph of harvest-time. The miner passes through the same trying experience. The earth has nothing to gain by holding her gold and her diamonds, her copper and her coal, in such a tight clutch. Yet she makes the work of the miner a desperate and dangerous business. He takes his life in his hand as he descends the shaft. The peril and the toil add a greater value to the

booty, I confess; but the work of the dark mine is none the less trying on that account. He who would grasp the treasures that lie buried in the bowels of the earth must first break down the most determined and dogged resistance. And the treasures of the mind also follow this curious law. There is no royal road to learning. Knowledge resists the intruder. It presents an exterior that is altogether revolting, and only the brave persist in the attack. The text-books of the schools are rarely set to music; they do not tingle with romance. They look as dry as dust, and they are often even more arid than they look. I remember that, in my college days, the student who sat next to me on the old familiar benches suddenly died. He was brilliant; I was not. And when I heard that he had gone, the first thought that occurred to me was a peculiar one. Had all his knowledge perished with him? I asked myself. I thought of the problems that he had mastered, but with which I was still grappling. Could he not have bequeathed to me the fruits of his patient and hard-won victories? No; it could not be. The city must be patiently besieged and gallantly stormed before it will surrender. The coveted diploma may be all the sweeter afterwards as a result of so long and persistent a struggle; but that fact does not at the time relieve the tedium or lessen the intolerable drudgery. Knowledge seems so good and so desirable a thing; yet it resists the aspiring student with such pitiless and unsympathetic pertinacity.

Even love behaves in the same way. The lady keeps her lover at arm’s length. She would rather die than not be his, but she must guard her modesty at all hazards. She must not make herself too cheap. She assumes a frigidity that is in hopeless conflict with the warmth of her real sentiments. Her apparent indifference and repeated rebuffs nearly drive her poor wooer to distraction. Her kisses are all the sweeter later on when she is delightfully and avowedly his own; but whilst the siege of her affections lasts the torment almost wrecks his reason. It is really no hypocrisy on her part. It is the recognition of a true instinct. All the best things resist us, and their resistance has to be overcome. And the psalmist declares that even the divine Word treated him in the selfsame way. It did not entice, allure, fascinate; that is usually the policy of evil things. No; it repelled, resisted, dared him! And it was not until he had conquered that hostility that he entered into his triumph. It was in the carcase of the fierce lion he had previously destroyed that Samson found the honey that was so sweet to his taste. We generally find our spoil in the cities that slammed their great gates in our faces.

II

But the city capitulates for all that. It may hold out stubbornly, and for long, but it always yields at the last. It was so ordained. The soil was meant to resist the farmer; but it was also meant to yield to the farmer at length, and to furnish him with his proud and delightful prize. The minerals are hidden so cleverly, and buried so deeply, not that they may successfully elude the vigilance and skill of the heroic miner, but in order that he may justly prize the precious metals when they fall at last into his hands. The student's tedious struggle after knowledge is made so painful a process, not to deter or defeat him, but so that, side by side with the acquisition of learning, he may develop those faculties of brain and intellect which can alone qualify him to wield with wisdom the erudition that he is now so laboriously amassing. The lady treats her poor lover with such seeming disdain, not by any means to dishearten him, but that she may make quite sure that his ardour is no mere passing whim, but a deep and enduring attachment. In each case capitulation is agreed upon if only the besieger is sufficiently gallant and persistent. The best things, and even the holiest things, 'hold us off that they may draw us on'—to use Tennyson's expressive phrase.

To cite a single example, what a wonder-story is that of the Syro-Phoenician woman! The Master conceals Himself from her; treats her anguish with apparent indifference; preserves a frigid silence in face of her passionate entreaty; and offers exasperating rebuffs in reply to her desperate arguments! But did He design to destroy her faith? Let us see! Like a gallant besieger, she sat down before the city with indomitable courage and patience. Beaten back at one gate, she instantly stormed another. Resisted at one redoubt, she mustered all her forces in the effort to reduce a second. And at last 'Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt!' The capitulation was a predetermined policy; but the courage and pertinacity of the besieger must be tested to the utmost before the gates can be finally thrown open.

