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A TIME TO LAUGH

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LEND ME YOUR EARS

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A TIME TO LAUGH

and other essays

F. Sinclaire

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To E. S.

Acknowledgment is made to the
Editor of the Christchurch *Press*
in which most of these essays
first appeared

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A Time to Laugh

I THINK it was Oscar Wilde who once described the typical Englishman of his generation as a person with a vocation for funerals. Wilde's specimen, gathered half a century ago, may perhaps have been only a temporary variation from the permanent type, a product of the marriage between Victorian prudery and commercial Philistinism. But many centuries before Queen Victoria's day, an acute French observer, noting the qualities of the many and various peoples among whom he had travelled, set down his main impression of the English character in words which have become almost proverbial. 'They were taking their pleasures gravely,' says the old French chronicler, 'after the manner of their country'.

Yes, it is in the English manner to take one's pleasures gravely, and we of the English stock are in the tradition and have carried that manner with us to the ends of the earth. If anyone doubts it, let him go out on some fine Saturday afternoon and watch the younger men at their cricket and football, or the older men at their bowls. We pride ourselves on our fondness for field sports and our aptitude for them. Perhaps we pay too dearly for our boast. Watch the faces of the players. Not a laugh! Hardly a smile! If enjoyment implies joy, are these people enjoying their game? Are they, in any true sense of the word, playing? 'Don't play with the ball'; when I overheard these words the other day, shouted in stentorian tones from the other side of a high fence which blocked my view, I thought at first that some angry schoolmaster was recalling his pupils to their books. The ironical emphasis on the word 'play' should have enlightened me: the voice I heard was that of a football coach directing his team. 'Don't play with the ball': to do that would not be what we understand by play. Nothing so sportive as playing with the ball must be allowed to intrude upon our sport. Well, as I understand the words, this sort of thing is neither play nor sport, but merely a grim struggle for victory, possibly a rehearsal for another Waterloo—if indeed that victory

was won, as we used to be told, on the playing fields of Eton, and not rather, as Mr Dooley claims, on the potato patches of Ireland. Another Irishman, Mr Bernard Shaw, has told us that we don't know how to play, because we take our games too seriously. I think he is right. In a game, I conceive, there should be room for the indulgence of the spirit of pure irresponsible fun. We have regulated and rationalised our games till we have quite eliminated the sportive element, and we have gone as near as can be to the elimination of the factor of chance, which is one of the best of funmakers.

It is the same with our indoor games: here, too, we are not gamesome. Chess and draughts are games of pure skill, and the grave countenances of the players may be right. But what of cards? Cards, I should have thought, were invented for our relaxation. A visitor from Mars, watching a party at a bridge table, would hardly have suspected this kindly and humane intention in the inventor. How seriously they are all taking it! When do these people relax? Perhaps, like Mrs Battle, over a book. Where do they turn for their fun?

But perhaps, after all, when the time comes for a final judgment of our national character, and for learned historians to talk of us as we talk of the Greeks and Romans, perhaps—I repeat this qualifying word in deference to the Public School spirit—we shall be judged by our achievement in other fields than our playing fields. We shall be remembered, not for the games we played, but for the books we wrote. And unless human nature undergoes some radical change, there is one thing which readers of the future will find in those English books as they will hardly find it elsewhere. In cricket or football the world's championship may go to France or Russia, to China or Peru. The world's championship in humour goes to the land of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Browning, of Fielding and Jane Austen and Dickens, of Addison and Lamb and Chesterton. No one will find in these typically English writers a vocation for funerals. Dickens, to be sure, has his funereal moments, and loves a good cry; but a good reader knows how to skip, and does so without loss of the basic Dickensian substance of hilarious vitality. And it will be set down to our credit that this English humour is kindly and charitable. For the other sort we must turn to the Irish Swift or the Scottish Carlyle. No, once again, if you wish to find the real English spirit, look for it not in the Englishman's sports, but in his books.

* * * *

We have just been celebrating a very great and joyous occasion, and we have done it, I suppose, as best we could. And what a poor business we have made of it all! I am not so ungracious as to overlook the splendidly appropriate singing of the Hallelujah Chorus in the Square. But besides that, what was there? Speechifying and other kinds of noise in plenty: some of us drank a good deal—that was a little better; but of the spirit of joyfulness, what outward and adequate expression was there? Above all, where were our songs? Bad people, says the German proverb, have no songs. Let us hope the converse proposition is not true. We have something worse than no songs, as everyone knows who listened to the alternate lugubriousness and inanity of the strains in which certain celebrants who walked the streets on Victory Night gave expression to their feelings. Some wise man has said that he would rather write the songs of a people than make its laws. Of laws and law-makers we have our fair share. Who will write us a song we can all sing in chorus on festive occasions without loss of self-respect?

They know no Songs

AT LEAST some of my readers, I hope, will not need to be told the source from which I have taken my title, which is also to be my text, for this week's sermon. But the traditional custom of quoting chapter and verse is a good one, and I should be sorry to ignore it, especially as it gives me the opportunity to introduce some new readers to a fine poem. My text, then, is taken from that spirited poem of Chesterton which he calls The Secret People, that is, the people of England. Speaking of the successive masters whom the Secret People have been called upon to serve in the course of their long history, the poet comes finally to 'the new unhappy lords' of his own day, the commercial plutocrats into whose hands England has fallen. Men who dare not carry their swords, who fight by shuffling papers—

> 'Their doors are shut in the evening,
> and they know no songs.'

'They know no songs.' Those words have been coming back to my mind again and again since I read in our cables the other day a certain passage in the account of the opening of the newly elected British Parliament. On that occasion, we are told, Mr Churchill was greeted on his entry by cheers from the Conservatives, who sang *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*. Whereupon, the report goes on to tell us, a veteran Labour member, in a counter-demonstration, started Government members singing *The Red Flag*. 'This too,' concludes the cable message, 'was received with a round of applause.'

What shall we say—what can we say—to these things? Wanting the pen of a Tacitus, I must leave to some future historian, the malicious pleasure of making his incisive comment on this episode, and using it as material for a summary estimate of the musical taste and accomplishment of our generation. All I can do now is to invite my reader to brace himself, and take courage to think

of it for a moment. Recall the occasion and the circumstances. England has just escaped from the greatest peril which has ever assailed her liberty. Her very existence has hung in the balance. She has come through to victory and safety. Her representatives, carefully chosen to speak and act for the nation, are assembled for the first time since the long struggle has ended and the danger is past. It is surely an august and even historic occasion. The entry of the nation's hero seems to call for some fitting vocal expression of good will, of gratitude and admiration, and finds it in the roaring of a pot-house ditty. And then, deep calls to deep (shall we say?) and there follows the ' counter-demonstration', the rival contribution to the competition in bathos, which takes shape in lugubrious drivel of a more pretentious sort. Mr Churchill may be a jolly good fellow, bawl the counter-demonstrators, but for all that, come dungeon dark or gallows grim (to mention one or two remote possibilities), we'll keep the Red Flag flying here!

I hope no one will suppose I am taking sides politically. In these demonstrations and counter-demonstrations I should say that dishonours are about equal. But what I am talking about has no more to do with politics than with pyrotechnics, and my own politics have come to the stage where they are fairly summed up in the famous phrase of Mercutio, 'A plague of both your houses!' And, despairing of adequate comment on the scene I have been describing, I find comfort in recalling some relevant remarks made under slightly similar provocation many years ago. Mr Bernard Shaw had been attending a Labour conference, at the close of which someone started and others took up the singing of *The Red Flag* . .. ' Whereupon,' says Mr Shaw, ' I seized my hat and stalked out of the room, snorting superiority from both nostrils. There are songs—the Marseillaise, for example—which, if the Revolution were in hand, might inspire even a sedentary civilian like myself with a momentary burst of heroism: but if anyone raised that mournful wail (*The Red Flag*), I should at once run away with my tail between my legs.' And there, I should say, you have just about the last word on that part of my subject.

' They know no songs.' But it is time to change the personal pronoun, and to turn our attention from the mote to the beam. In one respect at least our parliamentary representatives do, in spite of all the unkind witticisms we invent against them, quite fairly and adequately represent us. I mean, musically. They know no songs. Do we? If we do, I have not yet had the good fortune to hear them sung either at public functions ar at smaller and more intimate festive gatherings. There was a time when people had

songs appropriate to every occasion, songs grave and gay, carols, drinking songs, marching songs, songs for work and for play. What has become of them?

It is usual, I think, to lay the blame on the Puritans. Well, I am not inclined to extenuate the offences against the spirit of mirth and jollity and good fellowship and charity which lie to the charge of people who forbade by law the celebration of Christmas. But that was three centuries ago. In the last few generations the Puritan influence has waned almost to the vanishing point. We have had ample time, as well as inclination, to cast it off. If we must hang somebody, it will not be the Puritans.

I said just now that I had never, on any public or private occasion, heard the right songs sung. That statement, made in the bitterness of my spirit, needs one important qualification. I once had the privilege of belonging to a little group of people—men and women, younger and older—who called themselves the Fellowship. We met once a fortnight throughout the year, and after a meal proceeded to disport ourselves with music, play-reading, dancing, and charades. There was always plenty of singing in chorus. But we never sank to the level of proclaiming ourselves or one another jolly good fellows, or of moaning about the people's flag. We had better things in abundance. I remember particularly the old wassail song which begins 'Here we come a wassailing' and runs on through its half dozen verses, with the refrain 'Love and joy come to you, and to you your wassail too.' At Christmas, besides some choice old-time carols, we had always at least one new one specially composed by one or ourselves. Then there was *Waltzing Matilda*, Australia's one genuine song, racy of the soil. Our repertoire included a small anthology of comic songs, *Fishballs* (does any of my readers know that excellent ditty?) being the one I remember best. And a sailor-member, on his occasional visits, taught us some sea-chanties. On the rare occasions when we sang *Auld Lang Syne*, it was not in the pitifully mutilated version commonly heard, but as Burns wrote it. Remembering those happy hours, and reverting to my more immediate topic of hanging, I feel that I can after all end on a note of hope and cheer, and find expression in another line from the poet who provided us with my text. 'I think I will not hang myself today.'

Thoughts in Season

AUTUMN IS COME, and we have all been telling one another that this is the loveliest of the seasons, and the time when our city shows at its best. I suppose we mean what we say, and no doubt we are right. At the worst, we have a seasonable topic with which to eke out our casual conversation with the man who sits beside us in the tram. But whether it is from some special streak of perversity in me, or whether it is merely a normal reaction, I find myself growing restive and mildly contentious in the face of all this protesting. I want to challenge these reiterated commonplaces. Like Socrates, I want to ask questions. When we sing the praises of autumn are we speaking from our own hearts and minds, or are we politely conforming to a modern fashion? Should we have talked like this if we had lived a couple of centuries ago? Should we talk in this way if we were alive two centuries hence?

Some day I shall perhaps find courage to put these questions to my neighbour in the tram. He in his turn will probably suggest that my questions require some elucidation. That will give me the opening for which I have been playing. Being a bookish person, I shall embark on a dissertation on autumn, not as I have seen or failed to see it with my own eyes, but as I have read about it in books. No doubt some learned Czech or Transylvanian has written a treatise in several volumes on Autumn in Literature. My treatment of the subject will be less exhaustive and exhausting. And in practising on any reader who has got as far as this, I shall speak under correction and not on oath.

Autumn is a fairly recent discovery. 'Where are the songs of spring?' asks the poet. The answer is that they are everywhere. Among the seasons spring is the spoilt darling of the makers of songs. He is the year's pleasant king, the only pretty ringtime, and all the other pleasant things which rhyme with his name. And here, of course, autumn starts at a disadvantage in answering to a name for which even Browning has not given us a rhyme. Summer too, with the pomps and pageants proper to that season, has had

abundant celebration. Even winter has been hailed as a genial Falstaffian old ruffian, inviting to snug fireside comforts and the fellowship of the bowl. But where are the songs of autumn? Our poets and prose writers have, to be sure, had the grace to acknowledge the bounteousness which is written into the very name of this neglected season. But for the rest, generations of writers have seen in the falling leaf nothing but a symbol and a warning, a text for trite and lugubrious moralising on the theme of human mortality. For any expression of pure disinterested enjoyment of the beauties of autumn you will, I think, search vainly in the pages of our older writers. Keats's great Ode, which heads the list, was written only a century and a quarter ago. It may be that one or another of our landscape painters anticipated the poet's discovery of autumn; but I don't know, and the question of precedency, though interesting enough, lies outside the scope of my present subject.

I do not forget James Thomson, whose *Seasons* belong to the middle of the eighteenth century. But it is significant that of the four parts which make up that poem, the *Autumn* was the last to be written. The reason will be obvious to anyone who has the courage and patience to read carefully through that not very lively product of the Caledonian Muse. Coming to his fourth season, the poet finds himself gravelled for lack of matter. The reader almost hears him counting his lines and muttering to himself, ' Now what can I think of to put in next? ' He has indeed little or nothing to say. Except for some perfunctory glances at autumn's ' yellow lustres', ' russet meads', ' tepid gleams', ' attempered suns', and such shop-worn remnants and second-hand stock, the whole piece is mere padding and evasion. At one point the poet invites us to join him in the praise of industry—a virtue for which he was himself far from conspicuous; presently he launches into a denunciation of the barbarous sports of ' the sylvan youth '; a little later he contrives to fill a few pages with the story of the girl Lavinia, whose task it was to glean the fields of a farmer bearing the fine old British surname of Palemon; presently he gives us a sort of annotated catalogue of birds; then patriotism, that last refuge of scoundrels and sometimes of authors, comes easily to the author of *Rule Britannia;* and so the poem rambles on to its closing panegyric on the life which is spent ' far from public rage ' and is ' wrapp'd in conscious peace'. All this may or may not be magnificent; but it is not what the author calls it. It is not autumn as Keats saw it. The elder poet cannot be taken seriously as a rival to the younger in the discovery of autumn.

And we, who fit our opinions so comfortably into the fashion of our own day, if we had lived two centuries ago—I repeat my original question—should we have been conscious that something was lacking in his poem? Is our enthusiasm for autumn anything more than an affirmation of conformity with the prevailing fashion? 'All we like sheep . . .' Now and again some busybody asks us to name our favourite books, and like automata we begin, 'Shakepeare and The Bible', though perhaps those are just the two books we most sedulously avoid. So I may be allowed to suspect our praises of the seasons of chilblains and colds in the nose and what Thomson would have called 'pangs arthritic'. Here is a simple test of our sincerity. We have just been having a succession of superb dawns: how many of us have seen them?

A Friend in Need

READERS who know their Gilbert and Sullivan will remember Bunthorne, the extremely aesthetic gentleman in *Patience*, who tells us that he is not fond of uttering platitudes in stained-glass attitudes. I have a quarrel to pick with him. What I object to are not the stained-glass attitudes. I know the poor fellow has been hard put to it for a rime, and presently I shall help him out. His offence lies, if I may so express it, in his attitude to the platitude.

I can perhaps come to my point most conveniently by starting from the antipodes of the platitude; namely the lie. According to the legendary schoolboy, the lie is an abomination in the sight of the Lord, and . . . a very present help in trouble. The praises of the platitude, on which I now embark, will involve me in no such equivocation. Morally, the platitude is above reproach. The very substance of the fault we find with it is precisely its scrupulous regard for universally acknowledged truth. If, for example, I had begun this essay by announcing that all men are mortal, the more fastidious and sophisticated sort of reader might curl the contumelious lip and pass to the next page. The one thing he could not say would be that I was lying. But a mixture of a lie, as Bacon tells us, does ever add pleasure. The platitude offends by disappointing what the same philosopher calls this natural and corrupt love of the lie. It is moral to the backbone, and reaches indeed about as high a degree of moral perfection as can be found in the world. It tells the truth, and nothing but the truth. If it could lie, it would cease to be a platitude, and sink to the status of an epigram.

