

LIFE AND LETTERS

Edited by Desmond MacCarthy

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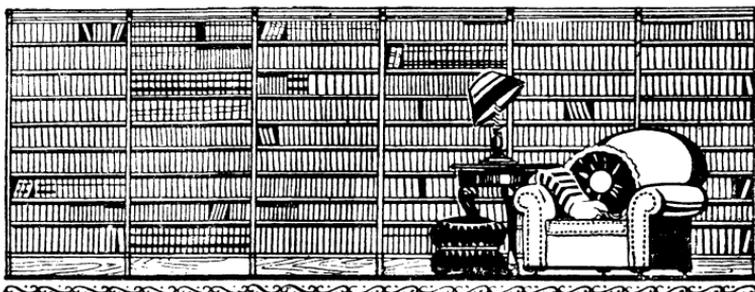
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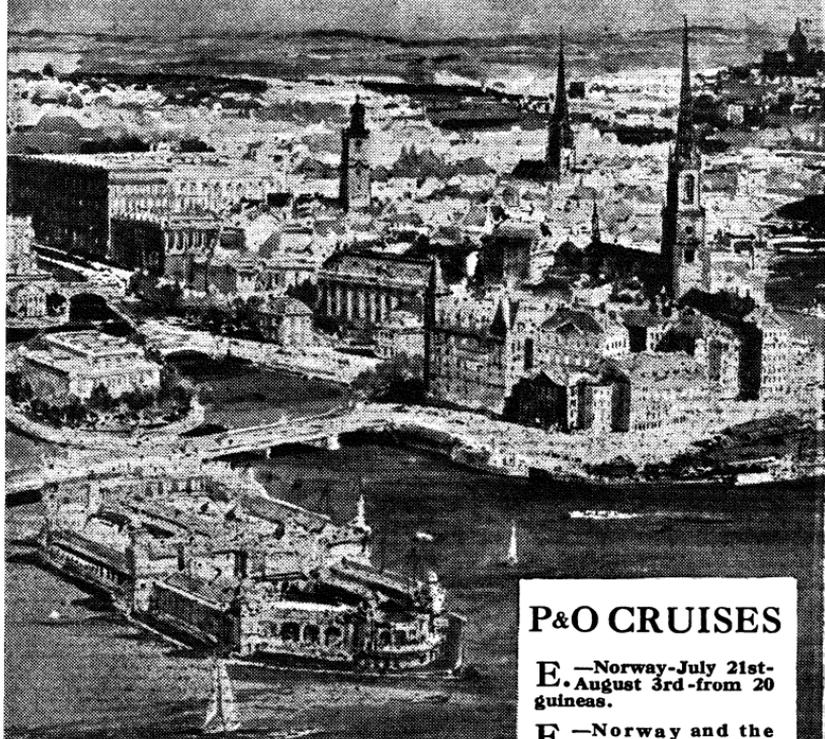
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EDITED BY DESMOND MACCARTHY

ASSISTANT EDITOR: OLIVER BRETT

VOL. I. No. 2. JULY 1928

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CONSTABLE

LIFE AND LETTERS

A. J. A. SYMONS

FREDERICK BARON CORVO

I

THE BIRTH OF BARON CORVO

In 1898 John Lane reprinted from *The Yellow Book* six unusual tales, which on their first appearance had charmed sceptics equally with the devout. They were novel both in style and pose, being in effect retellings of the legends of Catholic saints in the manner of Greek mythology, with quaint attributions of human characteristics and motives to the saints in their heavenly functions, reminding the reader irresistibly of the Gods of Olympus. The narrator was one Toto, an ingenuous vivacious Italian peasant, whose audience was his English patron; and Toto's manner of speech was represented by a delightful mixture of archaisms and broken English. These fables were reprinted in a booklet uniform with Mr. Max Beerbohm's *The Happy Hypocrite*, and their author was given as Frederick, Baron Corvo; but even the well-informed could not have told you who Baron Corvo was, and *Debrett, Who's Who*, the *Almanach de Gotha*, and the *Literary Year Book* were equally ignorant. Lane, had you asked him, would have smiled, and told you that authors must be judged by their words, not by their deeds; if pressed, he would have referred you to Henry Harland, for this mysterious Baron

actually appeared at Harland's Thursday afternoon tea-parties in the Cromwell Road. Tall, priestly-visaged, eagle-nosed, clean-shaven, middle-aged, clothed in plain blue serge or white drill, reticent, unsmiling, wearing strange rings and using stranger words, he was obviously eccentric and a man of parts. When he talked, he kept his eyes cast down, raising them abruptly to disconcert interrupters. Had you been so fortunate as to catch him in a talkative mood, you might have heard a surprising panegyric of the Borgias, or a vivid description of modern Rome, a profession of Catholic faith, or a bitter denunciation of contemporary Catholics. Had you caught his sympathy, he would have recounted his past life for hours; for, like all good talkers, his favourite subject was himself. Probably he would have told you that he had starved in every part of England, and that the Welsh had treated him less kindly than the Scots; he might have referred to his paintings, or explained that he was a tonsured clerk who had received the minor orders; he might have told you many startling things about Aberdeen; but whatever else was said, the one thing certain was that he would refer to his enemies and their conspiracies against himself: for, though he was not mad like William Blake, nor deranged like Cowper, he was afflicted with a mild form of persecution mania, which made him an expert in the art of quarrelling, and transmuted his powers into pugnacity. To the world at large he seemed actuated by motiveless malice, and those who suffered by it have hardly yet forgiven him. Like those weird people who see omens in every chance event, the fall of a leaf or a mirror, he saw the hand of an enemy in every misfortune: and where he saw an enemy, he struck.

'Baron Corvo' was christened by his parents Frederick

William Rolfe; designations insufficient for a natural Romantic, which he took an early chance to supplement. He was born on July 22, 1860, at 61 Cheapside, where his family had manufactured pianos since the eighteenth century. Sent, at the usual age, to a sound school in Camden Town, he made progress when he chose; but his waywardness and discontent cut short his school-days in his fifteenth year. There is an axiom of the wise that those who cannot learn, teach: Rolfe fulfilled it by finding work as an under-master; and ten years of tutoring and school-teaching brought him a curiously deep, though narrow, knowledge of life and literature. I have not inquired more deeply into that decade: the dates of his wanderings are as uncertain as his temper was. Converted to the Roman Catholic faith, he was confirmed at Westminster by Cardinal Manning, who conferred upon him the additional names of Austin Lewis Mary. Serafino had already been added, so that he was now, more fitly, able to call himself Frederick William Serafino Austin Lewis Mary Rolfe.

The priesthood was proposed to him, and his romantic imagination took fire at the thought of complicated ritual performed in elaborate vestments; but at Oscott College he preferred painting and writing verses to serious study. The year 1889 found him in the Scots College at Rome, where he lives in the recollections of his contemporaries as an astonishing romancer, who told tales as tall as Mark Twain's, borrowed money from all who would lend, and spent his time in writing triolets and prose articles, taking posed photographs, singing, improvising pianoforte accompaniments, and painting pictures. On everything he did was the touch of eccentricity, yet he never wavered in his belief in his vocation; perhaps it pleased him to be

addressed as 'The Rev. F. W. Rolfe'. But his fellow students found his stories incredible and his accomplishments intolerable, and complained to the Rector of the discredit that the debts and dilettanteism of this æsthetic *poseur* brought upon the College. He was given a fortnight in which to go, and went, after bitter protests that he had been condemned unheard. A few months later he reappeared in England as Baron Corvo.

His own explanation of this sudden ennoblement was that the Duchess Sforza-Cesarini had adopted him as a grandson, and assigned to him an estate carrying the title of Baron Corvo, much as certain English properties carry the title of Lord of the Manor; and he implied that the allowance that the Duchess undoubtedly paid was the revenue from the Corvo estate, rightly allocated to him. I hope this is not true. I prefer to think that the title was a sardonic jest on the shape of his own nose. What is certain is that the income thus accruing was insufficient to keep him out of debt; and that the Duchess helped him, wrongly believing him to be a talented young painter. He settled in the quiet summer resort of Christchurch in Hampshire. His mural decorations for Catholic churches I have never seen, but it is remembered that draughtsmanship was his weakness, and that the difficulty was ingeniously evaded by photographs of suitably posed and draped models, projected by magic-lantern on the painting area. The Byzantine eikon was his ideal, and his oil paintings were enhanced with fur and feathers, and spangled with sham gems.

Two years drifted agreeably, and then, suddenly, the Duchess's allowance ceased; and there was the usual quarrel between patron and protégé. Corvo tried to buy Gleeson White's bookshop and freehold house on 'tick',

but failed, and left Christchurch discredited and in debt. In desperation, much in the mood in which young men join the Foreign Legion, the Baron went to Aberdeen.

What his hopes were, no one knows; how he subsisted is equally a mystery. The advice usually given to the talented indigent is 'Look for work'; smarting under the phrase, Corvo found a job as 'learner' to a firm of photographers, who, for services that were probably nominal, paid him the certainly nominal salary of 12s. 6d. a week. For three months he pottered in the studio, and amused the workers by tall stories of rich relatives, until the proprietor lost patience and dismissed him. He claimed to have invented a new instrument for submarine photography, and to have discovered a process by which photographs could be reproduced in natural colours; unfortunately he failed to find support for either, and so they are lost to the world, if they ever existed. After a while three of his paintings in the medieval manner adorned the windows of Messrs. Gifford in Aberdeen, priced, inquirers were told, at 70 guineas each. The Marquess of Huntly had thoughts of buying them, but his agent, though admitting talent, jibbed at anatomical eccentricities. Misfortune alone was constant to the errant artist; and though the worst thing that happened to him in Scotland was ignominious ejection from his lodgings in pyjamas (when his clothes were flung after him and he dressed in the street) the Welsh put him in the workhouse! His picaresque career reads like a page from the *Arabian Nights*, or a column from the *News of the World*. And yet he was neither a waster nor a scoundrel. Once warmed and fed, Rolfe expanded, and the entertainment of his company was more than value for the host's expenditure. And, despite these vicissitudes, he never cringed, but he persisted in his vocation and his

genius. Truly, much was hidden behind the unsmiling face of the quaint Baron who sipped tea in Harland's drawing-room, and chatted with the author of *The Golden Age*.

About this time *The Wide World Magazine*, a journal which rashly guaranteed the veracity of its authors, issued the romances of M. de Rougemont; and one number, the last, it may be mentioned, thus to be guaranteed, also contained a plausible recital of 'How I was Buried Alive', by Baron Corvo, with a photograph of its noble author. This pleasant fiction was seized on by one of the Baron's many enemies, who wrote a long exposure under the heading 'A Nobleman from Aberdeen' in which the unfortunate details of Rolfe's past were set out with damaging emphasis and careful malice. The attack was copied by Catholic papers; and this unwelcome publicity seems to have turned Rolfe's brain. His reprisal was characteristic. He directed his publisher to return all letters for him, marked 'Refused'; and those of his friends who did not contradict the calumnies in print were expunged from his acquaintance. Hitherto, he had allowed affronts to avenge themselves, assisting Providence only when necessary; henceforward, he avenged all slights, real or imaginary, by savage letters of picric sharpness.

He was suffering from this shock when, in 1899, Mr. Grant Richards was impressed, as all strangers were, by the Baron's elaborate manners and odd appearance. Imagine the advent in a publisher's office of a tall, ascetic person, with a papal title, a vast capacity for lurid reminiscence, and a vital knowledge of Italian history! The penniless Baron was commissioned to write a history of the Borgia family, which was to be a gallimaufry of vivid pictures rather than a studious chronicle. He was given seven months in which to produce the book, but long

before that time had ended there were differences of opinion between publisher and author, and the indignant Corvo, his artistic conscience outraged by correction and expurgation, had disavowed his work and demanded that his name should not appear on the title-page. Later, he was so far mollified towards his publisher by a wrangle with a third party, for which he desired an audience, that he consented to appear at lunch, in the following words:

‘I do not want to appear ungracious, nor do I ever eat lunch; and you know that to interrupt my work even for a couple of hours is a grave inconvenience; indeed, I actually have not been outside this house since the exequies of the Divine Victoria; but I feel something is due to you on account of the exasperation which you have endured from So-and-So; and, therefore, if you can meet me on friendly terms, remembering all the while that my mind is concentrated on the sixteenth not the eighteenth century, and if you will agree to consider our conversation as privileged and in no wise binding, I will be at Romano’s between 1 and 2 p.m. on Tuesday.’ It is given to few to accept luncheon invitations in such terms.

The reconciliation was not lasting, for a few weeks later Rolfe wrote to Grant Richards, ‘This is commerce in which I am engaged—not euchre’: and once more formally ordered the withdrawal of his name from the title-page. Two more letters, written, like the rest, in red or violet ink, in exquisite script, ended their intercourse:

‘Sir, I do not know by what law, either of business or of common courtesy, you justify your disregard of my request—that you should refuse all letters sent to your care for me—a rule which I asked you to construe as absolute, to which no exception can be made under any circumstances. The thing which I ask you is a very small

Since the three-times & four-times accursed invention of the art of printing, & its application by the turpitudiniferous (baronial or otherwise) primarily to the gain of gold & secondarily to the gain of power, both by means of the concupiscence of human nature ever (as Saint Paul says) avid of some novelty, it has been the custom of Our apostolic predecessors (from Alexander the Sixth, the Paparch, of magnificent invincible memory) to muzzle these devils of printers by censures, maledictions, excommunications, interdicts, & all commodious anathemas. Whose example We are not slow to follow; & We will make a mild beginning, while reserving far more awful fulminations for the reduction of incorrigibility.