III

And then the victors fly upon the spoil! The repelling Word yields, and is found to contain wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. 'I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil.' *Spoil!* We have all felt the thrill of those tremendous pages in which Gibbon describes the sack of Rome by the all-victorious Goths. We seem to have witnessed with our own eyes the glittering wealth of the queenly city poured at the feet of the rapacious conqueror. Or, in

Prescott's stately stories, we have watched the fabulous hoards of Montezuma, and the heaped-up gold of Atahuallpa, piled at the feet of Cortes and Pizarro. Or if, forsaking the shining spoils of the Goths in Europe and the gleaming argosies which the Spaniards brought from the West, we turn to a later date and an Eastern clime, we instinctively recall the glowing periods of Macaulay in his story of the conquests of Clive. After his amazing victory at Plassey, 'the treasury of Bengal was thrown open to him. There were piled up, after the usage of Indian princes, immense masses of coin. Clive walked between heaps of gold and silver, crowned with rubies and diamonds, and was at liberty to help himself. He accepted between two and three hundred thousand pounds.' He was afterwards accused of greed. He replied by describing the countless wealth by which he was that day surrounded. Vaults piled with gold and with jewels were at his mercy. 'To this day,' he exclaimed, 'I stand astonished at my own moderation!'

Here, then, is the magic key that opens to us the secret in the psalmist's mind. 'I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil.' The besiegers pour into the city. Every house is ransacked. In the most unlikely places the citizens have concealed their treasures, and in the most unlikely places, therefore, the invaders come upon their spoils. Out from queer old drawers and cupboards, out of strange old cracks and crannies, the precious hoard is torn. As the besiegers rush from house to house you hear the shout and the laughter with which another and yet another find is greeted. So was it with his conquest of the Word, the psalmist tells us. At first it resisted and repelled him. But afterwards its gates were opened to his challenge. He entered the city and began his search for spoil. And, lo, from out of every promise and precept, out of every innocent-looking clause or insignificant phrase, the treasures of truth came pouring, until he found himself possessed at length of a wealth compared with which the pomp of princes is the badge of beggary.

V

A PHILOSOPHY OF FANCY-WORK

‘“WHAT course of lectures are you attending now, ma’am?” said Martin Chuzzlewit’s friend, turning again to Mrs. Jefferson Brick.

‘“The Philosophy of the *Soul*, on Wednesdays,” replied Mrs. Brick.

‘“And on Mondays?”

‘“The Philosophy of *Crime*.”

‘“On Fridays?”

‘“The Philosophy of *Vegetables*.”

‘“You have forgotten Thursdays; the Philosophy of *Government*, my dear,” observed a third lady.

‘“No,” said Mrs. Brick, “that’s Tuesdays.”

‘“So it is!” cried the lady. “The Philosophy of *Matter* on Thursdays, of course.”

‘“You see, Mr. Chuzzlewit, our ladies are fully employed,” observed his friend.’

They were indeed; but for the life of me I cannot understand why, amidst so many philosophies, the Philosophy of *Fancy-work* was so cruelly ignored. I should have thought it quite as suitable and profitable a study for Mrs. Jefferson Brick and her lady friends as some of the subjects to which they paid their attention.

‘Whatever are you making now, dear?’ asked a devoted husband of his spouse the other evening.

‘Why, an antimacassar, George, to be sure; can’t you see?’

‘And what on earth is the good of an antimacassar, I should like to know?’

‘Stupid man!’

Stupid man, indeed! But there it is! And for the crass stupidity of their husbands, Mrs. Jefferson Brick and her philosophical friends have only themselves to blame. If they had included the Philosophy of Fancy-work in

their syllabus of lectures, they might have acquired such a grasp of a great and vital subject that they would have been able to convince their husbands that there is nothing in the house quite so useful as an antimacassar. The pots and the pans, the chairs and the tables, are nowhere in comparison. The antimacassar is the one indispensable article in the establishment. Let no man attempt to deride or belittle it.

