Genius of Ireland and Other Essays

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The Genius of Ireland
and Other Essays
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Preface

Two of the following essays, and part of another, appeared anonymously in the pages of the Church of Ireland Gazette a couple of years ago and are republished here by arrangement with the Editor at that time. The rest of the material is new.

George Townshend.
Ahascragh,
Co. Galway.

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The Genius of Ireland

Irish humour

Men say that Irish humour is vanishing, that the leaven of jocularity and wit which once so graciously gave lightness to our social life is out of fashion and out of use, and that clever quips and lightning repartee are now seldom heard on the platform or at the bar. The English have lamented that their Parliament has grown dull since the Irish left, but no Irishman has claimed that what Westminster lost was gained by the Dail.1 We are now—so men assert—no better masters of the ludicrous than are our neighbours, and there are no more jokes and jests to be heard in Ireland than there are in any other land.

If this be true, what a strange turn has revolution taken, and in what an unexpected hour has our humour gone from us! Here have we got, for the first time in history, Ireland for the Irish; here are we "ourselves alone" at last; here are we a free nation, living in a Free State—and the first thing we do is to lose the most renowned and distinguishing of all our national

1 Dail Eireann ("Assembly of Ireland") is the lower house and principal chamber of the Oireachtas, which also includes the president of Ireland and a senate called Seanad Eireann.

excellent test of its civilisation. If, therefore, this ancient, winning, and most honourable gift is now in truth leaving our shores, our moralists and Ministers of State should take notice, and by some further measures of protection and stimulation, prevent its total disappearance.

Sydney Smith1 once said that any man could make himself a humourist by working at it for four hours a day. How valuable is the hint to us in our emergency! Our nationality might gain more from a revival of Irish humour than from a revival of the Irish language. How much more pleasant and popular, and how much less costly it would be to give in our State schools lessons in humour instead of lessons in Irish. After all, when our boys and girls shall have learned at last to use the Irish tongue, their only gain will be that they can talk to one another in a language that no other national can understand. But if they regain their fore-fathers' genial humour they will be able to speak a language that will unite them to all other human beings, and will make them welcome everywhere.

Humour has long been taken, in foreign lands, to be the especial distinction of the Irishman. Famous observers like Thackeray and Meredith2 have indeed given of the Irish quite a different account, But (whether we always like it or not) it is spontaneous humour that is known abroad as the outstanding trait of the Irish character.

No one who knew and loved the pre-war Ireland will be altogether surprised that this reputation of

Sydney Smith (1771–1845) was an English writer and Anglican clergyman.

2 William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863) was an English novelist and illustrator. George Meredith (1828–1909), was an English novelist and critic.

possessions. Our statesmen are busy bolting our doors and putting up our shutters, trying to establish, in a little hermit island, a nationality so clean-cut and self-centred that all will cry out in admiration, “Here is the real Ireland at last!” and meantime we are letting slip from our midst that one precious thing which has always been looked on as the delightful hallmark of the genuine Irishman.

And how precious a thing it, was! For surely if humour be not an actual virtue, it is one of the chief among the graces and the charms of life, and its demise demands a tear. What difficulties does it ease, what restraints does it remove, what springs of fellow-feeling does it open. How potent a weapon is it in the hands of one who seeks to persuade rather than to convince. How many a verdict has it determined, and how often has it proved more effective than reason or rhetoric. If it can lighten labour it can not less enrich leisure. In the lesser concerns of home and office, and also in such august assemblages as Synod or Senate, its appearance may be as magical as it is welcome. Carlyle1 will have it that laughter is much more than a mere gift or grace: it is a token of virtue. “No man who has once heartily and wholly laughed,” he protests, “can be altogether irreclaimably bad.” Carlyle was a Scotchman, too, and therefore not over prone to exaggerate the value of a laugh. Meredith held that “the flourishing of the comic idea and of comedy” in a country was an

1 Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) was a Scottish essayist, historian and philosopher.

ours should be what it is. For one thing, people all the world over like humour, even if they have not very much of it themselves. They are prompt to notice it, and they remember it a long time—especially when it is (like our Irish humour) of a genial and kindly type. Nor is there much doubt that among Irishmen the sense of humour lies nearer the surface than it does among people of other countries. The atmosphere is charged with humour. Not only are jests and drolleries current coin in our social activities, but it has been remarked that in Ireland things will often fall out in some incongruous or

amusing way that never would occur among a more grave or cautious people.

Is there any nation except the Irish who can claim that they have a definite brand of joke especially named after them? Whether the Irish Bull is in reality any more Irish than, say, that dish called Irish stew, is certainly debatable. Some who have gone into the question have, like Sir Boyle Roche,1 boldly answered in the affirmative, "No." It has been told of Professor Wilkie,2 a Scotchman, that he said to a boy whom he met, "I was sorry to hear there was fever in your family last spring. Was it you or your brother that died of it?" "It was me," said the boy. The late Sir James Percy, in his delightful Bulls and Blunders, 3 quotes a number of specimens from abroad. He tells of a Hindu baker in Bombay, with a business largely British, who advertised himself as "a first-class English loafer"; of a Dutchman pointing out "there's a windmill that works by

Sir Boyle Roche, (1736–1807) was an Irish politician.

2 William Wilkie (1721–1772) was a Scottish Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Natural Philosophy.

3 Sir James Campbell Percy (1869–?) was an Irish journalist. Bulls and Blunders was published in 1915.

water"; of a Welsh sailor boasting that in his country "the tops of many of the houses were copper-bottomed with sheet lead"; of an Englishman (who surely must have had an Irish grandmother!) complaining that "his physician drenched him so with drugs during his illness that he was sick for a long time after he got well."

But whether bulls are, by right, Irish or not, possession is nine parts of the law. The bull is now Irish property. So it will remain as long as it lives; and a long life to it!

People who like to be very precise have had a difficulty in defining the bull in such a way that it would not be confused in the show yard with other humorous blunders. But definitions matter little; all recognise a bull at sight. The word is used broadly, inclusively. When one looks over familiar specimens of the genus, one sees that they are of two kinds. In the first—perhaps the purer breed—the sense is plain and evident enough, and the confusion is confined to the language. When a sailor says "all hands went ashore to stretch their legs", or a Dublin Recorder that "the only people who pay attention to motor horns are the dogs", or an orator "this will be the brightest feather in my crown", there is no ambiguity about his meaning. But there is another kind of bull, in which the confusion is in the sense, rather than in the words, or in both sense and words. An Irishman who rued a too early marriage

confided to a friend, “Ah, if I had my time to come again I would never marry

so young, if I lived to be as old as Methuselah.” A certain baronet, learning that his married sister had given birth to twins, sent at once, in excited interest, to know if he were an uncle or aunt or both. Sir Boyle Roche (a pity that a gentleman so highly respected should be remembered only for his blunders!) once complained, when the shoemaker brought home the boots made for his gouty feet, “You have bungled these boots. I told you to make one larger than the other, and instead of that you have made one smaller than the other—the very opposite.” In cases such as these the tangle is a little more than verbal.

But though bulls may differ slightly among themselves in such details, they all are alike in being by nature accidental. They are uttered wholly, or almost wholly, in innocence. Nor in this do they stand alone among Irish jokes. The humour of many of our most popular stories is unconscious. Illustrations are so numerous and so familiar, one can hardly quote any without an apology. Take any of the best-known members of that large family of jokes that turn on the rival religions of our country. Sir John Ross,1 in his memoirs, calls to mind a good example (said to have occurred in the Provost’s kitchen in Dr Salmon’s time). A Roman Catholic cook, religiously keeping a fast-day, watched her Protestant kitchen-maid enjoying a succulent and savoury beefsteak. “Well,” she said, “if you’re not going to hell for that, I’m getting a queer sell.”2 We have all heard of the young

Sir John Ross (1777–1856) was a British naval officer and explorer.

2 “A queer sell” is an old-fashioned English idiom meaning “a strange deception”, “an unexpected trick”, or “a puzzling disappointment”. “If you can eat meat on a fast-day and not be punished, then I’ve been fooled.”

essayist’s “There are no wild beasts left in Ireland except in the theological gardens”; of the fish-wife, assailed on her way from Mass, by her old adversary, retorting, “It’s aisy seen you know I’m in a state of grace now, and can’t answer you back; but, glory be to God, I shan’t be so for long, and then I’ll be showing you what I can do with my tongue.”

Of course, unconscious humour is to be found in all countries. Mr Morley, in his Life of Gladstone,1 tells how much that statesman was amused by the story of the Bostonian who, having read Shakespeare for the first time, observed gravely: “I call that a very clever book. I don’t suppose there are twenty

men in Boston to-day who could have written that book." But it is a question whether people who thus blunder into jokes do so always by accident. Doubtless the majority of these jokes, or very many of them, are made in all innocence. But—at least in Ireland—some of them are realised well enough by the speaker, or are, at any rate, half-conscious. The best of humour is said by Meredith to lie in the ability to detect the ridicule of those you love without loving them less. An Irishman so dearly prizes a little fun that he would rather have a joke at his own expense than none at all. Perhaps there is, too, a subtler reason for this prevalence of unconscious humour in our country. It ought often to be described, not as unconscious, but as subconscious. There is in the Irish temperament—north and south—an inborn proneness to jocularity which has heavily charged the mental atmosphere

1 John Morley (1838–1923), was a British Liberal statesman, writer and newspaper editor. The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, 3 vols, 1903.

we have created about ourselves, and which is the more precious and the more prominent because it is offset by that other mood of Celtic melancholy. The traveller who lands at Cobh or Dun Laoghaire feels almost at once what he certainly does not feel when he disembarks at Holyhead or Calais or New York. He becomes quickly aware of the genial good-humour of the Irish people, and of that light-hearted drollery which they let prevail in so much of their life. The real distinction of Irish humour is to be found less in its character than its superabundance. It is not found chiefly in this class nor chiefly in this locality, but belongs to all the people in all sections. American humour is associated with Mark Twain and Artemus Ward; English with Lamb and Sydney Smith; French with Moliere, and so forth. But Irish humour is as much that of the jarvey and the gossoon, 1 of the judge and the cleric, as it is of Richard Brinsley Sheridan2 or the world-enlivening George Bernard Shaw, and it cares nothing for boundaries, but is current coin from the centre to the sea. Here is the probable reason why—as some have remarked—so many ludicrous things happen in Ireland. Quite as many happen in other countries; but people see some other side, the practical, or financial, or inconvenient, or humiliating side, and so miss the fun. When, as happened to a Mr D—some years ago, near Limerick, an Irishman fishing for pike with a frog as bait somehow gets the fish-hook through the grisly part of

1 Coachman (jarvey) and a lad (gossoon).

2 Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan (1751–1816) was an Anglo-Irish

playwright, writer and Whig politician.

his nose and has to walk four miles with a frog hanging from his face (covered as far as possible by a handkerchief) before he reaches a blacksmith and gets the hook cut through, his sense of humour takes the edge off his trouble, and for years after he enjoys telling the story against himself. Another man—Alan Breck, for instance—might feel merely mortified, and keep mum about his misadventure. Here, too, is one reason why drollery and low comedy are regarded as a feature of our humour. This is but natural when the humour is not the distilled product of literary minds, but springs direct from the off-hand daily conversation of educated and uneducated alike. Whatever one may say of the stories of bulls and unconscious humour in Ireland, no one will believe they come of any lack of native intelligence and wit. Clever thrusts, lightning parries, unanswerable repartees are heard every day—or used to be heard—in all grades and ranks of society. High comedy—that is, comedy that awakes thoughtful laughter—may be the monopoly of the highbrow. But genuine wit is as much public property as the bull. The distinction between wit and humour is an old problem. When Carlyle said wit was an affair of the head, humour of the heart, he put shortly what many others have said at greater length. Mr H. W. Fowler1 (who being both a wit and a humourist ought to know), carries out the analysis more thoroughly when he says that the province of humour is human nature—that of wit, words and ideas; the method of

1 Henry Watson Fowler (1858–1933) was an English schoolmaster, lexicographer and commentator on the usage of the English language.

humour is observation—that of wit, surprise; and that humour appeals to sympathy, wit to intelligence. So let it be. We have had in the past, if we have not still in the present, a galaxy of wits: Swift, O’Connell, Curran, Archbishop Whately, Father Healy, Percy French, and countless others have wellremembered mots1 to their credit.

Jokes have much in common all the world over, and in all ages. The difference between various nations in their wit and humour is not so wide as it is often made out to be. For instance: A man returning to his home-city after a long absence met an old acquaintance, and enquired about a mutual friend. “Oh, he’s married.” “What, married!” cried the traveller; “he whom I lately left alive and walking about!” The story has quite a modern ring in it; and few would guess it was

more than twenty centuries old, and came out of an ancient Greek play. But the humour of a nation (rather more than its wit) does certainly reflect much of the social conditions and the history of a people as well as some dominant traits in its character. The financial shrewdness of the Scotch will appear in any collection of Scotch humorous stories. A rather boastful exaggeration, again, is a mark of American humour, and appears in those stories which Europe thinks typically American. The farmer of Georgia boasts that his melons grow so fast they wear themselves out running along the ground, his pigs' tails curl so tight they lift the hindquarters off the ground, and so on. The

1 Bon mot (a witty remark).

American patriot protests his country is bounded on the north by the aurora borealis, on the south by the procession of the equinoxes, on the east by the rising sun and on the west by the Day of Judgement. It is told of someone seated on the piazza of the Grand Hotel in Naples and looking at Vesuvius, which was in eruption at the time, that he said to some Americans who were in the party, "That's one big thing you can't show in America." To which one of them replied, "No, sir; but we have a cataract in America that could put out that thing in two minutes."

The quotation of characteristic jokes may show what national humour is like in other countries, but it will not do so in the case of Ireland. Humour here has long been more prevalent and more popular than in other lands. In the regime of our social life it is not so much a favourite dish as a favourite flavour. We delight to season our conversation and, at times, our business and our politics, with it. The wit of Athens was its Attic salt.1 Humour is our Irish salt, or rather, our Irish honey. It sweetens and attracts. It does not show itself always, nor chiefly, in flashes. Rather it is, in common life, like the cheering glow of the fireside. With a steady flame it warms and brightens. It is a temper or aptitude which plays in social life as an undercurrent, continually felt, but seldom breaking the surface, seldom showing itself in a mot which could be taken away and shewn as an example of drollery or wit, Often when it is most precious and

1 Attic refers to Athens—specifically to the refined, elegant culture of ancient Attica, the region surrounding the city. Hence, the sharp, dry, graceful wit associated with classical Athenians. In older English, salt could mean "wit" or "piquancy". Writers from the Renaissance through the 19th century used the phrase to praise humour that was intelligent and lightly ironic rather than

heavy or vulgar.

most charming it is so closely bound up with the occasion that prompted it, with details of time or place or person, that its life is its spontaneity and the delight of it is incommunicable.