But this more sublime aspect of the platitude, though we commonly overlook it, is too conspicuous to need elaboration. What especially endears it to me—and the constant reader will hardly need to be told that the platitude is one of my hobbies; in fact it was one such reader who suggested my present subject as thoroughly congenial to my pen—what I like about the platitude is its humble and ready serviceableness. The perfect rime for it

is gratitude. Yet I cannot think of any poet who has followed this obvious lead. I am surely not the only person who has felt this impulse of thankfulness towards a patient and never-failing servant, a true friend in need. For instance, the lecturer, glancing for the first time at his watch, has just announced that his two hours' talk on the foreign policy of Turkestan must now come to an end. You and your fellow sufferers sit motionless—all seven of you—staring at the floor, wrapt in a silence which for once is not golden, avoiding the chairman's eye as you would the basilisk's. Then the blow falls. 'We have with us this evening . . . say a few words.' Having, if possible, rather less knowledge of the lecturer's subject than you had two hours ago, you draw on the common stock—intellectual treat, lucid exposition, deserving a larger audience—and you end by declaring impressively that the nations now stand at the parting of the ways. Thanks to the platitude, and its progeny of clichès, you have pulled through, and once again all goes merry as a funeral bell. Well, if at that moment you are not grateful, I give you up. The marble-hearted fiend has mastered you, and you must not count me among your friends.

Every day these occasions of gratitude arise in the lives of all of us. The man who sits beside you in the tram has folded up his newspaper. He is not a bookish person, and you are not sporting, and even in Christchurch the weather will hardly last you a full section. Or perhaps you have to answer—'acknowledge', is, I think, the right word—a letter on business. I never face that melancholy duty without recalling a little manual we used in our schooldays, which professed to teach the art of composition. The author warned us—he was full of warnings and prohibitions—against certain clichès current in the world of business. That was all very well for schoolboys, whose business correspondence is not usually voluminous; and I, like others, set out with high intentions, fortified by the precepts of the manual. But that was a long time ago. In the intervening years I have grown more humble, and learned to be thankful for the clichè and the jargon and the platitude. Yours to hand, contents noted, these and a dozen other such phrases—where, I ask, should we be without them? Long live the platitude!

Yes, as we grow older, we learn the lesson of humility. We realise more keenly the limitations of human knowledge. We part with the desire, along with the hope of saying anything that is at once new and true. *Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixere*—curse the fellows who have said our good things before us! It was, I am sure, a young man who uttered that famous malediction. No, no.

Let us be above such Timonian misanthropy, and forbear to call down evil on the heads of all mankind! Let us, I say, learn from the years the salutary lessons of humility and acquiescence in our own ignorance and commonplaceness. 'All men are mortal.' What was once a copy-book maxim, a text from the primer of logic, becomes, with the thinning in the ranks of our contemporaries, a truth that comes home very convincingly to our own condition. No young man, says Hazlitt, ever thinks he shall die. To the young, death is no more than a word, a text for dreary sermonising without relevancy or savour. The old know better. They have come to see that it is one of the half-dozen platitudes which contain the sum of human knowledge. The rest is at best glossing and commentary, at worst evasion and a futile endeavour to disguise the spectres of nescience and mortality.

I have fallen into a more solemn vein than I expected. Blame, if you like, my choice of subject; but for my treatment of it I dare not apologise. If you want comfortable sayings, narcotics; if your desire is to forget and ignore, to escape from the world of fact into the world of dreams, you have not far to go in search of help. But, as you value your peace of mind, beware of looking fairly and squarely in the face those uncompromising truths which you dismiss as platitudes!

Patronising the Bible

Hic liber est in quo quaerit sua dogmata quisque:
Invenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua.

'THIS BOOK,' says the Latin epigram, but with a terseness and concentrated malice which can hardly be given in a prose paraphrase, 'this book (the Bible) is the book in which each of us looks to find his own dogmas—and finds them.' Nowadays that barbed shaft draws less blood than it did when it was new. We do not generally read the Bible in search of texts to support our own dogmas—so far, so good! But then, many of us do not read it at all! And among those who do, there has grown up a new habit no less deserving of its epigram. I mean the habit of patronising the Bible. I wish I could impale this fashionable habit on a Latin couplet. But since I cannot, I must see what I can do in my pedestrian prose.

In my young days, which coincided with the young days of the present century, we were all rationalists, at least all of us who were still in our teens. The Bible, says the poet Cowper, speaking of Voltaire, was his jest-book. We young intellectuals—that is, we young prigs—were also, in our small way, rather in Voltaire's line. I remember the pleasure I got from a surreptitious reading of a little book (with a portrait of the author, looking very wise and noble, on the cover) written by the American rationalist, Colonel Ingersoll. The book bore the promising title, *Some Mistakes of Moses*. Whether it is still in print I don't know. I have not seen a copy of it for nearly half a century. The Colonel's favourite butt was the Bible-banger, as we used to call the louder and more indiscreet champions of literalism. Ingersoll, too, in his different way, banged the Bible. Without intellectual distinction or subtlety, there was in Ingersoll a redeeming strain of manliness, and a clumsy but genuine devotion to truth (a word which we used to spell with a capital letter).

That time is past, and all—but no! I must not continue the Wordsworthian quotation; for in rationalism, whatever else there

might be, there were certainly no aching joys, nor dizzy raptures. Fashions change, and to-day I suppose we are at least as far from rationalism as from the doctrines it assailed. The prevailing attitude towards creeds and formulae is rather flabbily non-committal. After the conflict of ideas, we are perhaps feeling tired. The contemporary intellectual is like the man in the old music-hall ditty: 'e dunno where 'e are.

Meanwhile, however, the Bible is coming back. More than ever—so the publishers' statistics tell us—it is the best of best-sellers. But here one must walk cautiously, and observe the rules of the road. You may still, I gather, read the Bible, even in this twentieth century, without loss of intellectual self-respect—or should I say conceit? But then you must be careful to read it as 'literature'. That is the current catch-phrase which, with variations, I seem to have met a hundred times in different places in the last few years. You may, for example, read the Bible in one of those grotesque perversions especially prepared for the modern reader, in case the poor fellow should find the language of the Authorised Version too hard for him. 'What joy for those with the poor man's feelings! Heaven's Empire is for them'—so runs the first Beatitude in one of these manhandlings. In another, the prodigal son, having 'led a dissolute life' and being in 'actual' want, resolves to 'get up' and go to his father. Such obscenities cry aloud for the public hangman, and make one envy that functionary his official task. If this is literature, let us take every precaution to preserve our illiteracy. 'Heaven's Empire!'

Some of the Bible-fanciers, to do them justice, are enthusiasts for the Authorised Version. We not only may, but must, they tell us, read that work—but under conditions which they generally hasten to emphasise. Listen, for example, to Mr Arnold Bennett, whom I quote rather than any other of the Bible's contemporary patrons, because he is a critic for whom I have a sincere regard. 'The Authorised Version of the Bible,' say Mr Bennett in his little book on Literary Taste, 'the Authorised Version which you now read, not as your forefathers read it, but with an aesthetic delight.' Notice the 'but'!

And notice, too, what follows. I must deny myself the pleasure of stopping to quarrel with the negative or prohibitive part of Mr Bennett's counsel—his pronouncement on the way we are not to read the Bible. Thank God, he seems to mean, we modern intellectuals are not as the rest of men, nor even as our forefathers! It is true, of course, of the Bible, as of all the world's greatest books, that no two generations, no two individual readers, find it

it quite the same things. But—we are to read the Bible with ' an aesthetic delight'. What depths of intellectual snobbishness and pettifogging dilettantism lie beneath that hideous phrase! We seem, when we read it, to be back in the world of those aesthetic young ladies of the eighteen-nineties whom Mr Punch depicted in his cartoon as gasping over a newly acquired vase, and asking one another, ' Can we live up to it? ' Well, Mr Bennett's infelicitous remark gives just the tone of those contemporary highbrows who condescend to the Bible.

I, for one, shall not take their advice. I shall not read the Bible, any more than I shall read Shakespeare or Dante, as ' literature '; that is, apparently, as something from which all that is virile and significant and illuminating in the matter is subordinated to the manner, where the appeal comes not from what the writer has to say to us, but from his way of saying it. I should like to hear the prophet Amos dealing with one of these aesthetic delighters. (' Take thou away from me the noise of they songs, for I will not hear the meoldy of thy viols.')

My mind will no doubt revert from time to time to some outstandingly beautiful phrase or sentence. But when I read St Paul's chapter in praise of Charity, or the twenty-third Psalm, or the parable of the Prodigal Son, shall I be conscious primarily, or at all, of aesthetic delight? I hope not. That, I should say, is just the way not to read the Bible, or any book which has something to say. The aesthetic delight, if it comes at all, must be secondary, an after-thought. I may perhaps follow Mr Bennett's advice when I come upon the work of those bright young moderns, Mr X and Miss Z. But then I shall surely ask myself if it is worth my while to read them at all. The ' delight ' to be lasting and satisfying must, I say it again, be secondary and incidental. Otherwise my experience tells me that it will soon pall, and end even in annoyance or disgust. But that is a theme I need not labour. It has been said, and said better, a hundred times before. My excuse for repeating it is that in our day the Bible, escaping from the hands of the dogmatist, seems to be in danger of falling into the hands of the dilettante.

So I shall after all read the Bible in much the same way in which my forefathers read it, even if they missed the privilege of being my contemporaries. I shall not look to it for any titillation of my aesthetic sensibility, but for light and leading, for nourishment and refreshment. ' Is not my word like a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock? '

A Defence of Middle Age

'SINCE we cannot attain to greatness, let us take our revenge by railing against it.' But Montaigne, who gave that advice, had little need to practise what he preached. That, you may have noticed, is very often the case with your advisers: they are like the philosopher Seneca, who, we are told, wrote his eloquent panegyric on Poverty by the light of a golden chandelier. To most of us, however, the great Frenchman's maxim comes as a welcome and serviceable prescription; and I suppose I am not at all singular in having made it a principle of spiritual hygiene. But there comes a time—I speak now for myself—when even the exquisite pleasure of railing begins to pall. We have spent our little stock of jibes and witticisms upon the fat and greasy citizen who has been guilty of succeeding where we have failed. Our small anthology of moral reflections on the littleness of greatness and the vanity of human ambitions has worn thin, and begins to ring false even in our own ears. There is then nothing for it but to settle down to our own littleness, to make a virtue of necessity, and to draw from our virtue fresh material, if not for railing, at least for a new vein of high-toned moralising—which comes perhaps to much the same thing. But—another but!—the years in their courses rob us of even that solace. High-toned moralising—even when we ourselves have the floor—is not generally very rich in vitamins. Where then shall we turn?

To that question some of my readers will have found their own answer. I write for the encouragement of those who have not. Mine is a recent discovery. Perhaps it may turn out to be a mare's nest, but just now it is burning a hole in my pocket. Here then is my prescription, a variant on the text I have quoted from Montaigne. Since we cannot recover our lost youth, let us take our revenge—by railing against it? No! Not quite that. That we shall take for granted as a part of our hygienic regimen. Let us take our revenge, I say, by singing the praises of middle-age. So far as I know, it has never been done. There is Cicero on Old Age, the book some

of us were condemned to read when we were in our 'teens, and there is abundance of prose and verse in praise of youth. The rest is silence, broken only by the patronage and condescension or downright contempt of the bright young things.

Our poets are full of the praises of youth, the season made for joys. Yet the songs of their own youth are more often than not in the minor key, and their enjoyment of youth retrospective. In the game of life it would seem that the spectator not only sees more but enjoys more than the player. Look at Shakespeare's prentice work in plays like *Titus Andronicus* or *Richard the Third* or even *Romeo and Juliet*, and then turn to his last plays, to the love-making of Florizel and Perdita, and the songs of Ariel. The difference is not simply a matter of increased technical mastery: it is a difference of atmosphere, a change of spiritual climate. Blake was a mature man verging on middle life when he gave the world his *Songs of Innocence*. ' Heaven lies about us in our infancy,' writes Wordsworth at a time when the shades of the prisonhouse are already gathering thick about him, and he is well on the way to become the ' daddy Wordsworth ' of some of his irreverent juniors. But we need not go to the poets for this retrospective praise of childhood and youth. It is the same, in our humbler way, with all of us when we repeat, for the edification of our juniors, the platitude that our early years are the happiest of our lives. Do we really believe it? Have we forgotten the vague supernatural terrors which beset our childish imagination, the uncongenial tasks and irksome discipline of our school days, the rivalries and jealousies and resentments against real or supposed injustice, the restlessness of adolescence, with its ill-defined ambitions, its abortive love affairs, its religious perplexities? No!—Whatever we may think of them when they lie two or three decades behind us, such things as these were a very real and substantial deduction from the happiness of our earlier years. And sometimes, in spite of themselves, the celebrants of the joys of youth let the cat out of the bag. Recall Shakespeare's sketch of the infant mewling and puking in the nurse's arms, of the whining schoolboy, of the young lover with his woeful ballad. That is realism! But there is not much of it to be found in our great writers. When we are born, says Shakespeare in another place, we weep that we are come to this great stage of fools. The Roman poet had said much the same thing, in his own grave and majestic music, many centuries before.

In middle life we have left most of these troubles behind. We have done with our love affairs—or we ought. In the matter of ambition we have learned, as the saying is, to cut our coat according

to our cloth: we have accepted our own mediocrity. *Nos numerus sumus.* We have found or worked out some tentative theory of life, and have settled down in contentment within the limitation of our outlook upon those major problems for which we once sought that reasoned certainty which is not for us mortals. And on the other hand we have not yet reached the stage of the lean and slippered pantaloon, and second childishness—note the implications of that phrase!—is still at a comfortable distance. Shakespeare's portrait of middle life, with its round belly lined with good capon, is not a picture of sublimity, but it is comfortable, the only comfortable figure in his gallery.

'Comfortable!'—I seem to hear a voice from the opposition benches—'Yes, that is just the word! Comfort, the ideal which the middle-aged man shares with the stalled ox!'—and so on. My bait has done its work, and it is now the turn of the juniors to indulge their taste for heroic moralising. Well, comfort, I know, is not the chief end of man, but I can see no merit in discomfort viewed as an end in itself. Let us try to clear our minds of cant. It was Robert Louis Stevenson, I think, who said that as a companion on a long train journey we should prefer Falstaff to John Knox. The man who is comfortable in the sense in which I have just been using the word is likely to spread some of his own genial glow to his fellow-travellers in the journey of life and that, after all, is something. And the joys of childhood and youth are, in their turn, largely selfish, depending for their existence on an incapacity to understand or imagine the pains and duties of mature life.

I have yet a great deal to say in defence of that Falstaff who embodies the spirit of middle age. But it must wait. I must not anticipate the privilege which is reserved for a still later season of life: I must beware of growing garrulous before my appointed time.

Adventures in Shakespeare

AN HONEST and straightforward critic, says Anatole France, whenever he lacks the strength of mind to hold his tongue, ought to preface his remarks with some such formula as this: 'I am going to talk about myself apropos of Shakespeare, or Racine, or Pascal, or Goethe.'