As it is, however, Mrs. Jefferson Brick and her friends have never really studied the Philosophy of Fancy-work, and have never therefore been in a position to enlighten the darkened minds of their benighted husbands. As an inevitable consequence, those husbands continue to regard the busy needles as an amiable frailty pertaining to the sex of their better halves. In writing thus, I am thinking of the better-tempered husbands. Husbands of the other variety regard fancy-work as an unmitigated nuisance. Mark Rutherford has familiarized us with a husband who so regarded his wife's delicate traceries and ornamentations. I refer, of course, to *Catherine Furze*. We all remember Mrs. Furze's parlour at Eastthorpe. 'There was a sofa in the room, but it was horse-hair with high ends both alike, not comfortable, which were covered with curious complications called antimacassars, that slipped off directly they were touched, so that anybody who leaned upon them was engaged continually in warfare with them, picking them up from the floor or spreading them out again. There was also an easy chair, but it was not easy, for it matched the sofa in horse-hair, and was so ingeniously contrived that, directly a person placed himself in it, it gently shot him forwards. Furthermore, it had special antimacassars, which were a work of art, and Mrs. Furze had warned Mr. Furze off them. "He would ruin them," she said, "if he put his head upon them." So a Windsor chair with a high back was always carried by Mr. Furze into the parlour after dinner, together with a common kitchen chair, and on these he took his Sunday nap.' The reader is made to feel that, on these interesting occasions, Mr. Furze wished his wife and her antimacassars at the bottom of the deep blue sea; and one rather admires his self-restraint in not explicitly saying so. Mr. Furze is the natural representative of all those husbands who see no rhyme or reason in fancy-work. If only Mrs. Jefferson Brick had included that phase of philosophy on her programme, and had passed on the illumination to some member of the sterner sex! But let us indulge in no futile regrets.

That there is a Philosophy of Fancy-work goes without saying. To begin with, think of the relief to the overstrung nerves and the over-wrought emotions, at the close of a trying day, in being able to sit down in a cosy chair, and, when the eyes are too tired for reading, to finger away at the needles, and

get on with the antimacassar. Our grandmothers went in for antimacassars instead of neurasthenia. ‘It is astonishing,’ exclaimed the ‘Lady of the Decoration,’ ‘how much bad temper one can knit into a garment!’ An earlier generation of wonderfully wise women made that discovery, and worked all their discontents, and all their evil tempers, and all their quivering nervousness into antimacassars. On the whole it is cheaper than working them into drugs and doctors’ bills, and drugs and doctors’ bills are certainly no more ornamental.

In his essay on *Tedium*, Claudius Clear deals with that particular form of tedium that arises from leaden hours. And he thinks that in this respect women have an immense advantage over men. Men have to wait for things, and they find the experience intolerable. But a woman turns to her fancy-work, and is amused at her husband’s uncontrollable impatience. The antimacassar, he believes, gives just enough occupation to the fingers to make absolute tedium impossible. The war has led to a remarkable revival of knitting and of fancy-work. My present theme was suggested to me on Saturday. I took my wife for a little excursion; she took her knitting, and we saw ladies working everywhere. Two were busy in the tram; we came upon one sitting in a secluded spot in the bush, her deft needles chasing each other merrily. And on the river steamer eleven ladies out of fifteen had their fancy-work with them. I could not help thinking that, in not a few of these cases, the workers must derive as much comfort from the occupation as the wearers will eventually derive from the garments. Many a woman has woven all her worries into her fancy-work, and has felt the greatest relief in consequence. One such worker has borne witness to the consolation afforded her by her needles.

Silent is the house. I sit
In the firelight and knit.
At my ball of soft grey wool
Two grey kittens gently pull—
Pulling back my thoughts as well,
From that distant, red-rimmed hell,
And hot tears the stitches blur
As I knit a comforter.

‘Comforter’ they call it—yes,
Such it is for my distress,
For it gives my restless hands
Blessed work. God understands
How we women yearn to be
Doing something ceaselessly.

Anything but just to wait
Idly for a clicking gate!

We must, however, be perfectly honest; and to deal honestly with our subject we must not ignore the classical example, even though that example may not prove particularly attractive. The classical example is, of course, Madame Defarge. Madame Defarge was the wife of Jacques Defarge, who kept the famous wine-shop in *A Tale of Two Cities*. When first we are introduced to the wine-shopkeeper and his wife, three customers are entering the shop. They pull off their hats to Madame Defarge. 'She acknowledged their homage by bending her head, and giving them a quick look. Then she glanced in a casual manner round the wine-shop, took up her knitting with great apparent calmness and repose of spirit, and became absorbed in it.' Everybody who is familiar with the story knows that here we have the stroke of the artist. Madame Defarge, be it noted, took up her knitting with apparent calmness and repose of spirit, and became absorbed in it. As a matter of fact, Madame Defarge was absorbed, not in the knitting, but in the conversation; and all that she heard with her ears was knitted into the garment in her hands. The knitting was a tell-tale register.

