The Trembling of the Veil

1922

W. B. Yeats

I

At the end of the 'eighties my father and mother, my brother and sisters and myself, all newly arrived from Dublin, were settled in Bedford Park in a red-brick house with several mantelpieces of wood, copied from marble mantelpieces designed by the brothers Adam, a balcony and a little garden shadowed by a great horse-chestnut tree. Years before we had lived there, when the crooked ostentatiously picturesque streets with great trees casting great shadows had been a new enthusiasm: the Pre-Raphaelite movement at last affecting life. But now exaggerated criticism had taken the place of enthusiasm, the tiled roofs, the first in modern London, were

said to leak, which they did not, and the drains to be bad, though that was no longer true; and I imagine that houses were cheap. I remember feeling disappointed because the co-operative stores, with their little seventeenth century panes, had lost the romance they had when I had passed them still unfinished on my way to school; and because the public house, called The Tabard after Chaucer's Inn, was so plainly a common public house; and because the great sign of a trumpeter designed by Rooke, the Pre-Raphaelite artist, had been freshened by some inferior hand. The big red-brick church had never pleased me, and I was accustomed, when I saw the wooden balustrade that ran along the slanting edge of the roof where nobody ever walked or could walk, to remember the opinion of some architect

friend of my father's, that it had been put there to keep the birds from falling off. Still, however, it had some village characters and helped us to feel not wholly lost in the metropolis. I no longer went to church as a regular habit, but go I sometimes did, for one Sunday morning I saw these words painted on a board in the porch: "The congregation are requested to kneel during prayers; the kneelers are afterwards to be hung upon pegs provided for the purpose." In front of every seat hung a little cushion and these cushions were called "kneelers." Presently the joke ran through the community, where there were many artists who considered religion at best an unimportant accessory to good architecture and who disliked that particular church.

II

I could not understand where the charm had gone that I had felt, when as a school-boy of twelve or thirteen I had played among the unfinished houses, once leaving the marks of my two hands, blacked by a fall among some paint, upon a white balustrade. Sometimes I thought it was because these were real houses, while my play had been among toy-houses some day to be inhabited by imaginary people full of the happiness that one can see in picture books.

I was in all things Pre-Raphaelite. When I was fifteen or sixteen my father had told me about Rossetti and Blake and given me their poetry to read; and once at Liverpool on my way to Sligo I had seen Dante's Dream in the gallery there, a

picture painted when Rossetti had lost his dramatic power and to-day not very pleasing to me, and its colour, its people, its romantic architecture had blotted all other pictures away. It was a perpetual bewilderment that my father, who had begun life as a Pre-Raphaelite painter, now painted portraits of the first comer, children selling newspapers, or a consumptive girl with a basket of fish upon her head, and that when, moved perhaps by some memory of his youth, he chose some theme from poetic tradition, he would soon weary and leave it unfinished. I had seen the change coming bit by bit and its defence elaborated by young men fresh from the Paris art-schools. "We must paint what is in front of us," or "A man must be of his own time," they would say, and if I spoke of Blake or Rossetti they would point out

his bad drawing and tell me to admire Carolus Duran and Bastien-Lepage. Then, too, they were very ignorant men; they read nothing, for nothing mattered but "knowing how to paint," being in reaction against a generation that seemed to have wasted its time upon so many things. I thought myself alone in hating these young men, now indeed getting towards middle life, their contempt for the past, their monopoly of the future, but in a few months I was to discover others of my own age, who thought as I did, for it is not true that youth looks before it with the mechanical gaze of a well-drilled soldier. Its quarrel is not with the past, but with the present, where its elders are so obviously powerful and no cause seems lost if it seem to threaten that power. Does cultivated youth ever really love the future, where the eye can

discover no persecuted Royalty hidden among oak leaves, though from it certainly does come so much proletarian rhetoric?

I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only. I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church out of poetic tradition: a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians. I wished for a world, where I could discover this tradition perpetually, and not in pictures and in poems only, but in tiles round the chimney-piece and in the hangings that

kept out the draught. I had even created a dogma: "Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking may be the nearest I can go to truth." When I listened they seemed always to speak of one thing only: they, their loves, every incident of their lives, were steeped in the supernatural. Could even Titian's "Ariosto" that I loved beyond other portraits have its grave look, as if waiting for some perfect final event, if the painters before Titian had not learned portraiture, while painting into the corner of compositions full of saints and Madonnas, their kneeling patrons? At seventeen years old I was already an old-fashioned brass cannon full of shot, and

nothing had kept me from going off but a doubt as to my capacity to shoot straight.

III

I was not an industrious student and knew only what I had found by accident and I found nothing I cared for after Titian, and Titian I knew from an imitation of his Supper of Emmaus in Dublin, till Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites; and among my father's friends were no Pre-Raphaelites. Some indeed had come to Bedford Park in the enthusiasm of the first building and others to be near those that had. There was Todhunter, a well-off man who had bought my father's pictures while my father was still Pre-Raphaelite; once a Dublin doctor he was now a poet and a writer of poetical plays; a tall, sallow, lank, melancholy man, a good

scholar and a good intellect; and with him my father carried on a warm exasperated friendship, fed I think by old memories and wasted by quarrels over matters of opinion. Of all the survivors he was the most dejected and the least estranged, and I remember encouraging him, with a sense of worship shared, to buy a very expensive carpet designed by Morris. He displayed it without strong liking and would have agreed had there been any to find fault. If he had liked anything strongly he might have been a famous man, for a few years later he was to write, under some casual patriotic impulse, certain excellent verses now in all Irish anthologies; but with him every book was a new planting, and not a new bud on an old bough. He had I think no peace in himself. But my father's chief friend was York Powell, a famous Oxford

Professor of history, a broad-built, broad-headed, brown-bearded man clothed in heavy blue cloth and looking, but for his glasses and the dim sight of a student, like some captain in the merchant service. One often passed with pleasure from Todhunter's company to that of one who was almost ostentatiously at peace. He cared nothing for philosophy, nothing for economics, nothing for the policy of nations; for history, as he saw it, was a memory of men who were amusing or exciting to think about. He impressed all who met him, and seemed to some a man of genius, but he had not enough ambition to shape his thought, or conviction to give rhythm to his style and remained always a poor writer. I was too full of unfinished speculations and premature convictions to value rightly his conversation, informed by a vast

erudition, which would give itself to every casual association of speech and company, precisely because he had neither cause nor design. My father, however, found Powell's concrete narrative manner in talk a necessary completion of his own, and when I asked him in a letter many years later where he got his philosophy replied "from York Powell" and thereon added, no doubt remembering that Powell was without ideas, "by looking at him." Then there was a good listener, a painter in whose hall hung a big picture painted in his student days of Ulysses sailing home from the Phaeacian court, an orange and a skin of wine at his side, blue mountains towering behind; but who lived by drawing domestic scenes and lovers' meetings for a weekly magazine that had an immense circulation among the

imperfectly educated. To escape the boredom of work, which he never turned to but under pressure of necessity and usually late at night, with the publisher's messenger in the hall, he had half-filled his studio with mechanical toys, of his own invention, and perpetually increased their number. A model railway train at intervals puffed its way along the walls, passing several railway stations and signal boxes; and on the floor lay a camp with attacking and defending soldiers and a fortification that blew up when the attackers fired a pea through a certain window; while a large model of a Thames barge hung from the ceiling. Opposite our house lived an old artist who worked also for the illustrated papers for a living, but painted landscapes for his pleasure, and of him I remember nothing except that he had outlived ambition, was a good

listener, and that my father explained his gaunt appearance by his descent from Pocahontas. If all these men were a little like becalmed ships, there was certainly one man whose sails were full. Three or four doors off on our side of the road lived a decorative artist in all the naïve confidence of popular ideals and the public approval. He was our daily comedy. "I myself and Sir Frederick Leighton are the greatest decorative artists of the age," was among his sayings, and a great Lych-gate, bought from some country church-yard, reared its thatched roof, meant to shelter bearers and coffin, above the entrance to his front garden to show that he at any rate knew nothing of discouragement. In this fairly numerous company--there were others though no other face rises before me--my father and York Powell

found listeners for a conversation that had no special loyalties, or antagonisms; while I could only talk upon set topics, being in the heat of my youth, and the topics that filled me with excitement were never spoken of.

IV

Bedford Park had a red brick clubhouse with a little theatre that began to stir my imagination. I persuaded Todhunter to write a pastoral play and have it performed there.

A couple of years before, while we were still in Dublin, he had given at Hengler's Circus, remodelled as a Greek Theatre, a most expensive performance of his Helena of Troas, an oratorical Swinburnian play which I had thought as

unactable as it was unreadable. Since I was seventeen I had constantly tested my own ambition with Keats's praise of him who "left great verses to a little clan," so it was but natural that I should spend an evening persuading him that we had nothing to do with the great public, that it should be a point of honour to be content with our own little public, that he should write of shepherds and shepherdesses because people would expect them to talk poetry and move without melodrama. He wrote his Sicilian Idyll, which I have not looked at for thirty years, and never rated very high as poetry, and had the one unmistakable success of his life. The little theatre was full for twice the number of performances intended, for artists, men of letters and students had come from all over London.

I made through these performances a close friend and a discovery that was to influence my life. Todhunter had engaged several professional actors with a little reputation, but had given the chief woman's part to Florence Farr, who had qualities no contemporary professional practice could have increased, the chief man's part to an amateur, Heron Allen, solicitor, fiddler and popular writer on palmistry. Heron Allen and Florence Farr read poetry for their pleasure. While they were upon the stage no one else could hold an eye or an ear. Their speech was music, the poetry acquired a nobility, a passionate austerity that made it seem akin for certain moments to the great poetry of the world. Heron Allen, who had never spoken in public before except to lecture upon the violin, had the wisdom to reduce his acting to a series of poses,

to be the stately shepherd with not more gesture than was needed to "twitch his mantle blue" and to let his grace be foil to Florence Farr's more impassioned delivery. When they closed their mouths, and some other player opened his, breaking up the verse to make it conversational, jerking his body or his arms that he might seem no austere poetical image but very man, I listened in raging hatred. I kept my seat with difficulty, I searched my memory for insulting phrases, I even muttered them to myself that the people about might hear. I had discovered for the first time that in the performance of all drama that depends for its effect upon beauty of language, poetical culture may be more important than professional experience.

Florence Farr lived in lodgings some twenty minutes' walk away at Brook Green, and I was soon a constant caller, talking over plays that I would some day write her. She had three great gifts, a tranquil beauty like that of Demeter's image near the British Museum reading room door, and an incomparable sense of rhythm and a beautiful voice, the seeming natural expression of the image. And yet there was scarce another gift that she did not value above those three. We all have our simplifying image, our genius, and such hard burden does it lay upon us that, but for the praise of others, we would deride it and hunt it away. She could only express hers through an unfashionable art, an art that has scarce existed since the seventeenth century, and so could only earn unimportant occasional praise. She would dress

without care or calculation as if to hide her beauty and seem contemptuous of its power. If a man fell in love with her she would notice that she had seen just that movement upon the stage or had heard just that intonation and all seemed unreal. If she read out some poem in English or in French all was passion, all a traditional splendour, but she spoke of actual things with a cold wit or under the strain of paradox. Wit and paradox alike sought to pull down whatever had tradition or passion and she was soon to spend her days in the British Museum reading room and become erudite in many heterogeneous studies moved by an insatiable, destroying curiosity. I formed with her an enduring friendship that was an enduring exasperation--"why do you play the part with a bent back and a squeak in the voice? How can you be a

character actor, you who hate all our life, you who belong to a life that is a vision?" But argument was no use, and some Nurse in Euripedes must be played with all an old woman's infirmities and not as I would have it, with all a Sybil's majesty, because "it is no use doing what nobody wants," or because she would show that she "could do what the others did."

I used in my rage to compare her thoughts, when her worst mood was upon her, to a game called Spillikens which I had seen played in my childhood with little pieces of bone that you had to draw out with a hook from a bundle of like pieces. A bundle of bones instead of Demeter's golden sheaf! Her sitting room at the Brook Green lodging house was soon a reflection of her mind, the walls covered with musical instruments, pieces

of oriental drapery, and Egyptian gods and goddesses painted by herself in the British Museum.

V

Presently a hansom drove up to our door at Bedford Park with Miss Maud Gonne, who brought an introduction to my father from old John O'Leary, the Fenian leader. She vexed my father by praise of war, war for its own sake, not as the creator of certain virtues but as if there were some virtue in excitement itself. I supported her against my father, which vexed him the more, though he might have understood that, apart from the fact that Carolus Duran and Bastien-Lepage were somehow involved, a man so young as I could not have differed from a woman so beautiful and so young. To-day, with her

great height and the unchangeable lineaments of her form, she looks the Sybil I would have had played by Florence Farr, but in that day she seemed a classical impersonation of the Spring, the Virgilian commendation "She walks like a goddess" made for her alone. Her complexion was luminous, like that of apple blossom through which the light falls, and I remember her standing that first day by a great heap of such blossoms in the window. In the next few years I saw her always when she passed to and fro between Dublin and Paris, surrounded, no matter how rapid her journey and how brief her stay at either end of it, by cages full of birds, canaries, finches of all kinds, dogs, a parrot, and once a full-grown hawk from Donegal. Once when I saw her to her railway carriage I noticed how the cages

obstructed wraps and cushions and wondered what her fellow travellers would say, but the carriage remained empty. It was years before I could see into the mind that lay hidden under so much beauty and so much energy.

VI

Some quarter of an hour's walk from Bedford Park, out on the high road to Richmond, lived W. E. Henley, and I, like many others, began under him my education. His portrait, a lithograph by Rothenstein, hangs over my mantelpiece among portraits of other friends. He is drawn standing, but because doubtless of his crippled legs he leans forward, resting his elbows upon some slightly suggested object--a table or a window-sill. His heavy figure and powerful head, the

disordered hair standing upright, his short irregular beard and moustache, his lined and wrinkled face, his eyes steadily fixed upon some object, in complete confidence and self-possession, and yet as in half-broken reverie, all are there exactly as I remember him. I have seen other portraits and they too show him exactly as I remember him, as though he had but one appearance and that seen fully at the first glance and by all alike. He was most human--human I used to say like one of Shakespeare's characters--and yet pressed and pummelled, as it were, into a single attitude, almost into a gesture and a speech as by some overwhelming situation. I disagreed with him about everything, but I admired him beyond words. With the exception of some early poems founded upon old French models I

disliked his poetry, mainly because he wrote in vers libre, which I associated with Tyndall and Huxley, and Bastien-Lepage's clownish peasant staring with vacant eyes at her great boots; and filled it with unimpassioned description of an hospital ward where his leg had been amputated. I wanted the strongest passions, passions that had nothing to do with observation, sung in metrical forms that seemed old enough to be sung by men half-asleep or riding upon a journey. Furthermore, Pre-Raphaelism affected him as some people are affected by a cat in the room, and though he professed himself at our first meeting without political interests or convictions, he soon grew into a violent unionist and imperialist. I used to say when I spoke of his poems: "He is like a great actor with a bad part; yet who would look at Hamlet

in the grave scene if Salvini played the grave-digger?" and I might so have explained much that he said and did. I meant that he was like a great actor of passion--character-acting meant nothing to me for many years--and an actor of passion will display some one quality of soul, personified again and again, just as a great poetical painter, Titian, Botticelli, Rossetti, may depend for his greatness upon a type of beauty which presently we call by his name. Irving, the last of the sort on the English stage, and in modern England and France it is the rarest sort, never moved me but in the expression of intellectual pride and though I saw Salvini but once I am convinced that his genius was a kind of animal nobility. Henley, half inarticulate--"I am very costive," he would say--beset with personal quarrels, built up an image of power and

magnanimity till it became, at moments, when seen as it were by lightning, his true self. Half his opinions were the contrivance of a sub-consciousness that sought always to bring life to the dramatic crisis and expression to that point of artifice where the true self could find its tongue. Without opponents there had been no drama, and in his youth Ruskinism and Pre-Raphaelitism, for he was of my father's generation, were the only possible opponents. How could one resent his prejudice when, that he himself might play a worthy part, he must find beyond the common rout, whom he derided and flouted daily, opponents he could imagine moulded like himself? Once he said to me in the height of his imperial propaganda, "Tell those young men in Ireland that this great thing must go on. They say Ireland is not

fit for self-government, but that is nonsense. It is as fit as any other European country, but we cannot grant it." And then he spoke of his desire to found and edit a Dublin newspaper. It would have expounded the Gaelic propaganda then beginning, though Dr Hyde had, as yet, no league, our old stories, our modern literature--everything that did not demand any shred or patch of government. He dreamed of a tyranny, but it was that of Cosimo de' Medici.

VII

We gathered on Sunday evenings in two rooms, with folding doors between, and hung, I think, with photographs from Dutch masters, and in one room there was always, I think, a table with cold meat. I can recall but one elderly man--

Dunn his name was--rather silent and full of good sense, an old friend of Henley's. We were young men, none as yet established in his own, or in the world's opinion, and Henley was our leader and our confidant. One evening, I found him alone amused and exasperated: "Young A----," he cried "has just been round to ask my advice. Would I think it a wise thing if he bolted with Mrs B----? 'Have you quite determined to do it?' I asked him. 'Quite.' 'Well,' I said, 'in that case I refuse to give you any advice.'" Mrs B---- was a beautiful talented woman, who, as the Welsh Triad said of Guinievere, "was much given to being carried off." I think we listened to him, and often obeyed him, partly because he was quite plainly not upon the side of our parents. We might have a different ground of quarrel, but the result seemed more important

than the ground, and his confident manner and speech made us believe, perhaps for the first time, in victory. And besides, if he did denounce, and in my case he certainly did, what we held in secret reverence, he never failed to associate it with things or persons that did not move us to reverence. Once I found him just returned from some art congress in Liverpool or in Manchester. "The salvation armyism of art," he called it, and gave a grotesque description of some city councillor he had found admiring Turner. Henley, who hated all that Ruskin praised, thereupon derided Turner, and finding the city councillor the next day on the other side of the gallery, admiring some Pre-Raphaelite there, derided that Pre-Raphaelite. The third day Henley discovered the poor man on a chair in the middle of the room staring

disconsolately upon the floor. He terrified us also and certainly I did not dare, and I think none of us dared, to speak our admiration for book or picture he condemned, but he made us feel always our importance, and no man among us could do good work, or show the promise of it, and lack his praise. I can remember meeting of a Sunday night Charles Whibley, Kenneth Grahame, author of The Golden Age, Barry Pain, now a well-known novelist, R. A. M. Stevenson, art critic and a famous talker, George Wyndham, later on a cabinet minister and Irish chief secretary, and now or later Oscar Wilde, who was some ten years older than the rest of us. But faces and names are vague to me and while faces that I met but once may rise clearly before me, a face met on many a Sunday has perhaps vanished. Kipling came

sometimes, I think, but I never met him; and Stepniak, the Nihilist, whom I knew well elsewhere but not there, said--"I cannot go more than once a year, it is too exhausting." Henley got the best out of us all, because he had made us accept him as our judge and we knew that his judgment could neither sleep, nor be softened, nor changed, nor turned aside. When I think of him, the antithesis that is the foundation of human nature being ever in my sight, I see his crippled legs as though he were some Vulcan perpetually forging swords for other men to use; and certainly I always thought of C----, a fine classical scholar, a pale and seemingly gentle man, as our chief swordsman and bravo. When Henley founded his weekly newspaper, first The Scots, afterwards The National Observer, this young man wrote articles and

reviews notorious for savage wit; and years afterwards when The National Observer was dead, Henley dying, and our cavern of outlaws empty, I met him in Paris very sad and I think very poor. "Nobody will employ me now," he said. "Your master is gone," I answered, "and you are like the spear in an old Irish story that had to be kept dipped in poppy-juice that it might not go about killing people on its own account." I wrote my first good lyrics and tolerable essays for The National Observer, and as I always signed my work could go my own road in some measure. Henley often revised my lyrics, crossing out a line or a stanza and writing in one of his own, and I was comforted by my belief that he also rewrote Kipling then in the first flood of popularity. At first, indeed, I was ashamed of being rewritten and thought that others were

not, and only began investigation when the editorial characteristics--epigrams, archaisms, and all--appeared in the article upon Paris fashions and in that upon opium by an Egyptian Pasha. I was not compelled to full conformity for verse is plainly stubborn; and in prose, that I might avoid unacceptable opinions, I wrote nothing but ghost or fairy stories, picked up from my mother or some pilot at Rosses Point and Henley saw that I must needs mix a palette fitted to my subject matter. But if he had changed every "has" into "hath" I would have let him, for had not we sunned ourselves in his generosity? "My young men outdo me and they write better than I," he wrote in some letter praising Charles Whibley's work, and to another friend with a copy of my Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland:

"See what a fine thing has been written by one of my lads."

VIII

My first meeting with Oscar Wilde was an astonishment. I never before heard a man talking with perfect sentences, as if he had written them all over night with labour and yet all spontaneous. There was present that night at Henley's, by right of propinquity or of accident, a man full of the secret spite of dulness, who interrupted from time to time, and always to check or disorder thought; and I noticed with what mastery he was foiled and thrown. I noticed, too, that the impression of artificiality that I think all Wilde's listeners have recorded came from the perfect rounding of the sentences and from the deliberation that

made it possible. That very impression helped him, as the effect of metre, or of the antithetical prose of the seventeenth century, which is itself a true metre, helped its writers, for he could pass without incongruity from some unforeseen, swift stroke of wit to elaborate reverie. I heard him say a few nights later: "Give me The Winter's Tale, 'Daffodils that come before the swallow dare' but not King Lear. What is King Lear but poor life staggering in the fog?" and the slow, carefully modulated cadence sounded natural to my ears. That first night he praised Walter Pater's Studies in the History of the Renaissance: "It is my golden book; I never travel anywhere without it; but it is the very flower of decadence: the last trumpet should have sounded the moment it was written." "But," said the dull man, "would you not

have given us time to read it?" "Oh no," was the retort, "there would have been plenty of time afterwards--in either world." I think he seemed to us, baffled as we were by youth, or by infirmity, a triumphant figure, and to some of us a figure from another age, an audacious Italian fifteenth century figure. A few weeks before I had heard one of my father's friends, an official in a publishing firm that had employed both Wilde and Henley as editors, blaming Henley who was "no use except under control" and praising Wilde, "so indolent but such a genius"; and now the firm became the topic of our talk. "How often do you go to the office?" said Henley. "I used to go three times a week," said Wilde, "for an hour a day but I have since struck off one of the days." "My God," said Henley, "I went five times a week for five hours a

day and when I wanted to strike off a day they had a special committee meeting." "Furthermore," was Wilde's answer, "I never answered their letters. I have known men come to London full of bright prospects and seen them complete wrecks in a few months through a habit of answering letters." He too knew how to keep our elders in their place, and his method was plainly the more successful, for Henley had been dismissed. "No he is not an aesthete," Henley commented later, being somewhat embarrassed by Wilde's Pre-Raphaelite entanglement; "one soon finds that he is a scholar and a gentleman." And when I dined with Wilde a few days afterwards he began at once, "I had to strain every nerve to equal that man at all"; and I was too loyal to speak my thought: "You and not he said all the brilliant things." He like the rest of us had

felt the strain of an intensity that seemed to hold life at the point of drama. He had said on that first meeting "The basis of literary friendship is mixing the poisoned bowl"; and for a few weeks Henley and he became close friends till, the astonishment of their meeting over, diversity of character and ambition pushed them apart, and, with half the cavern helping, Henley began mixing the poisoned bowl for Wilde. Yet Henley never wholly lost that first admiration, for after Wilde's downfall he said to me: "Why did he do it? I told my lads to attack him and yet we might have fought under his banner."