It is not essential, either to temporal politeness or to spiritual progress, that Christians should know or note the geasts of mummers, buffoons, misers, innkeepers, gladiators, snobs; bounders, the criminal classes, or the set fatuously dubbed smart, all self-damned. Still less is it desirable that Our well-beloved children should upset their own equanimity by the perusal of gasped & snipped & hiccoughed canards, or torpidify their divinely-donated faculties by reading feuilletons of great dramatic power, vilely & cheaply printed. None of these things, nor indeed ought of like kind, ought to concern Christian men & women by one jot or tittle. For such matters are of the earth, very earthy in fact, inevitably tending to dull business. And ye, well-beloved wearers of white robes, ye are but *metoikoi*, resident aliens on this orb of earth for a very little while, & having nothing whatever to do with it, excepting to keep yourself unspotted from its filthy contaminations.

thing, and not, I believe, an unheard-of thing: and your repeated disregard of my wishes impels me to remind you that, in view of your mutilation of my work, and the libellous liberties which you have been taking with my name, you should avoid converting my present attitude of forbearance into one of reprisal.'

But his letters continued to follow him; and his final unjustified shriek ended in his best style of invective:

'I doubt whether you ever have made a more ruthless or persecuting enemy than—Your obedient servant—Frederick William Rolfe.'¹

The book that was the cause of so much fervour was published in 1901 as *The Chronicles of the House of Borgia*. It is an essay in sophistication, the only disingenuous book Rolfe wrote. Having constituted himself counsel for the defence, he availed himself of all legal methods, and notably fallacies and fictions, for the presentation of his case. The chapter on 'The Legend of the Borgia Venom' is as ingenious as the lock of a Milner safe. All his sophistries are of the highest quality. He defended Alexander from the charge of simony, on the ground that the famous Bull against simony issued by Julius II, being delivered by a successor, was not retrospective in its action; so, that which would have been sin in Julius was innocence in Alexander; contending further that Alexander's bribery was not the simony of Holy Writ, but simply a cardinal's relinquishment of temporal possessions for which (election of the

¹ I quote these letters by the courtesy of Mr. Grant Richards, who bears no malice to the memory of the strange being who uttered these violent reproaches for no better reason than that letters addressed to him were forwarded and not refused! Mr. Richards has also placed in my hands letters of an altogether friendly nature, written to him by Rolfe five years after these outbursts, in which the writer proposed a new alliance and more publications.

papacy being imminent) he had no further use! Rolfe read his own temperament into the Borgias, and presented Alexander VI, the hero of the piece as 'A very great man, guilty of hiding none of his human weaknesses', a man of indomitable spirit, steadfast against the customary accusations; Cæsar Borgia as Alexander's practical right hand, with the efficiency and nature of a successful warrior, severe, but not more severe than any other captain of mercenaries; and Lucrezia Borgia as 'a pearl among women'! The book did not aspire to be serious history, but Corvo certainly proved the serious historians wrong on some points, and discredited for ever many tales of complicated Borgian turpitude. He accorded to his characters their full titles, respectfully alluding to Cæsar Borgia as Duke Cesare de Valentino della Romagna. Those who prize ingenuity for its own sake will be entertained by his foible of avoiding the word 'poison', which defiles his pages only in a quotation from a rival. For 'poison' he used 'venom'; for 'poisoned', 'envenomed'; for 'poisonous', 'veneficous'; and for 'poisoning', 'venenation'.

These obsolete forms will be found in any reliable dictionary, and their mention brings me to Corvo's neological style, which prevails in all his books. The exquisite handwriting in which he wrote to publishers had been carefully modelled on early Italian script; and his prose was equally artificial. As 'an artificer in verbal expression', he aimed to enlarge the English language, and recorded his innovations in a private dictionary, which is, unfortunately, not among his papers, though it could be reconstructed from internal evidence in his books. It must have contained three divisions: unusual or obsolete forms, such as those already quoted, or the infrequently used

'eximious', 'tractator' and 'sussurated'; corrected versions of common words, such as 'mispresent' for 'misrepresent', 'imperscrutable' for 'inscrutable', 'antecessors' for 'ancestors', 'incoronation' for 'coronation', and 'exsequies' for 'obsequies'; and new formations, including many made on the portmanteau model; examples are 'persequent', 'diaphotick', 'hybrist', 'occession', 'dicaculous', 'tolutiloquent', 'contortuplicate', 'noncurance', and 'regesced'.

Some of the best examples occur only in his private letters: 'turpiludicrous' and 'perridiculous' are two gems. These tongue-twisters were set in sentences in which the adverb invariably preceded both parts of the verb; Rolfe frequently lapsed into Latin or relapsed into Greek; and the whole strange mixture was strengthened with such homely expressions as 'bucked up', and divided into chapters ending with a hexameter and a pentameter. Strange as it may seem, the style so artificially compounded can be read with pleasure, for it fits and furbishes the themes Rolfe chose. Having whitewashed the house of Borgia, he proceeded to blacken Omar, which he did by translating a complete version of *The Rubáiyát* from the French of J. B. Nicholas, at the suggestion of Kenneth Grahame and Henry Harland. He expanded the Toto stories already mentioned into a larger volume, *In His Own Image*, concerning which no more need be said than that the born writer is shown by Rolfe's assimilation of Italian atmosphere during six months misspent as a theological student.

There was a second harvest from his Borgia sowings in *Don Tarquinio*, which is described on the title-page as a Kataleptic, Phantasmatic Romance. It purports to be a record of every detail of twenty-four hours in the life of a

sensuous young Roman patrician in the days of Alexander VI, translated from a holograph left by the eponymous hero, Don Tarquinio Santacroce. The book is a characteristic extravagance, which no one else could or would have written; and Alexander, Cæsar and Lucrezia play their benevolent Borgian parts, just as in the Chronicle.

In 1904 Rolfe abandoned his Barony, and reverted to his natal name, though he gave it a deceptive twist by writing the first two letters of Frederick so that they might be read as Father (Fr. Rolfe). Appropriately, he first used his own name on his masterpiece, *Hadrian the Seventh*. It is an autobiographical drama, in which the hero throughout fulfils Rolfe's dreams. Like him, a rejected candidate for Holy Orders, the force of George Arthur Rose's vocation is recognized after twenty years of starvation and oppression have embittered him. Belatedly admitted to the priesthood, tardy amends are made for his sufferings, mental and financial. And then, by a combination of circumstances made to seem probable by astonishing art, he who was so recently the despised and rejected of men is elected to the Papacy, choosing the dignity of Hadrian the Seventh. Then the fun begins. Rolfe really lets himself go. Instead of becoming obedient to his cardinals, the new Pope lives up to his position of infallible autocrat. His sufferings have taught him command, not obedience. Half the delight is in the thinly veiled personalities, the palpable truth to fact. Hadrian appoints his early friends (all recognizable among Rolfe's acquaintances) as Bishops and Cardinals, and issues an astonishing Epistle to All Christians, admirable extracts from which are set before the reader. There is an interview between Hadrian and the Kaiser, and another with the King of Italy. All the dialogues ring out loud in the ear. On every page are

metaphors like lightning, similes that shine, and appositions that linger in the mind like verse; but the comparisons out-top all in point, as in the description of the Pope's 'cold white candent voice, which was more caustic than silver nitrate, and more thrilling than a scream', or the sentence 'Miscellaneous multitudes paved the spaces with tumultuous eyes'. Rolfe's phrases tell as much as the paragraphs of others. Hadrian reconciles the papal and temporal powers in Italy by a Bull on the text, 'My Kingdom is not of this World', and by relinquishing all claims to temporal dominion; and he sells the art treasures of the Vatican for thirty-three millions sterling, which is applied to the benefit of the Italian people. Finally, he is assassinated as he walks in procession through Rome, and the last words of the book are: 'Pray for the repose of his soul. He was so tired.'

Hadrian the Seventh is Rolfe's testament. There is no precedent for it in English literature, and even if his lost manuscripts are never recovered, it will assure him an exalted place in the appreciation of those who cherish good writing. The books already described (with the addition of another of no moment) constitute his literary record as it is known to the world; and all five appeared between 1900 and 1905. There was that period of active eruption, during which his books, if not sufficiently applauded to assure his future, were at least received with the opposition that stimulates sales; and then came silence. What happened to Baron Corvo and Frederick Rolfe? Why did no more eyebrow-raising books enliven publishers' dull lists? In 1913 there appeared in *The Times* a brief announcement of his death. His story, in the eight years following the publication of his last book, has never before been told. This is what happened.

II

THE DEATH OF FREDERICK ROLFE

The Baron became more bizarre as the years went by. He astonished his hosts in country houses by appearing in a mole-velvet dinner jacket, and by uttering incantations in the moonlight that brought to his legs mysterious and unknown cats. Though restrained in dress, he developed a passion for rings, and wore ten on his fingers and an equal number strung round his neck. They were mostly silver, and these he placed at night-time in powdered sulphur, that they might keep the right shade of tarnished darkness. On each hand he wore one ring in which was mounted the rowel of a spur, and he explained that when the Jesuits made, as they would, their inevitable attempt at abduction, he would smite them on their foreheads, and the lines thus excoriated would blind these assailants with blood while he escaped. But though he lived in a world of fancies, his contacts with the world were less disturbing, and he escaped public notice until, in August, 1904, he, who had received so many, issued a writ.

For more than a year he had been knocking into shape some notes on pastoral and agricultural prospects in a British colony, compiled by 'an obese magenta colonel of militia' who could not write. In Corvo's hands the notes grew into a book, which was well received over the Colonel's name; but when the literary ghost applied for his pay, £25 was sent, instead of numerous hundreds. Moreover, Rolfe alleged that the Colonel had contracted to sell for a high price a family tree of the Borgias, which he had engrossed in many coloured inks and blazoned with the Borgia bull.

To give security for costs, Rolfe assigned the rights in

his published and unpublished works to his lawyers, who arranged that he might draw small sums from them pending a verdict in his claim. But there was a shortage of judges, and the pleadings were complicated: no one hurried; and more than three years went by, during which Rolfe drew his allowance, enjoyed a quarrel or two, and wrote his books. A day came in 1908 when twelve jurymen heard the action. Rolfe broke down in court and lost his case, thus offering an exception to the rule that the side which weeps first, wins.

It was his Moscow, though he did not know it. What he knew was bad enough. He was not to be paid for his work, and he owed several hundreds of pounds for costs, and some other debts. On the credit side, there were in his hands at the moment the completed manuscripts of three books, now lost: *The One and the Many*, an autobiographical novel in the style of *Hadrian*, in which Rolfe drew his own horoscope as Nicholas Crabbe; *Don Renato*, or *An Ideal Content*, another historical novel; and a translation of the songs of Meleagros of Gadara, which was to have been illustrated by its translator. The two books last mentioned had actually been accepted for publication. Moreover, Rolfe's expenses just then were slight, for he was making a prolonged stay with Mr. Harry Pirie-Gordon, whose acquaintance he had made at Oxford. But there were other complications also, and to ease his mind Rolfe went for six weeks' holiday in Italy; and falling under the spell of Venice, he declined to return to his debts and difficulties. At that moment he had in hand three interesting books, and an equal number of not less interesting quarrels. The first quarrel was with Robert Hugh Benson. They had met as the result of an enthusiastic letter written by Benson to the author of *Hadrian the Seventh*. a book which

Benson declared he had read three times, and would never part from. There was a cordial answer, and a feverish friendship sprang up between the two writers, involving at times an almost daily exchange of letters. Benson was, in fact, deeply impressed by all Rolfe wrote, and read the *Toto* stories aloud to many friends in Rome and Cambridge. There was a walking tour, and then, inevitably, proposals for a joint work, for Rolfe, despite his uneven temper, had a craze for collaboration. The subject chosen was St. Thomas of Canterbury. The method was to be that of *Don Tarquinio*, that is, a pretended translation from an early manuscript. Benson's point about collaboration was that his name jointly with Rolfe's on a title-page would reinstate Rolfe in the good opinion of Catholics who had not forgiven *Hadrian the Seventh*. It was settled that Benson should take two-thirds of the profits, Rolfe the rest. The book was started. And then Benson began to think better of his bargain.

If Rolfe's weak point was the habit of quarrelling, Benson's was the love of money. This is no secret: the fact may be deduced from his biography. In an unfortunate moment it occurred to Benson that the book on St. Thomas would have a greater sale were its title-page not disfigured by the name of a rejected candidate for priesthood; and he pointed out to his needy collaborator how much both would profit by the suppression of Rolfe's name. But Rolfe's suspicious mind saw in this (perhaps not unjustly) a deep affront; and he tartly declined the proposals. Benson insisted, and became peremptory. Rolfe became acrimonious, and accused Benson of using spiritual power to gain temporal ends. The book was shelved, and friends were enemies.

The second quarrel was with Mr. Pirie-Gordon, who

was also collaborating with Rolfe in an historical novel. They had met while Rolfe was acting as secretary to his life-long friend Dr. Hardy, the principal of Jesus College; and for two years the Pirie-Gordons housed and fed him while he worked on a remarkable piece of preciosity called *Hubert's Arthur*. It was an essay in might-have-been history; and its theme was that Arthur Duke of Brittany, instead of being murdered by King John, escapes to the Holy Land, marries Yolande, heiress to the kingdom of Jerusalem, becomes king in her right, and recovers Jerusalem from the Saracens by a *coup-de-main*. After many adventures, he returns to his Duchy of Brittany, doing homage for Normandy, Aquitaine and Poitou, as nearest heir to King Richard; and he becomes a claimant to the throne after John's death, in opposition to John's son Henry. The dispute between the two English claimants is settled by a trial of combat between Arthur and Henry, which Arthur wins. He is acclaimed King of England, as well as Jerusalem, and forthwith drives the French pretender out of the country, but meets his death in so doing. Incredible industry was lavished on the local colour, and the book was written in an enriched variant on the style of old-time chronicles. Incidentally, Rolfe indulged his taste for horrors. There were many entertaining letters between the collaborators, including this from Rolfe: 'Have you any objection to Lady Maud de Braose being shut up in a dungeon, and fed with the tails of haddocks, two a day, till she, saltish, perishes of pure displeasure? They can sing her requiem on the eleventh day.'