But to think over one's experience of Irish humour is to see in it at least two traits which are more or less distinctive; one, good enough; the other, better still. The first is its extravagance—an extravagance often overwhelming and irresistible, but yet an extravagance. It will revel in the ludicrous, even in the most rank and abandoned absurdity. We all know the story (told as true by Mr Lefanu) of the Irish coachman as he drove the English lady up Knockacuppall Hill, between Mallow and Killarney. A small boy, clad in only one garment (an old corduroy jacket), ran after the coach as it slowly went up the hill, asking for pennies. "Isn't it very sad," said the lady, "to see that poor little fellow with nothing on him but that wretched jacket?" "Ma'am," said the coachman, that boy could have clothes enough if he chose." "And why hasn't he?" she asked. "Well, now, ma'am, that boy is so wonderful ticklesome that he could never stand to let the tailor take his measure for a pair of trousers."

Sometimes a piece of sheer farce provokes at the time the more boisterous laughter because, perhaps, one is laughing, not only at the joke, but at the joker, for thinking of such a joke, and oneself for laughing at it.

The other trait is of a higher order. Irish humour

is, when true to type, not grim nor caustic, but genial and goodhumoured. If it slips into irony or satire, it does so infrequently, and it still remains not unkindly.

Indeed, humour at its best, in all lands, seems to have this quality. Those whom the nations like and honour as their greatest humorists have been lovers of their kind, lovers of what is sweet and beautiful in life. Was it not so with Shakespeare, with Lamb, with Dickens, with Sterne, and Goldsmith? Not only in typical Irish humour but in the most valued humour of other countries, the springs of laughter rise close beside those of sympathy and pathos.

Humour, indeed, is part of the mental equipment of the normal man, and no character is rounded without it. In a world full of error and of charlatans it is an aid and a weapon to the lover of truth. We do not think of Milton as a hilarious person, yet he has it that "the vein of laughing hath, of times, a strange and sinewy force in teaching and confuting."

The ancient Greeks believed that the gods enjoyed a jest as well as, or better than, mortals, and would take in good part a

joke played upon themselves. The disciples of St. Francis became known as joculatores Domini.1 Time out of mind humour combined with shrewdness and moral sense has been turned against the foibles and follies of mankind. Even in the Christian pulpit it has been used with vigour and effect. It is told of Whitefield2 that, when preaching one hot summer's day on the difficulty of entering the narrow gate, he saw the people

1 The Lord's jesters.
2 George Whitefield (1714–1770) was the famous Anglican evangelist of the Great Awakening.

were growing inattentive. He paused, and tried to catch a gnat that was buzzing about his face. "You think it quite easy," he went on, "to enter by the strait gate and secure salvation. Just as easy as for me to seize this gnat" (snatching again and again at the insect). Then, after a pause, he opened his hand and said solemnly, "But I have missed it!"

Mr Ward Beecher,1 one of the most impressive and brilliant of American preachers, was a wit and a humourist, and made a powerful use of his gifts in the pulpit. Mr Spurgeon,2 during those thirty years when twice every Sunday he held a great audience enthralled, did likewise. "I wonder," said an old and respected minister to him, "that you allow yourself such freedom, and discredit your sacred calling by making so many jokes in the pulpit." "You would not wonder at all," answered Spurgeon, "if you knew how many I keep to myself." Spurgeon was full of humour, but in his preaching he used his gift with tact and discretion. Thus—as in the case of Beecher—it increased immensely his power to persuade and to expose, to win and to subdue.

Humour, in fact, is one of the elements that make up a balanced and complete mentality. It is not only a diverting quality giving private pleasure in solitude and general pleasure in company, but it can be turned to serious purposes by the teacher or crusader. It is strange that it has been used in times of transition so often on the conservative, not on the progressive side. From the days of

1 Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887) was an American Congregationalist clergyman, social reformer, and speaker, known for his support of the abolition of slavery, his emphasis on God's love, and his 1875 adultery trial.
2 Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was an English Particular Baptist preacher.

Aristophanes and Juvenal to—shall we say those of Dean Inge, it has been used to expose the follies of the present by contrast

with a simpler and a saner past. But it need not be so, nor has it always been. Humour may be used now, as sometimes in the past, on the side of advance and construction. To take the most illustrious example possible—in that duel between good and evil which the New Testament records, one will find a grave and clear-eyed humour on the side of truth, hut none at all in the minds of the Pharisees and Scribes. Please goodness the momentary decay of humour in Ireland and other countries will soon end, and the forces of construction and enlightenment will add this weapon to their armoury. When in Ireland we learn once more to laugh together, we may learn to live together. A touch of humour may make us once more akin, and throughout the natural boundaries of our island home we may share alike the enjoyment of our common gifts and our common country.

The Genius of Ireland

Once, and only once, and for One only has Ireland taken the part of a leader among the peoples of Europe. Save for this one historical achievement, she has stood outside the main currents of development in the West, and has mingled little in European affairs.

Overwhelmed a thousand years ago by invaders whom her rich lands attracted, she has had to endure from that time to the present the suppression of her peculiar and precious individuality. Only once, and then for a brief time, did fate accord her an opportunity of using her talents in the service of mankind.

That service was intellectual and spiritual. It made Irish history during the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries a conspicuous part of religious European history. It won for her that title of the Island of Saints and Scholars, which remains to prove that Ireland was not always in that sad spiritual plight in which she seems to be to-day.

The chief features of that age of light are well known. From many parts of Europe students thronged into Ireland to sit at the feet of Irish Professors and Divines, and Irish teachers travelled

over sea and land to bring the gift of heavenly and of earthly knowledge to yet unilluminated regions of Britain and the Continent.

The three patron saints of Ireland, St. Patrick, St. Bridget, and Columcille,1 founded schools at Armagh, Kildare, and in Iona. Hundreds followed their example. Shrines of devotion and of learning were established in every part of the island. St. Finnian, travelling in Britain and seeing the ignorance of the

people, planned their conversion, and returning to Ireland founded at Clonard that famous school whose students during his lifetime numbered three thousand. Moville, Bangor, Lismore, Cork, Ross, Glendalough, Innisfallen, were seats of noted colleges. Districts now looked on in Ireland as remote were then educational centres whose circumference might reach as far as France or Italy. The lonely island of Aran Mor, in the days of its great teacher, St. Enda, was the resort of all the best minds in Ireland. The school at Clonfert was planted by St. Brendan the Voyager, whose reputed travels, under the title of “Navigatio Brendani”, were known throughout mediaeval Europe; it was the seat of St. Fursa (whose account of his Visions excited so wide an interest at one time that it has been held they offered suggestions even to the author of the “Divine Comedy”), and of the illustrious St. Cummian, some of whose writings are still extant, and who wins the admiration of the modern scholar by his intellectual humility and by the vastness of his learning.

1 Columba or Colmcille (CE 521–597) was an Irish abbot and missionary evangelist credited with spreading Christianity in what is today Scotland.

Clonmacnoise, now a desolate ruin in a lonely countryside, was founded by St. Kieran, and his cell soon became the centre of a veritable city of students. Iniscaltra became so famous for its school and monastery that an old record recounts how on one day there entered the mouth of the Shannon seven ships, full of students from foreign parts, bound for that little island on Lough Derg.

Aspirants, eager to gain and to bring back to their own darker homes the light of Western wisdom, came from all and sundry regions of Europe. Dagobert, a king of France, Aldfrid, king of Northumbria, St. Willibrord, a Saxon noble, afterwards Archbishop of Utrecht, Agilbert, a Frank, and afterwards Bishop of Paris, were among those educated at Irish schools. The Venerable Bede mentions that crowds of Anglo-Saxons went over to study in Ireland, where he reports they were kindly received and, without payment, were provided with books and with instruction. Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury, records that, while Canterbury School was not over-full, the English swarmed like bees to the schools in Ireland. Visitors came too, it is said, from Gaul, Germany, Italy, and even from Egypt.

Nor was this intellectual traffic one-sided. Irish saints and scholars went out from their homeland diffusing their knowledge and leaving behind them in Europe traces which

remain to this day. St. Columbanus and St. Gall, of the school at Bangor on Belfast Lough evangelised parts of

Burgundy, Lombardy, and Switzerland. Dungal, from the same school, was a friend of Charlemagne and was the founder of the University of Padua. St. Aidan, of Galway, at the invitation of Oswald, king of Northumberland, went over to help in the conversion of the king's subjects to Christianity, and founded the monastery of Lindisfarne. He was the first in the line of Bishops to take their title from Durham. His successor was Saint Finan of Tipperary, whose efforts (with those of two other Irishmen, Cedd and Diuma) carried the Gospel far down into Central England. Fergil, or Virgilius, became Archbishop of Salsbury. St. Fursa worked for six years as missionary in East Anglia, and then went over to France, where he earned a wide reputation for virtue and learning. St. Finbar of Connacht aided in the conversion of Mercia, and developed the monastery of Glastonbury. It is said that to-day 155 Irish saints are still venerated in Germany, 46 in France, 32 in Belgium, 13 in Italy, 8 in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Those who thus found in Ireland a fountain of knowledge at which they could slake their thirst were not unappreciative beneficiaries; sometimes an old record will give some quaint witness to the gratitude of eminent foreigners to the Irish schools which had taught them so well.

Thus there is still extant a letter from Alcuin, the most learned man at the court of King Charles of France, addressed in affectionate terms to "his

blessed master and pious father" Colcu, or Colgan, chief Professor at Clonmacnoise. Not only did Alcuin send a letter, but he sent also 100 shekels of silver (50 from himself and 50 from the king) to the brotherhood of Clonmacnoise as a gift, with a quantity of olive oil for the Irish Bishops.

Such, in brief, were the Christian schools, such the signal achievement which won for Ireland that title which remains unforgotten as a call to aspiration and a challenge to effort, showing that once she has been, and yet may be again, an island of saints and scholars.

Then fate rang down the curtain upon this scene of intellectual activity and happiness. The Danes arrived. Invasion followed invasion. The brief, though brilliant day of Ireland's glory was followed by a night of a thousand years. She had used well the one opportunity given to her of expressing her individuality, and had nobly served the greatest of causes. But now the opportunity was at an end.

It was not wholly by accident, nor is it without profound

significance, that Ireland's one constructive achievement in international history should have been not political nor economic, not in the sphere of commerce nor of administration, but should have been distinctively religious. Perhaps also it is due to causes deeper than historical circumstance that the religion which she thus practised and taught had a clearly-marked character of its own, and, laying little emphasis on the

ecclesiastical and institutional aspects of religion, was, in type, strongly devotional and intellectual. For the Irish temperament was—and is—markedly spiritual. Had there not been latent in those Irish tribesmen mental potencies of a rare order, the Message which St. Patrick brought could never have kindled so quickly so great a fire, nor could a religious achievement so brilliant ever have been accomplished nor undertaken. To-day, as then, the Irish character—taken at its truest and best—is of a mystical cast. This special gift is not confined to any one class or to any one school of thought. Sometimes it is developed; more often it is not. But the sympathetic observer may, without search, see it as a tendency, an inclination, a dormant power, on every side, even among the most poor, the most obscure, the most remote.

That ancient gift of spiritual intuition is with us still, though there would be little wonder if it had vanished. For what is there remaining to us from those old days—what but the hills and the winds and the ruins of sculptured stone? It is not only that social conditions have been wholly transformed, that the monasteries were burned by the Danes and the scholars' books buried in the bogs, but that men of other stocks have settled in the land and mingled their blood with the blood of the older immigrants. The Irish men and women of the time of Brigit and Columba may be our forefathers in religion, but they are only partly so in blood. A fire that burns more steadily, if it does

not flash so far, had been kindled in the island; and from over many seas came strangers who have made Ireland their home and, bringing non-Celtic gifts and traits, have created the more balanced character of that composite being, the modern Irishman.

But the old spirituality has not been dissipated. It has been set too deep in the nature of the people to be weakened by the chances of time or the infusion of fresh blood into the native stock. In the era of the Plantations men noted that settlers from England and Scotland soon took on the characteristics of the older inhabitants, and became as the saying was, even

“more Irish than the Irish.” Be it the influence of climate or not, it is certain that the island possesses some power of moulding its inhabitants to a determined type, and that at least one of the traits of the older Irish—and that the noblest—remains to this day.

The world at large is ignorant of the true character of the Irish. Its acquaintance with the people has been casual. It has seen only what is superficial and obvious, and has noted only the qualities that show in social intercourse. It has formed a judgment on a few scraps of information and has let a fleeting impression be crystallised into a final verdict.

It allows to the Irishmen and Irishwomen quickness of mind and gaiety of spirit. In its romances, it likes to give to its heroines a dash of Irish blood. It regards humour and drollery as the peculiar

national characteristic, and it has fixed into its imagination as a type to set beside John Bull and Uncle Sam the figure of the stage Irishman.

Few will wonder that for long ages the Irish have not been known at their best, nor seen as they truly are. It has been always difficult for one nation to secure from others a fair judgment. Nations look at their own virtues and at others’ failings. They seem quite content not to be just to one another. They try to see what they would like to see; and in order that they may the better magnify themselves, they make little of the worth of others. Even when there is a desire to be really judicial, it is not easy to be so. One has to judge from one’s own standpoint, and cannot tell what might come into view from another angle. One has to judge from what one knows, and one seldom knows accurately much about foreign peoples. Circumstances, too, may, for a time, distort or hide important traits, and bring into prominence matters which, in fact, are trifling.

Few nations have been so hampered by circumstance as the Irish for the last thousand years: few so misrepresented by circumstance as the Irish for the last hundred years. For ages past fate has denied them adequate means of self-expression. What chances they have had they have made good use of, and the same high gifts which shone so brightly in the days of Columcille did not wholly cease to cast their light till the thirteenth century. After the Battle of Clontarf, the spirituality of the

Irish again leapt into flame. This was the period when Irish activity in Germany was at its height. A monk from Donegal founded a monastery of St. James at Regensburg in 1076. Soon

a daughter house was opened at the same place, dedicated to St. Jacob. From this centre Irish influence spread in all directions. Twelve Irish monasteries were founded in Germany and in Austria, at Wurzburg, Nurnberg, Konstanz, Vienna, Eichstadt, and other places. Irishmen coming directly from their native land travelled far and wide through Europe carrying the Gospel, and sometimes founding monasteries. Irishmen were chaplains of Conrad III and of Frederic Barbarossa. Under the latter monarch a monastery was founded in what is now Bulgaria, and an Irishman appointed abbot. John, Bishop of Mecklenburg, preached to the Vandals between the Elbe and the Vistula. Pope Adrian IV studied under an Irish professor in the University of Paris. The fame of Irish saintliness and learning was established everywhere. Students still came, like their ancestors, to visit this island so celebrated for its intellectual and spiritual wealth.

But this revival burnt itself out, and the flame has never since been lit again. With the Normans there was introduced a condition of permanent warfare, which soon disintegrated Irish life. Suitable recruits were no longer sent out to the Continent, and the great Irish monasteries in Germany and elsewhere were either secularised, like

that at Nurnberg, or turned over to local authorities, like those at Vienna or Wurzburg.

The nineteenth century had come before the Irish character began to find again an opportunity of asserting itself. Even then, the conditions, at first, were unfortunate. Irish intelligence had been given no opening for constructive effort in learning, or art, or statesmanship, or any such activity, and found its scope chiefly in the wiles and ingenuities of opposition. It spent itself in evading or outwitting the powers that were. Thus it became warped by misuse. A wrong impression of the Irish character, and of the quality of Irish intelligence, was given to the outside world. For a long time it was not recognised that the Irish really possessed that ample and positive mental power which they had shown long ago and which, of late years, they have begun to show again.