IX

It became the custom, both at Henley's and at Bedford Park, to say that R. A. M.

Stevenson, who frequented both circles, was the better talker. Wilde had been trussed up like a turkey by undergraduates, dragged up and down a hill, his champagne emptied into the ice tub, hooted in the streets of various towns, and I think stoned, and no newspaper named him but in scorn; his manner had hardened to meet opposition and at times he allowed one to see an unpardonable insolence. His charm was acquired and systematized, a mask which he wore only when it pleased him, while the charm of Stevenson belonged to him like the colour of his hair. If Stevenson's talk became monologue we did not know it, because our one object was to show by our attention that he need never leave off. If thought failed him we would not combat what he had said, or start some new theme, but would encourage him

with a question; and one felt that it had been always so from childhood up. His mind was full of phantasy for phantasy's sake and he gave as good entertainment in monologue as his cousin Robert Louis in poem or story. He was always "supposing"; "Suppose you had two millions what would you do with it?" and "Suppose you were in Spain and in love how would you propose?" I recall him one afternoon at our house at Bedford Park, surrounded by my brother and sisters and a little group of my father's friends, describing proposals in half a dozen countries. There your father did it, dressed in such and such a way with such and such words, and there a friend must wait for the lady outside the chapel door, sprinkle her with holy water and say, "My friend Jones is dying for love of you." But when it was over those quaint

descriptions, so full of laughter and sympathy, faded or remained in the memory as something alien from one's own life, like a dance I once saw in a great house, where beautifully dressed children wound a long ribbon in and out as they danced. I was not of Stevenson's party and mainly I think because he had written a book in praise of Velasquez, praise at that time universal wherever Pre-Raphaelism was accurst, and to my mind, that had to pick its symbols where its ignorance permitted, Velasquez seemed the first bored celebrant of boredom. I was convinced from some obscure meditation that Stevenson's conversational method had joined him to my elders and to the indifferent world, as though it were right for old men, and unambitious men and all women, to be content with charm and humour. It was

the prerogative of youth to take sides and when Wilde said: "Mr Bernard Shaw has no enemies but is intensely disliked by all his friends," I knew it to be a phrase I should never forget, and felt revenged upon a notorious hater of romance, whose generosity and courage I could not fathom.

X

I saw a good deal of Wilde at that time--was it 1887 or 1888?--I have no way of fixing the date except that I had published my first book The Wanderings of Usheen and that Wilde had not yet published his Decay of Lying. He had, before our first meeting, reviewed my book and despite its vagueness of intention, and the inexactness of its speech, praised without qualification; and

what was worth more than any review he had talked about it and now he asked me to eat my Christmas dinner with him believing, I imagine, that I was alone in London. He had just renounced his velveteen, and even those cuffs turned backward over the sleeves, and had begun to dress very carefully in the fashion of the moment. He lived in a little house at Chelsea that the architect Godwin had decorated with an elegance that owed something to Whistler. There was nothing mediaeval, nor Pre-Raphaelite, no cupboard door with figures upon flat gold, no peacock blue, no dark background. I remember vaguely a white drawing room with Whistler etchings, "let in" to white panels, and a dining room all white, chairs, walls, mantelpiece, carpet, except for a diamond-shaped piece of red cloth in the middle of the table under a

terra-cotta statuette, and I think a red shaded lamp hanging from the ceiling to a little above the statuette. It was perhaps too perfect in its unity, his past of a few years before had gone too completely, and I remember thinking that the perfect harmony of his life there, with his beautiful wife and his two young children, suggested some deliberate artistic composition.

He commended and dispraised himself during dinner by attributing characteristics like his own to his country: "We Irish are too poetical to be poets; we are a nation of brilliant failures, but we are the greatest talkers since the Greeks." When dinner was over he read me from the proofs of The Decay of Lying and when he came to the sentence: "Schopenhauer has analysed the

pessimism that characterises modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy," I said, "Why do you change 'sad' to 'melancholy'?" He replied that he wanted a full sound at the close of his sentence, and I thought it no excuse and an example of the vague impressiveness that spoilt his writing for me. Only when he spoke, or when his writing was the mirror of his speech, or in some simple fairy tale, had he words exact enough to hold a subtle ear. He alarmed me, though not as Henley did, for I never left his house thinking myself fool or dunce. He flattered the intellect of every man he liked; he made me tell him long Irish stories and compared my art of storytelling to Homer's; and once when he had described himself as writing in the census paper "age 19, profession genius,

infirmity talent" the other guest, a young journalist fresh from Oxford or Cambridge, said, "What should I have written?" and was told that it should have been "profession talent, infirmity genius." When, however, I called, wearing shoes a little too yellow--unblackened leather had just become fashionable--I realized their extravagance when I saw his eyes fixed upon them; and another day Wilde asked me to tell his little boy a fairy story, and I had but got as far as "Once upon a time there was a giant" when the little boy screamed and ran out of the room. Wilde looked grave and I was plunged into the shame of clumsiness that afflicts the young. When I asked for some literary gossip for some provincial newspaper, that paid me a few shillings a month, he explained very explicitly that writing

literary gossip was no job for a gentleman.

Though to be compared to Homer passed the time pleasantly, I had not been greatly perturbed had he stopped me with: "Is it a long story?" as Henley would certainly have done. I was abashed before him as wit and man of the world alone. I remember that he deprecated the very general belief in his success or his efficiency, and I think with sincerity. One form of success had gone: he was no more the lion of the season and he had not discovered his gift for writing comedy, yet I think I knew him at the happiest moment of his life. No scandal had touched his name, his fame as a talker was growing among his equals, and he seemed to live in the enjoyment of his own spontaneity. One day he began: "I

have been inventing a Christian heresy," and he told a detailed story, in the style of some early father, of how Christ recovered after the Crucifixion, and escaping from the tomb, lived on for many years, the one man upon earth who knew the falsehood of Christianity. Once St Paul visited his town and he alone in the carpenters' quarter did not go to hear him preach. The other carpenters noticed that henceforth, for some unknown reason, he kept his hands covered. A few days afterwards I found Wilde with smock frocks in various colours spread out upon the floor in front of him, while a missionary explained that he did not object to the heathen going naked upon week days, but insisted upon clothes in church. He had brought the smock frocks in a cab that the only art-critic whose fame had reached Central Africa might

select a colour; so Wilde sat there weighing all with a conscious ecclesiastic solemnity.

XI

Of late years I have often explained Wilde to myself by his family history. His father was a friend or acquaintance of my father's father and among my family traditions there is an old Dublin riddle: "Why are Sir William Wilde's nails so black?" Answer, "Because he has scratched himself." And there is an old story still current in Dublin of Lady Wilde saying to a servant, "Why do you put the plates on the coal-scuttle? What are the chairs meant for?" They were famous people and there are many like stories; and even a horrible folk story, the invention of some Connaught peasant,

that tells how Sir William Wilde took out the eyes of some men, who had come to consult him as an oculist, and laid them upon a plate, intending to replace them in a moment, and how the eyes were eaten by a cat. As a certain friend of mine, who has made a prolonged study of the nature of cats, said when he first heard the tale, "Cats love eyes." The Wilde family was clearly of the sort that fed the imagination of Charles Lever, dirty, untidy, daring, and what Charles Lever, who loved more normal activities, might not have valued so highly, very imaginative and learned. Lady Wilde, who when I knew her received her friends with blinds drawn and shutters closed that none might see her withered face, longed always perhaps, though certainly amid much self-mockery, for some impossible splendour of character and

circumstance. She lived near her son in level Chelsea, but I have heard her say, "I want to live on some high place, Primrose Hill or Highgate, because I was an eagle in my youth." I think her son lived with no self-mockery at all an imaginary life; perpetually performed a play which was in all things the opposite of all that he had known in childhood and early youth; never put off completely his wonder at opening his eyes every morning on his own beautiful house, and in remembering that he had dined yesterday with a duchess, and that he delighted in Flaubert and Pater, read Homer in the original and not as a schoolmaster reads him for the grammar. I think, too, that because of all that half-civilized blood in his veins he could not endure the sedentary toil of creative art and so remained a man of action,

exaggerating, for the sake of immediate effect, every trick learned from his masters, turning their easel painting into painted scenes. He was a parvenu, but a parvenu whose whole bearing proved that if he did dedicate every story in The House of Pomegranates to a lady of title, it was but to show that he was Jack and the social ladder his pantomime beanstalk. "Did you ever hear him say 'Marquess of Dimmesdale'?" a friend of his once asked me. "He does not say 'the Duke of York' with any pleasure."

He told me once that he had been offered a safe seat in Parliament and, had he accepted, he might have had a career like that of Beaconsfield, whose early style resembles his, being meant for crowds, for excitement, for hurried decisions, for immediate triumphs. Such men get their

sincerity, if at all, from the contact of events; the dinner table was Wilde's event and made him the greatest talker of his time, and his plays and dialogues have what merit they possess from being now an imitation, now a record, of his talk. Even in those days I would often defend him by saying that his very admiration for his predecessors in poetry, for Browning, for Swinburne and Rossetti, in their first vogue while he was a very young man, made any success seem impossible that could satisfy his immense ambition: never but once before had the artist seemed so great, never had the work of art seemed so difficult. I would then compare him with Benvenuto Cellini who, coming after Michael Angelo, found nothing left to do so satisfactory as to turn bravo and quarrel with the man who broke Michael Angelo's nose.

XII

I cannot remember who first brought me to the old stable beside Kelmscott House, William Morris's house at Hammersmith, and to the debates held there upon Sunday evenings by the Socialist League. I was soon of the little group who had supper with Morris afterwards. I met at these suppers very constantly Walter Crane, Emery Walker, in association with Cobden Sanderson, the printer of many fine books, and less constantly Bernard Shaw and Cockerell, now of the Museum of Cambridge, and perhaps but once or twice Hyndman the Socialist and the Anarchist Prince Kropotkin. There, too, one always met certain more or less educated workmen, rough of speech and manner, with a conviction to meet every

turn. I was told by one of them, on a night when I had done perhaps more than my share of the talking, that I had talked more nonsense in one evening than he had heard in the whole course of his past life. I had merely preferred Parnell, then at the height of his career, to Michael Davitt, who had wrecked his Irish influence by international politics. We sat round a long unpolished and unpainted trestle table of new wood in a room where hung Rossetti's Pomegranate, a portrait of Mrs. Morris, and where one wall and part of the ceiling were covered by a great Persian carpet. Morris had said somewhere or other that carpets were meant for people who took their shoes off when they entered a house and were most in place upon a tent floor. I was a little disappointed in the house, for Morris was an old man content

at last to gather beautiful things rather than to arrange a beautiful house. I saw the drawing-room once or twice, and there alone all my sense of decoration, founded upon the background of Rossetti's pictures, was satisfied by a big cupboard painted with a scene from Chaucer by Burne-Jones; but even there were objects, perhaps a chair or a little table, that seemed accidental, bought hurriedly perhaps and with little thought, to make wife or daughter comfortable. I had read as a boy, in books belonging to my father, the third volume of The Earthly Paradise, and The Defence of Guenevere, which pleased me less, but had not opened either for a long time. The Man Who Never Laughed Again had seemed the most wonderful of tales till my father had accused me of preferring Morris to Keats, got angry about it, and

put me altogether out of countenance. He had spoiled my pleasure, for now I questioned while I read and at last ceased to read; nor had Morris written as yet those prose romances that became after his death so great a joy that they were the only books I was ever to read slowly that I might not come too quickly to the end. It was now Morris himself that stirred my interest, and I took to him first because of some little tricks of speech and body that reminded me of my old grandfather in Sligo, but soon discovered his spontaneity and joy and made him my chief of men. To-day I do not set his poetry very high, but for an odd altogether wonderful line, or thought; and yet, if some angel offered me the choice, I would choose to live his life, poetry and all, rather than my own or any other man's. A reproduction of his

portrait by Watts hangs over my mantelpiece with Henley's, and those of other friends. Its grave wide-open eyes, like the eyes of some dreaming beast, remind me of the open eyes of Titian's "Ariosto," while the broad vigorous body suggests a mind that has no need of the intellect to remain sane, though it give itself to every phantasy: the dreamer of the middle ages. It is "the fool of fairy ... wide and wild as a hill," the resolute European image that yet half remembers Buddha's motionless meditation, and has no trait in common with the wavering, lean image of hungry speculation, that cannot but fill the mind's eye because of certain famous Hamlets of our stage. Shakespeare himself foreshadowed a symbolic change, that shows a change in the whole temperament of the world, for though he called his Hamlet "fat" and

even "scant of breath," he thrust between his fingers agile rapier and dagger.

The dream world of Morris was as much the antithesis of daily life as with other men of genius, but he was never conscious of the antithesis and so knew nothing of intellectual suffering. His intellect, unexhausted by speculation or casuistry, was wholly at the service of hand and eye, and whatever he pleased he did with an unheard of ease and simplicity, and if style and vocabulary were at times monotonous, he could not have made them otherwise without ceasing to be himself. Instead of the language of Chaucer and Shakespeare, its warp fresh from field and market, if the woof were learned, his age offered him a speech, exhausted from

abstraction, that only returned to its full vitality when written learnedly and slowly.

The roots of his antithetical dream were visible enough: a never idle man of great physical strength and extremely irascible--did he not fling a badly baked plum pudding through the window upon Christmas Day?--a man more joyous than any intellectual man of our world, called himself "the idle singer of an empty day," created new forms of melancholy, and faint persons, like the knights and ladies of Burne-Jones, who are never, no not once in forty volumes, put out of temper. A blunderer who had said to the only unconverted man at a Socialist picnic in Dublin, to prove that equality came easy, "I was brought up a gentleman and now as you can see associate with all sorts" and left wounds thereby that rankled

after twenty years, a man of whom I have heard it said "He is always afraid that he is doing something wrong and generally is," wrote long stories with apparently no other object than that his persons might show to one another, through situations of poignant difficulty the most exquisite tact.

He did not project like Henley or like Wilde, an image of himself, because having all his imagination set upon making and doing he had little self knowledge. He imagined instead new conditions of making and doing; and in the teeth of those scientific generalizations that cowed my boyhood, I can see some like imagining in every great change, believing that the first flying fish first leaped, not because it

sought "adaptation" to the air, but out of horror of the sea.

XIII

Soon after I began to attend the lectures a French class was started in the old coach-house for certain young Socialists who planned a tour in France, and I joined it, and was for a time a model student constantly encouraged by the compliments of the old French mistress. I told my father of the class, and he asked me to get my sisters admitted. I made difficulties and put off speaking of the matter, for I knew that the new and admirable self I was making would turn, under family eyes, into plain rag-doll. How could I pretend to be industrious, and even carry dramatisation to the point of learning my lessons, when my sisters

were there and knew that I was nothing of the kind? But I had no argument I could use, and my sisters were admitted. They said nothing unkind, so far as I can remember, but in a week or two I was my old procrastinating idle self and had soon left the class altogether. My elder sister stayed on and became an embroideress under Miss May Morris, and the hangings round Morris's big bed at Kelmscott House, Oxfordshire, with their verses about lying happily in bed when "all birds sing in the town of the tree," were from her needle, though not from her design. She worked for the first few months at Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, and in my imagination I cannot always separate what I saw and heard from her report, or indeed from the report of that tribe or guild who looked up to Morris as to some worshipped mediaeval king. He had no

need for other people. I doubt if their marriage or death made him sad or glad, and yet no man I have known was so well loved; you saw him producing everywhere organisation and beauty, seeming, almost in the same instant, helpless and triumphant; and people loved him as children are loved. People much in his neighbourhood became gradually occupied with him or about his affairs, and, without any wish on his part, as simple people become occupied with children. I remember a man who was proud and pleased because he had distracted Morris's thoughts from an attack of gout by leading the conversation delicately to the hated name of Milton. He began at Swinburne: "O, Swinburne," said Morris, "is a rhetorician; my masters have been Keats and Chaucer, for they make pictures." "Does

not Milton make pictures?" asked my informant. "No," was the answer, "Dante makes pictures, but Milton, though he had a great earnest mind, expressed himself as a rhetorician." "Great earnest mind" sounded strange to me, and I doubt not that were his questioner not a simple man Morris had been more violent. Another day the same man started by praising Chaucer, but the gout was worse, and Morris cursed Chaucer for destroying the English language with foreign words.

He had few detachable phrases, and I can remember little of his speech, which many thought the best of all good talk, except that it matched his burly body and seemed within definite boundaries inexhaustible in fact and expression. He alone of all the men I have known

seemed guided by some beast-like instinct and never ate strange meat. "Balzac! Balzac!" he said to me once, "oh, that was the man the French Bourgeoisie read so much a few years ago." I can remember him at supper praising wine: "Why do people say it is prosaic to be inspired by wine? Has it not been made by the sunlight and the sap?" and his dispraising houses decorated by himself: "Do you suppose I like that kind of house? I would like a house like a big barn, where one ate in one corner, cooked in another corner, slept in the third corner, and in the fourth received one's friends"; and his complaining of Ruskin's objection to the underground railway: "If you must have a railway the best thing you can do with it is to put it in a tube with a cork at each end." I remember, too, that when I asked what

led up to his movement, he replied: "Oh, Ruskin and Carlyle, but somebody should have been beside Carlyle and punched his head every five minutes." Though I remember little, I do not doubt that, had I continued going there on Sunday evenings, I should have caught fire from his words and turned my hand to some mediaeval work or other.

Just before I had ceased to go there I had sent my Wanderings of Usheen to his daughter, hoping of course that it might meet his eyes, and soon after sending it I came upon him by chance in Holborn--"You write my sort of poetry," he said and began to praise me and to promise to send his praise to The Commonwealth, the League organ, and he would have said more had he not caught sight of a new ornamental cast-

iron lamp post and got very heated upon that subject.

I did not read economics, having turned socialist because of Morris's lectures and pamphlets, and I think it unlikely that Morris himself could read economics. That old dogma of mine seemed germane to the matter. If the men and women imagined by the poets were the norm, and if Morris had, in let us say "News from Nowhere," then running through The Commonwealth, described such men and women, living under their natural conditions, or as they would desire to live, then those conditions themselves must be the norm and could we but get rid of certain institutions the world would turn from eccentricity. Perhaps Morris himself justified himself in his own heart by as simple an argument, and was, as

the socialist D---- said to me one night, walking home after some lecture, "an anarchist without knowing it." Certainly I and all about me, including D---- himself, were for chopping up the old king for Medea's pot. Morris had told us to have nothing to do with the parliamentary socialists, represented for men in general by the Fabian Society and Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation and for us in particular by D----. During the period of transition mistakes must be made, and the discredit of these mistakes must be left to "the Bourgeoisie"; and besides, when you begin to talk of this measure, or that other, you lose sight of the goal, and see, to reverse Swinburne's description of Tiresias, "Light on the way but darkness on the goal." By mistakes Morris meant vexatious restrictions and compromises--"If any man puts me into a

labour squad, I will lie on my back and kick." That phrase very much expresses our idea of revolutionary tactics: we all intended to lie upon our back and kick. D----, pale and sedentary, did not dislike labour squads and we all hated him with the left side of our heads, while admiring him immensely with the right side. He alone was invited to entertain Mrs Morris, having many tales of his Irish uncles, more especially of one particular uncle who had tried to commit suicide by shutting his head into a carpet-bag. At that time he was an obscure man, known only for a witty speaker at street corners and in Park demonstrations. He had, with an assumed truculence and fury, cold logic, an invariable gentleness, an unruffled courtesy, and yet could never close a speech without being denounced by a journeyman hatter, with an Italian

name. Converted to socialism by D----, and to anarchism by himself, with swinging arm and uplifted voice, this man put, and perhaps, exaggerated our scruple about Parliament. "I lack," said D----, "the bump of reverence"; whereon the wild man shouted: "You 'ave a 'ole." There are moments when looking back I somewhat confuse my own figure with that of the hatter, image of our hysteria, for I too became violent with the violent solemnity of a religious devotee. I can even remember sitting behind D---- and saying some rude thing or other over his shoulder.

I don't remember why I gave it up but I did quite suddenly and the push may have come from a young workman who was educating himself between Morris and Karl Marx. He had planned a history

of the Navy, and when I had spoken of the battleships of Nelson's day had said, "O, that was the decadence of the battleship," but if his naval interests were mediæval, his ideas about religion were pure Karl Marx, and we were soon in perpetual argument. Then gradually the attitude towards religion of almost everybody but Morris, who avoided the subject altogether, got upon my nerves, for I broke out after some lecture or other with all the arrogance of raging youth. They attacked religion, I said, or some such words, and yet there must be a change of heart and only religion could make it. What was the use of talking about some new revolution putting all things right, when the change must come, if come it did, with astronomical slowness, like the cooling of the sun, or it may have been like the drying of the

moon? Morris rang his chairman's bell, but I was too angry to listen, and he had to ring it a second time before I sat down. He said that night at supper, "Of course I know there must be a change of heart, but it will not come as slowly as all that. I rang my bell because you were not being understood." He did not show any vexation, but I never returned after that night; and yet I did not always believe what I had said, and only gradually gave up thinking of and planning for some near sudden change for the better.

XIV

I spent my days at the British Museum and must, I think, have been delicate, for I remember often putting off hour after hour consulting some necessary book because I shrank from lifting the heavy

volumes of the catalogue; and yet to save money for my afternoon coffee and roll I often walked the whole way home to Bedford Park. I was compiling, for a series of shilling books, an anthology of Irish fairy-stories and, for an American publisher, a two-volume selection from the Irish novelists that would be somewhat dearer. I was not well paid, for each book cost me more than three months' reading; and I was paid for the first some twelve pounds ("O, Mr. E.," said publisher to editor, "you must never again pay so much!") and for the second twenty, but I did not think myself badly paid, for I had chosen the work for my own purposes.