The third quarrel was more serious. It was between Rolfe and solicitors who were administering his affairs. Their allowance sufficed for his wants while he stayed with the Pirie-Gordons; it was quite insufficient to keep

him in Venice; and when Rolfe spent for other purposes money sent to bring him home, they gave him up. The stranded author wrote violent letters, alleging mismanagement and demanding money. No money was sent, and his landlord grew restive. The mortgage on his books prevented him from benefiting from the two works in the press until his heavy debt to the solicitors was discharged. He was financially hamstrung, and when this became plain, utter fury possessed him. He resolved that since *he* could not benefit from his manuscripts no one should, and wrote to the publisher who had *Don Renato* and *Songs of Meleagros* in hand, ordering him to postpone their issue. His other unpublished books he denounced to the Publishers' Association. There was a complete deadlock. Rolfe could get no money, and the solicitors could not realize their security. Meanwhile, Rolfe reverted to his early conditions of starvation. It must have made him feel quite young again. A doctor allowed him the use of a floor in an empty palace. He made tea-leaves serve for six brews, and was reduced to using the nauseous residue as tobacco! Having become expert in the Venetian mode of rowing, he purchased a Puppabin (a small open boat) and spent the winter of 1909 in it, sleeping in the boat in dry weather, and walking the streets in wet. Yet he declined alms, and when Benson and others subscribed a sum to be paid in weekly instalments to a hotel-keeper, the money was returned with insults. He endeavoured to find a financial partner who would take over his assets, administer them, and allow him an income; and nothing else in the way of help would he look at. He seems to have lived on pride and quarrels, and sheer determination not to die. Of his sufferings there is no doubt, and they drove him into a state of ungoverned fury with his friends and

agents in England. He denounced Robert Hugh Benson to his brother and his Bishop, in letters that shriek with malignance: and wrote to Benson himself in such terms that his future letters were destroyed unopened. He denounced his solicitors to the Law Society, the Publishers' Association, and every other public body that would listen to him. Mr. Pirie-Gordon he denounced to all his Crickhowell neighbours, intimating that the only purpose for which he would return to England was the pleasure of dying in Crickhowell workhouse. As if these vendettas were insufficient to occupy him, he disagreed (with Rolfe to disagree meant a scalp-hunting expedition) with all the resident English in Venice. For a time he appeared at Horatio Brown's Mondays, to gain company, and in the hope that there would be sandwiches on the sideboard! and after the quarrel, he frequented one waterway daily that he might have the chance of publicly cutting the indignant Brown. He was driven to offering his services as second gondolier to tourist parties. And meanwhile, since his books could not be published, he made them unpublishable. Sitting in his boat he wrote *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole*, in which all his false friends are wittily pilloried. Benson appears as the Reverend Bobugo Bosen, concerning whom there is this gibe: 'He did not exactly aspire to actual creation; but he certainly nourished the notion that several serious mistakes had resulted from his absence during the events described in the first chapter of Genesis'.

In this novel, which Rolfe truly sub-titled 'A Romance of Modern Venice', he recorded all his sufferings and starvation, going so far on the path of autobiography as to transcribe sections of his vituperative correspondence, which on his side revealed a versatility of epithet quite

unparalleled, for he wrote hundreds of letters, all venomous and all different, though he never descended to mere abuse. He organized his insults, and became a master of derogatory nuance. The labour involved in writing and recording these vindictive epistles must have been immense. One began, 'Quite cretinous creature'; another ended, 'Bitterest execrations'. Certain suggestions having been made by a reader, Rolfe inquired, 'What do you mean by letting a Quaker go rooting and snouting in my lovely Catholic garden?' Having remarked that 'A stab in the back is what Spite invariably gives to Scorn', he threatened to publish a pornographic work in Paris, with Benson's initials on the title-page and the Pirie-Gordons' arms on the cover. All his letters ended, 'This is all without prejudice, and I reserve all rights in this and in all previous communications'. Ultimately only publishers knew of his existence; and they grew to fear his decorative writing, and to recoil from his manuscripts, rancid with libels, as from live serpents or lighted bombs. Some tried good advice. John Buchan wrote to him of one of his books that 'the more I look at it the more I admire it, and the more convinced I am that no publisher in Britain could make a success of it'; and Maurice Hewlett implored him to use his great gifts to better purposes. It was too late. Nothing but a holocaust of his enemies would have satisfied Rolfe.

His wit, the beauty of his handwriting, and his fury stayed with him to the last; but in other ways his courage failed him and he degenerated. Until his fiftieth year he hoped against the facts that his priestly vocation would be recognized, and holy orders offered him; and perhaps the most pathetic thing in his life was his fall from grace when the appointed time was past. He sinned less with

his body than his mind, and left certain letters that Aretino might have written to Casanova's dictation. By a terrible anticlimax, the help that might have saved him came too late. A year before his death a kindly Anglican clergyman came to the rescue of the abandoned Catholic, took over the mortgage of his work, and paid his debts. Rolfe was working on a counterblast to Edward Carpenter, entitled *Towards Aristocracy*, and a novel having Botticelli as its principal character, when he died of heart-failure, resulting from pneumonia induced by his hardships.

In reviewing his career, it is impossible to think of him without admiration and pity. He had so many gifts, industry above all; and they weighed so slightly in the scale against his mad lack of toleration, and his lack of honesty. His life was wrecked by his inability to receive favours, and inability to understand the spirit of property, which are not in themselves serious faults, and, separately, might be commendable. His wants were few; an income of £300 a year would have satisfied them; and knowing that he was giving good work to the world, he thought it the world's duty to support him. The books by which readers know him are but an earnest of what he might have done, and less than half of what he did. And yet, frustrated though he was, only the unimaginative will regard him as a failure, for he realized himself, brought the medieval atmosphere into modern days, and lived in the time of telephones as if in an age of rapiers.

No man of letters ever had an odder apprenticeship; and his end was consistent with his beginning. He led his own life, and left in his strange books the record of a stranger personality.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

[*The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne*, by Lloyd Morris. Constable & Co. 1928. 16s. *Hawthorne*, by Henry James, Junr. Macmillan. 1879.]

Few things mark so relentlessly the flight of Time as it passes unconsciously over our heads as when it is suddenly brought home to old men how long ago it was since they first learnt to love a favourite Author. The dates of publication of the two volumes named at the top of the page, separated as they are from each other by nearly half a century, and yet dealing with affection and real distinction with the same subject-matter, serve to remind me that it is now more than seventy years ago since that day in 1856 when, trying hard to keep step with my Father whilst walking down Castle Street in Liverpool, he bent down to me and whispered in my ear, 'Keep your eyes open, for the author of *The Wonder Book* will pass us in a moment'. How hard I stared at Hawthorne as he went by! He was the first author I had ever seen, and though since that happy day I have encountered many of the breed, he still lives in my memory as the handsomest of them all; nor has he lost favour in my sight as an author, though no longer of one wonder-book but of many.

Hawthorne himself has now been dead sixty-four years (18th May 1864). But how does he stand to-day after all these years, so prolific of story-tellers of divers nationalities and of all shades and descriptions? Has he worn well? What signs does he show of wear and tear? Do the young

find him as delightful as did their elders—nay, do those elders themselves, if still alive, when dreamily turning once enchanted pages, altogether succeed in recapturing the ancient charm? To put it bluntly, can we read the *House of the Seven Gables* or the *Blithedale Romance* without skipping?

I should find it easy to answer this last coarsely worded query with an arrogant and blustering ‘Certainly we can,’ yet, remembering that as we are writing of an author unusually free from any taint of humbug, and this, despite the fact that almost from the first Hawthorne possessed a style so perfect in its artistry as to be in itself an incentive to humbug, we are especially behoven to scrape our consciences closely, and to see to it that we say nothing whatever about Hawthorne and his books that is not, at least, truth for us.

Hawthorne heartily disliked many things and many people, but he hated few things more than injudicious praise. When Mr. S. C. Hall praised him injudiciously, Hawthorne begged that he might never be asked to sit next Mr. Hall again. Montaigne tells us that if, after his death, he should chance to hear anyone on earth praising him for a quality he knew he had never possessed, he would return to the world just long enough to give the fellow the lie. Hawthorne resembled Montaigne in many particulars.

So far as Hawthorne’s style is concerned, it may safely be pronounced as flawless as ever. How he came by it who can say? That he took great pains is certain. That he burnt thousands and tens of thousands of words we know. His solitary boyhood in the dismal house in Salem, the good old-fashioned books by which he was luckily surrounded and over which he pored, probably prevented his forming

early in life bad literary habits, whilst his detached mind, as boy, youth and man, averse from early enthusiasms and make-believe hero-worships, helped him to avoid falling a victim to any of the many bad examples by which he was encompassed. However this mystery of style came about, Hawthorne, after no long time of experimenting, became possessed of a way of writing he never lost—a style it is impossible to parody, for it is at once romantic and realistic, dreamily mystical, yet as sceptical as David Hume's; straightforward and subtle, and managing, as it flows easily along, to create the very temper of mind that is best fitted to enjoy it.

Personally, I have only one criticism, and it is a very minute one, of Hawthorne's style, for it only consists in complaining of his excessive use of the word 'methinks', which is to be found scattered in a too plentiful profusion over all Hawthorne's writings, tales, note-books, even letters. My objection to this word is that it is *too* characteristic, and lets his readers into one of the secrets of his musing style that should have been kept hidden from the profane vulgar.

Has anyone attempted to parody Hawthorne's style of writing? 'Methinks not'!

Leaving, then, as we safely may, Hawthorne in quiet possession of his style, we can proceed to ask how does he stand as a story-teller? Here he has to submit to the fierce competition of many subsequent masters of the craft.

Do we still read Hawthorne for the story or for his way-side comments upon it?

It must be remembered that until 1850, when he was forty-six years old, and published *The Scarlet Letter*, he was only known to a very few people in America as an occasional writer of short stories in American magazines of no great

repute; short stories that gained him little notoriety and less cash. I find it almost comical to discover that the old friend of my infancy, *Peter Parley* (C. S. Goodrich), whom I pictured as a cheerful old Father Christmas, was in reality the slightly stingy and occasionally impecunious 'publisher' of Hawthorne's struggling efforts.

When these casual contributions to magazines were collected, they made up those *Twice-told Tales*, which, though they had no great popularity, made it plain to those who could observe such occurrences that there was some one living in the neighbourhood of Salem, Mass., who knew how to write the English language at least as well as Washington Irving, the then pet American of Albemarle Street.

Hawthorne's first regular novel, *Fanshawe*, was a complete failure, a fate the wise Peter Parley attributed to the fact that its publisher did not know the art of puffery.

Fully to enjoy Hawthorne as a writer of stories, long or short, it is very necessary you should become acquainted with the pit out of which he was dug.

Strangely enough, it is easy to do this, for though Hawthorne was by common consent, from birth to death, a shy, elusive, reticent creature with a bitter rind at the centre of his nature, he belonged to that class of men who no sooner take up a pen and find themselves near an inkstand, than they become self-communicative. Pinch a page of Hawthorne, and he bleeds. His books, therefore, like Hazlitt's, will be found to contain a buried autobiography. You can follow Hawthorne from place to place all through his life, from Salem to Raymond, from Raymond back again to Salem, from Salem to College, from College back again to Salem, then to Brook Farm in Roxburg with the Transcendentalists—from them to the

old Manse, from the old Manse across the Atlantic to Liverpool, from whence he will take you by the hand and force you to accompany him in his excursions through the Old Home, and then to Florence and Rome and the Marble Faun, and finally back to the country of his birth. Too shy ever to speak of himself to his friends, it is his readers who become his intimates.

This habit of his has made the task of his biographers at once easy and exceeding difficult. A biography, or even a portrait-sketch in words, of Hawthorne becomes a Twice-told-Tale, and as any tale told by Hawthorne about himself is pretty sure to be more engaging than the same tale told by somebody else, the biographer finds himself in a quandary; he cannot always be quoting, yet when he ceases to quote, and begins to take up the story on his own account, even a biographer can hardly fail to become conscious of a difference.

Mr. Lloyd Morris has composed 'a Portrait of Hawthorne' for which he deserves both thanks and praise; and written, as it has been, more than sixty years after Hawthorne's death, it gives us pleasant proof how deeply the author of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* has struck his roots into the beloved soil of his native land.

The portrait Mr. Morris has drawn is an affectionate and sympathetic one, but at the same time it is searching, and is wholly free from that gushing sentimentality which would have disgusted the subject of the picture. Mr. Morris has used the ample material at his disposal with rare judgement, and for those readers who have had the good or bad luck to be born in the present century, and consequently will never think it necessary to read through the lengthy biography prepared by Hawthorne's son Julian, and published in 1885, this book may be warranted to

contain all that our young friends need be told about Hawthorne, except what he himself will tell them if they are wise enough to seek the fountain-head.

We have but one fault to find with Mr. Morris, and it is one not far to seek, for it is to be seen on his title-page. Why is Hawthorne described as a rebellious Puritan?