Having quite lately risen from a bed of examination scripts, and finding myself in the weak mental condition just mentioned—*Semper ego auditor tantum? Nunquamne reponam?*—I take shelter behind the authority of the brilliant Frenchman, and propose to myself the luxury of an exercise in what he calls subjective criticism, or what the reader may call, if he likes, the lower egotism. I shall talk about myself apropos of the Shakespearean play we have just had the privilege of seeing on the stage. For that rare experience we are indebted to the altogether commendable enthusiasm and ability of Miss Ngaio Marsh and her company of amateur players. I offer them my congratulations and hearty thanks, and I hope they will give us more. But there is something else to be said here; and if I were to hold my tongue and refrain from saying it, I should be neglecting the opportunity to perform a public duty. In a community which makes any pretensions to the rudiments of culture, the presentation of great works of dramatic art ought not to be left solely to the enterprise of amateurs. When shall we have, like other countries, our subsidised National Theatre, taking its place as a matter of course alongside our University and our public libraries and galleries as an obvious and indispensable amenity of civilised life?

King Henry the Fifth! My more familiar acquaintance with that play goes back nearly half a century: that is, to my later schooldays. We have all, I suppose, encountered from time to time the person who tells us that Shakespeare was 'spoiled' for him at school. But I hope we don't believe him. At any rate, I don't. We teachers have no doubt much to answer for, and how our audit

stands, who knows save Heaven? With the best of intentions we are likely enough to mishandle this or that delicate piece of literary art. But there are some writers—and Shakespeare is chief among them—who are of tougher fibre: they are pedant-proof. No, the person for whom Shakespeare has been spoiled must not lay the blame on his teachers: he must take it on his own shoulders. At best he may plead congenital incapacity, or whatever the psychologists call it nowadays. In plain terms, he lacks his normal share of that milk of human kindness which is all that is needed for the understanding and enjoyment of Shakespeare and Dickens, of Chaucer and Browning. But it was not of this pitiful person that I set out to write. I pass him by on the other side, and return to myself.

Towards the end of my schooldays came George Rignold. Some of my readers will remember him. Fifty years ago, Rignold was the one and only Henry the Fifth of the English-speaking theatre. To this day I cannot read or hear the familiar lines:

'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,' or

'And what art thou, thou idol ceremony?' or

'O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts.'

without recalling 'handsome George' and his manly and royal presence and bearing, without hearing the organ tones in which he rolled out, with such manifest gusto, the great rhetorical exercises in which the play abounds. But these memories belong to days when one was more susceptible to the appeal of the theatre, when one was entering for the first time into the magic kingdom of the arts, and was still giddy and intoxicated with wonder and delight . . . 'Oh joy that in our embers . . .'

Almost immediately on the heels of Rignold came certain pages of dramatic criticism appearing in the *Saturday Review* over the initials 'G.B.S.' A very disturbing but very healthy douche for an uncritical young enthusiast whose love of Shakespeare hardly stopped this side of idolatry. G.B.S. entertained and shocked and puzzled me. Here was a man one simply could not help reading, one who clearly knew what he was talking about, making game of the Bardolaters (my own sect), refusing to fall on his knees before the Bard, treating him as a man and a brother and saying things quite unlike the polite and correct opinions one had read in the approved manuals—and also vastly more entertaining. 'When I began to write, William was a divinity and a bore. Now he is a fellow-creature.'

I resist the temptation to quote more from Shaw, because I must make room for a critic of another sort. No one nowadays, I hope,

reads Gervinus. In the days of which I have been speaking that egregious dullard had the floor. For him, King Henry was Shakespeare's ideal man, and that was more or less the generally received doctrine. Even Dowden, in dissenting from this view, qualifies his dissent by declaring Henry to be Shakespeare's ideal of 'the practical heroic character, the king who will not fail.' Perhaps! But if so, one must add that the creator of Hamlet and Lear and Othello and Anthony and Brutus, of Autolycus and Falstaff, was not greatly enamoured of the type described in Dowden's phrase. In the English historical plays, it is plain that Richard the Second, the unpractical failure, was a man more after the writer's heart than the successful usurper Bolingbroke. In the sequence of these English plays on which he was engaged, the poet came, by no choice of his own, to the fifth Henry. Did he perhaps set to work in the spirit of Gilbert's hero—'It's my duty, and I will'? Falstaff and Hotspur had helped him through the two preceding plays. And in this play no one doubts that the finest things are Mrs Quickly's account of the death of Falstaff, and Bardolph's comment, 'Would I were with him, wheresome'er he be, in heaven or in hell.' These 'practical' heroes die, too, but none of them receives a tribute like that, or like Horatio's farewell to Hamlet or Charmian's to Cleopatra! And then, as if to justify Falstaff's claim that he is not only witty himself, but the cause of wit in others, how sadly Bardolph and his companions seem to have fallen away since they have lost the inspiration of their immortal leader! It is as if the poet himself, having parted with Sir John, feels for the moment that nothing matters. So, with the easy fluency he has now attained in a certain kind of blank verse he reels off the sonorous rhetoric of Henry's speeches and the lines spoken by the Chorus, and says to himself, as he lays down his pen with a chuckle, 'That's the sort of stuff they like.' The ear, as G.B.S. used to insist, is the true clue to Shakespeare. In this play, the ear listens in vain for the emotional depth and vibration of the Othello music, or the light and shade of the Cleopatra music. No! This is not one of the great plays, nor its central figure one of Shakespeare's great creations. A single line of Othello, a single phrase of Falstaff, is worth all this gaudy rhetoric.

Returning finally to my own associations with this play, I recall the phrase with which a former colleague of mine, a devout and learned Shakespearean, dismissed it: 'That damned jingo play!' My own theory, if there is no more to be said for it, has at least the merit of clearing the gentle Shakespeare of that infamous charge. He wrote it, as Dryden would say, with his left hand, and,

also with his tongue in his cheek. Or, if you prefer to put it so, he wrote it for fun!

The Case Against Shakespeare

ANYONE who ventures at this time of day to add his few drops to the ocean of Shakespearean commentary and criticism must, in the phrase of one of the most illustrious of his predecessors, be frighted by his own temerity. Few subjects will provide him with a richer supply of opportunities for being dull and trite. But the anniversary of the poet's birthday, which is close upon us, offers some sort of excuse to those of us who cannot, like Cordelia, love and be silent. So I take my courage in both hands: if I must be dull, I hope at least to be dull in a new way.

I take my cue from an entry in the Note-Books of Samuel Butler: ' Books should be tried by judge and jury as though they were crimes, and counsel heard on both sides.' We have all, in our time, heard a good deal in praise of Shakespeare. I have just been perusing an anthology devoted to these eulogies, and I feel a good measure of sympathy with that Athenian citizen who was for banishing Aristides on the ground that he was tired of having him called 'Aristides the Just'. Suppose we follow Butler's suggestion, and celebrate Shakespeare's birthday by taking up the trial at the point where the prosecuting counsel calls up his witnesses. Let us, by way of a change, give the devil's advocate his turn.

The writer I have just been quoting tells us in another place that the only man he ever knew to confess openly to a dislike of Shakespeare was his own father. ' I could forgive my father for not liking Shakespeare,' says Butler, ' if it were only because Shakespeare wrote poetry; but he dislikes Shakespeare because he finds him so very coarse. He also says he likes Tennyson, and this seriously aggravates his offence.' With this jotting of Butler's is always associated in my mind the notable answer one of my own schoolfellows made when he was asked whether he liked Shakespeare: ' I don't mind him.' But neither this lukewarm compliment to the Bard nor the elder Butler's ground of objection to him is quite what we are just now seeking. Let us turn to some of the

weightier names among Shakespeare's detractors. They are not hard to find.

There is Voltaire, for example, with his famous remark about the 'drunken barbarian', and his complaint that in Shakespeare's plays the hero is born in the first act and dies of old age in the fifth. (Mr Addison, when he wrote his immortal tragedy of Cato, showed Shakespeare's fellow-barbarians how the thing ought to be done.) Voltaire's contemporary Ducis, one of Shakespeare's improvers—the race is not yet extinct, at least, among theatrical producers—substitutes for the humble handkerchief which causes so much mischief in *Othello* a fillet of diamonds. Half a century later the poet de Vigny, in the full flood of the Romantic movement, made a version of *Othello* in which the handkerchief is permitted—but it is *orne de fleurs asiatiques.* Nowadays French taste is apparently less fastidious, for I well remember a fine French performance of *Othello.* I saw a few years ago, which was received —' mouchoir ' and all—with enthusiasm by a Parisian audience. My own grievance on that occasion was that I had to accept French prose in place of the music of Shakespeare's blank verse.

But our prosecuting counsel need not go abroad to find witnesses. One of the greatest of Shakespeare's contemporaries has left us his considered judgment that his friend and fellow 'wanted art'. That was the opinion of Ben Jonson. And it was the same authority who, taking up the indiscreet eulogist who praised Shakespeare's fluency and declared that ' he never blotted a line,' made the retort, ' Would he had blotted a thousand!'

So soon were the spots becoming visible on the sun! To the Frenchified taste of the next generation of Englishmen, the spots almost obscured the light. Let us hear a witness from among the Restoration men. His name is Rymer. True, it has been claimed for Rymer that he was the worst critic who ever lived. But if our present procedure is to be strictly judicial, such reflections on the character of witnesses must be ruled out of order. Let us forget what we have just heard of Rymer, and take his evidence on its merits. In tragedy, says this critic, the author of *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Macbeth* appears quite out of his element. And *Othello*! The hero of that play is ' a jealous booby ' and the play itself ' a long rabble of York Pudding farce, profaning the name of tragedy . . . the most absurd maggot that ever bred from any poet's addled brain'. And as for Shakespeare's verse, and in particular what a recent distinguished critic has called ' the Othello music', to Rymer's ear ' the neighing of a horse or the howling of a mastiff possesses more meaning'.

This is strong language: but it is far surpassed by a single word applied to Shakespeare by one of the greatest of England's sons. Charles Darwin, in later life, found Shakespeare 'nauseating'. It is fair to add that he laid the blame upon himself and his life-long devotion to what he calls 'fact-grinding', which had destroyed his imagination. He had not had the good fortune to escape, as Goethe did with thankfulness, from what the German poet calls 'the charnel-house of Science'.

Here I had intended to call up another giant. But reverence for the author of *War and Peace* deters me from quoting from the essay on Shakespeare which Tolstoy wrote in his old age. Let us rather forget those last aberrations of a great writer who had outlived himself. For some part of Tolstoy's objections to Shakespeare we may turn to another broad-shouldered veteran. 'The comedies,' says Walt Whitman, 'are altogether non-acceptable to America and Democracy,' being written to entertain 'only the elite of the castle, and from its point of view.'

There is another great writer, still happily among us, whose deliverances I have no intention or desire to forget. I have just been re-reading, with renewed delight, some of the things which Bernard Shaw had to say of Shakespeare fifty years ago. To number Shaw among the anti-Shakespeareans would, of course, be mere stupidity. His shafts are directed rather against the 'Bardolaters'; against the sheer hypocrisy of the Shakespeare cult. This hypocrisy, Shaw tells us, is sufficiently proved by the procedure which is followed whenever a Shakespeare play is presented on the London stage. First the play is edited down to the level of the contemporary British playgoer. In the process 'crown jewels of dramatic poetry' such as abound in the early comedies and in the 'magic music' of *The Tempest*, are ruthlessly excised. Then the dish has to be made more attractive by lavish stage ornament, and by the personal appeal of 'some famously beautiful actress in the leading part'. But the blame does not lie solely on audience and producer: 'Shakespeare's enormities transcend my power of invective.' He had the misfortune to drop into the middle of 'that gang of ruffianly pedants', the Elizabethan dramatists 'a bloody-minded, bawdy-minded crew'. Hamlet's compliments to Ophelia 'would make a cabman blush'. The poet's morality is conventional and second-hand; his ideas—'finely expressed'—are borrowed. Jaques's famous speech on the seven ages of man is 'a grandmotherly Elizabethan edition of the advertisement of Cassell's Popular Educator'. The Duke in the same play of *As You Like It* is 'an unvenerable impostor, expanding on his mixed diet

of pious twaddle'; and as for the wit of Touchstone, 'an Eskimo would ask for his money back if a modern author offered him such fare'. Yet the play which contains these and other enormities is 'fascinating', thanks mainly to the superb quality of its prose, just as *Othello* is 'magnificent by the volume of its passion and the splendour of its word-music'. Shakespeare's greatness, in short, lies in his unrivalled virtuosity, as a musician in words: 'The ear is the sure clue to him. In a deaf nation these plays would have died long ago.' If you go Shakespeare in search of moral or political wisdom, you will fare badly. *Henry the Fifth* is 'a jingo hero'; *Julius Caesar*, a splendidly written political melodrama'. And in an article entitled 'Better Than Shakespeare?'—do not miss the mark of interrogation—Mr Shaw tells us that he finds in Bunyan that heroic quality which he misses in Shakespeare and his heroes.

Among Shakespeare's enemies Mr Shaw would include the commentators. Dr Johnson and many others have had hard things to say of that well-meaning and laborious race. But one thing at least we ought never to forget: to the labours of these people we owe it that we are now able to read our Shakespeare comfortably in a fairly uniform and reasonably accurate text. And when these editors and commentators appear before the bar of Rhadamanthus, they will be able to plead at least one glorious achievement. In Mrs Quickly's account of the death of Falstaff, we read in our modern editions how in his last moments the old reprobate 'babbled of green fields'. That immortal phrase—and if Shakespeare did not write it, the less Shakespeare he!—we owe to a conjecture of Pope's enemy, Theobald. Without that editor's help we should still be reading some unintelligible bathos about 'a table of green fields'. That one inspired emendation is more than enough to redeem the pedantries and ineptitudes of the whole tribe of commentators.

And the Baconians? Ought they to have a place among Shakespeare's enemies? I myself, if I dealt in cryptograms, might find a reference to them in Othello's words about men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders. But I prefer to pass by even the opportunity of deriding them. As the man says in Handel's song, so mean a triumph I disdain.

And now, if we still have the heart, let us proceed, as the poet says, to remember Shakespeare like anything. But perhaps, like Lord Lilac, we 'have had quite enough'.

What is a Song?—Verse Translations

I HOPE I am not the only person who read with surprise and dissent the remarks of Mr Adolph Mann, and of 'Fidelo', on the subject of singing in foreign languages. The substance of these remarks may not unfairly be summed up in three propositions—first that singing in a foreign language savours of 'swank', secondly that for most listeners the pleasure of listening to a song is diminished when the words are unintelligible, and thirdly that adequate verse translations can be found. Each of these propositions seems to call for comment.

The first need not detain us long. It seems to me to be a lamentable concession to the pseudo-democratic idea that excellence of any kind is a thing to be ashamed of, and an occasion for ostentation. If this idea is to be applied to the singer it will presently have to be extended to the instrumentalist and to all performing artists. The singer who renders an Italian aria in Italian or a German Lied in German is simply doing what the composer has asked him to do. The articulation of the Italian or German words is merely a part of his technical proficiency. It is no more ' swank ' than the technique of the violinist, the pianist. If this is not so, I see nothing for it but either to revert to the bones and tongs, or to cultivate imperfections under the name of humility. This I am quite sure is not the intention of this critic of ours, but it is none the less the probable practical tendency of their words. Those words will awaken a sympathetic response in the bosom of all that class of performers who rely on ' gifts ' and shirk the use of their brains. It will encourage the already widely spread notion that it is democratic to be content with the second best, to brush the bloom off excellence, and that the pursuit of perfection is only seriously applicable to outdoor games.

Then as to the audience. It is no doubt true that the majority of any audience are not linguists any more than they are instrumentalists. And, whether we like it or not, we cannot escape the

corollary that their limitation in knowledge involves also a limitation of enjoyment. Enjoyment is the reward of knowledge, and knowledge is the fruit of effort. No audience has any right to expect the reward without the effort. This disability will be got over by singing to them in English translations only on the pleasing assumption that the singer's articulation is so clear that the audience can follow every word. But how far this assumption is from the actual fact everyone knows who has frequented concerts. So frankly indeed is this difficulty recognised that it is customary to print the words of songs on the programmes. Surely this is the simple solution—so far as there is any—of the difficulty of foreign words.