Though I went to Sligo every summer, I was compelled to live out of Ireland the greater part of every year, and was but

keeping my mind upon what I knew must be the subject-matter of my poetry. I believed that if Morris had set his stories amid the scenery of his own Wales, for I knew him to be of Welsh extraction and supposed wrongly that he had spent his childhood there, that if Shelley had nailed his Prometheus, or some equal symbol, upon some Welsh or Scottish rock, their art had entered more intimately, more microscopically, as it were, into our thought and had given perhaps to modern poetry a breadth and stability like that of ancient poetry. The statues of Mausolus and Artemisia at the British Museum, private, half-animal, half-divine figures, all unlike the Grecian athletes and Egyptian kings in their near neighbourhood, that stand in the middle of the crowd's applause, or sit above measuring it out unpersuadable justice,

became to me, now or later, images of an unpremeditated joyous energy, that neither I nor any other man, racked by doubt and inquiry, can achieve; and that yet, if once achieved, might seem to men and women of Connemara or of Galway their very soul. In our study of that ruined tomb raised by a queen to her dead lover, and finished by the unpaid labour of great sculptors, after her death from grief, or so runs the tale, we cannot distinguish the handiworks of Scopas and Praxiteles; and I wanted to create once more an art where the artist's handiwork would hide as under those half anonymous chisels, or as we find it in some old Scots ballads, or in some twelfth or thirteenth century Arthurian Romance. That handiwork assured, I had martyred no man for modelling his own image upon Pallas Athena's buckler; for I

took great pleasure in certain allusions to the singer's life, one finds in old romances and ballads, and thought his presence there all the more poignant because we discover it half lost, like portly Chaucer, behind his own maunciple and pardoner upon the Canterbury roads. Wolfram von Eschenbach, singing his German Parsifal, broke off some description of a famished city to remember that in his own house at home the very mice lacked food, and what old ballad singer was it who claimed to have fought by day in the very battle he sang by night? So masterful indeed was that instinct that when the minstrel knew not who his poet was, he must needs make up a man: "When any stranger asks who is the sweetest of singers, answer with one voice: 'a blind man; he dwells upon rocky Chios; his songs shall be the most

beautiful for ever.'" Elaborate modern psychology sounds egotistical, I thought, when it speaks in the first person, but not those simple emotions which resemble the more, the more powerful they are, everybody's emotion, and I was soon to write many poems where an always personal emotion was woven into a general pattern of myth and symbol. When the Fenian poet says that his heart has grown cold and callous--"For thy hapless fate, dear Ireland, and sorrows of my own"--he but follows tradition and if he does not move us deeply, it is because he has no sensuous musical vocabulary that comes at need, without compelling him to sedentary toil and so driving him out from his fellows. I thought to create that sensuous, musical vocabulary, and not for myself only, but that I might leave it to later Irish poets, much as a

mediæval Japanese painter left his style as an inheritance to his family, and was careful to use a traditional manner and matter, yet did something altogether different, changed by that toil, impelled by my share in Cain's curse, by all that sterile modern complication, by my "originality," as the newspapers call it. Morris set out to make a revolution that the persons of his Well at the World's End or his Waters of the Wondrous Isles, always, to my mind, in the likeness of Artemisia and her man, might walk his native scenery; and I, that my native scenery might find imaginary inhabitants, half-planned a new method and a new culture. My mind began drifting vaguely towards that doctrine of "the mask" which has convinced me that every passionate man (I have nothing to do with mechanist, or philanthropist, or man

whose eyes have no preference) is, as it were, linked with another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy. Napoleon was never of his own time, as the naturalistic writers and painters bid all men be, but had some Roman emperor's image in his head and some condottiere blood in his heart; and when he crowned that head at Rome with his own hands he had covered, as may be seen from David's painting, his hesitation with that emperor's old suit.

XV

I had various women friends on whom I would call towards five o'clock mainly to discuss my thoughts that I could not bring to a man without meeting some competing thought, but partly because

their tea and toast saved my pennies for the 'bus ride home; but with women, apart from their intimate exchanges of thought, I was timid and abashed. I was sitting on a seat in front of the British Museum feeding pigeons when a couple of girls sat near and began enticing my pigeons away, laughing and whispering to one another, and I looked straight in front of me, very indignant, and presently went into the Museum without turning my head towards them. Since then I have often wondered if they were pretty or merely very young. Sometimes I told myself very adventurous love-stories with myself for hero, and at other times I planned out a life of lonely austerity, and at other times mixed the ideals and planned a life of lonely austerity mitigated by periodical lapses. I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of

Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem Innisfree, my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music. I had begun to loosen rhythm as an escape from rhetoric and from that emotion of the crowd that rhetoric brings, but I only understood vaguely and occasionally that I must for my special purpose use nothing but the common syntax. A couple of years later I would not have written that first line with its conventional archaism--"Arise and go"--nor the inversion in the last stanza. Passing another day by the new Law Courts, a building that I admired because

it was Gothic--"It is not very good," Morris had said, "but it is better than anything else they have got and so they hate it"--I grew suddenly oppressed by the great weight of stone, and thought, "There are miles and miles of stone and brick all round me," and presently added, "If John the Baptist or his like were to come again and had his mind set upon it, he could make all these people go out into some wilderness leaving their buildings empty," and that thought, which does not seem very valuable now, so enlightened the day that it is still vivid in the memory. I spent a few days at Oxford copying out a seventeenth century translation of Poggio's Liber Facetiarum or the Hypneroto-machia of Poliphili for a publisher; I forget which, for I copied both; and returned very pale to my troubled family. I had lived upon bread

and tea because I thought that if antiquity found locust and wild honey nutritive, my soul was strong enough to need no better. I was always planning some great gesture, putting the whole world into one scale of the balance and my soul into the other and imagining that the whole world somehow kicked the beam. More than thirty years have passed and I have seen no forcible young man of letters brave the metropolis, without some like stimulant; and all after two or three, or twelve or fifteen years, according to obstinacy, have understood that we achieve, if we do achieve, in little sedentary stitches as though we were making lace. I had one unmeasured advantage from my stimulant: I could ink my socks, that they might not show through my shoes, with a most haughty mind, imagining myself, and my torn

tackle, somewhere else, in some far place "under the canopy ... i' the city of kites and crows."

In London I saw nothing good and constantly remembered that Ruskin had said to some friend of my father's--"As I go to my work at the British Museum I see the faces of the people become daily more corrupt." I convinced myself for a time, that on the same journey I saw but what he saw. Certain old women's faces filled me with horror, faces that are no longer there, or if they are pass before me unnoticed: the fat blotched faces, rising above double chins, of women who have drunk too much beer and eaten much meat. In Dublin I had often seen old women walking with erect heads and gaunt bodies, talking to themselves with loud voices, mad with drink and poverty,

but they were different, they belonged to romance. Da Vinci had drawn women who looked so and so carried their bodies.

XVI

I attempted to restore one old friend of my father's to the practice of his youth, but failed, though he, unlike my father, had not changed his belief. My father brought me to dine with Jack Nettleship at Wigmore Street, once inventor of imaginative designs and now a painter of melodramatic lions. At dinner I had talked a great deal--too much, I imagine, for so young a man, or maybe for any man--and on the way home my father, who had been plainly anxious that I should make a good impression, was very angry. He said I had talked for effect and that talking for effect was precisely what one must never

do; he had always hated rhetoric and emphasis and had made me hate it; and his anger plunged me into great dejection. I called at Nettleship's studio the next day to apologise, and Nettleship opened the door himself and received me with enthusiasm. He had explained to some woman guest that I would probably talk well, being an Irishman, but the reality had surpassed, etc., etc. I was not flattered, though relieved at not having to apologise, for I soon discovered that what he really admired was my volubility, for he himself was very silent. He seemed about sixty, had a bald head, a grey beard, and a nose, as one of my father's friends used to say, like an opera-glass, and sipped cocoa all the afternoon and evening from an enormous tea-cup that must have been designed for him alone, not caring how cold the cocoa grew. Years

before he had been thrown from his horse, while hunting, and broke his arm, and because it had been badly set suffered great pain for a long time. A little whisky would always stop the pain, and soon a little became a great deal and he found himself a drunkard, but having signed his liberty away for certain months he was completely cured. He had acquired, however, the need of some liquid which he could sip constantly. I brought him an admiration settled in early boyhood, for my father had always said, "George Wilson was our born painter, but Nettleship our genius," and even had he shown me nothing I could care for, I had admired him still because my admiration was in my bones. He showed me his early designs, and they, though often badly drawn, fulfilled my hopes. Something of Blake they certainly

did show, but had in place of Blake's joyous, intellectual energy a Saturnian passion and melancholy. "God Creating Evil," the death-like head with a woman and a tiger coming from the forehead, which Rossetti--or was it Browning?--had described "as the most sublime design of ancient or modern art," had been lost, but there was another version of the same thought, and other designs never published or exhibited. They rise before me even now in meditation, especially a blind Titan-like ghost floating with groping hands above the tree-tops. I wrote a criticism, and arranged for reproductions with the editor of an art magazine, but after it was written and accepted the proprietor, lifting what I considered an obsequious caw in the Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, Bastien-Lepage rookery, insisted upon its

rejection. Nettleship did not mind its rejection, saying, "Who cares for such things now? Not ten people," but he did mind my refusal to show him what I had written. Though what I had written was all eulogy, I dreaded his judgment for it was my first art criticism. I hated his big lion pictures, where he attempted an art too much concerned with the sense of touch, with the softness or roughness, the minutely observed irregularity of surfaces, for his genius; and I think he knew it. "Rossetti used to call my pictures pot-boilers," he said, "but they are all--all"--and he waved his arm to the canvasses--"symbols." When I wanted him to design gods, and angels, and lost spirits once more, he always came back to the point "Nobody would be pleased." "Everybody should have a raison d'être" was one of his phrases. "Mrs ----'s

articles are not good but they are her raison d'être." I had but little knowledge of art for there was little scholarship in the Dublin art school, so I overrated the quality of anything that could be connected with my general beliefs about the world. If I had been able to give angelical or diabolical names to his lions I might have liked them also and I think that Nettleship himself would have liked them better and liking them better have become a better painter. We had the same kind of religious feeling, but I could give a crude philosophical expression to mine while he could only express his in action or with brush and pencil. He often told me of certain ascetic ambitions, very much like my own, for he had kept all the moral ambition of youth, as for instance--"Yeats, the other night I was arrested by a policeman--was walking

round Regent's Park barefooted to keep the flesh under--good sort of thing to do. I was carrying my boots in my hand and he thought I was a burglar and even when I explained and gave him half a crown, he would not let me go till I had promised to put on my boots before I met the next policeman."

He was very proud and shy and I could not imagine anybody asking him questions and so I was content to take these stories as they came: confirmations of what I had heard of him in boyhood. One story in particular had stirred my imagination for, ashamed all my boyhood of my lack of physical courage, I admired what was beyond my imitation. He thought that any weakness, even a weakness of body, had the character of sin and while at breakfast with his

brother, with whom he shared a room on the third floor of a corner house, he said that his nerves were out of order. Presently he left the table, and got out through the window and on to a stone ledge that ran along the wall under the windowsills. He sidled along the ledge, and turning the corner with it, got in at a different window and returned to the table. "My nerves," he said, "are better than I thought."

Nettleship said to me: "Has Edwin Ellis ever said anything about the effect of drink upon my genius?" "No," I answered. "I ask," he said, "because I have always thought that Ellis has some strange medical insight." Though I had answered no, Ellis had only a few days before used these words: "Nettleship drank his genius away." Ellis, but lately returned from

Perugia where he had lived many years, was another old friend of my father's but some years younger than Nettleship or my father. Nettleship had found his simplifying image, but in his painting had turned away from it, while Ellis, the son of Alexander Ellis, a once famous man of science, who was perhaps the last man in England to run the circle of the sciences without superficiality, had never found that image at all. He was a painter and poet, but his painting, which did not interest me, showed no influence but that of Leighton. He had started perhaps a couple of years too late for Pre-Raphaelite influence, for no great Pre-Raphaelite picture was painted after 1870, and left England too soon for that of the French painters. He was, however, sometimes moving as a poet and still more often an astonishment. I have

known him cast something just said into a dozen lines of musical verse, without apparently ceasing to talk; but the work once done he could not or would not amend it, and my father thought he lacked all ambition. Yet he had at times nobility of rhythm--an instinct for grandeur, and after thirty years I still repeat to myself his address to Mother Earth--

"O mother of the hills, forgive our towers, O mother of the clouds forgive our dreams."

And there are certain whole poems that I read from time to time or try to make others read. There is that poem where the manner is unworthy of the matter, being loose and facile, describing Adam and Eve fleeing from Paradise. Adam asks

Eve what she carries so carefully, and Eve replies that it is a little of the apple-core kept for their children. There is that vision concerning Christ the Less, a too hurriedly written ballad, where the half of Christ sacrificed to the divine half "that fled to seek felicity" wanders wailing through Golgotha, and there is The Saint and the Youth, in which I can discover no fault at all. He loved complexities--"Seven silences like candles round her face" is a line of his--and whether he wrote well or ill had always a manner which I would have known from that of any other poet. He would say to me, "I am a mathematician with the mathematics left out"--his father was a great mathematician--or "A woman once said to me, 'Mr Ellis, why are your poems like sums?'" And certainly he loved symbols and abstractions. He said once,

when I had asked him not to mention something or other, "Surely you have discovered by this time that I know of no means whereby I can mention a fact in conversation."

He had a passion for Blake, picked up in Pre-Raphaelite studios, and early in our acquaintance put into my hands a scrap of notepaper on which he had written some years before an interpretation of the poem that begins

"The fields from Islington to Marylebone,
To Primrose Hill and St. John's Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood."

The four quarters of London represented Blake's four great mythological personages, the Zoas, and also the four

elements. These few sentences were the foundation of all study of the philosophy of William Blake that requires an exact knowledge for its pursuit and that traces the connection between his system and that of Swedenborg or of Boehme. I recognised certain attributions, from what is sometimes called the Christian Cabbala, of which Ellis had never heard, and with this proof that his interpretation was more than fantasy he and I began our four years' work upon the Prophetic Books of William Blake. We took it as almost a sign of Blake's personal help when we discovered that the spring of 1889, when we first joined our knowledge, was one hundred years from the publication of The Book of Thel, the first published of the Prophetic Books, as though it were firmly established that the dead delight in anniversaries. After

months of discussion and reading we made a concordance of all Blake's mystical terms, and there was much copying to be done in the Museum and at Red Hill, where the descendants of Blake's friend and patron, the landscape painter John Linnell, had many manuscripts. The Linnells were narrow in their religious ideas and doubtful of Blake's orthodoxy, whom they held, however, in great honour, and I remember a timid old lady who had known Blake when a child saying, "He had very wrong ideas, he did not believe in the historical Jesus." One old man sat always beside us, ostensibly to sharpen our pencils but perhaps really to see that we did not steal the manuscripts, and they gave us very old port at lunch, and I have upon my dining-room walls their present of Blake's Dante engravings.

Going thither and returning Ellis would entertain me by philosophical discussion varied with improvised stories, at first folk-tales which he professed to have picked up in Scotland, and, though I had read and collected many folk tales, I did not see through the deceit. I have a partial memory of two more elaborate tales, one of an Italian conspirator flying barefoot, from I forget what adventure through I forget what Italian city, in the early morning. Fearing to be recognised by his bare feet, he slipped past the sleepy porter at an hotel, calling out "number so and so" as if he were some belated guest. Then passing from bedroom door to door he tried on the boots, and just as he got a pair to fit, a voice cried from the room: "Who is that?" "Merely me, sir," he called back, "taking your boots." The other was of a martyr's

Bible, round which the cardinal virtues had taken personal form--this a fragment of Blake's philosophy. It was in the possession of an old clergyman when a certain jockey called upon him, and the cardinal virtues, confused between jockey and clergyman, devoted themselves to the jockey. As whenever he sinned a cardinal virtue interfered and turned him back to virtue, he lived in great credit, and made, but for one sentence, a very holy death. As his wife and family knelt round in admiration and grief he suddenly said "damn." "O my dear," said his wife, "what a dreadful expression." He answered, "I am going to heaven," and straightway died. It was a long tale, for there were all the jockey's vain attempts to sin, as well as all the adventures of the clergyman, who became very sinful indeed, but it ended happily for when the

jockey died the cardinal virtues returned to the clergyman. I think he would talk to any audience that offered, one audience being the same as another in his eyes, and it may have been for this reason that my father called him unambitious. When he was a young man he had befriended a reformed thief and had asked the grateful thief to take him round the thieves' quarters of London. The thief, however, hurried him away from the worst saying, "Another minute and they would have found you out. If they were not the stupidest of men in London, they had done so already." Ellis had gone through a detailed, romantic and witty account of all the houses he had robbed and all the throats he had cut in one short life.

His conversation would often pass out of my comprehension, or indeed I think of

any man's, into a labyrinth of abstraction and subtlety and then suddenly return with some verbal conceit or turn of wit. The mind is known to attain in certain conditions of trance a quickness so extraordinary that we are compelled at times to imagine a condition of unendurable intellectual intensity from which we are saved by the merciful stupidity of the body, and I think that the mind of Edwin Ellis was constantly upon the edge of trance. Once we were discussing the symbolism of sex in the philosophy of Blake and had been in disagreement all the afternoon. I began talking with a new sense of conviction and after a moment Ellis, who was at his easel, threw down his brush and said that he had just seen the same explanation in a series of symbolic visions. "In another moment," he said, "I should have been

off." We went into the open air and walked up and down to get rid of that feeling, but presently we came in again and I began again my explanation, Ellis lying upon the sofa. I had been talking some time when Mrs Ellis came into the room and said, "Why are you sitting in the dark?" Ellis answered, "But we are not," and then added in a voice of wonder, "I thought the lamp was lit, and that I was sitting up, and now I find that I am lying down and that we are in darkness." I had seen a flicker of light over the ceiling but thought it a reflection from some light outside the house, which may have been the case.

XVII

I had already met most of the poets of my generation. I had said, soon after the

publication of The Wanderings of Usheen, to the editor of a series of shilling reprints, who had set me to compile tales of the Irish fairies, "I am growing jealous of other poets and we will all grow jealous of each other unless we know each other and so feel a share in each other's triumph." He was a Welshman, lately a mining engineer, Ernest Rhys, a writer of Welsh translations and original poems, that have often moved me greatly though I can think of no one else who has read them. He was perhaps a dozen years older than myself and through his work as editor knew everybody who would compile a book for seven or eight pounds. Between us we founded The Rhymers' Club, which for some years was to meet every night in an upper room with a sanded floor in an ancient eating house in the Strand called

The Cheshire Cheese. Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Victor Plarr, Ernest Radford, John Davidson, Richard le Gallienne, T. W. Rolleston, Selwyn Image, Edwin Ellis, and John Todhunter came constantly for a time, Arthur Symons and Herbert Home, less constantly, while William Watson joined but never came and Francis Thompson came once but never joined; and sometimes if we met in a private house, which we did occasionally, Oscar Wilde came. It had been useless to invite him to The Cheshire Cheese for he hated Bohemia. "Olive Schreiner," he said once to me, "is staying in the East End because that is the only place where people do not wear masks upon their faces, but I have told her that I live in the West End because nothing in life interests me but the mask."

We read our poems to one another and talked criticism and drank a little wine. I sometimes say when I speak of the club, "We had such and such ideas, such and such a quarrel with the great Victorians, we set before us such and such aims," as though we had many philosophical ideas. I say this because I am ashamed to admit that I had these ideas and that whenever I began to talk of them a gloomy silence fell upon the room. A young Irish poet, who wrote excellently but had the worst manners, was to say a few years later, "You do not talk like a poet, you talk like a man of letters," and if all the Rhymers had not been polite, if most of them had not been to Oxford or Cambridge, the greater number would have said the same thing. I was full of thought, often very abstract thought,

longing all the while to be full of images, because I had gone to the art school instead of a university. Yet even if I had gone to a university, and learned all the classical foundations of English literature and English culture, all that great erudition which once accepted frees the mind from restlessness, I should have had to give up my Irish subject matter, or attempt to found a new tradition. Lacking sufficient recognized precedent I must needs find out some reason for all I did. I knew almost from the start that to overflow with reasons was to be not quite well-born, and when I could I hid them, as men hide a disagreeable ancestry; and that there was no help for it seeing that my country was not born at all. I was of those doomed to imperfect achievement, and under a curse, as it were, like some race of birds compelled to spend the

time, needed for the making of the nest, in argument as to the convenience of moss and twig and lichen. Le Gallienne and Davidson, and even Symons, were provincial at their setting out, but their provincialism was curable, mine incurable; while the one conviction shared by all the younger men, but principally by Johnson and Home, who imposed their personalities upon us, was an opposition to all ideas, all generalizations that can be explained and debated. E---- fresh from Paris would sometimes say--"We are concerned with nothing but impressions," but that itself was a generalization and met but stony silence. Conversation constantly dwindled into "Do you like so and so's last book?" "No, I prefer the book before it," and I think that but for its Irish members, who said whatever came into their heads, the

club would not have survived its first difficult months. I saw--now ashamed that I saw "like a man of letters," now exasperated at their indifference to the fashion of their own river-bed--that Swinburne in one way, Browning in another, and Tennyson in a third, had filled their work with what I called "impurities," curiosities about politics, about science, about history, about religion; and that we must create once more the pure work.

Our clothes were, for the most part unadventurous like our conversation, though I indeed wore a brown velveteen coat, a loose tie, and a very old inverness cape, discarded by my father twenty years before and preserved by my Sligo-born mother whose actions were unreasoning and habitual like the

seasons. But no other member of the club, except Le Gallienne, who wore a loose tie, and Symons, who had an inverness cape that was quite new and almost fashionable, would have shown himself for the world in any costume but "that of an English gentleman." "One should be quite unnoticeable," Johnson explained to me. Those who conformed most carefully to the fashion in their clothes, generally departed furthest from it in their handwriting, which was small, neat, and studied, one poet--which, I forget--having founded his upon the handwriting of George Herbert. Dowson and Symons I was to know better in later years when Symons became a very dear friend, and I never got behind John Davidson's Scottish roughness and exasperation, though I saw much of him, but from the first I devoted myself to

Lionel Johnson. He and Horne and Image and one or two others, shared a man-servant and an old house in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, typical figures of transition, doing as an achievement of learning and of exquisite taste what their predecessors did in careless abundance. All were Pre-Raphaelite, and sometimes one might meet in the rooms of one or other a ragged figure, as of some fallen dynasty, Simeon Solomon the Pre-Raphaelite painter, once the friend of Rossetti and of Swinburne, but fresh now from some low public house. Condemned to a long term of imprisonment for a criminal offence, he had sunk into drunkenness and misery. Introduced one night, however, to some man who mistook him, in the dim candle light, for another Solomon, a successful academic painter and R.A., he started to his feet in

a rage with, "Sir, do you dare to mistake me for that mountebank?" Though not one had hearkened to the feeblest caw, or been spattered by the smallest dropping from any Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, Bastien-Lepage bundle of old twigs I began by suspecting them of lukewarmness, and even backsliding, and I owe it to that suspicion that I never became intimate with Horne, who lived to become the greatest English authority upon Italian life in the fourteenth century and to write the one standard work on Botticelli. Connoisseur in several arts, he had designed a little church in the manner of Inigo Jones for a burial ground near the Marble Arch. Though I now think his little church a masterpiece, its style was more than a century too late to hit my fancy, at two or three and twenty;

and I accused him of leaning towards that eighteenth century

"That taught a school Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit, Their verses tallied."

Another fanaticism delayed my friendship with two men, who are now my friends and in certain matters my chief instructors. Somebody, probably Lionel Johnson, brought me to the studio of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, certainly heirs of the great generation, and the first thing I saw was a Shannon picture of a lady and child, arrayed in lace silk and satin, suggesting that hated century. My eyes were full of some more mythological mother and child and I would have none of it and I told Shannon

that he had not painted a mother and child, but elegant people expecting visitors and I thought that a great reproach. Somebody writing in The Germ had said that a picture of a pheasant and an apple was merely a picture of something to eat and I was so angry with the indifference to subject, which was the commonplace of all art criticism since Bastien-Lepage, that I could at times see nothing else but subject. I thought that, though it might not matter to the man himself whether he loved a white woman or a black, a female pickpocket or a regular communicant of the Church of England, if only he loved strongly, it certainly did matter to his relations and even under some circumstances to his whole neighbourhood. Sometimes indeed, like some father in Molière, I ignored the lover's feelings altogether and even

refused to admit that a trace of the devil, perhaps a trace of colour, may lend piquancy, especially if the connection be not permanent.