To be a rebel you must at one time or another have been a subject. Hawthorne's early American ancestors were rebels to their lawful Sovereign, and Puritans by religious conviction. Their story-telling descendant was a Republican born and bred and through and through, and as for being a Puritan by religion, he was not one for a single moment.

Never was there a son of Adam less animated, still less dominated, either by the prejudices of a Sectary or the pride of a Churchman. His education was unusually free from the traditions of either Church or Chapel. You cannot fancy Nathaniel being pinioned in a family pew of schismatics, or conducted to a seat in a Church choir. Hawthorne had no occasion to become a rebel; for, like the Apostle Paul, he was born free.

At all times and in all places Hawthorne led the life, the easy-going life, of a sedate and thoughtful Pagan. His habits, seldom otherwise than decorous, bore no traces of what can properly be called Puritan. He was as fond of cards as Charles Lamb, and as good a judge of wine as Cardinal Newman, though, oddly enough, he had not that ear for music usually found associated with a fine palate. Hawthorne must be ranked with those who, like Elia, have 'no ear', for has he not left it on record that he could never distinguish 'Hail, Columbia!' from 'Yankee Doodle'?

Mr. Morris would appear to have come to the conclusion

that Hawthorne was in a state of rebellion against a deep-hidden Puritanism in his nature from two facts—the first being Hawthorne's 'austere notions' of sexual morality, and the second the idea or belief that pervades so many of his books and stories, that there is such a thing as sin in the world, and that the existence of this thing has, if one may use such an expression, played the devil with Creation ever since its introduction among the sons of men.

As to the first of these facts, it is very agreeably plain that a strain of personal purity did run through Hawthorne's life, and nowhere is this trait in his character more exquisitely illustrated than in the love-letters he wrote to his wife during their courtship of four years. Of these letters Mr. Morris has, with his usual judgement, made copious use.

Hitherto I have always supposed that personal purity, or chastity as it is sometimes called, is a Christian virtue of universal obligation (however frequently disregarded) upon all, men and women alike, who call themselves Christians; but now it would appear to be a sectarian virtue only appendant to a theory of life styled Puritanical.

As for Hawthorne's doctrine of sin and its consequences entailed upon mankind, a doctrine which he certainly expounds over and over again in his tales (see, for an example, 'Fancy's Show Box' in the *Twice-told Tales*), it can confidently be stated that it has no connexion with any doctrine of sin as taught in Geneva, Lambeth, or Rome, or anywhere else throughout what is called Christendom. It was coined in Hawthorne's own mint, and is half phantasy, half faith.

It is, no doubt, true that though Hawthorne was as un-

like a Puritan as Charles Dickens, he was that rare bird, an author with a long pedigree, and one which, though it left his beliefs uncoloured, mightily affected his literary imagination.

Hawthorne's earliest American ancestor was William Hathorne (for the w was first inserted by our romantic Nathaniel himself, who thus made the old Puritan stem blossom in the wilderness), who came from pleasant Wiltshire to Massachusetts in 1630, in company with John Winthrop and other fathers and founders of a new country. About the Puritanism of William Hathorne there can be no manner of doubt. He was a Sectary to the backbone and may be taken to be the progenitor of those 'grave, bearded, sable-cloaked and steeple-crowned hatted' figures who tread so heavily, with their misunderstood Bibles in their hands and their sharp swords by their sides, through the pages of Hawthorne's romances, who had not read Scott for nothing.

This William Hathorne 'was soldier, legislator, judge', and a great man and landowner (by virtue of grants) in the neighbourhood of Salem, where for many long years he ruled with a heavy hand that Carlyle might have admired but which exacted a shudder in the breast of one of his descendants. Hathorne was a savage persecutor. Quakers were his aversion. 'He ordered five women of that sect to be stripped to the waist, bound to the tails of carts, and lashed by the constable through Salem, Boston and Dedham'.

Nathaniel Hawthorne had no sympathy with separatists of any kind, and would never have insisted upon keeping his hat on his head in any place of worship or court of justice; nor would he, we may be sure, have refused the easy tribute of his knee to any ancient image

or symbol; but cruelty based on religion he abhorred. William Hathorne was, consequently, no hero of his, nor was his next ancestor any more to his mind, for when William died in 1681, full of honours, he was succeeded in many of his offices by his son John, an active judge in the colony, and one who never willingly suffered a witch to live. His exceptionally harsh treatment of Rebecca Nurse, who, though twice acquitted by a jury, and protesting to the end her innocence, was hounded to the gallows by Judge Hathorne, who insisted upon a third trial, when he succeeded in securing a verdict of guilty. 'After the sentence had been read she turned towards Justice Hathorne, and, looking fixedly upon him with old eyes, she solemnly cursed him and his posterity to the last generation.'

Old Rebecca's curse still reverberates in the rafters of *The House of Seven Gables*, and withers drearily through many a dark corner of Hawthorne's romances.

Mr. Justice Hathorne lived ten years after he had done Rebecca to death, and though his local honours accumulated his fortunes declined. Two of his sons died, and he was compelled, owing to unlucky ventures, to borrow money he was unable to repay. When prosperous, he had acquired a wide tract of forest-land in what afterwards became part of the State of Maine, and would have brought untold gold to his descendants, but the title-deeds mysteriously disappeared and the wealth was lost. All this is familiar to Hawthorne's readers.

John Hathorne had several sons who, for the most part, followed the sea, leaving Joseph Hathorne at home to look after the farms and watch the decline of the family fortunes.

'Farmer' Joseph was succeeded by Daniel, a bold

mariner, who played a dashing part in the Revolutionary War, earned a fair amount of prize-money, and built himself a house near the Wharfs in Salem, where he died, but not without begetting children, one of whom he called Nathaniel, who in his turn became the father of our Nathaniel, who was born (auspicious day) on the 4th of July 1804. Nathaniel the elder, who also followed the sea, died abroad in 1808.

Thus it came about that when our author was born his family had been settled in Salem for nearly two centuries, and though luck had of late years deserted them, and newer generations more prosperous than they had grown up in Salem, still the Hathornes held their heads high, brooded over past days, and looked down upon their neighbours.

In 1808 the family in the old wooden house consisted of the widow of Daniel the bold, her daughter Ruth, aged thirty, Nathaniel's mother, the widow of Nathaniel the elder, and her three children: Elizabeth, Nathaniel (aged four), and Louisa.

Hawthorne's mother, though an affectionate and sensible woman, much attached, after her own strange fashion, to her children, led, after her husband's death, a life of East Indian seclusion, passing the whole day in her own room, and only visiting her children in their separate apartments. There were no family meals and nothing that can be called family life. The old grandmother soon died, and what became of Ruth I do not know, except that she died unmarried in 1847. Hawthorne's sister, Elizabeth, though a girl of great ability and even learning, led almost as lonely a life as her mother. Nathaniel has left it on record that the only thing he was ever really frightened of was Elizabeth's ridicule. His other sister—younger than himself—was of livelier mould.

This was the secluded atmosphere in which Hawthorne grew up. The home, though hardly a home, was happy enough, and in it, barring a serious accident to his foot that crippled him for some time, Nathaniel grew up a vigorous, handsome, robust boy, able to hold his own if occasion arose, and a great reader of Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Thomson (of *The Seasons*), and Rousseau, and, as time went on, of both Scott and Godwin's novels.

When his tenth year came along, the family migrated from the old house in Salem to still lonelier quarters in Essex County—a tiny settlement called Raymond, on a headland thrust into the Lake Sebago, where the boy, in his own words, 'ran quite wild and would, I doubt not, have willingly run wild until this time, fishing all day long, and on rainy days reading Shakespeare, *The Pilgrim's Progress* and any poetry or light books within my reach.' Hawthorne always looked back upon this wild time with great pleasure and counted it profitable.

He had, however, in his mother's opinion, to be prepared for college, and so, after a time, they all went back to Salem.

After Salem, and some attempts at schooling, came college. Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, then a ragged village, but, if words have any meaning, pleasantly, even romantically, situated 'on a wide tract of pine forest, where footpaths wound through miles of fragrant shade, and a brook loitered on its way to Androscoggin River'. The college itself seems to have been an easy-going kind of secondary school with a four years' course—with a president at the head of it—and some sort of a degree at the end. A pleasant enough place for a 'general reader' to fleet away his time. Card-playing for stakes and the drinking of wine were no part of the curriculum, and were,

indeed, frowned upon by the president. Nevertheless, Nathaniel seems on occasions to have indulged moderately in these unpuritanical pastimes, in a respectable tavern outside the precincts.

There is no need to deplore the absence from Hawthorne's life of the Isis or the Cam. He would probably have got into far more serious scrapes at either Oxford or Cambridge, and certainly would have spent a great deal more of his mother's money. Nor is there much reason to suppose he would have worked any harder anywhere else.

In one respect the college by the Androscoggin supplied the very want English parents in old days used to credit our old universities with supplying, viz. the opportunity of making useful acquaintances—patrons of good livings, and future Prime Ministers and so on. At Bowdoin, by the banks aforesaid, Hawthorne found a future President of the United States, who became his life-long friend, and lived to bestow upon him what was reckoned a fat piece of Uncle Sam's patronage, the Consulship at Liverpool. And besides Mr. Franklin Pierce, was not Longfellow, as popular a bard as ever lightly drew his breath, also a fellow collegian? He was; and though I do not think Hawthorne admired Longfellow as much as he would have liked Longfellow to admire him, the two were always good friends, and it was thought a fine leg-up for Hawthorne when the great Longfellow reviewed favourably one of his books. But the best friend Hawthorne made at college was Horatio Bridge, who always loved him like a brother, and befriended him like the most beneficent of strangers.

In 1825 Hawthorne was back again in the old house at Salem, and there he dwelt for twelve years in the family

circle—and twelve dull years they must have been—the *Peter Parley* years of his uneventful detached life.

And now having conducted Hawthorne to his majority and described his pedigree, we can drop narration, only adding that the most joyous incident in a life not very full of joy, was his falling in love with Sophia Peabody, who became his wife. The courtship was, for financial reasons, a long one, for he was not married until 1842.

Previously to this happy event Hawthorne had, on two different occasions, spent some months with the Transcendentalists at Brook Farm, and what happened to him there can be read in the fascinating and ironical pages of *The Blithedale Romance*, from which perusal the reader will be able to form his own opinion as to what Hawthorne really thought of Emerson, Ripley, Thoreau, and that remarkable woman, whose memoirs are so well worth reading, Margaret Fuller Ossoli. It is fair to add that these eminent personages entirely failed to recognize themselves in *The Blithedale Romance*.

There is no need here to discuss the general achievements of Hawthorne in Literature.

Some half-dozen of his *Twice-told Tales*, a few *Mosses from an Old Manse* are not likely to be forgotten for many a long day. *The Scarlet Letter* has already lived just as long as I have, and shows fewer signs of impending dissolution. Indeed, its introductory chapter, describing the old Custom House, which is as fine a bit of writing as an Essay of Elia, and no finer bit of writing in its own *genre* has been produced since, may safely be trusted to secure *The Scarlet Letter* house-room in thousands of homes in both hemispheres for a period so indefinite as almost to justify the use of an otherwise absurd term—when applied to a book—immortality. *The House of the Seven Gables* is

often reckoned the best of Hawthorne's regularly-constructed stories, and though here and there it may grow slumbrous, it is an enchanting volume. Then there is *The Blithdale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*, or (in our English edition) *Transformation*. Finally there is *Our Old Home* (Smith & Elder. 1863. 2 vols.).

On this last-named book, not now so well known as it should be in these days when guide-books to England have become as plentiful as blackberries or anthologies, I should like to be permitted to say a few words.

As already indicated, Hawthorne is, as I read him, a 'bitter-sweet author'. The first stanza in a pretty little poem of Coventry Patmore's called 'The Yew Berry' is, I have always thought, a good description of Hawthorne:

'I call this idle history the Berry of the Yew,
Because there is nothing sweeter than its husk of
scarlet glue,
And nothing half so bitter than its dark rind bitten
through.'

The state of mind in which, in 1853, Hawthorne approached England for the first time to take up the consulate at Liverpool, was a curiously conflicting one, and made up of those 'contending emotions' that were the death of Brian du Bois Guilbert. Love for the old home mingled with a suspicion that he should dislike most of its present inhabitants—a sensitiveness and self-consciousness, produced by his secluded life and mode of education, a desperate effort never to allow himself to be carried away by the stirrings of affection for the old place, its sights and sounds, its hedgerows and its ditches, its beasts and birds, so as to shake his faith in the vast superiority of the new home—all these emotions, and others that

could be named, inhabited Hawthorne's breast as he took possession of the old consulate office in Liverpool near the Goree Piazza at the corner of Brunswick Street. Liverpool looked its very dirtiest as Hawthorne disembarked. 'Outdoors a brown soupy rain fell incessantly.' Both Nathaniel and his Sophia succumbed to melancholy, feeling themselves aliens and unwelcome.

On the walls of his office hung a large map of the United States, and a similar one of Great Britain. 'On the top of a bookcase stood a fierce and terrible bust of General Jackson, pilloried in a military collar which rose above his ears, and frowning forth immitigably at any Englishman who might happen to cross the threshold. I am afraid, however, that the truculence of the old general's expression was utterly thrown away on this stolid and obdurate race of men; for when they occasionally inquired whom this work of art represented, I was mortified to find that the younger ones had never heard of the battle of New Orleans, and that the elders had either forgotten it altogether, or contrived to misremember, and twist it wrong end foremost into something like an English victory. They have caught from the old Romans this excellent method of keeping the national glory intact, by sweeping all defeats and humiliations clean out of their memory.' (*Our Old Home*. Vol. 1. p. 3.)