But a further and more general question is here involved—the question of the rights of an audience. Here again we are on dangerous ground. The audience should not be encouraged in the idea that it can get the delights of art cheaply. Unpleasant as it may sound, it is necessary to say once for all that the rights of an audience are limited by the laws of art, and that the more or less capricious and corrupt and certainly untrained taste of an audience is not the final court of appeal. Every performer likes to be on good terms with his audience, but there are some things which he cannot do without ceasing to be an artist.

There remains the vital question of the adequacy of translations. A wholly adequate translation of a song must be adequate both poetically and musically. To satisfy either of these demands singly is in the nature of things a virtual impossibility. Their combination is a piling of Pelion on Ossa. To realise this one has only to turn to the renderings of the lyrics of Heine and Goethe in English editions of the German song composers. The best are wholly inadequate, the vast majority are insufferably clumsy and insipid. The two examples cited on the other side of the question are not in this respect quite representative. *The Erl King* and *The Two Grenadiers* are both narrative poems, and one of them has had the good fortune to be translated by no less a person than Sir Walter Scott. But narrative poetry is always set, so to speak, in a somewhat lower poetic key than lyric. Its effects are comparatively broad and crude; they are diffused through the whole piece, and not, like those of lyrical poetry, delicately atmospheric, arising from subtle technical effects or from the emotional and spiritual associations of single words. Yet I do not think that even Scott's translation of *The Erl King*—exceptional as it is in merit—really invalidates the general rule that poetry is untranslatable. Ask any singer who has sung the song often in both the English and the German.

When we turn from narrative to lyrical poetry the case against translations hardly needs stating. Among the many translations of the lyrics of Goethe and Heine are there any which are more than tolerable? Take as a favourable example Longfellow's version of *The Wanderer's Night Song*. Longfellow has the advantage over most translators of being both a poet and a scholar. But try to substitute his words for Goethe's original in Schubert's setting, and the result is merely grotesque. Or—to take one or two examples more or less at random—try Schubert's setting of Goethe's *Haiden Roslein* in the version given in one of the best English editions.

'Rose said "Better let me be,
Or you will get stung by me".'

Not much word-magic there! I wonder how any singer with the rudiments of a literary conscience can publicly deliver himself of such stuff. It is like grit under the teeth. The very title and key-word of the poem baffles the translater. *Haiden Roslein* is (very badly and literally) 'Little Hedge Rose' or 'Hedge Rosebud'. The translator gaily renders it 'Hedge Roses'. A small matter, but one which shows well enough which way the wind blows.

Or set side by side the German words of Heine,

Ich hab' in Traum geweinet

with the French version,

J'ai pleuré en reve.

The French is at any rate a literal rendering of the words. But what has become of the rhythm, of the vowel values—in a word, of the poetry? The colour has been bleached out, the spirit has evaporated.

These illustrations lead us from the question of poetic to that of musical adequacy. And here the translator's difficulty is of another though hardly less serious kind. It can easily be illustrated from examples in which the original, not being great poetry, does not present the poetical difficulty in an extreme form. The words of Handel's Largo are not, I suppose, great poetry. But what are we to say to the alteration, in the German and English versions, respectively, of the sonorous Italian original:—*Ombra mai fu*, to *Herr in den Hohn*, and 'Slumber dear maid'? The English and German words do not profess to be a translation. The whole situation has been conceived afresh. There is no harm in that. Handel himself did the same sort of thing when he transferred airs from his secular operas to his oratorios and adapted them to 'sacred' words. But can anything be musically more inept than the substitution—to go no further than the sustained first note—of the German 'e' in 'Herr' for the Italian 'o' in 'Ombra'?

It is not a question of the relative intrinsic beauty of languages. I have never heard a language which was not beautiful, and I am certainly not one of those who fondly imagine that the language of Heine is unmusical. The German version here fails utterly for the palpable reason that its vowel values are all wrong. The English version, as anyone can hear by singing it or listening to it, makes a hopelessly false start by clogging the opening vowel with the preceding consonantal combination, in which ' ombra ' becomes ' slumber,' and follows it up with the very awkward combination of ' ea-r ' in ' dear,' and—well—gives you ' maid ' for 'fu'! Of course, a skilful singer will do much to mitigate these atrocities, and a listener unfamiliar with the original will scarcely be aware of them. But to anyone familiar with the original the effect must be as distressing as the setting—I have seen it—of Mozart's *Batti Batti* to the words of the 65th Psalm, and as grotesque—but not so amusing—as the setting of a well-known hymn to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*, which I once heard sung by a hilarious party of undergraduates.

The conclusion of the whole matter seems to be that a song is an indivisible unity of words and music. Its two component parts are as inseparable as a form and substance, or as the features and expression of a face. Voice and verse are in Milton's felicitous phrase, 'a wedding of divine sounds'. Elements thus joined in accordance with some eternal law of harmony, let no man put asunder. The result, when it is not an outrage, is at least a disaster.

Drinking Without Tears

In his very entertaining and informative 'Notes on a Cellar Book', Professor Saintsbury, that abyss of learning, tells us that he had once intended to write, and had actually begun to write, a History of Wine. We are losers by the fact that the proposed work was never accomplished. If it had been, we may be sure it would have been loaded with the same immense erudition and wealth of accurate detail as those other monumental works—which some of us find so good to steal from—the *History of English Prosody* and the *History of European Criticism.*

My own ambition, bounded by a vastly inferior knowledge and experience, is more modest. What I should like to write is a pamphlet on the Art of Drinking. Those of us who are old enough to have become fairly discreet and enlightened drinkers, remembering the first days of our emancipation from 'soft' drinks into the larger air of drinks proper, will, I think, agree with me when I say that in those difficult days we might have been helped by such a guide-book, containing a few simple rules and warnings, telling us what to drink, how to drink, and when and where to drink.

My pamphlet is not yet written; but its name is duly entered in the comprehensive catalogue of my unwritten works. Just now I have a valid excuse: nowadays drinking is a luxury reserved for millionaires. Perhaps there is hope for the future. But from what I have noticed about prices in the course of a longish life, I am inclined to be despondent. Books, for example . . . But these gloomy forebodings are in the wrong vein. Let us be cheerful.

In the effort to be cheerful my mind turns—how and why I leave to psychologists to explain—to an author who is not indeed one of my intimates or prime favourites, and to a book which is not one of my bedside companions, but whose authority and respectability are beyond dispute. I mean Adam Smith, and his *Wealth of Nations.* 'The cheapness of wine,' says that judicious writer—those who like to verify their quotations will find it in the third

chapter of the fourth book of his great work—' the cheapness of wine seems to be a great cause, not of drunkenness, but of sobriety. The inhabitants of the wine countries are in general the soberest people in Europe.' Adam Smith's remark is, of course, corroborated by the observation of every traveller; but I am glad to back it with his authoritative name. I ask my readers to relate it to what I said just now about the present price of wine. ' The cheapness of wine is a great cause of sobriety.' Conversely, then, the dearness of wine may be expected to be a great cause . . . of what? I commend my quotation and my question to the notice of all those who concern themselves with what is called the drink problem.

The scope of my present effort does not oblige me to argue with those people who regard all ' drinking ' as intrinsically evil. I think they are not only wrong, but dangerously wrong. If their conscience bids them, by all means let them impose total abstinence on themselves. It is when they seek to force it on others that they become not only tyrannical, but distinctly dangerous. I take it as an axiom that man is a drinking animal and that when this normal and innocent taste is thwarted, it is likely to take the course of a thwarted instinct, and to find underground and morbid expression.

And that leads me to my second axiom, which is tersely and definitely expressed in the Latin proverb: *abusus non tollit usum*—the abuse of a thing does not warrant us in refraining from its use. In this country we are all tea-drinkers, and many of us—probably most of us—drink too much tea. This excess is as surely a form of intemperance as any other indulgence, and the consequences are bound to follow—less spectacular than those of alcoholic excess, but more subtle and possibly in the long run even more disastrous. Again, many of us—perhaps most of us—eat too much. In every case the remedy lies, not in total abstinence, but in temperance.

And now it is time to lay down some fundamental principles of the art of drinking. They are to be taken most of them, in a soft and flexible sense. But not the first rule, which is this: no furtive drinking! That rule must stand without qualification. We must not do our drinking on the sly. I have heard abstainers of the straiter sect declare, with a touch of self-righteousness, that they never allow ' it ' to enter their homes. This wrong-headed policy is a main cause of mischief. To the sons of Eve, and especially to the young and the newly emancipated, there is an almost irresistible attraction in forbidden fruit, charm in the semi-disreputable. Hear John Aubrey's account of how a certain Oxford don managed this matter three and a half centuries ago. His name was Ralph Kettel,

and he was the head of a college. ' He observed,' says Aubrey, ' that the houses that had the smallest beer had the most drunkards, for it forced them to go into the towns to comfort their stomachs. Wherefore Dr Kettel always had in his college excellent beer, not better to be had in Oxon, so that we could not go to any other place but for the worse, and we had the fewest drunkards of any house in Oxford.' Wise Ralph Kettel! Let us not forget to drink sometimes to your memory, and let us emulate your wisdom!

No sly drinking, then! That is the first and great rule. And as a corollary, the abolition or transformation of the bar. Let us drink like Christians, or at least as they do in Christian countries. Why can we not have in our parks and public squares what one finds in every European town, places where a man may sit with his wife or his sweetheart or his friends, taking his drink at leisure, noting the qualities of people, and having a good talk? I should like to see such little groups of people sitting happily about whenever I cross Cathedral Square. And why not in the Cathedral grounds? I commend to the Cathedral authorities this opportunity for some useful pioneering. Some readers may find my suggestion frivolous or feebly facetious. I offer it in all seriousness. And the same body might supplement its good service in the cause of temperance by printing officially and distributing some such booklet on the art of drinking as I have in mind.

I have dwelt so long—but not, I think, too long—on my golden rule—that the rest must for the present be discussed summarily. Something needs to be said about the order of drinks, about the beginner's need to know something of their varying potency—here the experienced drinker can and should help his juniors—and several other matters of secondary importance. For example, there is Mr Hilaire Belloc's rule, never to touch any drink invented since the Reformation, which rule puts out of bounds all American abominations. Another good habit is to postpone our drinking till late in he day, to drink only with our main meal, or at least not to drink without eating. These and other matters must wait for more adequate treatment in my pamphlet. But before I end, there are one or two things which must be said, and can best be said in quotation. The poet Cowper speaks of cups that cheer, but not inebriate. He means cups of tea, and only half his statement is true. More wisely the Scripture text bids us give wine to him that is of a heavy heart. And then, finally, there is holy George Herbert's counsel to drinkers: ' Stop at the third glass.' But here we need a Saintsbury to tell us the size of the glasses they used in Herbert's day.

P.S.—This article is not in one sense or another, inspired, I have

no financial interest in the trade. But if any members of that body should wish to show their approval of what I have written, and care to do it in kind, I shall not take it amiss.

Spoils to the Vanquished

'HE nothing common did or mean'—there is no need to continue the quotation, which is one of the most familiar tags in our literature. But of those who know and quote the familiar lines, how many, I wonder, could, as the examiners say, refer them to their context, or even name the poem in which they occur? The Horatian Ode, as its author called it, is generally ascribed to Andrew Marvell, but not with absolute certainty, since it was not published for more than a century after that poet's death. The Ode was written to celebrate Cromwell's victorious return from Ireland. Let us hope the poet knew less than we do of his hero's exploits in that unhappy country. At any rate it is not Cromwell, but his royal victim, who gets the centre of the stage. 'It is strange,' comments Mr Birrell, 'that the death of the king should be so nobly sung in an Ode bearing Cromwell's name, and dedicated to his genius.'

'It is strange.' Yes, but not at all in the sense of being without parallel.

In the year 31 B.C., when Rome had just heard the news of Octavian's victory at Actium over the combined forces of Antony and Cleopatra, and of the queen's death, the poet Horace was moved to write an ode to celebrate the occasion. The opening lines of the poem are pure mafficking:—*Nunc est bidendum*—now, says the poet, is the time for a good bout of drinking and dancing and feasting. But presently the note changes. The poet's imagination has been caught and kindled by the figure of the dying queen, and his language passes from noisy hilarity to quiet dignity and even sublimity. Cleopatra has entered and taken possession.

The 'strange' thing which happened to both these poets in writing their songs of victory was to happen also to a greater poet than either, handling a larger theme. In his great epic, Milton set out, as he tells us, to assert Eternal Providence and to justify the ways of God to men. But most readers have felt that *Paradise Lost*, especially in its grandest parts, is dominated by the heroic

figure of Satan. We all admire the fallen archangel, even if we do not express our admiration as openly and energetically as that British peer who made the immortal comment, 'A fine fellow! Damme, I wish he'd won.'

We are content to follow timidly the more discreet phrases of the critics who censure as a fault Milton's exaltation of Satan into something very like the hero of the poem. ' Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it,' said Dr Johnson. And Marvell, then, of the King's party, and Horace of Cleopatra's? All these poets were caught in the net of that spiritual law which draws our interest and sympathy towards the losing side. ' Victrix causa,' says another poet—the winning cause found favour with the gods, the losing cause with Cato. If that is true, then Cato is only another name for Everyman. But is the poet's neat antithesis right? The victory which the gods give to their favourite is after all a Pyrrhic victory. The immediate spoils and material prizes go to him. But it is for the vanquished that the gods reserve their more lasting favours in the poet's song and in the tears and sympathy of unborn generations.

There is another way of arriving at much the same conclusion. In this age of anthologies, it is significant that no one has given us an anthology of poems written to celebrate victories. The reason is that the thing can't be done: there are not enough poems of sufficient distinction to make a decent book. Let any one who doubts it search his memory or his shelves. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* is not a specialised anthology, but its 300 or 400 pieces fairly cover the whole range of human interests: I can find only three of four poems of the kind we are seeking. One is Marvell's Ode, another is Campbell's *Battle of the Baltic*, a poem which few of us would pass for inclusion on its poetic merits, and the third—Southey's *Blenheim* with Master Peterkin's famous query—is not quite the sort of thing our imaginary anthologist would welcome. Has Palgrave overlooked anything? Byron's lines on Waterloo in *Childe Harold* occur to my mind; but these lines too, for all their flashy rhetoric, end on the Peterkinian heresy. It is indeed, as Mr Birrell says, strange!

Palgrave's collection was made nearly a century ago. Would his harvest be any richer if he were gathering it to-day? He would no doubt wish to include Tennyson's fine poem, *The Revenge*. And any one, if he is foolish enough, may say, and say quite truly, that this poem tells the story of a victory. To which we may retort —but need we?—that what the poet celebrates and glorifies is a defeat. The paradox will not astonish anyone who has in mind

the poems I have already quoted. Tennyson's is not only true to its type: it is an outstanding example of its type. Victory, for what it is worth, goes to the Spaniard: Sir Richard and his little ship have won their place in the hearts of the poet and his audience. Wordsworth tells us that a poet cannot sing of tyranny. Nor, it would seem, of victory.

And if our anthologist were to go further afield than our own English poetry, would he fare much better? That is a question I must leave to more learned heads; but I am confident of the answer. He would have—if one swallow could make a summer—the magnificent song of Deborah in the Book of Judges. But even there I find something more than a mere cry of exultation, an undertone which is an expression of relief from the threat of overwhelming and tyrannic force. And in those verses in which the Greeks commemorated their victory over the might of Persia, one seems to catch something of the same note.

