

PR

4881

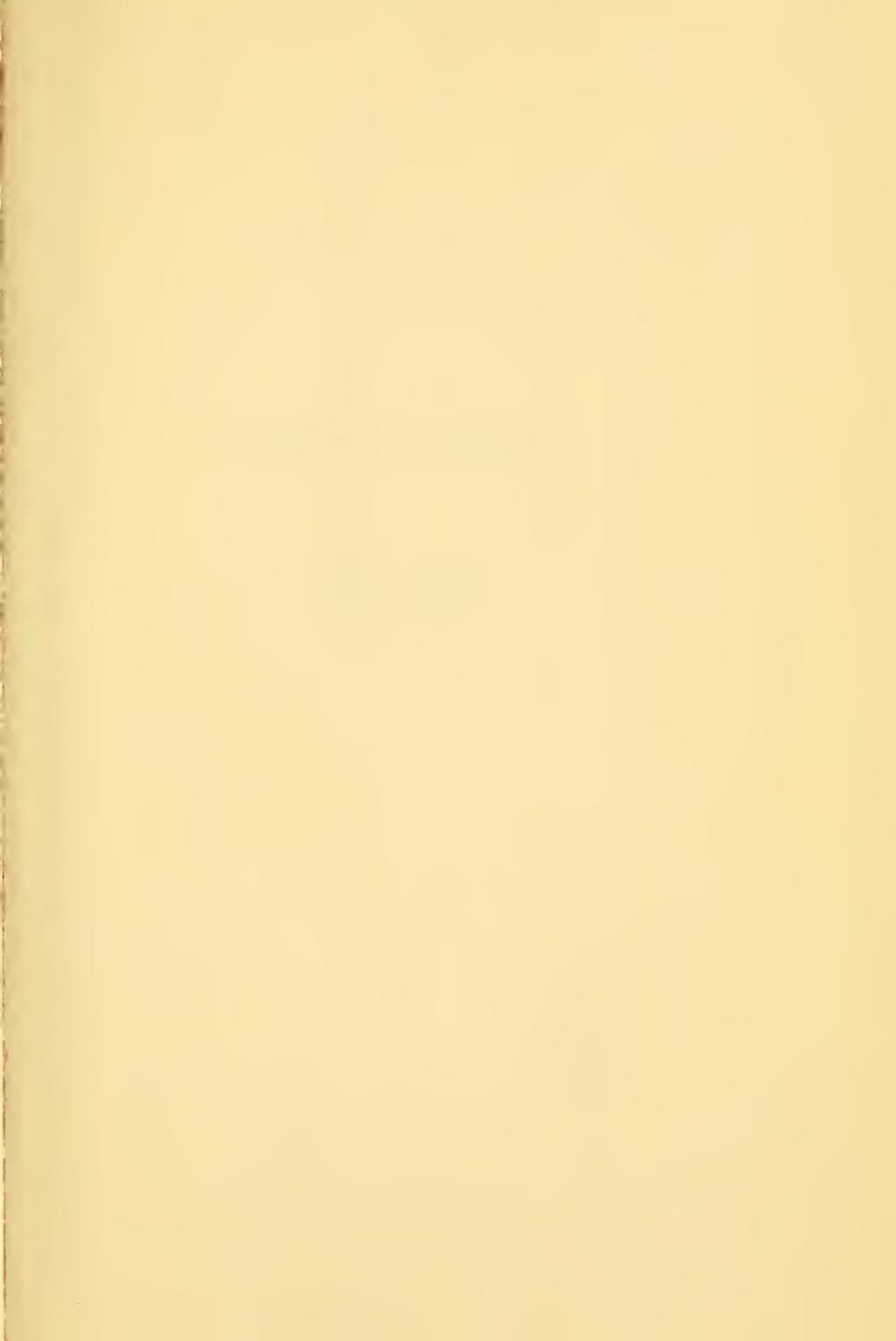
.P8

1897









PROSE FANCIES



SECOND SERIES



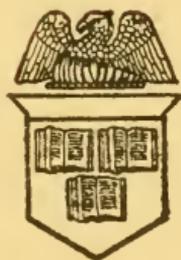


PROSE FANCIES

SECOND SERIES

BY

RICHARD LeGALLIENNE



HERBERT S. STONE & CO., CHICAGO
JOHN LANE, LONDON
MDCCCXCVII

FD-4001
P. 1
177

COPYRIGHT, 1896, BY
HERBERT S. STONE & CO.

Gift

W. L. Shoemaker

7 S '06

12-36163



FOURTH IMPRESSION

TO MAGGIE LE GALLIENNE, WITH
LOVE



*Poor are the gifts of the poet
Nothing but words!
The gifts of kings are gold,
Silver and flocks and herds,
Garments of strange soft silk,
Feathers of wonderful birds,
Jewels and precious stones,
And horses white as the milk—
These are the gifts of Kings;
But the gifts that the poet brings
Are nothing but words.*

*Forty Thousand words!
Take them—a gift of flies!
Words that should have been birds,
Words that should have been flowers,
Words that should have been stars,
In the eternal skies.
Forty thousand words!
Forty thousand tears—
All out of two sad eyes.*

PROSE FANCIES—I

A SEVENTH STORY

HEAVEN.



AT one end of the city that I love there is a tall dingy pile of offices that has evidently seen more prosperous fortunes. It is not the aristocratic end. It is remote from the lordly street of the fine shops of the fair women, where in the summer afternoons the gay bank clerks parade arm-in-arm in the wake of the tempestuous petticoat. It lies aside from the great exchange which looks like a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in the moonlight, from the town hall from whose clocked and gilded cupola ring sweet chimes at midnight, and whence, throned above the city, a golden Britannia, in the sight of all men, is seen visibly ruling the waves—while in the square below the death of Nelson is played all day in stone, with a frieze of his noble words about the pedestal. England expects! What an influ-

ence that stirring challenge has yet upon the hearts of men may be seen by any one who will study the faces of the busy imaginative cotton brokers, who, in the thronged and humming mornings, sell what they have never seen to a customer they will never see.

In fact, the end I mean is just the very opposite end to that. It is the end where the cotton that everybody sells and nobody buys *is* seen, piled in great white stacks, or swinging in the air from the necks of mighty cranes, cranes that could nip up an elephant with as little ado, and set him down on the wharf, with a box on his ugly ears for his cowardly trumpeting. It is the end that smells of tar, the domain of the harbour-masters, where the sailor finds a 'home,'—not too sweet, and where the wild sea is tamed in a maze of granite squares and basins, the end where the riggings and buildings rise side by side, and a clerk might swing himself out upon the yards from his top floor desk. Here is the custom-house, and the conversation that shines is full of freightage and dock dues; here are the shops that sell nothing

but oilskins, sextants and parrots, and here the taverns do a mighty trade in rum.

It was in this quarter, for a brief sweet time, that Love and Beauty made their strange home, as though a pair of halcyons should choose to nest in the masthead of a cattleship. Love and Beauty chose this quarter, as alas, Love and Beauty must choose so many things—for its cheapness. Love and Beauty were poor, and office rents in this quarter were exceptionally low. But what should Love and Beauty do with an office? Love was a poor poet in need of a room for his bed and his rhymes, and Beauty was a little blue-eyed girl who loved him.

It was a shabby, forbidding place, gloomy and comfortless as a warehouse on the banks of Styx. No one but Love and Beauty would have dared to choose it for their home. But Love and Beauty have a great confidence in themselves—a confidence curiously supported by history—and they never had a moment's doubt that this place was as good as another for an earthly Paradise. So Love signed an agreement for one great room at the very

top, the very masthead of the building, and Beauty made it pretty with muslin curtains, flowers, and dainty makeshifts of furniture, but chiefly with the light of her own heavenly face. A stroke of luck coming one day to the poet, the lovers, with that extravagance which the poor alone have the courage to enjoy, procured a piano on the kind-hearted hire-purchase system, a system specially conceived for lovers. Then, indeed, for many a wonderful night that room was not only on the seventh floor, but in the seventh heaven; and as Beauty would sit at the piano, with her long hair flying loose, and her soul like a whirl of starlight about her brows, a stranger peering in across the soft lamplight, seeing her face, hearing her voice, would deem that the long climb, flight after flight of dreary stair, had been appropriately rewarded by a glimpse of Heaven.

Certainly it must have seemed a strange contrast from the life about and below it. The foot of that infernal stair plunged in the warm rum-and-thick-twist atmosphere of a sailor's tavern — and 'The Jolly Shipmates' was a house of entertainment by

no means to be despised. Often have I sat there with the poet, drinking the whisky from which Scotland takes its name, among wondering sea-boots and sou'-westers, who could make nothing of that wild hair and that still wilder talk.

From the kingdom of rum and tar, you mounted into a zone of commission agents and ship-brokers, a chill, unoccupied region, in which every small office bore the names of half-a-dozen different firms, and yet somehow could not contrive to look busy. Finally came an airy echoing landing, a region of empty rooms, which the landlords in vain recommended as studios to a city that loved not art. Here dwelt the keeper and his kind-hearted little wife, and no one besides save Love and Beauty. There was thus a feeling of rarefaction in the atmosphere, as though at this height it was only the Alpine flora of humanity that could find root and breathing. But once along the bare passage and through a certain door, and what a sudden translation it was into a gracious world of books and flowers and the peace they always bring.

Once upon a time, in that enchanted

past where dwell all the dreams we love best, precisely, with loving punctuality, at five in the afternoon, a pretty girlish figure, like Persephone escaping from the shades, stole through the rough sailors at the foot of that sordid Jacob's ladder and made her way to the little Heaven at the top.

I shall not describe her, for the good reason that I cannot. Leonardo, ever curious of the beauty that was most strangely exquisite, once in an inspired hour painted such a face, a face wrought of the porcelain of earth with the art of Heaven. But, whoever should paint it, God certainly made it—must have been the comment of any one who caught a glimpse of that little figure vanishing heavenwards up that stair, like an Assumption of Fra Angelico's—that is any one interested in art and angels.

She had not long to wait outside the door she sought, for the poet, who had listened all day for the sound, had ears for the whisper of her skirts as she came down the corridor, and before she had time to knock had already folded her in his arms. The two babes in that thieves' wood of

commission agents and ship brokers stood silent together for a moment, in the deep security of a kiss such as the richest millionaire could never buy—and then they fell to comparing notes of their day's work. The poet had had one of his rare good days. He had made no money, his post had been even more disappointing than usual,—but he had written a poem, the best he had ever written, he said, as he always said of his last new thing. He had been burning to read it to somebody all afternoon—had with difficulty refrained from reading it to the loquacious little keeper's wife as she brought him some coals—so it was not to be expected that he should wait a minute before reading it to her whom indeed it strove to celebrate. With arms round each other's necks, they bent over the table, littered with the newborn poem, all blots and dashes like the first draft of a composer's score, and the poet, deftly picking his way among the erasures and interlineations, read aloud the beautiful words—with a full sense of their beauty!—to ears that deemed them more beautiful even than they were.

The owners of this now valuable copy-right allow me to irradiate my prose with three of the verses.

‘Ah! what,’ half chanted, half crooned the poet —

‘Ah! what a garden is your hair!—
Such treasure as the kings of old,
In coffers of the beaten gold,
Laid up on earth—and left it there.’

So tender a reference to hair whose beauty others beside the poet had loved must needs make a tender interruption—the only kind of interruption the poet could have forgiven—and ‘Who,’ he continued —

‘Who was the artist of your mouth?
What master out of old Japan.
Wrought it so dangerous to man . . .’

And here it was but natural that laughter and kisses should once more interrupt—

‘Those strange blue jewels of your eyes,
Painting the lily of your face,
What goldsmith set them in their place—
Forget-me-nots of Paradise?’

‘And that blest river of your voice,
Whose merry silver stirs the rest
Of water-lilies in your breast . . .’

At last, in spite of more interruptions, the poem came to an end — whereupon, of course, the poet immediately read it through once more from the beginning, its personal and emotional elements, he felt, having been done more justice on a first reading than its artistic excellencies.

‘Why, darling, it is splendid,’ was his little sweetheart’s comment; ‘you know how happy it makes me to think it was written for me, don’t you?’ And she took his hands and looked up at him with eyes like the morning sky.

Romance in poetry is almost exclusively associated with very refined ethereal matters, stars and flowers and such like — happily, in actual life it is often associated with much humbler objects. Lovers, like children, can make their paradises out of the quaintest materials. Indeed, our paradises, if we only knew, are always cheap enough; it is our hells that are so expensive. Now these lovers — like, if I mistake not, many other true lovers before and since — when they were particularly happy, when some special piece of good luck had befallen them could think of no

better paradise than a little dinner together in their seventh-story heaven. 'Ah! wilderness were Paradise enow!'

To-night was obviously such an occasion. But, alas! where was the money to come from? They didn't need much — for it is wonderful how happy you can be on five shillings, if you only know how. At the same time it is difficult to be happy on ninepence — which was the entire fortune of the lovers at the moment. Beauty laughingly suggested that her celebrated hair might prove worth the price of their dinner. The poet thought a pawnbroker might surely be found to advance ten shillings on his poem — the original MS. too — else had they nothing to pawn, save a few gold and silver dreams which they couldn't spare. What was to be done? Sell some books, of course! It made them shudder to think how many poets they had eaten in this fashion. It was sheer cannibalism — but what was to be done! Their slender stock of books had been reduced entirely to poetry. If there had only been a philosopher or a modern novelist, the sacrifice wouldn't have seemed

so unnatural. And then Beauty's eyes fell upon a very fat informing-looking volume on the poet's desk.

'Would n't this do?' she said.

'Why, of course!' he exclaimed; 'the very thing. A new history of socialism just sent me for review. Hang the review; we want our dinner, do n't we, little one? And then I've read the preface, and looked through the index — quite enough to make a column of, with a plentiful supply of general principles thrown in! Why, of course, there's our dinner for certain, dull and indigestible as it looks. It's worth fifty minor poets at old Moser's. Come along. . . .'

So off went the happy pair — ah! how much happier was Beauty than ever so many fine ladies one knows who have only, so to say, to rub their wedding rings for a banquet to rise out of the ground, with the most distinguished guests around the table, champagne of the best, and conversation of the worst.

Old Moser found histories of socialism profitable, more profitable perhaps than socialism, and he actually gave five-and-

sixpence for the volume. With the ninepence already in their pockets, you will see that they were now possessors of quite a small fortune. Six-and-threepence! It would n't pay for one's lunch nowadays. Ah! but that is because the poor alone know the art of dining.

You need n't wish to be happier and merrier than those two lovers, as they gaily hastened to that bright and cosy corner of the town where those lovely ham-and-beef shops make glad the faces of the passers-by. O those hams with their honest shining faces, polished like mahogany—and the man inside so happy all day slicing them with those wonderful long knives (which, of course, the superior class of reader has never seen) worn away to a veritable thread, a mere wire, but keen as Excalibur. Beauty used to calculate in her quaint way how much steel was worn away with each pound of ham, and how much therefore went to the sandwich. And what an artist was the carver! What a true eye, what a firm, flexible wrist, never a shaving of fat too much—he was too great an artist for that. Then there

were those dear little cream cheeses and those little brown jugs of yellow cream, come all the way from Devonshire — you could hear the cows lowing across the rich pasture, and hear the milkmaids singing and the milk whizzing into the pail, as you looked at them.

And then those perfectly lovely sausages — I beg the reader's pardon! I forgot that the very mention of the word smacks of vulgarity. Yet, all the same, I venture to think that a secret taste for sausages among the upper classes is more widespread than we have any idea of. I confess that Beauty and her poet were at first ashamed of admitting their vulgar frailty to each other. They needed to know each other very well first. Yet there is nothing, when once confessed, that brings two people so close as — a taste for sausages.

‘You darling!’ exclaimed Beauty, with something like tears in her voice, when her poet first admitted this touch of nature — and then next moment they were in fits of laughter that a common taste for a very ‘low’ food should bring tears to

their eyes ! But such are the vagaries of love—as you will know, if you know anything about it—‘vulgar,’ no doubt, though only the vulgar would so describe them ; for it is only vulgarity that is always ‘refined.’

Then there was the florist’s to visit. What beautiful trades some people ply ! To sell flowers is surely like dealing in fairies. Beautiful must grow the hands that wire them, and sweet the flower-girl’s every thought !

There remained but the wine merchant’s, or, had we not better say at once, the grocer’s, for our lovers could afford no rarer vintages than Tintara or the golden burgundy of Australia ; and it is wonderful to think what a sense of festivity one of those portly colonial flagons lent to their little dining-table. Sometimes, I may confide, when they wanted to feel very dissipated, and were *very* rich, they would allow themselves a small bottle of Benedictine—and you should have seen Beauty’s eyes as she luxuriantly sipped at her green little liqueur glass ; for, like most innocent people, she enjoyed to the full the delight of

feeling occasionally wicked. However, these were rare occasions, and this night was not one of them.

Half a pound of black grapes completed their shopping, and then, with their arms full of their purchases, they made their way home again, the two happiest people in what is, after all, a not unhappy world.

Then came the cooking and the laying of the table. For all her Leonardo face, Beauty was a great cook—like all good women, she was as earthly in some respects as she was heavenly in others, which I hold to be a wise combination—and, indeed, both were excellent cooks; and the poet was unrivalled at ‘washing up,’ which, I may say, is the only skeleton at these Bohemian feasts.

You should have seen the gusto with which Beauty pricked those sausages—I had better explain to the un-Bohemian reader that to attempt to cook a sausage without first pricking it vigorously with a fork, to allow for the expansion of its juicy gases, is like trying to smoke a cigar without first cutting off the end—and O!

to hear again their merry song as they writhed in torment in the hissing pan, like Christian martyrs raising hymns of praise from the very core of Smithfield fires.

Meanwhile, the poet would be surpassing himself in the setting out of the little table, cutting up the bread reverently as though it were for an altar—as indeed it was—studying the effect of the dish of tomatoes, now at this corner, now at that, arranging the flowers with much more care than he arranged the adjectives in his sonnets, and making ever so sumptuous an effect with that half a pound of grapes.

And then at last the little feast would begin, with a long grace of eyes meeting and hands clasping; true eyes that said ‘how good it is to behold you, to be awake together in this dream of life;’ true hands that said ‘I will hold you fast forever—not death even shall pluck you from my hand, shall loose this bond of you and me;’ true eyes, true hands, that had immortal meanings far beyond the speech of mortal words.

And it had all come out of that dull his-

tory of socialism, and had cost little more than a crown! What lovely things can be made out of money! Strange to think that a little silver coin of no possible use or beauty in itself can be exchanged for so much tangible beautiful pleasure. A piece of money is like a piece of opium, for in it lie locked up the most wonderful dreams — if you have only the brains and hearts to dream them.

When at last the little feast grew near its end, Love and Beauty would smoke their cigarettes together; and it was a favorite trick of theirs to lower the lamp a moment, so that they might see the stars rush down upon them through the skylight which hung above their table. It gave them a sense of great sentinels, far away out in the lonely universe, standing guard over them, seemed to say that their love was safe in the tender keeping of great forces. They were poor, but then they had the stars and the flowers and the great poets for their servants and friends; and, best of all, they had each other. Do you call that being poor?

And then, in the corner, stood that

magical box with the ivory keys, whose strings waited ready night and day — strange media through which the myriad voices, the inner-sweet thoughts, of the great world-soul found speech, messengers of the stars to the heart, and of the heart to the stars.

Beauty's songs were very simple. She got little practice, for her poet only cared to have her sing over and over again the same sweet songs ; and perhaps if you had heard her sing ' Ask nothing more of me, sweet,' or ' Darby and Joan,' you would have understood his indifference to variety.

At last the little feast is quite, quite finished. Beauty has gone home ; her lover still carries her face in his heart as she waved and waved and waved to him from the rattling lighted tramcar ; long he sits and sits thinking of her, gazing up at those lonely ancient stars ; the air is still bright with her presence, sweet with her thoughts, warm with her kisses, and as he turns to shut the piano, he can still see her white hands on the keys and her girlish

face raised in an ecstasy — Beata Beatrix
—above the music.

‘O love, my love ! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring —
How then should sound upon Life’s darkening slope
The ground whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death’s imperishable wing !’

And then . . . he would throw him-
self upon his bed and burst into tears.