The Irish gift of humour and drollery has, in a similar way, been perverted. It was used by the weaker against the stronger to cajole, to wheedle, to placate. “Better be laughed at than be trampled on,” thought the poor man, facing his rich master. Hence arose the type of the stage Irishman, which, being original and amusing, was found convenient by novelist and playwright, and became stereotyped. Even to-day it is, in parts of the world, taken to represent a truly national figure. In America, for instance, the part of the buffoon in every anecdote

is given to “Pat”, save only in the Southern States. The Irish

traveller is relieved when he crosses the Mason-Dixon Line and finds that the part of the clown in story is there given, not to the Irishman, but to the negro.

But these false impressions are rapidly disappearing. Irish intelligence, wit, and humour are not now fettered, as of old, but have full scope to work and a fair field in which to show themselves. And if, in an age so materialistic as this, spirituality finds few avenues of self-expression, and is shut in by convention and by dead habits of thought, nevertheless, there is, perhaps, no country outside the Orient where the observer will find such evidence of latent spiritual capacity as in this ancient island.

Nor is any close or detailed examination needed in order to discover how strong is this quality among the Irish people today. “A man is hidden behind his tongue,” says an Arabian proverb. A nation is hidden behind its literature. The writings of a people form a mirror in which the popular mind and heart are reflected. A poet is not a creator only, but a revealer; and he reveals, not only his own soul, but the soul of his people and of his age. For the past fifty years or so we have had in Ireland a brilliant revival of letters, which has been written about in many lands as an Irish Renaissance. And in the work of this Renaissance no human quality has found such general or such felicitous and ardent expression as that of spirituality.

In all ages nations have been proud of their

poets. When they wish to display their greatness, it is to their poets they point—the English to Shakespeare, the Germans to Goethe, the Italians to Dante, just as long ago the Romans pointed to Vergil and the Greeks to Homer. A country’s poets give the highest expression of the national character. Set half-adozen poets of the Irish Revival beside a similar group of today’s poets from England, or the Colonies, or from America, and one of the traits which is seen at once to mark the Irish writers is the vividness and ardour of their religious feeling. This feeling is not, of course, absent from the contemporary poets of other lands: far from it. But it is not elsewhere so pervasive, so emphatic, as in Irish verse, nor has it the same quality of instinctive yearning and aspiration. No one can read the verse of Lionel Johnson, of Katharine Tynan-Hinkson, of Pearse, of Dora Sigerson, of Joseph Campbell in his earlier years, or of many another, without noting the devotional and often mystical quality of the author’s temperament. Indeed, the wealth of idealistic material is so great that it is some matter for surprise that no one has yet published an anthology

of Irish verse of this special type.
The two finest and most famous of Irish poets are, however, those in whose works this spirituality shines out with the greatest brilliance and power. It is to both Yeats and A.E.1 the one dominant thought, the one central theme. The hero of their verse is not man the mortal, but man the immortal,

1 William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) was an Irish poet, dramatist, writer and literary critic who was one of the foremost figures of 20th-century literature. George William Russell (1867–1935), who wrote with the pseudonym Æ (often written AE or A.E.), was an Irish writer, editor, critic, poet, painter and Irish nationalist. He was also a writer on mysticism, and a central figure in the group of devotees of theosophy which met in Dublin for many years.

and their sadness is that of a spirit ill-content to dwell in a house of clay amid a world of illusions. Yeats has spoken of "the disembodied ecstasy" of A.E's verse, and no two words can better describe its special quality. "Be it thine," writes A.E. of his own poetry, "be it thine to win Rare vistas of white light, Half-parted lips through which the infinite murmurs its ancient story … until thy song's elation Echoes the multitudinous meditation." His verse is, in an extraordinary degree, aetherial, and its ideals of human life noble and august. He loves his country, but has no patience with those who are slaves of the embittering traditions of history. Of himself and those who think like him he says:

"We are less children of this clime
Than of some nation yet unborn,
Or empire in the womb of time.
We hold the Ireland in the heart
More than the land our eyes have seen,
And love the goal for which we start
More than the tale of what has been.
We would no Irish sign efface,
But yet our lips would gladlier hail
The first-born of the coming Race
Than the last splendour of the Gael.
No blazoned banner we unfold,
One charge alone we give to youth,
Against the sceptred myth to hold
The golden heresy of truth."

If only the voters of Ireland could reach up to this thought, how quickly might the ship of State

sail out from among the rocks that now beset us, and seem likely to beset out children!

A.E. looks out upon a world full of unhappiness, and he sees human sorrow as springing always from men's forgetfulness of their divine origin and of that high estate which once was theirs before they descended into this world of matter. "We dwindle down beneath the skies, and from ourselves we pass away." They who forget they are from everlasting spiritual beings invoke misery. The remembrance of this truth brings an inward joy which lies "far beyond earth's misery" and is the one road to real dominion and self-completion. Lesser goals of effort than this delude and disappoint. The whole universe, in its vastness and in its tiniest detail, is spirit-woven, and the Mighty Artist who reared "the changing halls of day and night" shows forth His delight likewise in the perfection of the wild flower of the field.

The volume of his Collected Poems, first published in 1913, and many times reprinted, includes more than two hundred and thirty pieces, and runs to 369 pages. The treatment of a theme so vast and rich in so many brief lyrics leaves, perhaps, on the reader a sense of fragmentariness. More than twenty years ago a writer in an American paper, the Sewanee Review, spoke of A.E. as an "Irish Emerson". It is a suggestive comparison; but Emerson was a dreamer and a thinker, while A.E., in his verse, appears rather as a dreamer and a singer. The view of life and of

the universe which A.E. presents is taken from the Upanishads. The mythology which he employs is Celtic. Those readers, therefore, who are trained in the classical tradition of the West may find themselves here in a strange world. But the poet's facility, the splendour of his language, the delicacy of his colour-sense, the occasional magic of his descriptive phrases, attract and charm; and no reader can be unmoved by the magnanimity and loftiness of the poet's thought. Technically the work does not always show infallible clarity and finish. The poet seems a genius first, an artist in the second place. Yeats, on the other hand, is a genius in the second place, an artist first. If Mr Yeats has not in the same degree as A.E. an unquenched and unquenchable assurance of the truth and reality of his vision, nevertheless his work likewise depends for its individuality on a rare and ardent idealism. The dominant mood of his poetry, taken as a whole, is one of dream and reverie, of loneliness and longing. A belief in something better than the actual and a desire to reach and to enjoy it, form the main source of his inspiration. And though he has written in many moods, and ranged' far in his choice of themes, yet it is when he makes adoration his motive that his touch is most sure, his eloquence most compelling. His idealism has many

sides, and the ideal types which his heart or fancy present to him are now of one kind, now of another. Sometimes it is an image of ideal love

on which he broods, sometimes an image of ideal joy, sometimes of ideal beauty. But the one of which he dreams more constantly than any other, the ideal of which he writes with a reiteration that never seems to slacken or grow weary is a perfection of beauty—a beauty still sensuous yet transcendently more fair than any that charms the senses of mankind on earth.

With the world of ethics his idealism has little concern. Save in one brilliant poem, he pays scant attention to perfection of character or to standards of conduct. He has shown in the Countess Cathleen what he can do in this field when he so wills. He has here taken an old legend which tells how once upon a time an Irish Princess, in order to save her people, gave up for them the most precious thing she possessed, her own soul. When she died, the Almighty pardoned her and received her into heaven because, if her deed was evil, her motive was divine. This story Mr Yeats weaves into a dramatic poem, in which he does not bring out the conflict of the warring forces within the heroine's breast before she makes her awful decision, but emphasises the moral beauty of her act and the religious significance of her ultimate forgiveness. The Lady Cathleen seems not so much a mere being of the earth as the spirit of a selfless love incarnate in a woman's form. The whole poem is of so high and rare a loveliness that none of Mr Yeats's later work, brilliant though it be, seems quite to fulfil the promise given here.

Joy is set by the poet among his ideals, and yet it plays but a small part in his poetry. He writes with more affection of sorrow; and the lady of his dreams is nearly always sorrowful, and never joyous. He speaks of joy as one of the marks of the land of his heart's desire, and in the Wanderings of Oisin he tells in a score of graceful lines the part joy plays in the universe. But even here, when he sings joy's praise, he carries little conviction, because he sings always in a minor key. Nor does Yeats write of the love of man and woman with the enthusiasm that marks most poets, and which inspires them to their best verse. Only in one poem does he tell what is essentially a love story, or seek to express that inspiration which impels the soul to seek for happiness through a love union with its perfect mate. But here, in Shadowy Waters (which, though in form dramatic, is in its nature lyric and personal) the theme has done for Mr Yeats what it has done for almost every poet who

has treated it—it has ennobled his style and enabled him to write some of his most exquisite and haunting poetry. Apart from this poem, Mr Yeats's attitude toward love is one of deprecation. As implied in many places and expressed in his Rose of Battle, his view is that love brings contentment and repose which are inimical to the divine hunger of the poet. It is to the sad, the lonely, the insatiable, that Nature reveals her mysteries. The poet must abjure love and drive it from him to "hide its face amid a crowd of stars."

Doubtless the poet's failure to write at length of joy and love and moral perfection is not so much due to his loving these less, but to his loving another ideal even more. The ideal which he prizes most highly is that of beauty. He chants the praise of beauty in his lyrics, his narratives, his plays. He chanted it when he was a boy, and he chants it now he is a man. So active is his imagination when enkindled by the desire for beauty, that the poet seems able to look at his ideal now from this angle, now from that, to see it in a hundred different forms, and to sing it in a hundred different ways. And if he writes of this theme late and early, he writes of it also with an emotion which, though it may seldom be impassioned or rapturous, is always sincere and earnest and profound.

The great function of poetry is to him, the expression of beauty. He sees the poets as "labouring all their days to build a perfect beauty in rhyme." Nor could they well choose a worthier theme, since it is the love of beauty that has impelled men to the heights of epic achievement (as in old Hellas and ancient Ireland). Moreover, beauty was, indeed, the cause of creation, since God made the world that He might provide the Angel of Beauty with a place where she might wander at will. In one poem Mr Yeats claims that an aesthetic difference is an ethical one, and that ugliness is unrighteous. "The wrong of unshapely things," he cries, "is a wrong too great to

be told." So monotheistic is he in this worship that when he turns to indite a poem in honour of Erin he fears he may be guilty of unfaithfulness, and, therefore, saves himself by propounding the belief that beauty is the tutelary Goddess of Erin, and still loves that land as her peculiar haven and home on earth. In what might seem intended as love poems Mr Yeats writes not so much of love as of beauty. He praises his beloved because she reminds him of the loveliness that has long faded from the world; he tells her that when she sighs, he hears White Beauty sighing too, and that she seems to him an incarnation of that Angel of Beauty to whom his heart is given. He does not seem self-forgetful, like the true lover, but

conscious of himself and of his dreams; so that, for instance, when he tells his beloved that he spreads before her feet his dreams as cloths for her to walk upon, he is careful to ask that she tread lightly.

This sensuous beauty, which Yeats so devoutly adores, he often personifies as a woman or goddess of whom he is the humble devotee and priest. But at other times he thinks rather of some ideal age or place where there is nothing, neither form nor colour, nor odour, nor sound, that is not beautiful. Frequently he speaks of bygone ages as possessed of a loveliness which, like Astraea, has long since fled from earth. In one or two brief lyrics some favourite spot in Ireland like the Lake Isle of Innisfree1 is painted as the ideal place of his dreams.

1 Lake Isle of Innisfree is an uninhabited island within Lough Gill, in Ireland, near which Yeats spent his summers as a child.

But in his larger works the dwelling-place and home of beauty is some imaginary land beyond the known borders of the world—in The Wanderings of Oisin it is the Isle of the Blessed; in The Land of Heart's Desire it is the realms of Faery; in Where There is Nothing it is the heaven of the mystic's faith.

It has been Mr Yeats's custom to place this halcyon home of Beauty in strong and striking contrast to the actual life of man on earth. The workaday world he shows as a hard and sordid place, whose darkness he uses as a foil to set off the glory of the land of his dreams. This opposition is, to him, not a mere artistic device, but a profound fact of Nature, and it provides him with the subject of some of his best poetry. Indeed, the poems which have appealed to his readers as most sincere, and which are the most general favourites, are precisely those in which this opposition is the crux and central theme.

In these points Mr Yeats's method—if without injustice to his art one may point for a moment to the foundations and the ground-plan on which he has built—is to place the hero (or heroine) in the midst, with Earth on one side and Elysium on the other, and then have him decide which of the two he will choose. The making of the choice, the struggle to escape from earth, and the final attainment of Elysium provide the plot. The hero's weariness of earth, his longing for Paradise, and his delight on reaching his haven, supply the

emotion of the piece. Names, dates, places may vary, but this plan varies not. Oisin, Maire Bruin, Forgael, Paul Rutledge—mythic warrior, peasant girl, pirate, and nineteenth century country gentleman—all stand in similar dilemmas, all make a

similar election, and all reach similar goals. There is, however, one play which, though it belongs to this class, yet stands by itself as apart from its fellows. This is Cathleen Ny Houlihan. For in this piece the hero does not seek the personal enjoyment of any delectable Paradise, but refuses the good things of earth that he may the better do his duty and fight in his country's cause.

Yet if in this large group of poems Mr Yeats changes neither the theme nor the essentials of his plot, he does considerably change his point of view and his treatment of the story. When he was young he looked at the matter from one angle, and wrote The Wanderings of Oisin; when he was a little less young, his point of view was changed, and he wrote The Land of Heart's Desire; when he reached middle age he saw it all in yet another way, and wrote Where there is Nothing. In his youth his fancy broke its leash, and he revelled in the delights of his dream-Elysium. His hero of this period, Oisin, escapes forthright from earth and rides with a fairy bride to the Isle of the Blessed, and the poet fills almost the whole of his poem with enraptured descriptions of that wonderful world. But with growing experience Mr Yeats's perspective changed, and the thought of

earth became obtrusive. Maire Bruin, the main figure in The Land of Heart's Desire, did not find so quick or easy an escape to the place of her dreams as did Oisin. It is only when Earth has grown at last unbearable that she calls for the fairies, whom she has loved so long, to take her out of "this dull world". Even then her decision has to be fought out in a hard and bitter struggle, for earth has its ties, and she cannot win her fairy land till she has broken the bonds of faith and home. Paul Rutledge has a yet more arduous experience than Maire. Less fortunate than she, he does not know where that which he desires is to be found. No fairy-child, no princess from the Happy Isles, comes to his need. He must go out and search for his ideal himself. He does so in a fashion which is, at least, uncompromising, and becomes by turn tinker, monk, and selfappointed friar. But his goal remains unknown till, at the very last, as he drops dying beneath the stones of the mob, he cries "I go to the sacred heart of flame", and finds his soul's desire through martyrdom. So hardly did Paul Rutledge attain what Oisin was given as a gift; and so little is the reader told of that Paradise which in the earlier poem a thousand glowing lines were hardly sufficient to describe.