Among these men, of whom so many of the greatest talents were to live such passionate lives and die such tragic deaths, one serene man, T. W. Rolleston, seemed always out of place; it was I brought him there, intending to set him to some work in Ireland later on. I have known young Dublin working men slip out of their workshop to see the second Thomas Davis passing by, and even remember a conspiracy, by some three or four, to make him "the leader of the Irish race at home and abroad," and all because he had regular features; and when all is said Alexander the Great and Alcibiades were personable men, and the

Founder of the Christian religion was the only man who was neither a little too tall nor a little too short, but exactly six feet high. We in Ireland thought as do the plays and ballads, not understanding that, from the first moment wherein nature foresaw the birth of Bastien-Lepage, she has only granted great creative power to men whose faces are contorted with extravagance or curiosity, or dulled with some protecting stupidity.

I had now met all those who were to make the 'nineties of the last century tragic in the history of literature, but as yet we were all seemingly equal, whether in talent or in luck, and scarce even personalties to one another. I remember saying one night at the Cheshire Cheese, when more poets than usual had come, "None of us can say who will succeed, or

even who has or has not talent. The only thing certain about us is that we are too many."

XVIII

I have described what image--always opposite to the natural self or the natural world--Wilde, Henley, Morris, copied or tried to copy, but I have not said if I found an image for myself. I know very little about myself and much less of that anti-self: probably the woman who cooks my dinner or the woman who sweeps out my study knows more than I. It is perhaps because nature made me a gregarious man, going hither and thither looking for conversation, and ready to deny from fear or favour his dearest conviction, that I love proud and lonely things. When I was a child and went daily

to the sexton's daughter for writing lessons, I found one poem in her School Reader that delighted me beyond all others: a fragment of some metrical translation from Aristophanes wherein the birds sing scorn upon mankind. In later years my mind gave itself to gregarious Shelley's dream of a young man, his hair blanched with sorrow, studying philosophy in some lonely tower, or of his old man, master of all human knowledge, hidden from human sight in some shell-strewn cavern on the Mediterranean shore. One passage above all ran perpetually in my ears--

"Some feign that he is Enoch: others dream He was pre-Adamite, and has survived Cycles of generation and of ruin. The sage, in truth, by dreadful abstinence, And conquering penance of

the mutinous flesh, Deep contemplation and unwearied study, In years outstretched beyond the date of man, May have attained to sovereignty and science Over those strong and secret things and thoughts Which others fear and know not. Mahmud. I would talk With this old Jew. Hassan. Thy will is even now Made known to him where he dwells in a sea-cavern 'Mid the Demonesi, less accessible Than thou or God! He who would question him Must sail alone at sunset where the stream Of ocean sleeps around those foamless isles, When the young moon is westering as now, And evening airs wander upon the wave; And, when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle, Green Erebinthus, quench the fiery shadow Of his gilt prow within the sapphire water, Then must the lonely helmsman cry aloud 'Ahasuerus!' and the

caverns round Will answer 'Ahasuerus!' If his prayer Be granted, a faint meteor will arise, Lighting him over Marmora; and a wind Will rush out of the sighing pine-forest, And with the wind a storm of harmony Unutterably sweet, and pilot him Through the soft twilight to the Bosphorus: Thence, at the hour and place and circumstance Fit for the matter of their conference, The Jew appears. Few dare, and few who dare Win the desired communion."

Already in Dublin, I had been attracted to the Theosophists because they had affirmed the real existence of the Jew, or of his like, and, apart from whatever might have been imagined by Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, and Bastien-Lepage, I saw nothing against his reality. Presently having heard that Madame

Blavatsky had arrived from France, or from India, I thought it time to look the matter up. Certainly if wisdom existed anywhere in the world it must be in some such lonely mind admitting no duty to us, communing with God only, conceding nothing from fear or favour. Have not all peoples, while bound together in a single mind and taste, believed that such men existed and paid them that honour, or paid it to their mere shadow, which they have refused to philanthropists and to men of learning.

XIX

I found Madame Blavatsky in a little house at Norwood, with but, as she said, three followers left--the Society of Psychical Research had just reported on her Indian phenomena--and as one of the

three followers sat in an outer room to keep out undesirable visitors, I was kept a long time kicking my heels. Presently I was admitted and found an old woman in a plain loose dark dress: a sort of old Irish peasant woman with an air of humour and audacious power. I was still kept waiting, for she was deep in conversation with a woman visitor. I strayed through folding doors into the next room and stood, in sheer idleness of mind, looking at a cuckoo clock. It was certainly stopped, for the weights were off and lying upon the ground, and yet, as I stood there the cuckoo came out and cuckooed at me. I interrupted Madame Blavatsky to say, "Your clock has hooted me." "It oftens hoots at a stranger," she replied. "Is there a spirit in it?" I said. "I do not know," she said, "I should have to be alone to know what is in it." I went

back to the clock and began examining it and heard her say: "Do not break my clock." I wondered if there was some hidden mechanism and I should have been put out, I suppose, had I found any, though Henley had said to me, "Of course she gets up fraudulent miracles, but a person of genius has to do something; Sarah Bernhardt sleeps in her coffin." Presently the visitor went away and Madame Blavatsky explained that she was a propagandist for women's rights who had called to find out "why men were so bad." "What explanation did you give her?" I said. "That men were born bad, but women made themselves so," and then she explained that I had been kept waiting because she had mistaken me for some man, whose name resembled mine and who wanted to persuade her of the flatness of the earth.

When I next saw her she had moved into a house at Holland Park, and some time must have passed--probably I had been in Sligo where I returned constantly for long visits--for she was surrounded by followers. She sat nightly before a little table covered with green baize and on this green baize she scribbled constantly with a piece of white chalk. She would scribble symbols, sometimes humorously explained, and sometimes unintelligible figures, but the chalk was intended to mark down her score when she played patience. One saw in the next room a large table where every night her followers and guests, often a great number, sat down to their vegetable meal, while she encouraged or mocked through the folding doors. A great passionate nature, a sort of female Dr

Johnson, impressive I think to every man or woman who had themselves any richness, she seemed impatient of the formalism of the shrill abstract idealism of those about her, and this impatience broke out in railing and many nicknames: "O you are a flap-doodle, but then you are a theosophist and a brother." The most devout and learned of all her followers said to me, "H. P. B. has just told me that there is another globe stuck on to this at the north pole, so that the earth has really a shape something like a dumb-bell." I said, for I knew that her imagination contained all the folklore of the world, "That must be some piece of Eastern mythology." "O no it is not," he said, "of that I am certain, and there must be something in it or she would not have said it." Her mockery was not kept for her followers alone, and her voice

would become harsh, and her mockery lose fantasy and humour, when she spoke of what seemed to her scientific materialism. Once I saw this antagonism, guided by some kind of telepathic divination, take a form of brutal fantasy. I brought a very able Dublin woman to see her and this woman had a brother, a physiologist whose reputation, though known to specialists alone, was European, and because of this brother a family pride in everything scientific and modern. The Dublin woman scarcely opened her mouth the whole evening and her name was certainly unknown to Madame Blavatsky, yet I saw at once in that wrinkled old face bent over the cards, and the only time I ever saw it there, a personal hostility, the dislike of one woman for another. Madame Blavatsky seemed to bundle herself up,

becoming all primeval peasant, and began complaining of her ailments, more especially of her bad leg. But of late her master--her "old Jew," her "Ahasuerus"--cured it, or set it on the way to be cured. "I was sitting here in my chair," said she, "when the master came in and brought something with him which he put over my knee, something warm which enclosed my knee--it was a live dog which he had cut open." I recognized a cure used sometimes in mediaeval medicine. She had two masters and their portraits, ideal Indian heads, painted by some most incompetent artist, stood upon either side of the folding doors. One night when talk was impersonal and general, I sat gazing through the folding doors into the dimly lighted dining room beyond. I noticed a curious red light shining upon a picture and got up to see

where the red light came from. It was the picture of an Indian and as I came near it slowly vanished. When I returned to my seat, Madame Blavatsky said, "What did you see?" "A picture," I said. "Tell it to go away." "It is already gone." "So much the better," she said, "I was afraid it was mediumship. But it is only clairvoyance." "What is the difference?" "If it had been mediumship, it would have stayed in spite of you. Beware of mediumship; it is a kind of madness; I know for I have been through it."

I found her almost always full of gaiety that, unlike the occasional joking of those about her, was illogical and incalculable and yet always kindly and tolerant. I had called one evening to find her absent but expected every moment. She had been somewhere at the seaside for her health

and arrived with a little suite of followers. She sat down at once in her big chair, and began unfolding a brown paper parcel while all looked on full of curiosity. It contained a large family Bible. "This is a present for my maid," she said. "What a Bible and not even annotated!" said some shocked voice. "Well, my children," was the answer, "what is the good of giving lemons to those who want oranges?" When I first began to frequent her house, as I soon did very constantly, I noticed a handsome clever woman of the world there, who seemed certainly very much out of place, penitent though she thought herself. Presently there was much scandal and gossip for the penitent was plainly entangled with two young men, who were expected to grow into ascetic sages. The scandal was so great that Madame Blavatsky had to call the

penitent before her and to speak after this fashion, "We think that it is necessary to crush the animal nature; you should live in chastity in act and thought. Initiation is granted only to those who are entirely chaste," and so it ran on for some time. However, after some minutes in that vehement style, the penitent standing crushed and shamed before her, she had wound up, "I cannot permit you more than one." She was quite sincere but thought that nothing mattered but what happened in the mind, and that if we could not master the mind our actions were of little importance. One young man filled her with exasperation for she thought that his settled gloom came from his chastity. I had known him in Dublin where he had been accustomed to interrupt long periods of asceticism, in which he would eat vegetables and drink

water, with brief outbreaks of what he considered the devil. After an outbreak he would for a few hours dazzle the imagination of the members of the local theosophical society with poetical rhapsodies about harlots and street lamps, and then sink into weeks of melancholy. A fellow-theosophist once found him hanging from the windowpole, but cut him down in the nick of time. I said to the man who cut him down, "What did you say to each other?" He said, "We spent the night telling comic stories and laughing a great deal." This man, torn between sensuality and visionary ambition, was now the most devout of all, and told me that in the middle of the night he could often hear the ringing of the little "astral bell" whereby Madame Blavatsky's master called her attention, and that, although it

was a silvery low tone, it made the whole house shake. Another night I found him waiting in the hall to show in those who had right of entrance, on some night when the discussion was private, and as I passed he whispered into my ear, "Madame Blavatsky is perhaps not a real woman at all. They say that her dead body was found many years ago upon some Russian battlefield." She had two dominant moods, both of extreme activity, one calm and philosophic, and this was the mood always on that night in the week when she answered questions upon her system, and as I look back after thirty years I often ask myself, "Was her speech automatic? Was she a trance medium, or in some similar state, one night in every week?" In the other mood she was full of fantasy and inconsequent raillery. "That is the Greek Church, a

triangle like all true religion," I recall her saying, as she chalked out a triangle on the green baize, and then as she made it disappear in meaningless scribbles, "it spread out and became a bramble bush like the Church of Rome." Then rubbing it all out except one straight line, "Now they have lopped off the branches and turned it into a broomstick and that is protestantism." And so it was night after night always varied and unforeseen. I have observed a like sudden extreme change in others, half whose thought was supernatural and Lawrence Oliphant records somewhere or other like observations. I can remember only once finding her in a mood of reverie, something had happened to damp her spirits, some attack upon her movement, or upon herself. She spoke of Balzac, whom she had seen but once, of Alfred

de Musset, whom she had known well enough to dislike for his morbidity, and George Sand, whom she had known so well that they had dabbled in magic together of which "neither knew anything at all" in those days; and she ran on, as if there was nobody there to overhear her, "I used to wonder at and pity the people who sell their souls to the devil, but now I only pity them. They do it to have somebody on their side," and added to that, after some words I have forgotten, "I write, write, write as the Wandering Jew walks, walks, walks."

Besides the devotees, who came to listen and to turn every doctrine into a new sanction for the puritanical convictions of their Victorian childhood, cranks came from half Europe and from all America, and they came that they might talk. One

American said to me, "She has become the most famous woman in the world by sitting in a big chair and permitting us to talk." They talked and she played patience, and totted up her score on the green baize, and generally seemed to listen, but sometimes she would listen no more. There was a woman who talked perpetually of "the divine spark" within her, until Madame Blavatsky stopped her with--"Yes, my dear, you have a divine spark within you and if you are not very careful you will hear it snore." A certain Salvation Army captain probably pleased her, for if vociferous and loud of voice, he had much animation. He had known hardship and spoke of his visions while starving in the streets and he was still perhaps a little light in the head. I wondered what he could preach to ignorant men, his head ablaze with wild

mysticism, till I met a man who had heard him talking near Covent Garden to some crowd in the street. "My friends," he was saying, "you have the kingdom of heaven within you and it would take a pretty big pill to get that out."

Meanwhile I had got no nearer to proving that the sage Ahasuerus "dwells in a sea cavern 'mid the Demonesi," nor did I learn any more of those "Masters" whose representative Madame Blavatsky claimed to be. All there seemed to feel their presence, and all spoke of them as if they were more important than any visible inhabitant of the house. When Madame Blavatsky was more silent, less vivid than usual, it was "because her Masters were angry;" they had rebuked her because of some error, and she professed constant error. Once I seemed

in their presence, or that of some messenger of theirs. It was about nine at night, and half a dozen of us sat round her big table cloth, when the room seemed to fill with the odour of incense. Somebody came from upstairs, but could smell nothing--had been outside the influence it seems--but to myself and the others, it was very strong. Madame Blavatsky said it was a common Indian incense, and that some pupil of her master's was present; she seemed anxious to make light of the matter and turned the conversation to something else. Certainly it was a romantic house, and I did not separate myself from it by my own will. I had learned from Blake to hate all abstraction, and, affected by the abstraction of what were called "esoteric teachings," I began a series of experiments. Some book or magazine

published by the society had quoted from that essay of magic, which Sibley, the eighteenth century astrologer, had bound up with his big book upon astrology. If you burnt a flower to ashes and put the ashes under, I think, the receiver of an air pump, and stood the receiver in the moonlight for so many nights, the ghost of the flower would appear hovering over its ashes. I got together a committee which performed this experiment without results. The "esoteric teachings" had declared that a certain very pure kind of indigo was the symbol of one of the seven principles into which they divided human nature. I got with some difficulty a little of this pure indigo, and gave portions of it to members of the committee, and asked them to put it under their pillows at night and record their dreams. I argued that all natural

scenery must be divided into seven types according to these principles, and by their study we could rid the mind of abstraction. Presently a secretary, a friendly, intelligent man, asked me to come and see him, and, when I did, complained that I was causing discussion and disturbance. A certain fanatical hungry face had been noticed red and tearful, and it was quite plain that I was not in agreement with their methods or their philosophy. "We have certain definite ideas," he said, "and we have but one duty, to spread them through the world. I know that all these people become dogmatic, that they believe what they can never prove, that their withdrawal from family life is for them a great misfortune, but what are we to do? We have been told that all spiritual influx into the society will come to an end in

1897 for exactly one hundred years; before that date our fundamental ideas must be spread in all countries." I knew the doctrine, and it made me wonder why that old woman, or the "masters" from whom, whatever they were or were not, her genius had come, insisted upon it; for influx of some kind there must always be. Did they dread heresy, or had they no purpose but the greatest possible immediate effect?

XX

At the British Museum reading room I often saw a man of thirty-six, or thirty-seven, in a brown velveteen coat, with a gaunt resolute face, and an athletic body, who seemed before I heard his name, or knew the nature of his studies, a figure of romance. Presently I was introduced,

where or by what man or woman I do not remember. He was called Liddle Mathers, but would soon, under the touch of "The Celtic Movement," become Macgregor Mathers, and then plain Macgregor. He was the author of The Kabbala Unveiled, and his studies were two only--magic and the theory of war, for he believed himself a born commander and all but equal in wisdom and in power to that old Jew. He had copied many manuscripts on magic ceremonial and doctrine in the British Museum, and was to copy many more in Continental libraries, and it was through him mainly that I began certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory. I believe that his mind in those early days did not belie his face and body, though in later years it

became unhinged, for he kept a proud head amid great poverty. One that boxed with him nightly has told me that for many weeks he could knock him down, though Mathers was the stronger man, and only knew long after that during those weeks Mathers starved. With him I met an old white-haired Oxfordshire clergyman, the most panic-stricken person I have ever known, though Mathers' introduction had been "he unites us to the great adepts of antiquity." This old man took me aside that he might say--"I hope you never invoke spirits--that is a very dangerous thing to do. I am told that even the planetary spirits turn upon us in the end." I said, "Have you ever seen an apparition?" "O yes, once," he said. "I have my alchemical laboratory in a cellar under my house where the Bishop cannot see it. One day I was

walking up and down there when I heard another footstep walking up and down beside me. I turned and saw a girl I had been in love with when I was a young man, but she died long ago. She wanted me to kiss her. O no, I would not do that." "Why not?" I said. "O she might have got power over me." "Has your alchemical research had any success?" I said. "Yes, I once made the elixir of life. A French alchemist said it had the right smell and the right colour" (the alchemist may have been Eliphas Levi, who visited England in the 'sixties, and would have said anything) "but the first effect of the elixir is that your nails fall out and your hair falls off. I was afraid that I might have made a mistake and that nothing else might happen, so I put it away on a shelf. I meant to drink it when I was an

old man, but when I got it down the other day it had all dried up."

Soon after my first meeting with Mathers he emerged into brief prosperity, becoming for two or three years Curator of a private museum at Forest Hill, and marrying a young and beautiful wife, the sister of the philosopher, Henri Bergson. His house at Forest Hill was soon a romantic place to a little group, Florence Farr, myself, and some dozen fellow students. I think that it was she, her curiosity being insatiable, who first brought news of that house and that she brought it in mockery and in wonder. Mathers had taken her for a walk through a field of sheep and had said, "Look at the sheep. I am going to imagine myself a ram," and at once all the sheep ran after him; another day he had tried to

quell a thunder storm by making symbols in the air with a masonic sword, but the storm had not been quelled; and then came the crowning wonder. He had given her a piece of cardboard on which was a coloured geometrical symbol and had told her to hold it to her forehead and she had found herself walking upon a cliff above the sea, seagulls shrieking overhead. I did not think the ram story impossible, and even tried half a dozen times to excite a cat by imagining a mouse in front of its nose, but still some chance movement of the flock might have deceived her. But what could have deceived her in that final marvel? Then another brought a like report, and presently my own turn came. He gave me a cardboard symbol and I closed my eyes. Sight came slowly, there was not that sudden miracle as if the darkness

had been cut with a knife, for that miracle is mostly a woman's privilege, but there rose before me mental images that I could not control: a desert and black Titan raising himself up by his two hands from the middle of a heap of ancient ruins. Mathers explained that I had seen a being of the order of Salamanders because he had shown me their symbol, but it was not necessary even to show the symbol, it would have been sufficient that he imagined it. I had already written in my diary, under some date in 1887, that Madame Blavatsky's Masters were "trance personalities," and I must have meant such beings as my black Titan, only more lasting and more powerful. I had found when a boy in Dublin on a table in the Royal Irish Academy a pamphlet on Japanese art and read there of an animal painter so remarkable that

horses he had painted upon a Temple wall, had slipped down after dark and trampled the neighbours' fields of rice. Somebody had come into the temple in the early morning, had been startled by a shower of water drops, had looked up and seen painted horses still wet from the dew-covered fields, but now "trembling into stillness."

I had soon mastered Mathers' symbolic system, and discovered that for a considerable minority--whom I could select by certain unanalysable characteristics--the visible world would completely vanish, and that world, summoned by the symbol, take its place. One day when alone in a third-class carriage, in the very middle of the railway bridge that crosses the Thames near Victoria, I smelt incense. I was on my

way to Forest Hill; might it not come from some spirit Mathers had called up? I had wondered when I smelt it at Madame Blavatsky's--if there might be some contrivance, some secret censer, but that explanation was no longer possible. I believed that Salamander of his but an image, and presently I found analogies between smell and image. It must be from thought but what certainty had I, that what had taken me by surprise, could be from my own thought, and if a thought could affect the sense of smell, why not the sense of touch? Then I discovered among that group of students that surrounded Macgregor, a man who had fought a cat in his dreams and awaked to find his breast covered with scratches. Was there an impassable barrier between those scratches and the trampled fields of rice? It would seem so,

and yet all was uncertainty. What fixed law would our experiments leave to our imagination?

Mathers had learning but no scholarship, much imagination and imperfect taste, but if he made some absurd statement, some incredible claim, some hackneyed joke, we would half consciously change claim, statement or joke, as though he were a figure in a play of our composition. He was a necessary extravagance, and he had carried further than anyone else, a claim implicit in the romantic movement from the time of Shelley and of Goethe; and in body and in voice at least he was perfect; so might Faust have looked at the end of his hundred years. In the credulity of our youth we secretly wondered if he had not met with, perhaps even been taught by

some old man who had found the elixir. Nor did he undeceive us. "If you find the elixir," he was accustomed to say, "you always look a few years younger than the age at which you found it. If you find it at sixty you will look fifty for a hundred years." None of us would have admitted that we believed in stone or elixir, the old Oxfordshire clergyman excited no belief, yet one among us certainly laboured with crucible or athanor. Ten years ago I called upon an elderly solicitor, on some business, but at his private house, and I remembered whose pupil he had been when I found among the ashes of the hearth a little earthen pot. He pretended that he studied alchemy that he might some day write its history, and I found when I questioned others, that for twenty years there had been just such a little pot among the ashes.

XXI

I generalized a great deal and was ashamed of it. I thought it was my business in life to be an artist and a poet, and that there could be no business comparable to that. I refused to read books and even to meet people who excited me to generalization, all to no purpose. I said my prayers much as in childhood, though without the old regularity of hour and place, and I began to pray that my imagination might somehow be rescued from abstraction and became as preoccupied with life as had been the imagination of Chaucer. For ten or twelve years more I suffered continual remorse, and only became content when my abstractions had composed themselves into picture and

dramatization. My very remorse helped to spoil my early poetry, giving it an element of sentimentality through my refusal to permit it any share of an intellect which I considered impure. Even in practical life I only very gradually began to use generalizations, that have since become the foundation of all I have done, or shall do, in Ireland. For all I know all men may have been so timid, for I am persuaded that our intellects at twenty contain all the truths we shall ever find, but as yet we do not know truths that belong to us from opinions, caught up in casual irritation or momentary fantasy. As life goes on we discover that certain thoughts sustain us in defeat, or give us victory, whether over ourselves or others, and it is these thoughts, tested by passion, that we call convictions. Among subjective men (in all

those, that is, who must spin a web out of their own bowels) the victory is an intellectual daily recreation of all that exterior fate snatches away, and so that fate's antithesis; while what I have called "the Mask" is an emotional antithesis to all that comes out of their internal nature. We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy.