.
‘And they are gone ; ay, ages long ago :
These lovers fled away into the storm.’

The seventh-story heaven once more
leads a dull life as the office of a ship-
chandler, and harsh voices grate the air
where Beauty sang. The books and the
flowers and the lovers’ faces are gone
forever. I suppose the stars are the
same, and perhaps they sometimes look
down through that roof window, and
wonder what has become of those two
lovers who used to look up at them so
fearlessly long ago.

But friends of mine who believe in
God say that He has given His angels

charge concerning that dingy old seventh-floor heaven, and that, for those who have eyes to see, there is no place where a great dream has been dreamed that is not thus watched over by the guardian angels of memory.

*For M. Le G.,
25 September, 1895.*

PROSE FANCIES—II

SPRING BY PARCEL POST



They've taken all the Spring from the country to the
town—
Like the butter and the eggs, and the milk from the
cow . . .

SO began to jig and jingle my thoughts
as in my letters and newspapers this
morning I read, buried alive among the
solitary fastnesses of the Surrey hills, the last
news from town. The news I envied most
was that spring had already reached London.
'Now,' ran a pretty article on spring fash-
ions, 'the sunshine makes bright the
streets, and the flower-baskets, like huge
bouquets, announce the gay arrival of
spring.' I looked up and out through my
hillside window. The black ridge on the
other side of the valley stood a grim wall
of burnt heather against the sky— which
sky, like the bullets in the nursery rhyme,
was made unmistakably of lead; a close
rain was falling methodically, and, gener-

ally speaking, the world looked like a soaked mackintosh. It was n't much like the gay arrival of spring, and grimly I mused on the advantages of life in town.

Certainly it did seem hard, I reflected, that town should be ahead of us even in such a country matter as spring. Flower baskets indeed! Why, we have n't as much as a daisy for miles around. It is true that on the terrace there the crocuses blaze like a street on fire, that the primroses thicken into clumps, lying among their green leaves like pounds of country butter; it is true that the blue cones of the little grape hyacinth are there, quaintly formal as a child's toy flowers; yes! and the big Dutch hyacinths are already shamelessly *enceinte* with their buxom waxen blooms, so fat and fragrant — (One is already delivered of a fine blossom. Well, that is a fine baby, to be sure! say the other hyacinths, with babes no less bonny under their own green aprons — all waiting for the doctor sun). Then, among the blue-green blades of the narcissus, here and there you see a stem topped with a creamish chrysalis-like envelope, from

which will soon emerge a beautiful eye, rayed round with white wings, looking as though it were meant to fly, but remaining rooted — a butterfly on a stalk; while all the beds are crowded with indeterminate beak and blade, pushing and elbowing each other for a look at the sun, which, however, sulkily declines to look at them. It is true there is spring on the terrace, but even so it is spring imported from the town — spring bought in Holborn, spring delivered free by parcel post; for where would the terrace have been but for the city seedsman — that magician who sends you strangely spotted beans and mysterious bulbs in shrivelled cerements, weird little flower mummies that suggest centuries of forgotten silence in painted Egyptian tombs. This strange and shrivelled thing can surely never live again, we say, as we hold it in our hands, seeing not the glowing circles of colour, tiny rings of Saturn, packed so carefully inside this flower-egg, the folds of green and silver silk wound round and round the precious life within.

But, of course, this is all the seedsman's

cunning, and no credit to Nature; and I repeat that were it not for railways and the parcel post — goodness knows whether we should ever get any spring at all in the country! Think of the days when it had to travel down by stage-coach. For, left to herself, what is the best Nature can do for you with March well on the way? Personally, I find the face of the country practically unchanged. It is, to all intents and purposes, the same as it has been for the last three or four months — as grim, as unadorned, as bleak, as draughty, and generally as comfortless as ever. There is n't a flower to be seen, hardly a bird worth listening to, not a tree that is not winter-naked, and not a chair to sit down upon. If you want flowers on your walks you must bring them with you; songs, you must take a poet under your arm; and if you want to rest, lean laboriously on your stick — or take your chance of rheumatism.

Of course your specialists, your botanists, your nature-detectives, will tell you otherwise. They have surprised a violet in the act of blossoming; after long and

excited chase have discovered a clump of primroses in their wild state; seen one butterfly, heard one cuckoo. But as one swallow does not make a summer, it takes more than one cuckoo to make a spring. I confess that only yesterday I saw three sulphur butterflies, with my own eyes; I admit the catkins, and the silver-notched palm; and I am told on good colour authority that there is a lovely purplish bloom, almost like plum bloom, over certain copses in the valley; by taking thought, I have observed the long horizontal arms of the beech growing spurred with little forked branches of spear-shaped buds, and I see little green nipples pushing out through the wolf-coloured rind of the dwarf fir-trees. Spring is arming in secret to attack the winter—that is sure enough, but spring in secret is no spring for me. I want to see her marching gaily with green pennons, and flashing sun-blades, and a good band.

I want butterflies as they have them at the Lyceum—‘butterflies all white,’ ‘butterflies all blue,’ ‘butterflies of gold,’ and I should particularly fancy ‘butterflies all

black.' But there, again, you see, — you must go to town, within hearing of Mrs. Patrick Campbell's *voix d'or*. I want the meadows thickly inlaid with buttercups and daisies; I want the trees thick with green leaves, the sky all larks and sunshine; I want hawthorn and wild roses — both at once; I want some go, some colour, some warmth in the world. O where are the pipes of Pan?

The pipes of Pan are in town, playing at street corners and in the centres of crowded circuses, piled high with flower-baskets blazing with refulgent flowery masses of white and gold. Here are the flowers you can only buy in town; simple flowers enough, but only to be had in town. Here are fragrant banks of violets every few yards, conflagrations of daffodils at every crossing, and narcissus in scented starry garlands for your hair.

You wander through the Strand, or along Regent street, as through the meadows of Enna — sweet scents, sweet sounds, sweet shapes, are all about you; the town butterflies, white, blue and gold, 'wheel and shine' and flutter from shop to shop, sud-

denly resurgent from their winter wardrobes as from a chrysalis ; bright eyes flash and flirt along the merry, jostling street, while the sun pours out his golden wine overhead, splashing it about from gilded domes and bright-faced windows — and ever are the voices at the corners and the crossings calling out the sweet flower names of the spring !

But here in the country it is still all rain and iron. I am tired of waiting for this slow-moving provincial spring. Let us to the town to meet the spring — for :

They've taken all the spring from the country to the town—

Like the butter and the eggs, and the milk from the cow ;

And if you want a primrose, you write to London now,
And if you need a nightingale, well,—Whiteley sends it down.

PROSE FANCIES—III

THE GREAT MERRY- GO-ROUND



IN an age curious of new pleasures, the merry-go-round seems still to maintain its ancient popularity. I was the other day the delighted, indeed the fascinated, spectator of one in full swing in an old Thames-side town. It was a very superior example, with a central musical engine of extraordinary splendour, and horses that actually curvetted, as they swirled maddeningly round to the strains of 'The Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo.' How I longed to join the wild riders! But though I am a brave man, I confess that to ride a merry-go-round in front of a laughter-loving Cockney public is more than I can dare. I had to content myself with watching the faces of the riders. I noticed particularly one bright-eyed little girl, whose whole passionate young soul seemed to be on fire with ecstasy, and for

whom it was not difficult to prophesy trouble when time should bring her within reach of more dangerous excitements. Then there was a stolid little boy, dull and unmoved in expression as though he were in church. Life, one felt sure, would be safe enough, and stupid enough, for him; the world would have no music to stir or draw him. The fifes would go down the street with a sweet sound of marching feet, and the eyes of other men would brighten and their blood be all glancing spears and streaming banners, but he would remain behind his counter; from the strange hill beyond the town the dear, unholy music, so lovely in the ears of other men and maids, would call to him in vain, and morning and evening the stars would sing above his draper's shop, but he never hear a word.

What particularly struck me was the number of quite grown-up, even elderly, people who came and had their penny-worth of horse exercise. Now it was a grave young workman quietly smoking his pipe as he revolved; now it was a stout middle-aged woman returning from mark-

eting, on whom the Zulu music and the whirling horses laid their irresistible spells. Unless ye become as little children!

Is the Kingdom of Heaven really at hand? For, indeed, men and women, and perhaps particularly literary men and women, are once more becoming as little children in their pleasures.

Seriously, one of the most curious and significant of recent literary phenomena is the sudden return of the literary man to physical, and so-called 'Philistine', pleasures and modes of recreation. Perhaps Stevenson set the fashion with his canoe and his donkey. But at the moment that he was valiantly daring any one to tell him whether there was anything better worth doing 'than fooling among boats,' Edward Fitzgerald, all unconscious and careless of literary fashions, was giving still more practical expression to the physical faith that was in him, by going shares in a Lowestoft herring-lugger, and throwing his heart as well as his money into the fortunes of its noble skipper 'Posh.' A literary man *par excellence*, Mr. Lang reproaches his sires for his present way of life —

‘ Why lay your gipsy freedom down
And doom your child to pen and ink?’

and by steady and persistent golfing and writing about angling and cricket, comes as near to the noble savage as is possible to so incorrigibly civilised a man. Mr. Henley — that Berserker of the pen — sings the sword with a vigour that makes one curious to see him using it, and we all know Mr. Kipling’s views on the matter. Then Mr. Bernard Shaw rides a bicycle !

Those men of letters whose inclinations or opportunities do not lead them to these out-of-door and more or less ferocious, pleasures seek to forget themselves at the music hall, the Aquarium or the numerous Earl’s Court exhibitions. They become amateurs of foreign dancing, connoisseurs of the trapeze, or they leave their great minds at home and go up the Great Wheel. Earl’s Court, particularly, is becoming quite a modern Vauxhall — Tan-ta-ra-ra ! Earl’s Court ! Earl’s Court ! — and Mr. Imre Kiralfy, with his conceptions and designs, is to our generation what Albert Smith was to the age of Dickens and Edmund Yates.

It takes some experience of life to realise how right this is; to realise that, after all our fine philosophies and cocksure sciences, there is no better answer to the riddle of things than a good game of cricket or an exciting spin on one's 'bike.' The real inner significance of Earl's Court — Mr. Kiralfy will no doubt be prepared to hear — is the failure of science as an answer to life. We give up the riddle, and enjoy ourselves with our wiser children. Simple pleasures, no doubt, for the profound! But what is simple, and what is profound?

The simple joy we get from 'fooling among boats' on a summer day, the thrill of a well-hit ball, the rapture of a skilful dive, are no more easy to explain than the more complicated pleasures of literature, or art, or religion. And why is it — to come closer to our theme — that the round or the whirling have such attraction for us? What is the secret of the fascination of the circle? Why is it that the turning of anything, be it but a barrel-organ or a phrase, holds one as with an hypnotic power? I confess that I can

never genuinely pity a knife-grinder, however needy. Think of the pleasure of driving that wheel all day, the merry chirp of the knife on the stone, and the crisp bright spray of the flying sparks! Why, he does 'what some men dream of all their lives'! Wheels of all kinds have the same strange charm; mill-wheels, colliery-wheels, spinning-wheels, water-wheels, and wheeling waters: there may — who knows? — have been a certain pleasure in being broken on the wheel, and, at all events, that hideous punishment is another curious example of the fascination of the circle. It would take a whole volume to illustrate the prevalence of the circle in external nature, in history, and, even more significant, in language. We all know, or think we know, that the world is round —

‘ This orb — this round
Of sight and sound,’

as Mr. Quiller Couch sings — though I remember a porter at school who was sure that it was flat, and who used to say that Hamlet's

‘ How weary, stale, *flat*, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this *world*!’

was a cryptic reference to Shakespeare's secret belief in his theory. Many of the things we love most are round. Is not money, according to the proverb, made round that it may go round, and are not the men most in demand described as 'all-round men'? Nor are all-round women without their admirers. Events, we know, move in a circle, as time moves in cycles — though, alas! not on them. The ballet and the bicycle are popular forms of the circle, and it is the charm of the essay to be 'roundabout.'

Again, how is it that that which on a small scale does not impress us at all, when on a large scale impresses us so much? What is the secret of the impressiveness of size, bulk, height, depth, speed, and mileage? Philosophically, a mountain is no more wonderful than a mole-hill, yet no man is knighted for climbing a mole-hill. One little drop of water and one little grain of sand are essentially as wonderful as 'the mighty ocean' or 'the beauteous land' to which they contribute. A balloon is no more wonderful than an air-bubble and were

you to build an Atlantic liner as big as the Isle of Wight it would really be no more remarkable than an average steam launch. Nobody marvels at the speed of a snail, yet, given a snail's pace to start with, an express train follows as a matter of course. Movement, not the rate of movement, is the mystery. Precisely the same materials, the same forces, the same methods, are employed in the little as in the big of these examples. Why should mere accumulation, reiteration, and magnification make the difference? We may ask why? But it does, for all that. If we answer that these mammoth multiplications impress us because they are so much bigger, taller, fatter, faster, etc., than we are, the question arises, How many times bigger than a man must a mountain be before it impresses us? Perhaps the problem has already been tackled by the schoolman who pondered how many angels could dance on the point of a needle.

However, these and similar first principles, it will readily be seen, are far from being irrelevant for the visitor at the Earl's Court Exhibition. No doubt they are

continually discussed by the thousands who daily and nightly throng that very charming dream-world which Mr. Kiralfy has built 'midmost the beating' of our 'steely sea.'

To an age that is over-read and over-fed Mr. Kiralfy brings the message: 'Leave your great minds at home, and go up the Great Wheel!' and I heard his voice and obeyed. The sensation is, I should say, something between going up in a balloon and being upon shipboard—a sensation compounded, maybe, of the creaking of the circular rigging, the pleasure of rising in the air, the freshening of the air as you ascend, the strange feeling of the earth receding and spreading out beneath you, the curious diminution of the people below—to their proper size. You will hear original minds all about you comparing them to ants, and it is curious to notice the involuntary feeling of contempt that possesses you as you watch them. I believe one has a half-defined illusion that we are growing greater as they are growing smaller. Ants and flies! ants and flies! with here and there a fiery centipede

in the shape of a District train dashing in and out amongst them. We lose the power of understanding their motions, and their throngs and movements do indeed seem as purposeless at this height as the hurry-scurrying about an ant-hill. At this height, indeed, one seems to understand how small a matter a bank smash may seem to the Almighty; though, as a lady said to me — as we clung tightly together in terror ‘a-top of the topmost bough’ — it must be gratifying to see so many churches.

Those who would keep their illusions about the beauty of London had better stay below, at least in the daytime, for it makes one’s heart sink to look on those miles and miles of sordid grey roofs huddled in meaningless rows and crescents, just for all the world like a huge child’s box of wooden bricks waiting to be arranged into some intelligible pattern. Of course, this is not London proper. Were the Great Wheel set up in Trafalgar Square, one is fain to hope that the view from it would be less disheartening — though it might be better not to try.

By night, except for the bright oases of the Indian Exhibition, the view is little more than a black blank, a great inky plain with faint sparks and rows of light here and there, as though the world had been made of saltpetre paper, and had lately been set fire to. Were you a traveller from Mars you would say that the world was very badly lighted. But, for all that, night is the time for the Great Wheel, for the conflagration of pleasure at our feet makes us forget the void dark beyond. Then the Wheel seems like a great revolving spider's web, with fireflies entangled in it at every turn, and the little engine-house at the centre, with its two electric lights, seems like the great lord spider, with monstrous pearls for his eyes. And, as in the daytime the height robs the depth of its significance, strips poor humanity of any semblance of impressive or attractive meaning, at night the effect is just the reverse. What a fairy world is this opening out beneath our feet, with its golden glowing squares and circles and palaces, with its lamplit gardens and pagodas, and who are these gay and beautiful

beings flitting hither and thither, and passing from one bright garden to another on the stream of pleasure! If this many-coloured, passionate dream be really human life, let us hasten to be down amongst it once more! And, after all, is not this flattering night aspect of the world more true than that disheartening countenance of it in the daylight? Those golden squares and glowing gardens and flashing waters are, of course, an illusion of the magician Kiralfy's, yet what power could the illusion have upon us without the realities of beauty and love and pleasure it attracts there?

PROSE FANCIES—IV

THE BURIAL OF ROMEO AND JULIET

ONE morning of all mornings the citizens of Verona were startled by strange news. Tragic forces, to which they had been accustomed to pay little heed, had been at work in their city during the dark hours, and young Romeo of the Montagues, handsome, devil-mecare lad as they had known him, and little Juliet of the Capulets, that mad-cap, merry, gentle young mistress, lay dead, side by side in the church of Santa Maria.

Death! surely they were used to death! and Love, flower of the clove! they were used to *love*. But here were love and death, that somehow they could not understand. So they hurried in wondering groups to Santa Maria, that they might gaze at the dead lovers, and thus perhaps come to understand.

Romeo and Juliet lay receiving their

guests in the vault of the Capulets, with a strange smile of welcome for all who came. And their presence-chamber was bright with candles and flowers, and sweet with the sweet smell of death. The air that had drunk in their wild words and their last long looks of heavenly love still hung about the dark corners, as the air where a rose has been holds a little while the memory of its breath. Yes! that morning, in that dank but shining tomb, you might draw into you the very breath of love. The air you breathed had passed through the sweet lungs of Juliet, it had been etherialised with her holy passion, and washed clean with her lovely words. And now, for a little while yet, it feasted on the fair peace of their glad young faces. To-morrow, or the next day, or the next week, they would belong to the unvisited treasure-house of the past, but now this morning of all mornings, this day that could never come again, they still belonged to the real and radiant present.

Flowers there are that bloom but once in a hundred years, but here in this tomb had blossomed one of those marvellous

flowers that bloom but once throughout eternity. Poets and kings in after-times, O men of Verona, will yearn to have seen what you look upon to-day. For you, you thick and greasy citizens, are chosen out of all time to behold this beauty. There were once in the world thousands of men and women who had heard the very words of Christ as they fell from His lips, words that we may only read. There have been men, actual, living, foolish men, who have looked on at the valour of Horatius, men who, from the crowded banks of the Nile, have watched the living body of Cleopatra step into her gilded barge, men who, standing idle in the streets of Florence, have seen the love-light start in the great Dante's eyes, seen his hand move to his laden heart, as the little Beatrice passed him by among her maidens. Base men of the past, by the indulgent accident of time, have been granted to behold these wonders, and now for you, O men of Verona, a like wonder has been born.

Romeo and Juliet lay receiving their

guests in the vault of the Capulets, with a strange smile of welcome for all who came.

It had been an innocent little desire, yet had all the world come against it. It had been a simple little desire, yet too strong for all the world to break.

Strange this enmity of the world to love, as though men should take arms against the song of a bird, or plot against the opening of a flower.

But now, what was this strange homage to a love that a few hours ago had no friend in all the daylight, a fearful bliss beneath the secret moon? But yesterday a stupid old nurse, a herb-gathering friar, a rascally apothecary, had been their only friends, and now was all the world come here to do their bidding.

No need to steal again beneath the shade of orchard walls, no need again to heed if lark or nightingale sang in the reddening east. For the world had grown all warm to love, warm and kind as June to the rose.

Three days lay Romeo and Juliet re-

ceiving their guests in the vault of the Capulets, with that strange smile of welcome for all who came. Three days the world worshipped the love it could not understand, but still came dense and denser throngs to worship. For the news of the wonderful flower that had blossomed in Verona had gone far and wide, and travellers from distant cities kept pouring in to look at those strange young lovers, who had deemed the world well lost so that they might leave it together.

Then the governor of the city decreed, as the time drew near when the two lovers must be left to their peace, and it was ill that any should lose the sight of this marvel, that on the fourth day they should be carried through the streets in the eyes of all the people, and then be buried together in the vault of the Capulets — for by this burial in the same tomb, says the old chronicler, who was first honoured with the telling of their sweet story, the governor hoped to bring about a peace between the Montagues and Capulets, at least for a little while.

Meanwhile, though Verona was a city

of many trades and professions, and love and death were idle things, yet was there little said of business all these days, and little else done but talk of the two lovers, of whom, indeed, it was true, as it has seldom been true out of holy writ, that death was swallowed up in victory. During these days, also, there stole a strange sweetness over the city, as though the very spirit of love had nested there, and was filling the air with its soft breathing—as when, in the first days of spring, the birds sing so sweetly that broken hearts must hide away, and hard hearts grow a little kind. Men once more spoke kindly to their wives, and even coarse faces wore a gentle light—just as sometimes at evening the setting sun will turn to tenderness even black rocks and frowning towers.