What does it all mean? For about the fact there can be no reasonable doubt. It is, as usual, when we come to explain that our doubts and differences begin. On the face of it, one would say that the fact bears witness to the native chivalry and generosity of our human nature. I should be glad to leave it at that. But there is, I am afraid, another and less laudable motive at work. I mean fear—fear of that sinister Power to whom the Greeks gave the name of Nemesis. Under whatever name, or even nameless, that dark mysterious deity still holds a place somewhere in the shadowy recesses of the minds of all of us. Unconsciously, sub-consciously —describe it in whatever terms modern psychology may have invented for it—we are all restrained from exulting over a fallen enemy or triumphing in our little victories, not solely by the nobler motives of modesty and generosity, but by the old dread of Nemesis. *Hodie tibi, cras mihi.* 'I pity him,' says Odysseus in the play of Sophocles, as he looks upon his distraught enemy. 'I pity him.' So far so good! But Odysseus goes on to add just perhaps the explanation we have been seeking: 'I pity him, looking not more to his lot than to my own, and reflecting that we are all of us shadow and dust.'

Variations on an Old Theme

THE OTHER DAY I quoted in this column the wise man who declared that he had rather make a nation's songs than its laws. To those admirable words I now venture to suggest, not an amendment—for none is needed—but a small addition. When we are in the mood to remember our debt of gratitude to the world's benefactors who have given us our laws and our songs and our books, do we ever find a place among them for the makers of games? And if not, why not? Let us drop for a moment our habitual pose of self-conscious dignity, and be honest enough to admit the gamemaker as an eligible candidate for a place in our Calendar of Saints. His claim may be humble; but it is at least less ambiguous than that of some others who have made a greater noise in the world. Look for example at Carlyle's gallery of heroes. I could very gladly part company with more than one or two of them if I might replace them with some of my humbler claimants, and I should not turn to Carlyle for an account of their deservings.

I do not aspire to a place in this benignant company. All I have to offer is a variant of an old theme. We have all—that is, all of us who are bookishly inclined—played the Desert Island Library game of making a list of the dozen or so books we should choose as our companions if we were suddenly called upon to act the part of Robinson Crusoe. It is a pleasant enough way of comparing notes and exchanging suggestions with other bookish people. I can also recommend it as a useful expedient for some of those austere public occasions which debar us alike from the resources of society and of solitude, when speeches are being made by other people. I say 'by other people'; but I sometimes wonder, even in the midst of my own modest oratorical triumphs, what devices my own hearers are using as an escape. So far they have not been obliging enough or candid enough to let me into their secret. My students, of course, are in a relatively strong position: with pen, paper, and desk, it is a man's own fault if he is at a loss for something to

occupy his mind. But the functions I have been recalling usually provide no such material aids. Sometimes there is the small mercy of a printed programme, from which one can select a longish word and proceed to make shorter words from its component letters. But that is at best an insipid occupation for a robust mind, and besides, the oratory is distracting . . . But it is high time to settle to my subject.

The Desert Island Library game, in its orthodox form, proceeds by selection; my proposed variant, by rejection. You begin with a list of say fifty of the world's greatest books—even Sir John Lubbock's egregious list of 100 will serve well enough—and you you have to reduce the number to twelve. In other words, you have to decide which of the great books you can most comfortably live without. By way of illustrating the game, and perhaps encouraging the others, or at least providing some of my readers with a few bones to pick, I make a purely personal confession of unfaith, and name some post-ferences.

Here then, to begin with, is a small shelf of English poets. Out goes Pope, and along with him everything between Milton and Wordsworth. And here is the great and venerable name of Spenser, whom I reject with some twinges of conscience, remembering the days when I revelled in the *Faery Queen*, and even wished for more! And there is that other darling of my younger years to whom I would fain be loyal; but Tennyson must make way for others. Shelley—to some this will be flat blasphemy—has never been one of my major poetic deities. Over Keats I hesitate, but I can't afford him a place in my meagre list. And George Herbert—to him also I must bid a reluctant farewell, and content myself with the great four who remain. I have left, besides Shakespeare, Chaucer, Wordsworth, and Browning.

Next, English prose: Lamb, or Hazlitt? A painful dilemma! Since I can't have both, I must gently assign Elia to a high place of honour in Limbo, tossing after him, as a propitiatory gesture, Carlyle and Ruskin, not as equals or companions, but as targets. Other names over which I hesitate are Walton—the *Angler* and the *Lives* in one volume—and, for random dips rather than for consecutive reading—Burton of *The Anatomy* and Sir Thomas Browne. And coming nearer home, I should like to have the collected plays of Bernard Shaw and a substantial volume of G. K. Chesterton. But I must deal ruthlessly with many an old frined, and I am left finally with Boswell's Johnson, a volume of Hazlitt, and the Omnibus volume of Jane Austen.

Turning to the ancients, I find that here, too, I must make

a clean sweep, or rather a foul sweep if I am to live within my allotted means. Yes, a volume of Greek plays would be a good investment, and I do not at all like the prospect of parting with Herodotus. And if I were an eighteenth century three-bottle man, I should carry in my pocket a well-thumbed Horace. But both these luxuries a desert islander must forego. An old schoolfellow asked me the other day if I had ever gone back to Cicero's treatise on Old Age since we read it together at school nearly half a century ago. Granting that it would be at least more seasonable to-day than it was for a boy in his teens. I still find those edifying pages, together with the rest of Tully, perfectly do-withoutable. Leave me the Odyssey and Virgil, and I shall not starve.

Before coming to the shelf from which I am to reject some of the masterpieces of modern European literature, I had better, perhaps, remind the reader, that what I am writing is not a critical exercise, but an expression of preferences, which I do not feel called upon to justify—a sort of pedagogue's holiday. Therefore, I do not blush to name among the books I reject, some which I am willing to acknowledge (on the authority of my betters) as being among the world's greatest. There is Rabelais, for instance,. I confess I can get little either of nutriment or of fun from the society of Master Pantagruel and his associates. And *Don Quixote*—apart from a few episodes and some sayings of Sancho, do people, I wonder, really get as much entertainment as they have been led to expect from a continuous and complete reading of that great book? Goethe's *Faust*, again, is a book over which we used to confer and debate very solemnly. Perhaps that was only part of the outworn fashionableness of all things German. At any rate I can well do without Goethe. I should much rather have a volume of Heine's poetry and prose; but I cannot find room for him. Of French writers, the one I should like to keep is Molière; but on the whole I must reject him to make room for Dante and for Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.

The Bible completes my list. With these dozen books ' at my beddes head ' I should not be poor. The thirty-seven plays of Shakespeare, with the poems to eke them out, will give me one day's reading for each week of the year. The hundred cantos of the *Divine Comedy*, well chewed and digested, will be enough for another day of the week . . . But, after all, I have perhaps not been strictly playing my own game, for my business was not to select, but to reject. If I were a philosopher, and if I had a few more columns to spare, I might set out to prove that the two come to much the same thing. But for the present I must leave that, along

with any other debatable points I have raised, to the judgment of my readers.

Variations on an old Theme—Second Suite

AT LAST I have found a reader! And before I take up the pretty quarrel to which my critic, E. Badian, publicly invites me in his letter of last Saturday, decency requires that I should express my gratitude. Hitherto my efforts to provoke an argument have been greeted with what the old-time music-hall comedians used to call shrieks of silence. By breaking that chilly silence my critic has given me the only documentary evidence I have so far been able to collect that at least one of my articles has found at least one reader, and—what is better still—a reader of independent judgment. I have to thank him, too, for the kind and flattering phrases with which he has seasoned his anim adversions. Best of all, he has given me a bone to pick, and an excuse for returning to a congenial theme.

My critic finds in my choice of books for a Desert Island library the taint of insularity. I might retort that if there is one place where insularity is highly proper, it is a desert island. But now that I have found a reader who pays me the compliment of taking me seriously, I dare not be frivolous. To the charge of insularity, I plead not guilty. That charge might carry some weight if I had been legislating or making an ex cathedra pronouncement on the world's best books. But I was doing nothing of the kind: my choice was meant for nothing more that a free and easy expression of personal likes and dislikes. And like the man in the song, who resisted all temptations to belong to other nations, and remained an Englishman, I was guided in my choice by the accident that English is my mother-tongue. I was writing, not critically, but, as Sterne would say, hobby-horsically. *Sic volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas.*

But now that my bookish blood is up, I am not content to leave the matter there. I am not one of those reprehensible people who, as my critic puts it, 'start from the axiom that England has practically a monopoly of literature'—or even of poetry. I myself have never met these people. What has often annoyed me is the

Englishman's excessive deference to things foreign or outlandish, the attitude of those used to dote on all one sees that's Japanese, or German, or Russian. Let us for a moment change the subject a little and suppose that we are talking, not books but music. A German or an Austrian, let us suppose, is naming the six musical composers of his predilection. We shall not, I think, tax him with insularity or patriotic bias if even the whole six of his names are those of his own illustrious countrymen. Even to claim for them a monopoly would be no very gross exaggeration. And if the case of modern European poetry could be tried by a competent international court, I do not think the claim of England to stand against the rest of the world would be laughed out of audience, or lightly dismissed. Except Dante, whom I included among my twelve, the other nations of Europe would admittedly have none to set beside our Shakespeare and Milton. A good start! And when we add Chaucer and Wordsworth and Browning—to name only the other three on my list—then the balance begins to dip very visibly on the English side. I do not forget Ariosto, for whose *Orlando* it has been fairly claimed that, with the exception of Shakespeare's plays, it has probably given more pleasure than any other poetic composition. As for Goethe, if I may revert again to personal preferences, I have all of him I want in the half-dozen lyrics familiar to me in the settings of Schubert. If Germany is to be represented, Heine is my man. And coming to the French, I shelter behind the verdict of the Frenchman who declared that the two things which none of his countrymen ever did or could understand are poetry and religion. That, I think, is what sportsmen call having it from the horse's mouth! My critic would make room for the Spanish Calderon. No! I remember the high hopes with which I once came to that writer. The result was one of the major disappointments of my career as a reader. And Bossuet! Why Bossuet? A great and venerable man, no doubt, but, for a desert island, funereal company! 'Was there not Zimmermann On Solitude?'

I am asked to reject Jane Austen in favour of *Gil Blas*. But here I think my critic overlooks one of the fundamental principles of our game. It is not at all, or at least not chiefly, a question of the comparative merits of two great novelists. Jane Austen may or may not be the equal of Lesage, or Balzac, or Tolstoy. In a desert island library, quantity counts. And as soon as we reckon with that factor, to me it is as clear as daylight that the volume containing Jane's half-dozen novels is the best bargain we can have in the way of fiction.

I end with what theologians call an eirenicon and politicians

an olive branch. My austere critic, toned up to a vein of high seriousness by a recent colloquy with Bossuet, may be inclined to discredit the source from which I take my formula for an honourable peace. He will not refuse it the merit of realism. Playing in his turn at our present game, Mr Chesterton has named the first book of his choice. It is called *Everyman's Practical Guide to Shipbuilding*.

John Gay

IN THE HISTORY of literary reputations there are some apparent accidents which, as Swinburne has remarked, almost persuade us to believe in the Goddess of Chance. The life of John Gay, and the part played by extraneous circumstance in the preservation of his name, should at least incline us to believe in luck. Time, says one of Gay's biographers, has dealt gently with his fame. His earthly pilgrimage was conducted on the principle that it was someone else's duty to provide for him. He writes to Swift from Burlington House, where he is surrounded by the great: ' They wonder at each other for not providing for me, and I wonder at them all.' ' Providence,' writes Swift, ' never designed Gay to be above two and twenty.' He had a knack of attaching himself to a wealthy patron and dropping into a sinecure. While his brothers of the pen were drudging in Grub Street, Mr Gay was taking the waters at Bath, or rambling on the Continent at other people's expense, or collecting his salary as Commissioner of the State Lottery. The London apprentice died in the house of a Duke and left behind him, in spite of himself, a fortune of £6,000. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, sincerely mourned by Pope and Swift. He neither commanded success, nor conspicuously deserved it; he simply accepted it as the right of one who was born lucky.

He had the same luck with his writings. His first success, *The Shepherd's Week*, has long since gone the way to dusty death. What distinction it possesses it owes, as we shall see, to a suggestion of Pope's. *The Beggar's Opera*, his second and greater hit, sprang from a germ conceived in the fertile brain of Swift. This work, and the ' pastoral opera ' of Acis and Galatea have preserved Gay's reputation for two centuries. But the songs in *The Beggar's Opera*, apart from the airs which Gay found ready-made, are almost incredibly commonplace and pedestrian, and only the musical genius of Handel covers the insipidity of Acis and Galatea. Here too, Gay has been lucky in his associates.

He was born at Barnstaple in Devonshire in 1685, and after some schooling at the establishment of a Mr Luck, came up to London in his 'teens to begin his career as apprentice to a silk mercer. Not greatly caring for work, he was soon back in Devonshire, living on an uncle. But before long he had outstayed his welcome, and was again ' respiring the smoke of London,' and in some vague way ' courting business with successless pain'. The tide of fortune turned in 1712, when he became secretary to the Duchess of Monmouth. Henceforth he was to be sought among lords and wits. His heroic career was cut short at the age of 47 by his failure to attend to the good advice of Swift, that he should ' use his legs more and his jaws less'. His maxim, says Congreve, might have been ' Edo, ergo sum'. He took his last meal in December, 1732, and was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, the last offices being performed by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Rochester, ' the choir attending'. His monument, ' occupying much wall-space', bears, not the flowery tribute in which Pope predicts that in future ages

> the worthy and the good shall say,
> Striking their pensive bosoms: Here lies Gay,

but the more appropriate cynicism of his own composition:

> Life's a jest, and all things show it.
> I thought so once, and now I know it.

Strange to say, Gay is perhaps the most prolific poet of his age. He began in 1708 with Wine, a dull poem in facetiously Miltonic blank verse, after the pattern of John Phillips in *The Splendid Shilling*. In *Rural Sports*, which followed in 1713, he is heavily didactic on the subject of trout-fishing, but takes refuge from hunting, which 'demands a more experienced lay', in the praises of rural innocence and quiet, as seen from a distance. About this time Steele, or another, had been writing in the *Guardian* some papers on Pastoral Poetry, and had omitted to mention the great Mr Pope, hailing instead Ambrose Philips (' Namby Pamby ') as the true successor of Spenser. Pope proceeded to his vengeance with characteristic obliquity. He sent to the *Guardian* an anonymous paper extolling his own Pastorals, and making fun of Philips. Next he engaged Gay to write a burlesque on Philips in the form of realistic descriptions of country life and manners. The result was *The Shepherd's Week*, in which, like some other parodists, Gay was carried beyond his original mark, and discovered his talent for realism.

Trivia, or *The Art of Walking the Streets of London*, which

followed in 1716, is, as the name indicates, satirically didactic. It is no great compliment to the poetic qualities of this work to say that its faint interest for the modern reader, arises almost wholly from the unpleasant picture it gives of London in the early eighteenth century. Gay's motto is Safety First:

Mind only safety, and contemn the mire.

What with perils from street-sweepers and wet paint and carters' ropes and 'thundering waggons,' from the varied odours which rise from the stalls of chandlers, fishmongers, butchers, and cheesemongers, from loose stones underfoot and loose tiles overhead, from prentices pursuing 'the fury of the football war', from bullies who drive you from the wall to 'the muddy kennel', from pickpockets and their accomplices the ballad-singers, what with the varied perils of the day and the night, there is no safety but in eternal vigilance:

Let constant vigilance thy footsteps guide
And wary circumspection guard they side.

Yet the pedestrian is the happy man—but not because he has learned, with Nietzsche, that the secret of a happy life is to live dangerously: what Mr Gay likes about walking is that it is so good for the health. 'The utmost exercise you can bear,' writes Swift to the author of *Trivia*, 'is a coach and six.'