XXII

A conviction that the world was now but a bundle of fragments possessed me without ceasing. I had tried this conviction on the Rhymers, thereby plunging into greater silence an already too silent evening. "Johnson," I was accustomed to say, "you are the only man I know whose silence has beak and claw." I had lectured on it to some

London Irish society, and I was to lecture upon it later on in Dublin, but I never found but one interested man, an official of the Primrose League, who was also an active member of the Fenian Brotherhood. "I am an extreme conservative apart from Ireland," I have heard him explain; and I have no doubt that personal experience made him share the sight of any eye that saw the world in fragments. I had been put into a rage by the followers of Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, and Bastien-Lepage, who not only asserted the unimportance of subject whether in art or literature, but the independence of the arts from one another. Upon the other hand, I delighted in every age where poet and artist confined themselves gladly to some inherited subject matter known to the whole people, for I thought that in man

and race alike there is something called "Unity of Being," using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the Convito to a perfectly proportioned human body. My father, from whom I had learned the term, preferred a comparison to a musical instrument so strung that if we touch a string all the strings murmur faintly. There is not more desire, he had said, in lust than in true love, but in true love desire awakens pity, hope, affection, admiration, and, given appropriate circumstance, every emotion possible to man. When I began, however, to apply this thought to the state and to argue for a law-made balance among trades and occupations my father displayed at once the violent free trader and propagandist of liberty. I thought that the enemy of this unity was abstraction, meaning by abstraction not the distinction but the

isolation of occupation, or class or faculty--

"Call down the hawk from the air Let him be hooded, or caged, Till the yellow eye has grown mild, For larder and spit are bare, The old cook enraged, The scullion gone wild."

I knew no mediaeval cathedral, and Westminster, being a part of abhorred London, did not interest me, but I thought constantly of Homer and Dante, and the tombs of Mausolus and Artemisia, the great figures of King and Queen and the lesser figures of Greek and Amazon, Centaur and Greek. I thought that all art should be a Centaur finding in the popular lore its back and its strong legs. I got great pleasure too from remembering that Homer was sung, and

from that tale of Dante hearing a common man sing some stanza from The Divine Comedy, and from Don Quixote's meeting with some common man that sang Ariosto. Morris had never seemed to care greatly for any poet later than Chaucer and though I preferred Shakespeare to Chaucer I begrudged my own preference. Had not Europe shared one mind and heart, until both mind and heart began to break into fragments a little before Shakespeare's birth? Music and verse began to fall apart when Chaucer robbed verse of its speed that he might give it greater meditation, though for another generation or so minstrels were to sing his lengthy elaborated Troilus and Criseyde; painting parted from religion in the later Renaissance that it might study effects of tangibility undisturbed; while, that it might

characterize, where it had once personified, it renounced, in our own age, all that inherited subject matter which we have named poetry. Presently I was indeed to number character itself among the abstractions, encouraged by Congreve's saying that "passions are too powerful in the fair sex to let humour," or as we say character, "have its course." Nor have we fared better under the common daylight, for pure reason has notoriously made but light of practical reason, and has been made light of in its turn from that morning when Descartes discovered that he could think better in his bed than out of it; nor needed I original thought to discover, being so late of the school of Morris, that machinery had not separated from handicraft wholly for the world's good, nor to notice that the distinction of classes had become

their isolation. If the London merchants of our day competed together in writing lyrics they would not, like the Tudor merchants, dance in the open street before the house of the victor; nor do the great ladies of London finish their balls on the pavement before their doors as did the great Venetian ladies, even in the eighteenth century, conscious of an all enfolding sympathy. Doubtless because fragments broke into ever smaller fragments we saw one another in a light of bitter comedy, and in the arts, where now one technical element reigned and now another, generation hated generation, and accomplished beauty was snatched away when it had most engaged our affections. One thing I did not foresee, not having the courage of my own thought: the growing murderousness of the world.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere The ceremony of innocence is drowned; The best lack all conviction while the worst Are full of passionate intensity."

XXIII

If abstraction had reached, or all but reached its climax, escape might be possible for many, and if it had not, individual men might still escape. If Chaucer's personages had disengaged themselves from Chaucer's crowd, forgot their common goal and shrine, and after sundry magnifications became each in

turn the centre of some Elizabethan play, and had after split into their elements and so given birth to romantic poetry, must I reverse the cinematograph? I thought that the general movement of literature must be such a reversal, men being there displayed in casual, temporary, contact as at the Tabard door. I had lately read Tolstoy's Anna Karenina and thought that where his theoretical capacity had not awakened there was such a turning back: but a nation or an individual with great emotional intensity might follow the pilgrims as it were to some unknown shrine, and give to all those separated elements and to all that abstract love and melancholy, a symbolical, a mythological coherence. Not Chaucer's rough tongued riders, but rather an ended pilgrimage, a procession of the Gods! Arthur Symons brought back

from Paris stories of Verhaeren and Maeterlinck, and so brought me confirmation, as I thought, and I began to announce a poetry like that of the Sufi's. I could not endure, however, an international art, picking stories and symbols where it pleased. Might I not, with health and good luck to aid me, create some new Prometheus Unbound; Patrick or Columbkil, Oisin or Fion, in Prometheus' stead; and, instead of Caucasus, Cro-Patric or Ben Bulben? Have not all races had their first unity from a polytheism, that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called "the applied arts of

literature," the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design? Perhaps even these images, once created and associated with river and mountain, might move of themselves and with some powerful, even turbulent life, like those painted horses that trampled the rice fields of Japan.

XXIV

I used to tell the few friends to whom I could speak these secret thoughts that I would make the attempt in Ireland but fail, for our civilization, its elements multiplying by division like certain low forms of life, was all-powerful; but in

reality I had the wildest hopes. To-day I add to that first conviction, to that first desire for unity, this other conviction, long a mere opinion vaguely or intermittently apprehended: Nations, races, and individual men are unified by an image, or bundle of related images, symbolical or evocative of the state of mind, which is of all states of mind not impossible, the most difficult to that man, race, or nation; because only the greatest obstacle that can be contemplated without despair, rouses the will to full intensity.

A powerful class by terror, rhetoric, and organized sentimentality, may drive their people to war but the day draws near when they cannot keep them there; and how shall they face the pure nations of the East when the day comes to do it

with but equal arms? I had seen Ireland in my own time turn from the bragging rhetoric and gregarious humour of O'Connell's generation and school, and offer herself to the solitary and proud Parnell as to her anti-self, buskin following hard on sock, and I had begun to hope, or to half hope, that we might be the first in Europe to seek unity as deliberately as it had been sought by theologian, poet, sculptor, architect, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Doubtless we must seek it differently, no longer considering it convenient to epitomize all human knowledge, but find it we well might could we first find philosophy and a little passion.

BOOK II

IRELAND AFTER THE FALL OF PARNELL

IRELAND AFTER THE FALL OF PARNELL

I

A couple of years before the death of Parnell, I had wound up my introduction to those selections from the Irish novelists with the prophecy of an intellectual movement at the first lull in politics, and now I wished to fulfil my prophecy. I did not put it in that way, for I preferred to think that the sudden emotion that now came to me, the sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come, was a

moment of supernatural insight. How could I tell, how can I tell even now?

There was a little Irish Society of young people, clerks, shop boys, and shop girls, called "The Southwark Irish Literary Society," and it had ceased to meet because the girls got the giggles when any member of the Committee got up to speak. Every member of it had said all he had to say many times over. I had given them a lecture about the falling asunder of the human mind, as an opening flower falls asunder, and all had professed admiration because I had made such a long speech without quotation or narrative; and now I invited the Committee to my father's house at Bedford Park, and there proposed a new organization, "The Irish Literary Society." T. W. Rolleston came to that first

meeting, and it was because he had much tact, and a knowledge of the technical business of committees, that a society was founded which was joined by every London-Irish author and journalist. In a few months somebody had written its history, and published that history, illustrated by our portraits, at a shilling. When it was published I was in Dublin, founding a society there called "The National Literary Society," and affiliating it with certain Young Ireland Societies in country towns which seemed anxious to accept its leadership. I had definite plans; I wanted to create an Irish Theatre; I was finishing my Countess Cathleen in its first meagre version, and thought of a travelling company to visit our country branches; but before that there must be a popular imaginative literature. I arranged with Mr. Fisher Unwin and his

reader, Mr Edward Garnett--a personal friend of mine--that when our organization was complete Mr Fisher Unwin was to publish for it a series of books at a shilling each. I told only one man of this arrangement, for after I had made my plans I heard an alarming rumour. Old Sir Charles Gavan Duffy was coming from Australia to start an Irish publishing house, and publish a series of books, and I did not expect to agree with him, but knew that I must not seek a quarrel. The two societies were necessary because their lectures must take the place of an educated popular press, which we had not, and have not now, and create a standard of criticism. Irish literature had fallen into contempt; no educated man ever bought an Irish book; in Dublin Professor Dowden, the one man of letters with an international influence,

was accustomed to say that he knew an Irish book by its smell, because he had once seen some books whose binding had been fastened together by rotten glue; and Standish O'Grady's last book upon ancient Irish history--a book rather wild, rather too speculative, but forestalling later research--had not been reviewed by any periodical or newspaper in England or in Ireland.

At first I had great success, for I brought with me a list of names written down by some member of the Southwark Irish Literary Society, and for six weeks went hither and thither appealing and persuading. My first conversation was over a butter-tub in some Dublin back street, and the man agreed with me at once; everybody agreed with me; all felt that something must be done, but

nobody knew what. Perhaps they did not understand me, perhaps I kept back my full thoughts, perhaps they only seemed to listen; it was enough that I had a plan, and was determined about it. When I went to lecture in a provincial town, a workman's wife, who wrote patriotic stories in some weekly newspaper, invited me to her house, and I found all her children in their Sunday best. She made a little speech, very formal and very simple, in which she said that what she wrote had no merit, but that it paid for her children's schooling; and she finished her speech by telling her children never to forget that they had seen me. One man compared me to Thomas Davis, another said I could organise like Davitt, and I thought to succeed as they did, and as rapidly. I did not examine this applause, nor the true thoughts of those I

met, nor the general condition of the country, but I examined myself a great deal, and was puzzled at myself. I knew that I was shy and timid, that I would often leave some business undone, or purchase unmade, because I shrank from facing a strange office or a shop a little grander than usual, and yet, here was I delightedly talking to strange people every day. It was many years before I understood that I had surrendered myself to the chief temptation of the artist, creation without toil. Metrical composition is always very difficult to me, nothing is done upon the first day, not one rhyme is in its place; and when at last the rhymes begin to come, the first rough draft of a six-line stanza takes the whole day. At that time I had not formed a style, and sometimes a six-line stanza would take several days, and not seem finished even

then; and I had not learnt, as I have now, to put it all out of my head before night, and so the last night was generally sleepless, and the last day a day of nervous strain. But now I had found the happiness that Shelley found when he tied a pamphlet to a fire balloon.

II

At first I asked no help from prominent persons, and when some clerk or shop-assistant would say "Dr So-and-so or Professor So-and-so will have nothing to do with us" I would answer, "When we prove we can gather sheep shepherds will come." Presently, come they did, old, middle-aged, or but little older than myself, but all with some authority in their town: John O'Leary, John F. Taylor, and Douglas Hyde, and Standish O'Grady,

and of these much presently; Dr. Sigerson who has picked a quarrel with me and of whom I shall say nothing that he may not pick another; Count Plunkett, Sinn Feiner of late and Minister of Dail Eireann; Dr. Coffey, now head of the National University; George Coffey, later on Curator of the Irish Antiquities at the Museum of the Royal Dublin Society; Patrick J. McCall, poet and publican of Patrick Street, and later member of corporation; Richard Ashe King, novelist and correspondent of Truth, a gentle, intelligent person, typical of nothing; and others, known or unknown. We were now important, had our Committee room in the Mansion House, and I remember that the old Mansion House butler recognised our importance so fully, that he took us into his confidence once in every week, while we sat waiting for a quorum. He

had seen many Lord Mayors, and remembered those very superior Lord Mayors who lived before the extension of the municipal franchise, and spoke of his present masters with contempt. Among our persons of authority, and among the friends and followers they had brought, there were many who at that time found it hard to refuse if anybody offered for sale a pepper-pot shaped to suggest a round tower with a wolf-dog at its foot, and who would have felt it inappropriate to publish an Irish book, that had not harp and shamrock and green cover, so completely did their minds move amid Young Ireland images and metaphors, and I thought with alarm of the coming of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy; while here and there I noticed that smooth, smiling face that we discover for the first time in certain pictures by Velasquez; all that

hungry, mediaeval speculation vanished, that had worn the faces of El Greco and in its place a self-complacent certainty that all had been arranged, provided for, set out in clear type, in manual of devotion or of doctrine. These, however, were no true disciples of Young Ireland, for Young Ireland had sought a nation unified by political doctrine, a subservient art and letters aiding and abetting. The movement of thought, which had in the 'fifties and 'fourties at Paris and London and Boston, filled literature, and especially poetical literature with curiosities about science, about history about politics, with moral purpose and educational fervour--abstractions all--had created a new instrument for Irish politics, a method of writing that took its poetical style from Campbell, Scott, Macauley, and Beranger, with certain

elements from Gaelic, and its prose style--in John Mitchell, the only Young Ireland prose writer who had a style at all--from Carlyle. To recommend this method of writing as literature without much reservation and discrimination I contended was to be deceived or to practice deception. If one examined some country love-song, one discovered that it was not written by a man in love, but by a patriot who wanted to prove that we did indeed possess, in the words of Daniel O'Connell, "the finest peasantry upon earth." Yet one well-known anthology was introduced by the assertion that such love-poetry was superior to "affected and artificial" English love-songs like "Drink to me only with thine eyes"--"affected and artificial," the very words used by English Victorians who wrote for the newspapers to

discourage capricious, personal writing. However, the greater number even of those who thought our famous anthology, The Spirit of the Nation, except for three or four songs, but good election rhyme, looked upon it much as certain enlightened believers look upon the story of Adam and Eve and the apple, or that of Jonah and the whale, which they do not question publicly, because such stories are an integral part of religion to simple men and women. I, upon the other hand, being in the intemperance of my youth, denied, as publicly as possible, merit to all but a few ballads translated from Gaelic writers, or written out of a personal and generally tragic experience.

III

The greater number of those who joined my society had come under the seal of Young Ireland at that age when we are all mere wax; the more ambitious had gone daily to some public library to read the bound volumes of Thomas Davis's old newspaper, and tried to see the world as Davis saw it. No philosophic speculation, no economic question of the day, disturbed an orthodoxy which, unlike that of religion had no philosophic history, and the religious bigot was glad that it should be so. Some few of the younger men were impatient, and it was these younger men, more numerous in the London than in the Dublin Society, who gave me support; and we had been joined by a few older men--some personal friends of my own or my father--who had only historical interest in Thomas Davis and his school. Young Ireland's prose had

been as much occupied with Irish virtue, and more with the invader's vices, than its poetry, and we were soon mired and sunk into such problems as to whether Cromwell was altogether black, the heads of the old Irish clans altogether white, the Danes mere robbers and church burners (they tell me at Rosses Point that the Danes keep to this day the maps of the Rosses fields they were driven out of in the 9th century, and plot their return) and as to whether we were or were not once the greatest orators in the world. All the past had been turned into a melodrama with Ireland for blameless hero and poet, novelist and historian had but one object, that we should hiss the villain, and only a minority doubted that the greater the talent the greater the hiss. It was all the harder to substitute for that melodrama a nobler form of art,

because there really had been, however different in their form, villain and victim; yet fight that rancour I must, and if I had not made some head against it in 1892 and 1893 it might have silenced in 1907 John Synge, the greatest dramatic genius of Ireland. I am writing of disputes that happened many years ago, that led in later years to much bitterness, and I may exaggerate their immediate importance and violence, but I think I am right in saying that disputes about the merits of Young Ireland so often interrupted our discussion of rules, or of the merit of this or that lecturer, and were so aggravated and crossed by the current wrangle between Parnellite and anti-Parnellite that they delayed our public appearance for a year. Other excited persons, doubtless, seeing that we are of a race intemperate of speech, had looked up from their

rancours to the dead Lord Mayors upon the wall, superior men whose like we shall not see again, but never, I think, from rancours so seemingly academic. I was preparing the way without knowing it for a great satirist and master of irony, for master works stir vaguely in many before they grow definite in one man's mind, and to help me I had already flitting through my head, jostling other ideas and so not yet established there, a conviction that we should satirize rather than praise, that original virtue arises from the discovery of evil. If we were, as I had dreaded, declamatory, loose, and bragging, we were but the better fitted, that once declared and measured, to create unyielding personality, manner at once cold and passionate, daring long premeditated act; and if bitter beyond all the people of the world, we might yet lie,

that too declared and measured, nearest the honeyed comb:--

"Like the clangour of a bell Sweet and harsh, harsh and sweet, That is how he learnt so well To take the roses for his meat."

IV

There were others with followers of their own, and too old or indifferent to join our society. Old men who had never accepted Young Ireland, or middle-aged men kept by some family tradition to the school of thought before it arose, to the Ireland of Daniel O'Connell and of Lever and of Thomas Moore, convivial Ireland with the traditional tear and smile. They sang Moore's Melodies, admitted no poetry but his, and resented Young Ireland's political

objections to it as much as my generation's objection to its artificial and easy rhythm; one, an old commercial traveller, a Gaelic scholar who kept an erect head and the animal vigour of youth, frequented the houses of our leading men, and would say in a loud voice, "Thomas Moore, sir, is the greatest heroic poet of ancient or modern times." I think it was the Fire Worshippers in Lalla Rookh that he preferred to Homer; or, jealous for the music of the Melodies, denounce Wagner, then at the top of his vogue; "I would run ten miles through a bog to escape him," he would cry. Then there was a maker of tombstones of whom we had heard much but had seen little, an elderly fighting man, lately imprisoned for beating a wine-merchant. A young member of the London society, afterwards librarian to the National

University, D. J. O'Donohue, who had published a dictionary of the Irish poets, containing, I think, two thousand names, had come to Dublin and settled there in a fit of patriotism. He had been born in London, and spoke the most Cockney dialect imaginable, and had picked up--probably from London critics--a dislike for the poetry of Thomas Moore. The tombstone maker invited him to tea, and he arrived with a bundle of books, which he laid beside him upon the table. During tea he began expounding that dislike of his; his host was silent, but he went on, for he was an obstinate little man. Presently the tombstone-maker rose, and having said solemnly, "I have never permitted that great poet to be slandered in my presence," seized his guest by the back of the collar, and flung him out into the street, and after that flung out the

books one after another. Meanwhile the guest--as he himself told the tale--stood in the middle of the street repeating, "Nice way to treat a man in your own 'ouse."

V

I shared a lodging full of old books and magazines, covered with dirt and dust, with the head of the Fenian Brotherhood, John O'Leary. "In this country," he had said to me, "a man must have upon his side the Church or the Fenians, and you will never have the Church." He had been converted to nationality by the poems of Davis, and he wished for some analogous movement to that of Davis, but he had known men of letters, had been the friend of Whistler, and knew the faults of the old literature. We had made him the

President of our Society, and without him I could do nothing, for his long imprisonment and longer exile, his magnificent appearance, and, above all, the fact that he alone had personality, a point of view not made for the crowd's sake, but for self-expression, made him magnetic to my generation. He and I had long been friends, he had stayed with us at Bedford Park, and my father had painted his portrait, but if I had not shared his lodging he would have opposed me. He was an old man, and my point of view was not that of his youth, and it often took me half the day to make him understand--so suspicious he was of all innovation--some simple thing that he would presently support with ardour. He had grown up in a European movement when the revolutionist thought that he, above all men, must appeal to the

highest motive, be guided by some ideal principle, be a little like Cato or like Brutus, and he had lived to see the change Dostoievsky examined in The Possessed. Men who had been of his party--and oftener their sons--preached assassination and the bomb; and, worst of all, the majority of his countrymen followed after constitutional politicians who practised opportunism, and had, as he believed, such low morals that they would lie, or publish private correspondence, if it might advance their cause. He would split every practical project into its constituent elements, like a clerical casuist, to find if it might not lead into some moral error; but, were the project revolutionary, he would sometimes temper condemnation with pity. Though he would cast off his oldest acquaintance did he suspect him of

rubbing shoulders with some carrier of bombs, I have heard him say of a man who blew himself up in an attempt to blow up Westminster Bridge, "He was not a bad man, but he had too great a moral nature for his intellect, not that he lacked intellect." He did not explain, but he meant, I suppose, that the spectacle of injustice might madden a good man more quickly than some common man. Such men were of his own sort, though gone astray, but the constitutional politicians he had been fighting all his life, and all they did displeased him. It was not that he thought their aim wrong, or that they could not achieve it; he had accepted Gladstone's Home Rule Bill; but that in his eyes they degraded manhood. "If England has been brought to do us justice by such men," he would say, "that is not because of our strength, but

because of her weakness." He had a particular hatred for the rush of emotion that followed the announcement of Gladstone's conversion, for what was called "The Union of Hearts," and derided its sentimentality; "Nations may respect one another," he would say, "they cannot love." His ancestors had probably kept little shops, or managed little farms in County Tipperary, yet he hated democracy, though he never used the word either for praise or blame, with more than feudal hatred. "No gentleman can be a socialist," he said, and then, with a thoughtful look, "He might be an anarchist." He had no philosophy, but things distressed his palate, and two of those things were International propaganda and the Organised State, and Socialism aimed at both, nor could he speak such words as "philanthropy,"

"humanitarianism," without showing by his tone of voice that they offended him. The Church pleased him little better; there was an old Fenian quarrel there, and he would say, "My religion is the old Persian, to pull the bow and tell the truth." He had no self-consciousness, no visible pride, and would have hated anything that could have been called a gesture, was indeed scarce artist enough to invent a gesture; yet he would never speak of the hardship of his prison life--though abundantly enough of its humours--and once, when I pressed him, replied, "I was in the hands of my enemy, why should I complain?" A few years ago I heard that the Governor of the prison had asked why he did not report some unnecessary discomfort, and O'Leary had said, "I did not come here to complain." Now that he is dead, I wish that I could

question him, and perhaps discover whether in early youth he had come across some teacher who had expounded Roman virtue, but I doubt if I would have learnt anything, for I think the wax had long forgotten the seal--if seal there were. The seal was doubtless made before the eloquent humanitarian 'forties and 'fifties, and was one kind with that that had moulded the youthful mind of Savage Landor. Stephens, the founder of Fenianism, had discovered him searching the second-hand bookstalls for rare editions, and enrolled him in his organization. "You have no chance of success," O'Leary had said "but it will be good for the morale of the country" (morale was his great word), "and I will join on the condition that I am never asked to enrol anybody." He still searched the second-hand bookstalls, and

had great numbers of books, especially of Irish history and literature, and when I, exhausted over our morning's casuistry, would sit down to my day's work (I was writing The Secret Rose) he would make his tranquil way to the Dublin Quays. In the evening, over his coffee, he would write passages for his memoirs upon postcards and odd scraps of paper, taking immense trouble with every word and comma, for the great work must be a masterpiece of style. When it was finished, it was unreadable, being dry, abstract, and confused; no picture had ever passed before his mind's eye. He was a victim, I think, of a movement where opinions stick men together, or keep them apart, like a kind of bird lime, and without any relation to their natural likes and tastes, and where men of rich nature must give themselves up to an

irritation which they no longer recognise because it is always present. I often wonder why he gave me his friendship, why it was he who found almost all the subscribers for my Wanderings of Usheen, and why he now supported me in all I did, for how could he like verses that were all picture, all emotion, all association, all mythology? He could not have approved my criticism either, for I exalted Mask and Image above the 18th century logic which he loved, and set experience before observation, emotion before fact. Yet he would say, "I have only three followers, Taylor, Yeats, and Rolleston," and presently he cast out Rolleston--"Davitt wants to convert thousands, but I want two or three." I think that perhaps it was because he no more wished to strengthen Irish Nationalism by second-rate literature

than by second-rate morality, and was content that we agreed in that. "There are things a man must not do to save a Nation," he had once told me, and when I asked what things, had said, "To cry in public," and I think it probable that he would have added, if pressed, "To write oratorical or insincere verse."