'"Are you sure," asked one of the wine-shopkeeper's accomplices one day, "are you sure that no embarrassment can arise from our manner of keeping the register? Without doubt it is safe, for no one beyond ourselves can decipher it; but shall *we* always be able to decipher it—or, I ought to say, *will she*?"

'"Man," returned Defarge, drawing himself up, "if Madame, my wife, undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it—not a syllable of it. Knitted, in her own stitches, and her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun. Confide in Madame Defarge. It would be easier for the weakest poltroon that lives to erase himself from existence than to erase one letter of his name or crimes from the knitted register of Madame Defarge."'

Oh those tell-tale needles! Up and down, to and fro, in and out they flashed and darted, Madame seeming all the time so preoccupied and inattentive! Yet into those innocent stitches there went the guilty secrets; and when the secrets were revealed the lives and deaths of men hung in the balance! Here, then, is a philosophy of fancy-work that will carry us a very long way. The stitches are always a matter of life and of death, however innocent or trivial they may seem. Whether I do a row of stitches, or drive a row of nails, or write a row of words, I am a little older when I fasten the last stitch, or drive the last nail, or write the last word, than I was when I began. And what does that mean? It means that I have deliberately taken a fragment of my life and have woven it into my work.

That is the terrific sanctity of the commonest toil. It is instinct with life. ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend,’ and whenever I drive a nail, or write a syllable, or weave a stitch for another, I have laid down just so much of my life for his sake.

But when we begin to exploit the possibilities of a Philosophy of Fancy-work, we shall find our feet wandering into some very green pastures and beside some very still waters. Fancy-work will lead us to think about friendship, than which few themes are more attractive. For the loveliest idyll of friendship is told in the phraseology of fancy-work. ‘And it came to pass that the soul of Jonathan was *knit* to the soul of David.’ Knitting, knitting, knitting; up and down, to and fro, in and out, see the needles flash and dart! Every moment that I spend with my friend is a weaving of his life into mine, and of my life into his; and pity me, men and angels, if I entangle the strands of my life with a fabric that mars the pattern of my own! And pity me still more if the inferior texture of my life impairs the perfection and beauty of my friend’s! Into the sacred domain of our sweetest friendships, therefore, has this unpromising matter of fancy-work conveyed us. But it must take us higher still. For ‘there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother,’ and the web of my life will look strangely incomplete at the last unless the fabric of my soul be found knit and interwoven with the fair and radiant colours of His.

VI

A PAIR OF BOOTS

THERE seems to be very little in a pair of boots—except, perhaps, a pair of feet—until a great crisis arises; and in a great crisis all things assume new values. When the war broke out, and empires found themselves face to face with destiny, the nations asked themselves anxiously how they were off for boots. When millions of men began to march, boots seemed to be the only thing that mattered. The manhood of the world rose in its wrath, reached for its boots, buckled on its sword, and set out for the front. And at the front, if Mr. Kipling is to be believed, it is all a matter of boots.

Don't—don't—don't—don't—look at what's in front of you;
Boots—boots—boots—boots—moving up and down again;
Men—men—men—men—men go mad with watching 'em.
An' there's no discharge in the war.

Try—try—try—try—to think o' something different—
Oh—my—God—keep—me from going lunatic!
Boots—boots—boots—boots—moving up and down again
An' there's no discharge in the war.

We—can—stick—out—'unger, thirst, an' weariness,
But—not—not—not—not the chronic sight of 'em—
Boots—boots—boots—boots—moving up and down again!
An' there's no discharge in the war.

'Tain't—so—bad—by—day because o' company,
But—night—brings—long—strings o' forty thousand million
Boots—boots—boots—boots—moving up and down again!
An' there's no discharge in the war.