The long-continued vogue of the Fables, which begin to appear in 1727, is hard to explain. Perhaps they are the best things of their kind in English, for we have no English *La Fontaine*. Let us hope that the young Duke of Cumberland, for whom they were written, sucked edification from them. The Fables are now as dead as need be, and a few years ago one might have said the same of the Beggar's Opera, which appeared in the next year, 1728. In 1920 it unaccountably came to life again at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, and ran for more than three years.

Why these things happen, no one can tell. If we could, we should all be successful writers for the stage. But the furore created by *The Beggar's Opera* at its original performance is to some extent explicable. 'It drove out of England for that season,' says Pope, 'the Italian opera, which had carried all before it for ten years.' The town was growing impatient of the Italian yoke. But since the death of Purcell in 1696, there had been no great operatic work in English. Gay hit the public taste by offering an all-English opera, with an English plot unfolded in English dialogue, and interspersed with English songs sung to traditional or familiar English airs, and he added a spice of political satire.

Pope has told the now familiar story of the origin of the opera and its first reception. Swift had suggested to Gay that a Newgate Pastoral might make an odd pretty sort of thing. Gay took the hint, and, with some advice from Swift and Pope, set to work. Congreve predicted that the piece would either take greatly or be damned confoundedly. The first performance ended in a clamour of applause, and the piece had a record run of sixty-three performances. It made Gay rich and Rich (the manager) gay. From London it went to Scotland, Ireland, and even to Jamaica. Ladies carried the songs in their fans. The original Polly married a Duke. Some clerical moralists, zealous in the good cause of private property, raised objections which Swift (perhaps ironically) answered. The ethical controversy was still alive in Johnson's day. The good doctor was not inclined to take it seriously, since 'highwaymen and housebreakers seldom frequent the playhouse, or mingle in any elegant diversion'. But when, in the year following, Gay tried to repeat his success in a sequel called *Polly*, the Lord Chamberlain interposed his veto, and morality was vindicated.

'As a poet,' says Johnson, 'Gay cannot be ranked very high.' That is a kind way of putting it. A more recent critic has modestly claimed that Gay was a poet 'once'—in the verses he addressed to Pope on the completion of his *Iliad*. It is a sprightly and fluent piece; but the poetry of it is hard to find. Gay's lyrics, in his operas and elsewhere, have been praised. But they are of the earth, earthy. All that can be said is that in an age when poetry had almost lost its singing voice, Gay possessed a gift of fitting mediocre verses to good tunes, and that he had the sense to know his limitations. He never comes very signally to grief, because he plays for safety, and never leaves the ground. His precarious foothold in the anthologies depends on one piece—probably his best—*Black-eyed Susan*, in which he saves his face by assuming an air of conscious absurdity—

Adieu, she cries! and wav'd her lily hand.

Gay was too complete a realist to be a good poet. His poetical reputation is not quite legitimate. But he was one of Lamb's 'great race'. In life, he spunged harmlessly and good naturedly where he could: and, if to be remembered after two hundred years is a fair earnest of what is called immortality, he is safer than many of his betters. For in the Elysian fields, where doubtless he may be found among the best people, he need no longer wonder, as he did in Burlington House, that they do not provide for him. They have done it handsomely. In the stately mansion of Handel's fame he

has found a snug corner, where the great eater, protected by the greater, may defy oblivion, and feel safe for many a year from the jaws of omnivorous Time, greatest eater of all.

Who Wants Freedom?

THE TITLE of my address, as you have just heard, is put in the form of a question. Who wants freedom? How shall we best answer it? Shall we take a show of hands? There is no need: we know how the vote would go, and that it would be unanimous. Then why not adjourn? Since we are so snugly agreed, why all this talk?

Some of you may recall Chesterton's parable of the men who banded together to destroy a certain lamp-post. I quote from memory, but the substance of the parable is something like this. Like us, they were unanimous. But when the deed was done, they found that their objections to the lamp-post were very various. One man wanted the light nearer his own street corner; another, being an artist, could not abide the design of the post; a third objected to gas-lamps—he had shares in an electrical company; a fourth found that light interfered with his business—he was a burglar. And so on.

We all 'want freedom': but we mean all sorts of different things: we want it for different reasons: we claim it on different grounds: we have different plans for getting it or keeping it. In a word, our unanimity is largely illusory.

So the subject is not closed. I can't let you go home yet. We of my generation began life with a comfortable feeling that, on the whole, the battle for freedom had been fought and won by our fathers and grandfathers in the nineteenth century, and that for whatever remained to be done we might trust to the 'great law of Progress', and to what one enthusiast called 'The Human Providence': the face of mankind was firmly set towards the light The Dark Ages, as we called them, were past and gone, never to return: the new century began in hope and confidence.

Well, here is 1942. Mankind is engaged chiefly in the work of slaughter. Freedom, in the most elementary sense of the word, is less secure than it has been at almost any moment in history.

Something has gone wrong. What?

I don't pretend to answer that question with a neat and compact formula: I don't deal in Morrison's Pills: I am not offering you a Handy Guide to the Universe. But I have one thing to say which is literally of vital importance—that is, a matter of life and death. The fabric of freedom is tottering because its foundations have not been truly and securely laid: we have no dug deep enough. That sounds platitudinous! Let me put it in another way. The true and secure foundations of freedom are not laid in our personal likes and dislikes, nor in any considerations of personal convenience, nor of political expediency, nor of economic theory. Nor can we defend our claim to freedom by an appeal to common sense, nor even to reason. The foundations of freedom are mystical, religious, or they are nothing. What I mean by that will appear presently.

We of the present day inherit our conception of freedom largely from the nineteenth century. Now, it happens that some of the greatest champions of freedom in that epoch were—like Mill and Huxley and Bradlaugh—secularists. All honour to them for the great work they did! But their secularism has coloured our conception of freedom, and led us to overlook that mystical or religious basis on which alone, as I said just now, we can build securely.

Consider for a moment the reasons why the revolt against freedom has, in countries like Germany, gathered such terrific force. You may denounce Hitler as an arch-criminal, a pervert, a lunatic. But the tens and hundreds of thousands of men and women who are following Hitler's lead are not all of them criminals or perverts: you can't draw up an indictment against a whole nation: they are, I suppose, people very much like ourselves, some better, some worse. Hitler's success in winning their allegiance cannot be explained if you leave out of account the appeal he has made to certain idealist or religious or mystical motives—to patriotism, to loyalty, to ideals of duty and service and self-sacrifice. Yes, you say, spurious idealism, debased religion, perverted mysticism. I agree. But I hasten to add that though Hitler and Hitlerism may deserve all the bad you like to say of them, the world is not going to be saved by lurid denunciation. That is all too easy! We must oppose to the false and distorted idealism of Hitler a saner and truer idealism . We must meet the Fascist creed, not merely with denunciation, or denial, but with a creed, a belief, a way of life, as positive, as aggressive, and at the same time saner and more truly constructive and creative. Where are we to find it?

Listen to these words of the greatest of living Germans, banished from his native land for the crime of being a Jew. It is Einstein who is speaking, from his place of exile in America:

' Being a lover of freedom, when the revolution came in Germany, I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth: but, no, the universities immediately were silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers, whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom, but they, like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks. Then I looked to the individual writers who, as literary guides of Germany, had written much and often concerning the place of freedom in modern life: but they, too, were mute. Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration, because the Church alone had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom.'

Where, I was asking just now, are we to find a moral and spiritual force to oppose to the perverted spiritual force of Hitlerism? My quotation from Einstein has almost, if not quite, answered the question. It tells us of something that has actually happened—it gives us the result of an experimental test—on the intellectual and spiritual front, in the war of ideas. In Germany, it would appear, the enemies of freedom have carried all before them—universities, liberal press, etc.—all but one fortress. You see now what I meant when I said a moment ago that the foundations of freedom are mystical, religious, or they are nothing: that the purely secular conception of freedom is powerless to defend or justify itself. You may talk in fine phrases about the rights of man or the dignity of thought: the exponents of the philosophy of Might will make short work of such phrases: they are mere wind unless they have behind and beneath them the intuitions, the reasoned faith, of religion. Either man is a child of God with a calling and a destiny and a duty answering to that high estate, or words like freedom are meaningless—sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

We Christians, then, believe, with our fellow-Christians in Germany, that we have that better and truer idealism which at once defines and safeguards freedom. We say this humbly, remembering our own weakness and unworthiness, and confessing with shame that we have too often neglected and even gone near to betraying our great trust; but we say it confidently, too, as men and women who are conscious of their trust, who dare not hide their light under a bushel, who are called upon to bear witness, and to serve and save the world.

We know—or we ought to know—what this freedom is which

we claim for ourselves and others. We do not make the claim in any spirit of self-assertion. Freedom, for us, is nothing so abject and futile as the supposed right 'to do as one likes'. No such right exists. It is freedom to live in a full human life, in loyalty to the highest we know. That is the paradox of true freedom, that it is freedom to serve, freedom to obey, freedom to be loyal. In the great phrase of one of the collects, there is a service which is perfect freedom. The freest man on earth—the only free man—is the man who has found his freedom in a satisfying allegiance.

Many things remain to be said. I must confine myself to two of them. First, this: that freedom is not the whole of life. As someone has very aptly remarked, 'you won't get very fat on freedom'. No, I would add, nor on a diet of fresh air. Freedom, like fresh air, is a condition of healthy living, and a condition only. It is a means, not an end, in itself. Given freedom, the question remains to be answered—What will you do with it? I have already hinted at the answer. Freedom is a necessary condition for the healthy and effective exercise of our powers of mind and soul. Nothing more.

And my second point is this: Let us never forget that the threat to freedom does not come solely from the enemy without. Hitler and Hitlerism—yes!—but suppose that menace were removed—as, please God, it shall be!—what then? There remain the enemies within. You know their names as well as I do. Their names are pride and lust, avarice and selfishness, envy and malice, and self-righteousness and sloth. These are some of the things that baulk us of our desired freedom. 'Lucifer,' says Sir Thomas Browne, 'keeps court within me: Legion is revived in me.'

But I am not here to preach a sermon. I will end with a text: we can all preach the sermon to ourselves. The price of liberty, we have been told, is eternal vigilance. But you will get rather lean on vigilance. And some of us expend so much of our energy on the vigilance that we have none left for the freedom. Rather, therefore, I should say that the price of freedom is the constant exercise of freedom—that the best way of asserting your claim to freedom is not merely to be vigilant, not merely to talk about freedom—as I have been doing for twenty minutes—but to act like free men and women. And—if we are honest with ourselves—what hinders us? Not only the enemy without, but the legion of enemies within. And of that company of domestic companions whose names I enumerated just now, not always the more spectacular vices, but chiefly, I should say, sheer mental and spiritual slackness and indifference. One might almost say that if

we are in danger of losing our freedom, it is because we have not used it: we have not exercised our faculties of mind and soul as free men should do, and must do, if they are to remain free.

Who wants freedom? Let him be prepared to pay the price: let him clear his mind of the cant of freedom: let him know the meaning of the word he so glibly repeats: let him learn what are the true foundations of freedom, and what are its ultimate safeguards.

Who wants freedom? No, we shall not take a show of hands. That would settle nothing: that would get us no further. Better, I suggest, to go home and think about it.

Confessions of a Rationalist

'REASON is king': I had just transcribed that maxim from one of the older sages, and was airing it a little among my friends, when one of them called to my notice a recent pronouncement of one of our modern yogis. Mr John D. Rockefeller (junior) has been letting the cat out of the bag, and giving us all an intimate view of the hitherto secret places of his soul. The greatest thing in the world, according to this eminent authority, is something which he calls Love with a capital letter. Not but what he believes also in several other edifying things, such as the dignity of labour (without a capital). 'He would,' was the slightly oblique comment of a friend to whom I communicated this part of Mr Rockefeller's allocation. And if any of my readers is in search of uplift, he had better read no further; for I do not deal in that commodity. I return brazenly and doggedly to my text. I refuse to be side-tracked.

'Reason is king.' My text was chosen in the hope of placating and reassuring another type of reader. I mean those austere critics who have been shaking their heads sorrowfully over some things I said lately on the subject of rationalism. Reason is king: I say it for the third time, and I am ready at all times to subscribe that first and great commandment of the rationalist creed. But—

We are none of us nowadays believers in absolutism, and the kingship we accede to Reason is also, I take it, a limited monarchy. The king is bound to listen to his advisers, and his decrees are valid only with their concurrence. To put the matter less figuratively, the appeal to reason is always seasonable; but the findings of reason are valid and fruitful only in their right context.

Take, for example, the maxim I am using as my text. I quote it from Plotinus. 'He who would rise above Reason,' says the same philosopher in another place, 'falls outside it.' Sound rationalist doctrine, surely! But the rationalists will hardly claim Plotinus as a kindred spirit. Even those who, like myself, have little more than a nodding acquaintance with that writer, know him as one of the

fountain-heads of European mysticism. And it is in that mystical context that his great aphorism must be read and interpreted, The part must be related to the whole. There alone it is significant. Else it sinks to the level of arid platitude.

That one should be able to quote such an aphorism from such a source will surprise no one who is at all familiar with the lives and writings of the saints and mystics. I think it was George Tyrrell who described himself as a mystic with an incurably Voltairean mind. He was far from being singular in that spiritual equipment. His words might almost serve as a rough-and-ready description of the mystical type. If I were required to compile a small anthology of rationalism, I believe I could do it quite well by confining myself to the literature of mysticism, or even to our own peculiar treasury of English prose and poetry. For the present I must content myself with a few random illustrations.

No good rationalist, I suppose, deals much in visions. But there have been times when the visionary has claimed and received much consideration, and the question of the genuineness and significance of visions has been seriously debated. In the course of such a debate one disputant maliciously reminded his hearers that among the visionaries must be numbered Balaam's ass. One can imagine the laughter and applause which would greet that sally if it came from a modern debater: Actually it came from one Bonaventura, a canonised saint of the Church. Another party to the debate dismissed visions as ' childish toys ' or worse! He was the saint now generally known as St John of the Cross. Yet another tentatively diagnosed visions as symptoms of indigestion. (More applause.) This last suggestion came from that great-souled woman of whom our English poet writes:

> She never undertook to know
> What death with love should have to do;
> Yet though she cannot tell you why,
> She can love, and she can die.

Saint Teresa, too, like her brother saints, had her Voltairean moments. But her greatness rests precisely on things ' she never undertook to know', on heroisms conceived and achieved ' she cannot tell you why'.

And now, having begun to quote from my proposed anthology I am embarrassed by the wealth of material before me. There is St Paul, for example, who had rather speak five words with his understanding than 10,000 ' in a tongue '; who will pray with his spirit indeed, but also, with his understanding. Or there is the German mystic, Eckhart, telling us that the final appeal must always

be ' to the deepest part of my being, and that is my reason'. Or, turning abruptly to another time and place, there are the great sentences scattered thickly about the writings of that group of English writers of the seventeenth century known as the Cambridge Platonists. ' It ill becomes us,' says one of them, ' to make our intellectual faculties Gibeonites'; and again, ' I oppose not spiritual to rational, for spiritual is most rational.' ' Reason in man,' says another writer of this group, ' is lumen de lumine, a light flowing from the fountain and Father of Lights.' And as for our English poets, I dare not begin to quote. But I must not end without at least one reference. Expounding his doctrine of the imagination, Wordsworth describes that faculty as ' reason in its most exalted mood'.

I hope I have said enough to prove to my rationalist critics that I, too, am a rationalist in my own way. That is, I can get all the rationalism, I need from such sources as I have been indicating. And with this advantage, that here I find it in what I have called its right context. Here is the salt of common sense, of intelligence and common honesty, put to its right use in its right proportions. Salt is good, but not nutritive. Here, to vary the image, is the salutary cold douche administered to our over-heated and undisciplined imagination, to our wishful thinking and seductive sentimentalism, by teachers who do not ask us to spend our lives in the cold bath.