Mr Yeats himself is acutely conscious of this change. He sees no more the heavens opened, nor does he tell burning tales of dream-guided adventurers forsaking all to seek the

mystic home of Beauty. He cannot write now in that high, happy

strain. His songs no more thrill with faith and hope. He doubts. "Is this my dream, or the truth?" he asks. Once he wrote a poem—The Rose of the World—to protest against the false dream that "Beauty passes like a dream." Now he records the wisdom of the old men: "I heard the old, old men say, 'All that's beautiful drifts away like the waters.'" He feels the loss and laments the change. "I am worn out with dreams," he cries; and again, "Now my heart is sore. All's changed"—"My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone"—and

"The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished;
I have nothing but the embittered sun;
Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,
And now that I have come to fifty years
I must endure the timid sun."

He tries to think, however, that if the fading of his early vision be sad, yet it has its gains. Perhaps he was wrong then and is right now.

"Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth."

"The truth!" What, then is this truth which has come when joy is gone? One reads The Green Helmet, and comes on the following lines, and wonders whether they really can be written by the same pen as that which charmed all hearts not long ago with a story of that "Land of Heart's

Desire where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood":

"How shall I know
That in the blinding light beyond the grave
We'll find so good a thing as we have lost?
The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,
The habitual content of each with each,
When neither soul nor body has been crossed."

Heaven, it seems, is closed. Only the earth remains. But when the poet took this for the burden of his song, his power and his rapture left him. He is still the craftsman, but he cannot move men's spirits. Like his heroic Oisin, so soon as he slips from his faery-steed and touches the common earth, his strength turns to water and the years master him. "O, who could have foretold that the heart grows old!" he cries. He has no tidings now. What is an Irish poet who has lost his idealism? He is as a saint without the knowledge of heaven, as a scholar without the knowledge of the earth.

But Mr Yeats has not spoken his last word. Progress moves

not in a straight line, but in a spiral. Wordsworth's Child, who at first saw all things apparelled in celestial light, and later, as he grew to man's estate, lost the happiness of this intuitive vision, found in later years the same high wisdom restored and deepened through thought and contemplation. So may it be with this poet whom God has gifted and man has justly honoured. Before he lays down his pen he will, of a surety, see once again the gates of pearl cast wide, and, in fuller, stronger tones than ever before, will

sing in his old age the glories of the Land of the Ever-Young. The poems of Mr Yeats, with those of A.E., have made the name of Ireland honourably known through the Englishspeaking world, particularly among the educated and most influential classes. They have, in a dark and doubting age, upheld, with power and persuasiveness, the cause of idealism and of spirituality. They have had the effect, throughout the Empire and in America, of connecting this cause with the revival of letters in Ireland. It has been felt that the special qualities of these poems are not merely personal, but are typical of the genius of the Irish people.

Here lies the national significance of these two great poets' work. Their achievement is not the singular and unaccountable outburst of an extraordinary talent; it is not unrelated to its environment, a flaming bush in a wilderness. On the contrary, Mr Yeats and A.E. are children of their country. Their greatest and most splendid quality is one which they inherit from Ireland. Their power of vision is an Irish gift. It marked the Irish long ago, and it marks them now. What is singular in their attainment is not that they possess the seer's temperament, but that to it they add a rare faculty of poetical expression. It is not their privilege to sing of themes unknown or strange to the Irish people, but rather to give utterance to aspirations which many among the Irish felt, yet none but themselves can put in music or in words.

Indeed, what these two men have achieved might well be impossible had they not had the spirit of the people with them. For they have done something which, in the realm of letters, is comparable with the work of an ancient Irish missionary in the realm of religion. In an age when the Philistines have captured the Ark of Beauty, when most poets sing of earthliness and shadows and despair, here are two Irishmen singing, in strains of rapture and desire, tidings of joy and light and loveliness.

"Men yet shall hear
The Archangels rolling Satan's empty skull
Over the mountain tops"

is continually the burden of their song. And where else in the wide world to-day will this be found as the characteristic and dominant note of a nation's contemporary verse?

The Irish have long desired a place among the peoples of the world and an opportunity for national self-expression. That opportunity now has come. It has come, indeed, in almost extravagant measure. This present age is one in which the idea of independence and self-determination has been carried to its furthest limits, and all men and all nations seem bent on nothing so much as on asserting their own individuality. Our country is small and poor, nor is it likely ever to become rich. But nations far greater than we shall ever be—greater than the Empires of Rome or Babylon—have been as small and as poor as ourselves. The

Roman poet long ago proudly voiced his country's renunciation of the pursuit of Beauty and of Truth, of the arts and the sciences, and proclaimed that the imperial glory of the Caesars lay in the military conquest of the world. The larger nations of to-day may—if they will—pursue some such ambition. For the humble and the weak, such as ourselves, another path invites. If this little land of ours is to play, indeed, a useful part among mankind, it will not be in the field of commerce, nor in the arts of administering vast areas or complex commonwealths. Rather it may be—if anywhere—in the realm of the mind and the spirit. No service to mankind can be higher than that which may be rendered by religious intuition and the faculty of vision; and now there lies before the Irish such an opportunity of using these gifts as has not appeared for a millennium. If they fail, the blame can no longer be laid on hostile conditions nor on other people. If they succeed, they will prove themselves not unworthy heirs of a great tradition. That which has been done in Ireland during the last ten years will not permit anyone to sentimentalize the Irish character. The name of honour which Ireland once won is used often now in mockery of our present state. But a high and rare capacity for spiritual attainment is assuredly ours. It has but to be used. Our poets have led the way; they have sounded the reveille. Now it is for others to walk by the path of the Spirit into heavenly

places, and continually to see and declare a fuller and fuller vision of God and His truth.

To consider that this great gift of spiritual sensibility belongs in a marked degree to the Irish: to look back on a distant past and see how the religious genius of the people made this lovely island once the shrine of Western Europe: to realise that still there burns deep in the dumb heart of the

people that ancient fire : to hear to-day in our midst the voice of poets beginning to raise again the strain so long unheard, and chant in the ears of a forgetful world the praise of eternal beauty and eternal truth: thus to watch, to listen, and to reflect is to be filled with hope that Ireland may not be slow to catch the vision of a breaking day, or to hear the tidings already breathed from on high, and that she may do for mankind now such service as her saints and scholars did for Europe long ago.

A kinship in genius: The English poet-prophets

Truth makes us all akin. The idealism and impassioned faith which inspired long ago our scholars and our saints and which echoes to-day in our noblest contemporary verse is not the mark of Irish letters alone. It rings in the poet-prophets of yesterday in England. And though their soaring and majestic song has little of its kind to herald it in England and still less to carry on its message at the present hour, yet its inspiration is the same as that which animates the best genius of Ireland; and in range, richness, and profundity it goes beyond that which our poets have yet given to the world.

More than a century ago a great Poet-Prophet (himself of Irish stock) uplifted in England a strange new Song of Victory and Triumph, and foretold the approach of an age when hypocrisy and tyranny would be dethroned and when man would recognise at last the hidden truth about himself and the worlds in which he lives and would enjoy the rights of a lawabiding Citizen of the Universe.

Blake[1] with clear eyes saw the oppression which filled the earth, and watched the helpless struggle

1 William Blake (1757–1827) was an English poet, painter and printmaker.

of the weak, the poor, the enslaved against those who were able by force to hold them in subjection. He not only felt with extraordinary intensity the pitifulness of their condition, but he recognised it as a fearful spiritual wrong, a blasphemous defiance of God’s will: this cruelty was a lie against God. And, looking beyond man’s manifold iniquity, he saw approaching the certain vengeance of an outraged deity; he foretold the deliverance of the world from misrule and the final acceptance by mankind of the eternal principle of brotherhood and unity. To the declaration of this theme he dedicated his gifts, as an artist and a poet, insisting always that what he uttered was “not fable but vision”, and that he spoke by inspiration.

His mantle fell on other poets, who like him called men’s hearts away from deism and doubt and chanted the praise of

the Universal Spirit—Unborn, Undying, Over-ruling all and Ordaining all. They knew Its joy and Its beauty, and they saw Its power animating the natural world and directing the slow processes of human history. Its will was desecrated by man's crimes; Its beneficent purpose postponed by his obtuseness. But they were conscious of Its transcendent might, beheld the certainty of Its triumph and witnessed in the world about them the stirring of a stupendous soul-force that would bring justice to the earth and establish among men obedience to Truth and God.

Blake was the most complete visionary of all this group of prophet-poets; his insight was the most

piercing, his outlook the most wide. He had his own reading of human life and of the nature of man, built up his ideas into a complex but single picture of Reality, and did his best to devise a galaxy of forms and figures through which he could express thoughts so unwonted and aetherial.

Though he kept in close touch with the social and political life about him, yet he was too far in advance of his age, and too far above it, to find contemporary appreciation. Gross materialism shut him in on every side. His point of view was totally incomprehensible to all except a very few; and as men made their ignorance the standard by which he was to be judged, they regarded his originality not as a sign of his Truthfulness (which it was) but as a proof of his madness.

The strangeness of his thoughts was emphasised by the strangeness of his style and literary method. He made himself in youth a master of the traditional manner of writing English poetry. He wrote verses such as those which open the Fourth Book of the Golden Treasury, beginning:

"Whether on Ida's shady brow,
Or in the chambers of the East,
The chambers of the sun, that now
From ancient melody have ceased ….

Then he discarded this manner for one of his own devising. Henceforth he abandoned the use of Greek mythology which was familiar to the reading public and created a cryptic mythology of his own.

Even to-day much of his work remains difficult and obscure. Among his contemporaries, to whom his attitude of mind was much less congenial than it has become to us, the originality of his manner, added to the originality of his matter, served only to secure the total condemnation of his verse from every point of view.

Blake as a great mystic saw the eternal happiness of heaven

beating its wings against the misery of a recusant world which declined to listen or to heed. Within his own heart this happiness found a lodging, and, looking about him, he saw, in spite of appearances, the same happiness latent and expectant in all things. He would address even the humblest form of animal life and cry:

“Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!
Arise and drink your bliss, for everything that lives is holy!”

He was the first to discover childhood and to set it in its due place of honour and regard. He wrote of children not only with exquisite tenderness and sympathy, but with a dramatic power which makes his verse seem not the utterance of a kindly observer but of childhood itself.

He rediscovered nature and showed forth in all his work a love of all country things—of light and cloud and valley, even of the worm, the “image of weakness”, and of the clod of clay, which in The Book of Thel thus addresses the Human Soul:

“Thou seest me, the meanest thing, and so I am indeed
My bosom of itself is cold and of itself is dark;
But He that loves the lowly pours His oil upon my head,
And kisses me and binds His nuptial bands around my breast,
And says: ‘Thou mother of my children, I have loved thee,
And I have given thee a crown that none can take away.”

Blake pleaded passionately for man’s better understanding of the lesser children of a common Creator. We all know now his lines:

“A robin redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage …
A dog starved at his master’s gate
Predicts the ruin of the State.
A horse misused upon the road
Calls to Heaven for human blood.
A skylark wounded in the wing,
A cherubim does cease to sing.
Kill not the moth nor butterfly,
For the Last Judgment draweth nigh.”

With pity—and with anger—he looked out upon a social order saturated with iniquity and cruelty, and he sang some of the most poignant songs of sympathy with the oppressed that our literature has to show. With what a searching eye does he see, with what relentless lucidity does he expose the arts of the modern tyrant! Here is the advice given in Vala by the archtyrant Urizen:

“Listen to the words of wisdom.
Compel the poor to live upon a crust of bread by soft
mild arts:
So shall you govern over all. Let Moral Duty tune your
tongue
But be your hearts harder than the nether millstone …
When his children sicken, let them die; there are enough
Born, even too many, and our earth will soon be overrun
Without these arts. If you would make the Poor live
with temper,
With pomp give every crust of bread you give; with
gracious cunning
Magnify small gifts; reduce the man to want a gift, and
then give with pomp ...”

Gentle-spirited as he was, Blake all through his life was “ever a fighter”, and he gave no quarter to the enemies of justice or of truth. Against false science and wrong-headed philosophy, against ecclesiastical hypocrisy and political tyranny he waged relentless war; and long before Shelley wrote or Byron was born, he sang hymns of deliverance, paeans of liberty. He never doubted how the battle would end, nor questioned the certainty of the triumph of the principle of brotherhood. He saw in clear vision the awakening of mankind and the sublimation of the social order. He deliberately bent all his powers to aid in that tremendous struggle which must precede the final victory of the Powers of Good on earth.

His real interest, however, lay not so much in

outward as in inward things. The oppression which he saw about him, the struggle of the weak and poor for liberty, had their counterpart and their source in the soul of man. They were indeed the shadow cast on the outer world by conditions existing within the mind. To Blake, history begins—within. The real stage on which the action of his poems takes place is the human soul. He was not only nor chiefly a poet of Nature (as were his successors, Wordsworth and Shelley) but primarily a poet of man; and not of man only, but likewise of divinity. He believed that poetry is the power of transmitting heavenly communications, and that it can never be comprehended by the “corporeal understanding” but only by sympathetic intuition. The beginning of all the world’s troubles lies in the heart, and their ending is to be found in the same place. Blake was not a revolutionary. He did not counsel the use of force nor think that through it wrongs could be permanently righted. The basis of the tyranny which he saw wherever he turned—in England, in France, in America—was psychological; and the remedy must likewise be psychological.

He struck at the root of the tree. The essential truth which ran through all his utterances and thoughts was a principle which all accepted and no one put to use—that man is spirit and that mankind is one spirit in many bodies. Blake was an ardent Christian, and though he had no patience with a literal interpretation of the Bible, he strongly held that the Scripture contained the spiri-

tual history of man, and was an inspired Guide to the knowledge of the eternal truth. God, he believed, was to be found and to be loved in every man. Indeed, not the human race alone but all existence was in its last reality one, and was animated throughout by love. The object of every man's mortal life was to attain the purpose of creation: namely, the soul's communion with God. Since the Fall (which of course he took as an allegory) man was shut up in the prison of his five senses. Hell was to Blake not a place but a condition of being, a state of self-centredness and enslavement to "corporeal desires". Reason of itself was too weak to free man from this confinement. The principle by which man perceives what is beyond the realm of sense was the power of God unto salvation. Faith arouses intuition or spiritual insight, and by this power man bursts the bounds of his hell and escapes for ever from the limitations of corporeal blindness.

Men therefore in their true nature were to Blake free and happy. They had lost their way and strayed into misery. But they would assuredly find the right path again and win back on this earth an elysian condition which in the eternal world they once had had and which it was not God's will they should ever have lost.