A soldier sees enough pairs of boots in a ten-mile march to last him half a lifetime.

Yet, after all, are not these the most amiable things beneath the stars, the things that we treat with derision and contempt in days of calm, but for which

we grope with feverish anxiety when the storm breaks upon us? They go on, year after year, bearing the obloquy of our toothless little jests; they go on, year after year, serving us none the less faithfully because we deem them almost too mundane for mention; and then, when they suddenly turn out to be a matter of life and death to us, they serve us still, with never a word of reproach for our past ingratitude. If the world has a spark of chivalry left in it, it will offer a most abject apology to its boots.

It would do a man a world of good, before putting on his boots, to have a good look at them. Let him set them in the middle of the hearthrug, the shining toes turned carefully towards him, and then let him lean forward in his arm-chair, elbows on knees and head on hands, and let him fasten on those boots of his a contrite and respectful gaze. And looking at his boots thus attentively and carefully he will see what he has never seen before. He will see that a pair of boots is one of the master achievements of civilization. A pair of boots is one of the wonders of the world, a most cunning and ingenious contrivance. Dan Crawford, in *Thinking Black*, tells us that nothing about Livingstone's equipment impressed the African mind so profoundly as the boots he wore. 'Even to this remote day,' Mr. Crawford says, 'all around Lake Mweru they sing a "Livingstone" song to commemorate that great "path-borer," the good Doctor being such a federal head of his race that he is known far and near as Ingeresa, or "The Englishman." And this is his memorial song:

Ingeresa, who slept on the waves,
Welcome him, for he hath no toes!
Welcome him, for he hath no toes!

That is to say, revelling in paradox as the negro does, he seized on the facetious fact that this wandering Livingstone, albeit he travelled so far, had no toes—that is to say, had *boots*, if you please!' Later on, Mr. Crawford remarks again that the barefooted native never ceases to wonder at the white man's boots. To him they are a marvel and a portent, for, instead of thinking of the boot as merely covering the foot that wears it, his idea is that those few inches of shoe carpet the whole forest with leather. He puts on his boots, and, by doing so, he spreads a gigantic runner of linoleum across the whole continent of Africa. Here is a philosophical way of looking at a pair of boots! It has made my own boots look differently ever since I read it. Why, these boots on the hearthrug, looking so reproachfully up at me, are millions of times bigger than they seem! They look to my poor distorted vision like a few inches of leather; but as a matter of fact they represent hundreds of miles of leathern matting. They make

a runner paving the path from my quiet study to the front doors of all my people's homes; they render comfortable and attractive all the highways and byways along which duty calls me. Looked at through a pair of African eyes, these British boots assume marvellous proportions. They are touched by magic and are wondrously transformed. From being contemptible, they now appear positively continental. I am surprised that the subject has never appealed to me before.

Now this African way of looking at a pair of boots promises us a key to a phrase in the New Testament that has always seemed to me like a locked casket. John Bunyan tells us that when the sisters of the Palace Beautiful led Christian to the armoury he saw such a bewildering abundance of boots as surely no other man ever beheld before or since! They were shoes that would never wear out; and there were enough of them, he says, to harness out as many men for the service of their Lord as there be stars in the heaven for multitude. Bunyan's prodigious stock of shoes is, of course, an allusion to Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian Christians concerning the armour with which he would have them to be clad. 'Take unto you the whole armour of God ... and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.'

Whenever we get into difficulties concerning this heavenly panoply, we turn to good old William Gurnall. Master Gurnall beat out these six verses of Paul's into a ponderous work of fourteen hundred pages, bound in two massive volumes. One hundred and fifty of these pages deal with the footgear recommended by the apostle; and Master Gurnall gives us, among other treasures, 'six directions for the helping on of this spiritual shoe.' But we must not be betrayed into a digression on the matter of shoe-horns and kindred contrivances. Shoemaker, stick to thy last! Let us keep to this matter of boots. Can good Master Gurnall, with all his hundred and fifty closely printed pages on the subject, help us to understand what Paul and Bunyan meant? What is it to have your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace? What are the shoes that never wear out? Now the striking thing is that Master Gurnall looks at the matter very much as the Africans do. He turns upon himself a perfect fusillade of questions. What is meant by the gospel? What is meant by peace? Why is peace attributed to the gospel? What do the feet here mentioned import? What grace is intended by that 'preparation of the gospel of peace' which is here compared to a shoe and fitted to these feet? And so on. And in answering his own questions, and especially this last one, good Master Gurnall comes to the conclusion that the spiritual shoe which he would fain help us to put on is 'a gracious, heavenly, and excellent spirit.' And his hundred and fifty