Education in the Bomb Age

'IT MOVES.' I preface my remarks with the text which some tacit convention seems to have prescribed for all who set out to comment on public institutions in New Zealand. Next year this text will provide matter for ten thousand lay sermons.

The educationists have got in early. Some of them have just been telling us, in their cheery and re-assuring way, that at any rate in the field of education we are progressive—perhaps not quite as progressive as we might be, but still, progressive. The goal is undefined, the direction uncertain and liable to abrupt changes. But the great thing is to keep moving. And we move. Why, even in the last twenty years—so one of our educational leaders announced the other day—a new and superior sort of school has made its appearance in this favoured country: 'The pioneers could no more have thought of this type of school than of the high-speed bombing aeroplane.' There is a happy valiancy of style about that remark, but its substance is trite and commonplace. It says no more than what most of us are saying and thinking just now, or getting ready to say and think next year, when the great festival of boast, boost, and bluff gives us our chance. It crystallises, in a felicitous phrase, the mood of complacency in which we are preparing to celebrate our hundred years of progress.

Now I am not myself an educationist. On the contrary, I am only a teacher. Therefore I do not as a rule exercise myself in great matters. But for once I am provoked to say my little say. Like one of my betters, I ask my readers to bear with me if, in the midst of all this boasting, I also boast myself a little. I ask them to stretch a point, and allow a teacher to have an opinion about education. For I, too, am one of those who are being kept continually on the march towards the Promised Land. Even in the days of Moses and Joshua there were those who murmured. I am glad to see that there are to-day some murmurers. I am of their party. I don't believe in the P.L. And as for our modern Joshuas, I regard them

with what political orators call profound suspicion. I think our educational system, as it is called, badly needs to be disinfected of pretentiousness, cant, and humbug.

It is fair to say, before I go on, that the expert whose memorable phrase I quoted just now was referring primarily to school architecture. That is a matter of some importance. But it is perhaps a matter for specialists, and I do not meddle with it. An educational system is justified, not by its buildings, but by what goes on inside them; not by its machinery, but by its products.

Here I claim the right to speak with some confidence. For many years I have been not only a teacher but an examiner. Please do not tell me that examinations are a very imperfect test. I have heard all that before. I know it. It is my refuge and my consolation when I have been examining some of my own pupils. But examination is as good a method as human ingenuity has so far been able to devise for finding out certain things. Examinations are not tests of character or piety or aptitude for money-making or capacity for leadership. But they are pretty good tests of knowledge, which is all they should pretend to be. The candidate who knows his work generally passes. That is my experience, and I do not think it is singular.

But I am not going to entangle myself in argument. I deal in the humbler currency of statistics. I have lately been engaged in examining work which, according to the official prescription, 'represents the reasonable result of four years' training in a secondary school'. The papers I have read come from perhaps a hundred schools in different parts of New Zealand. The average age of candidates is from 15 to 16. My statistics are based upon an examination of five or six hundred papers.

Of these products of our secondary schools—

Seventy-five per cent. cannot spell;

Ninety-five per cent. do not know the meaning of common words;

Ninety-eight per cent. cannot explain the meaning of some of the most hackneyed quatations from English poetry.

I. Seventy-five per cent. cannot spell

My figures are 'conservative'—I believe that is the word—for I have made allowance for occasional slips due to the flurry of the examination room, and I have not made too much of what may be called venial errors. What my statement means is that of our secondary schoolboys and schoolgirls who have reached leaving age, only one in four can write a page or two of English, in words of

their own choosing, without gross blunders. I mean also that when it is merely a question of copying certain words which stare them in the face from the printed paper before them, many of them cannot do it.

I cannot stop to argue with the school of educationists who say that spelling does not matter. A candidate for a commercial degree in Australia once told me that he ' left all that ' to his typists. But we cannot all have typists to do our spelling for us while we attend to the weightier matters of the law. Even if we could, someone must do the typing. And if the typists cannot spell, wherewith shall they be salted? It is hard to escape the unpalatable conclusion that somebody had better be able to spell. Why not everybody?

I have also heard that we ought not to stickle for correct spelling, because a bad speller may happen to be a genius. I have not myself met any of these illiterate geniuses. What I have generally found is that bad spelling goes not with genius, but with mental indolence and slovenliness. I am no Rhadamanthus, I hope, when I say that for my part I must draw the line. Geniuses may be privileged to write sonets, sonates, or even sonetts, and peoms with all sorts of amazing ryhme scemes. They may perhaps be allowed to discus, in their own inspired way, the work of their peers, those great English poets who called themselves Spencer, Grey, Burnes, Tenison, and were equally at home in trochic and dactilyc meaters. I am perhaps over-fastidious when I say that discussions of that sort seem to brush off something of the bloom of great poetry. So I let that pass. But there is at least one word which our unhappy generation ought to be able to spell, more especially if it happens to be on the printed paper: I appeal with confidence to all progressive educationists against such major heresies as phycology, psycology, psycilogy, and perhaps even cycology. And to the more retrogressive I appeal to rescue me from the plague of flys and locuses which assailed me from the skies in the answers to one of the questions. Perhaps it is pedantic, to insist that young New Zealanders, before entering the university, should give up the habit of writing about Moaris. I don't think so myself . . . But to avoid unprofitable argument, I end this paragraph with a select list which the reader may ponder at his leisure:

> *foreget beleive comparitive centenial* (the ' centennial ' was on the printed paper) *deffinately existance immagine murmer warf vetrin alright.*

When such spelling is common, even an examminor of long experiance, a hardened vetrin, may be forgiven for doughting wheather, even in this age of high-speed boms, things are alright.

II. Ninety-five per cent. do not know the meaning of common words

Candidates for entrance to our university were asked to write sentences showing the correct use of the five following words: arbitrary, imperious, oblivious, sanctimonious, querulous. The result was a deluge of Malapropisms: arbitrary courts, imperious conferences, oblivious errors, sanctimonious ceremonies. Scarcely any candidates knew the meaning of any of the five words. About five per cent. knew one, two, or possibly three of the five. Ninety-eight per cent. think the word 'sanctimonious' means 'sacred.'

III Ninety-eight per cent. do not know the allusions contained in certain almost proverbial tags of English poetry

To allow for tricks of memory, nine such passages were given, and candidates were asked to explain any five. Of the 500 candidates whose papers I read, only six knew that Marvell's lines

> He nothing common did or mean
> Upon that memorable scene

refer to King Charles I, and not to the Penitent Thief, or Sir John Moore, or 'Dorothy Goldsmith, who cared after his brother Oliver'. Twelve of the 500 knew the reference in the song

> Charlie, he's my darling,
> The young Chevalier.

Of the remaining 488, a few had at least the sense to say nothing. A fair proportion identified Charlie with Charles Lamb: others preferred Charlie Chaplin, or another film star whose Christian name is unfortunately not Charlie, but Maurice.

Well, there are some facts and figures from which I leave the reader to draw his own conclusions about the state of education in the Bomb Age. But there is one conclusion which I ask him to avoid. It is so easy to blame the teachers. And that, I think, is just what we must not do. I say this as a teacher who has to face periodically the chastening experience of examining his own students. We teachers are, I suppose, prepared to admit our share of the blame. But in my opinion it is a small share. We struggle against an evil which is not of our making, nor within our control. Therefore if any reader is for hanging somebody, he must not make a rush for the teachers. I could suggest several more eligible candidates for pendulous suffocation. And when centennial sports and spectacles are in preparation . . .

When Mr Chadband put to his hearers the rhetorical question, 'My friends, why can we not fly?' Mr Snagsby, it will be remembered, replied with admirable promptitude and brevity, 'No wings!' If anyone cares to ask me why our educational

progress is just now taking the form of a dègringolade towards illiteracy, I reply, ' No roots! '

A Sentimentalist at Christmas

I AM one of those in whom the thought of Christmas—not the Festival itself, but the cluster of associations which have gathered round it—never fails to touch springs of sentimentalism. To say that nowadays is, I know, to be out of the prevailing fashion, perhaps even to be Victorian. Well, I had rather be Victorian than live in constant dread of Victorianism. But I do not see that any such awkward choice is forced upon me. For there is in all of us —even the youngest and most disillusioned—an imprisoned sentimentalist always waiting for his chance to get the upper hand of us. The problem is, what to do with him? A policy of mere repression will not do: it will only lead to kinks—I mean inhibitions and complexes—in the soul. There is nothing for it but to give him his rights. But what are they?

Our forefathers knew. At their Christmas festivities they appointed a Lord of Misrule or Abbot of Unreason. Rule and Reason, they meant, are masters from whose control we need an occasional holiday; no man is wise who cannot play the fool in season, and nonsense is a part of wisdom. And that is where the imprisoned sentimentalist should get his turn; we must let him out for an occasional airing. If you play the fool at the right time you are a little less likely to do it at the wrong time. Just as tragedy by providing us with a good cry, is said to clear our minds of certain perilous emotional secretions, so, in its more modest way, does a periodic burst of sentimentalism.

But I seem to be making excuses where none are needed. I am not one of those who esteem all days alike—which in practice means esteeming none at all. I like to observe times and seasons, to remember anniversaries and birthdays, especially in the family history of mankind. These memories make me less forlorn; in our priggish contemporary cant, they restore my sense of values.

I cannot think of Christmas without recalling these lines from *Hamlet:*

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

As the hallowed and gracious season draws near, the quiet beauty of those lines moves me as deeply as the greatest things in Shakespeare. They are frankly sentimental, even if the poet saves his face with the non-committal 'Some say,' and the comment of Horatio—'So have I heard, and do in part believe it.' For it is just in this twilight world of half-beliefs and fancies that the sentimentalist finds his food. It is not meant to be our daily bread—least of all at Christmas, when the Festival, if we keep it aright, has other things to offer us.

'Some say': but nowadays some say quite other things, if not quite so well, at least with more assurance. We know now that a yellow primrose is a yellow primrose, and that's the end of that matter; that the nights before Christmas are just what, having regard to the Science of Statistics, you would expect December nights to be. So have I heard, and do in great part disbelieve it. I don't think the Gradgrinds, the stern realists and men of hard fact, the experts in the art of sinking, have the whole truth so neatly packed and portable in their tidy little heads. They remind me of a passage in Boswell's *Johnson*. 'That, Sir,' said Boswell, 'showed great fortitude of mind.' 'No, Sir,' replied Johnson, 'stark insensibility.' As I repeat to myself the magic lines of Shakespeare, I have no doubt that the realists have missed the reality. For the moment I am under the spell of the poet's beauty; and I have been taught that beauty is the splendour of truth. Of course I follow Shakespeare in declining to make any dogmatic affirmations or denials about witches, ghosts and fairies. I take his lines in a soft and flexible sense. But I decline also, and with even greater firmness to exchange the old bogies for the new bogus. Nonsense for nonsense, I prefer Shakespeare's to that of our modern masters of bathos. Perhaps, too, I have a lurking fear that when I have allowed myself to be fuddled and bamboozled by the new nonsense, I shall prove an easy mark for the purveyors of the still newer nonsense whose textbook is *Mein Kampf*.

I have grown mildly controversial when I meant only to be sentimental; such is the common fate of those who mention

Hamlet. There is a line from another poet which, if I were compiling a Christmas anthology, I should use as a general text: 'The shepherds sing, and shall I silent be?' But George Herbert, who wrote that line, was a man of holy life and humble heart. What can we do at Christmas, we commonplace sinners who have not the poet's singing voice? If we cannot emulate Herbert's holiness or his song, we can take a lesson from his humility. We can have the courage—that is, the humility—of our commonplaceness. At Christmas we shall not give ourselves airs by pretending to be superior to the commonplaces of sentimentalism. At the worst, our sentimental nonsense will do us less harm than the sin of pride. And if, as may well happen, it engenders in us some unaccustomed touch of kindliness and charity, it will have brought us nearer to at least one aspect of the central Mystery we celebrate at Christmas.

'But,' some reader may be wishing to interject, 'you have surely forgotten something. This is Christmas 1941.' I have not forgotten it. How could I? But if we are to make fitness and worthiness a condition for keeping the Feast, it will never be kept, and never could have been. In all the Christian centuries there never has been peace on earth or goodwill among men. 'Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back, Guilty of dust and sin.' Every generation, every individual, has had ample reason for that drawing back. We who are living in 1941 are not likely—unless Christmas has lost its meaning for us altogether—to be exceptions. The danger for us is that we should forget, not the war, but the Festival.

The Safe Man Speaks

THOSE who invited me to speak here to-day were good enough to say that I might choose my own topic and treat it in my own way—in fact, I might say what I liked. I shall not go to such lengths as that! I hope I do not fail to appreciate the compliment implied in the terms of the invitation. It means I have qualified as a safe man, who can be trusted to drink to the occasion and to say the expected. Far be it from me to abuse such confidence. I think I know what is expected. We celebrate to-day one of our recurring festivals of platitude—of platitude tempered by interjection. For the livelier of these two ingredients I look to the younger members of my audience; my province is platitude. There or nowhere is my America.

While I am talking in quotation some of you will remember, as I always do on such occasions, G. K. Chesterton's description of some people who met together to celebrate the 300th birthday of Shakespeare, how—

> They sat together in a ring
> Remembering him like anything,

and how—

> They clung like limpets to the spot
> Lest they forgot, lest they forgot.

We are here to-day to remember Education, Scholarship, Research and such fearful wild fowl. Let us remember them like anything!

You will forgive me if I seem to speak flippantly of the mighty deity whom we are here to acclaim. Some of us have seen too much of her seamy side. A lifetime spent in teaching—with periodic descents into examining—is apt to strain the most robust faith. There is a story told of a distinguished author asked to address a little group on art who sent them the reply: 'Art be damned!' And now that I have begun to swear in quotation marks may I repeat the phrase in which Mozart described the world in which he lived as 'the hell of music'. Every teacher must have

moments when he longs to blow the gaff on all the fine talk about education. When I consider the expensive and elaborate machinery of our educational apparatus in New Zealand, when I listen to the things we say about it (the best in the world) and then turn to its finished product—a public that wallows in the cinema and the radio—when in fact I judge the tree by its fruits—I feel—well, I feel that I had not better not finish my sentence.

Now what do I mean by Education? Let me commend to your notice a famous saying of a great moralist. 'Sir,' said Dr Johnson, 'clear your mind of cant.' That maxim as far as it goes contains by implication about the best definition of education I can anywhere find. I should say that the first business of education is to clear the mind of cant. And that, as one realises more clearly with the years, is a task for which a lifetime is hardly sufficient. Cant is a Proteus which, slain in one form, springs up in another. There is the cant of religion—or perhaps I should say there was—that form of cant is not very popular just now, and so much the better for religion. There is a cant of art, of politics. In our unhappy day there is a cant of commerce, of sport, of education. The first business of education, as I see it, is to clear the mind of these poisonous growths, to teach us that things are what they are, and not simply what we choose to call them.

So far, so good. But now Dr Johnson's maxim begins to fail us. Clear your mind of cant; by all means. But afterwards? We have been warned of the danger that lies in wait for the mind that is swept and garnished—and empty. It is ready to be occupied by more and worse devils than have been cast out. The mind does not thrive in even the tidiest emptiness. I suppose all of us know either from the temptations of our own experience or from observations of others what I mean when I speak of the pose of disillusionment, of the mind which professes to have seen through the fine phrases of religion and politics and what not, to have seen, in the Scripture phrase, an end of all good, and to have settled down, not without pride, on a bare and brutal bedrock of negation. The very fear of cant, it would seem, betrays us into a new form of cant, the cant of disillusionment. Our education has served us ill if it leaves us in this valley of desolation, without faith or hope or charity, without love for God or man. If I had to choose between this state and one which still cherishes some generous illusions, I know which I would choose. Better Quixote than Sancho!