O'Leary's movements and intonations were full of impulse, but John F. Taylor's voice in private discussion had no emotional quality except in the expression of scorn; if he moved an arm it moved from the shoulder or elbow alone, and when he walked he moved from the waist only, and seemed an automaton, a wooden soldier, as if he had no life that was not dry and abstract. Except at moments of public oratory, he lacked all personality, though when one

saw him respectful and gentle with O'Leary, as with some charming woman, one saw that he felt its fascination. In letters, or in painting, it repelled him unless it were harsh and obvious, and, therefore, though his vast erudition included much art and letters, he lacked artistic feeling, and judged everything by the moral sense. He had great ambition, and had he joined some established party, or found some practicable policy, he might have been followed, might have produced even some great effect, but he must have known that in defeat no man would follow him, as they followed O'Leary, as they followed Parnell. His oratory was noble, strange, even beautiful, at moments the greatest I have ever listened to; but, the speech over, where there had been, as it seemed, so little of himself, all coming from beyond

himself, we saw precisely as before an ungainly body in unsuitable, badly-fitting clothes, and heard an excited voice speaking ill of this man or that other. We knew that he could never give us that one price we would accept, that he would never find a practicable policy; that no party would admit, no government negotiate with, a man notorious for a temper, that, if it gave him genius, could at times carry him to the edge of insanity.

Born in some country town, the son of some little watchmaker, he had been a shop assistant, put himself to college and the bar, learned to speak at temperance meetings and Young Ireland societies, and was now a Queen's Counsel famous for his defence of country criminals, whose cases had seemed hopeless--Taylor's boys, their neighbours called

them or they called themselves. He had shaped his style and his imagination from Carlyle, the chief inspirer of self-educated men in the 'eighties and early 'nineties. "I prefer Emerson's Oversoul," the Condalkin cobbler said to me, "but I always read Carlyle when I am wild with the neighbours"; but he used his master's style, as Mitchell had done before, to abase what his master loved, to exalt what his master scorned. His historical erudition seemed as vast as that of York Powell, but his interests were not Powell's, for he had no picture before the mind's eye, and had but one object--a plea of not guilty--entered in his country's name before a jury which he believed to be packed. O'Leary cared nothing for his country's glory, its individuality alone seemed important in his eyes; he was like some man, who

serves a woman all his life without asking whether she be good or bad, wise or foolish; but Taylor cared for nothing else; he was so much O'Leary's disciple that he would say in conversation, "We are demoralised, what case for change if we are not?" for O'Leary admitted no ground for reform outside the moral life, but when he spoke to the great plea he would make no admission. He spoke to it in the most obscure places, in little halls in back streets where the white-washed walls are foul with grease from many heads, before some audience of medical students or of shop assistants, for he was like a man under a curse, compelled to hide his genius, and compelled to show in conspicuous places his ill judgment and his temper.

His distaste for myself, broken by occasional tolerance, in so far as it was not distaste for an imagination that seemed to him aesthetic rather than ethical, was because I had published Irish folk-lore in English reviews to the discredit, as he thought, of the Irish peasantry, and because, England within earshot, I found fault with the Young Ireland prose and poetry. He would have hated The Playboy of the Western World, and his death a little before its performance was fortunate for Synge and myself. His articles are nothing, and his one historical work, a life of Hugh O'Neill, is almost nothing, lacking the living voice; and now, though a most formidable man, he is forgotten, but for the fading memory of a few friends, and for what an enemy has written here and elsewhere. Did not Leonardo da Vinci

warn the imaginative man against pre-occupation with arts that cannot survive his death?

VI

When Carleton was dying in 1870, he said there would be nothing more about Irish Literature for twenty years, and his words were fulfilled, for the land war had filled Ireland with its bitterness; but imagination had begun to stir again. I had the same confidence in the future that Lady Gregory and I had eight or nine years later, when we founded an Irish Theatre, though there were neither, as it seemed, plays or players. There were already a few known men to start my popular series, and to keep it popular until the men, whose names I did not know, had learnt to express themselves. I

had met Dr. Douglas Hyde when I lived in Dublin, and he was still an undergraduate. I have a memory of meeting in college rooms for the first time a very dark young man, who filled me with surprise, partly because he had pushed a snuffbox towards me, and partly because there was something about his vague serious eyes, as in his high cheek bones, that suggested a different civilization, a different race. I had set him down as a peasant, and wondered what brought him to college, and to a Protestant college, but somebody explained that he belonged to some branch of the Hydes of Castle Hyde, and that he had a Protestant Rector for father. He had much frequented the company of old countrymen, and had so acquired the Irish language, and his taste for snuff, and for moderate quantities of a

detestable species of illegal whiskey distilled from the potato by certain of his neighbours. He had already--though intellectual Dublin knew nothing of it--considerable popularity as a Gaelic poet, mowers and reapers singing his songs from Donegal to Kerry. Years afterwards I was to stand at his side and listen to Galway mowers singing his Gaelic words without knowing whose words they sang. It is so in India, where peasants sing the words of the great poet of Bengal without knowing whose words they sing, and it must often be so where the old imaginative folk life is undisturbed, and it is so amongst schoolboys who hand their story books to one another without looking at the title page to read the author's name. Here and there, however, the peasants had not lost the habit of Gaelic criticism, picked up, perhaps, from

the poets who took refuge among them after the ruin of the great Catholic families, from men like that O'Rahilly, who cries in a translation from the Gaelic that is itself a masterpiece of concentrated passion--

"The periwinkle and the tough dog-fish
Towards evening time have got into my dish."

An old rascal was kept in food and whiskey for a fortnight by some Connaught village under the belief that he was Craoibhin Aoibhin, "the pleasant little branch," as Doctor Hyde signed himself in the newspapers where the villagers had found his songs. The impostor's thirst only strengthened belief in his genius, for the Gaelic song-writers have had the infirmities of Robert Burns,

"It is not the drink but the company," one of the last has sung. Since that first meeting Doctor Hyde and I had corresponded, and he had sent me in manuscript the best tale in my Faery and Folk Tales, and I think I had something to do with the London publication of his Beside the Fire, a book written in the beautiful English of Connaught, which is Gaelic in idiom and Tudor in vocabulary, and indeed, the first book to use it in the expression of emotion and romance, for Carleton and his school had turned it into farce. Henley had praised him, and York Powell had said, "If he goes on as he has begun, he will be the greatest folk-loreist who has ever lived"; and I know no first book of verse of our time that is at once so romantic and so concrete as his Gaelic Abhla de'n Craoibh; but in a few years Dublin was to laugh him, or rail him, out

of his genius. He had no critical capacity, having indeed for certain years the uncritical folk-genius, as no educated Irish or Englishman has ever had it, writing out of an imitative sympathy like that of a child catching a tune and leaving it to chance to call the tune; and the failure of our first attempt to create a modern Irish literature permitted the ruin of that genius. He was to create a great popular movement, far more important in its practical results than any movement I could have made, no matter what my luck, but, being neither quarrelsome nor vain, he will not be angry if I say--for the sake of those who come after us--that I mourn for the "greatest folk-loreist who ever lived," and for the great poet who died in his youth. The Harps and Pepperpots got him and the Harps and Pepperpots kept him till he wrote in our

common English--"It must be either English or Irish," said some patriotic editor, Young Ireland practice in his head--that needs such sifting that he who would write it vigorously must write it like a learned language, and took for his model the newspaper upon his breakfast table, and became for no base reason beloved by multitudes who should never have heard his name till their schoolmasters showed it upon his tomb. That very incapacity for criticism made him the cajoler of crowds, and of individual men and women; "He should not be in the world at all," said one admiring elderly woman, "or doing the world's work"; and for certain years young Irish women were to display his pseudonym, "Craoibhin Aoibhin," in gilt letters upon their hat bands.

"Dear Craoibhin Aoibhin,.....impart to us, We'll keep the secret, a new trick to please; Is there a bridle for this Proteus That turns and changes like his draughty seas, Or is there none, most popular of men, But, when they mock us, that we mock again?"

VII

Standish O'Grady, upon the other hand, was at once all passion and all judgment. And yet those who knew him better than I assured me he could find quarrel in a straw; and I did know that he had quarrelled a few years back with Jack Nettleship. Nettleship's account had been, "My mother cannot endure the God of the Old Testament, but likes Jesus Christ; whereas I like the God of the Old Testament, and cannot endure Jesus

Christ; and we have got into the way of quarrelling about it at lunch; and once, when O'Grady lunched with us, he said it was the most disgraceful spectacle he had ever seen, and walked out." Indeed, I wanted him among my writers, because of his quarrels, for, having much passion and little rancour, the more he quarrelled, the nobler, the more patched with metaphor, the more musical his style became, and if he were in his turn attacked, he knew a trick of speech that made us murmur, "We do it wrong, being so majestical, to offer it the show of violence." Sometimes he quarrelled most where he loved most. A Unionist in politics, a leader-writer on The Daily Express, the most Conservative paper in Ireland, hater of every form of democracy, he had given all his heart to the smaller Irish landowners, to whom he

belonged, and with whom his childhood had been spent, and for them he wrote his books, and would soon rage over their failings in certain famous passages that many men would repeat to themselves like poets' rhymes. All round us people talked or wrote for victory's sake, and were hated for their victories--but here was a man whose rage was a swan-song over all that he had held most dear, and to whom for that very reason every Irish imaginative writer owed a portion of his soul. In his unfinished History of Ireland he had made the old Irish heroes, Fion, and Oisin, and Cuchullan, alive again, taking them, for I think he knew no Gaelic, from the dry pages of O'Curry and his school, and condensing and arranging, as he thought Homer would have arranged and condensed. Lady Gregory has told the same tales, but

keeping closer to the Gaelic text, and with greater powers of arrangement and a more original style, but O'Grady was the first, and we had read him in our 'teens. I think that, had I succeeded, a popular audience could have changed him little, and that his genius would have stayed, as it had been shaped by his youth in some provincial society, and that to the end he would have shown his best in occasional thrusts and parries. But I do think that if, instead of that one admirable little book The Bog of Stars, we had got all his histories and imaginative works into the hands of our young men, he might have brought the imagination of Ireland nearer the Image and the honeycomb.

Lionel Johnson was to be our critic, and above all our theologian, for he had been

converted to Catholicism, and his orthdoxy, too learned to question, had accepted all that we did, and most of our plans. Historic Catholicism, with all its counsels and its dogmas, stirred his passion like the beauty of a mistress, and the unlearned parish priests who thought good literature or good criticism dangerous were in his eyes "all heretics." He belonged to a family that had called itself Irish some generations back, and its recent English generations but enabled him to see as one single sacred tradition Irish nationality and Catholic religion. How should he fail to know the Holy Land? Had he not been in Egypt? He had joined our London Irish Literary Society, attended its committee meetings, and given lectures in London, in Dublin, and in Belfast, on Irish novelists and Irish poetry, reading his lectures always, and

yet affecting his audience as I, with my spoken lectures, could not, perhaps because Ireland had still the shape it had received from the eighteenth century, and so felt the dignity, not the artifice, of his elaborate periods. He was very little, and at a first glance he seemed but a schoolboy of fifteen. I remember saying one night at the Rhymers', when he spoke of passing safely, almost nightly, through Seven Dials, then a dangerous neighbourhood, "Who would expect to find anything in your pockets but a pegtop and a piece of string?" But one never thought of his small stature when he spoke or read. He had the delicate strong features of a certain filleted head of a Greek athlete in the British Museum, an archaistic Graeco-Roman copy of a masterpiece of the fourth century, and that resemblance seemed symbolic of the

austere nobility of his verse. He was now in his best years, writing with great ease and power; neither I, nor, I think, any other, foresaw his tragedy.

He suffered from insomnia, and some doctor, while he was still at the University, had recommended alcohol, and he had, in a vain hope of sleep, increased the amount, as Rossetti had increased his doses of chloral, and now he drank for drinking's sake. He drank a great deal too much, and, though nothing could, it seemed, disturb his calm or unsteady his hand or foot, his doctrine, after a certain number of glasses, would become more ascetic, more contemptuous of all that we call human life. I have heard him, after four or five glasses of wine, praise some church father who freed himself from sexual

passion by a surgical operation, and deny with scorn, and much historical evidence, that a gelded man lost anything of intellectual power. Even without stimulant his theology conceded nothing to human weakness, and I can remember his saying with energy, "I wish those people who deny the eternity of punishment could realise their unspeakable vulgarity."

Now that I know his end, I see him creating, to use a favourite adjective of his, "marmorean" verse, and believing the most terrible doctrines to keep down his own turbulence. One image of that stay in Dublin is so clear before me that it has blotted out most other images of that time. He is sitting at a lodging-house table, which I have just left at three in the morning, and round him lie or sit in huddled attitudes half-a-dozen men in

various states of intoxication: and he is looking straight before him with head erect, and one hand resting upon the table. As I reach the stairs I hear him say, in a clear, unshaken voice, "I believe in nothing but the Holy Roman Catholic Church." He sometimes spoke of drink as something which he could put aside at any moment, and his friends believed, and I think he liked us to believe, that he would shortly enter a monastery. Did he deceive us deliberately? Did he himself already foresee the moment when he would write The Dark Angel? I am almost certain that he did, for he had already written Mystic and Cavalier, where the historical setting is, I believe, but masquerade.

"Go from me: I am one of those, who fall. What! hath no cold wind swept your

heart at all, In my sad company? Before the end, Go from me, dear my friend!

Yours are the victories of light: your feet Rest from good toil, where rest is brave and sweet. But after warfare in a mourning gloom I rest in clouds of doom.

Seek with thine eyes to pierce this crystal sphere: Canst read a fate there, prosperous and clear? Only the mists, only the weeping clouds: Dimness, and airy shrouds.

O rich and sounding voices of the air! Interpreters and prophets of despair:

Priests of a fearful sacrament! I come To make with you my home."

VIII

Sir Charles Gavan Duffy arrived. He brought with him much manuscript, the private letters of a Young Ireland poetess, a dry but informing unpublished historical essay by Davis, and an unpublished novel by William Carleton, into the middle of which he had dropped a hot coal, so that nothing remained but the borders of every page. He hired a young man to read him, after dinner, Carlyle's Heroes and Hero-Worship, and before dinner was gracious to all our men of authority and especially to our Harps and Pepperpots. Taylor compared him to Odysseus returning to Ithaca, and every newspaper published his biography. He was a white-

haired old man, who had written the standard history of Young Ireland, had emigrated to Australia, had been the first Australian Federalist, and later Prime Minister, but, in all his writings, in which there is so much honesty, so little rancour, there is not one sentence that has any meaning when separated from its place in argument or narrative, not one distinguished because of its thought or music. One imagined his youth in some little gaunt Irish town, where no building or custom is revered for its antiquity; and there speaking a language where no word, even in solitude, is ever spoken slowly and carefully because of emotional implication; and of his manhood of practical politics, of the dirty piece of orange-peel in the corner of the stairs as one climbs up to some newspaper office; of public meetings where it would be

treacherous amid so much geniality to speak, or even to think of anything that might cause a moment's misunderstanding in one's own party. No argument of mine was intelligible to him, and I would have been powerless, but that fifty years ago he had made an enemy, and though that enemy was long dead, his school remained. He had attacked, why or with what result I do not remember, the only Young Ireland politician who had music and personality, though rancorous and devil-possessed. At some public meeting of ours, where he spoke amid great applause, in smooth, Gladstonian periods, of his proposed Irish publishing firm, one heard faint hostile murmurs, and at last a voice cried, "Remember Newry," and a voice answered, "There is a grave there!" and a part of the audience sang, "Here's to

John Mitchell that is gone, boys, gone; Here's to the friends that are gone." The meeting over, a group of us, indignant that the meeting we had called for his welcome should have contained those malcontents, gathered about him to apologize. He had written a pamphlet, he explained: he would give us copies. We would see that he was in the right, how badly Mitchell had behaved. But in Ireland personality, if it be but harsh and hard, has lovers, and some of us, I think, may have gone home muttering, "How dare he be in the right if Mitchell is in the wrong?"

IX

He wanted "to complete the Young Ireland movement"--to do all that had been left undone because of the Famine,

or the death of Davis, or his own emigration; and all the younger men were upon my side in resisting that. They might not want the books I wanted, but they did want books written by their own generation, and we began to struggle with him over the control of the company. Taylor became very angry, and I can understand what I looked like in his eyes, when I remember Edwin Ellis's seriously-intended warning, "It is bad manners for a man under thirty to permit himself to be in the right." But John O'Leary supported me throughout.

When Gavin Duffy had gone to London to draw up articles of association for his company, for which he had found many shareholders in Dublin, the dispute became very fierce. One night members of the general public climbed the six

flights of stairs to our committee room, now no longer in the Mansion House, and found seats for themselves just behind our chairs. We were all too angry to send them away, or even to notice their presence, for I was accused of saying at a public meeting in Cork, "Our books," when I should have said, "Sir Charles Gavan Duffy's books." I was not Taylor's match with the spoken word, and barely matched him with the written word. At twenty-seven or twenty-eight I was immature and clumsy, and O'Leary's support was capricious, for, being but a spectator of life, he would desert me if I used a bad argument, and would not return till I found a good one; and our chairman, Dr. Hyde, "most popular of men," sat dreaming of his old white cockatoo in far-away Roscommon. Our very success had been a misfortune, for

an opposition which had been literary and political, now that it had spread to the general public, brought religious prejudice to its aid. Suddenly, when the company seemed all but established, and a scheme had been thought out which gave some representation on its governing board to contemporary Irish writers, Gavan Duffy produced a letter from Archbishop Walsh, and threw the project up. The letter had warned him that after his death the company would fall under a dangerous influence. At this moment the always benevolent friend, to whom I had explained in confidence, when asking his support, my arrangements with my publisher, went to Gavan Duffy and suggested that they should together offer Mr Fisher Unwin a series of Irish books, and Mr Fisher Unwin and his reader accepted the series under

the belief that it was my project that they accepted. I went to London to find the contract signed, and that all I could do was to get two sub-editors appointed, responsible to the two societies. Two or three good books were published, especially Dr. Hyde's Short History of Gaelic Literature, and Standish O'Grady's Bog of Stars; but the series was killed by its first volume, Thomas Davis's dry but informing historical essay. So important had our movement seemed that ten thousand copies had been sold before anybody had time to read it, and then came a dead stop.

Gavan Duffy knew nothing of my plans, and so was guiltless, and my friend had heard me discuss many things that evening. I had perhaps dispraised the humanitarian Stephen Phillips, already in

his first vogue, and praised Francis Thompson, but half-rescued from his gutter; or flouted his belief in the perpetual marriage of genius and virtue by numbering the vices of famous men; this man's venery, that man's drink. He could not be expected to remember that where I had said so much of no account, I said one thing, and he had made no reply, that I thought of great account. He died a few months ago, and it would have surprised and shocked him if any man had told him that he was unforgiven; had he not forgotten all about it long ago? A German doctor has said that if we leave an umbrella at a friend's house it is because we have a sub-conscious desire to re-visit that house; and he had perhaps a sub-conscious desire that my too tumultuous generation should not have its say.

X

I was at Sligo when I received a letter from John O'Leary, saying that I could do no more in Dublin, for even the younger men had turned against me, were "jealous," his letter said, though what they had to be jealous of God knows. He said further that it was all my own fault, that he had warned me what would happen if I lived on terms of intimacy with those I tried to influence. I should have kept myself apart and alone. It was all true; through some influence from an earlier generation, from Walt Whitman, perhaps, I had sat talking in public bars, had talked late into the night at many men's houses, showing all my convictions to men that were but ready for one, and used conversation to explore and

discover among men who looked for authority. I did not yet know that intellectual freedom and social equality are incompatible; and yet, if I had, could hardly have lived otherwise, being too young for silence. The trouble came from half a dozen obscure young men, who having nothing to do attended every meeting and were able to overturn a project, that seemed my only bridge to other projects, including a travelling theatre. We had planned small libraries of Irish literature in connection with our country branches; we collected books and money, sending a lecturer to every branch and taking half the proceeds of that lecture to buy books. Maud Gonne, whose beauty could draw a great audience in any country town, had been the lecturer. The scheme was very nearly self-supporting, and six or seven bundles

of books, chosen after much disputation by John O'Leary, J. F. Taylor, and myself, had been despatched to some six or seven branches. "The country will support this work" Taylor had said somewhere on some public platform, "because we are the most inflammable people on God's earth," his harsh voice giving almost a quality of style to Carlylian commonplace; but we are also a very jealous people. The half-a-dozen young men, if a little jealous of me, were still more jealous of those country branches which were getting so much notice, and where there was so much of that peasant mind their schoolmasters had taught them to despise. One must be English or Irish, they would have said. I returned to find a great box of books appropriated for some Dublin purpose and the whole scheme abandoned. I know that it was a

bitter moment because I remember with gratitude words spoken not to my ear, but for my ear, by a young man who had lately joined our Society, Mr. Stephen McKenna, now well-known amongst scholars for his distinguished translations of Plotinus, and I seem to remember that I lost through anger what gift of persuasion I may possess, and that I was all the more helpless because I felt that even the best of us disagreed about everything at heart. I began to feel that I needed a hostess more than a society, but that I was not to find for years to come. I tried to persuade Maud Gonne to be that hostess, but her social life was in Paris, and she had already formed a new ambition, the turning of French public opinion against England. Without intellectual freedom there can be no agreement, and in Nationalist Dublin

there was not--indeed there still is not--any society where a man is heard by the right ears, but never overheard by the wrong, and where he speaks his whole mind gaily, and is not the cautious husband of a part; where phantasy can play before matured into conviction; where life can shine and ring, and lack utility. Mere life lacking the protection of wealth or rank, or some beauty's privilege of caprice cannot choose its company, taking up and dropping men merely because it likes, or dislikes, their manners and their looks, and in its stead opinion crushes and rends, and all is hatred and bitterness: wheel biting upon wheel, a roar of steel or iron tackle, a mill of argument grinding all things down to mediocrity. If, as I think, minds and metals correspond the goldsmiths of Paris foretold the French Revolution when they

substituted steel for that unserviceable gold in the manufacture of the more expensive jewel work, and made those large, flat steel buttons for men of fashion whereby the card players were able to cheat by studying the reflections of the cards.