crowded pages on the matter of footwear give us clearly to understand that the man who puts on this beautiful spirit will be able to walk without weariness the stoniest roads, and to climb without exhaustion the steepest hills. He shall tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shall he trample under feet. In slimy bogs and on slippery paths his foot shall never slide; and in the day when he wrestles with principalities and powers, and with the rulers of the darkness of this world, his foothold shall be firm and secure. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be.' Master Gurnall's teaching is therefore perfectly plain. He looks at this divine footwear much as the Africans looked at Livingstone's boots. The man whose feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace has carpeted for himself all the rough roads that lie before him. The man who knows how to wear this 'gracious, heavenly, and excellent spirit' has done for himself what Sir Walter Raleigh did for Queen Elizabeth. He has already protected his feet against all the miry places of the path ahead of him. If good Master Gurnall's 'six directions for the helping on of this spiritual shoe' will really assist us to be thus securely shod, then his hundred and fifty pages will yet prove more precious than gold-leaf.

Bunyan speaks of the amazing exhibition of footgear that Christian beheld in the armoury as '*shoes that will not wear out*.' I wish I could be quite sure that Christian was not mistaken. John Bunyan has so often been my teacher and counsellor on all the highest and weightiest matters that it is painful to have to doubt him at any point. The boots may have looked as though they would never wear out; but, as all mothers know, that is a way that boots have. In the shoemaker's hands they always look as though they would stand the wear and tear of ages; but put them on a boy's feet and see what they will look like in a month's time! I am really afraid that Christian was deceived in this particular. Paul says nothing about the everlasting wear of which the shoes are capable; and the sisters of the Palace Beautiful seem to have said nothing about it. I fancy Christian jumped too hastily to this conclusion, misled by the excellent appearance and sturdy make of the boots before him. My experience is that the shoes do wear out. The most 'gracious, heavenly, and excellent spirit' must be kept in repair. I know of no virtue, however attractive, and of no grace, however beautiful, that will not wear thin unless it is constantly attended to. My good friend, Master Gurnall, for all his hundred and fifty pages does not touch upon this point; but I venture to advise my readers that they will be wise to accept Christian's so confident declaration with a certain amount of caution. The statement that 'these shoes will not wear out' savours rather too much of the spirit of advertisement; and we have learned from painful experience that

the language of an advertisement is not always to be interpreted literally.

One other thing these boots of mine seem to say to me as they look mutely up at me from the centre of the hearthrug. Have they no history, these shoes of mine? Whence came they? And at this point we suddenly invade the realm of tragedy. The voice of Abel's blood cried to God from the ground; and the voice of blood calls to me from my very boots. Was it a seal cruelly done to death upon a northern icefloe, or a kangaroo shot down in the very flush of life as it bounded through the Australian bush, or a kid looking up at its slaughterer with terrified, pitiful eyes? What was it that gave up the life so dear to it that I might be softly and comfortably shod? And so every step that I take is a step that has been made possible to me by the shedding of innocent blood. All the highways and byways that I tread have been sanctified by sacrifice. The very boots on the hearthrug are whispering something about redemption. And most certainly this is true of the shoes of which the apostle wrote, the shoes that the pilgrims saw at the Palace Beautiful, the shoes that trudge their weary way through Master Gurnall's hundred and fifty packed pages. These shoes could never have been placed at our disposal apart from the shedding of most sacred blood. My feet may be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; but, if so, it is only because the sacrifice unspeakable has already been made.