But no such choice need be forced upon us if education has done its full work. Its first task is to clear the mind; its last and noblest is to fill the mind. But with what? Among the competing

disciplines and programmes of study which jostle one another in the world to-day, what shall we teach? What shall we learn? If there is an answer to these questions I do not know it, and I leave it to wiser heads. It is at any rate no longer possible for even an Aristotle or a Bacon to take all knowledge as his province . . .

Before I end there are two things I wish to say. Some of you may remember the name of a school book which had a vogue a couple of generations ago. It was called Mangnall's questions. In my day it had already been discarded. Sometimes I am half inclined to regret that I missed it. The book consisted, I think, of formidable lists of fact. Now it may be, as a great French writer has told us, that facts are stupid things. (There are a great many facts that are not very rich in vitamins. I like that aphorism of Nietzsche, ' Once and for all, there are some things I do not wish to know.') And yet—I perhaps speak now as an examiner—you can hardly do without facts. Someone has defined a scholar as a man who has a due sense of the responsibility of making a statement. So we may say that a part—a humble but necessary part—of the business of education is to furnish our heads with a supply of facts.

But above all education should furnish us with a scale of values, a standard of reference and judgment. Perhaps never in the history of the world was this function of education more urgent and vital than it is to-day. 'As we sink deeper into the iron age,' writes that great Irishman, George Russell—better known perhaps by his pen-name of A.E.—'As we sink deeper into the iron age we are met by the mighty devils of state and empire, lurking in the abyss, claiming the soul for their own, moulding it to their image, to be verily their own creature and not heaven's. We need a power in ourselves that can confront these mighty powers.' To give us that inward power for which A.E. is asking is in the main the business of religion. But here education as I understand it is the handmaid or—if you like it—the ally, of religion. Indeed I hardly know where the function of one ends and that of the other begins . . . But perhaps an illustration taken from my own province of study will make my meaning clearer than any generalization can do. I met lately, not for the first time, this quotation: ' The weakest must go to the wall and we must help them to go. What is more harmful than any vice? Practical sympathy with the weak and botched.' Now I can conceive a mind to which those words and that doctrine make a strong appeal; still more easily another type of mind which, being revolted by them, nevertheless, finds them disturbing. Yes, you may say, weak minds, diseased minds, per-

verted minds. But the fact remains that Nietzsche, who wrote them, has not lacked and does not lack disciples, and that in one form or another the philosophy of might has taken hold on many minds to-day. Have we in ourselves that power of which A.E. speaks to confront and confute the false doctrines? There is, of course, the power of a better and truer religion. ' Now we that are strong ought to help them that are weak, and not to please ourselves.' But there is also the power of education. As I read these lines of Nietzsche there rise in my mind a cloud of witnesses to testify against this doctrine. I think, for example, of that lovely line of Chaucer, ' For pity runneth soon in gentle heart'. I think of the lines on mercy which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Portia, ' 'Tis thrice blest; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.' I think of Blake's Divine Image, ' For Mercy has a human heart, Pity a human face'.

Translator's English

I HAD promised myself, as a holiday task and pleasure, the re-reading of the Greek pastoral poets. But as I was returning to them after a longish interval, I knew that their vocabulary would exceed the resources of my diminished stock. And it was still too early in January to break my recent heroic resolution to look up in the lexicon every unfamiliar world. Turning the matter over, I recalled an obiter dictum uttered half a century ago by one of my contemporaries of the fourth form. A crib, said that ingenious philosopher, is only a dictionary with the words arranged in more convenient order. In this view I had always seemed to detect a strain of sophistry, or, as we all say nowadays, of wishful thinking. But then again, Liddell and Scott's admirable compilation is not quite a book for the pocket or the bedside . . . and on holiday one may allow oneself some small indulgences . . . and one is no longer a breeching scholar of the schools . . . and . . . Still, it was not without a feeling, if not of actual guilt, at least of something like shame—some of my readers will perhaps share with me this survival from schoolboy ethics—it was, I say, with a slightly uncomfortable feeling that I brushed aside my scruples, and sneaked into my little holiday library, along with the original text, an English translation made by a distinguished scholar and man of letters of the last century.

I had not read far when my attention began to be drawn away more and more from the old poets to their translator. The hackneyed Italian phrase brands all translators as traitors to their originals. That cap did not fit here, for the author of the English version had done his work faithfully, and, on the whole, skilfully. What distracted my attention from the matter of his work was the manner of it. A writer addressing an audience of English readers might have been expected to employ a plain, straightforward English style. Nothing of the kind. Ben Jonson said of the poet Spenser that he writ no language. But that, again, was not the

trouble here. Here, on the contrary, was a language which experience had taught me to know familiarly, and which once, amid the exigencies of the examination room, I had even been able to write with tolerable fluency: I mean, translators' English.

In this language, no one is ever angry, but only wroth; or tired, but sore aweary; or strong, but puissant—except when he is shent, and then, of course, his might is minished. People do not go from place to place: these wights are wont to fare, or else to hie. Nothing seems to astonish them much, though they have a trick of marvelling out of measure. All sorts of things wax and wane like the moon. In their revised arithmetical tables, one and one no longer made two, as we used to be taught, but twain. The reader moves along strange fauna and flora. He meets no such homely and friendly creatures as dogs and horses and cows, but only hounds and steeds and kine. Above his head fly merles and halcyons: about his feet lentisks and goat-worts and wind-flowers decorate the scene. When Browning published his version of the Agamemnon, some wag remarked that with the Greek original for a crib, the English poet's work was fairly easy reading. One who, like myself, has allowed himself to grow rusty in translators' English must feel, now and again, the need of a crib to the crib. 'I like to know what they are talking about,' said a friend of mine the other day, explaining why, after a course of contemporary novels, he had gone back to the Victorians. A very modest and reasonable ambition, surely! Yes, one does like to know.

I do not underrate the difficulties of translation. Dryden, who knew as much as any man about that disease, as he calls it, compared it to the performance of a man dancing on ropes with his legs fettered—'a man may shun a fall by using caution, but gracefulness of motion is not to be expected.' The translator, he goes on to say, must perfectly understand his author's tongue, and absolutely command his own. Perfectly, absolutely—when those words enter, we are talking of impossibilities. Yet once or twice in the history of European letters the impossible has been achieved, and the dancer has triumphed over his fetters. There is the German version of Shakespeare. And there is our own Authorised Version of the Bible. From the received opinion as to the supreme merit of that noble work I am neither learned enough nor foolish enough to dissent. If I were, a glance at one or other of the modern versions would cure me. But in fairness to the translators of other works, something should perhaps be added. The men of 1611 were working on an original which, generally speaking, set them a less difficult task than some other translators have had to face. It is

obviously easier to turn into adequate English a Psalm or a chapter of the Gospels than an ode of Horace or a chapter of Thucydides. Then again, the sheer excellence of the Authorised Version has proved a snare to some more recent translators in dealing with works of quite different style and substance. Many of the words and phrases I have quoted as specimens of translators' English are to be found in our Bible. But in 1611 they were still current in the spoken language: they were still alive. Nowadays the life has left them: they have become museum pieces, mantelshelf ornaments, or mere affectations. They belong, in fact, only to the vocabulary of translators' English.

What, then, have we a right to ask of the translator? Dryden, in the Essay on Translation from which I have already quoted, answers the question in his own authoritative and masterly way. The translator must be a nice critic in his mother-tongue. If he translates poetry, he must himself be a thorough poet. He must not only give his author's sense in good English and in musical numbers: his harder task is to maintain the individual character of his author, and to reproduce his style and distinguishing manner. All which amounts to saying that the translator needs all the gifts of a creative writer, and something more. If Dryden were right, the successful translation ought to rank above his original. But we do not place Schlegel above Shakespeare, or the makers of our Authorised Version above the Hebrew and Greek prose-writers and poets. Dryden, in his gallant defence of his own craft, has overreached himself. Even his authority cannot outweigh the consensus of settled opinion of generations of readers.

For myself, what I ask of the translator is something far less exacting. I do not expect that he should possess all the equipment of the creative artist, or even that he should reproduce either the incidental graces or the prevailing atmosphere of his original. What I do ask is that his language should be, in Wordsworth's phrase, the language actually used by men. If he cannot or will not give us that, let him sink his ambition and stoop to conquer by providing me with a decent crib—that is, by standard definition, with a conveniently, arranged and portable dictionary.

A Plea for Backwardness

Give me man as he is not to be.—CHARLES LAMB.

'MAN is something that must be surpassed . . . Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman.' So, with a vast deal more to the same effect, wrote Nietzsche some sixty or seventy years ago. In the life of mankind, seventy years is a short time, but not so short as to be negligible. And such a seventy years! Never has progress progressed so progressively! Not in any other seven hundred years, not in a cycle of Cathay, as every schoolboy knows, has so much been done to accelerate motion, to promote solid comfort, and in a thousand wonderful ways to make the world safe for Philistinism. It is not therefore too soon to inquire, in a modest way, how Nietzsche's rope is getting on. The end of the year 1937 is an opportune time for such an inquiry.

Of progress in general, one can confidently report that, like Parliament, it still goes on. Among the more attractive novelties are gas-masks for babies. Protection against germ-bombs is, I am led to believe, as good as assured. In his own country, Nietzsche's dream of applied eugenics has become a part of practical politics. And though the honours of the pioneer go to deep-thinking Germany, her neighbour whom we used to think of as priest-ridden Russia has seen the light and almost at a stride come into the ranks of the progressive. Both these great countries are now purging themselves of dysgenic elements—variously described as Jews, Christians, Fascists, Communists, or Trotskyites—with a thoroughness unparalleled in history. By hook or by crook the process of achieving racial and doctrinal purity is being carried to its ideal end, and progress by liquidation is—if I may be allowed to mix my metaphors—strengthening the rope like a house on fire.

So I suppose we may provisionally agree that, whatever may lie on the other side of it, the rope seems to be all right. What of the

Superman? Let us be patient: something is distinctly visible on the horizon, and it may be that our seventy years' vigil will ere long be rewarded. I used to think it something of a weakness in the Nietzschean apocalypse that, although it had so much to say about the Superman, it never told us in any very precise terms what he was going to be like. He was to walk, if I remember rightly, ' with a slow gait ': he was to be as hard as nails, to be full of the will to power, and say ' Yes ' to life. Otherwise he was a bit sketchy. But whatever he was to be, I think something rather like him has arrived. But then again, as Wordsworth remarks, ' Perhaps it is not he, but someone else.' I have to admit that in one very important respect the new arrival is not at all the sort of being Nietzsche would have desired. Perhaps it is the fate of prophets to have their prophecies botched by Destiny, and their stupendous dramas acted by amateurs.

The vital difference between the imagined Superman and the being who is actually at the doors and ready to take possession of the house as soon as it is vacated by Man is very well suggested by two phrases I am about to quote from a recent pamphlet of the poet, Mr Day Lewis. Mr Lewis is discoursing on what he calls 'A Hope for Poetry'. Why he calls it a hope I cannot quite make out, unless in the sense that so many people hope to win a first prize in Tattersall's. His hopes, at any rate, are quite hypothetical. ' If,' he writes in one place, ' there is to be any future for poetry . . . ' And a little later, ' If the man of the future is to have any religion . . .' These ' ifs ' are not very encouraging!

Like Nietzsche, Mr Day Lewis envisages, not so much a new sort of man as a new quasi-human species to replace Man. Hitherto Man has been an artistic and religious animal. In the future it is possible that he may be neither. That is the prospect, and however it affects us, whether we regard the new species as superhuman, or sub-human, or merely as post-human, we had better make up our minds to the fact that the prospect is something more than a mere prospect. It is a present reality. The new species is here. Contemporary man is already, except in a few backward countries, non-artistic. He is no longer a craftsman, he has lost his heritage of folk art, he has no songs and dances, and so far as he is concerned Shakespeare and Mozart need never have been born. To him they are at most mere names, and names about which he has no curiosity. I have heard Scottish people lament that in their own country, despite the advantage of a tenacious sense of nationality, the songs of Burns and the old ballads have been displaced on the lips and in the hearts of their countrymen by the songs of the

music-hall. The same sort of thing is true of all progressive communities. And when we turn from art to religion, the case of the contemporary man is only by a shade less desperate. One great country has openly repudiated religion. In most of the countries which are still nominally Christian, practising Christians are a minority. Mr Lewis's new man, I say, has arrived: he is all around us: he is the man we are likely to meet every hour of every day.

And yet I think that Mr Lewis and the many who talk like him are seriously wrong. They are at fault, not in their bleak prognostications, but in their statement of the case. They speak of the future of Art, of Religion. But it is not the future of Art and Religion that need cause us dismay, but the future of ourselves. It is we whose survival is hypothetical.

For, if I too may be allowed to join for a moment the sons of the prophets, I should say that Mr Lewis's new man has no chance of survival, because he has no survival value. In plain terms, he is not worth keeping alive. I may say this without uncharitableness, since it is a fact which the new man, through his representative spokesman, has almost given up denying, even in theory, and has long since approved by his practice. Like Nietzsche's superman, the new man may walk with a slow gait and devise all sorts of bluff to deceive himself and others. He may even employ clever people to invent philosophies which will justify his folly. But he will not long be able to conceal, even from himself, that his life is quite literally not worth living since he gave up being a man—that it is, in the words of Hobbes, nasty, mean, dull, brutish, and short. Such a being will welcome the excitement of war as a relief from the intolerable vapidity of his normal existence. He will take to Fascism and Communism as a poisoned animal takes to water, because Totalitarian doctrines seem to furnish him with a substitute for religion and a substitute for art, at the same time as they provide him with brave words which save him the trouble of thinking. These things being so, it is quite possible that, as some sober observers have predicted, the members of the new species will presently proceed to exterminate one another. The rope will then at least have served one of the immemorial purposes of ropes, and the Nietzschean image will have received an unexpected and sinister fulfilment.

But there is another easier and broader road to extermination; and we New Zealanders, if we have no other title to distinction, may justly claim that we are in the van of the ghastly procession which has taken that road. Herein, as I have said, the new man

bears no resemblance to Nietzsche's superman. That cracked fellow had in him a touch of the heroic. He did at any rate say ' Yes ' to life. We of the broad road say ' No.' To those religious and artistic animals, our predecessors, life was an occasion of thanksgiving. We have changed all that. We are perishing, not because our response to life is one of positive hatred—even in such an attitude there might conceivably be a sort of perverse heroism —but because we are bored, because we are losing hold, giving in, lowering the flag, deserting our post.

I conclude, then, that the being who has emerged from all the talk is not the Superman, and that the rope is after all rotten. And I suggest that those speculations about the future, with its Utopias and Nowheres and Supermen, in which the world has been indulging itself for the last century or so, have done us precious little good, and have done us a great deal of harm, by leading us into day dreams and escapes from the call of the present. I even suspect that, by way of redressing the balance, it is time to raise the standard of Backwardness. We have travelled far, but we have taken the wrong road, the road that leads to death. And however eccentric the confession may sound, the old sinner Man is good enough for me. I find him, with his art and his religion, and his pack of sins and follies, so infinitely lovable that I cannot easily resign myself to the prospect of his disappearance from the earth which he has tilled so faithfully, enriched with the monuments of his religion and art, and watered with his blood. But I am well aware that my likes and dislikes have nothing to do with the matter. Well then, I like him in the sporting sense. I like his chances of survival. And that is why I do not end, as some other prophets do, on a note of despair. It may be true, as we are being told so often, that civilisation is in danger. If that is so, I see no hope from the parodists of civilisation, whether of the Right or of the Left. My hope, under heaven, is in the Old Man. To him, rallied under the banner of Backwardness, I look confidently to maintain the fabric of the world.

axton

A TIME TO LAUGH: Sinclaire