This short extract gives us a little peep into the new Consul's state of mind on entrance into his office.

For my part, I find these two volumes delightful reading. I confess to liking books of travel containing a tinge of underlying dislike in them, and in Hawthorne's case his efforts, so honestly made and so frequently unsuccessful, to fan the flickering flames of his dislike for us, and to choke in the utterance his hearty admiration for so many

of our national characteristics, are as exciting to watch as a well-matched game of French and English.

Our Old Home gave great offence in England. There is only one really outrageous passage in the book, and that is the one that describes a fat woman. It is positively Swiftian in its horror and grossness. One of his Liverpool friends, a lady, and a very pretty one, remarkable for the symmetry of her shape, was so justly indignant that she wrote to Hawthorne to tell him that only a cannibal could have written it. However, his English friends forgave him.

In order to get the taste of the fat woman out of my mouth and mind, let me evoke another image, culled from the same book. After describing an English hedgerow in terms of rapture, Hawthorne proceeds to describe an English stone wall. 'Or if the roadside has no hedge, the ugliest stone fence (such as in America would keep itself bare and unsympathizing till the end of time) is sure to be covered with the small handiwork of Nature; that careful mother lets nothing go naked there, and if she cannot provide clothing, gives at least embroidery. No sooner is the fence (wall) built than she adopts and adorns it as part of her original plan, treating the hard, uncomely structure as if it had all along been a favourite idea of her own. A little sprig of ivy may be seen creeping up the side of the low wall, and clinging fast with its many feet to the rough surface; a tuft of grass roots itself between two of the stones where a pinch or two of wayside dust has been moistened into nutritious soil for it; a small bunch of fern grows in another crevice—a deep, soft, verdant moss spreads itself along the top, and over all the available inequalities of the fence, and where nothing else will grow, lichens stick tenaciously to the bare stone and variegate the monotonous grey with hues of yellow and red. Finally, a great deal of shrubbery clusters

along the base of the stone wall and takes away the hardness of its outline, and in due time, as the upshot of these apparently aimless or sportive touches, we recognize that the beneficent Creator of all things, working through His handmaiden whom we call Nature, has deigned to mingle a charm of divine gracefulness even with so earthly an institution as a boundary fence.' (Vol. I, p. 148.)

In Liverpool, Hawthorne made at once many good and lasting friends. Amongst these Henry A. Bright stands out. For some reason or other, Mr. Morris speaks slightly of Mr. Bright's intellectual stature. I do not know why. Anyhow, Mr. Bright's memory is firmly buttressed, for he wrote a little book called *A Year in a Lancashire Garden*, which, I am assured by those friends of mine who belong to the tenacious and self-satisfied class of botanists, is, in its way, a small masterpiece, and one that is just as likely to achieve literary immortality as *The House of the Seven Gables*. This may or may not be the case, but as I shall not be allowed to give a quotation from Mr. Bright's book, I will pray leave to reprint some descriptive rhymes of his on Hawthorne himself. The whole of this small effort is to be found in Mr. Julian Hawthorne's life of his father, but I will make a selection:

'Do you ask me, tell me further
Of this Consul—of this Hawthorne?
I would say, he is a sinner,
Never goes inside a chapel,
Only sees outsides of chapels,
Says his prayers without a chapel.
I would say that he is lazy,
Very lazy—good for nothing;
Hardly ever goes to dinners,

Never goes to balls or soirées—
Thinks one friend worth twenty friendly.
Cares for love but not for liking,
Hardly knows a dozen people,
Knows old Baucis, old Philemon,
Knows a beak, and knows a parson,
Knows a sucking scribbling merchant,
Hardly knows a soul worth knowing;
Lazy, good-for-nothing fellow.'

The rhythm of these lines may still be recognizable as that of the once popular *Hiawatha*, a tinkle still pleasing to my ear, and one which is for ever preserved in Dodgson's *Hiawatha's Photographing*—the most amusing of all English parodies.

If Mr. Bright's parody should not be found amusing, it should not be overlooked that Mr. Bright never set up either as a parodist or a poet, but was merely a Liverpool merchant of great credit, a nephew of De Quincey, the editor of the Glenriddell MSS. of Burns, a lover of good books, old friends, and Lancashire gardens. Hawthorne certainly had no more affectionate friend in England than Mr. Bright, to whom he pays a coyly hidden compliment on p. 57 of the first volume of *Our Old Home*.

HARRY GRAHAM

THE JOURNALIST

To some who've come to riper years
 The mem'ries of the past still linger
 When journalists led drab careers,
 With pencils parked behind their ears
 And ink on ev'ry finger;
 When whiskers hid their lack of collar,
 And Grub Street's synonym was Squalor!

Those penny-a-lining days are gone;
 How light the pressman's task has grown, ah!
 Now ev'ry goose-quill is a Swan ¹
 And writer's cramp unknown upon
 A Portable Corona; ¹
 While England's proudest sons and daughters
 Are all society reporters!

My cousin, young Lord Brazencheek,
 Is one of those who write or edit
 A social column ev'ry week—
 A man of charm, of fine physique,
 Whom one may justly credit
 With gifts of nat'ral self-expression
 Unmarred, unhampered by discretion.

¹Are you paid for these advertisements?—*Ed.*
 I hope so.—*H. G.*

He writes of titled friends he's met,
Celebrities he's been to stay with;
Tells all about the Smart Young Set—
Which ones are married still (or yet)
And whom they've run away with—
And keeps the few he doesn't mention
On tenterhooks of apprehension.

The choicest 'copy' he derives
From City magnates he plays golf with;
The secrets of financiers' lives,
And which of one another's wives
They threaten to get off with,
Supply suggestions for his journal
Of Triangles that seem Eternal!

Among his friends, the older folks
Are apt to look a trifle solemn—
A sense of outrage it provokes
To find their gossip and their jokes
Repeated in his column—
And Club Committees say: 'The Blighter!'
And blackball ev'ry other writer.

The facts, however, must be faced:
He earns the most colossal wages,
And though his style may be debased,
So cunningly the public taste
He panders to and gauges
That ev'ry one, from duke to draper,
Feels bound to read his beastly paper!

* * *

His sister, Lady Marrowfat,
 Who follows in his footsteps meekly,
 Provides the proletariat
 With half a page of social chat
 In yet another weekly.
 The groundlings, from her so-called 'Letters',
 Discern the doings of their betters.

I must confess I always find
 Her literary style too specious;
 Her baby-talk that seems designed
 For those of frankly feeble mind,
 So arch yet so facetious,
 No depth of bathos ever misses,
 It plumbs fatuity's abysses!

To read her letters one would think
 That what are called the Upper Classes
 Do naught but marry, eat and drink—
 That on a precipice's brink
 Their whole existence passes
 In one long round of social orgies
 That range from Night Clubs to St. George's!

The photographs she loves to print
 Portray the social world a place full
 Of beings of a negroid tint
 Whose attitudes, these snapshots hint,
 Are painfully ungraceful.
 She shows them walking, bathing, smirking—
 But, oh! she never shows them working!

Those pictures of the *haute noblesse*
 So sparsely clad upon the Lido:
 'Lord A. and Friend' in bathing-dress,
 And 'Lady B.' in even less,
 Disguised as a torpedo—
 How often in the fire I've flung them!
 My name, alas! was not among them!

You think me jealous? Well, you're right!
 I feel the social stigma strongly.
 I'd love to figure, if I might,
 In groups that 'read from left to right'
 (Though always labelled wrongly).
 But though I'd give a goodish lot to,
 'And Friend's' the nearest that I've got to!

Dear Lady Marrowfat, I pray
 You will not grudge me *one* exposure!
 Do snap me looking sweet in grey
 At Ascot on the Gold Cup day
 In the select Enclosure,
 Or later (with my Aunt Astarté)
 Gracing a Royal Garden Party!

And yet perchance 'tis thus you spread
 The seeds of social Revolution;
 In dreams I sometimes see you led
 (With Brazencheek two lengths ahead)
 To public execution,
 And, as I read your childish tattle,
 I hear the drums and tumbrils rattle!

CONSTANT LAMBERT

JAZZ

There are few more popular fallacies than the widely spread conception of jazz as an art at once 'crude, barbaric, and cacophonous', to mention only a few of the epithets constantly applied to it by our more high-brow critics and our more low-brow judges. This fallacy is perhaps due to the fact that jazz, whatever it may be at the present day, has its origins at least in negro folk-music, and probably that is why an essentially decadent and oversophisticated art is credited with the crude vigour and high spirits of its progenitors. To realize the inherent nostalgia and civilized melancholy of jazz music one has only to compare it with the popular music of an earlier day or of a purely European tradition such as the marches of Sousa or the Catalan *sardañas*; no piece of classical music could provide a greater contrast to the average fox-trot than the splendid 'Liberty Bell' of Sousa or 'El Vica del Casa' of Morera. The curiously quiet and refined vulgarity of jazz was strongly, though no doubt unconsciously, emphasized by an entertainment devised by the B.B.C., in which jazz songs of the present day were performed in the same programme as the Victorian songs popularized by Harold Scott and Elsa Lanchester, and a selection from the 'Façade' of Edith Sitwell and William Walton. Between the delightfully vigorous humour and sentiment of the 'eighties and the extraordinary pungency of the 'Façade' recitations came the songs of to-day—politely melancholy, humourless, slightly lascivious. Yet this is the

music that is described as a 'return to the tom-tom'! One sometimes wishes it was.

The point is that jazz has long ago lost the simple gaiety and sadness of the charming savages to whom it owes its birth, and is now, for the most part, a reflection of the nerves, sex-repressions, inferiority complexes, and general dreariness of the modern world. The nostalgia of the negro who wants to go home has given place to the infinitely more weary nostalgia of the cosmopolitan Jew who has no home to go to. The negro associations of jazz have become a formula of expression only, as empty and convenient as any other art formula.

The importance of the Jewish element in jazz cannot be too strongly emphasized, and the fact that nine-tenths of the jazz tunes are written by Jews undoubtedly goes far to account for the curiously sagging quality (admirably described by Wyndham Lewis as 'the depressed line') so typical of Jewish art, the almost masochistic melancholy of the average fox-trot. Were the passage not too long I should like to quote in connexion with this pp. 110-112 from Blaise Cendrars's remarkable book *Moravagine*. Even the outwardly cheerful tunes have a melancholy basis: they seem merely an effort to escape from a constant depression, reminiscent of Tchaikovsky marching with the band or riding on a roundabout in a vain attempt to rid himself of the self-pity which rides on his back like some lachrymose Old Man of the Sea.

The pleasures of just letting oneself sag are familiar to all, and no doubt it is this negative charm, either consciously or unconsciously realized, that makes jazz so acceptable to most people of the present day. (There are contributory factors, of course, but with these I shall deal later.) There are times when it seems that even the most

important artists of to-day are negative in spirit, and it is hardly to be wondered at if this bleak, yet at the same time subtly alluring, outlook should find its expression in popular art as well.

Apart, though, from its psychological qualities *per se* (and, of course, its suitability for dancing), jazz has an amazingly rich store of associations that must not be discounted when we are considering its popular appeal. Association is nearly always a part of our musical appreciation, but with jazz it is often the major part, for it is rarely that we hear a tune without recalling some revue or other, fixed in our minds, perhaps, by the attractions of one of the stars, or by the innocently promiscuous sex-appeal of the whole entertainment, and even if the tune recalls no actual production, it conjures up a pleasantly alluring vision of 'ideal scenes', slightly tawdry maybe, but none the less attractive.

Jazz, in fact, is just that sort of bastard product of art and life that provides so acceptable a drug to those incapable of really coping with either. As with all drug habits, one dare not stop for fear of the reaction, and it is no rare experience to meet people whose lives are so surrounded, bolstered up, and inflated by jazz that they can hardly get through an hour without its collaboration; with no doubt unconscious logic they make up for the threadbare quality of their own emotions by drawing on the warm, capacious reservoir of group-emotion so efficiently provided by the American jazz kings.

If we narrow our view from the social side of jazz to its purely technical side, we find qualities of so high an order that it is hardly surprising if many people are inclined to form rather exaggerated hopes of its possible future development. The virtuosity displayed both in the orchestra-

tion and performance of jazz is, indeed, little short of amazing, and at a time when the more serious forms of music seem gradually to be sinking into a slovenly amateurishness, the thoroughly slick efficiency of popular music cannot be too highly praised. It is no exaggeration to say that if one wants a really perfect ensemble, whether in dancing, singing or orchestral playing, one should go to such an entertainment as *Blackbirds*, rather than to the Ballet, the Opera or the Queen's Hall.

The orchestration, though at times it has a tendency to over-emphasize the more grotesque timbres, is for the most part executed with the greatest dexterity and charm, and is, perhaps, the most intrinsically pleasing instrumental sound since the Haydn orchestra. The piano writing, in particular, is of the utmost brilliance, and marks the greatest advance in piano technique since Albeniz. Like many so-called innovations in jazz, the speaking tone employed in the execution of saxophone passages has its counterpart in other ages and countries, an exact parallel to this particular device being provided by the Japanese method of playing a flute.

Orchestration and performance apart, though, the best jazz often displays rhythmic and harmonic ingenuities of the greatest interest. The most striking feature of the harmony is its curious resemblance to that of Delius, the least barbaric composer of modern times, and though some people may not at first see anything in common between 'The sleepy hills of Tennessee' and 'The first cuckoo in spring', let us say, there is no denying a certain technical and spiritual similarity which it is of great interest to examine in view of the light it throws on the origins of jazz.