VII

CHRISTMAS BELLS

It is an infinite comfort to us ordinary pulpiteers to know that even an Archbishop may sometimes have a bad time! And, on the occasion of which I write, the poor prelate must have had a very bad time indeed. For—tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon!—none of his hearers knew what he had been talking about! They could make neither head nor tail of it! 'I have not been able to find one man yet who could discover what it was about,' wrote one of his auditors to a friend. It is certainly most humiliating when our congregations go home and pen such letters for posterity to chuckle over. And yet the ability of the preacher at this particular service, and the intelligence of his hearers, are alike beyond question. For the preacher was the famous Richard Chenevix Trench, D.D., Professor of Theology at King's College, Dean of Westminster, and afterwards Archbishop of Dublin. The sermon was preached in the classical atmosphere of Cambridge University, principally to students and undergraduates. The theme was the Incarnation—'*The Word was made flesh*.'

And the young fellow who wrote the plaintive epistle from which I have quoted was Alfred Ainger, afterwards a distinguished litterateur and Master of the Temple. He could make nothing of it. 'The sermon, I am sorry to say, was universally disappointing. I have not been able to find one man yet who could discover what it was about. It is needless to say *I* could not. He chose, too, one of the grandest and deepest texts in the New Testament. He talked a great deal about St. Augustine, but any more I cannot tell you.'

Now Christmas will again come knocking at our doors, and many of us will find ourselves preaching on this selfsame theme. And we have a wholesome horror of sending our hearers home in the same fearful perplexity. 'What on earth was the minister talking about?' All the cards and the carols, the fun and the frolic, the pastimes and the picnics will be turned into dust and ashes, into gall and wormwood, into vanity and vexation of spirit to the poor preacher who suspects that his Christmas congregation returned home in such a mood. His Christmas dinner will almost choke him. There will be no merry Christmas for *him*!

But let no minister be terrified or intimidated by the Archbishop's unhappy experience. His 'bad time' may help us to enjoy a good one. We must take his text, and wrestle with it bravely. It is the ideal Christmas greeting. There is certainly depth and mystery; but there is humanness and tenderness as well.

'*The Word* was made flesh.' Words are wonderful things, to say nothing of '*the* Word'—whatever *that* may prove to be. This selfsame Archbishop Trench, whose sermon at Cambridge proved such a universal disappointment, has written a marvellous book *On the Study of Words*. Here are seven masterly chapters to show that words are fossil poetry, and petrified history, and embalmed romance, and that all the ages have left the record of their tears and their laughter, of their virtues and their vices, of their passion and their pain, in the *words* that they have coined. 'When I feel inclined to read poetry,' says Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'I take down *my dictionary*! The poetry of words is quite as beautiful as that of sentences. The author may arrange the gems effectively, but their shape and lustre have been given by the attrition of age. Bring me the finest simile from the whole range of imaginative writing, and I will show you a single word which conveys a more profound, a more accurate, and a more elegant analogy.' Words, then, are jewel-cases, treasure-chests, strong-rooms; they are repositories in which the archives of the ages are preserved.

'The Word *was made flesh*.' We never grasp the Word until it is. Let me illustrate my meaning. Here is a bonny little fellow of six, with sunny face and a glorious shock of golden hair. His father hands him his first spelling-book, with the alphabet on the front page, and little two-letter monosyllables following. But what can he make of even such small words? He will never learn the A.B.C. in that way. But give him a *teacher*. Make the word flesh, and he will soon have it all off by heart!

Five years pass away. The lad is in the full swing of his school-days now. But to-night, as he pores over his books, the once sunny face is clouded, and the wavy hair covers an aching head.

'Time for bed, sonny!' says mother at length.

'But, mother, I haven't done my home lessons, *and I can't*.'

'What is it all about, my boy?' she asks, as she draws her chair nearer to his, and, putting her arm round his shoulder, reads the tiresome problem.

And then they talk it over together. And, somehow, under the magic of her interest, it seems fairly simple after all. In her sympathetic voice, and fond glance, and tender touch, the word becomes flesh, and he grasps its meaning.

Five more years pass away. He is sixteen, and a perfect book-worm. Looking up from the story he is reading, he exclaims impatiently:

‘I can’t think why they want to work these silly *love-stories* into all these books. A fellow can’t pick up a decent book but there’s a love-story running through it. It’s horrid!’ He has come upon the greatest word in the language; but it has no meaning for him!