XI

No country could have more natural distaste for equality, for in every circle there was some man ridiculous for posing as the type of some romantic or distinguished quality. One of our friends, a man of talent and of learning, whose ancestors had come, he believed, from Denmark in the ninth century, looked and talked the distinguished foreigner so perfectly that a patriotic newspaper gave particulars of his supposed relations in

contemporary Denmark! A half-mad old man who had served for a few months in the Pope's army, many years before, still rode an old white warhorse in all national processions, and, if their enemies were not lying, one Town Councillor had challenged another to a duel by flinging his glove upon the floor; while a popular Lord Mayor had boasted in a public speech that he never went to bed at night without reading at least twelve pages of Sappho. Then, too, in those conversations of the small hours, to which O'Leary had so much objected, whenever we did not speak of art and letters, we spoke of Parnell. We told each other that he had admitted no man to his counsel; that when some member of his party found himself in the same hotel by chance, that member would think to stay there a presumption, and move to some

other lodging; and, above all, we spoke of his pride, that made him hide all emotion while before his enemy. Once he had seemed callous and indifferent to the House of Commons, Foster had accused him of abetting assassination, but when he came among his followers his hands were full of blood, because he had torn them with his nails. What excitement there would have been, what sense of mystery would have stirred all our hearts, and stirred hearts all through the country, where there was still, and for many years to come, but one overmastering topic, had we known the story Mrs. Parnell tells of that scene on Brighton Pier. He and the woman that he loved stood there upon a night of storm, when his power was at its greatest height, and still unthreatened. He caught her from the ground and held her at arm's length out over the water

and she lay there motionless, knowing that, had she moved, he would have drowned himself and her. Perhaps unmotived self-immolation, were that possible, or else at mere suggestion of storm and night, were as great evidence as such a man could give of power over self, and so of the expression of the self.

XII

When I look back upon my Irish propaganda of those years I can see little but its bitterness. I never met with, or but met to quarrel with, my father's old family acquaintance; or with acquaintance I myself might have found, and kept, among the prosperous educated class, who had all the great appointments at University or Castle; and this I did by deliberate calculation. If I

must attack so much that seemed sacred to Irish nationalist opinion, I must, I knew, see to it that no man suspect me of doing it to flatter Unionist opinion. Whenever I got the support of some man who belonged by birth and education to University or Castle, I would say, "Now you must be baptized of the gutter." I chose Royal visits especially for demonstrations of disloyalty, rolling up with my own hands the red carpet spread by some elderly Nationalist, softened or weakened by time, to welcome Viceroyalty; and threatening, if the London Society drank to the King's health, that my friends and I would demonstrate against it by turning our glasses upside down; and was presently to discover that one can grow impassioned and fanatical about opinions, which one has chosen as one might

choose a side upon the football field; and I thought many a time of the pleasant Dublin houses that would never ask me to dine; and the still pleasanter houses with trout-streams near at hand, that would never ask me upon a visit. I became absurdly sensitive, glancing about me in certain public places, the private view of our Academy, or the like, to discover imagined enemies; and even now, after twenty or thirty years, I feel at times that I have not recovered my natural manner. Yet it was in those pleasant houses, among the young men and the young girls, that we were to make our converts. When we loathe ourselves or our world, if that loathing but turn to intellect, we see self or world and its anti-self as in one vision; when loathing remains but loathing, world or self consumes itself away, and we turn to

its mechanical opposite. Popular Nationalism and Unionism so changed into one another, being each but the other's headache. The Nationalist abstractions were like the fixed ideas of some hysterical woman, a part of the mind turned into stone, and all the rest a seething and burning; and Unionist Ireland had re-acted from that seething and burning to a cynical indifference, and from those fixed ideas to whatever might bring the most easy and obvious success.

I remember Taylor at some public debate, stiff of body and tense of voice; and the contrasting figure of Fitzgibbon, the Lord Justice of Appeal of the moment and his calm, flowing sentences, satisfactory to hear and impossible to remember. Taylor speaks of a little nation of antiquity, which he does not name, "set between

the great Empire of Persia and the great Empire of Rome." Into the mouths of those great Empires he puts the arguments of Fitzgibbon, and such as he, "Join with our greatness! What in comparison to that is your little, beggarly nationality?" And then I recall the excitement, the shiver of the nerves, as his voice rose to an ecstatic cry, "Out of that nation came the salvation of the world." I remember, too, and grow angry, as it were yesterday, a letter from that Lord Justice of Appeal, who had changed his politics for advancement's sake, recommending a correspondent to avoid us, because we dissuaded people from the study of "Shakespeare and Kingsley."

Edward Dowden, my father's old friend, with his dark romantic face, the one man of letters Dublin Unionism possessed, was

withering in that barren soil. Towards the end of his life he confessed to a near friend that he would have wished before all things to have been the lover of many women; and some careless lecture, upon the youthful Goethe, had in early life drawn down upon him the displeasure of the Protestant Archbishop. And yet he turned Shakespeare into a British Benthamite, flattered Shelley but to hide his own growing lack of sympathy, abandoned for like reason that study of Goethe that should have been his life-work, and at last cared but for Wordsworth, the one great poet who, after brief blossom, was cut and sawn into planks of obvious utility. I called upon him from time to time out of gratitude for old encouragements, and because, among the Dublin houses open to me, his alone was pleasant to the eye,

with its many books and its air of scholarship. But when O'Grady had declared, rancorous for once but under substantial provocation, that he had "a bad head and a worse heart," I found my welcome troubled and called no more.

XIII

The one house where nobody thought or talked politics was a house in Ely Place, where a number of young men lived together, and, for want of a better name, were called Theosophists. Beside the resident members, other members dropped in and out during the day, and the reading-room was a place of much discussion about philosophy and about the arts. The house had been taken in the name of the engineer to the Board of Works, a black-bearded young man, with

a passion for Manichean philosophy, and all accepted him as host; and sometimes the conversation, especially when I was there, became too ghostly for the nerves of his young and delicate wife, and he would be made angry. I remember young men struggling, with inexact terminology and insufficient learning, for some new religious conception, on which they could base their lives; and some few strange or able men.

At the top of the house lived a medical student who read Plato and took haschisch, and a young Scotchman who owned a vegetarian restaurant, and had just returned from America, where he had gone as the disciple of the Prophet Harris, and where he would soon return in the train of some new prophet. When one asked what set him on his

wanderings, he told of a young Highlander, his friend in boyhood, whose cap was always plucked off at a certain twist in the road, till the fathers of the village fastened it upon his head by recommending drink and women. When he had gone, his room was inherited by an American hypnotist, who had lived among the Zuni Indians with the explorer Cushant, and told of a Zuni Indian who, irritated by some white man's praise of telephone and telegraph, cried out, "Can they do that?" and cast above his head two handfuls of sand that burst into flame, and flamed till his head seemed wrapped in fire. He professed to talk the philosophy of the Zuni Indians, but it seemed to me the vague Platonism that all there talked, except that he spoke much of men passing in sleep into the heart of mountains; a doctrine that was

presently incorporated in the mythology of the house, to send young men and women hither and thither inquiring for sacred places. On a lower floor lived a strange red-haired girl, all whose thoughts were set upon painting and poetry, conceived as abstract images like Love and Penury in the Symposium; and to these images she sacrificed herself with Asiatic fanaticism. The engineer had discovered her starving somewhere in an unfurnished or half-furnished room, and that she had lived for many weeks upon bread and shell-cocoa, so that her food never cost her more than a penny a day. Born into a county family, who were so haughty that their neighbours called them the Royal Family, she had quarrelled with a mad father, who had never, his tenants declared, "unscrewed the top of his flask with any man,"

because she wished to study art, had ran away from home, had lived for a time by selling her watch, and then by occasional stories in an Irish paper. For some weeks she had paid half-a-crown a week to some poor woman to see her to the art schools and back, for she considered it wrong for a woman to show herself in public places unattended; but of late she had been unable to afford the school fees. The engineer engaged her as a companion for his wife, and gave her money enough to begin her studies once more. She had talent and imagination, a gift for style; but, though ready to face death for painting and poetry, conceived as allegorical figures, she hated her own genius, and had not met praise and sympathy early enough to overcome the hatred. Face to face with paint and canvas, pen and paper, she saw nothing

of her genius but its cruelty, and would have scarce arrived before she would find some excuse to leave the schools for the day, if indeed she had not invented over her breakfast some occupation so laborious that she could call it a duty, and so not go at all. Most watched her in mockery, but I watched in sympathy; composition strained my nerves and spoiled my sleep; and yet, as far back as I could trace--and in Ireland we have long memories--my paternal ancestors had worked at some intellectual pursuit, while hers had shot and hunted. She could at any time, had she given up her profession, which her father had raged against, not because it was art, but because it was a profession, have returned to the common comfortable life of women. When, a little later, she had quarrelled with the engineer or his wife,

and gone back to bread and shell-cocoa I brought her an offer from some Dublin merchant of fairly well paid advertisement work, which would have been less laborious than artistic creation; but she said that to draw advertisements was to degrade art, thanked me elaborately, and did not disguise her indignation. She had, I believe, returned to starvation with joy, for constant anaemia would shortly give her an argument strong enough to silence her conscience when the allegorical images glared upon her, and, apart from that, starvation and misery had a large share in her ritual of worship.

XIV

At the top of the house and at the time I remember best, in the same room with

the young Scotchman, lived Mr. George Russell (A.E.), and the house and the society were divided into his adherents and those of the engineer; and I heard of some quarrelling between the factions. The rivalry was sub-conscious. Neither had willingly opposed the other in any matter of importance. The engineer had all the financial responsibility, and George Russell was, in the eyes of the community, saint and genius. Had either seen that the question at issue was the leadership of mystical thought in Dublin, he would, I think, have given way, but the dispute seemed trivial. At the weekly meetings, anything might be discussed; no chairman called a speaker to order; an atheistic workman could denounce religion, or a pious Catholic confound theosophy with atheism; and the engineer, precise and practical,

disapproved. He had an object. He wished to make converts for a definite form of belief, and here an enemy, if a better speaker, might make all the converts. He wished to confine discussion to members of the society, and had proposed in committee, I was told, a resolution on the subject; while Russell, who had refused to join my National Literary Society, because the party of Harp and Pepperpot had set limits to discussion, resisted, and at last defeated him. In a couple of years some new dispute arose; he resigned, and founded a society which drew doctrine and method from America or London; and Russell became, as he is to-day, the one masterful influence among young Dublin men and women who love religious speculation, but have no historical faith.

When Russell and I had been at the Art School six or seven years before, he had been almost unintelligible. He had seemed incapable of coherent thought, and perhaps was so at certain moments. The idea came upon him, he has told me, that, if he spoke he would reveal that he had lost coherence; and for the three days that the idea lasted spent the hours of daylight wandering upon the Dublin mountains, that he might escape the necessity for speech. I used to listen to him at that time, mostly walking through the streets at night, for the sake of some stray sentence, beautiful and profound, amid many words that seemed without meaning; and there were others, too, who walked and listened, for he had become, I think, to all his fellow students, sacred, as the fool is sacred in the East. We copied the model laboriously, but he

would draw without research into the natural form, and call his study "St. John in the Wilderness"; but I can remember the almost scared look and the half-whisper of a student, now a successful sculptor, who said, pointing to the modelling of a shoulder, "That is too easy, a great deal too easy!" For with brush and pencil he was too coherent.

We derided each other, told absurd tales to one another's discredit, but we never derided him, or told tales to his discredit. He stood outside the sense of comedy his friend John Eglinton has called "the social cement" of our civilization; and we would "gush" when we spoke of him, as men do when they praise something incomprehensible. But when he painted there was no difficulty in comprehending. How could that ease and rapidity of

composition, so far beyond anything that we could attain to, belong to a man whose words seemed often without meaning?

A few months before I had come to Ireland he had sent me some verses, which I had liked till Edwin Ellis had laughed me from my liking by proving that no line had a rhythm that agreed with any other, and that, the moment one thought he had settled upon some scheme of rhyme, he would break from it without reason. But now his verse was clear in thought and delicate in form. He wrote without premeditation or labour. It had, as it were, organized itself, and grown as nervous and living as if it had, as Dante said of his own work, paled his cheek. The Society he belonged to published a little magazine, and he had

asked the readers to decide whether they preferred his prose or his verse, and it was because they so willed it that he wrote the little transcendental verses afterwards published in Homeward Songs by the Way.

Life was not expensive in that house, where, I think, no meat was eaten; I know that out of the sixty or seventy pounds a year which he earned as accountant in a Dublin shop, he saved a considerable portion for his private charity; and it was, I think, his benevolence that gave him his lucidity of speech, and, perhaps, of writing. If he convinced himself that any particular activity was desirable in the public interest or in that of his friends, he had at once the ardour that came to another from personal ambition. He was always

surrounded with a little group of infirm or unlucky persons, whom he explained to themselves and to others, turning cat to griffin, goose to swan. In later years he was to accept the position of organizer of a co-operative banking system, before he had even read a book upon economics or finance, and within a few months to give evidence before a Royal Commission upon the system, as an acknowledged expert, though he had brought to it nothing but his impassioned versatility.

At the time I write of him, he was the religious teacher, and that alone--his painting, his poetry, and his conversation all subservient to that one end. Men watched him with awe or with bewilderment; it was known that he saw visions continually, perhaps more continually than any modern man since

Swedenborg; and when he painted and drew in pastel what he had seen, some accepted the record without hesitation, others, like myself, noticing the academic Graeco-Roman forms, and remembering his early admiration for the works of Gustave Moreau, divined a subjective element, but no one doubted his word. One might not think him a good observer, but no one could doubt that he reported with the most scrupulous care what he believed himself to have seen; nor did he lack occasional objective corroboration. Walking with some man in his park--his demesne, as we say in Ireland--he had seen a visionary church at a particular spot, and the man had dug and uncovered its foundations; then some woman had met him with, "Oh, Mr Russell, I am so unhappy," and he had replied, "You will be perfectly happy this

evening at seven o'clock," and left her to her blushes. She had an appointment with a young man for seven o'clock. I had heard of this a day or so after the event, and I asked him about it, and was told it had suddenly come into his head to use those words; but why he did not know. He and I often quarrelled, because I wanted him to examine and question his visions, and write them out as they occurred; and still more because I thought symbolic what he thought real like the men and women that had passed him on the road. Were they so much a part of his sub-conscious life that they would have vanished had he submitted them to question; were they like those voices that only speak, those strange sights that only show themselves for an instant, when the attention has been withdrawn; that phantasmagoria of which

I had learnt something in London: and had his verse and his painting a like origin? And was that why the same hand that painted a certain dreamy, lovely sandy shore, now in the Dublin Municipal Gallery, could with great rapidity fill many canvases with poetical commonplace; and why, after writing Homeward Songs by the Way, where all is skilful and much exquisite, he would never again write a perfect book? Was it precisely because in Swedenborg alone the conscious and the sub-conscious became one, as in that marriage of the angels, which he has described as a contact of the whole being, that Coleridge thought Swedenborg both man and woman?

Russell's influence, which was already great, had more to support it than his versatility, or the mystery that

surrounded him, for his sense of justice, and the daring that came from his own confidence in it, had made him the general counsellor. He would give endless time to a case of conscience, and no situation was too difficult for his clarity; and certainly some of the situations were difficult. I remember his being summoned to decide between two ladies who had quarrelled about a vacillating admirer, and called each other, to each other's faces, the worst names in our somewhat anaemic modern vocabulary; and I have heard of his success on an occasion when I think no other but Dostoievsky's idiot could have avoided offence. The Society was very young, and, as its members faced the world's moral complexities as though they were the first that ever faced them, they drew up very vigorous rules. One rule was that if any member saw a

fault growing upon any other member, it was his duty to point it out to that member. A certain young man become convinced that a certain young woman had fallen in love with him; and, as an unwritten rule pronounced love and the spiritual life incompatible, that was a heavy fault. As the young man felt the delicacy of the situation, he asked for Russell's help, and side by side they braved the offender, who, I was told, received their admonishment with surprised humility, and promised amendment. His voice would often become high, and lose its self-possession during intimate conversation, and I especially could put him in a rage; but the moment the audience became too large for intimacy, or some exciting event had given formality to speech, he would be at the same moment impassioned and

impersonal. He had, and has, the capacity, beyond that of any man I have known, to put with entire justice not only the thoughts, but the emotions, of the most opposite parties and personalities, as it were dissolving some public or private uproar into drama by Corneille or by Racine; and men who have hated each other must sometimes have been reconciled, because each heard his enemy's argument put into better words than he himself had found for his own; and this gift was in later years to give him political influence, and win him respect from Irish Nationalist and Unionist alike. It was, perhaps, because of it, joined to a too literal acceptance of those noble images of moral tradition which are so like late Graeco-Roman statues, that he had seen all human life as a mythological system, where, though

all cats are griffins, the more dangerous griffins are only found among politicians he has not spoken to, or among authors he has but glanced at; while those men and women who bring him their confessions and listen to his advice, carry but the snowiest of swan's plumage. Nor has it failed to make him, as I think, a bad literary critic; demanding plays and poems where the characters must attain a stature of seven feet, and resenting as something perverse and morbid all abatement from that measure. I sometimes wonder what he would have been had he not met in early life the poetry of Emerson and Walt Whitman, writers who have begun to seem superficial precisely because they lack the Vision of evil; and those translations of the Upanishads, which it is so much harder to study by the sinking flame of

Indian tradition than by the serviceable lamp of Emerson and Walt Whitman.

We are never satisfied with the maturity of those whom we have admired in boyhood; and, because we have seen their whole circle--even the most successful life is but a segment--we remain to the end their harshest critics. One old schoolfellow of mine will never believe that I have fulfilled the promise of some rough unscannable verses that I wrote before I was eighteen. Does any imaginative man find in maturity the admiration that his first half-articulate years aroused in some little circle; and is not the first success the greatest? Certainly, I demanded of Russell some impossible things, and if I had any influence upon him--and I have little doubt that I had, for we were very

intimate--it may not have been a good influence for I thought there could be no aim for poet or artist except expression of a "Unity of Being" like that of a "perfectly proportioned human body"--though I would not at the time have used that phrase. I remember that I was ironic and indignant when he left the Art Schools because his "will was weak, and must grow weaker if he followed any emotional pursuit;" as, later, when he let the readers of a magazine decide between his prose and his verse. I now know that there are men who cannot possess "Unity of Being," who must not seek it or express it--and who, so far from seeking an anti-self, a Mask that delineates a being in all things the opposite to their natural state, can but seek the suppression of the anti-self, till the natural state alone remains. These are

those who must seek no image of desire, but await that which lies beyond their mind, unities not of the mind, but unities of nature, unities of God: the man of science, the moralist, the humanitarian, the politician, St. Simon Stylites upon his pillar, St. Antony in his cavern; all whose pre-occupation is to know themselves for fragments, and at last for nothing; to hollow their hearts out till they are void and without form, to summon a creator by revealing chaos, to become the lamp for another's wick and oil; and indeed it may be that it has been for their guidance in a very special sense that the "perfectly proportioned human body" suffered crucifixion. For them Mask and Image are of necessity morbid, turning their eyes upon themselves, as though they were of those who can be law unto themselves, of whom Chapman has

written, "Neither is it lawful that they should stoop to any other law," whereas they are indeed of those who can but ask, "Have I behaved as well as So-and-so?" "Am I a good man according to the commandments?" or, "Do I realise my own nothingness before God?" "Have my experiments and observations excluded the personal factor with sufficient rigour?" Such men do not assume wisdom or beauty as Shelley did, when he masked himself as Ahasuerus, or as Prince Athanais, nor do they pursue an Image through a world that had else seemed an uninhabitable wilderness till, amid the privations of that pursuit, the Image is no more named Pandemos, but Urania; for such men must cast all Masks away and fly the Image, till that Image, transfigured because of their cruelties of self-abasement, becomes itself some

Image or epitome of the whole natural or supernatural world, and itself pursues. The wholeness of the supernatural world can only express itself in personal form, because it has no epitome but man, nor can The Hound of Heaven fling itself into any but an empty heart. We may know the fugitives from others poets because, like George Herbert, like Francis Thompson, like George Russell, their imaginations grow more vivid in the expression of something which they have not themselves created, some historical religion or cause. But if the fugitive should live, as I think Russell does at times, as it is natural for a Morris or a Henley or a Shelley to live, hunters and pursuers all, his art surrenders itself to moral or poetical commonplace, to a repetition of thoughts and images that have no relation to experience.

I think that Russell would not have disappointed even my hopes had he, instead of meeting as an impressionable youth with our modern subjective romanticism, met with some form of traditional belief, which condemned all that romanticism admires and praises, indeed, all images of desire; for such condemnation would have turned his intellect towards the images of his vision. It might, doubtless, have embittered his life, for his strong intellect would have been driven out into the impersonal deeps where the man shudders; but it would have kept him a religious teacher, and set him, it may be, among the greatest of that species; politics, for a vision-seeking man, can be but half achievement, a choice of an almost easy kind of skill instead of that kind which is,

of all those not impossible, the most difficult. Is it not certain that the Creator yawns in earthquake and thunder and other popular displays, but toils in rounding the delicate spiral of a shell?

XV

I heard the other day of a Dublin man recognizing in London an elderly man who had lived in that house in Ely Place in his youth, and of that elderly man, at the sudden memory, bursting into tears. Though I have no such poignant memories, for I was never of it, never anything but a dissatisfied critic, yet certain vivid moments come back to me as I write.

...Russell has just come in from a long walk on the Two Rock mountain, very full

of his conversation with an old religious beggar, who kept repeating, "God possesses the heavens, but He covets the earth--He covets the earth."

I get in talk with a young man who has taken the orthodox side in some debate. He is a stranger, but explains that he has inherited magical art from his father, and asks me to his rooms to see it in operation. He and a friend of his kill a black cock, and burn herbs in a big bowl, but nothing happens except that the friend repeats again and again, "Oh, my God," and when I ask him why he has said that, does not know that he has spoken; and I feel that there is something very evil in the room.

We are sitting round the fire one night, and a member, a woman, tells a dream that she has just had. She dreamed that she saw monks digging in a garden. They dug down till they found a coffin, and when they took off the lid she saw that in the coffin lay a beautiful young man in a dress of gold brocade. The young man railed against the glory of the world, and when he had finished, the monks closed the coffin reverently, and buried it once more. They smoothed the ground, and then went on with their gardening.

I have a young man with me, an official of the National Literary Society, and I leave him in the reading-room with

Russell, while I go upstairs to see the young Scotchman. I return after some minutes to find that the young man has become a Theosophist, but a month later, after an interview with a friar, to whom he gives an incredible account of his new beliefs, he goes to Mass again.

BOOK III

HODOS CAMELIONIS

HODOS CAMELIONIS

I

When staying with Hyde in Roscommon, I had driven over to Lough Kay, hoping to find some local memory of the old story of Tumaus Costello, which I was turning into a story now called Proud Costello, Macdermot's Daughter, and the Bitter Tongue. I was rowed up the lake that I might find the island where he died; I had to find it from Hyde's account in The Love-Songs of Connaught, for when I asked the boatman, he told the story of Hero and Leander, putting Hero's house on one island, and Leander's on another. Presently we stopped to eat our sandwiches at the "Castle Rock," an island all castle. It was not an old castle, being but the invention of some romantic man, seventy or eighty years ago. The last man who had lived there had been Dr. Hyde's father, and he had but stayed a fortnight. The Gaelic-speaking men in

the district were accustomed, instead of calling some specially useless thing a "white elephant," to call it "The Castle on the Rock." The roof was, however, still sound, and the windows unbroken. The situation in the centre of the lake, that has little wood-grown islands, and is surrounded by wood-grown hills, is romantic, and at one end, and perhaps at the other too, there is a stone platform where meditative persons might pace to and fro. I planned a mystical Order which should buy or hire the castle, and keep it as a place where its members could retire for a while for contemplation, and where we might establish mysteries like those of Eleusis and Samothrace; and for ten years to come my most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find philosophy and to create ritual for that Order. I had an unshakeable conviction,

arising how or whence I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature, and set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. I did not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all those things that had moved men most during many, mainly Christian, centuries.