The somewhat sentimental negro propaganda of the

last few years has always tried to make out that the folk-music of the American negro is a purely savage, unspoilt African product. A mere glance at the savage art of to-day might have sufficed to show that no tradition has less force and staying power than a barbaric tradition. This is particularly true of folk-music which depends on an aural tradition and has not, like sculpture, the steadying influence of past work actually before its eyes. Percy Grainger, in an extremely interesting pamphlet entitled *The Imprint of Personality on Unwritten Music*, has pointed out how the folk-music of Raratonga has been influenced, to a large extent, by the introduction of the harmonium, and there is no doubt that a similar influence has taken place in America. It is *Hymns Ancient and Modern* that is responsible for the richly sentimental harmony, both of the negro spiritual and the music of Delius. This statement may seem strange to those who do not realize that *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was the first real popularization of what is generally known as 'juicy' harmony, and that the best tunes of, for example, the Reverend John Bacchus Dykes must have possessed at the time they were written an extraordinary sensual appeal. The reaction of the sentimental and oppressed negroes to the rich and unctuous melancholy of the music was, of course, enormously enhanced by the religious nostalgia of the words, the oft-repeated desire to escape from this vale of woe into a better and happier land.

This nostalgia and desire for escape is equally present in the music of Delius, whose work, though completely and deliberately irreligious in intention, is, nevertheless, influenced by the more sentimental English church composers, sometimes, as in the 'Wanderer's Song' and 'The Splendour Falls', quite flagrantly. It is true, of course, that

Delius himself may have been slightly influenced by negro singing during his early days in Florida, but as his individual harmonic style did not develop until much later, and as his tunes and rhythms appear to be completely unswayed by negro music, it is only logical to suppose that these harmonic resemblances are due to a common influence. The texts chosen by Delius, the hymn writers and the jazz composers have an extraordinary emotional similarity. 'There is a blessed home beyond this vale of woe', Delius's setting of Fiona Macleod's 'Hy Brasil', and Geo. Meyer's 'Way Down South' are all an expression of the same nostalgic melancholy which, one suspects, is more of a consolation to the composers than would be the unexpected realization of their dreams.

An attempt is made by jazz composers to palliate this deadening nostalgia by a somewhat excessive use of rhythmic devices which rarely succeed, however, in spite of their ingenuity in disguising the essentially four-square metre of the tunes. These rhythmic devices, charming though they may be, are by no means as recent as is generally supposed, nor, with the possible exception of the charleston, are they exclusively of negroid origin. Putting aside the syncopations of Schumann and Tchaikovsky, examples of jazz rhythm can be found as far back as the English composers of the Henry VII period (the works of Edmund Turges being particularly interesting in this respect), and there is a charming example of ragtime in Dibdin's 'The Ephesian Matron or a Widow's Tears'.

The chief interest of jazz rhythms lies in their application to the setting of words, and although jazz settings have by no means the flexibility or subtlety of the early seventeenth-century airs, for example, there is no denying their lightness and ingenuity, and it is to be hoped that

their influence may free the setting of English words from the somewhat lumbering rhythm of the German lied. English words demand for their successful musical treatment an infinitely more varied and syncopated rhythm than is to be found in the nineteenth-century romantics, and the best jazz songs of to-day are, in fact, nearer in their methods to the late fifteenth-century composers than any music since. It has been unfortunate that those composers who have sought inspiration in jazz have not only made use of its exhilarating rhythmic qualities, but have incorporated also the more obvious harmonic clichés, the circumscribed form and the flat and uninspired melodic line that not even the utmost arabesque can save from deadness. There have naturally been exceptions, and certain sections of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* and Walton's 'Portsmouth Point' show a most interesting use of jazz rhythms adapted to a purely individual melodic and harmonic basis; but for the most part any attempt to produce 'symphonic jazz' has resulted in some such *mélange* as the 'Rhapsody in Blue', combining the more depressing mannerisms of jazz with all the formlessness of the nineteenth-century fantasia. The nineteenth century has, as a matter of fact, had very much more influence on jazz than is generally supposed; both technically and spiritually the fox-trot is, to a great extent, the somewhat common and profligate child of the Chopin mazurka and the Tchaikovsky valse, and can no more be considered the foundation of a new tradition than the buildings in Regent Street.

There seems to be a slight tendency to-day amongst composers of all countries to drop their exaggeratedly national characteristics and to write in a more or less stereotyped jazz style. Depressing as the adoption of a jazz

formula by all countries may sound, it would at least supply what has been lacking in music for the last hundred years—an international standard of criticism.

Unfortunately, the European essays in jazz have been disappointing. The French have too keen a sense of satire to approach it with sufficient seriousness, while, on the other hand, the Germans have approached it with a kind of earnest depravity and sense of sin that is not without its humorous side. Krenek's *Johnny spielt auf*, the principal example of Teutonic jazz, may seem daring to those whose previous standards have been a Munich café-band ploughing through a 'shimmy-fox', but its attempts to rival the school of Gershwin are singularly inept, and the main body of the work is as turgid and vulgar as anything that has come out of Germany for some years. The failure of composers to produce jazz works of any importance or profundity is in reality due to the fact that jazz is itself an essentially decadent and derived art—at its best an ironic comment on Romanticism; at its worst a sentimental expression of a negative emotion—it is neither a vigorous nor an essentially new form of music, and any attempt to use it as a folk-tradition on which to form a style is about as intelligent as using plaster swags and ornamental iron-work for the foundation of a cathedral.

PETER QUENNELL

BAUDELAIRE¹

‘Ce que je souffre en vivant, vois-tu, c’est inexprimable!’ Baudelaire wrote to his mother in 1861—a sentence M. Charles du Bos has chosen as epigraph for his excellent short study of the poet, and which might equally well have been placed by M. François Porché upon the title-page of his more popular biographical essay, now translated into English, *La Vie Dououreuse de Charles Baudelaire*. That sentence was written six years before his death, and his cry of ‘inexpressible suffering’ sums up in its single tortured line not only his remaining brief period, the flight to Brussels, tedious exile, aphasia and idiocy, but the whole tenor of the forty odd painful years that had preceded it. At no period can the current of his life have run even moderately smooth:

Ma jeunesse ne fut qu’un ténébreux orage
Traversé çà et là par de brillants soleils . . .

His youth, whatever its brilliant irradiations and meteoric flashes of pride and conscious genius, witnessed the inception of his miseries and learned to appreciate their vigour, the almost personal and revengeful force with which they pursued and harried him. At the attainment of his majority, or immediately afterwards, he had contracted immense debts—immense, that is to say, in proportion to his substance—and had also contracted the venereal infection which, long quiescent, ultimately

¹ *Charles Baudelaire*. By François Porché. Translated by John Mavin. (Wishart. 10s. 6d.)

robbed him of both speech and understanding. Worse still, he had developed that curious disease of the will, 'l'Acedia, maladie des moines', which made it impossible to settle in any rule of life or regular course of action.

Such was the spectacle, brusquely unrolled eleven years ago, by the publication of the Letters to his Mother. Thenceforth it was necessary to dismiss a conception of the poet hitherto obtaining, which had been fostered by various of his most fervent though least discerning admirers, and, in some small degree, encouraged by Baudelaire himself. We were obliged to strip his image bare of the rather tawdry rags and tatters in which Swinburne's magnificent rhetoric had swaddled it. Our previous conception, the 'strange, sad brother', Satanic dandy or frigidly preoccupied amateur of Vice, aghast, yet delightfully stimulated by the imminence of that horrific capital V, must be remodelled afresh. But, since modes of literary thought are as slow to germinate as they are sometimes quick to fade, it is now, during the last few years, that his restored portrait shows the first signs of assuming a distinct and novel shape.

In England, Mr. T. S. Eliot's critical judgements enjoy a considerable and deserved weight. With M. Charles du Bos, whose estimate of Baudelaire is contained in the collection of essays, called *Approximations*, he has piously set to work refurbishing our mental portrait, and the general trend of his conclusions may be gathered from a recent article in *The Dial*. As one might expect, a very persuasive and eloquent piece of argument, it errs, perhaps, if at all, in the opposite direction to that already pointed out by Swinburne and Mr. Arthur Symons. When Mr. Eliot, in company with M. du Bos, claims that Baudelaire was a Christian poet pre-eminently, he traverses, it would seem,

the limits of Baudelaire's always nebulous and indeterminate faith, set by the poet himself:

Quand même Dieu n'existerait pas (he wrote at the beginning of *Fusées*) la religion serait encore sainte et divine.

And farther than that he could never find it in his reason to go. 'Je suis mystique au fond et je ne crois à rien', M. du Bos recalls Flaubert's confession. There was present a strong Christian tendency, no doubt, but Baudelaire's nature was large enough to comprehend the Christian as well as other divergent tendencies. Together with his passionate desire towards a sublimation of the passions:

Dis-moi, ton cœur parfois s'envole-t-il, Agathe,
Loin du noir océan de l'immonde cité,
Vers un autre océan où la splendeur éclate,
Bleu, clair, profond, ainsi que la virginité?

we detect the peculiarly un-Christian resonance of Latin verse, and the beauties of his achievement are classical in a sense in which you could hardly apply the word to productions of an exclusively Christian source.

Besides, every attempt finally to denominate Baudelaire a partisan of this or that creed will come perilously near ignoring one of the main assets of his genius—the singular economy, I mean, with which it performed its functions, an economy not least evident, monstrous as the paradox may appear, in its conduct of an ostensibly wasteful and disastrous life. Ruinously wasteful. Yet nothing of Baudelaire's potentiality was ever dissipated or squandered. He was idle; yet, his own severest critic, his idleness, he declared at the end of his life, had been the nursery of his talent. He lacked equilibrium; yet that very lack of

balance kept him exquisitely impressionable and receptive, swinging like a fine magnetic needle, pivoted on his centre of ennui. Ennui!

Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat . . . Baudelaire's was the consuming ennui of a born *flâneur*, anxious to reform but absolutely incapable of eradicating the hateful propensity. How else should he have written *Le Spleen de Paris*, or so drenched his verse in the winter fog, spring damp and piercing autumn chill of the nineteenth-century metropolis? No part of his being, then, but was subsidiary to the growth of his genius. He used everything, committed his full support to nothing. His sensibility was universal. Its appetite was voraciously keen. And we shall be as ill-advised if we entitle him Christian Saint like Mr. Eliot, as if, like Mr. Arthur Symons, we write him down Diabolist and dilettante of the Black Art. We should remember that his scope was sufficiently supple to touch extreme quarters of the horizon; a great poet, an unparalleled critic, a figure steadily emerging, while its companions gradually recede.

DESMOND MACCARTHY

MODERN BIOGRAPHY

Three books which appeared last month are, each in its way, characteristic of the modern literary tendencies; two of them are autobiographies and one is a biographical study—*The Skull of Swift*, by Shane Leslie (*Chatto & Windus, 12s. 6d.*). The autobiographies, *Nuda Veritas*, by Clare Sheridan (*Butterworth, 21s.*), and *My Life*, by Isadora Ducan (*Gollancz, 15s.*), are books written with a modern candour. Not long ago *Nuda Veritas* would have scandalized by its lack of reserve and its comments upon the living, and *My Life* by the rapturous and intimate accounts which the heroine gives of her love-affairs. No doubt both books have even to-day shocked not a few; for literary reserve is a matter of manners, and since manners change in varying degrees in different sections of the community, some readers will always resent a candour which others welcome. Nothing can be more instructive than the truth when a writer has been determined to tell it; but such genuine determination is itself rare and the ability to carry it through rarer still. Meanwhile, it does not follow that all that is candid is either true, or instructive, or even entertaining. Both these books, however, are certainly entertaining, and *My Life* is something more. Isadora Duncan's book is the record of the emotional life of an artist; Mrs. Sheridan's that of a spirited woman well placed for seeing life, whose gifts as a sculptor have incidentally increased those opportunities. The one is a revelation of a temperament which found full expression in an art; the other is a vivid, straightforward account of the

incidents and encounters which have made the author's life exciting.

When Isadora Duncan describes the emotions which her lovers and children, music and nature, inspired in her, she is re-telling us what she could express perfectly by her dancing. In print she is sometimes merely ecstatically clumsy; she could not be clumsy on the stage. Her own body, not the written word, was her proper medium of expression. Nevertheless, when she sat down to write she had to try to convey in words her feeling for the body's beauty, her joy in it, and that profound faith in vital impulses which had inspired her dancing. Reserve, shyness, let alone a sense of shame, are fatal inhibitions in a dancer. She would, as an author, inevitably despise, too, that self-regarding watchfulness which, when extended beyond technical accomplishment and towards what others may be thinking of the performer, lowers the energy, rapture, and confidence of self-expression. This emotional congruity between her autobiography and her life as an artist makes her book valuable. It is a naked book. Those who are afraid of the body must think it immoral; readers who are sceptical may find it lacking in humour and far too guilelessly gushing; but there is no excuse for thinking it indecent.

It is not, on the other hand, the merits, but the defects of *The Skull of Swift* which makes it significant as an example of modern biography. Ever since Mr. Lytton Strachey published *Eminent Victorians*, and opened his essay on Gordon by telling us, in the manner of an old-fashioned novelist, that in 1883 a solitary gentleman might have been seen wandering in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem with a Bible under his arm, biographers have resolved to arrest our attention by their opening sentence

and to stuff every subsequent page with picturesque details. How pleasant it would be to get back again to the old unpretentious narrative which began by informing us quietly when and where the hero was born!