Blake was the Elijah, the earliest of a succession of prophets whose splendour illumines with unaccustomed light the first half of the nineteenth century. His vision was broader than that of those

who followed him, his flight was more sustained. Though the world-darkness which surrounded him was even denser than that which surrounded them, yet his genius dwelt in a glory which they saw only in glimpses. But they too had their vision, their message, their heaven-born power; and they produced on the mind of their time an influence far greater than his. Wordsworth[1] and Shelley[2] saw man as spirit and all existence as a unified whole. They proclaimed the inalienable dignity of manhood and the right of all men to liberty. And though they took from his hand the Torch of spiritual light, they were more closely akin to each other than to him in this, that they looked rather through Nature to find God than

through man.
When Wordsworth observed with minute care the objects through the countryside and pondered them in loving remembrance, the details of the scene became to him avenues through which he looked into an immaterial realm. His senses were what Blake said our senses ought to be—"means of spiritual apprehension". With their aid his intuitions unveiled to him a sphere of beauty lapped in a light that never was on sea or land. He felt the presence in the sky, the ocean, the air, of a moving spirit which permeated all life, all existence, all objects of thought. The splendour of that imperial realm is, he proclaimed, the true home of man. Out of it he descends into this world, and into it he returns. Birth into mortality is but a sleep and

1 William Wordsworth (1770–1850) was an English Romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with their joint publication Lyrical Ballads (1798).
2 Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was an English writer who is considered one of the major English Romantic poets.

a forgetting. In childhood we still recall something of this dear beauty and ante-natal delight. The shadows of earth-life gather about the soul, separating it from knowledge, till with growing years reflection re-awakes the vision of childhood; and the earnest contemplation of Nature, even of the simplest bloom or flower, brings thoughts that lie too deep for tears, enables the soul to see again the domes of the hidden Palace of God, and to hear the waters beating forever on the eternal shores.
Shelley, too, was a poet of mysticism, and took for his subject Nature rather than man. Intensely spiritual, he looked "not with but through his eye" on an open vision of incorporeal Beauty which transcended all that is of earth but was yet in a degree manifest in Nature. To him, everywhere save within the dark confines of man's life on earth, there shone the stainless radiance of Eternity. In that everlasting glory dwelt the great Realities of existence—Beauty, and Love, and Joy. The splendour of Truth, however, was hidden from men as they made their weary pilgrimage through this world from birth to death. The poet's function is to lift the veil and let the true light shine here in the darkness. The poet is a revealer. He is a prophet less of God as Law than of God as Beauty and as Love.
To Shelley life was sad because of its limitations and its deprivations. He did not see nor think deeply enough to find for it—as Blake did—a special and limited purpose in the farstretching scheme of things. He spoke of birth

into this world as an “eclipsing curse”. Its delight was
“Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright.”
Living man might escape from its sorrow in his dreams, but from these he must “wake to weep”, and his counsel to one whose heart was filled with high imaginings was
“Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek.”
But if he thus sang dirges over earth-life and cried out that our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought, he did not proclaim that man in his true identity was sad. Earthlife was a little thing, man a great thing. Few have believed more nobly or chanted more enthusiastically the essential dignity of manhood. Man did not belong to this earth-life nor was he bounded by it. It was merely an incident which Shelley did not explain. Man was the heir of infinity, born of “that Light whose smile kindled the universe”; and his destiny, when he attained the consummation of his manhood, was to become a portion of that loveliness which the poet revealed.
Even here below there awaited man a far greater happiness than he yet had found. Life must, he believed, be sad in comparison with the Bliss to be conferred hereafter; but it need not be so sad as it had been made. Shelley was not content to be a visionary. Like both Blake and Wordsworth, he

was intensely interested in the social and political movements of his time. Wordsworth in his youth had strong republican sympathies. His visits to France intensified these, and he took the warmest interest in the progress of the Revolution. So extreme was he that he became a disciple of the radical doctrines of William Godwin, parts of whose subversive work Political Justice he paraphrased in The Prelude. When his extravagant hopes of the Revolution were dashed, he was struck with consternation, and the reaction caused such a change of views that he incurred, as we all know, the censure of Browning. But he never disowned these ideal hopes which he had too confidently connected with the activities of Danton and Robespierre. Shelley’s political convictions were of sterner stuff. He was, and always remained, a fierce opponent of militarism, priest craft, sex-inequality, and all the forms of domination with which he saw the world filled. He believed in the certain betterment of mankind and never ceased to champion it. He foresaw the coming of a new heaven and a new earth and was assured that his vision would in fact and deed be realised on earth at no distant date.
Browning 1 likewise proclaimed the Universe as a spiritual

thing, existing for the purposes of the soul. God is
“one everlasting bliss
From whom all being emanates, all power
Proceeds; in whom is life for evermore.”

1 Robert Browning (1812–1889) was an English poet and playwright whose dramatic monologues put him high among the Victorian poets.

He was one with Wordsworth and Shelley in seeing God’s presence in Nature, but he went beyond them in seeing God revealed yet more fully and more clearly in man.

“Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark
Soars up and up, shivering for very joy;
Afar the ocean sleeps; white fishing gulls
Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe
Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek
Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews
His ancient rapture. Thus He dwells in all,
From life’s minute beginnings, up at last
To man—the consummation of this scheme
Of being, the completion of this sphere Of life …”

He kept always in the closest touch with human life and with the thought of his time. His work throughout is permeated with the idea of development and progress and with the attendant moral questions of success and failure. His sympathies were liberal and democratic. In the third book of Sordello, he tells how he had pledged his art to serve the cause of the people; the race was to be his Muse, and he was to tune his art not to please the taste of the few so much as to serve the needs of the many. The political creed expressed long afterwards in Why I am a Liberal, in 1885, only four years before his death, is the same as that of this early poem. He stood all through his life for the principle of social liberty and of social opportunity. Every man should have the chance to
“live, love,

and labour freely”, and was entitled to favourable conditions under which he could pursue the purpose that God traced for his body and his soul.

Browning expresses a belief in the general development of the human race through the ages. In Cleon he traces the intellectual development from beast to man; in Sordello (Bk. V), he sketches the historical and social development from the time of Charlemagne to that of the hero of the poem. But he is more especially concerned with the progress of the individual human soul, and in his poems on single men and women or on

national life he delights in taking some moment of crisis when the issue is whether the movement shall be forward or (as it may be) backward. He is the poet of the human will and holds that the central business of man's life comes from his power to choose. God has His scheme laid out for the human race, and every individual has a special ideal born of his own nature. But progress towards the ideal needs choice and effort. The human will should be exercised in making the decision and in then vigorously carrying it out, and even should failure be the result, the will should never falter nor faith be lost. Browning went so far as to hold (what Huxley also maintained) that there is more hope for a man who chooses the wrong path and walks in it than for the faint heart who stagnates through refusal to move in any direction whatever.

Browning thought much and wrote much about the problem of evil. He has left not a few unlovely

pictures of human depravity, and the Guido of The Ring and the Book is probably the most mean and miserable villain that appears in any great English poem. But though he thus made himself so familiar with forms of wickedness, he retained always his firm and radiant belief in the overwhelming power of Goodness—he "never doubted clouds would break, never dreamed though right were worsted wrong would triumph." He loves to show that the idea of human progress and growth implies shortcomings and involves effort. A stationary happiness would be no happiness at all; and completeness on earth would leave nothing to hope for and would be merely death. Effort gives life its delight, and where the world laments that there is no rose without a thorn, Browning is glad that "a thorn comes to the aid of and completes the rose." He is not disheartened when he looks at his own life and sees the gap between the actual and his ideal:

"What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me."

The man who caught up with his ideals, who morally and spiritually had nothing more to do, would suffer, to Browning's mind, the most lamentable kind of ennui and boredom. His optimism is, in the last resort, based on his philosophy of life; it is the logical result of a firmly held view of the universe. His intuition gave him the same experience as that which the magic of music gave to

Abt Vogler: it imparted to him a direct, irresistible, rapturous sense of the activity of an Almighty Spirit. He believed always in the over-ruling intelligence and power of God, Whose name was love and Who had His seat in every human heart.

Wherever love was, however distorted and meagre it might be, there lay a hope of the coming of God, and love comes to every heart, even—in the shock of mortal fear—to such a one as Guido. This Divine love, so passionate is its warmth, must melt and overcome all; it will "fill infinitude wholly nor leave up or down one spot for the creature to stand in." And the progress made here on earth will not end here. "No work begun shall ever pause for death." There lie ahead "other heights in other lives" and

"man is hurled
From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled."

Social betterment and the regeneration of the race would be the inevitable outcome of that soul-progress which Browning saw proceeding in the human heart. But he remained always the analyst and poet of the individual. His concern was with the soul: "Little else," he said, "is worth study; and by soul he meant the soul of a single man or woman, not the soul of a nation or of a race or of humanity. Broad changes in the world at large would of necessity follow from the individual changes which he so clearly outlined. But he chose to deal little with these larger consequences

and much with the finer and more subtle inward causes. Tennyson1 did contrariwise. He was interested in outer rather than in inner things; in history and science more than in philosophy and psychology. Though he was like Browning in his faith and his optimism, he was strikingly unlike him in his manner, his temperament, and in the range and province of his thought. He had no sympathy with anything in politics that was revolutionary or radical. And as he was without the crusading moral vigour of Browning, so was he without the searching contemplativeness of Wordsworth or the firewinged enthusiasm of Shelley.

Yet in his own way this precedent-loving and highly nationalistic English gentleman was one of the prophets—and the last of them. He too saw the Invisible. He apprehended "a presence, a motion and a Spirit" which overruled all things. He had his own original angle of vision, and added a new profound thought to those which his poet-brothers had acclaimed. His gaze was turned not so much on the heart of nature, nor on the heart of man, as on the history of the human race. Here it was that he saw evidence of the Divine power, indications of the Divine purpose. The course of world-events, to him, clearly followed a definite Design, was directed by an Over-will, was bent towards a fixed consummation. Shelley had seen this in glimpses, and sung of it in snatches. But Tennyson's mind was

held by it, and in his poems

1 Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) was an English poet.

he gives it a central place. Shelley saw the regeneration of society as an event assured indeed, but sudden and miraculous. Tennyson saw it as the final result of a long and ordered process. It is an idea to him so precious, so beautiful, so vital, that it is never far from his mind, and claims a position of honour in his poetry. It is, in truth, his special and most valuable contribution to that group of thoughts which we call idealism. It stands out in one poem after another: in The Day Dream, The Two Voices, The Golden Year, The Passing of Arthur, The Poet's Song, Locksley Hall.

"Not in vain the distance beckons.
Forward, forward let us range;
Let the great world spin for ever
Down the ringing grooves of change."

And—

"For we are Ancients of the earth,
And in the morning of the times."

Or—

"This fine old world of ours is but a child
Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time
To learn its limbs. There is a Hand that guides."

Merlin summarises history in four zones of symbolic sculpture—in the lowest, beasts are slaying men; in the second, men are slaying beasts,

"And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings."

This evolution takes shape in a world-state,

"When the war-drum throbs no longer and the battleflags are furled
In the Parliament of man, the federation of the world."

And as he had used this idea to close The Princess on a note of hope, so again, at the conclusion of In Memoriam, he resorts to it again to seal the greatest of his poems with the mark of final comfort and assurance.

"… The man that with me trod
This planet was a noble type
Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine who lives in God,
That God which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far off divine event
To which the whole creation moves."

With Tennyson this line of English prophets closed. They

had done their work. They had scattered the doubt and the deism of the eighteenth century. They had exposed the guile, the hypocrisy, the oppression which had poisoned the political and social life of the western nations. They had proclaimed the dignity of man and given a new and truer ideal of manhood. They had seen the Universe as spirit-woven and humanity as the orphaned Child of the Almighty Over-Soul from whose Home was not always to be exiled. One and all they acclaimed love as the clue to Truth, the

answer to all mysteries, the creative and sustaining principle of life, the essence of the nature of God and the trysting place where the spirit of man can meet the Father-Spirit. They bade men look not to the past but to the future. They foretold the regeneration of mankind, the near approach of that Blessedness promised from of old by the Spokesmen of Destiny. They saw drawing near to a negligent and unbelieving world an Era of Justice and Freedom, of Unity and constructive Peace. Tennyson died, and since his time there has been no open vision. The heavens are shut up. Instead of making peace men made a universal war. Nation rose against nation, class against class, children against their parents, wives against their husbands and husbands against their wives. Society was resolved into its constituent atoms and whatever discipline or order had existed was swallowed up in a raging chaos. Hope fell away, and a sense of impotence bred despair. The young took refuge in dissipation, and the old imitated, as best they might, the young. Instead of the progress and development the Prophets foresaw, Time has brought us decadence.

So dark are the portents of the time that the hearts of many thoughtful men fail them for fear. They are tempted to despair of the future, even of human nature. Satire and destructive criticism have become the vogue. But no seer ever despairs. Blake never doubted his inspiration. Shelley dealt with “forms more real than living

man.” To them the realities of this world—water and clay and hunger and thirst and life and death—were realities of impermanence, but the realities of the realm of vision were not subject to dissolution nor decay. They wrote with the assurance of clear sight and certain knowledge. That which they saw, that which they sang, that which filled their souls with joy and empowered them to thrill the hearts of all who “had ears to hear”, was the ancient and everlasting truth. The veritable victory of Him whose smile kindled the Universe, the beating of the sword into a ploughshare, the transmutation of men into sons of God, the appearance of a new heaven and a

new earth, make up an Event which prophets have upheld in more ages than Blake's. But in the present age it is on the eve of accomplishment. The prophet now sees it in greater fullness and shows it forth in greater detail. The spirit which moves him is the same spirit, the vision is the same vision, the rapture which fills him is the same rapture, but now the destined transformation takes shape and outline. The changes that are involved, and the method by which these changes are to be effected and maintained, these now are left no longer indefinite or obscure. The unification of the peoples, the establishment of a world-order and of a central Parliament, the substitution of social justice for force, and the attainment of this universal metamorphosis not by an arbitrary decree but as the climax of an age-long process of race-education and race-development: all this, set

forth of old in ecstatic images by the seers of distant times, is now proclaimed with a new precision and exactitude.

Blake and Shelley sang in the depths of a Stygian darkness. What they said seemed too absurd to be considered. But already—indeed long since—it has begun to happen. East and West have met. The world has become a single country, a single city. The League of Nations has been established. A universal language has been constructed. Universal peace is now the goal of international statesmen. The old hypocrisies have been exposed. The old oppressions discredited. With a determination never known before, universal justice is demanded by all men. Everywhere there is abroad a sense that the troubles of our time are the throes of a great New Birth—that we live in a stage of transition: a great era has definitely passed away and a New Age is in process of creation.

Great reforms take time. Things which are to endure come into being not in a moment but by slow degrees. Reformers need not only vision and energy but also patience. Perseverance was proclaimed at the beginning of our Era as a distinguishing mark of the Master and His followers. Before profound changes can be consummated, large numbers of people must be trained to discard the traditions and prejudices of the past and to accept new ways of thought, new ideals of conduct and of administration. Men of affairs have to

devise means and methods, and men of action to carry them into effect. The question of the day is not whether the evolution so long foretold and now so far advanced is to continue to its destined climax. It is one of less or greater delay. How long will mankind (or its leaders) resist the higher impulses which stir in their hearts and hang back from the

tasks which progress demands of them? Blake saw that before liberty and happiness could be attained by mankind there must be a fierce and bitter warfare, a battle to the death. He sang the battle-song of the Peace of God. His triumphant summons to victory has found its echo to-day in our Irish poetry—“Men yet shall hear The archangels rolling Satan’s empty skull Over the mountain tops”—and is still the song of all who love their kind and believe in God and in His prophets.

“And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England’s mountain green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England’s pleasant pastures seen?
And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills? And was
Jerusalem budded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?
Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant land.”