I thought that for a time I could rhyme of love, calling it The Rose, because of the Rose's double meaning; of a fisherman

who had "never a crack" in his heart; of an old woman complaining of the idleness of the young, or of some cheerful fiddler, all those things that "popular poets" write of, but that I must some day, on that day when the gates began to open, become difficult or obscure. With a rhythm that still echoed Morris I prayed to the Red Rose, to Intellectual Beauty:

"Come near, come near, come near--ah, leave me still A little space for the Rose-breath to fill, Lest I no more hear common things.... But seek alone to hear the strange things said By God to the bright hearts of those long dead, And learn to chant a tongue men do not know."

I do not remember what I meant by "the bright hearts," but a little later I wrote of Spirits "with mirrors in their hearts."

My rituals were not to be made deliberately, like a poem, but all got by that method Mathers had explained to me, and with this hope I plunged without a clue into a labyrinth of images, into that labyrinth that we are warned against in those Oracles which antiquity has attributed to Zoroaster, but modern scholarship to some Alexandrian poet. "Stoop not down to the darkly splendid world wherein lieth continually a faithless depth and Hades wrapped in cloud, delighting in unintelligible images."

II

I found a supporter at Sligo in my elderly uncle, a man of fifty-three or fifty-four, with the habits of a much older man. He had never left the West of Ireland, except for a few days to London every year, and a single fortnight's voyage to Spain on board a trading schooner, in his boyhood. He was in politics a Unionist and Tory of the most obstinate kind, and knew nothing of Irish literature or history. He was, however, strangely beset by the romance of Ireland, as he discovered it among the people who served him, sailing upon his ships or attending to his horses, and, though narrow and obstinate of opinion, and puritanical in his judgment of life, was perhaps the most tolerant man I have ever known. He never expected anybody to agree with him, and if you did not upset his habits by cheating him over a horse, or by

offending his taste, he would think as well of you as he did of other men, and that was not very well; and help you out of any scrape whatever. I was accustomed to people much better read than he, much more liberal-minded, but they had no life but the intellectual life, and if they and I differed, they could not take it lightly, and were often angry, and so for years now I had gone to Sligo, sometimes because I could not afford my Dublin lodging, but most often for freedom and peace. He would receive me with "I have learned that your friend So and So has been seen at the Gresham Hotel talking to Mr William Redmond. What will not people do for notoriety?" He considered all Irish Nationalist Members of Parliament as outside the social pale, but after dinner, when conversation grew intimate, would talk sympathetically of

the Fenians in Ballina, where he spent his early manhood, or of the Fenian privateer that landed the wounded man at Sligo in the 'sixties. When Parnell was contesting an election at Sligo a little before his death, other Unionist magistrates refused or made difficulties when asked for some assistance, what I do not remember, made necessary under election law; and so my uncle gave that assistance. He walked up and down some Town Hall assembly-room or some courtroom with Parnell, but would tell me nothing of that conversation, except that Parnell spoke of Gladstone with extravagant hatred. He would not repeat words spoken by a great man in his bitterness, yet Parnell at the moment was too angry to care who listened. I knew one other man who kept as firm a silence; he had attended Parnell's last public meeting, and after it

sat alone beside him, and heard him speak of the followers that had fallen away, or were showing their faint hearts; but Parnell was the chief devotion of his life.

When I first began my visits, he had lived in the town itself, and close to a disreputable neighbourhood called the Burrough, till one evening, while he sat over his dinner, he heard a man and woman quarrelling under his window. "I mind the time," shouted the man, "when I slept with you and your daughter in the one bed." My uncle was horrified, and moved to a little house about a quarter of a mile into the country, where he lived with an old second-sighted servant, and a man-servant to look after the racehorse that was browsing in the neighbouring field, with a donkey to keep it company.

His furniture had not been changed since he set up house for himself as a very young man, and in a room opposite his dining-room were the saddles of his youth, and though he would soon give up riding, they would be oiled and the stirrups kept clean and bright till the day of his death. Some love-affair had gone wrong when he was a very young man; he had now no interest in women; certainly never sought favour of a woman, and yet he took great care of his appearance. He did not let his beard grow, though he had, or believed that he had, for he was hypochondriacal, a sensitiveness of the skin that forced him to spend an hour in shaving, and he would take to club and dumb-bell if his waist thickened by a hair's breadth, and twenty years after, when a very old man, he had the erect shapely figure of his

youth. I often wondered why he went through so much labour, for it was not pride, which had seemed histrionic in his eyes--and certainly he had no vanity; and now, looking back, I am convinced that it was from habit, mere habit, a habit formed when he was a young man, and the best rider of his district.

Probably through long association with Mary Battle, the second-sighted servant, he had come to believe much in the supernatural world, and would tell how several times, arriving home with an unexpected guest, he had found the table set for three, and that he himself had dreamed of his brother's illness in Liverpool before he had other news of it. He saw me using images learned from Mathers to start reverie, and, though I held out for a long time, thinking him too

old and habit-bound, he persuaded me to tell him their use, and from that on we experimented continually, and after a time I began to keep careful record. In summer he always had the same little house at Rosses Point, and it was there that he first became sensitive to the cabalistic symbols. There are some high sandhills and low cliffs, and I adopted the practice of walking by the seashore while he walked on cliff or sandhill; I, without speaking, would imagine the symbol, and he would notice what passed before his mind's eye, and in a short time he would practically never fail of the appropriate vision. In the symbols which are used certain colours are classified as "actives," while certain other colours are "passives," and I had soon discovered that if I used "actives" George Pollexfen would see nothing. I therefore gave him exercises to

make him sensitive to those colours, and gradually we found ourselves well fitted for this work, and he began to take as lively an interest, as was possible to a nature given over to habit, in my plans for the Castle on the Rock.

I worked with others, sworn to the scheme for the most part, and I made many curious observations. It was the symbol itself, or, at any rate, not my conscious intention that produced the effect, for if I made an error and told someone, let us say, to gaze at the wrong symbol--they were painted upon cards--the vision would be suggested by the symbol, not by my thought, or two visions would appear side by side, one from the symbol and one from my thought. When two people, between whose minds there was even a casual

sympathy, worked together under the same symbolic influence, the dream or reverie would divide itself between them, each half being the complement of the other; and now and again these complementary dreams, or reveries, would arise spontaneously. I find, for instance, in an old notebook, "I saw quite suddenly a tent with a wooden badly-carved idol, painted dull red; a man looking like a Red Indian was prostrate before it. The idol was seated to the left. I asked G. what he saw. He saw a most august immense being, glowing with a ruddy opalescent colour, sitting on a throne to the left", or, to summarise from a later notebook,... I am meditating in one room and my fellow-student in another, when I see a boat full of tumult and movement on a still sea, and my friend sees a boat with motionless sails

upon a tumultuous sea. There was nothing in the originating symbol to suggest a boat.

We never began our work until George's old servant was in her bed; and yet, when we went upstairs to our beds, we constantly heard her crying out with nightmare, and in the morning we would find that her dream echoed our vision. One night, started by what symbol I forget, we had seen an allegorical marriage of Heaven and Earth. When Mary Battle brought in the breakfast next morning, I said, "Well, Mary, did you dream anything last night?" and she replied (I am quoting from an old notebook) "indeed she had," and that it was "a dream she would not have liked to have had twice in one night." She had dreamed that her bishop, the Catholic

bishop of Sligo, had gone away "without telling anybody," and had married "a very high-up lady," "and she not too young, either." She had thought in her dream, "Now all the clergy will get married, and it will be no use going to confession." There were "layers upon layers of flowers, many roses, all round the church."

Another time, when George Pollexfen had seen in answer to some evocation of mine a man with his head cut in two, she woke to find that she "must have cut her face with a pin, as it was all over blood." When three or four saw together, the dream or vision would divide itself into three or four parts, each seeming complete in itself, and all fitting together, so that each part was an adaptation of a single meaning to a particular personality.

A visionary being would give, let us say, a lighted torch to one, an unlighted candle to another, an unripe fruit to a third, and to the fourth a ripe fruit. At times coherent stories were built up, as if a company of actors were to improvise, and play, not only without previous consultation, but without foreseeing at any moment what would be said or done the moment after. Who made the story? Was it the mind of one of the visionaries? Perhaps, for I have endless proof that, where two worked together, the symbolic influence commonly took upon itself, though no word was spoken, the quality of the mind that had first fixed a symbol in the mind's eye. But, if so, what part of the mind? One friend, in whom the symbolic impulse produced actual trance, described an elaborate and very strange story while the trance was upon him, but

upon waking told a story that after a certain point was quite different. "They gave me a cup of wine, and after that I remembered nothing." While speaking out of trance he had said nothing of the cup of wine, which must have been offered to a portion of his mind quite early in the dream. Then, too, from whence come the images of the dream? Not always, I was soon persuaded, from the memory, perhaps never in trance or sleep. One man, who certainly thought that Eve's apple was the sort that you got from the greengrocer, and as certainly never doubted its story's literal truth, said, when I used some symbol to send him to Eden, that he saw a walled garden on the top of a high mountain, and in the middle of it a tree with great birds in the branches, and fruit out of which, if you held a fruit to your ear, came the sound

of fighting. I had not at the time read Dante's Purgatorio, and it caused me some trouble to verify the mountain garden, and, from some passage in the Zohar, the great birds among the boughs; while a young girl, on being sent to the same garden, heard "the music of heaven" from a tree, and on listening with her ear against the trunk, found that it was made by the "continual clashing of swords." Whence came that fine thought of music-making swords, that image of the garden, and many like images and thoughts? I had as yet no clear answer, but knew myself face to face with the Anima Mundi described by Platonic philosophers, and more especially in modern times by Henry More, which has a memory independent of individual memories, though they constantly enrich it with their images and their thoughts.

III

At Sligo we walked twice every day, once after lunch and once after dinner, to the same gate on the road to Knocknarea; and at Rosses Point, to the same rock upon the shore; and as we walked we exchanged those thoughts that never rise before me now without bringing some sight of mountain or of shore. Considering that Mary Battle received our thoughts in sleep, though coarsened or turned to caricature, do not the thoughts of the scholar or the hermit, though they speak no word, or something of their shape and impulse, pass into the general mind? Does not the emotion of some woman of fashion, caught in the subtle torture of self-analysing passion, pass down, although she speak no word, to

Joan with her Pot, Jill with her Pail and, it may be, with one knows not what nightmare melancholy to Tom the Fool?

Seeing that a vision could divide itself in divers complementary portions, might not the thought of philosopher or poet or mathematician depend at every moment of its progress upon some complementary thought in minds perhaps at a great distance? Is there nation-wide multiform reverie, every mind passing through a stream of suggestion, and all streams acting and reacting upon one another, no matter how distant the minds, how dumb the lips? A man walked, as it were, casting a shadow, and yet one could never say which was man and which was shadow, or how many the shadows that he cast. Was not a nation, as distinguished from a crowd of chance

comers, bound together by these parallel streams or shadows; that Unity of Image, which I sought in national literature, being but an originating symbol?

From the moment when these speculations grew vivid, I had created for myself an intellectual solitude, most arguments that could influence action had lost something of their meaning. How could I judge any scheme of education, or of social reform, when I could not measure what the different classes and occupations contributed to that invisible commerce of reverie and of sleep; and what is luxury and what necessity when a fragment of gold braid, or a flower in the wallpaper may be an originating impulse to revolution or to philosophy? I began to feel myself not only solitary but helpless.

IV

I had not taken up these subjects wilfully, nor through love of strangeness, nor love of excitement, nor because I found myself in some experimental circle, but because unaccountable things had happened even in my childhood, and because of an ungovernable craving. When supernatural events begin, a man first doubts his own testimony, but when they repeat themselves again and again, he doubts all human testimony. At least he knows his own bias, and may perhaps allow for it, but how trust historian and psychologist that have for two hundred years ignored in writing of the history of the world, or of the human mind, so momentous a part of human experience? What else had they ignored and distorted? When Mesmerists first

travelled about as public entertainers, a favourite trick was to tell a mesmerised man that some letter of the alphabet had ceased to exist, and after that to make him write his name upon the blackboard. Brown, or Jones, or Robinson would become upon the instant, and without any surprise or hesitation, Rown, or Ones, or Obinson.

Was modern civilisation a conspiracy of the sub-conscious? Did we turn away from certain thoughts and things because the Middle Ages lived in terror of the dark, or had some seminal illusion been imposed upon us by beings greater than ourselves for an unknown purpose? Even when no facts of experience were denied, might not what had seemed logical proof be but a mechanism of change, an automatic impulse? Once in London, at a

dinner party, where all the guests were intimate friends, I had written upon a piece of paper, "In five minutes York Powell will talk of a burning house," thrust the paper under my neighbour's plate, and imagined my fire symbol, and waited in silence. Powell shifted conversation from topic to topic and within the five minutes was describing a fire he had seen as a young man. When Locke's French translator Coste asked him how, if there were no "innate ideas," he could explain the skill shown by a bird in making its nest, Locke replied, "I did not write to explain the actions of dumb creatures," and his translator thought the answer "very good, seeing that he had named his book A Philosophical Essay upon Human Understanding." Henry More, upon the other hand, considered that the bird's instinct proved the

existence of the Anima Mundi, with its ideas and memories. Did modern enlightenment think with Coste that Locke had the better logic, because it was not free to think otherwise?

V

I ceased to read modern books that were not books of belief older than any European Church, and founded that interested me, I tried to trace it back to its earliest use, believing that there must be a tradition of belief older than any European Church, and founded upon the experience of the world before the modern bias. It was this search for a tradition that urged George Pollexfen and myself to study the visions and thoughts of the country people, and some country conversation repeated by one or the

other often gave us a day's discussion. These visions, we soon discovered, were very like those we called up by symbol. Mary Battle, looking out of the window at Rosses Point, saw coming from Knocknarea, where Queen Maeve, according to local folklore, is buried under a great heap of stones, "the finest woman you ever saw travelling right across from the mountains and straight to here."--I quote a record written at the time. "She looked very strong, but not wicked" (that is to say, not cruel). "I have seen the Irish Giant" (some big man shown at a fair). "And though he was a fine man he was nothing to her, for he was round and could not have stepped out so soldierly ... she had no stomach on her but was slight and broad in the shoulders, and was handsomer than any one you ever saw; she looked about

thirty." And when I asked if she had seen others like her, she said, "Some of them have their hair down, but they look quite different, more like the sleepy-looking ladies one sees in the papers. Those with their hair up are like this one. The others have long white dresses, but those with their hair up have short dresses, so that you can see their legs right up to the calf." And when I questioned her, I found that they wore what might well be some kind of buskin. "They are fine and dashing-looking, like the men one sees riding their horses in twos and threes on the slopes of the mountains with their swords swinging. There is no such race living now, none so finely proportioned ... When I think of her and the ladies now they are like little children running about not knowing how to put their clothes on

right ... why, I would not call them women at all."

Not at this time, but some three or four years later, when the visions came without any conscious use of symbol for a short time, and with much greater vividness, I saw two or three forms of this incredible beauty, one especially that must always haunt my memory. Then, too, the Master Pilot told us of meeting at night close to the Pilot House a procession of women in what seemed the costume of another age. Were they really people of the past, revisiting, perhaps, the places where they lived, or must I explain them, as I explained that vision of Eden as a mountain garden, by some memory of the race, as distinct from individual memory? Certainly these Spirits, as the country people called

them, seemed full of personality; were they not capricious, generous, spiteful, anxious, angry, and yet did that prove them more than images and symbols? When I used a combined earth and fire and lunar symbol, my seer, a girl of twenty-five, saw an obvious Diana and her dogs, about a fire in a cavern. Presently, judging from her closed eyes, and from the tone of her voice, that she was in trance, not in reverie, I wished to lighten the trance a little, and made through carelessness or hasty thinking a symbol of dismissal; and at once she started and cried out, "She says you are driving her away too quickly. You have made her angry." Then, too, if my visions had a subjective element, so had Mary Battle's, for her fairies had but one tune, The Distant Waterfall, and she never heard anything described in a sermon at

the Cathedral that she did not "see it after," and spoke of seeing in this way the gates of Purgatory.

Furthermore, if my images could affect her dreams, the folk-images could affect mine in turn, for one night I saw between sleeping and waking a strange long bodied pair of dogs, one black and one white, that I found presently in some country tale. How, too, could one separate the dogs of the country tale from those my uncle heard bay in his pillow? In order to keep myself from nightmare, I had formed the habit of imagining four watch-dogs, one at each corner of my room, and, though I had not told him or anybody, he said, "Here is a very curious thing; most nights now, when I lay my head upon the pillow, I hear a sound of dogs baying--the sound

seems to come up out of the pillow." A friend of Strindberg's, in delirium tremens, was haunted by mice, and a friend in the next room heard the squealing of the mice.

VI

To that multiplicity of interest and opinion, of arts and sciences, which had driven me to conceive a Unity of Culture defined and evoked by Unity of Image, I had but added a multiplicity of images, and I was the more troubled because, the first excitement over, I had done nothing to rouse George Pollexfen from the gloom and hypochondria always thickening about him. I asked no help of books, for I believed that the truth I sought would come to me like the subject of a poem, from some moment of passionate

experience, and that if I filled my exposition with other men's thought, other men's investigation, I would sink into all that multiplicity of interest and opinion. That passionate experience could never come--of that I was certain--until I had found the right image or right images. From what but the image of Apollo, fixed always in memory and passion, did his priesthood get that occasional power, a classical historian has described, of lifting great stones and snapping great branches; and did not Gemma Galgani, like many others that had gone before, in 1889 cause deep wounds to appear in her body by contemplating her crucifix? In the essay that Wilde read to me one Christmas Day, occurred these words--"What does not the world owe to the imitation of Christ, what to the imitation of Caesar?" and I

had seen Macgregor Mathers paint little pictures combining the forms of men, animals, and birds, according to a rule which provided a form for every possible mental condition, and I had heard him describing, upon what authority I do not remember, how citizens of ancient Egypt assumed, when in contemplation, the images of their gods.

But now image called up image in an endless procession, and I could not always choose among them with any confidence; and when I did choose, the image lost its intensity, or changed into some other image. I had but exchanged the Temptation of Flaubert's Bouvard et Pecuchet for that of his St. Anthony, and I was lost in that region a cabalistic manuscript, shown me by Macgregor Mathers, had warned me of; astray upon

the Path of the Cameleon, upon Hodos Camelionis.

VII

Now that I am a settled man and have many birds--the canaries have just hatched out four nestlings--I have before me the problem that Locke waved aside. As I gave them an artificial nest, a hollow vessel like a saucer, they had no need of that skill the wild bird shows, each species having its own preference among the lichen, or moss; but they could sort out wool and hair and a certain soft white down that I found under a big tree. They would twist a stem of grass till it was limber, and would wind it all about the centre of the nest, and when the four grey eggs were laid, the mother bird knew how to turn them over from time to

time, that they might be warmed evenly; and how long she must leave them uncovered, that the white might not be dried up, and when to return that the growing bird might not take cold. Then the young birds, even when they had all their feathers, were very still as compared with the older birds, as though any habit of movement would disturb the nest or make them tumble out. One of them would now and again pass on the food that he had received from his mother's beak to some other nestling. The father had often pecked the mother bird before the eggs were laid, but now, until the last nestling was decently feathered, he took his share in the feeding, and was very peaceable, and it was only when the young could be left to feed themselves that he grew jealous and had to be put into another cage.

When I watch my child, who is not yet three years old, I can see so many signs of knowledge from beyond her own mind; why else should she be so excited when a little boy passes outside the window, and take so little interest in a girl; why should she put a cloak about her, and look over her shoulder to see it trailing upon the stairs, as she will some day trail a dress; and why, above all, as she lay against her mother's side, and felt the unborn child moving within, did she murmur, "Baby, baby?"

When a man writes any work of genius, or invents some creative action, is it not because some knowledge or power has come into his mind from beyond his mind? It is called up by an image, as I think; all my birds' adventures started

when I hung a little saucer at one side of the cage, and at the other a bundle of hair and grass; but our images must be given to us, we cannot choose them deliberately.

VIII

I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind. There are, indeed, personifying spirits that we had best call but Gates and Gate-keepers, because through their dramatic power they bring our souls to crisis, to Mask and Image, caring not a straw whether we be Juliet

going to her wedding, or Cleopatra to her death; for in their eyes nothing has weight but passion. We have dreamed a foolish dream these many centuries in thinking that they value a life of contemplation, for they scorn that more than any possible life, unless it be but a name for the worst crisis of all. They have but one purpose, to bring their chosen man to the greatest obstacle he may confront without despair. They contrived Dante's banishment, and snatched away his Beatrice, and thrust Villon into the arms of harlots, and sent him to gather cronies at the foot of the gallows, that Dante and Villon might through passion become conjoint to their buried selves, turn all to Mask and Image, and so be phantoms in their own eyes. In great lesser writers like Landor and like Keats we are shown that Image

and that Mask as something set apart; Andromeda and her Perseus--though not the sea-dragon--but in a few in whom we recognise supreme masters of tragedy, the whole contest is brought into the circle of their beauty. Such masters, Villon and Dante, let us say, would not, when they speak through their art, change their luck; yet they are mirrored in all the suffering of desire. The two halves of their nature are so completely joined that they seem to labour for their objects, and yet to desire whatever happens, being at the same instant predestinate and free, creation's very self. We gaze at such men in awe, because we gaze not at a work of art, but at the re-creation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and, it may even seem that the hairs of our heads stand up, because that

birth, that re-creation, is from terror. Had not Dante and Villon understood that their fate wrecked what life could not rebuild, had they lacked their Vision of Evil, had they cherished any species of optimism, they could but have found a false beauty, or some momentary instinctive beauty, and suffered no change at all, or but changed as do the wild creatures, or from devil well to devil sick, and so round the clock.

They and their sort alone earn contemplation, for it is only when the intellect has wrought the whole of life to drama, to crisis, that we may live for contemplation, and yet keep our intensity.

And these things are true also of nations, but the Gate-keepers who drive the

nation to war or anarchy that it may find its Image are different from those who drive individual men, though I think at times they work together. And as I look backward upon my own writing, I take pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me I have found something hard, cold, some articulation of the Image, which is the opposite of all that I am in my daily life, and all that my country is; yet man or nation can no more make Mask or Image than the seed can be made by the soil into which it is cast.

Ille.

"What portion in the world can the artist have, Who has awakened from the common dream, But dissipation and despair?

Hic.

And yet No one denies to Keats, love of the world. Remember his deliberate happiness.

Ille.

His art is happy, but who knows his mind? I see a schoolboy, when I think of him, With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window. For certainly he sank into his grave His senses and his heart unsatisfied, And made, being poor, ailing, and ignorant.... Shut out from all the luxury of the world, Luxuriant song."

—————The End—————