The manner of Macaulay was soon discredited by imitators who had no learning to support it; Mr. Lytton Strachey, too, has not been blessed in his literary descendants, the majority of whom ape his methods without understanding his discretion. The form he made fashionable is one which requires the finest literary tact and minute research. Now Mr. Shane Leslie, who attempts this form, has a strong imagination but lacks entirely literary tact. He is essentially a sensational writer and more careless than most of his kind. Undoubtedly he can write a good sentence, but he has no notion when he has written a preposterous one: 'Under the rough features and coarse clothes he' (Sir William Temple) 'recognized a sensitive being' (Swift) 'easily touched by the bludgeons and blunderbusses of a world which was insensately divided by opposing creeds and factions, theories and nations'. It hardly requires a remarkable degree of sensitiveness to feel 'the touch' of a bludgeon or a blunderbuss, but Mr. Leslie never stops to notice the implications of what he writes. He takes pot-shots at his ideas (I do not say he never hits the mark; he does so occasionally), and he nearly always prefers the heaviest missiles. Alliteration has an irresistible attraction for him. An infatuated affection for that humble literary device can alone explain, for instance, the following sentence: 'It was not enough for this gibing giant to play with Vanessa or to ply Stella'; or account for his having ended the description of an imaginary delirium with the question: 'When the Dean looked again out, of his *sobbing skull*, was it weeks or was it months?'

This imaginary delirium, imitated, of course, from the closing pages of Mr. Strachey's *Queen Victoria*, and used to recapitulate a life in pictures, is, by the bye, the most imaginative passage in the book. There is a macabre vigour about some of the pictures which shows that the writer is at last on his proper ground; but his impatience throughout to drag his subject on to it has ruined his book as a biographical study. The narrative itself is violently emphatic without being clear. The reader sometimes does not know for pages together whether Swift is in Ireland or in England, only that he, the reader, is supposed to be in Swift's head.

A writer so careless in combining words would hardly be more scrupulous in arbitrarily combining facts. Mr. Leslie suggests, for instance, that Dryden's crushing comment on Swift's early poems, 'Cousin, you will never be a poet', was spoken in The Rose coffee-house in the presence of Congreve, to whom Swift then whispered, 'Some day I will make sin and folly bleed'. Dryden is reported to have made that remark, and Swift in a poetic epistle to Congreve certainly wrote the lines,

My hate, whose lash just heaven has long decreed,
Shall on a day make sin and folly bleed;

but there is no evidence that such a scene ever took place. This is typical of modern picturesque biographers—it *might* have happened, that is enough. Not all, of course, are quite as careless as Mr. Leslie, who, to make a phrase, will describe Swift's eyes as 'glaring like sunken loadstones from their occiput', though a glance at Swift's portrait shows that they were unusually prominent; but in the matter of constructing scenes out of unrelated facts there is not much to choose between Mr. Leslie and many others. The trouble is that reviewers have not time to find

them out, so the public never distinguishes between those biographers who respect facts and those who twist them and combine them as they please.

The most curious deficiency in the book is the omission of the last interview between Swift and Vanessa. It is the climax of the story that Mr. Leslie had been telling at considerable length, yet he never mentions that Vanessa in despair wrote at last a letter to Stella asking her whether she was indeed Swift's wife. According to Sheridan she replied that she was, and forwarded the letter to Swift himself. Whereupon Swift, who could never bear his hand to be forced, rode over to Celbridge in a fury and flung the letter on Vanessa's table, glared at her with his terrible blue eyes and left her without a word. Vanessa died soon afterwards. All Swift's biographers accept this incident. Orrery only differs from Sheridan in speaking of the letter as having been written to Swift, and not to Stella. But at the very point in Mr. Leslie's narrative at which we expect it, we read instead this mysterious sentence: 'Fortune fixed their next meeting-place without help of terrestrial weather. Their secret remains one that the gods do not divulge nor can men discover.'

The 'survey in preface' is the best part of the book; its title, *The Skull of Swift*, has, of course, no more relevancy to the contents than the tail-piece, which is a small drawing of a skull with the words, 'Alas, Poor Stella!' printed under it. These are merely signs of the author's love of sensationalism. It is not against his sensationalism that these criticisms are chiefly directed, but against defects which would not be tolerated unless readers of biography were already accustomed to childish thought-reading and inexpensive local colour which are the stock-in-trade of modern biographers.

READERS' REPORTS

Rossetti: His Life and Work (Evelyn Waugh. Duckworth. 12s. 6d.) will interest any one interested in human beings or in painting. Those who are familiar with pre-Raphaelite legend will find little new material, but they will be delighted by Mr. Waugh's witty and well-balanced treatment of the old; and to those who are not familiar with that enchanted world he provides an irresistible introduction. No one could read his quotations without wanting to turn to the sources from which they were taken. Nowadays it is easier to be witty than to be fair, and Mr. Waugh's fairness is a pleasant surprise. Ruskin's old-maidish fussiness, for example, was an obvious butt for wit, but the author has dwelt on what was far more important, Ruskin's good judgement and splendid generosity. He is equally fair on Rossetti, judging his unspeakable conduct by the peculiar standards necessary, but not varnishing it with the usual twaddle about genius.

Mr. Waugh evidently values that part of his book in which he confounds the modern school of art criticism; but the poor old horse he thrashes might have been left to die in peace. No sensitive person can take very seriously the æsthetic puritanism of the last fifteen years, and the most high and dry of art critics likes things entirely at variance with his theories. It is pleasant to read a book on painting by some one who understands technique, though I think Mr. Waugh overrates the influence of the Carracci in 1850. His æsthetic judgement seems to me very sure.

Unrelieved praise is apt to numb the reader's interest, so I will end with fault-finding. First a complaint which every one will make: the book does not do justice to

Rossetti's poetry. The author is obviously more interested in painting, which was, in fact, the chief concern of Rossetti's life. But a hundred English people care for poetry for every one that cares for painting, and some of these may be disappointed. Secondly Mr. Waugh's light style, though perfectly suited to the earlier part of the book, has not enough weight and power for the tragedy of Rossetti's decline. Thirdly, his structure is sometimes buried beneath a heap of quotations; at the beginning of Chapter III, for example, the narrative is broken by the interesting, but too long, extracts from the Ruskin correspondence. Lastly, there is a bad misprint on p. 104: Philip Wells for Philip Webb.

Charles XII of Sweden, by The Hon. Eveline Godley. (Collins. 12s. 6d.) This biography will continue to be read because, unlike many contemporary biographies, it brings out the permanent interest of its theme, not merely those aspects of it which appeal to the intellectual whims of the moment. For Sweden, Charles's career was disastrous: no attempt is made to challenge that verdict. But the author has a wider sense of historical values: that Charles XII grew great at the expense of his own nation does not alter the fact, in her eyes, that he *was* great. She shows how Russia, not Sweden, emerged from his passionately unstatesmanlike campaigns as a participant in Western civilization; how the epic strain in Scandinavian temperament was called into play by this hero out of the twilight; and how, from the austere details of his life, from endurance, self-control and hatred of treachery, he was in truth a character from the study of which, as from a work of art, men cannot cease to profit. In form the book is narrative: the reader marches with the Swedish armies

from start to finish. There are, however, intervals in which Charles's European background is adroitly summarized; and the figures with which it brought him into contact: Augustus, Elector of Saxony, and the Duke of Marlborough, are portrayed with sufficient force to act as foil to the handsome, jack-booted monarch, whose fondness of the open-air and disdain of a wig caused the eighteenth century to regard him as a demoniac. The author has a grasp of character which gives reality to events, but she never substitutes psychology for fact. In this uprightness lies the book's dual appeal, both to the specialist and the casual reader. Though the point of view is not new, it is well documented at many points from unpublished sources. The style is sober and scholarly, and illumined now and then by a discreet humour. It is a good biography.

I have read through Mr. Norman Douglas's *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology* (*Chapman & Hall. 7s. 6d.*) with great interest; always with admiration of the learning displayed, and at times with acute enjoyment; but when I come to sum up my impressions I am embarrassed. Nothing that the author of *Old Calabria* writes can be without merit; yet I find it all but impossible to give a coherent judgement of the book. Nor am I much helped when I see that Mr. Douglas seems to be as dubious as myself. He started with the idea of writing, 'in reverential playfully-erudite fashion', a general treatise on ancient Natural History: and then found he had to limit himself to notes—and notes often very hasty and scrappy—on allusions to animal life in the Anthology. These, as he says, may serve as material for someone with more leisure than he enjoys. They strike me as immensely learned; they are full of

knowledge both of the classics and of animal life in general, but they won't do for the ordinary reader, whether a Greek scholar or another. They are so short, and so allusive, that they postulate a reader with opportunities of turning up the passages mentioned, of comparing, adjusting, criticizing. One wants the references.

The style, as is inevitable in notes of this kind, is sometimes jerky and hurried, though often very lively and picturesque. The translations, aiming at accuracy rather than beauty, are occasionally bald and hard to scan. Every now and then anybody with a moderate knowledge of Greek, and with the Anthology beside him, will be charmed. Animal lovers should not miss it; but they must read it in a library, and be prepared to jump up every minute to consult this work of reference or that.

On the whole, I incline to think that Mr. Douglas is right: the book is really written to be the basis of another book. When the right man appears, he will find Mr. Douglas's notes of enormous assistance, and, if he has as much talent, he will produce a most delightful work. As things are, this little collection is undigested matter; a mere 'permanent possibility' of pleasant sensations.

Jørgensen: An Autobiography; translated from the Danish by Ingeborg Lund. (Sheer & Ward. 10s. 6d.) This is *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, from the early life of the Danish poet Johannes Jørgensen. The first half gives an interesting cross-section of the turmoil in the European mind excited by Darwin, Nietzsche, and Ibsen, the break-up of social discipline and the rediscovery of the individual. It is a distinct contribution to the history of nineteenth-century thought. The writer views his past with detachment and his masters and contemporaries, from Höffding and Brandes downward,

with a demure humour which sometimes flashes into penetrating judgements. The biographical notes which tell us who all the aspiring young people were, and what became of them, were badly needed. Some English readers will be interested to trace the influence of Shelley, Mill and Swinburne on the more cosmopolitan northern mind and to discover analogies in their own late Victorian decades to the Dano-Catholic movement, the discovery of Baudelaire, the cult of Japanese prints, and the poetic revolt which addressed 'the brain flower, trembling on the stem of the vertical column' and shouted 'Better one kiss from a hundred girls than a hundred kisses from one'. The style is of that period too (neo-Byronic introspection rendered with inventoried detail) which the rising generation had caught from France, and called realism: 'The mysterious cooing of the cuckoo is like the gurgling of blood from a wound; the large leaves of the sycamores shine with a blue tint in the rays of the sun.' May 22. 'Have quarrelled with the day and been defrauded by the night.' There is a great deal of this, copied from old diaries—a great deal too much, one may say. At twenty-eight, the young author, poor, dissatisfied, and unable to keep his feet—or his head—in the rushing stream of new ideas, began to draw towards Rome. What follows, his journey to Italy and to Assisi, and his gradual approach to the Church, is elaborately, picturesquely and somewhat tediously recounted. The manner of it suggests Huysmans crossed with Compton Mackenzie, with an occasional naïveté which reminds us that even cosmopolitan culture is no safeguard against silliness: 'I became acquainted with the English periodical, *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*. It was in the language of Byron and Shelley! For the first time I saw the language of the great revolution-

aries employed to the glory of the Catholic Church, and England, after four hundred years of No Popery, bending the knee to Rome.'

The English Miss, by R. H. Mottram. (Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d.) *The Semi-Detached House*, by Emily Eden. (Elkin Mathews. 7s. 6d.) *Apparition*, by F. Le Gros Clark. (Knopf. 7s. 6d.) *Phillida*, by H. S. Reid. (Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d.) *The Phantom Gondola*, by Maurice Dekobra. (Werner Laurie. 7s. 6d.) *The English Miss* is an admirably solid and well-constructed book; on that count, at least, it holds no disappointment in store for the numerous admirers of Mottram's *Spanish Farm Trilogy*. Yet ever so slightly disappointed (I cannot but think) they are likely to be, and the explanation of its partial failure seems to be that commonplace ought to be the province of writers of genius, and R. H. Mottram's considerable talent is almost overwhelmed by the banality of the characters and *milieu* he sets out to describe, *The English Miss* herself and other equally four-square, red-brick personalities, squarely planted in a symmetrical suburban group. He has essayed the portrait of a blank wall; his protagonist, he repeats, was inarticulate, was unawakened, was entirely chaste, was not even pretty (as who should assert that the wall was blank, was blank, and was blank again!). His effect is spoiled by a curious psychological dogma: that apparent commonplace, after all, is probably no more nor less than the aggregate of infinitesimal oddities.

The Semi-Detached House is the amateur's book, *par excellence*, written as the amateur's book ought to be written and so seldom is. Qualities of wit, warmth, social observation, with which the conversationist is often at least as highly endowed as the professional writer, are

here preserved and crystallized. It has the immediacy of talk and the permanence of a minor work of art. It is unassuming and extremely capable. Miss Emily Eden, I learn from the preface, was related to the Miss Eden with whom Pitt at one time considered marriage, was born during the last years of the eighteenth century, and spent much of her life acting hostess for her brother, a Governor-General of India: facts, none of them without its significance. Hers is, with *The Bachelor of the Albany*, the most delightful book yet published in Messrs. Elkin Mathews's excellent *Rescue Series*.

If the parallel is accepted with reservations, *Apparition* might be compared with a volume of the *Forsyte Saga*, drawn slightly out of perspective. Here is a kind of underlying seriousness and external ponderousness of treatment, almost worthy of the elder prophet, which may please or exasperate, according to the individual reader's temperament and traditions. Here are the portraits of a complex family group, all variously affected by the sense of some tremendous imminent social change. The novel is immensely crowded and, at least, twice too long. We appreciate its situations intellectually, but emotionally we do not experience them. In the author's imagination, I suspect, the sociological plan must have preceded and dominates the incidental human detail.