The language of the Commonwealth

Among the conspicuous achievements and possessions of the English people there is one which is commonly given less than its due of recognition and praise. We hear much of the British Empire, the British Constitution, British Jurisprudence, and the like; but we hear little of the creation of that marvellous instrument of expression, the English language. Not many of those who use it give a thought to the unprecedented variety of the work which it is called upon to do, or of the outstanding position which it has gained for itself among the languages of mankind. Fewer still pause to consider the copiousness of its vocabulary and the flexibility of its forms, or to remember the busy ages of enrichment and refinement that have gone to its making.

A modern language, if it is to meet the increasing requirements of this complex life of ours, must be a highly elastic and expansive thing. There is no language which has been put to so severe a test as English, nor is there any which has stood up to its work more stoutly or more successfully. The broad and evident facts of English literature—or, to be more exact, of the many literatures

written all in the speech of England—are enough to show this resourcefulness and virility. Indeed, they set it off in high relief. What might one not say in praise of the adaptability of a language when one finds that it meets the needs, not only of law, commerce, and science, but also that in its higher moods it suits alike the pedestrian prose of Defoe and Swift on the one hand, and the mystical verse of Blake and Shelley on the other; that in the paragraphs of Pater1 it can pace with imperturbable slowness, or at the call of a Swinburne can race at headlong speed in torrential lyrics; that in the hands of a Tennyson or a Charles Lamb it has the lightness and delicacy of a fairy or an elf, and now can roll with sonorous rhythm in the learned pages of Milton or of Gibbon? Yet this is not the whole of the various achievements of the English language. Throughout the nations of the British Commonwealth English is the vernacular. Each of the great white colonies has its own outlook, but all are able to find full self-expression in the tongue of their motherland. The romantic history of Scotland and its people—its clans and princes, its highlanders and gipsies, its lawyers, shepherds, ministers, and the rest—has been immortalised in English; and in, the person of Burns the Scotch have given to letters the most truly loved of all the poets who have used the English tongue. The Irish have accomplished a yet more remarkable feat. They have shown (through the works of men like Burke, Goldsmith, Moore, Yeats, and Russell) how a language shared

1 Walter Horatio Pater (1839–1894) was an English essayist, art and literary critic, and fiction writer.

with England and the colonies can be tuned to express a temperament original, distinctive, and in many ways dissimilar. Further yet from the centre stand those recent writers of Indian blood—such as Rabindranath Tagore—whose subtle, exquisite and imaginative work represents a culture unlike any found in the Occident.

No language of the present or the past, neither Latin in the Middle Ages, nor Greek at the beginning of our era, nor any lingua franca of any known age, ever ranged so far as this tongue, the use of which extends throughout an Empire on which the sun never sets.

But the use of English is not confined to the British Commonwealth. It has been inherited by the United States, and is the adopted language of all the diverse nationalities that make up the cosmopolitan population of that country. When the London paradox-maker, on his arrival in New York, said: “I

find we have everything in common with the Americans, except, of course, language," he hit the obverse of the truth fairly in the centre. Americans learn the classic use of the language from England. They accept as the standard of taste and correctness the forms preferred in England. Yet American literature is no mere variation of an old tune. It has developed a native quality and a national distinction, and in the three fields of form, of substance, and of spirit, it has made a definite contribution of its own to the common stock of English literature. In form, it has elaborated the short story, the

cult of which began with Edgar Allan Poe and Hawthorne, and has been passed on through many typical and popular writers to O. Henry1 and to others of our time. In substance, it has added to the great characters of world-fiction a new and strikingly romantic figure in the Red Indian of the Leatherstocking Tales. James Fenimore Cooper's five romances—The Pioneers, The Prairie, The Last of the Mohicans, The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer—unite in giving an idealised portrait of Chingachgook, the Red Man, as well as of the backwoodsman, Hawkeye. The account of the daily life of Indian huntsmen and the vivid descriptions of wood, lake, and prairie form a unique and memorable picture of human conditions and natural scenes which have long since passed away, and the portrait of Chingachgook has made a deeper impression on the popular imagination of Europe than any other feature of American fiction.

Yet the most vital and valuable distinction of the literature of the States lies in that spirit of idealism which, with so strong and constant a power, shines in the pages of those writers whom America honours as typical exponents of her genius. The work—in prose or verse—of Emerson, Whitman, Longfellow, Lanier, Whittier, and Hawthorne runs through many moods; but if there be one noble trait which in each and all stands out more boldly it is this idealistic attitude of mind. The note which is heard in Emerson's2 exalted love poem beginning "Give all for love" and closing with the lines:

1 William Sydney Porter (1862–1910), better known by his pen name O. Henry, was an American writer known primarily for his short stories, though he also wrote poetry and non-fiction.

2 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), who went by his middle name Waldo, was an American essayist, lecturer, philosopher, minister, abolitionist.

"Though thou loved her as, thyself,
As a self of purer clay,

Though her parting dims the day,
Stealing grace from all alive;
Heartily know, when half-gods go
The gods arrive":
the note which is heard again in Whitman's Pioneers:1
"All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied
world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize,
World of labour and the march,
Pioneers, O Pioneers!"
—which is heard in the more familiar lines of Excelsior, or of
the Battle Hymn of the Republic:2
"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the
Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of
wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fatal lightning of His terrible swift
sword:
His truth is marching on."
This is the distinctive note of the great American writers.
On this theme of practical idealism they have made their
highest contribution to English literature, and for this as well
as for their national uses they have made the language of the
English serve their purpose.
Here, then, are seven of the nations which have severally
signed as States Members of the League, with America in
addition to make the eighth—

Walter Whitman Jr. (1819–1892) was an American poet, essayist, and journalist.

2 Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910) was an American author and poet, known for writing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" as new lyrics to the song "John Brown's Body".

people of distant climes and different character, representing
more than one religion and one race and, indeed, united into
one whole by little else than this sole bond of a common
speech—all using for literary purposes the English language
and combining to make "English literature" the most
cosmopolitan of literary creations.
But the labours of the English language are by no means
finished when it has served the imaginative purposes of such
diverse lands. A hundred other needs, those, for example, of
the forum and the home, of the laboratory and the market, of
engineers and inventors and the heterogeneous army of all
manner of specialists, have also to be met. No such tax was

ever laid upon human speech in ancient times.
The great modern languages have only been able to meet the exactions of a new environment by refining their machinery and increasing their resources. They have enlarged their vocabularies. They have invented new grammatical forms. They have sought simplicity and accuracy of expression by every means which intelligence can suggest. In all this progress English has proved one of the most enterprising of languages, and many scholars regard it to-day as being the most advanced and efficient of European languages. No other known tongue has in it so many words: the Oxford English Dictionary—apart from any supplement—catalogues four hundred thousand. In order to give the meaning, source, and history of these, 178 miles of

type and half a million quotations are needed. The work fills ten imperial quarto volumes, and cost its promoters more than thirty-five thousand pounds. The story of these words is itself a compendium of the development of the English people, and is as picturesque as any historical romance. Here in this vast vocabulary are represented remote lands and savage tribes, strange and long-disused pursuits, events small and great, national or personal, stretching continuously back across millenniums to a date before the first forbears of the Anglo-Saxon race entered the continent of Europe.
The study of its words—or even of a single word like, say, ‘ginger’, or ‘silk’, or ‘almanac’—will start an enquirer upon an exploration as fascinating as that of an excavator who digs up a buried city from which our civilisation sprang.
‘Calico’, for example, is taken from the name ‘Calicut’; ‘banana’ and ‘negro’ are African words; ‘bamboo’, ‘gong’, ‘cockatoo’ come from Malay; ‘chocolate’, ‘cocoa’, ‘tomato’, are Mexican; ‘hurricane’, ‘hammock’, ‘maize’, ‘savannah’, are Caribbean; ‘dervish’ is Persian; ‘magazine’, ‘coffee’, and ‘harem’,
Arabian. From Peru has travelled the word ‘guano’; from the island of Haiti, ‘canoe’, ‘tobacco’, and ‘potato’. The Red Indians have given us ‘hickory’, ‘tomahawk’, ‘moccasin’, and ‘opossum’. Such words as these have been brought to us in modern times by sailors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Other words came to us overland from the East, like ‘alcohol’, ‘amber,’

‘alkali’, ‘camphor’, ‘cipher’, ‘algebra’, from Arabia. The Greeks
borrowed ‘pearl’ and ‘sapphire’ from the Orient; the Orient borrowed from the Greek ‘alchemy’ and ‘alembic’; and each passed its borrowing on to us. The Crusades were the means of

bringing to the West scores of Eastern words—‘cotton’ and ‘sugar’ and ‘azure’ and ‘saffron’ and ‘damask’ (from Damascus) and ‘lute’ and ‘mattress’ and so on. ‘Assassin’ meant originally ‘eaters of hashish’, and was applied by the Crusaders to Moslem murderers who were sent out to kill the Christian leaders and who used to intoxicate themselves with hashish before they started on their errand. Far back in ages antedating the Crusades the word ‘silk’ was brought from China, ‘ginger’ from the Sanskrit, ‘pepper’ and ‘orange’ and the names ‘India’ and ‘Saracen’ from remote sources in the East.

Most of the events of English history have left their mark upon the language. ‘Cannibal’ and ‘canoe’ were brought back by Christopher Columbus; ‘tattoo’ and ‘kangaroo’ by Captain Cook. The Reformation introduced ‘sincere’, ‘evangelical’, ‘Protestant’, ‘dunce’, ‘faction’, ‘precise’, ‘Puritan’, and gave new meanings to ‘religion’, ‘godly’, and ‘piety’. To the Renaissance we owe ‘Arcadian’, ‘enthusiasm’, ‘Hesperian’, ‘Elysian’ and many other words drawn direct from the classics.

Those words which form the core and heart of the language date back far beyond any known events of history. They go back to a time before

the ancestors of the Germans and English and Dutch and Scandinavians had separated and while they still spoke a common language: back yet further to a still more distant age when all the European peoples (Celts and Latins, Slays, Teutons, and Greeks) lived together; back ultimately to a period out-dating Babel, when the Hindus and Persians and the peoples who now inhabit Europe shared a single primitive language, and a single civilisation.

Those distant ancestors whom we have in common with so many now sundered peoples, lived somewhat as the patriarchs of the Old Testament lived, and had words to cover all they knew of nature and human life: such words as ‘night’ and ‘star’, ‘dew’ and ‘snow’, ‘wind’ and ‘thunder’, ‘father’ and ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ and ‘sister’, ‘hound’ and ‘ox’, and ‘wheel’ and ‘axle’, and ‘door’ and ‘thatch’. These primeval words, and a few dozen more of the same simplicity, have come down through all the unrecorded changes of time to this present day and hour. They form still part of the common vocabulary of many nations of the East and the West. And their presence in the vernacular of peoples now divided bears witness to the closeness of a kinship which for long lay neglected and forgotten.

This continual expansion of our vocabulary has often

roused misgivings in the minds of scholars and of purists. It has not always been so managed—especially in recent years—as to be an unmixed

advantage. Samuel Johnson once remarked that if we did not stop borrowing Gallicisms, English would soon become a dialect of French. We have continued to borrow even to this day; but English remains English and retains its distinctive force and directness. The influence of America, rather than France, is at present under suspicion; yet the working day vernacular will not be the poorer if we take to ourselves such expressions as ‘fix up’, ‘back number’, ‘standpoint’, or ‘anyway’.

And it is, surely, no disservice to have preserved the good word ‘fall’ in the place of ‘autumn’, or to have brought into use such words as ‘antagonise’ in the sense of ‘rouse the hostility of’, and ‘placate’.

Ireland (without exciting alarm or comment) has produced—as some of Yeats’ and Lady Gregory’s writing will prove—a distinct species of prose with an idiom of its own, and has contributed more original words than any other colony or than the United States. Most of these words are unimportant: ‘hubbub’, ‘bother’, ‘blarney’, ‘shamrock’, ‘boycott’, for instance.

But there is one of real interest and significance: ‘cross’. The native word in England for cross was ‘rood’, which we remember in Shakespeare’s “no, by the rood”, and in “roodbeam”. But the Irish Christians formed ‘cross’ from the Latin crux, and, in their missionary work throughout Northern England, introduced it into the northern dialects, from which, in time, it made its way into literary use.

Errors in word-formation have, too, called forth

1 Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) was an English writer who made lasting contributions as a poet, playwright, essayist, moralist, literary critic, sermonist, biographer, editor, and lexicographer.

protests from those jealous for the purity of our English speech. Macaulay objected to ‘constituency’ and to ‘influential’; Coleridge and Carlyle to ‘talented’. ‘Cab’, ‘mob’, and ‘van’ were

once looked on as vulgar and slangy. A generation or so ago loud protests were made against ‘reliable’ on the ground that it should be ‘reli-on-able’, and against ‘telegram’, which ought to be ‘tele-grapheme’. ‘Bus’ is not always looked on yet as legitimate, and lately we have had crusades against ‘automobile’ and ‘scientist’. But usage rules and over-rules in

these matters, and the efforts of scholars to maintain the purity and correctness of the language have availed little.

The additions made during the last century, and especially during the last generation, have not been such as to rejoice the heart of the poet or to lend themselves to the use of the stylist. They have contributed nothing to the aesthetic quality of the language, and have, in fact, rendered it less euphonious than the "English undefiled" of an earlier day.

The number of these additions is enormous. Webster's original Dictionary, published in 1828, contained less than eighty thousand words. The Oxford Dictionary has more than five times as many, and since it began publication, in 1881, hundreds, and even thousands of words have been added. Some idea of this growth may be gathered from a statement made by the Editor of the Supplement to the Dictionary:

"It might be supposed that for the letter 'A' there was little to add beyond aeroplane' and 'appendicitis', and perhaps 'automobile' and 'aviation'; and the thirty pages (already in type) of additions under the first letter of the alphabet will, I think, surprise any who are not in the habit of observing the almost daily accretions to the English vocabulary. 'A' begins with 'aasvogel', which is supported by references to Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling, and ends with 'azygospore', botanical term now, it is true, rarely used, but which must be recorded for completeness' sake.1 These are the alphabetical termini of a multitude of common colloquialisms, of technicalities that have become public currency, of the labels of discoveries and inventions, of the names of exotic plants and garments, of religious, political, and social movements, of terms of sport and of the new psychology and so on. There are, for instance: to put or get it across, auto-suggestion, autopiano, auto-erotism, autogiro, accent in art, to go all out, apperception, the all-red line, Agapemone, apache, adenoids, aspidistra, acrobatic, alpha rays, drug addict, air-bath, airworthy, adurol, Ashkenazim, Anglicist, Anglophobiac, angels on horseback, the spiritistic apport, and accelerometer.

And some words or meanings must be marked obsolete even in this supplement of modernisms; as, for example, the older sense of 'aerodrome', now expressed by 'aeroplane', and the original sense of 'aeroplane', which was plane or wing; and 'animatograph', one

1 For the sake of completeness.

of the early names of the cinema, is as dead as Queen Anne."