There were many wild stories afloat about the end of the lovers. Some said one way, and some another. By some the story went that Romeo was already dead before Juliet had awakened from her swoon, but others declared that the poison had not worked upon him until Juliet's awakening had made him awhile forget

that he was to die. There were those who professed to know the very words of their wild farewell, and in fact there had been several witnesses of Juliet's agony over the body of her lord. These had told how first she had raved and clung to him, and called him 'Romeo,' 'Sweet Sir Romeo,' 'Husband,' and many flower-like names, and had petted him and wooed him to come back. Then on a sudden she had cried, 'God-a-mercy — how cold thou art!' and looked at him long and strangely. Then had she grown stern, and anon soft. 'Canst thou not come back, my love? Then must I follow thee. Not so far art thou on the way of death, but that I shall overtake thee, and together shall we go to Pluto's realm, and seek a kinder world.'

Thereat she had plunged Romeo's dagger into her side, though some said she had stopped her heart's beating by the strong will of her great love. Yea — such were the distracted rumours — some averred that at the last she had cursed Christ and his saints, and called upon Venus, whom, it was rumoured in awe-

struck whispers, was being worshipped once more in secret corners of the world.

It was strong noon when, on the fourth day, Romeo and Juliet were carried through the bright and solemn streets, that the world might be saved; saved as ever by the spectacle and the worship of a mysterious nobility, an uncomprehended greatness, a beauty which haunts not its daily dreams, lifted up by the humble gaze of devout eyes into the empyrean of greater souls, stirred to an unfamiliar passion, and fired with glimpses of a strange, unworldly truth.

In the light of the sun, the faces of the two lovers, as they lay amid their flowers, seemed to have grown a little weary, but they still wore their sweet and royal smile, and their laurelled brows were very white and proud.

And in the faces that looked upon them, as they moved slowly by, with sweet death music, and the hushed marching of feet, and the wafted odour of lilies, there was to be seen strangely blent a great pity for their tragedy and a heavenly tenderness

for their love. It was like a dream passing down the streets of a dream, so deep and tender was the silence, for only the hearts of men were speaking; though here and there a girl sobbed, or a young man buried his face in his sleeve, and the sternest eyes were dashed with the holy water of tears. And with the pity and tenderness, who shall say but that in all that silent heart-speech there was no little envy of the two who had loved so truly and died in the springtide of their love, before the ways of love had grown dusty with its summer, or dreary with its autumn, before its dreams had petrified into duties, and its passion deadened into use?

‘Would it were thou and I,’ said many wedded eyes one to the other, delusively warm and soft for a moment, but all cold and hard again on the morrow.

And maybe some poet would say in his heart :

‘If you loved her living, my Romeo, what were your love could you but see her dead!’ for indeed life has no beauty so wonderful as the beauty of death.

And, as in all places and times, there was a base remnant that gaped and worshipped not, and in their hearts resented all this distinction paid to a nobility they could not recognise, as the like had grumbled when Cimabue's Madonna had been carried through the streets in glory. But of these there is no need that we should take account, any more than of the beasts that moved head down amid the pastures outside the town, knowing not of the wonder that was passing within. For the ass will munch his thistles though the Son of Man be his rider, nor will the sheep look aside from his grazing though Apollo be the herdsman.

At length the sacred pageant was ended, gone like the passing of an aerial music, and the people went to their homes silent, with haunted eyes ; while the Earth, which had given this beauty, took it back to herself, and one more Persephone of human loveliness was shut within the gates of the forgetful grave.

PROSE FANCIES—V

VARIATIONS UPON WHITEBAIT



A VERY Pre-Raphaelite friend of mine came to me one day and said, *à propos* of his having designed a very Early English chair: ‘After all, if one has anything to say one might as well put it into a chair!’

I thought the remark rather delicious, as also his other remark when one day in a curiosity-shop we were looking at another chair, which the dealer declared to be Norman. My friend seated himself in it very gravely, and after softly moving about from side to side, testing it, it would appear, by the sensation it imparted to the sitting portion of his limbs, he solemnly decided: ‘I don’t think the *flavour* of this chair is Norman!’

I thought of this Pre-Raphaelite brother as the Sphinx and I were seated a few evenings ago at our usual little dinner, in

our usual little sheltered corner, on the Lover's Gallery of one of the great London restaurants. The Sphinx says that there is only one place in Europe where one can really dine, but as it is impossible to be always within reasonable train service of that Montsalvat of cookery, she consents to eat with me — she cannot call it dine — at the restaurant of which I speak. I being very simple-minded, untravelled and unlanguageed, think it, in my Cockney heart, a very fine place indeed, with its white marble pillars surrounding the spacious peristyle and flashing with a thousand brilliant lights and colours: with its stately cooks, clothed in white samite, mystic wonderful, ranged behind a great altar loaded with big silver dishes, and the sacred musicians of the temple ranged behind them — while in and out go the waiters, clothed in white and black, waiters so good and kind that I am compelled to think of Elijah being waited on by angels.

They have such an eye for a romance, too, and really take it personally to heart if it should befall that our little table is

usurped by others that know not love. I like them, too, because they really seem to have an eye for the strange beauty and charm of the Sphinx, quite an unexpected taste for Botticelli. They ill-conceal their envy of my lot, and sometimes, in the meditative pauses between the courses, I see them romantically reckoning how it might be possible by desperately saving up, by prodigious windfalls of tips, from unexampled despatch and sweetness in their ministrations, how it might be possible in ten years' time, perhaps even in five — the lady would wait five years! and her present lover could be artistically poisoned meanwhile! — how it might be possible to come and sue for her beautiful hand. Then a harsh British cry for 'waiter' comes like a rattle and scares away that beautiful dream-bird, though, as the poor dreamer speeds on the quest of roast beef for four, you can see it still circling with its wonderful blue feathers around his pomatumed head.

Ah, yes, the waiters know that the Sphinx is no ordinary woman. She cannot conceal even from them the mystical

star of her face, they too catch far echoes of the strange music of her brain, they too grow dreamy with dropped hints of fragrance from the rose of her wonderful heart.

How reverently do they help her doff her little cloak of silk and lace: with what a worshipful inclination of the head, as in the presence of a deity, do they await her verdict of choice between rival soups — shall it be ‘clear or thick’? And when she decides on ‘thick,’ how relieved they seem to be, as if — well, some few matters remain undecided in the universe, but never mind, this is settled forever — no more doubts possible on one portentous issue, at any rate — Madame will take her soup ‘thick.’

‘On such a night’ our talk fell upon whitebait.

As the Sphinx’s silver fork rustled among the withered silver upon her plate, she turned to me and said:

‘Have you ever thought what beautiful little things these whitebait are?’

‘Oh, yes,’ I replied, ‘they are the daisies of the deep sea, the threepenny-pieces of the ocean.’

‘You dear!’ said the Sphinx, who is alone in the world in thinking me awfully clever. ‘Go on, say something else, something pretty about whitebait — there’s a subject for you!’

Then it was that, fortunately, I remembered my Pre-Raphaelite friend, and I sententiously remarked: ‘Of course, if one has anything to say one cannot do better than to say it about whitebait. . . . Well, whitebait . . .

But here, providentially, the band of the beef — that is, the band behind the beef; that is, the band that nightly hymns the beef (the phrase is to be had in three qualities) — struck up the overture from ‘Tannhäuser,’ which is not the only music that makes the Sphinx forget my existence; and thus, forgetting me, she momentarily forgot the whitebait. But I remembered, remembered hard — worked at pretty things, as metal workers punch out their flowers of brass and copper. The music swirled about us like golden waves, in which swam myriad whitebait, like showers of tiny stars, like falling

snow. To me it was one grand processional of whitebait, silver ripples upon streams of gold.

The music stopped. The Sphinx turned to me with the soul of Wagner in her eyes, and then she turned to the waiter: 'Would it be possible,' she said, 'to persuade the bandmaster to play that wonderful thing over again?'

The waiter seemed a little doubtful, even for the Sphinx, but he went off to the bandmaster with the air of the man who has at last an opportunity to show that he can dare all for love. Personally, I have a suspicion that he poured his month's savings at the bandmaster's feet, and begged him to do this thing for the most wonderful lady in the world; or perhaps the bandmaster was really a musician, and his musician's heart was touched—lonely there amid the beef—to think that there was really someone, invisible though she were to him, some shrouded silver presence, up there among the beef-eaters, who really loved to hear great music. Perhaps it was thus made a night

he has never forgotten ; perhaps it changed the whole course of his life — who knows ? The sweet, reassuring request may have come to him at a moment when, sick at heart, he was deciding to abandon real music forever, and settle down amid the beef and the beef-music of Old England.

Well, however it was, the waiter came back radiant with a ‘Yes’ on every shining part of him, and if the ‘Tannhäuser’ had been played well at first, certainly the orchestra surpassed themselves this second time.

When the great jinnee of music had once more swept out of the hall, the Sphinx turned with shining eyes to the waiter :

‘Take,’ she said, ‘take these tears to the bandmaster. He has indeed earned them.’

‘Tears, little one,’ I said. ‘See how they swim like whitebait in the fishpools of your eyes!’

‘Oh, yes, the whitebait,’ rejoined the Sphinx, glad of a subject to hide her emotion. ‘Now tell me something nice

about them, though the poor little things have long since disappeared. Tell me, for instance, how they get their beautiful little silver waterproofs?’

‘Electric Light of the World,’ I said, ‘it is like this. While they are still quite young and full of dreams, their mother takes them out in picnic parties of a billion or so at a time to where the spring moon is shining, scattering silver from its purse of pearl far over the wide waters — silver, silver for every little whitebait that cares to swim and pick it up. The mother, who has a contract with some such big restaurateur as ours, chooses a convenient area of moonlight, and then at a given sign they all turn over on their sides, and bask and bask in the rays, little fin pressed lovingly against little fin — for this is the happiest time in the young whitebait’s life: it is at these silvering parties that matches are made and future consignments of whitebait arranged for. Well, night after night, they thus lie in the moonlight, first on one side, then on the other, till by degrees, tiny scale by scale, they have be-

come completely lunar-plated. Ah! how sad they are when the end of that happy time has come.'

'And what happens to them after that?' asked the Sphinx.

'One night when the moon is hidden their mother comes to them with treacherous wile, and suggests that they should go off on a holiday again to seek the moon — the moon that for a moment seems captured by the pearl fishers of the sky. And so off they go merrily, but, alas, no moon appears, and presently they are aware of unwieldy bumping presences upon the surface of the sea, presences as of huge dolphins, and rough voices call across the water, till, scared, the little whitebaits, turn home in flight — to find themselves somehow meshed in an invisible prison, a net as fine and strong as air, into which, O agony, they are presently hauled, lovely banks of silver, shining like opened coffers beneath the coarse and ragged flares of yellow torches. The rest is silence.'

'What sad little lives! and what a cruel world it is!' said the Sphinx — as she

crunched with her knife through the body of a lark, that but yesterday had been singing in the blue sky. Its spirit sang just above our heads as she ate, and the air was thick with the grey ghosts of all the whitebait she had eaten that night.

But there were no longer any tears in her eyes.

PROSE FANCIES--VI

THE ANSWER OF THE ROSE



THE Sphinx and I sat in our little box at *Romeo and Juliet*. It was the first time she had seen that fairy-tale of passion upon the stage. I had seen it played once before — in Paradise. Therefore, I rather trembled to see it again in an earthly play-house, and as much as possible kept my eyes from the stage. All I knew of the performance—but how much was that!—was two lovely voices making love like angels; and when there were no words, the music told me what was going on. Love speaks so many languages.

One might as well look. It was as clear as moonlight to the tragic eye within the heart. The Sphinx was gazing on it all with those eyes that will never grow old, neither for years nor tears; but though I seemed to be seeing nothing but an advertisement of Paderewski pianos on the

programme, I saw it — O did n't I see it? — all. The house had grown dark, and the music low and passionate, and for a moment no one was speaking. Only, deep in the thickets of my heart, there sang a tragic nightingale that, happily, only I could hear; and I said to myself, 'Now the young fool is climbing the orchard wall! Yes, there go Benvolio and Mercutio calling him; and now — 'he jests at scars who never felt a wound' — the other young fool is coming out on to the balcony. God help them both! They have no eyes — no eyes — or surely they would see the shadow that sings "Love! Love! Love!" like a fountain in the moonlight, and then shrinks away to chuckle "Death! Death! Death!" in the darkness!'

But, soft, what light from yonder window breaks!

The Sphinx turned to me for sympathy — this time it was the soul of Shakespeare in her eyes.

'Yes!' I whispered, 'it is the Opening of the Eternal Rose, sung by the Eternal Nightingale!'

She pressed my hand approvingly ; and while the lovely voices made their heavenly love, I slipped out my silver-bound pocket-book of ivory and pressed within it the rose which had just fallen from my lips.

The worst of a great play is that one is so dull between the acts. Wit is sacrilege, and sentiment is bathos. Not another rose fell from my lips during the performance, though that I minded little, as I was the more able to count the pearls that fell from the Sphinx's eyes.

It took quite half a bottle of champagne to pull us up to our usual spirits, as we sat at supper at a window where we could see London spread out beneath us like a huge black velvet flower, dotted with fiery embroideries, sudden flaring stamens, and rows of ant-like fireflies moving in slow zig-zag processions along and across its petals.

‘How strange it seems,’ said the Sphinx, ‘to think that for every two of those moving double-lights, which we know to be the eyes of hansoms, but which seem up here nothing but gold dots in a very bar-

baric pattern of black and gold, there are two human beings, no doubt, at this time of night — two lovers, throbbing with the joy of life, and dreaming, heaven knows what dreams.

‘Yes,’ I rejoined; ‘and to them I’m afraid we are even more impersonal. From their little Piccadilly coracles our watch-tower in the skies is merely a radiant façade of glowing windows, and no one of all who glide by realises that the spirited illumination is every bit due to your eyes. You have but to close them, and every one will be asking what has gone wrong with the electric lights.’

A little nonsense is a great healer of the heart, and by means of such nonsense as this we grew merry again. And anon we grew sentimental and poetic, but — thank heaven! we were no longer tragic.

Presently I had news for the Sphinx. ‘The rose-tree that grows in the garden of my mind,’ I said, ‘desires to blossom.’

‘May it blossom indeed,’ she replied; ‘for it has been flowerless all this long evening; and bring me a rose fresh with all the dews of inspiration — no florist’s

flower, wired and artificially scented — no bloom of yesterday's hard-driven brains.'

'I was only thinking,' I said, '*à propos* of nightingales and roses, that though all the world has heard the song of the nightingale to the rose, only the nightingale has heard the answer of the rose. You know what I mean?'

'Know what you mean! Of course, that's always easy enough,' retorted the Sphinx, who knows well how to be hard on me.

'I'm so glad,' I ventured to thrust back; 'for lucidity is the first success of expression: to make others see clearly what we ourselves are struggling to see, believe with all their hearts what we are just daring to hope, is — well, the religion of a literary man!'

'Yes, it's a pretty idea,' said the Sphinx, once more pressing the rose of my thought to her brain; 'and, indeed, it's more than pretty. . . .'

'Thank you!' I said humbly.

'Yes, it's *true* — and many a humble little rose will thank you for it. For, your nightingale is a self-advertising bird.

He never sings a song without an eye on the critics, sitting up there in their stalls among the stars. He never, or seldom, sings a song for pure love, just because he must sing it or die. Indeed, he has a great fear of death, unless—you will guarantee him immortality. But the rose, the trusting little earth-born rose, that must stay all her life rooted in one spot till some nightingale comes to choose her—some nightingale whose song maybe has been inspired and perfected by a hundred other roses, which are at the moment pot-pourri—ah, the shy bosom-song of the rose . . .’

Here the Sphinx paused, and added abruptly—

‘Well, there is no nightingale worthy to hear it!’

‘It is true,’ I agreed, ‘O trusting, little earth-born rose!’

‘Do you know why the rose has thorns?’ suddenly asked the Sphinx. Of course I knew, but I always respect a joke, particularly when it is but half-born—humourists always prefer to deliver themselves—so I shook my head.

‘To keep off the nightingales, of course,’

said the Sphinx, the tone of her voice holding in mocking solution the words 'Donkey' and 'Stupid,' — which I recognized and meekly bore.

'What an excellent idea!' I said. 'I never thought of it before. But don't you think it's a little unkind? For, after all, if there were no nightingales, one should n't hear so much about the rose; and there is always the danger that if the rose continues too painfully thorny, the nightingale may go off and seek, say, a more accommodating lily.'

'I have no opinion of lilies,' said the Sphinx.

'Nor have I,' I answered soothingly, 'I much prefer roses — but . . . but . . .'

'But what?'

'But — well, I much prefer roses. Indeed I do.'

'Rose of the World,' I continued with sentiment, 'draw in your thorns. I cannot bear them.'

'Ah!' she answered eagerly, 'that is just it. The nightingale that is worthy of the rose will not only bear, but positively

love, her thorns. It is for that reason she wears them. The thorns of the rose properly understood are but the tests of the nightingale. The nightingale that is frightened of the thorns is not worthy of the rose — of that you may be sure. . . .’

‘I am not frightened of the thorns,’ I managed to interject.

‘Sing then once more,’ she cried, ‘the Song of the Nightingale.’

And it was thus I sang :—

O Rose of the World, a nightingale,
 A Bird of the World, am I,
 I have loved all the world and sung all the world,
 But I come to your side to die.

Tired of the world, as the world of me,
 I plead for your quiet breast,
 I have loved all the world and sung all the world —
 But — where is the nightingale’s nest ?

In a hundred gardens I sung the rose,
 Rose of the World, I confess —
 But for every rose I have sung before
 I love you the more, not less.

Perfect it grew by each rose that died,
 Each rose that has died for you,
 The song that I sing — yea, ’tis no new song,
 It is tried — and so it is true.

Petal or thorn, yea ! I have no care,
So that I here abide,
Pierce me, my love, or kiss me, my love,
But keep me close to your side.

I know not your kiss from your scorn, my love,
Your breast from your thorn, my rose,
And if you must kill me, well, kill me, my love !
But — say 't was the death I chose.

‘ Is it true ? ’ asked the Rose.

‘ As I am a nightingale, ’ I replied ; and
as we bade each other good-night, I
whispered :

‘ When may I expect the Answer of the
Rose ? ’

PROSE FANCIES—VII

ABOUT THE SE-
CURITIES



WHEN I say that my friend Matthew lay dying, I want you so far as possible to dissociate the statement from any conventional, and certainly from any pictorial, conceptions of death which you may have acquired. Death sometimes shows himself one of those impersonal artists who conceal their art, and, unless you had been told, you could hardly have guessed that Matthew was dying, dying indeed sixty miles an hour, dying of consumption, dying because some one else had died four years before, dying, too, of debt.

Connoisseurs, of course, would have understood; at a glance would have named the sculptor who was silently chiselling those noble hollows in the finely modelled face—that Pygmalion who turns all flesh to stone—at a glance

would have named the painter who was cunningly weighting the brows with darkness that the eyes might shine the more with an unaccustomed light. Matthew and I had long been students of the strange wandering artist, had begun by hating his art (it is ever so with an art unfamiliar to us) and had ended by loving it.

‘Let us see what the artist has added to the picture since yesterday,’ said Matthew, signing to me to hand him the mirror.

‘H’m,’ he murmured, ‘he’s had one of his lazy days, I’m afraid. He’s hardly added a touch—just a little heightened the chiaroscuro, sharpened the nose a trifle, deepened some little the shadows round the eyes . . .’

‘O why,’ he presently sighed, ‘does he not work a little overtime and get it done? He’s been paid handsomely enough . . .’

‘Paid,’ he continued, ‘by a life that is so much undeveloped gold-mine, paid by all my uncashed hopes and dreams . . .’

‘He works fast enough for me, old fel-

low,' I interrupted, 'there was a time, was there not, when he worked too fast for you and me?'