But five years later he understands! He has been captivated by a pure and radiant face, by a charming and graceful form, by lovely eyes that answer to his own. That great word *love* has been made flesh to him, and it simply gleams with meaning. And so, all through the years, as life goes on, he finds the great key-words expounded to him through infinite processes of incarnation. ‘Ideas,’ says George Eliot, ‘are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in their vapour and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes *they are made flesh*; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft responsive hand, they look at us with sad sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame.’

And if this be so with other words, how could the greatest, grandest, holiest word of all have been expressed except in the very selfsame way? ‘*The* Word was made flesh.’ There was no other way of saying GOD intelligibly. I should never, never, never have understood mere abstract definitions of so august a term. And so—‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was GOD, and the Word was *made flesh*.’ I can grasp that great word now. Bethlehem and Olivet, Galilee and Calvary, have made it wonderfully plain. The word GOD would have frightened me if it had never been expressed in the terms of ‘a Face like my face’—as Browning puts it—and a heart that beats in sympathy with my own. And so Tennyson says:

And so the Word had breath, and wrought
  With human hands the creed of creeds
  In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought;

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
  Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
  And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef.

And thus the most awful, the most terrible, and the most incomprehensible word that human lips could frame has become the most winsome and charming in the whole vocabulary. GOD is JESUS, and JESUS is GOD! ‘The Word was made flesh.’

The same principle dominates all religious experience and enterprise. Generally speaking, you cannot make a man a Christian by giving him a Bible or posting him a tract. The New Testament lays it down quite clearly that the Christian *man* must accompany the Christian *message*. The Word must be presented in its proper human setting. Our missionaries all over the planet tell of the resistless influence exerted by gracious Christian homes, and by holy Christian lives, in winning idolators from superstition. I was reading only this morning a touching instance of a young Japanese who trudged hundreds of miles to inquire after the secret of ‘the beautiful life’—as he called it—which he had seen exemplified in some Christian missionaries. The Word, *made flesh*, is thus pronounced with an accent and an eloquence which are simply irresistible.

‘I said, and I repeat,’ says Mr. Edwin Hodder, in his biography of Sir George Burns, the founder of the Cunard Steamship Company, ‘I said, and I repeat, that if the Bible were blotted out of existence, if there were no prayer-book, no catechism, and no creed, if there were no visible Church at all, I could not fail to believe in the doctrines of Christianity while the living epistle of Sir George Burns’ life remained in my memory.’ That was Whittier’s argument:

The dear Lord’s best interpreters
  Are humble human souls;
The gospel of a life like his
  Is more than books or scrolls.

From scheme and creed the light goes out,
  The saintly fact survives;
The blessed Master none can doubt,
  Revealed in holy lives.

We have reached a very practical aspect now of the message that the Christmas bells will soon be ringing. The thoughts of men are only intelligibly communicable by means of words; and the words of men only become pregnant with passion and with power when they are *made flesh*. And, in the same way, the thoughts of God to men are only eloquent when they are so expressed. Revelation became sublimely rhetorical at Bethlehem, and we can only perpetuate its eloquence through the agency of lives transfigured.

Transcriber’s Notes

Inconsistent hyphenation left as printed: heart-breaking/heartbreaking, over-wrought/overwrought.

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of Faces in the Fire, by Frank W. Boreham

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FACES IN THE FIRE ***

***** This file should be named 42105-h.htm or 42105-h.zip *****
This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:
http://www.gutenberg.org/4/2/1/0/42105/

Produced by David Wilson and the Online Distributed
Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was
produced from images generously made available by The
Internet Archive/American Libraries.)

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions
will be renamed.

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no
one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation
(and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without
permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules,
set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to
copying and distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works to
protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm concept and trademark. Project
Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you
charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you
do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the
rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose
such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and
research. They may be modified and printed and given away--you may do
practically ANYTHING with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is
subject to the trademark license, especially commercial
redistribution.

*** START: FULL LICENSE ***

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free
distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work
(or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project
Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project
Gutenberg-tm License (available with this file or online at
http://gutenberg.org/license).

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg-tm
electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm
electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to
and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property
(trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all
the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy
all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession.
If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project

Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org/license

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the

trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.pglaf.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at http://pglaf.org/fundraising. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://pglaf.org

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations

($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://pglaf.org

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://pglaf.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.