The words quoted here may be taken as typical of the accretions which to-day are growing about our English tongue. Nobody could say they were pleasing to the ear or to the eye. They are not suited for literary or aesthetic purposes but are blankly utilitarian. They illustrate the undoubted fact (now recognised more generally than ever before) that the development of a language through the influence of circumstance has its drawbacks and its dangers. The result may be at times to mutilate and to debase rather than to improve. If the intelligentsia could exercise more control than in the past they might in a degree prevent deterioration and increase effectiveness. Recent study of the processes of thought and of speech has indeed suggested that science may do more for a language than our forefathers knew or than conservative scholars to-day are ready to admit. An organised effort is actually on foot to create a new world-language and to do more thoroughly by the cooperation of many minds what was done in Esperanto by that genius Dr Zamenhof.1 If, it is argued, the direction of scientific methods to a definite purpose has accomplished so much in other realms, may it not do likewise in the matter of language? May not knowledge and constructive thought accomplish in this field something more than chance and the hazards of national growth have ever yet done? May not experts build a means of

1 L. L. Zamenhof (1859–1917) was the creator of Esperanto, the most widely used constructed international auxiliary language.

communication more simple, economical, and possibly more beautiful than any of our inherited forms of speech? We have learned that the general structure of the Indo-European languages is superior to that of the Mongolian, and we are apt to assume that no better design than this is within man's reach. But the structure of some of the Red Indian languages is now reported as fundamentally different from both the Mongolian and the Aryan type, and as being in some respects more economical than either. Scholars may yet succeed in combining these types or perhaps in devising a new type better than them all. What happened with numerals in Europe many centuries ago may now happen again—but this time with words. The ancient Romans could not do long division and thought of it much as we now think of the unpictureable ultimates of contemporary physics and mathematics. It seemed to them abstruse and intrinsically difficult. But when from the East the Arabians brought to Europe the system of figures known to this

day by their name, it was discovered that the crux of the problem lay not in the sum itself but in the inadequacy of the tools for doing it. The calculation itself proved to be so easy that school-children could master it. If the analogy hold good, science may yet cap the evolution of human speech by creating a synthetic language which will enable future generations, relieved of the handicap of defective tools of thought, to pursue

with ease ideas and mental processes that seem to us to-day most difficult.

But the growth of a language is one of those things which have never yet been in the hands of the intelligentsia nor of the few, which are not planned nor guided by any forethought, and which draw to themselves little immediate notice or observation. The appearance of a great classic like the Authorised Version, or the Works of Shakespeare, will help to stabilise the vocabulary: to this day there is a working convention among poets that a word used by Shakespeare is legitimate, not out of date. The power of an outstanding author, like Shelley, may introduce and popularise a new word. But language has no Lycurgus and no Napoleon. It is the creation of the people. It develops; but nobody can quite tell how. It increases its range and its efficiency, not by the conscious direction of one man or of the many, but in obedience to some active and controlling instinct.

When a development has taken shape, it then becomes an object for the expert to scrutinise and judge; and, looking back, one may clearly discover the means by which that development was brought into being. All modern languages are moving along the same path. They are, by degrees, abandoning the baldness and complexity which mark primitive speech for an ever greater fullness and simplicity. French, German, Italian, Spanish and all the greater languages have travelled far along this path, but none has travelled so far as English. All modern

languages, for example, are learning to express meaning by the easy method of word-order rather than by that of changing the form of words. But English has carried this further than any other. We know how convenient it is to use a noun as an adjective, as in ‘war expenditure’, ‘waste-paper basket’, ‘Covent-Garden Market’, or ‘Covent-Garden Market salesman’; or to put the sign of the possessive after a whole phrase, like ‘the King of the Cannibal Islands’ ‘appetite’. But these are liberties which only users of the English language can take. Grammatical gender is a barbarous and irrational convention which attributes sex to sexless objects and often the wrong gender to

living objects. It is still retained by all the other well-known languages of Europe, and has been abandoned by English alone. To a greater extent than any other nation we have discarded many grammatical forms, have given up inflexions of nouns and verbs, using (instead of cases and tenses) prepositions and auxiliaries.

This modern recourse to prepositions may, of course, be overdone. The Society for Pure English is on the watch against the misuse of this, as against the misuse of other innovations. Some time ago they published the following dialogue as a warning:—

"Child: I want to be read to.

Nurse: What book do you want to be read to out of?

Child: Robinson Crusoe.

(Nurse goes out and returns with The Swiss Family Robinson).

Child: What did you bring me that book to be read to out of from for?"

An excellent reductio ad absurdum.1 But the device caricatured is, nevertheless, one of the most ingenious and effective improvements in our language. More and more we succeed in expressing each separate thought by a separate word, and so lead other nations in achieving that exactness of language which is the product of a high civilisation.

Thus, in its progressiveness and adaptability, in its range, its richness, and the perfection of its mechanism, English stands second to none among the most highly developed of modern languages.

Its unsurpassed, and perhaps unequalled, efficiency is the result of ages of constant enrichment and refinement. Its lifehistory leads back through the great national and international movements of modern and mediaeval times to a date beyond the beginnings of Western civilisation. And though its romantic story and its present power are too little recognised, it stands clearly out pre-eminent and alone as being both the most ancient heritage of the British people and also one of their most consummate modern achievements.

1 Reductio ad absurdum ("reduction to the absurd") is a mode of argumentation that seeks to establish a contention by deriving an absurdity from its denial, thus arguing that a thesis must be accepted because its rejection would be untenable. It is a style of reasoning that has been employed throughout the history of mathematics and philosophy from classical antiquity onwards.

The beauty of Ireland

In such summer days as these1 a citizen is tempted to seek

freedom from the confinement of the streets, to leave their noise and smoke, their fever and their fret and, in the fragrant open spaces of the country, to enjoy again for a time those natural blessings of which an ever-increasing proportion of mankind have elected to deprive themselves. Here, amid rural scenes, he is moved to those childlike but profound reflections which from time immemorial nature has prompted in the heart of man. He wonders at the strange and deathless power which, though unseen itself, takes form in so prodigal a profusion of beauty, finding a mirror in the least as in the greatest, in the wild flower as in the mountain, and spreading like shapes of loveliness over plains and seas and continents that lie out of view the world around! He wonders at the charm of nature which, though as ancient as the first man himself, still holds in full measure its primeval freshness, and pours upon all for ever its eternal magic and eternal youth. With relief he yields up his heart to this all-involving and inviolate peace which summons into

1 This Essay was published serially in summer time.

fellowship with itself everyone who contemplates a natural scene, and reveals to his vision the serene omnipotence of an ever-reigning law, an ever-moving life.

As he watches and reflects, another and less happy thought invades his mind. How alien, how unworthy of an earth so lovely and so majestic are the cities which man, with such pride, has been building for himself! How dark, unwholesome, and how pitiful seem these elaborate and labyrinthine prisons in which man has chosen to manacle his spirit! As modernity grows more intense, more sophisticated, the cities that men rear grow further and further from all that is exquisite, glorious, and uplifting in Nature. Has not city-building man misused an opportunity? Cannot a city be a city without being what these modern cities have become? Are these cities really fit to be called cities—are they not tragic caricatures, prodigious monuments of misapplied ingenuity and skill? In order to be a centre of human activity, must a city have these crowded and raging streets, these rattling tunnels, these dizzy piles of masonry that shut out so much light and air and often outsoar both the steeple and the stork? When a man goes back into the city, must he leave utterly behind him this sweetness and this peace, forget it, deny it, and pass into another and an alien sphere sealed against all communion with Nature and her eternities?

What fairer, happier, worthier cities might not man create in this resourceful age, if only he were

not content to accept as wholly true the adage that God made the country and manmade the town. The city has its own peculiar genius, and the country has its own; but, though the two are different, and in contrast, they are not in reality (whatever man may have made of them) repugnant to each other, nor in any degree alien. On the contrary, they are complementary. For completeness the positive charge of electricity needs the negative, the man needs the woman, the West needs the East; and the city, likewise, needs its older brother, the country. Both are necessary for the full well-being of the human race. Both spring from God. He made one and ordained the other. He presented man with the country as a gift, and taught him how to create the city.

Of course, the two can be set in opposition and in direct antagonism to each other. Men can make of a city what they please, using the opportunity divinely, indifferently, or infernally. The same book that pictures the ideal consummation of human attainment under the symbol of a heavenly city, likens hell also to a city in the gates of which Satan and his chiefs take counsel and from which they lead forth their legions in vain campaigns against the soldiers of the Most High God. How valiantly has man gone to work to make the city, in its appearance, its character, and in its influence on the soul and spirit, as unlike the country as may be!

In those cities which are most typically and

boastfully modern this unlikeness and opposition is seen at its extreme. The cleavage between city and country grows deeper; the gulf grows wider. Man grows more and more sophisticated. He moves further and further from Nature. And the ultramodern cities he likes to build reflect his attitude of mind. In

Ireland, we are comparatively fortunate. We do not here see the modern city to disadvantage. Most of our large towns are exceptionally well situated. They have the sea on one side, and on the other mountains, loughs, and woods. What position could be better than that of our capital, and how admirably it is provided with parks and open spaces. We have no town yet that could be called excessive in size. We have no town of which we need say what a parish clergyman in England sadly said some time ago: “For a poor man, the quickest road out of Manchester is through the public house.” From the heart of our largest city, a man, by tram or bicycle, may, with a little effort, soon reach green fields or sandy shore.

But look at the chief centres of population in larger countries. How long will one spend, even with the help of train or motor-car, in getting out of, say, London or New York, or

Chicago? Extensive as are such modern cities, how inconveniently and dangerously overcrowded are they, one and all. Movement in them grows more difficult and more slow, and yet their streets, as an English judge remarked the other day, are “only for the quick

and the dead”. In the houses people are packed almost as closely as on the streets. London is the financial centre of the world and the focus of all the material sources of a vast Empire. Yet in London there are six hundred and thirty thousand persons living in slums where the poverty and squalor are extreme. In these slums vermin share with human beings many of the dwellings, and Mr Galsworthy has told the story of how, in a certain tenement, hungry rats ate off the foot of a living baby.1 The supply of light and air is, in a modern town, inadequate; virtually no individual receives the proper amount—not even among the well-to-do, let alone the poor. To reduce the available supply yet further, there is added the smoke-nuisance. Measurements have shown (the figures are almost incredible) that in the English metropolis two hundred and fifty tons of soot fall every year on every square mile. Yet the atmosphere of London is comparatively clear. The deposit in other centres is far greater—three, four, five hundred tons to the square mile, and in one city of the midlands, Burslem, six hundred tons. If, under such conditions, pulmonary complaints are common, who will be surprised!

In spite of such disadvantages (which tend to increase rather than to abate) people pour in larger and larger flocks into the cities. The countryside is denuded of its most energetic and ambitious children. From the rural parts of Ireland young men and maidens drift away, some

1 John Galsworthy (1867–1933) was a novelist and a social reformer. This “story” does not occur in his works and is a later hearsay in Victorian/Edwardian “slum horror” literature.

going East, and some going West; but whether it be to Glasgow or to Philadelphia, their goal is always a large city.

The movement of these young folk is typical of the modern attitude of mind. The ultra-modern man has his back to the country, his face to the city. He magnifies the city and regards it as the focus of all that he covets as most desirable. The country, to him, stands lower in the scale of evolution. He even regards it as a brake upon the advancement of mankind. “Human progress in historical time,” writes a scientist, “has been the progress of cities dragging a reluctant countryside in their wake.”

A civilisation which ignores the life and outlook of the country and reflects distinctively the traits and conditions of the town must needs be partial and one-sided; and when the towns are so far from satisfactory as ours, the impoverishment of civilisation is the greater and the more marked. The true civilisation towards which by the grace of Heaven we are moving will not be based on this manufactured antagonism, but on a natural alliance. It will recognise that for the spirit, the mind and the body of man the country has its uses as well as the city. It will not desire to exalt one at the expense of the other, but letting each develop towards perfection in its own way, will draw its own character from the wealth of both. This consummation, though it may now be hidden from our eyes, surely is an obvious ideal.

some day—perhaps not a distant day—it will be accomplished. This magnification of all that is urban and belittlement of all that is rural cannot continue much longer. The disadvantages of the modern city tend to increase, and are found less and less tolerable. The modern city-builder has overreached himself. The by-products and the direct products of an ever-intensified congestion grow more numerous and more difficult to cope with. When one sees a city stretching north, south, east, and west further than the eye can reach, towering far into the polluted air, and delving deep into the over-loaded earth; when one reads of subsidence of ancient structures, of bursting mains that pour forth floods of water or of flaming gas, one wonders whether it was man only that made such a town, and whether the devil too had not a hand in the work.

Meantime the advantages of country life grow, year by year, greater. Deprivations are removed. Comforts, pleasures, refinements increase. Thanks to the inventor and the engineer, the village, the farm, the country house are no longer isolated. Loneliness and monotony have been dispelled. Locomotion has become swift and cheap. Culture is decentralised. Whatever civilisation has to offer is now more evenly distributed throughout the length and breadth of the land than at any past time in history. The newspaper, the motor, and the radio have revolutionised country life, and, while

taking away little, have added new wealth to its old wealth. However artificial man may become, and however far selfglorification may lead him from the natural blessings which are his birth right, the blunt and simple facts of life will, sooner or later, assert themselves. How diverse, rich, and indispensable to happiness are the gifts and graces of the countryside! The whole of man’s being, material and spiritual, draws sustenance

from it. Man, as we have heard, is a parasite on the cow. Civilisation is built upon the farm. The millennium is not only to break the sword, but to beat it into a ploughshare. Science may develop synthetic food, and mankind elect to feast on tabloids; but there will be no getting away from the human need of fruit and grains and stock. The farmer is the most necessary of citizens, and will remain so. We would do ill without bankers and lawyers, musicians and poets; but that these may exist, we must first have someone to sow and to reap, to herd and to shear.

The country is the foster-mother of the city, and in the countryside many of the chief sources of man's normal and rightful happiness are still to be sought. Here man takes his fill of pure light and clean air and natural exercise. Here he has for his neighbours animals and green growing things, enjoys the fragrance of field and garden, and the sound of streams and rustling leaves, and can look out over open spaces that rest his eyes and soothe his mind. To be deprived of these simple blessings—as those con-

fined in dungeons are—has always been considered a signal misfortune. Yet in the modern great city this deprivation is a condition from which many escape but little, and from which multitudes of the poor never escape at all.

Man's love for the country has not been acquired like his love for the city, but is immemorial and inborn. He has looked upon the country through the ages as his natural home, his refuge and his temple. Here more than elsewhere he has found solace, content and inspiration. Why should I give my Sabine farm in exchange for wealth and its cares? asked a great poet long ago; and he ascribed his distinction in Aeolian song to the peace and beauty of "the streams that flow by fruitful Tivoli and the close foliage of the groves." How many who were poets, and who were not poets, have, since the time of Horace, felt and repeated the same sentiment, and how many great works in verse, and other arts as well, have owed their being to the same love for Nature.

For Nature is man's treasure-house and playground. More than that, she is not only kind, but kin to him. She is a sistercreature made like him, out of the self-same dust, and subject to like laws. Her wealth is boundless, and she withholds nothing from him. Rich in all manner of delights, she has pleasures for all his senses. Her storehouse of odours is boundless, and all its wealth is bestowed prodigally in endless variety. She hangs on every side about him meadowsweet or honey-

suckle, over his head lilac and lime-blossom, at his feet violet, primrose, mignonette. Every degree of odour is hers to be lavished away, from the strong scent of syringa,1 almost too powerful to endure indoors, to the faint perfume of clover and wild thyme. Now she distils her odours from a single bush or a single bloom, now pours them forth from tracts of gorse or fields of new-mown hay in rivers that flood the air with sweetness. And when at night many flowers close and sleep, she has her flowers of the dark that cast out upon the still air the perfume they withheld during the day.