There are moments, for certain people, when such fantastic unreality as this is the truest realism. Matthew and I talked like this with our brains, because we hadn't the courage to allow our hearts to break in upon the conversation. Had I dared to say some real emotional thing, what effect would it have had but to set poor tired Matthew a-coughing? and it was our aim that he should die with as little to-do as practicable. The emotional in such situations is merely the obvious. There was no need for either of us to state the elementary feelings of our love. I knew that Matthew was going to die, and he knew that — I was going to live; and we pitied each other accordingly, though I confess my feeling for him was rather one of envy — when it was not congratulation.

Thus, to tell the truth, we never mentioned 'the hereafter.' I don't believe it even occurred to us. Indeed, we spent the few hours that remained of our friend-

ship in retailing the latest gathered of those good stories with which we had been accustomed to salt our intercourse.

One of Matthew's anecdotes was, no doubt, somewhat suggested by the occasion, and I should add that he had always somewhat of an ecclesiastical bias, and would, I believe, have ended some day as a Monsignor, a notable 'Bishop Blougram.'

His story was of an evangelistic preacher who desired to impress his congregation with the unmistakable reality of hell-fire. 'You know the Black Country, my friends,' he had declaimed, 'you have seen it, at night, flaring with a thousand furnaces, in the lurid incandescence of which myriads of unhappy beings, our fellow-creatures (God forbid!) snatch a precarious existence, you have seen them silhouetted against the yellow glare, running hither and thither as it seemed from afar, in the very jaws of the awful fire. Have you realized that the burdens with which they thus run hither and thither are molten iron, iron to which such a stupendous heat has been applied that it has melted, melted as though it had been

sugar in the sun — well ! returning to hell-fire, let me tell you this, that in hell they eat this fiery molten metal for ice-cream! yes! and are glad to get anything so cool.’

It was thus we talked while Matthew lay dying, for why should we not talk as we had lived? We both laughed long and heartily over this story, perhaps it would have amused us less had Matthew not been dying; and then his kind old nurse brought in our lunch. We had both excellent appetites, and were far from indifferent to the dainty little meal which was to be our last but one together. I brought my table as close to Matthew’s pillow as was possible, and he stroked my hand with tenderness in which there was a touch of gratitude.

‘ You are not frightened of the bacteria !’ he laughed sadly, and then he told me, with huge amusement, how a friend (and a true, dear friend for all that) had come to see him a day or two before, and had hung over the end of the bed to say farewell, daring to approach no nearer, mopping his fear-perspiring brows with a handkerchief soaked in ‘ Eucalyptus ’!

‘He had brought an anticipatory elegy, too,’ said my friend, ‘written against my burial. I wish you’d read it for me,’ and he fidgeted for it in the nervous manner of the dying. Finding it among his pillows, he handed it to me saying, ‘you need n’t be frightened of it. It is well dosed with Eucalyptus.’

We laughed even more over this poem than over our stories, and then we discussed the terms of three cremation societies to which, at the express request of my friend, I had written a day or two before.

Then having smoked a cigar and drunk a glass of port together (for the assured dying are allowed to ‘live well’), Matthew grew sleepy, and tucking him beneath the counterpane, I left him, for, after all, he was not to die that day.

Circumstances prevented my seeing him again for a week. When I did so, entering the room poignantly redolent of the strange sweet odour of antiseptics, I saw that the great artist had been busy in my absence. Indeed, his work was nearly at end. Yet to one unfamiliar with his methods, there was still little to alarm in Matthew’s face.

In fact, with the exception of his brain, and his ice-cold feet, he was alive as ever. And even to his brain had come a certain unnatural activity, a life as of the grave, a sort of vampire vitality, which would assuredly have deceived any who had not known him. He still told his stories, laughed and talked with the same unconquerable humour, was in every way alert and practical, with this difference, that he had forgotten he was going to die, that the world in which he exercised his various faculties was another world to that in which, in spite of his delirium, we ate our last boiled fowl, drank our last wine, smoked our last cigar together. His talk was so convincingly rational, dealt with such unreal matters in so every-day a fashion, that you were ready to think that surely it was you and not he whose mind was wandering.

‘ You might reach that pocket-book, and ring for Mrs. Davies,’ he would say in so casual a way that of course you would ring. On Mrs. Davies’s appearance he would be fumbling about among the papers in his pocket-book, and presently he would

say, with a look of frustration that went to one's heart—'I've got a ten-pound note somewhere here for you, Mrs. Davies, to pay you up till Saturday, but somehow I seem to have lost it. Yet it must be somewhere about. Perhaps you'll find it as you make the bed in the morning. I'm so sorry to have troubled you. . . .'

And then he would grow tired and doze a little on his pillow.

Suddenly he would be alert again, and with a startling vividness tell me strange stories from the dreamland into which he was now passing.

I had promised to see him on Monday, but had been prevented, and had wired to him accordingly. This was Tuesday.

'You need n't have troubled to wire,' he said. 'Did n't you know I was in London from Saturday to Monday?'

'The doctor and Mrs. Davies did n't know,' he continued, with the creepy cunning of the dying, 'I managed to slip away to look at a house I think of taking—in fact I've taken it. It's in—in—now, where is it? Now is n't that silly?'

I can see it as plain as anything—yet I cannot, for the life of me, remember where it is, or the number. . . . It was somewhere St. John's Wood way . . . never mind, you must come and see me there, when we get in. . . .'

I said he was dying in debt, and thus the heaven that lay about his death-bed was one of fantastic Eldorados, sudden colossal legacies, and miraculous windfalls.

'I have n't told you,' he said presently, 'of the piece of good luck that has befallen me. You are not the only person in luck. I can hardly expect you to believe me, it sounds so much like the Arabian nights. However, it's true for all that. Well, one of the little sisters was playing in the garden a few afternoons ago, making mud-pies or something of that sort, and she suddenly scraped up a sovereign. Presently she found two or three more, and our curiosity becoming aroused, a turn or two with the spade revealed quite a bed of gold, and the end of it was that on further excavating, the whole garden proved to be one mass of sovereigns. Sixty thousand pounds we counted . . . and then, what

do you think — it suddenly melted away.
 . . .”

He paused for a moment, and continued, more in amusement than regret —

‘Yes — the government got wind of it, and claimed the whole lot as treasure-trove !’

‘But not,’ he added slyly, ‘before I’d paid off two or three of my biggest bills. Yes—and—you’ll keep it quiet, of course, there’s another lot been discovered in the garden, but we shall take good care the government doesn’t get hold of it this time, you bet.’

He told this wild story with such an air of simple conviction that, odd as it may seem, one believed every word of it. But the tale of his sudden good fortune was not ended.

‘You’ve heard of old Lord Osterley,’ he presently began again. ‘Well, congratulate me, old man, he has just died and left everything to me. You know what a splendid library he had—to think that that will all be mine—and that grand old park through which we’ve so often wandered, you and I. Well, we shall

need fear no gamekeeper now, and of course, dear old fellow, you 'll come and live with me—like a prince—and just write your own books and say farewell to journalism forever. Of course, I can hardly believe it's true yet. It seems too much of a dream, and yet there's no doubt about it. I had a letter from my solicitors this morning, saying that they were engaged in going through the securities, and—and—but the letter's somewhere over there, you might read it. No? Can't you find it? It's there somewhere about, I know. Never mind, you can see it again . . . ' he finished wearily.

'Yes!' he presently said, half to himself, 'it will be a wonderful change! a wonderful change!'

At length the time came to say good-bye, a good-bye I knew must be the last, for my affairs were taking me so far away from him that I could not hope to see him for some days.

'I'm afraid, old man,' I said, 'that I mayn't be able to see you for another week.'

'O never mind, old fellow, don't worry

about me. I'm much better now—and by the time you come again we shall know all about the securities.'

The securities! My heart had seemed like a stone, incapable of feeling, all those last unreal hours together, but the pathos of that sad phrase so curiously symbolic, suddenly smote it with overwhelming pity, and the tears sprang to my eyes for the first time.

As I bent over him to kiss his poor damp forehead, and press his hand for the last farewell, I murmured—

'Yes—dear, dear old friend. We shall know all about the securities . . .'

PROSE FANCIES—VIII

THE BOOM IN YELLOW



GREEN must always have a large following among artists and art lovers; for, as has been pointed out, an appreciation of it is a sure sign of a subtle artistic temperament. There is something not quite good, something almost sinister, about it—at least, in its more complex forms, though in its simple form, as we find it in outdoor nature, it is innocent enough; and, indeed, is it not used in colloquial metaphor as an adjective for innocence itself? Innocence has but two colours, white or green. But Becky Sharp's eyes also were green, and the green of the æsthete does not suggest innocence. There will always be wearers of the green carnation; but the popular vogue which green has enjoyed for the last ten or fifteen years is probably passing. Even the æsthete himself would seem to be

growing a little weary of its indefinitely divided tones, and to be anxious for a colour sensation somewhat more positive than those to be gained from almost imperceptible *nuances* of green. Jaded with over-refinements and super-subtleties, we seem in many directions to be harking back to the primary colours of life. Blue, crude and unsoftened, and a form of magenta, have recently had a short innings; and now the triumph of yellow is imminent. Of course, a love for green implies some regard for yellow, and in our so-called æsthetic renaissance the sunflower went before the green carnation—which is, indeed, the badge of but a small schism of æsthetes, and not worn by the great body of the more catholic lovers of beauty.

Yellow is becoming more and more dominant in decoration—in wall-papers, and flowers cultivated with decorative intention, such as chrysanthemums. And one can easily understand why: seeing that, after white, yellow reflects more light than any other colour, and thus ministers to the growing preference for light and joyous rooms. A few yellow chrys-

anthemums will make a small room look twice its size, and when the sun comes out upon a yellow wall-paper the whole room seems suddenly to expand, to open like a flower. When it falls upon the pot of yellow chrysanthemums, and sets them ablaze, it seems as though one had an angel in the room. Bill-posters are beginning to discover the attractive qualities of the colour. Who can ever forget meeting for the first time upon a hoarding Mr. Dudley Hardy's wonderful Yellow Girl, the pretty advance guard of *To-Day*? But I suppose the honour of the discovery of the colour for advertising purposes rests with Mr. Colman; though its recent boom comes from the publishers, and particularly from the Bodley Head. The *Yellow Book* with any other colour would hardly have sold as well—the first private edition of Mr. Arthur Benson's poems by the way, came caparisoned in yellow, and with the identical name, *Le Cahier Jaune*; and no doubt it was largely its title that made the success of *The Yellow Aster*. In literature, indeed, yellow has long been the colour of romance. The word 'yellow-back' wit-

nesses its close association with fiction; and in France, as we know, it is the all but universal custom to bind books in yellow paper. Mr. Heinemann and Mr. Unwin have endeavoured to naturalise the custom here; but, though in cloth yellow has emphatically 'caught on,' in paper it still hangs fire. The A B C Railway Guide is probably the only exception, and that, it is to be hoped, is not fiction. Mr. Lang has recently followed the fashion with his *Yellow Fairy Book*; and, indeed, one of the best known figures in fairydom is yellow—namely, the Yellow Dwarf. Yellow, always a prominent Oriental colour, was but lately of peculiar significance in the Far East; for were not the sorrows of a certain high Chinese official intimately connected with the fatal colour? The Yellow Book, the Yellow Aster, the Yellow Jacket!—and the Yellow Fever, like 'Orion' Horne's sunshine, is always with us 'somewhere in the world.' The same applies also, I suppose, to the Yellow Sea.

Till one comes to think of it, one hardly realises how many important and pleasant

things in life are yellow. Blue and green, no doubt, contract for the colouring of vast departments of the physical world. 'Blue!' sings Keats, in a fine but too little known sonnet—

' . . . 'Tis the life of heaven—the domain
 Of Cynthia—the wide palace of the sun—
 The tent of Hesperus, and all his train—
 The bosomer of clouds, gold, grey, and dun.
 Blue! 'Tis the life of waters . . .
 Blue! Gentle cousin of the forest green,
 Married to green in all the sweetest flowers.'

Yellow might retort by quoting Mr. Grant Allen, in his book on *The Colour Sense*, to the effect that the blueness of sea and sky is mainly poetical illusion or inaccuracy, and that sea and sky are found blue only in one experiment out of fourteen. At morning and evening they are usually in great part stained golden. Blue certainly has one advantage over yellow; in that it has the privilege of colouring some of the prettiest eyes in the world. Yellow has a chance only in cases of jaundice and liver complaint, and his colour scheme in such cases is seldom appreciated. Again, green has the contract for the greater bulk of the vegetable life of the

globe ; but his is a monotonous business, like the painting of miles and miles of palings, grass, grass, grass, trees, trees, trees, *ad infinitum* ; whereas yellow leads a roving versatile life, and is seldom called upon for such monotonous labour. The sands of Sahara are probably the only conspicuous instance of yellow thus working by the piece. It is in the quality, in the diversity of the things it colours, rather than in their mileage or tonnage, that yellow is distinguished ; though for that matter, we suppose, the sun is as big and heavy as most things, and that is yellow. Of course, when we say yellow we include golden, and all varieties of the colour—saffron, orange, flaxen, tawny, blonde, topaz, citron, etc.

If the sun may reasonably be described as the most important object in the world, surely money is the next. That, as we know, is, in its most potent metallic form, yellow also. The ‘yellow gold’ is a favourite phrase in certain forms of poetry ; and ‘yellow-boys’ is a term of natural affection among sailors. Following the example of their lord the sun, most fires

and lights are yellow or golden, and it is only in times of danger or superstition that they burn red or blue. And, if yellow be denied entrance to beautiful eyes, it enjoys a privilege which—except in the case of certain indigo-staining African tribes, who cannot be said to count—blue has never claimed, that of colouring perhaps the loveliest thing in the world, the hair of woman. Hair is naturally golden—unnaturally also. When Browningsings pathetically of ‘dear dead women—with such hair too!’ he continues:—

‘What’s become of all the *gold*
Used to hang and brush their bosoms’—

not ‘all the blue’ or ‘all the brown,’ though some of us, it is true, are condemned to wear our hair brown or blue-black. But such are only unhappy exceptions. Yellow or gold is the rule. The bravest men and the fairest women have had golden hair, and, we may add, in reference to another distinction of the colour we are celebrating, golden hearts. Hair at the present time is doing its best to conform to its normal conditions of colour. Numerous instances might be adduced of

its changing from black to gold, in obedience to chemical law. ‘Peroxide of hydrogen!’ says the cynic. ‘Beauty!’ says the lover of art.

And it might be argued, in a world of inevitable compromise, that the damage done to the physical health and texture of the hair thus playing the chameleon may well be overbalanced by the happiness, and consequent increased effectiveness, of the person thus dyeing for the sake of beauty. Thaumaturgists lay much stress on the mystic influence of colours; and who knows but that if we were only allowed to dye our hair what color we chose, we might be different men and women. Strange things are told of women who have dyed their hair the color of blood or of wine, and we know from Christina Rossetti that golden hair is negotiable in fairyland —

“ ‘You have much gold upon your head,’ ”

They answered all together;

“ ‘Buy from us with a golden curl.’ ”

Whether Laura could have done business with the goblin merchantmen with an oxidized curl is a difficult point, for

fairies have sharp eyes; and though it be impossible for a mortal to tell the real gold from the false gold hair, the fairies may be able to do so, and might reject the curl as counterfeit.

Again, if in the vegetable world green almost universally colours the leaves, yellow has more to do with the flowers. The flowers we love best are yellow: the cowslip, the daffodil, the crocus, the buttercup, half the daisy, the honey-suckle, and the loveliest rose. Yellow, too, has its turn even with the leaves; and what an artist he shows himself when, in autumn, he 'lays his fiery finger' upon them, lighting up the forlorn woodland with splashes—pure palette-colour of audacious gold! He hangs the mulberry with heart-shaped yellow shields—which reminds one of the heraldic importance of 'or'—and he lines the banks of the Seine with phantasmal yellow poplars. And other leaves still dearer to the heart are yellow likewise; leaves of those sweet old poets whose thoughts seem to have turned the pages gold. Let us dream of this: a maid with yellow hair, clad in a yellow

gown, seated in a yellow room, at the window a yellow sunset, in the grate a yellow fire, at her side a yellow lamplight, on her knee a Yellow Book. And the letters we love best to read—when we dare—are they not yellow, too? No doubt some disagreeable things are reported of yellow. We have had the yellow-fever, and we have had pea-soup. The eyes of lions are said to be yellow, and the ugliest cats—the cats that infest one's garden—are always yellow. Some medicines are yellow, and no doubt there are many other yellow disagreeables; but we prefer to dwell upon the yellow blessings. I had almost forgotten that the gayest wines are yellow. Nor has religion forgotten yellow. It is to be hoped yellow will not forget religion. The sacred robe of the second greatest religion of the world is yellow, 'the yellow robe' of the Buddhist friar; and when the sacred harlots of Hindustan walk in lovely procession through the streets, they, too, like the friars, are clad in yellow. Amber is yellow; so is the orange; and so were stage-coaches and many dashing things of

the old time ; and pink is yellow by lamp-light. But gold-mines, it has been proved, are not so yellow as is popularly supposed. Hymen's robe is Miltonically 'saffron,' and the dearest petticoat in all literature — not forgetting the 'tempestuous' garment of Herrick's Julia — was 'yaller.'
Yes!

'Er petticoat was yaller an' 'er little cap was green,
An 'er name was Supi-yaw-lat, jes' the same as Thee-
baw's Queen.'

Is it possible to say anything prettier for yellow than that?

PROSE FANCIES—IX

LETTER TO AN UNSUCCESSFUL LITERARY MAN



MY DEAR SIR:—I agree with every word you say. You have my entire sympathy. The world is indeed hard, hard to the sad—particularly hard to the unsuccessful. A sure five hundred a year covers a multitude of sorrows. It is ever an ill wind for the shorn lamb. If it be true that nothing succeeds like success, it is no less sadly true that nothing fails like failure. And when one thinks of it, it is only natural, for every failure is an obstruction in the stream of life. Metaphorical writers are fond of saying that the successful ride to success on the back of the failures. It is true that many rise on stepping-stones of their dead relations—but that is because their relations have been financial successes. In trut', instead of the failure making the fortune of the successful, it is

just the reverse. A very successful man would be the more successful were it not for the failures — on whom he has either to spend his money to support, or his time to advise. The strong are said to be impatient towards the weak — and is it to be wondered at, in a world where even the strongest need all their strength, in a sea where the best swimmer needs all his wind and muscle and skill to keep afloat? If success is sometimes ‘unfeeling’ towards failure, failure is often unfair to success. Of course, ‘it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves,’ but that is a text that cuts both ways; and when all is said and done, the failure detracts from the force in the universe; he is the clog on the wheel of fortune. To say that the successful man benefits by the failure of others is as true as it would be to say that the ratepayer benefits by the poor rates. You use the word ‘charlatan’ somewhat profusely, of several successful writers, and no doubt you are right. But you must remember that it is a favourite charge against the gifted and the fortunate. Because we have failed by fair

means, we are sure the other fellows have succeeded by foul. And, moreover, one is apt to forget how much talent is needed to be a charlatan. Never look down upon a charlatan. Courage, skill, personal force or charm, great knowledge of human nature, dramatic instinct, and industry — few charlatans succeed (and no one is called a charlatan till he *does* succeed, be his success as low or high as you please) without possessing a majority of these qualities; how many of which — it would be interesting to know — do you possess?

Indeed, it would seem to need more gifts to be a rogue than an honest man, and there is a sense in which every great man may be described as a charlatan — plus greatness; greatness being an almost indefinable quality, a quality, at any rate, on which there is a bewildering diversity of opinion.

You seem a little cross with publishers and editors. They have not proved the distinguished, brilliant, and sympathetic beings you imagined them in your boyish dreams. No doubt, publishers and editors

enter hardly into the kingdom of heaven. But then, you see, they don't care so much about that; they are much more interested in the next election at certain fashionable clubs. It is really a little hard on them that they should suffer from the ignorant misconception of the literary amateur. It is only those who have had no dealings with them who would be unfair enough to expect publishers or editors to be literary men. They are business men—business men *par excellence*—and a good thing, too, for their papers and their authors. You lament their mercenary view of life; but, judging by your letter, even you are not disposed to regard money as the root of all evil.