Phillida, by H. S. Reid, is another of those frail pleas for the reform of the modern novel, raised by such cultivated and unassuming writers as Mr. David Garnett and Miss Sylvia Townsend-Warner. It is delivered in the rather quavering purity of style we have grown to expect—a charming story of seventeenth-century adventure on a remote continent, a suitable book to borrow, scarcely a book to buy.

Not one of Maurice Dekobra's literary airs and graces survives the rough usage of an exceptionally inefficient translator. His novel is littered with their relics, like a dismal display of burst paper bags. Trustful humanity may perhaps exhaust the English edition of this book, *The Phantom Gondola*, in the pathetic belief that a story so widely read must also be a story which contains certain seeds of potential amusement; but the adult part of humanity will come away perplexed and discouraged: the mystery of popular success remains quite insoluble.

Reconsiderations: Literary Essays, by E. E. Kellett. (Cambridge University Press. 8s. 6d.) Thirteen essays, well written with a body of sound learning behind them. Some of them are pleasant exercises in minute criticism—e.g. on the sources of Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*, and on the English of Joseph Conrad (showing he was not such a master of prose as is generally thought). Others are of larger scope—the exact nature of the service (and disservice) rendered by Chaucer to English poetry, the bearing on literary criticism of recent Shakespearian research, and Milton's careful avoidance of Dante's footsteps. Only one of them, on *Critical Certainties*, deals with fundamentals: it is worth meditating over. Mr. Kellett traces the fluctuations in some famous reputations, and attempts to determine the qualities which are necessary to survival. His own essay on the death of Swinburne is a most interesting document for the history of literary taste.

The Persian Gulf: An historical sketch from the earliest times to the beginning of the twentieth century. By Lt.-Col. Sir Arnold T. Wilson, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., C.M.G., D.S.O. With a Foreword by the Right Hon. L. S. Amery, P.C.

(*Oxford: Clarendon Press. 25s. net.*) I have thoroughly enjoyed Sir A. T. Wilson's book. It is a history of the Persian Gulf from the earliest times. The story begins with primitive man (the Gulf is supposed to be the place where mankind first learnt the art of navigation) and goes on to describe the great sea trade of Babylonian days, the exploit of Alexander's admiral Nearchus, the successive dominations of the Gulf by Persia, the Caliphate, and Portugal, the struggle for commercial supremacy of England with Portugal and later with Holland, with its Persian and Arabian complications, the suppression of piracy and the slave trade, down to the comparative peace of the beginning of the present century. Here, because of the author's intimate official connexion with the region, the narrative shows touches of diplomacy and abruptly ends.

It is a book full of information, but so well balanced and arranged, and the main tendencies and their pertinent influences are so kept sight of, that the reader is never bewildered or overwhelmed. There are a great many quotations from contemporary writers, which help to make the story vivid and full of human interest. The author is rather diffident about these, and quotes from Cicero about those who 'repeat the same things which have been written by others, which serves no purpose but to stuff their shelves'. He has at all events stuffed his shelves, not only thoroughly, but with discrimination: the bibliography extends to seventeen pages, but the book, although solid and scholarly, is very readable and may be recommended to the general reader as well as the historian. It will, of course, appeal particularly to all who have official connexion with the Gulf, or with England's recently assumed responsibilities in those parts; also to all

interested in the present revival by air of the old trade route between East and West, in the safety of our Indian Empire, or in the rise of British sea power.

Fouché, by Nils Forssell, translated by Anna Barwell. (George Allen & Unwin. 12s. 6d.) Dr. Forssell's task has been to discover consistency in a life usually held to exhibit none. Fouché, in the author's view, was a traitor to men because he remained all his life a slave to his first goddess, Reason, actuated therein by his 'profound lack of sympathy with the romantic and national movements which broke out in the nineteenth century'. Of other loyalties Fouché was devoid. Throughout his career, whether as regicide, terrorist, or minister under the Directory, Napoleon, and Louis XVIII, he was always drawn back, when opportunity offered, to the old Republican ideas of the Girondists. And it was his achievement, apart from his practical work in giving France internal peace, to bequeath the principles of the Revolution to such politicians of the nineteenth century as Thiers, who were destined to give them concrete shape. This thesis is a fresh and definite contribution to the study of Napoleonic France and the history of Liberty.

As a biography, however, the book is deficient. Dr. Forssell has no appreciation of that ruthless logic which governs the French character. Consequently, neither his subject nor his subject's environment is alive. Lightness of touch has probably been lost in translation, and consequently one or two romantic passages about the sea jar on one. The book is not so much the study of a man as an attempt to explain him by circumstantial evidence. Judged as such, it is interesting and valuable.

The Watsons: Jane Austen. Continued and completed by Edith and Francis Brown. (Elkin Mathews & Marrot. 7s. 6d.) *The Watsons* is a disappointing fragment, and only a few passages, such as Mr. Watson's account of Mr. Howard's preaching, and his daughter's question: 'And what did you have for dinner, Sir?' are of the true metal. The manner, staccato and heavy, indicates rather that she was not in a writing mood, and knew it. The continuation, based on family tradition, sustains fairly well the movement of the opening (here divided into ten chapters), but the characters sometimes fall off into caricature and the incidents into farce; the diction is often out of key.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE DETECTIVES

Detection is a difficult trade. Even more difficult, it would appear, it is to provide the detective, in a detective novel, with any real detecting to do. This does not worry the low-brow writer, who can keep his detective so busy climbing drainpipes and falling into Chinese opium dens that the absence of the more specialized activity is not noticeable; but it is hard on the high-brow, whose critical faculty will not allow this way out. Probably only Mr. Crofts and Mr. Freeman, of writers of this class, consistently keep their detectives' noses to the grindstone; and Mr. Freeman has a technique of his own, which is not to be imitated. At any rate, the majority of the bunch of authors coming before us for review this month appear to have felt the strain—their way out, according to temperament, being either to complicate the plot so incredibly that neither reader *nor* detective could possibly follow it; or to let the

plot go and to fall back on the characters. The latter solution is the more promising, but for the fact that these writers' experience lies all in one direction, that of the London life of the intellectual classes. But these form the subject of too many novels already, and, in any case, fare better without being forced into murder plots.

Mr. Lynn Brock's new book, *The Slip-Carriage Mystery* (*Collins. 7s. 6d.*), falls into the first of these categories. Never was any plot so tangled, never were there so many persons with guilty secrets walking between two covers. Under that sinister railway arch near which the slip-carriage lay, stalk no less than three figures in leggings, all bound on doubtful errands. Suspicious characters swarm like bees, and the only way to hit the murderer is to go nap on the only character who is *not* suspicious. There are no other clues provided—though the author, in a somewhat uneasy postscript, seems to think there are—either by the detective or by any one else. Colonel Gore, indeed, is, from the reader's point of view, one of the most useless of detectives. He walks round and round; he gets shot at; he makes many knowing noises; but all he *says* in effect is, 'You put sugar in your tea with your left hand on Thursday afternoon, November 9th, 1922? A-ah, then you're the murderer!' And so it is. This may be called 'the technique of the strawberry mark upon the left arm'. It is not interesting. For all that, the book is well written, intelligent, and readable; its trouble is really lack of imagination.

Mr. Anthony Gilbert is better. *The Murder of Mrs. Davenport* (*Collins. 7s. 6d.*) has, at any rate, some detection about it, and some characters, though he is regrettably inclined to sentimentalize over his rather unattractive protagonists. He has taken trouble about his minor parts, which have

got just the right amount of life; and his book is well written. But his plot is still too complicated; all the business about the clock and the bus-ticket is like an annoying knot in a skein of wool, and he has to go through appalling contortions to avoid letting the name of his villain get out three chapters too soon. (He might have saved himself the trouble; the gentleman has been obvious for some time previously.) But his book is well worth reading, and he should be watched.

Mr. Berkeley, who bears the same suspicious Christian name as our preceding author, is a writer on whom we have learned to rely for wit and competence. Unfortunately, in *The Silk Stockings Murders* (*Collins. 7s. 6d.*), he has hampered himself by a ridiculous plot. Homicidal maniacs, Mr. Berkeley should realize, are not interesting; and some kind critic might have pointed out that his final scene is absurd. He is always amusing, but may one softly hint to him that his hearty Mr. Sheringham is a bit apt to become the bore in fiction that he undoubtedly was in life? In his last book, Mr. Berkeley invented a really good character in Inspector Moresby; but here, alas! the Inspector is pushed into the background, and only gets a curtain-call. May he soon return.

As to the fourth book, *The Net Around Joan Ingilby* (*Collins. 7s. 6d.*), it sets Mr. Fielding in a lower class than Mr. Brock. It has a complex of plots, suspects, and detectives, which cannot be followed without the closest attention. In addition, Mr. Fielding, conscious possibly of a certain heaviness of style and characterization, has striven desperately, by means of shootings, stranglings, and abductions *ad lib.*, to brighten the course of his tale. This is coming to be Mr. Fielding's characteristic; but it is not really successful. The violent scenes fail to stir the

reader's pulse, and only move him to disbelief that such things ever happened to the lumps of stiff clay who serve the author for characters. Mr. Fielding is able; but his first book was much better than this.

These four novels, though open to criticism, are at least all worth reading, and all written by authors who know how to write. In the next batch we come to some of whom that cannot be said. Lord Ernest Hamilton must be either a man of infinite leisure or so voracious a reader that nothing less than 100,000 words can stay his appetite for an instant. Never did any story take so long as *The Four Tragedies of Memworth* (Gollancz. 7s. 6d.) to come to the point; nor are many modern novels written in so slow and dressily Victorian a style. The opening chapters are almost 'period literature'. This is a pity, for Lord Ernest had a good plot in his head, which, cut down by one-third, and managed rather better, would have made a good book. But he should note that his conclusion, though it may be original, is lazy, and burkes criticism, by making it impossible for the reader to know whether or not he has tied up his loose ends—one of the first essentials in a detective novel.

The same firm has issued, in 2 LO, by Walter Masterman (7s. 6d.), what must be nearly the worst story in the world. It is incredible from start to finish; its dialogue is a pale imitation of *East Lynne*; and its grand finale a shocking libel on the B.B.C. It would appear that Mr. Masterman has written at least one previous novel; but why a new firm, advertising itself especially as a connoisseur of detective novels, should put its name to such rubbish must remain a mystery. Mr. J. D. Beresford, also, practised novelist as he is, fills us with astonishment on reading *The Instrument of Destiny* (Collins. 7s. 6d.). The jacket mag-

niloquently announces that Mr. Beresford is proving 'that it is possible to have real characterization in detective fiction without sacrificing the interest of a subtle mystery plot'. But, as a matter of fact, there is not an ounce of characterization in the whole thing; the dialogue and the whole management of the story are incredibly wooden; and the solution is obvious before even the murder is committed. Mr. Beresford has mistaken his vocation.

Of this whole gathering of authors, Mrs. Agatha Christie is by far the most competent. In *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (Collins. 7s. 6d.) she leaves no ends untied; her characters stand on their own feet, so far as this is required of them; and she has no *longueurs* to make the reader wonder wearily whether anything is ever going to happen. As a matter of fact, this book is not her best; and the curtain-raiser at the beginning was definitely a mistake, and should have been worked in somewhere else. But almost everybody will enjoy reading it; and, after a diet of well-meaning blunderers, an author who both knows what she intends and can do it comes like a spring in the desert.

C. C.

READER'S BIBLIOGRAPHY

JOHN DONNE

There is no complete edition of Donne's works, and many of them can only be obtained at collectors' prices; some are extremely rare. The reader who wishes for information about them will find it in the *Bibliography of the Works of Dr. John Donne*, by Geoffrey Keynes (Printed for the Baskerville Club), Cambridge, 1914. The following theological works have not been reprinted since the seventeenth century: *Pseudo-martyr*, 1609; *Conclave Ignatii*, 1611; *Biathanatos*, 1608 (not printed till 1644). Of his sermons, all delivered between 1615 and 1631, a hundred and fifty-four were published by his son in three fine folios; *LXXX Sermons* in 1640, *Fifty Sermons*, 1649; and *XXVI Sermons* (actually twenty-four), 1660. A few sermons already in print were not included in these collections, and others are still extant in manuscript.

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This is far the best introduction to Donne as a preacher and prose writer. All the qualities of his eloquence are exemplified, and its general effect upon a modern reader is discussed in the essay.

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Interesting as specimens of the mannered wit of the period and in particular of the wit of 'Jack' Donne in his lighter unregenerate mood.

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POETRY

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This is the best edition. The Notes and Commentary are most valuable.

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To show how much editing has been required to get the text of Donne's poems straight, one example will suffice; the last line of the first stanza of *The Ecstasy* ran in the 1669 edition:

‘Sate we on one another's breasts.’

This is the best cheap edition of the poems.

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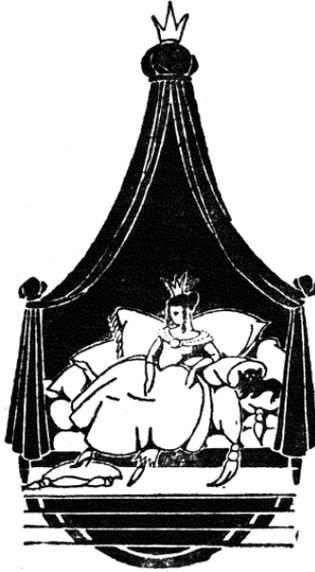
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