You cannot understand why you have failed where others have succeeded. You have far more Greek than Keats, more history than Scott, and you know nineteen languages—ten of them to speak. With so many accomplishments, it must indeed be hard to fail—though you do not seem to have found it difficult. You have travelled, too—have been twice round the world, and have a thorough knowledge of

the worst hotels. Certainly, it is singular. Nevertheless, I must confess that the dullest men I have ever met have been professors of history; the worst poets have not only known Greek, but French as well; and, generally speaking, the most tiresome of my acquaintances have more degrees than I have Latin to name them in. Alas! it is not experience, or travel, or language, but the use we make of them, that makes literary success, which, one may add, is particularly dependent — perhaps not unnaturally — on the use we make of language. A book may be a book, although there is neither Latin nor Greek, nor travel, nor experience — in fact ‘nothing’ in it; and though, like myself, you may pay an Oxford professor a thousand a year to correct your proofs, you may still miss immortality.

To these intellectual and general equipments you add goodness of heart, sincerity of conviction, and martyrdom for your opinions; you are, it would seem, like many others of us, the best fellow and greatest man of your acquaintance. Permit me to remind you that we are not talking

of goodness of heart, of strength or beauty of character, but of success, which is a thing apart, a fine art in itself.

You confess that you are somewhat unpractical: you expect others — hard-worked journalists who never met you — to tell you what to read, how to form your style! and how ‘to get into the magazines.’ You are, you say, with something of pride, but a poor business man. That is a pity, for nearly every successful literary man of the day, and particularly the novelists, are excellent business men. Indeed, the history of literature all round has proved that the men who have been masters of words have also been masters of things—masters of the facts of life for which those words stand. Many writers have mismanaged their affairs from idleness and indifference, but few from incapacity. Leigh Hunt boasted that he could never master the multiplication table. Perhaps that accounts for his comparative failure as a writer. Incompetence in one art is far from being a guarantee of competency in another, and a man is all the more likely to make a name if he is able to

make a living—though, judging from Coleridge, it seems a good plan to let another hard-worked man support one's wife and children. On the other hand, though business faculty is a great deal, it is not everything: for a man may be as punctual and methodical as Southey, and yet miss the prize of his high calling, or as generally 'impossible' as Blake, and yet win his place among the immortals.

In fact, after all, success in literature has something to do with writing. In temporary success, industry and business faculty, and an unworked field—be it Scotland, Ireland, or the Isle of Man (any place but plain England!)—are the chief factors. For that more lasting success which we call fame other qualities are needed, such qualities as imagination, fancy, and magic and force in the use of words. Can you honestly say, O beloved, though tiresome, correspondent, that these great gifts are yours? Judging from your letter—but Heaven forbid that I should be unkind! For, need I say I love you with a fellow-feeling? Do you think that you are the only unappreciated genius on the

planet—not to speak of all the other unappreciated geniuses on all the other planets. Thank goodness, the postal arrangements with the latter are as yet defective! Others there are with hearts as warm, minds as profound, and style at least as attractive, who languish in unmerited neglect. Miltons inglorious indeed, though far from mute.

Believe me, you are not alone. In fact, there are so many like you that it would be quite easy for you to find society without worrying me. And for all of us, there is the consolation that, though we fail as writers, we may still succeed as citizens, as husbands and fathers and friends. As Whitman would say—because you are not Editor of *The Times* do you give in that you are less than a man? There are poets that have never entered into the Bodley Head, and great prose writers who have never sat in an editorial chair. Be satisfied with your heavenly crowns, O you whining unsuccessful, and leave to your inferiors the earthly five-shilling pieces.

PROSE FANCIES—X

A POET IN THE CITY



‘In the midway of this our mortal life,
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray.’

I (AND when I say I, I must be understood to be speaking dramatically) only venture into the City once a year, for the very pleasant purpose of drawing that twelve-pound-ten by which the English nation, ever so generously sensitive to the necessities, not to say luxuries of the artist, endeavours to express its pride and delight in me. It would be a very graceful exercise of gratitude for me here to stop and parenthesise the reader on the subject of all that twelve-pound-ten has been to me, how it has quite changed the course of my life, given me that long-desired opportunity of doing my best work in peace, for which so often I vainly sighed in Fleet Street, and even allowed me an indulgence in minor luxuries

which I could not have dreamed of enjoying before the days of that twelve-pound-ten. Now not only peace and plenty, but leisure and luxury are mine. There is nothing goes so far as—Government money.

Usually on these literally State occasions, I drive up in state, that is, in a hansom. There is only one other day in the year on which I am so splendid, but that is another beautiful story. It, too, is a day and an hour too joyous to be approached otherwise than on winged wheels, too stately to be approached in merely pedestrian fashion. To go on foot to draw one's pension seems a sort of slight on the great nation that does one honour, as though a Lord Mayor should make his appearance in the procession in his office coat.

So I say it is my custom to go gaily, and withal stately, to meet my twelve-pound-ten in a hansom. For many reasons the occasion always seems something of an adventure, and I confess I always feel a little excited about it—indeed, to tell the truth, a little nervous. As I glide along

in my state barge (which seems a much more proper and impressive image for a hansom than 'gondola,' with its reminiscences of Earl's Court) I feel like some fragile country flower torn from its roots, and bewilderingly hurried along upon the turbid, swollen stream of London life.

The stream glides sweetly with a pleasant trotting tinkle of bells by the green park-side of Piccadilly, and sweet is it to hear the sirens singing, and to see them combing their gilded locks, on the yellow sands of Piccadilly Circus—so called, no doubt, from the number of horses and the skill of their drivers. Here are the whirling pools of pleasure, merry wheels of laughing waters, where your hansom glides along with a golden ease—it is only when you enter the First Cataract of the Strand that you become aware of the far-distant terrible roar of the Falls! They are yet nearly two miles away, but already, like Niagara, thou hearest the sound thereof—the fateful sound of that human Niagara, where all the great rivers of London converge: the dark, strong floods surging out from the gloomy fastnesses of the East End, the

quick-running streams from the palaces of the West, the East with its waggons, the West with its hansoms, the four winds with their omnibuses, the horses and carriages under the earth jetting up their companies of grimy passengers, the very air busy with a million errands.

You are in the rapids—metaphorically speaking—as you crawl down Cheapside, and here where the Bank of England and the Mansion House rise sheer and awful from, shall we say, this boiling cauldron, this ‘hell’ of angry meeting waters—Threadneedle Street and Cornhill, Queen Victoria Street and Cheapside, each ‘running,’ again metaphorically, ‘like a mill race’—here in this wild maëlstrom of human life and human conveyances, here is the true ‘Niagara in London,’ here are the most wonderful falls in the world—the London Falls.

‘Yes!’ I said softly to myself, and I could see the sly, sad smile on the face of the dead poet, at the thought of whose serene wisdom a silence like snow seemed momentarily to cover up the turmoil—‘Yes!’ I said softly, ‘there is still the

same old crush at the corner of Fenchurch street !’

By this time I had disbursed one of my two annual cab fares, and was standing a little forlorn at that very corner. It was a March afternoon, bitter and gloomy; lamps were already popping alight in a desolate way, and the east wind whistled mournfully through the ribs of the passers-by. A very unflower-like man was dejectedly calling out ‘daffadownillies’ close by. The sound of the pretty old word, thus quaintly spoken, brightened the air better than the electric lights which suddenly shot rows of wintry moonlight along the streets. I bought a bunch of the poor, pinched flowers, and asked the man how he came to call them ‘daffadownillies.’

‘D’vunshur,’ he said, in anything but a Devonshire accent, and then the east wind took him and he was gone — doubtless to a neighbouring tavern; and no wonder, poor soul. Flowers certainly fall into strange hands here in London.

Well, it was nearing four, and if I wanted a grateful country’s twelve-pound-ten, I must make haste; so presently I

found myself in a great hall, of which I have no clearer impression than that there were soft little lights all about me, and a soft chime of falling gold, like the rippling of Pactolus. I have a sort of idea, too, of a great number of young men with most beautiful moustaches, playing with golden shovels; and as I thus stood among the soft lights and listened to the most beautiful sound in the world, I thought that thus must Danae have felt as she stood amid the falling shower. But I took care to see that my twelve sovereigns and a half were right number and weight for all that.

Once more in the street, I lingered awhile to take a last look at the Falls. What a masterful alien life it all seemed to me. No single personality could hope to stand alone amid all that stress of ponderous, bullying forces. Only public companies, and such great impersonalities, could hope to hold their own, to swim in such a whirlpool—and even they, I had heard it whispered far away in my quiet starlit garret, sometimes went down. ‘How,’ I cried, ‘would —

‘ . . . my tiny spark of being wholly vanish in your
 deeps and heights . . .
 Rush of suns, and roll of systems, and your fiery
 clash of meteorites,’

again quoting poetry. I always quote poetry in the City, as a protest — moreover, it clears the air.

The more people buffeted against me the more I felt the crushing sense of almost cosmic forces. Everybody was so plainly an atom in a public company, a drop of water in a tyrannous stream of human energy — companies that cared nothing for their individual atoms, streams that cared nothing for their component drops; such atoms and drops, for the most part, to be had for thirty shillings a week. These people about me seemed no more like individual men and women than individual puffs in a mighty rushing wind, or the notes in a great scheme of music, are men and women — to the banker so many pens with ears whereon to perch them, to the capitalist so many ‘hands,’ and to the City man generally so many ‘helpless pieces of the game he plays’ up there in spidery nooks and corners of the City.

As I listened to the throbbing of the great human engines in the buildings about me, a rising and a falling there seemed as of those great steel-limbed monsters, weird contortionists of metal, that jet up and down, and writhe and wrestle this way and that, behind the long glass windows of great water-towers, or toil like Vulcan in the bowels of mighty ships. An expression of frenzy seems to come up even from the dumb tossing steel, sometimes it seems to be shaking great knuckled fists at one and brandishing threatening arms, as it strains and sweats beneath the lash of the compulsive steam. As one watches it, there seems something of human agony about its panic-stricken labours, and something like a sense of pity surprises one—a sense of pity that anything in the world should have to work like that, even steel, even, as we say, senseless steel. What, then, of these great human engine-houses! Will the engines always consent to rise and fall, night and day, like that? or will there some day be a mighty convulsion, and this blind Samson of labour pull down the

whole engine-house upon his oppressors? Who knows? These are questions for great politicians and thinkers to decide, not for a poet, who is too much terrified by such forces to be able calmly to estimate and prophesy concerning them.

Yes! if you want to realise Tennyson's picture of 'one poor poet's scroll' ruling the world, take your poet's scroll down to Fenchurch street and try it there. Ah, what a powerless little 'private interest' seems poetry there, poetry 'whose action is no stronger than a flower.' In days of peace it ventures even into the morning papers, but, let only a rumour of war be heard, and it vanishes like a dream on doomsday morning. A County Council election passeth over it and it is gone.

Yet it was near this very spot that Keats dug up the buried beauty of Greece, lying hidden beneath Finsbury Pavement! and in the deserted City churches great dramatists lie about us. Maybe I have wronged the City — and at this thought I remembered a little bookshop but a few yards away, blossoming like a rose right in the heart of the wilderness.

Here, after all, in spite of all my whirlpools and engine-houses, was for me the greatest danger in the City. Need I say, therefore, that I promptly sought it, hovered about it a moment — and entered. How much of that grateful governmental twelve-pound-ten came out alive, I dare not tell my dearest friend.

At all events I came out somehow reassured, more rich in faith. There was a might of poesy after all. There were words in the little yellow-leaved garland, nestling like a bird in my hand, that would outlast the bank yonder, and outlive us all. I held it up. How tiny it seemed, how frail amid all this stone and iron. A mere flower — a flower from the seventeenth century — long-lived for a flower! Yes, an *immortelle*.

PROSE FANCIES—XI

BROWN ROSES.

‘WELL, I never thought to see this day, sir,’ said Gibbs, with something like tears in his voice, as he reluctantly plied his scissors upon Hyacinth Rondel’s distinguished curls.

‘Nor I, Gibbs — nor I!’ said Rondel, sadly, relapsing into silence again, with his head meekly bent over the white sheet spread to catch his shorn beauty.

‘To think of the times, sir, that I have dressed your head,’ continued Gibbs, whose grief bore so marked an emphasis, ‘and to think that after to-day . . .’

‘But you forget, my dear Gibbs, that I shall now be a more constant customer than ever!’

‘Ah, sir, but that will be different. It will be mere machine-cutting, lawn-mowing, steam-reaping — if you understand me — there ’ll be no pleasure in it — no artistic pleasure, I mean.’

‘Yes, Gibbs, and you are an artist — I have often told you that.’

‘Ah, sir, but I am coming to the conclusion that it is better not to be an artist — better to be born just like every one else. In these days one suffers too much. Why, sir, I have n’t in the whole of my business six heads like yours, and I go on cutting all the rest, week in and week out, just for the pleasure of dressing those six — and now there ’ll only be five.’

* * *

‘It looks like a winding-sheet,’ mused Rondel presently, after a long silence, broken only by the soft crunch and click of the fatal scissors, as they feasted on the beautiful brown silk.

‘It do, indeed, sir,’ said Gibbs, with a shudder, as another little globe of golden brown rolled down into Rondel’s lap.

‘Poor brown roses!’ sighed the poet, after another silence; ‘they are just like brown roses, are n’t they, Gibbs?’

‘They are, indeed, sir.’

‘Brown roses scatterea over the winding-sheet of one’s youth — ah, Gibbs?’

‘They are, indeed, sir!’

‘That’s rather a pretty image, don’t you think, Gibbs?’

‘Indeed, I do, sir!’

‘Well, well, they have bloomed their last; and when Juliet’s white hands come seeking with their silver fingers white maidens lost in the brown enchanted forest, there will not be a rose left for her to gather.’

‘Believe me, sir; I would more gladly have cut off your head than your hair — that is, figuratively speaking,’ sobbed the artist-in-hair-oils.

‘Yes, my head would hardly be missed, you are quite right, Gibbs; but my hair! What will they do without it at first nights and private views? It was worth five shillings a week to many a poor paragraph-writer. Well, I must try and make up for it by my beard!’

‘Your beard, sir?’ exclaimed Gibbs in horror.

‘Yes, Gibbs, for some years I have been a Nazarene, that is, a Nazarite, for the top half of my head; now I am going to change about, and be a Nazarite with the lower. The razor has kissed my

cheeks and my chin and the fluted column of my throat for the last time.'

'You cannot mean it, sir,' said Gibbs, suspending his murderous task a moment.

'It's quite true, Gibbs.'

'Does she wish that, too, sir?'

'Yes, that, too.'

'Well, sir, I have heard of men making sacrifices for their wives, but of all the cruel . . .'

'Please don't, Gibbs, it does no good. And Mrs. Rondel's motive is a good one.'

'Of course, sir. I cannot presume — and yet, if it would n't be presuming, I should like to know why you are making this great, I may say this noble, sacrifice.'

'Well, Gibbs, we're old friends, and I'll tell you some day, but I hardly feel up to it to-day.'

'Of course not, sir — of course not; it's only natural,' said Gibbs tenderly, while the scissors once more took up the conversation.

PROSE FANCIES—XII

THE DONKEY THAT LOVED A STAR



‘**T**HAT is how the donkey tells his love!’ I said one day, with intent to be funny, as the prolonged love-whoop of a distant donkey was heard in the land.

‘Do n’t be too ready to laugh at donkeys,’ said my friend.

‘For,’ he continued, ‘even donkeys have their dreams. Perhaps, indeed, the most beautiful dreams are dreamed by donkeys.’

‘Indeed,’ I said, ‘and now that I think of it, I remember to have said that most dreamers are donkeys, though I never expected so scientific a corroboration of a fleeting jest.’

Now, my friend is an eminent scientist and poet in one, a serious combination, and he took my remarks with seriousness at once scientific and poetic.

‘Yes,’ he went on, ‘that is where you clever people make a mistake. You think that because a donkey has only two vowel sounds wherewith to express his emotions, he has no emotions to express. But let me tell you, sir . . .’

But here we both burst out laughing—

‘You Golden Ass!’ I said, ‘take a munch of these roses; perhaps they will restore you.’

‘No,’ he resumed, ‘I am quite serious. I have for many years past made a study of donkeys—high-stepping critics call it the study of Human Nature—however, it’s the same thing—and I must say that the more I study them the more I love them. There is nothing so well worth studying as the misunderstood, for the very reason that everybody thinks he understands it. Now, to take another instance, most people think they have said the last word on a goose when they have called it “a goose!”—but let me tell you, sir . . .’

But here again we burst out laughing—

‘Dear goose of the golden eggs,’ I said, ‘pray leave to discourse on geese to-night

— though lovely and pleasant would the discourse be — to-night I am all agog for donkeys.'

'So be it,' said my friend, 'and if that be so, I cannot do better than tell you the story of the donkey that loved a star — keeping for another day the no less fascinating story of the goose that loved an angel.'

By this time I was, appropriately, all ears.

'Well,' he once more began, 'there was once a donkey, quite an intimate friend of mine, and I have no friend of whom I am prouder, who was unpractically fond of looking up at the stars. He could go a whole day without thistles, if night would only bring him stars. Of course he suffered no little from his fellow donkeys for this curious passion of his. They said well that it did not become him, for indeed it was no little laughable to see him gazing so sentimentally at the remote and pitiless heavens. Donkeys who belonged to Shakespeare societies recalled the fate of Bottom, the donkey who had loved a fairy, but our donkey paid little heed. There is perhaps only one

advantage in being a donkey — namely, a hide impervious to criticism. In our donkey's case it was rather a dream that made him forget his hide — a dream that drew up all the sensitiveness from every part, from hoof, and hide, and ears, so that all the feeling in his whole body was centred in his eyes and brain, and those, as we have said, were centred on a star. He took it for granted that his fellows should sneer and kick out at him ; it was ever so with genius among the donkeys, and he had very soon grown used to these attentions of his brethren, which were powerless to withdraw his gaze from the star he loved. For though he loved all the stars, as every individual man loves all women, there was one star he loved more than any other ; and standing one midnight among his thistles, he prayed a prayer, a prayer that some day it might be granted him to carry that star upon his back, — which, he recalled, had been sanctified by the holy sign, — were it but for ever so short a journey. Just to carry it a little way, and then to die. This to him was a dream beyond the dreams of donkeys.

‘Now, one night,’ continued my friend, taking breath for himself and me, ‘our poor donkey looked up to the sky, and lo! the star was nowhere to be seen. He had heard it said that stars sometimes fall. Evidently his star had fallen. Fallen! but what if it had fallen upon the earth? Being a donkey, the wildest dreams seemed possible to him. And, strange as it may seem, there came a day when a poet came to his master and bought our donkey to carry his little child. Now, the very first day he had her upon his back, the donkey knew that his prayer had been answered, and that the little swaddled babe he carried was the star he had prayed for. And, indeed, so it was; for so long as donkeys ask no more than to fetch and carry for their beloved, they may be sure of beauty upon their backs. Now, so long as this little girl that was a star remained a little girl, our donkey was happy. For many pretty years she would kiss his ugly muzzle and feed his mouth with sugar—and thus our donkey’s thoughts sweetened day by day, till from a natural pessimist he blossomed into a perfectly absurd optimist, and

dreamed the donkiest of dreams. But, one day, as he carried the girl who was really a star through the spring lanes, a young man walked beside her, and though our donkey thought very little of his talk—in fact, felt his plain “hee-haw” to be worth all its smart chirping and twittering—yet it evidently pleased the maiden. It included quite a number of vowel-sounds, though if the maiden had only known, it did n’t mean half so much as the donkey’s plain monotonous declaration.

‘Well, our donkey soon began to realise that his dream was nearing its end; and, indeed, one day his little mistress came bringing him the sweetest of kisses, the very best sugar in the very best shops, but for all that our donkey knew that it meant good-bye. It is the charming manner of English girls to be at their sweetest when they say good-bye.

‘Our dreamer-donkey went into exile as servant to a woodcutter, and his life was lenient if dull, for the woodcutter had no sticks to waste upon his back; and next day his young mistress who was once a star took a pony for her love, whom some

time after she discarded for a talented hunter, and, one fine day, like many of her sex, she pitched her affections upon a man—he too being a talented hunter. To their wedding came all the countryside. And with the countryside came the donkey. He carried a great bundle of firewood for the servants' hall, and as he waited outside, gazing up at his old loves the stars, while his master drank deeper and deeper within, he revolved many thoughts. But he is only known to have made one remark—in the nature, one may think, of a grim jest—

‘“After all !” he was heard to say, “she has married a donkey, after all.”’

‘No doubt it was feeble ; but then our donkey was growing old and bitter, and hope deferred had made him a cynic.’

PROSE FANCIES—XIII

ON LOVING ONE'S ENEMIES



LIKE all people who live apart from it, the Founder of the Christian religion was possessed of a profound knowledge of the world. As, according to the proverb, the woodlander sees nothing of the wood for its trees, so those who live in the world know nothing of it. They know its gaudy, glittering surface, its Crystal Palace fireworks, and the paste-diamonds with which it bedecks itself; they know its music halls and its night clubs, its Piccadillies and its politics, its restaurants and its salons; but of the bad—or good?—heart of it all they know nothing. In more meanings than one, it takes a saint to catch a sinner; and Christ certainly knew as well as saved the sinner.

But none of His precepts show a truer knowledge of life and its conditions than

His commandment that we should love our enemies. He realised — can we doubt? — that without enemies the Church He bade His followers build could not hope to be established. He knew that the spiritual fire he strove to kindle would spread but little unless the four winds of the world blew against it. Well, indeed, may the Christian Church love its enemies, for it is they who have made it.

Indeed, for a man, or a cause, that wants to get on, there is nothing like a few hearty, zealous enemies. Most of us would never be heard of if it were not for our enemies. The unsuccessful man counts up his friends, but the successful man numbers his enemies. A friend of mine was lamenting, the other day, that he could not find twelve people to disbelieve in him. He had been seeking them for years, he sighed, and could not get beyond eleven. But, even so, with only eleven he was a very successful man. In these kind-hearted days enemies are becoming so rare that one has to go out of one's way to make them. The true interpretation, therefore, of the easiest of

the commandments is — make your enemies, and your enemies will make you.

So soon as the armed men begin to spring up in our fields, we may be sure that we have not sown in vain.

Properly understood, an enemy is but a negative embodiment of our personalities or ideas. He is an involuntary witness to our vitality. Much as he despises us, greatly as he may injure us, he is none the less a creature of our making. It was we who put into him the breath of his malignity, and inspired the activity of his malice. Therefore, with his very existence so tremendous a tribute, we can afford to smile at his self-conscious disclaimers of our significance. Though he slay us, we *made* him — to ‘make an enemy,’ is not that the phrase?

Indeed, the fact that he is our enemy is his one *raison d'être*. That alone should make us charitable to him. Live and let live. Without us our enemy has no occupation, for to hate us is his profession. Think of his wives and families!

The friendship of the little for the great is an old-established profession; there is but

one older—namely, the hatred of the little for the great; and, though it is perhaps less officially recognized, it is without doubt the more lucrative. It is one of the shortest roads to fame. Why is the name of Pontius Pilate an uneasy ghost of history? Think what fame it would have meant to be an enemy of Socrates or Shakespeare! *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Quarterly Review* only survive to-day because they once did their best to strangle the genius of Keats and Tennyson. Two or three journals of our own time, by the same unflinching method, seek that circulation from posterity which is denied them in the present.

This is particularly true in literature, where the literary enemy is as organized a tradesman as the literary agent. Like the literary agent, he naturally does his best to secure the biggest men. No doubt the time will come when the literary cut-throat—shall we call him?—will publish dainty little books of testimonials from authors, full of effusive gratitude for the manner in which they have been slashed and bludgeoned into fame. ‘Butcher to Mr. Grant

Alien ' may then become a familiar legend over literary shop-fronts :—

' Ah ! did you stab at Shelley's heart
 With silly sneer and cruel lie ?
 And Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Keats,
 To murder did you nobly try ?

You failed, 'tis true ; but what of that ?
 The world remembers still your name —
 'Tis fame, *for you*, to be the cur
 That barks behind the heels of Fame.'

Any one who is fortunate enough to have enemies will know that all this is far from being fanciful. If one's enemies have any other *raison d'être* beyond the fact of their being our enemies — what is it ? They are neither beautiful nor clever, wise nor good, famous, nor, indeed, passably distinguished. Were they any of these, they would not have taken to so humble a means of getting their living. Instead of being our enemies, they could then have afforded to employ enemies on their own account. Who, indeed, are our enemies ? Broadly speaking, they are all those people who lack what we possess.

If you are rich, every poor man is necessarily your enemy. If you are beau-

tiful, the great democracy of the plain and ugly will mock you in the streets.

It will be the same with everything you possess. The brainless will never forgive you for possessing brains, the weak will hate you for your strength, and the evil for your good heart. If you can write, all the bad writers are at once your foes. If you can paint, the bad painters will talk you down. But more than any talent or charm you may possess, the pearl of price for which you will be most bitterly hated will be your success. You can be the most wonderful person that ever existed so long as you don't succeed, and nobody will mind. 'It is the sunshine,' says some one, 'that brings out the adder.' So powerful, indeed, is success that it has been known to turn a friend into a foe. Those, then, who wish to engage a few trusty enemies out of place need only advertise among the unsuccessful.

P.S.—For one service we should be particularly thankful to our enemies—they save us so much in stimulants. Their unbelief so helps our belief, their negatives make us so positive.

PROSE FANCIES—XIV

THE DRAMATIC ART OF LIFE.



IT is a curious truth that, whereas in every other art deliberate choice of method and careful calculation of effect are expected from the artist, in the greatest and most difficult art of all, the art of life, this is not so. In literature, painting, or sculpture you first evolve your conception, and then after long study of it, as it glows and shimmers in your imagination, you set about the reverent selection of that form which shall be its most truthful incarnation, in words, in paint, in marble. Now life, as has been said many times, is an art too. Sententious morality from time past has told us that we are each given a part to play, evidently implying, with involuntary cynicism, that the art of life is — the art of acting.

As with the actor, we are each given a certain dramatic conception for the ex-

pression of which we have precisely the same artistic materials — namely, our own bodies, sometimes including heart and brains. One has often heard the complaint of a certain actor that he acts himself. On the metaphorical stage of life the complaint and the implied demand are just the reverse. How much more interesting life would be if only more people had the courage and skill to act themselves, instead of abjectly understudying some one else. Of course, there are supers on the stage of life as on the real stage. It is proper that these should dress and speak and think alike. These one courteously excepts from the generalisation that the composer of the play, as Marcus Aurelius calls him, has given each of us a certain part to play — that part simply oneself: a part, need one say, by no means as easy as it seems; a part most difficult to study, and requiring daily rehearsal. So difficult is it, indeed, that most people throw up the part, and join the ranks of the supers — who, curiously enough, are paid much more handsomely than the principals. They enter one of the learned or idle pro-

fessions, join the army or take to trade, and so speedily rid themselves of the irksome necessity of being anything more individual than 'the learned counsel,' 'the learned judge,' 'my lord bishop,' or 'the colonel,' names impersonal in application as the dignity of 'Pharaoh,' whereof the name and not the man was alone important. Henceforth they are the Church, the Law, the Army, the City, or that vaguer profession, Society. Entering one of these, they become as lost to the really living world as the monk who voluntarily surrenders all will and character of his own at the threshold of his monastery: bricks in a prison wall, privates in the line, peas in a row. But, as I say, these are the parts that pay. For playing the others, indeed, you are not paid, but expected to pay — dearly.

It is full time we turned to those on whom falls the burden of those real parts. Such, when quite young, if they be conscientious artists, will carefully consider themselves, their gifts and possibilities, study to discover their artistic *raison d'être* and how best to fulfil it. He or she will

say: Here am I, a creature of great gifts and exquisite sensibilities, drawn by great dreams, and vibrating to great emotions; yet this potent and exquisite self is as yet, I know, but unwrought material of the perfect work of art it is intended that I should make of it — but the marble wherefrom, with patient chisel, I must liberate the perfect and triumphant ME! As a poet listening with trembling ear to the voice of his inspiration, so I tremulously ask myself — what is the divine conception that is to become embodied in me, what is the divine meaning of ME? How best shall I express it in look, in word, in deed, till my outer self becomes the truthful symbol of my inner self — till, in fact, I have successfully placed the best of myself on the outside — for others besides myself to see, and know and love?

What is my part, and how am I to play it?

Returning to the latter image, there are two difficulties that beset one in playing a part on the stage of life, right at the outset. You are not allowed to 'look' it, or 'dress' it! What would an actor think,

who, asked to play Hamlet, found that he would be expected to play it without make-up and in nineteenth century costume? Yet many of us are in a like dilemma with similar parts. Actors and audience must all wear the same drab clothes and the same immobile expression. It is in vain you protest that you do not really belong to this absurd and vulgar nineteenth century, that you have been spirited into it by a cruel mistake, that you really belong to mediæval Florence, to Elizabethan, Caroline, or at latest Queen Anne England, and that you would like to be allowed to look and dress as like it as possible. It is no use; if you dare to look or dress like anything but your own tradesmen — and other critics — it is at your peril. If you are beautiful you are expected to disguise a fact that is an open insult to every other person you look at; and you must, as a general rule, never look, wear, feel, or say what everybody else is not also looking, wearing, feeling, or saying.

Thus you get some hint of the difficulty of playing the part of yourself on this stage of life.

In these matters of dressing and looking your part musicians seemed granted an immunity denied to all their fellow-artists. Perhaps it is taken for granted that the musician is a fool — the British public is so intuitive. Yet it takes the same view of the poet — without allowing him a like immunity. And, by the way, what a fine conception of his part had Tennyson: of the dignity, the mystery, the picturesqueness of it. Tennyson would have felt it an artistic crime to look like his publisher; yet what poet is there left us to-day half so distinguished-looking as his publisher?

Indeed, curiously enough, among no set of men does the desire to look as commonplace as the rest of the world seem so strong as among men of letters. Perhaps it is out of consideration for the rest of the world; but whatever the reason, immobility of expression and general mediocrity of style are more characteristic of them at present than even the military.

It is surely a strange paradox that we should pride ourselves on schooling to foolish insensibility, on eliminating from them every mark of individual character,

the faces that were intended subtly and eloquently to image our moods — to look glad when we are glad, sorry when we are sorry, angry in anger, and lovely in love.

The impassivity of the modern young man is indeed a weird and wonderful thing. Is it a mark to hide from us the appalling sins he none the less openly affects? Is it meant to conceal that once in his life he paid a wild visit to 'The Empire'—by kind indulgence of the County Council? that he once chucked a barmaid under the chin, that he once nearly got drunk, that he once spoke to a young lady he did not know — and then ran away?

One sighs for the young men of the days of Gautier and Hugo, the young men with red waistcoats who made asses of themselves at first nights and on the barricades, young men with romance in their hearts and passion in their blood, fearlessly sentimental and picturesquely everything.

The lover then was not ashamed that you should catch radiant glimpses of his love in his eyes — nay! if you smiled

kindly on him, he would take you by the arm and insist on you breaking a bottle with him in honour of his mistress. Joy and sorrow then wore their appropriate colours, according, so to say, to the natural sumptuary laws of the emotions — one of which is that the right place for the heart is the sleeve.

It is the duty of those who are great, or to whom great destinies of joy or sorrow have been dealt, to wear their distinctions for the world to see. It is good for the world, which, in its crude way, indicates the rudiments of this dramatic art of life, when it decrees that the bride shall walk radiant in orange blossom, and the mourner sadden our streets with black — symbols ever passing before us of the moving vicissitudes of life.

The mourner cannot always be sad, or the bride merry; the bride indeed sometimes weeps at the altar, and the mourner laughs a savage cynical laugh at the grave; but for those moments in which they awhile forget parts more important than themselves, the tailor and the dressmaker have provided symbolical garments, just as

military decorations have been provided for heroes without the gift of looking heroic, and sacerdotal vestments for the priest, who, like a policeman, is not always on duty.

In playing his part the conscientious artist in life, like any other actor, must often seem to feel more than he really feels at a given moment, say more than he means. In this he is far from being insincere — though he must make up his mind to be accused daily of insincerity and affectation. On the contrary, it will be his very sincerity that necessitates his make-believe. With his great part ever before him in its inspiring completeness, he must be careful to allow no merely personal accident of momentary feeling or action to jeopardize the general effect. There are moments, for example, when a really true lover, owing to such masterful natural facts as indigestion, a cold, or extreme sleepiness, is unable to feel all that he knows he really feels. To ‘tell the truth,’ as it is called, under such circumstances, would simply be a most dangerous form of lying. There is no duty we owe to truth

more imperative than that of lying stoutly on occasion—for, indeed, there is often no other way of conveying the whole truth than by telling the part-lie.

A watchful sincerity to our great conception of ourselves is the first and last condition of our creating that finest work of art—a personality; for a personality, like a poet, is not only born, but made.

PROSE FANCIES—XV

THE ARBITRARY CLASSIFI- CATION OF SEX.



IN an essay on Vauvenargues Mr. John Morley speaks with characteristic causticity of those epigrammatists 'who persist in thinking of man and woman as two different species,' and who make verbal capital out of the fancied distinction in the form of smart epigrams beginning '*Les femmes.*' It is one of Shakespeare's cardinal characteristics that *he understood woman.* Mr. Meredith's fame as a novelist is largely due to the fact that he, too, *understands women.* The one spot on the sun of Robert Louis Stevenson's fame, so we are told, is that he could *never draw a woman.* His capacity for drawing men counted for nothing, apparently, beside this failure. Evidently the Sphinx has not the face of a woman for nothing. That is why no one has read her riddle, translated her mystic smile. Yet many people

smile mysteriously, without any profound meanings behind their smile, with no other reason than a desire to mystify. Perhaps the Sphinx smiles to herself just for the fun of seeing us take her smile so seriously. And surely women must so smile as they hear their psychology so gravely discussed. Of course, the superstition is invaluable to them, and it is only natural that they should make the most of it. Man is supposed to be a complete ignoramus in regard to all the specialised female 'departments'—from the supreme mystery of the female heart to the humble domestic mysteries of a household. Similarly, men are supposed to have no taste in women's dress, yet for whom do women clothe themselves in the rainbow and the sea-foam, if not to please men? And was not the high-priest of that delicious and fascinating mystery a man—if it be proper to call the late M. Worth a man—as the best cooks are men, and the best waiters?

It would seem to be assumed from all this mystification that men are beings clear as daylight, both to themselves and to women. Poor, simple, manageable souls,

their wants are easily satisfied, their psychology — which, it is implied, differs little from their physiology — long since mapped out.

It may be so, but it is the opinion of some that men's simplicity is no less a fiction than women's mysterious complexity, and that human character is made up of much the same qualities in men and women, irrespective of a merely rudimentary sexual distinction, which has, of course, its proper importance, and which the present writer would be the last to wish away. From that quaint distinction of sex springs, of course, all that makes life in the smallest degree worth living, from great religions to tiny flowers. Love and beauty and poetry, Shakespeare's plays, Burne-Jones's pictures, and Wagner's operas — all such moving expressions of human life, as science has shown us, spring from the all-important fact that 'male and female created He them.'

This everybody knows, and few are fool enough to deny. Many people, however, confuse this organic distinction of sex with its time-worn conventional symbols; just

as religion is commonly confused with its external rites and ceremonies. The comparison naturally continues itself further; for, as in religion, so soon as some traditional garment of the faith has become outworn or otherwise unsuitable, and the proposal is made to dispense with or substitute it, an outcry immediately is raised that religion itself is in danger — so with sex, no sooner does one or the other sex propose to discard its arbitrary conventional characteristics, or to supplement them by others borrowed from its fellow-sex, than an outcry immediately is raised that sex itself is in danger.

Sex — the most potent force in the universe — in danger because women wear knickerbockers instead of petticoats, or military men take to corsets and cosmetics!

That parallel with religion may be pursued profitably one step further. In religion, the conventional test of your faith is, not how you live, not in your kindness of heart or purity of mind, but how you believe — in the Trinity, in the Atonement; and do you turn to the East during the recital of the Apostles' Creed?

These and such, as every one knows, are the vital matters of religion. And it is even so with sex. You are not asked for the realities of manliness or womanliness, but for the shadows, the arbitrary externalities, the fashions of which change from generation to generation.

To be truly womanly, you must never wear your hair short; to be truly manly, you must never wear it long. To be truly womanly, you must dress as daintily as possible, however uncomfortably; to be truly manly, you must wear the most hideous gear ever invented by the servility of tailors — a strange succession of cylinders from head to heel; cylinder on head, cylinder round your body, cylinders on arms and cylinders on legs. To be truly womanly, you must be shrinking and clinging in manner and trivial in conversation, you must have no ideas and rejoice that you wish for none; you must thank Heaven that you have never ridden a bicycle or smoked a cigarette; and you must be prepared to do a thousand other absurd and ridiculous things. To be truly manly, you must be and do the opposite of all

these things, with this exception — that with you the possession of ideas is optional. The finest specimens of British manhood are without ideas, but that, I say, is, generally speaking, a matter for yourself. It is indeed the only matter in which you have any choice. More important matters, such as the cut of your clothes and hair, the shape of your face, the length of your moustache and the pattern of your cane — all these are very properly regulated for you by laws of fashion, which you could never dream of breaking. You may break every moral law there is — or rather, was — and still remain a man. You may be a bully, a cad, a coward and a fool, in the poor heart and brains of you ; but so long as you wear the mock regimentals of contemporary manhood, and are above all things plain and undistinguished enough, your reputation for manhood will be secure. There is nothing so dangerous to a reputation for manhood as brains or beauty.

In short, to be a true woman you have only to be pretty and an idiot, and to be a true man you have only to be brutal and a fool.

From these misconceptions of manliness and womanliness, these superstitions of sex, many curious confusions have come about. The, so to say, professional differentiation between the sexes had at one time gone so far that men were credited with the entire monopoly of a certain set of human qualities, and women with the monopoly of a certain other set of human qualities; yet every one of these are qualities which one would have thought were proper to, and necessary for, all human beings alike, male and female.

In a dictionary of a date (1856) when everything on earth and in heaven was settled and written in penny cyclopedias and books of deportment, I find these delicious definitions:—

Manly: becoming a man; firm; brave; undaunted; dignified; noble; stately; not boyish or womanish.

Womanly: becoming a woman; feminine; as *womanly* behaviour.

Under *Woman* we find the adjectives—soft, mild, pitiful and flexible, kind, civil, obliging, humane, tender, timorous, modest.

Who can doubt that the dictionary maker defined and distributed his adjectives aright for the year 1856? Since then, however, many alarming heresies have taken root in our land, and some are heard to declare that both these sets of adjectives apply to men and women alike, and are, in fact, necessities of any decent human outfit. Otherwise the conclusion is obvious, that no one desirous of the adjective 'manly' must ever be—soft, mild, pitiful and flexible, kind, civil, obliging, humane, tender, timorous, or modest; and no one desirous of the adjective 'womanly'—be firm, brave, undaunted, dignified, noble, or stately.

But surely the essentials of 'manliness' and 'womanliness' belong to man and woman alike—the externals are purely artistic considerations, and subject to the vagaries of fashion. In art no one would think of allowing fashion any serious artistic opinion. It is usually the art which is out of fashion that is most truly art. Similarly, fashions in manliness or womanliness have nothing to do with real manliness or womanliness. Moreover,

the adjectives 'manly' or 'womanly,' applied to works of art, or the artistic surfaces of men and women, are irrelevant — that is to say, impertinent. You have no right to ask a poem or a picture to look manly or womanly, any more than you have any right to ask a man or a woman to look manly or womanly. There is no such thing as looking manly or womanly. There is looking beautiful or ugly, distinguished or commonplace, individual or insignificant. The one law of externals is beauty in all its various manifestations. To ask the sex of a beautiful person is as absurd as it would be to ask the publisher the sex of a beautiful book. Such questions are for midwives and doctors.

It was once the fashion for heroes to shed tears on the smallest occasion, and it does not appear that they fought the worse for it; some of the firmest, bravest, most undaunted, most dignified, most noble, most stately human beings have been women; as some of the softest, mildest, most pitiful and flexible, most kind, civil, obliging, humane, tender, timorous and modest human beings have been men.

Indeed, some of the bravest men that ever trod this planet have worn corsets, and it needs more courage nowadays for a man to wear his hair long than to machine-gun a whole African nation. Moreover, quite the nicest women one knows ride bicycles—in the rational costume.

PROSE FANCIES—XVI

THE FALLACY OF A NATION



IT IS, I am given to understand, a familiar axiom of mathematics that no number of ciphers placed in front of significant units, or tens or hundreds of units, adds in the smallest degree to the numerical value of those units. The figure one becomes of no more importance however many noughts are marshalled in front of it — though, indeed, in the mathematics of human nature this is not so. Is not a man or woman considered great in proportion to the number of ciphers that walk in front of him, from a humble brace of domestics to guards of honour and imperial armies?

A parallel profound truth of mathematics is, that a nought, however many times it be multiplied, remains nought; but again we find the reverse obtain in the mathematics of human nature. One

might have supposed that the result of one nobody multiplied even fifty million times would still be nobody. However, such is far from being the case. Fifty million nobodies make — a nation. Of course, there is no need for so many. I am reckoning as a British subject, and speak of fifty million merely as an illustration of the general fact that it is the multiplication of nobodies that makes a nation. ‘Increase and multiply’ was, it will be remembered, the recipe for the Jewish nation.

Nobodies of the same colour, tongue, and prejudices have but to congregate together in a crowd sufficiently big for other similar crowds to recognise them, and then they are given a name of their own, and become recognised as a nation — one of the ‘Great Powers.’

Beyond those differences in colour, tongue, and prejudices, there is really no difference between the component units — or rather ciphers — of all these several national crowds. You have seen a procession of various trades-unions filing toward Hyde Park, each section with its particular banner of a strange device : ‘the United

Guild of Paperhangers,' 'the Ancient Order of Plumbers,' and so on. And you may have marvelled to notice how alike the members of the various carefully differentiated companies were. So to say, they each and all might have been plumbers; and you could n't help feeling that it would n't have mattered much if some of the paperhangers had by mistake got walking amongst the plumbers, or *vice versa*.

So the great trades-unions of the world file past, one with the odd word 'Russia' on its banner; another boasting itself 'Germany'—this with a particularly bumptious and self-important young man walking backward in front of it, in the manner of a Salvation Army captain, and imperiously waving an iron wand; still another 'nation' calling itself 'France'; and yet another, boasting the biggest brass band, and called 'England.' Other smaller bodies of nobodies, that is, smaller nations, file past with humbler tread—though there is really no need for their doing so. For, as we have said, they are in every particular like to those haughtier nations who take precedence of them. In

fact, one or two of them, such as Norway and Denmark — were a truer system of human mathematics to obtain — are really of more importance than the so-called greater nations, in that among their nobodies they include a larger percentage of intellectual somebodies.

Remembering that percentage of wise men, the formula of a nation were perhaps more truly stated in our first mathematical image. The wise men in a nation are as the units with the noughts in front of them. And when I say wise men I do not, indeed, mean merely the literary men or the artists, but all those somebodies with some real force of character, people with brains and hearts, fighters and lovers, saints and thinkers, and the patient industrious workers. Such, if you consider, are really no integral part of the nation among which they are cast. They have no part in what are grandiloquently called national interests — war, politics, and horse-racing to wit. A change of Government leaves them as unmoved as an election for the board of guardians. They would as soon think of entering Parliament

or the County Council, as of yearning to manage the gasworks, or to go about with one of those carts bearing the legend 'Aldermen and Burgesses of the City of London' conspicuously upon its front. Their main concern in political changes is the rise and fall of the income tax, and, be the Cabinet Tory or Liberal, their rate papers come in for the same amount. It is likely that national changes would affect them but little more. What more would a foreign invasion mean than that we should pay our taxes to French, Russian, or German officials, instead of to English ones? French and Italians do our cooking, Germans manage our music, Jews control our money markets; surely it would make little difference to us for France, Russia, or Germany to undertake our government. The worst of being conquered by Russia would be the necessity of learning Russian; whereas a little rubbing up of our French would make us comfortable with France. Besides, to be conquered by France would save us crossing the Channel to Paris, and then we might hope for cafés in Regent Street, and

an emancipated literature. As a matter of fact, so-called national interests are merely certain private interests on a large scale, the private interests of financiers, ambitious politicians, soldiers and great merchants. Broadly speaking, there are no rival nations — there are rival markets; and it is its Board of Trade and its Stock Exchange rather than its Houses of Parliament that virtually govern a country. Thus one seaport goes down and another comes up, industries forsake one country to bless another, the military and naval strengths of nations fluctuate this way and that; and to those whom these changes affect they are undoubtedly important matters — the great capitalist, the soldier, and the politician; but to the quiet man at home with his wife, his children, his books, and his flowers, to the artist busied with brave translunary matters, to the saint with his eyes filled with ‘the white radiance of eternity,’ to the shepherd on the hillside, the milkmaid in love, or the angler at his sport — what are these pompous commotions, these busy, bustling mimicries of reality? England will be just as good to

live in though men some day call her France. Let the big busybodies divide her amongst them as they like, so that they leave one alone with one's fair share of the sky and the grass, and an occasional, not too vociferous, nightingale.

The reader will perhaps forgive the hackneyed references to Sir Thomas Browne peacefully writing his *Religio Medici* amid all the commotions of the Civil War, and to Gautier calmly correcting the proofs of his new poems during the siege of Paris. The milkman goes his rounds amid the crash of empires. It is not his business to fight. His business is to distribute his milk — as much after half-past seven as may be inconvenient. Similarly, the business of the thinker is with his thought, the poet with his poetry. It is the business of politicians to make national quarrels, and the business of the soldier to fight them. But as for the poet — let him correct his proofs, or beware the printer.

The idea, then, of a nation, is a grandiloquent fallacy in the interests of commerce and ambition, political and military. All

the great and good, clever and charming people belong to one secret nation, for which there is no name unless it be the Chosen People. These are the lost tribes of love, art, and religion, lost and swamped amid alien peoples, but ever dreaming of a time when they shall meet once more in Jerusalem.

Yet though they are thus aliens, taking and wishing no part in the organization of the 'nations' among which they dwell, this does not prevent those nations taking part and credit in them. And whenever a brave soldier wins a battle, or an intrepid traveller discovers a new land, his particular nation flatters itself as though it — the million nobodies — had done it. With a profound indifference to, indeed an active dislike of, art and poetry, there is nothing on which a nation prides itself so much as upon its artists and poets, whom, invariably, it starves, neglects, and even insults, as long as it is not too silly to do so.

Thus the average Englishman talks of Shakespeare — as though he himself had written the plays; of India — as though he himself had conquered it. And thus

grow up such fictions as 'national greatness' and 'public opinion.'

For what is 'national greatness' but the glory reflected from the memories of a few great individuals? and what is 'public opinion' but the blustering echoes of the opinion of a few clever young men on the morning papers?

For how can people in themselves little become great by merely congregating into a crowd, however large? And surely fools do not become wise, or worth listening to, merely by the fact of their banding together.

A 'public opinion' on any matter except foot-ball, prize-fighting, and perhaps cricket, is merely ridiculous — by whatever brutal physical powers it may be enforced — ridiculous as a town council's opinion upon art; and a nation is merely a big fool with an army.

PROSE FANCIES—XVII

THE GREATNESS OF MAN



IGNORANT, as I inevitably am, dear reader, of your intellectual and spiritual upbringing, I can hardly guess whether the title of my article will impress you as a platitude or as a paradox. Goodness knows, some men and women think quite enough of themselves as it is, and, from a certain momentary point of view, there may seem little occasion indeed to remind man of his importance.

I refer to your intellectual and spiritual upbringing, because I venture to wonder if it was in the least like my own. I was brought up, I rejoice to say, in the bosom of an orthodox Puritan family. I hope that family rejoices too. I was led and driven to believe that man was everybody, and that God was somebody — and that not merely the Sabbath, but the whole universe, was made for man: that the

stars were his bed-time candles, and that the sun arose to ensure his catching the 8.37 of a morning.

On this belief I acted for many years. Every young man believes that there is no god but God, and that he is born to be His prophet — though perhaps that belief is not so common nowadays. I am speaking of many years ago.

Science, however, has long since changed all that. Those terrible Muses, geology, astronomy, and particularly biology, have reduced man to a humility which, if in some degree salutary, becomes in its excess highly dangerous. Why should one maggot in this great cheese of the world take itself more seriously than others? Why dream mightily and do bravely if we are but a little higher than the beasts that perish? Nature cares nothing about us, and her giant forces laugh at our fancies. The world has no such meaning as we thought. Poets and saints, deluded by unhealthy imaginations, have misled us, and it is quite likely that the wild waves are really saying nothing more important than 'Beecham's Pills.'

‘Give us a definition of life,’ I asked a certain famous scientist and philosopher whom I am privileged to call my friend. ‘Nothing easier!’ he gaily replied. ‘Life is a product of solar energy, falling upon the carbon compounds, on the outer crust of a particular planet in a particular corner of the solar system.’

‘And that,’ I said, ‘really satisfies you as a definition of life — of all the wistful wonder of the world!’ And as I spoke I thought of Moses with mystically shining face upon the Mount of the Law, of Ezekiel rapt in his divine fancies, of Socrates drinking his cup of hemlock, of Christ’s agony in the garden; the golden faces of the great of the world passed as in a dream before me, — soldiers, saints, poets, and lovers. I thought of Horatius on the bridge, of the holy and gentle soul of St. Francis, of Chatterton in his splendid despair, and in fancy I went with the awe-struck citizens of Verona to reverently gaze at the bodies of two young lovers who had counted the world well lost if they might only leave it together.

The carbon compounds!

I took down *Romeo and Juliet*, listened to its passionate spheral music, and the carbon compounds have never troubled me again.

Love laughs at the carbon compounds, and a great book, a noble act, a beautiful face, make nonsense of such cheap formulæ for the mystery of human life.

Yet this parable of the carbon compounds is a fair sample of all that science can tell us when we come to ultimates. We go away from its oracles with a mouthful of sounding words, which may seem very impressive till we examine their emptiness. What, for example, is all this rigmarole about solar energy and the carbon compounds but a more pompous way of putting the old scriptural statement that man was made of the dust of the ground? To say that God took a handful of dust and breathed upon it and it became man, is no harder to realize than that solar rays falling upon that dust should produce humanity and all the various phantasmagoria of life. If anything, it is more explanatory. It leaves us with an inspiring mystery for explanation.

In saying this, I do not forget our debt to science. It has done much in clearing our minds of cant, in popularising more systematic thinking, and in instituting sounder methods of observation. In some directions it has deepened our sense of wonder. It has broadened our conception of the universe, though I fear it has been at the expense of narrowing our conception of man. With Hamlet it contemptuously says, 'What is this quintessence of dust!' It is so impressed by the mileage and tonnage of the universe, so abased before the stupendous measurements of the cosmos, the appalling infinity and eternity of its space and time, that it forgets the marvel of the mind that can grasp all these conceptions, forgets too that, big and bullying as the forces of nature may be, man has been able in a large measure to control, indeed to domesticate, them. Surely the original fact of lightning is little more marvellous than the power of man to turn it into his errand-boy or his horse, to light his rooms with it, and imprison it in pennyworths, like the genius in the bottle, in the underground railway. Mere

size seems unimpressive when we contemplate such an extreme of littleness as say the ant, that pin-point of a personality, that mere speck of being, yet including within its infinitesimal proportions a clever busy brain, a soldier, a politician, and a merchant. That such and so many faculties should have room to operate within that tiny body — there is a marvel before which, it seems to me, the billions of miles that keep us from falling into the jaws of the sun, and the tonnage of Jupiter, are comparatively insignificant and conceivable.

No, we must not allow ourselves to be frightened by the mere size and weight of the universe, or be depressed because our immediate genealogy is not considered aristocratic. Perhaps, after all, we are sons of God, and as Mr. Meredith finely puts it, our life here may still be

‘ . . . a little holding
To do a mighty service.’

‘ Things of a day!’ exclaims Pindar.
‘ What is a man? What is a man not?’

It is good for our Nebuchadnezzars, the kings of the world, and conceited, success-

ful people generally, to measure themselves against the great powers of the universe, to humble their pride by contemplation of the fixed stars; but a too humble attitude toward the Infinite, a too constant pondering upon eternity, is not good for us, unless, so to say, we can live with them as friends, with the inspiring feeling that, little as we may seem, there is that in us which is no less infinite, no less cosmic, and that our passions and dreams have, as Mr. William Watson puts it, 'a relish of eternity.'

Readers of Amiel's 'Journal' will know what a sterilising, petrifying influence his trance-like contemplation of the Infinite had upon his life. Amiel was simply hypnotised by the universe, as a man may hypnotise himself by gazing fixedly at a star.

Mr. Pater, you will remember, has a remarkable study of a similar temperament in his *Imaginary Portraits*. Sebastian van Storck, like Amiel, had become hypnotised by the Infinite. It paralysed in him all impulse or power 'to be or do any limited thing.'

‘For Sebastian, at least,’ we read, ‘the world and the individual alike had been divested of all effective purpose. The most vivid of finite objects, the dramatic episodes of Dutch history, the brilliant personalities which had found their parts to play in them, that golden art, surrounding one with an ideal world, beyond which the real world was discernible indeed, but etherealised by the medium through which it came to one; all this, for most men so powerful a link to existence, only set him on the thought of escape — into a formless and nameless infinite world, evenly grey. . . . Actually proud, at times, of his curious, well-reasoned nihilism, he could but regard what is called the business of life as no better than a trifling and wearisome delay.’

This mood, once confined to a few mystics, is likely to become a common one, is already, one imagines, far from infrequent — so the increase of suicide would lead us to suppose. Robbed of his hope of a glorious immortality, stripped of his spiritual significance, bullied and belittled by science on every hand, man not

unnaturally begins to feel that it is no use taking his life seriously, that, in fact, it betrays a lack of humour to do so. While he was a supernatural being, a son of God, it was with him a case of *noblesse oblige*; and while he is happy and comfortable he does n't mind giving up the riddle of the world. It is only the unhappy that ever really think. But what 's he to do when agony and despair come upon him, when all that made his life worth living is taken from him? How is he to sustain himself, where shall he look for his strength or his hope? He looks up at the sky full of stars, but he is told that God is not there, that the city of God is long since a ruin, and that owls hoot to each other across its moss-grown fanes and battlements; he looks down on the earth, full of graves, a vast necropolis of once radiant dreams, with the living for its phantoms—and there is no comfort anywhere. Happy is he if some simple human duty be at hand, which he may go on doing blindly and dumbly—till, perhaps, the light come again. It is difficult to offer comfort to such a one. Comfort is cheap, and we

know nothing. When life holds nothing for our love and delight, it is difficult to explain why we should go on living it—except on the assumption that it matters, that it is, in some mystical way, supremely important, how we live it—and what we make of those joys and sorrows, which, say some, are but meant as mystical trials and tests.

Sebastian van Storck refused ‘to be or do any limited thing,’ but the answer to his mysticism is to be found in a finer mysticism, that which says that there is no limited act or thing, but that the significance, as well as the pathos, of eternity is in our smallest joys and sorrows, as in our most everyday transactions, and the greatness of God incarnate in His humblest child.

This, the old doctrine of the microcosm, seems in certain moments, moments one would wish to say, of divination, strangely plain and clear—when, in Blake’s words, it seems so easy to

‘ . . . see a world in a grain of sand,
 And a heaven in a wild flower ;
 Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.’

Perhaps in the street, an effect of light, a passing face, yes, even the plaintive grind of a street organ, some such everyday circumstance, affects you suddenly in quite a strange way. It has become universalised. It is no longer a detail of the Strand, but a cryptic symbol of human life. It has been transfigured into a thing of infinite pathos and infinite beauty, and, sad or glad, brings to you an inexplicable sense of peace, an unshakable conviction that man is a spirit, that his life is indeed of supreme and lovely significance, and that his destiny is secure and blessed.

Matthew Arnold, ever sensitive to such spiritual states, has described these trance-like visitations in 'The Buried Life':

'Only, but this is rare —
 When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
 When, jaded with the rush and glare
 Of the interminable hours,
 Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
 When our world-deafen'd ear
 Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd —
 A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
 And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again :
 The eyes sink inward, and the heart lies plain,
 And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
 A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
 And hears its winding murmur ; and he sees
 The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.

‘And there arrives a lull in the hot race
 Wherein he doth forever chase
 That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
 An air of coolness plays upon his face,
 And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
 And then he thinks he knows
 The hills where his life rose,
 And the sea where it goes.’

‘To be or do any limited thing’! What, indeed, we ask in such hours, is a limited thing, when all the humble interests of our daily life are palpably big with eternity? Is the first kiss of a great love a limited thing? though there is, unhappily, no denying that it comes to an end! When a young husband and wife smile across to each other above the sleep of their little child — is that a limited thing? When the siren voices of the world blend together on the lips of a young poet, and with rapt eyes and hot heart he makes a song as of the morning stars — is that a limited thing? Are love, and genius, and duty done in the face of death — are these limited things? I think not — and man, indeed, knows better.

Greatness is not relative. It is absolute. It is not for man to depress himself by measuring himself against the eternities and

the immensities external to him. What he has to do is to look inward upon himself, to fathom the eternities and the immensities in his own heart and brain.

And the more man sees himself forsaken by the universe, the more opportunity to vindicate his own greatness. Is there no kind heart beating through the scheme of things? — man's heart shall still be kind. Will the eternal silence make mock of his dreams and his idealisms, laugh coldly at 'the splendid purpose in his eyes'? Well, so be it. His dreams and idealisms are none the less noble things, and if the gods do thus make mock of mortal joy and pain — let us be grateful that we were born mere men.

Moreover, he has one great answer to the universe — the answer of courage. He is still Prometheus, and there is no limit to what he can bear. Let the vultures of pain rend his heart as they will, he can still hiss 'coward' in the face of the Eternal. Nay, he can even laugh at his sufferings — thanks to the spirit of humour, that most blessed of ministering angels, without which surely the heart of humanity

had long since broken, by which man is able to look with a comical eye upon terrors, as it were taking themselves so seriously, coming with such Olympian thunders and lightnings to break the spirit of a mere six foot of earth!

But while his courage and his humour are defenses of which he cannot be disarmed, whatever be the intention of the Eternal, it is by no means certain that nature does not mean kindly by man. Perhaps the pain of the world is but the rough horseplay of great powers that mean but jest — and kill us in it: as though one played at ‘tick’ with an elephant!

Perhaps, after all, who knows — God is love, and His great purpose kind.

Surely, when you think of it, the existence in man of the senses of love and pity implies the probability of their existence elsewhere in the universe.

‘Into that breast which brings the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall.’

So runs the profoundest thought in modern poetry — and need I say it is Mr. Meredith’s?

As the fragrance and colour of the rose

must in some occult way be properties of the rude earth from which they are drawn by the sun, may not human love also be a kindly property of matter — that mysterious life-stuff in which is packed such marvellous potentialities? Evidently love must be somewhere in the universe — else it had not got into the heart of man; and perhaps pity slides down like an angel in the rays of the solar energy, while there is the potential beating of a human heart even in the hard crust of the carbon compounds.

I confess that this seems to me no mere fancy, but a really comforting speculation. Pain, we say, is inherent in the scheme of the universe; but is not love seen to be no less inherent, too?

There must be some soul of beauty to animate the lovely face of the world, some soul of goodness to account for its saints. If the gods are cruel, it is strange that man should be so kind, and that some pathetic spirit of tenderness should seem to stir even in the bosoms of beasts and birds.

Meanwhile, we cannot too often insist

that, whatever uncertainties there be, man has one certainty—himself. Science has really adduced nothing essential against his significance. That he is not as big as an Alp, as heavy as a star, or as long-lived as an eagle, is nothing against his proper importance. Even a nobleman is of more significance in the world than his acres, and giants are not proverbial for their intellectual or spiritual qualities. The ant is of more importance than the ass, and the great eye of a beautiful woman is more significant than the whole clayey bulk of Mars.

After all the scientific mockery of the old religious ideal of the importance of man, one begins to wonder if his Ptolemaic fancy that he was the centre of the universe, and that it was all made for him, is not nearer the truth than the pitiless theories which hardly allow him equality with the flea that perishes.

Suppose if, after all, the stars were really meant as his bedtime candles, and the sun's purpose in rising is really that he may catch the 8.37!

For, as Sir Thomas Browne says in his solemn English, 'there is surely a piece of Divinity in us, something that was before the elements, and owes no homage unto the sun.'

The long winter of materialistic science seems to be breaking up, and the old ideals are seen trooping back with something more than their old beauty, in the new spiritual spring that seems to be moving in the hearts of men.

After all its talk, science has done little more than correct the misprints of religion. Essentially, the old spiritualistic and poetic theories of life are seen, not merely weakly to satisfy the cravings of man's nature, but to be mostly in harmony with certain strange and moving facts in his constitution, which the materialists unscientifically ignore.

It was important, and has been helpful, to insist that man is an animal, but it is still more important to insist that he is a spirit as well. He is, so to say, an animal by accident, a spirit by birthright: and, however homely his duties may occasionally

seem, his life is bathed in the light of a sacred transfiguring significance, its smallest acts flash with divine meanings, its highest moments are rich with 'the pathos of eternity,' and its humblest duties mighty with the responsibilities of a god.

PROSE FANCIES—XVIII

DEATH AND TWO FRIENDS

A DIALOGUE

(To the memory of J. S. and T. C. L.)



PERSONS: SCRIPTOR AND LECTOR.*

LECTOR: But do you really mean, Scriptor, that you have no desire for the life after death?

SCRIPTOR: I never said quite that, Lector, though perhaps I might almost have gone so far. What I did say was that we have been accustomed to exaggerate its importance to us here and now, that it really matters less to us than we imagine.

LECTOR: I see. But you must speak for yourself, Scriptor. I am sure that it

* This dialogue was written originally as a rejoinder to certain criticisms on a book of mine entitled, *The Religion of a Literary Man—Religio Scriptoris*—hence the names given to the two ‘persons.’ It was written in March, 1894, before an event in the writer’s life to which, erroneously, some have supposed it to refer.

matters much to many, to most of us. It does, I know, to me.

SCRIPTOR: Less than you think, my dear Lector. Besides, you are really too young to know. It is true that, as years go, you are ten years my senior, but what of that? You have that vigorous health which is the secret of perpetual youth. You have not yet realised decay, not to speak of death. The immortality of the soul is a question wide of you, who have as yet practically no doubt of the immortality of the body. But I — well, it would be melodramatic to say that I face death every day. The metaphor applies but to desperate callings and romantic complaints. To some Death comes like a footpad, suddenly, and presents his pistol — and the smoke that curls upward from his empty barrel is your soul.

To another he comes featureless, a stealthily accumulating London fog, that slowly, slowly chokes the life out of you, without allowing you the consolation of a single picturesque moment, a single grand attitude. For you, probably, Death will only come when you die. I have to live

with him as well. I shall smoulder for years, you will be carried to heaven, like Enoch, in a beautiful lightning —

‘ A simple child
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What can it know of death ? ’

That’s you, my dear Lector, for all your forty years.

LECTOR: All the more reason, Scriptor, that you should desire a hereafter. You sometimes talk of the work you would do, if you were a robust Philistine such as I. Would it not be worth while to live again, if only to make sure of that *magnum opus* — just to realise those dreams that you say are daily escaping you?

SCRIPTOR: Ah! so speaks the energetic man, eager to take the world on his shoulders. I know the images of death that please you, Lector — such as that great one of Arnold’s, about ‘the sounding labour-house vast of being.’

But, Lector, you who love work so well — have you never heard tell of a thing called Rest? Have you never known what it is to be tired, my Lector?

— not tired at the end of a busy day, but tired in the morning, tired in the Memnonian sunlight, when larks and barrel-organs start on their blithe insistent rounds. No, the man who is tired of a morning sings not music-hall songs in his bedroom as he dashes about in his morning bath. But will you never want to go to bed, Lector? Will you be always like the children who hate to be sent to bed, and think that when they are grown up they will never go to bed at all? Yet in a few years' time how glad they are of the stray chance of bed at ten. May it not be so with sleep's twin brother? In our young vigour, driven by a hundred buoyant activities, enticed by dream on dream, time seems so short for all we think we have to do; but surely when the blood begins to thin, and the heart to wax less extravagantly buoyant, when comfort croons a kettle-song whose simple spell no sirens of ambition or romance can overcome — do n't you think that then 'bed-time' will come to seem the best hour of the day, and 'Death as welcome as a friend would fall'?

LECTOR: But you are no fair judge, Scriptor. You say my health, my youth, as you waggishly call it, puts me out of court. Yet surely your ill-health and low spirits just as surely vitiate your judgment?

SCRIPTOR: Admitted, so far as my views are the outcome of my particular condition. But you forget that the condition I have been supposing is not merely particular, but, on the contrary, the most general among men. Was it not old age?—which, like youth, is independent of years. You may be young beyond your years, I may be old in advance of them; but old age does come some time, and with it the desire of rest.

LECTOR: But does not old age spend most of its thought in dwelling fondly on its lost youth, hanging like a remote sunrise in its imagination? Is it not its one yearning desire just to live certain hours of its youth over again?—and would the old man not give all he possesses for the certainty of being born young again into eternity?

SCRIPTOR: He would give everything—but the certainty of rest. After sev-

enty years of ardent life one needs a long sleep to refresh us in. Besides, age may not be so sure of the advantages of youth. All is not youth that laughs and glitters. Youth has its hopes, which are uncertain; but age has its memories, which are sure; youth has its passions, but age has its comforts.

LECTOR: Your answers come gay and pat, Scriptor, but your voice betrays you. In spite of you, it saddens all your words. Tell me, have you ever known what it is actually to lose any one who is dear to you? Have you looked on Death face to face?

SCRIPTOR: Yes, Lector, I have — but once. It is now about five years ago, but the impression of it haunts me to this hour. Perhaps the memory is all the keener because it was my one experience. In a world where custom stales all things, save Cleopatra, it is all the better, perhaps, not to see even too much of Death, lest we grow familiar with him. For instance, doctors and soldiers, who look on him daily, seem to lose the sense of his terror — nay, worse, of his tragedy. Maybe it is something in his favour, and Death, like

others, may only need to be known to be loved.

LECTOR: But tell me, Scriptor, of this sad experience, which, even now, it moves you to name; or is the memory too sad to recall?

SCRIPTOR: Sad enough, Lector, but beautiful for all that, beautiful as winter. It was winter when she of whom I am thinking died—a winter that seemed to make death itself whiter and colder on her marble forehead. It is but one sad little story of all the heaped-up sorrow of the world; but in it, as in a shell, I seem to hear the murmur of all the tides of tears that have surged about the lot of man from the beginning.

There were two dear friends of mine whom I used to call the happiest lovers in the world. They had loved truly from girlhood and boyhood, and after some struggle—for they were not born into that class which is denied the luxury of struggle—at length saw a little home bright in front of them. And then Jenny, who had been ever bright and strong, suddenly and unaccountably fell ill. Like

the stroke of a sword, like the stride of a giant, Death, to whom they had never given a thought, was upon them. It was consumption, and love could only watch and pray. Suddenly my friend sent for me, and I saw with my own eyes what, at a distance, it had seemed impossible to believe. As I entered the house, with the fresh air still upon me, I spoke confidently, with babbling, ignorant tongue. 'Wait till you see her face!' was all my poor stricken friend could say.

Ah! her face! How can I describe it? It was much sweeter afterwards, but now it was so dark and witchlike, so uncanny, almost wicked, so thin and full of inky shadows. She sat up in her bed, a wizened little goblin, and laughed a queer, dry, knowing laugh to herself, a laugh like the scraping of reeds in a solitary place. A strange black weariness seemed to be crushing down her brows, like the 'unwilling sleep' of a strong narcotic. She would begin a sentence and let it wither away unfinished, and point sadly and almost humorously to her straight black hair, clammy as the feathers of a dead

bird lying in the rain. Her hearing was strangely keen. And yet she did not know, was not to know. How was one to talk to her — talk of being well again, and books and country walks, when she had so plainly done with all these things? How bear up when she, with a half-sad, half-amused smile showed her thin wrists? — how say that they would soon be strong and round again? Ugh! she was already beginning to be different from us, already putting off our body-sweet mortality, and putting on the fearful garments of Death, changing before our eyes from ruddy familiar humanity into a being of another element, an element we dread as the fish dreads the air. Soon we should not be able to talk to her. Soon she would have unlearned all the sweet grammar of earth. She was no longer Jenny, but a fearful symbol of mysteries at which the flesh crept. She was going to die.

Have you never looked ahead toward some trial, some physical trial, maybe an operation? — for perhaps the pains of the body are the keenest, after all — those of

the spirit are at least in some part metaphor. You look forward with dread, yet it is at last over. It is behind you. And have you never thought that so it will be with death some day? Poor little Jenny was to face the great operation.

Next time I saw her she was dead. In our hateful English fashion, they had shut her up in a dark room, and we had to take candles to see her. I shall never forget the moment when my eyes first rested on that awful snow-white sheet, so faintly indented by the fragile form beneath, lines very fragile, but oh! so hard and cold, like the indentations upon frozen snow; never forget my strange unaccountable terror when he on one side and I on the other turned down the icy sheet from her face. But terror changed to awe and reverence, as her face came upon us with its sweet sphinx-like smile. Lying there, with a little gold chain round her neck and a chrysanthemum in the bosom of her night-gown, there was a curious regality about her, a look as though she wore a crown our eyes were unable to see. And while I gazed upon her, the sobs of my

friend came across the bed, and as he called to her I seemed to hear the eternal Orpheus calling for his lost Eurydice. Poor lad!—poor maid! Here, naked and terrible, was all the tragedy of the world compressed into an hour, the Medusa-face of life that turns the bravest to stone. Surely, I felt, God owed more than He could ever repay to these two lovers, whom it had been so easy to leave to their simple joys. And from that night to this I can never look upon my white bed without seeing afar off the moment when it, too, will bear the little figure of her I love best in the world, bound for her voyage to the Minotaur Death; just as I never put off my clothes at night, and stretch my limbs down among the cool sheets, without thinking of the night when I shall put off my clothes for the last time and close my eyes for ever.

LECTOR: But, my friend, this is to feel too much; it is morbid.

SCRIPTOR: Morbid! How can one really *feel* and not be morbid? If one be morbid, one can still be brave.

LECTOR: But surely, true-lover as you

are, it would be a joy to you to think that this terrible parting of death will not be final. We cannot love so well without hoping that we may meet our loved ones somewhere after death.

SCRIPTOR: Hopes! wishes! desires! What of them? We hope, we *desire* all things. Who has not cried for the moon in his time? But what is the use of talking of what we desire? Does life give us all we wish, however passionately we wish it, and is Death any more likely to listen to the cry of our desires? Of course we *wish it*, wish it with a pathetic urgency which is too poignant to bear, and which the wise man bravely stifles. It would all be different if we *knew*.

LECTOR: But does not science even, of late, hold out the promise of its probability? — and the greatest poets and thinkers have always been convinced of its truth.

SCRIPTOR: The promise of a probability! O my Lector, what a poor substitute is that for a certainty! And as for the great men you speak of, what does their 'instinctive' assurance amount to but a strong sense of their own existence

at the moment of writing or speaking? Does one of them anywhere assert immortality as a *fact*—a fact of which he has his own personal proof and knowledge—a scientific, not an imaginative, theological fact? Arguments on the subject are naught. It is waste of time to read them; unsupported by fact, they are one and all cowardly dreams, a horrible hypocritical clutching at that, which their writers have not the courage to forego.

LECTOR: Yet may not a dream be of service to reality, my friend? Is it not certain that people are all the better and all the happier for this dream, as you call it?—for what seems to me this sustaining faith?

SCRIPTOR: Happier? Some people, perhaps, in a lazy, unworthy fashion. But 'better'? Well, so long as we believed in 'eternal punishment' no doubt people were sometimes terrified into 'goodness' by the picture of that dread vista of torment, as no doubt they were bribed into it by the companion picture of a green, unbounded Paradise; but, O my friend, what an unworthy kind of goodness, the mere

mask of virtue ! And now that the Inferno has practically disappeared from our theology, the belief in eternal life simply means unlimited cakes and ale, for good and evil alike, for all eternity. How such a belief can be moralising I fail to understand. To my mind, indeed, far from being moralising this belief in immortality is responsible for no inconsiderable portion of the wrong and misery of the world. It is the baneful narcotic which has soothed the selfish and the slothful from the beginning. It is that unlimited credit which makes the bankrupt. It simply gives us all eternity to procrastinate in. Instead of manfully eating our peck of dirt here and now, we leave it and all such disagreeables to the hereafter.

‘ He said, “ I believe in Eternal Life,”
 As he threw his life away —
 What need to hoard ?
 He could well afford
 To squander his mortal day.
 With Eternity his, what need to care ? —
 A sort of immortal millionaire.’

LECTOR : I am glad to be reminded, Scriptor, that you are a poet, for the line of your argument had almost made me

forget it. One expects other views from a poet.

SCRIPTOR : When, my dear Lector, will we get rid of the silly idea that the poet should give us only the ornamental view of life, and rock us to sleep, like babies, with pretty lullabies ? Is it not possible to make *facts* sing as well as *fancies* ? With all this beautiful world to sing of — for beautiful it is, however it be marred ; with this wonderful life — and wonderful and sweet it is, though it is shot through with such bitter pain ; with such *certainties* for his theme, we yet beg him to sing to us of shadows !

And you talk of ‘faith.’ ‘Faith’ truly is what we want, but it is faith in the life here, not in the life hereafter. Faith in the life here ! Let our poets sing us that. And such as would deny it — I would hang them as enemies of society.

LECTOR : But, at all events, to keep to our point — you at least *hope* for immortality. If Edison, say, were suddenly to discover it for us as a scientific certainty, you would welcome the news ?

SCRIPTOR : Well, yes and no ! Have

you seen the 'penny' phonographs in the Strand? You should go and have a penny-worth of the mysteries of time and space! How long will Edison's latest magic toy survive this popularisation, I wonder? For a little moment it awakens the sense of wonder in the idly curious, who set the demon tube to their ears; but if they make any remarks at all, it is of the cleverness of Mr. Edison, the probable profits of the invention — and not a word of the wonder of the world! So it would be with the undiscovered country. I was blamed the other day as being cheaply smart because I said that if 'one traveller returned,' his resurrection would soon be as commonplace as the telephone, and that enterprising firms would be interviewing him as to the prospects of opening branch establishments in Hades. Yet it is a perfectly serious, and I think true, remark; for who that knows the modern man, with his small knowingness, and his utter incapacity for reverence, would doubt that were Mr. Edison actually to be the Columbus of the Unseen, it would soon be as overrun with gaping tourists as

Switzerland, and that within a year railway companies would be advertising 'Bank-holidays in Eternity'?

No! let us keep the Unseen — or, if it must be discovered, let the key thereof be given only to true-lovers and poets.

PROSE FANCIES—XIX

A SEAPORT IN THE MOON.



NO ONE is so hopelessly wrong about the stars as the astronomer, and I trust that you never pay any attention to his remarks on the moon. He knows as much about the moon as a coiffeur knows of the dreams of the fair lady whose beautiful neck he makes still more beautiful. There is but one opinion upon the moon — namely, our own. And if you think that science is thus wronged, reflect a moment upon what science makes of things near at hand. Love, it says, is merely a play of pistil and stamen, our most fascinating poetry and art is ‘degeneration,’ and human life, generally speaking, is sufficiently explained by the ‘carbon compounds’ — God-a-mercy! If science makes such grotesque blunders about radiant matters right under its nose, how can one think of taking its opinion upon matters so remote as the stars — or even

the moon, which is comparatively near at hand?

Science says that the moon is a dead world, a cosmic ship littered with the skeletons of its crew, and from which every rat of vitality has long since escaped. It is the ghost that rises from its tomb every night to haunt its faithless lover, the world. It is a country of ancient silver mines, unworked for centuries. You may see the gaping mouths of the dark old shafts through your telescopes. You may even see the rusting pit tackle, the ruinous engine-houses, and the idle pick and shovel. Or you may say that it is counterfeit silver, coined to take in the young fools who love to gaze upon it. It is, so to speak, a bad half-a-crown.

As you will! but I am of Endymion's belief—and no one was ever more intimate with the moon. For me the moon is a country of great seaports, whither all the ships of our dreams come home. From all quarters of the world, every day of the week, there are ships sailing to the moon. They are the ships that sail just

when and where you please. You take your passage on that condition. And it is ridiculous to think for what a trifle the captain will take you on so long a journey. If you want to come back, just to take an excursion and no more, just to take a lighted look at those coasts of rose and pearl, he will ask no more than a glass or two of bright wine—indeed, when the captain is very kind, a flower will take you there and back in no time; if you want to stay whole days there, but still come back dreamy and strange, you may take a little dark root and smoke it in a silver pipe, or you may drink a little phial of poppy-juice, and thus you shall find the Land of Heart's Desire; but if you are wise and would stay in that land forever, the terms are even easier—a little powder shaken into a phial of water, a little piece of lead no bigger than a pea and a farthing's worth of explosive fire, and thus also you are in the Land of Heart's Desire forever.

I dreamed last night that I stood on the blustering windy wharf, and the dark ship was there. It was impatient, like all of us, to leave the world. Its funnels belched

black smoke, its engines throbbed against the quay like arms that were eager to strike and be done, and a bell was beating impatient summons to be gone. The dark captain stood ready on the bridge, and he looked into each of our faces as we passed on board. 'Is it for the long voyage?' he said. 'Yes! the long voyage,' I said—and his stern eyes seemed to soften as I answered.

At last we were all aboard, and in the twinkling of an eye were out of sight of land. Yet, once afloat, it seemed as though we should never reach our port in the moon—so it seemed to me as I lay awake in my little cabin, listening to the patient thud and throb of the great screws, beating in the ship's side like a human heart.

Talking with my fellow-voyagers, I was surprised to find that we were not all volunteers. Some in fact complained pitifully. They had, they said, been going about their business a day or two before, and suddenly a mysterious captain had laid hold of them, and pressed them to sail this unknown sea. Thus, without a word of warning they had been compelled to leave

behind them all they held dear. This one felt was a little hard of the captain; but those of us whose position was exactly the reverse, who had friends on the other side, all whose hopes indeed were invested there, were too selfishly expectant of port to be severe on the captain who was taking us thither.

There were three friends I had especially set out to see: two young lovers who had emigrated to those colonies in the moon just after their marriage, and there was another. What a surprise it would be to all three, for I had written no letter to say I was coming. Indeed, it was just a sudden impulse, the pistol flash of a long desire.

I tried to imagine what the town would be like in which they were now living. I asked the captain, and he answered with a sad smile, that it would be just exactly as I cared to dream it.

‘Oh, well then,’ I thought, ‘I know what it will be like. There shall be a great restless, tossing estuary, with Atlantic winds forever ruffling the sails of busy ships, ships coming home with laughter,

ships leaving home with sad sea-gull cries of farewell. And the shaggy tossing water shall be bounded on either bank with high granite walls, and on one bank shall be a fretted spire soaring with a jangle of bells, from amid a tangle of masts, and underneath the bells and the masts shall go streets rising up from the strand, streets full of faces, and sweet with the smell of tar and the sea. O, captain, will it be morning or night when we come to my city? In the morning my city is like a sea-blown rose, in the night it is bright as a sailor's star.

‘If it be early morning, what shall I do? I will run to the house in which my friends lie in happy sleep, never to be parted again, and kiss my hand to their shrouded window; and then I will run on and on till the city is behind and the sweetness of country lanes is about me, and I will gather flowers as I run, from sheer wantonness of joy, and then at last, flushed and breathless, I will stand beneath her window. I shall stand and listen, and I shall hear her breathing right through the heavy curtains and the hushed garden and

the sleeping house will bid me keep silence, but I shall cry a great cry up to the morning star, and say, "No, I will not keep silence. Mine is the voice she listens for in her sleep. She will wake again for no voice but mine. Dear one, awake, the morning of all mornings has come!"

As I write, the moon looks down at me like a Madonna from the great canvas of the sky. She seems beautiful with the beauty of all the eyes that have looked up at her, sad with all the tears of all those eyes; like a silver bowl brimming with the tears of dead lovers she seems. Yes, there are seaports in the moon, there are ships to take us there.

34.07





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 525 073 0