For the eye Nature has delights as many and as various. To walk anywhere among the trees is to have spread before one in endless profusion a feast of shape and of colour. Some of the leaves are as broad as a man's hand, others almost as fine as a lady's needle. All are green, but sometimes the green (as in the early beech) verges on yellow, and sometimes on purple, as in the pine; and even the surface of the leaves is never in two trees quite the same, but shows every kind of gradation, from the deepest grain to the utmost smoothness, from dullness to the brilliance of a mirror shining in the sun. Some leaves are hung so numerous and so close that (as on the chestnut) they seem to hide the boughs almost altogether; others seem now to hide, now to reveal, or like the birch-leaves, by their airiness and their contrasting hues, set off the long lines of the tree on which they grow. And when the wind passes through them they break

1 Syringa is a genus of 12 currently recognized species of flowering woody plants in the olive family, or Oleaceae, called lilacs.

—now here, now there, now all at once—into a tumultuous dance which, though to the last degree unruly and capricious, is always rhythmical and always a dance of joy.

The sound of the wind, in breeze or in a storm, has its own power to lull or to exhilarate, and joins with those other innumerable sounds of sea or stream or flying thing to give variety and completeness to the beauty of the world. The bees that hum among the heather, the lark in the high air, the mountain torrent or the great waves that thunder on the cliffs, all have their message to the human heart as well as to the ear. Our greatest Nature poet attributed to Nature's music an exquisite and special influence—an influence even greater than that of her other forms of beauty—when he told how Nature took Lucy to be her own child and ordained that—

"The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see,

Even in the motions of the storm,
Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
By silent sympathy."
He closed with the final and highest gift of Nature to the child—
"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."1

1 Verse nos 4 & 5 [no. 5 has been corrected] of William Wordsworth's poem "Three years She Grew".

When Nature lays by all her instruments of music, and when all her choir animate and inanimate are hushed, then does the pause, the cessation of sound, seem to uplift the soul, and the stillness of the open sea, the silence of the starry sky breathe upon man the sense of infinitude and peace.

Nor is there in the simple love for Nature and in the study of her ways any disillusion or satiety. Here familiarity increases delight and understanding. The wonders of the natural world are inexhaustible. If Nature were not a growing, ever-changing thing, but stationary, like a painted ship upon a painted ocean, even then the art of man could no more imitate the exquisite detail and delicacy of her minute workmanship than it can rival the vastness of the heavens which she stretches above his head. But Nature is always moving, never at rest, and none appreciates this so well as he who accepts her invitation to observe and study the life of her and her children.

The lowly world of bird and insect, of tree and flower, is never eventless, never unable to repay attention. Every season, every month, there is something special to be seen and noted, and every day is a link in that moving chain of growth and decay. The return of the migrants—chiff-chaff, corncrake, cuckoo; the springing of snowdrop, crocus, daffodil; the first unfolding of the leaves; the flowering of lilac and gorse, of hawthorn and chestnut; or the ripening of the wild grasses in

later summer—these are part of that gorgeous procession which the Nature-lover knows so well and watches with a delight that is always fresh and always satisfying. To the pleasures of realisation he is able to add those of memory. He is on the look-out for something—a bird, a song, a blossom—which he expects to appear, and recalls from the past some scene or date to give a contrast or a likeness to the present.

Those who live habitually with Nature, who work with her and become her partners in the production of grain or fruit or flowers, are able to draw near to her and to attain an intimacy and sense of kinship which is specially their own. Not only for the appetites and the nerves of her fellow-labourers, but even for their minds, she has simple gifts to bestow. The very handling of clay, the digging in the raw earth, is soothing, magnetic. Country people who earn their living in the fields and from babyhood to age, like their fathers before them, have a practical knowledge of the ways of bird and beast and the things that grow on the farm or in the forest; these people are able to speak of natural objects with a directness and a force that more sophisticated beings lose. Wordsworth felt this, and for this reason deliberately chose the peasant-class for the themes of his poetry. In Burns,1 or occasionally in a rural poet of Ireland like Padraic Colum,2 or Campbell3 in his younger days, something of this simple and realistic talk

1 Robert Burns (1759–1796) was a Scottish poet and lyricist.
2 Padraic Colum (1881–1972) was an Irish poet, novelist, dramatist, biographer, playwright, children's author and collector of folklore.
3 Joseph Campbell (1879–1944) was an Irish poet and lyricist.

passes over into the printed page. But as a rule and almost entirely it belongs to the son of the soil.

This love of man for Nature (so rich is she in beauty) is infinitely various, and responds to a thousand differing charms—some evident, some subtle, some purely sensuous, some in part ideal. So many are her aspects that a single human mind could hardly appreciate them all; nor, if it did, would it delight in them all equally. The pleasure that men take in scenery reflects one's mood of temperament, or (it may be) the taste and character not only of oneself, but of one's Nation, or one's Age. Some like best luxuriant growth and a quantity of exquisite detail; others prefer wide empty spaces; others wild mountains and rocky shores. Some must needs have a lake, a fountain, or a stream to make a scene quite satisfying to them—perhaps Wordsworth was such a one, and certainly Theocritus; some (like Spenser) must have birds to sing, or floating clouds. But such preferences are not merely capricious and personal. Sensitiveness to the beauty of the country is—like Nature herself—a living, growing thing. It may be encouraged, strengthened, refined; it can, too, be numbed or stunted. The history of our Western literature shows, during the last two or three thousand years, a slowly changing and deepening appreciation of Nature's manifold and inexhaustible attractions.

Mr Mackail, in the preface to his Anthology,1 says that it was in the third century before Christ that the

1 John William Mackail (1859–1945) was a Scottish academic of Oxford University and reformer of the British education system. Select Epigrams From The Greek Anthology (1890).

charm of the country was for the first time fully realised. Many years before this, Aeschylus had put into a single unmatched phrase all the beauty of the quiet sea shining in the sunlight, and had painted in language of befitting power the titanic world of rocks and Alpine heights, of storms and lightning and echoing thunder. Sophocles had sung of woods so thick the sun-rays could not enter, and of green coverts where the trilling nightingale hid among the dark-brown ivy. Aristophanes, with an accuracy which Ruskin noted, had described the clouds as seen on the hillside " coming softly through the hollows and the thickets, trailing aslant in multitudes." But passages such as these were rare, and were introduced, not for the sake of Nature's own loveliness, but in reference—through some sympathy or contrast—to human emotion or to a dramatic situation. It was not till a later day that men grew really conscious, as we moderns are, of the charm of the country. Writing of the third and second century BCE, Mr Mackail says: "In revulsion from the immense accumulation of material wealth in this period, a certain refined simplicity was then the ideal of the best minds, as it was afterwards in the early Roman. Empire, as it is in our own day …. The life of gardens became a passion, and hardly less so the life of the opener air, of the hill, and meadow, of the shepherd or hunter, the farmer and the fisherman. Sick of cities, the imagination turned to an Arcadia that henceforth was to fill all poetry with the music of

its names." This fresh original delight in the countryside has entered directly into our modern literature through the idylls of Theocritus, which deeply influenced the art of the pastoral poets of the Renaissance and of Tennyson. He loved to paint a landscape seen under the noonday heat as his shepherds reclined in the shade of oak tree or of pine where the firneedles strewed the ground or where the ferns made a "couch more soft than sleep". Or he would paint the beginnings of the hillside where the olive-gardens end and the short grass of the heights alternates with thorns and aromatic plants, and runnels flow from the fountains of the Nereids, or wells fringed with maidenhair bubble from the rocks.

The Roman's love for the country has not, perhaps, so much of sheer aesthetic delight in her loveliness as had the Greek's.

But it has a distinctive quality in its homeliness—in its devotion to the country as man's most fitting and most charming dwelling-place. A great Latin critic said of his countrymen that their taste in Nature was prevailingly for "pleasantness". The aspect of Nature which finds best expression in their poetry is the soft sweet freshness of Italy, with its fruitful orchards and its cosy farms. Horace wrote of Vergil that it was the country-loving Muses which granted him tenderness and grace. Often, said Tennyson of him, all the charm of all the Muses flowers in a lonely word. And to the same purpose Professor W. Y. Sellar1 has written: "By a

1 William Young Sellar (1825–1890) was a Scottish classical scholar and Professor of Humanity at the University of Edinburgh.

few simple words Vergil calls up before our minds the genial luxuriance of spring, the freshness of early morning, the rest of all living things in the burning heat of noon, the stillness of evening, the gentle imperceptible motions of Nature in the shooting up of the young alder tree, and the gradual colouring of the grapes on the sunny hillsides." Vergil's Georgics is, indeed, one of the most delightful poems in any language. But only the consummate art and the intimate nature-knowledge of the poet made it so. It is a practical and didactic work—a veritable Farmer's Guide.

The contrast between the Greek and the Roman author in his attitude towards Nature is one of emphasis rather than of kind, yet a difference is discernible and marked. The Greek wrote sparingly but enthusiastically of the beauty and the sweetness of the country. To this sensuous delight the Roman added a completer knowledge and a more domestic affection. Here, at the beginning of our Western culture, the Roman and the Greek mark out for us the two paths by which man approaches Nature. The two paths intertwine, and lead towards the same goal, but they remain distinct (the aesthetic and the practical—the emotional and the intellectual), and along these two paths literature and the men who made it have travelled ever since.

The first man was a gardener, and his first acquaintance with country life was gained in a garden. Since that time, his descendants, East and

West, have delighted in a garden, and have bestowed increasing care upon its design and its culture. Never in the past was the taste for gardening so widely diffused, nor shared by so many people in all lands as it is to-day. Yet never were such multitudes denied the opportunity of indulging their desire. In

great cities, space is so valuable that it must be either flagged or roofed over, and he who would domesticate the distant country must be content with a window-box or a flower-pot—or, perhaps, a piece of wet flannel sown with mustard and cress. But for those happy and grateful country-dwellers on whom fortune has bestowed the space, the light, the air, and the other means for making and tending a garden, what endless play is here for physical, emotional, and mental energy! Some have leave and liberty to plan and to lay out as they desire the space available, using to the best advantage the special shape and contour of the ground, and choosing the trees, bushes, hedges that suit best the soil or aspect of the place. All have if not these larger opportunities yet still the perennial delight of selecting, year by year, amongst a thousand flowers, the flowers of their own particular choice, and of varying as they will the harmony and the contrast of those colours which lavish Nature puts at their disposal. The care, the labour, and the devotion expended on such tasks increases the enjoyment and the reward, super-adding a moral to an aesthetic pleasure.

As in a garden, so at large in the countryside, knowledge opens up new avenues of satisfaction, and effort keeps one's enjoyment fresh. What we cannot learn of Nature's ways by experience or observation we can now learn readily at secondhand from specialists. Never before were so many or such readable and charming books written on birds, beasts, fishes, flowers, trees, and all the animate and inanimate objects that throng the external world about us. Never did mankind display so real a sympathy or so wide and exact an understanding of all lower forms of life as is displayed in our time.

One reads these books, and finds that wherever one turns in this wonderland of the external world there are new regions to explore, new forms of life, new ways of growth, activity and decay, that capture our interest and arouse our sympathy. Everywhere about us our humble fellow-creatures move and have their being, unimaginably diverse in their habits and appearance, yet subject to much the same physical laws as ourselves, and sufficiently akin to us to arouse our sympathy and, at times, our affection. How blank, dull, narrow, and obtuse are man's indifference and callousness towards his lesser brothers! How egotistic and barbaric his not infrequent antipathy and unkindness! To peruse Selborne or Walden, or the writings of Hudson, Burroughs, or even the more coldly scientific works of Darwin, is to pass from chamber to chamber in a vast palace of knowledge more richly

furnished, more full of attraction to the mind and to the emotions than the fabled miracles of any genie. Wherever we look we find life—life—life; and if we follow the lead of Fabre, Maeterlinck, or others like them, we learn that not only the lovelier objects, such as butterflies and flowers, but those too which have no outward charm at all but even the reverse, have, in their measure, a real appeal to the interest and the care of man.

We all have something of St. Francis' love for birds—his "flowers of the air". We can understand readily that the study of bird-life should have attracted many, and that charming books on this subject are numerous. It is easy too to desire a closer acquaintance with stars, trees, and the like. It is not at all so easy, on the other hand, nor so usual, to desire to make friends of creeping, crawling things of the insect tribe, from which our flesh seems to shrink. Yet a naturalist like Fabre will teach us our mistake, will quicken our sympathy with spiders, weevils, glow-worms, beetles, and all manner of insects, and thus will amazingly widen the field of our interest, of our pleasure and, if we give him his way, even of our affection and our love.

The delight of man in natural beauty reached its zenith in the nineteenth century, and such became its power at that time that it not only brought back to men all and more than all their old and partly forgotten love of Nature, but it also discovered for them vistas of unguessed beauty and opened

up avenues to new and deeper enjoyment. Wordsworth had, as Coleridge said of him, to create the taste by which he could fitly be judged. He and Shelley educated the English public to see again in Nature all that Shakespeare and Horace and Aeschylus had seen, and to discover in her something also which from them was in great part or wholly concealed. Shelley said it was the function of a poet, not merely to extol (as Horace might have done) the sensuous beauty of the world, but rather to reveal a beauty which to him was plain but from others was hidden. Since his and Words-worth's time men have been able to find in the contemplation of Nature a pleasure yet more precious and elevated than that which the poets of ancient Greece conveyed. Endowed by the spirit of the age with a higher sensitiveness, they have been able to discern in Nature something which does not meet the eye or the ear, and behind the veil of a corruptible loveliness, to catch the movement of a spiritual glory which does not fade nor change.

Such a view of Nature (carried from the East) may possibly lie behind the superstitious belief in Dryads, Fauns, and Sprites of stream and tree. Certainly this deeper consciousness was

possessed by the seer-poet Vergil. But for us it has its literary origin in the verse of Palestine rather than in that of Greece and Rome. The Hebrew never looked on Nature as self-subsisting. He always

thought of her as in relation to an overruling spiritual power. The thunder and the whirlwind, drought and flood, plague and famine, and all natural phenomena are the result of the immediate action of Him—

"Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
And meted out Heaven with the span,
And comprehended the dust in a measure, And weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance;
It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth,
And the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers;
That stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."—Isaiah 40:12–22.

The argument of the Book of Job is based on the majesty of the laws by which God rules His universe, and the wonders of creation are there expressed with a splendour which has never been surpassed.

Wordsworth and Shelley—like Blake before them—regarded Nature with a like reverence. She spoke to them of spiritual life, and led their thoughts to a world of a higher reality than this. But they did not sing of her merely as subordinate to an over-ruling Creator. They thought of her rather as animated by some Presence which imparted to them a breath of its own being, of its own consciousness.

"I have felt," says Wordsworth,

"A Presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
Anti the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."—Tintern Abbey.

And again—

"The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom He loves."

He felt that the objects in the landscape enjoyed the air they

breathed—
“The moon doth, with delight,
Look round her when the heavens are bare.”
Nature thus could give solace and companionship to men—could even impart a power of vision clearer than that attained through erudition.
“One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.”
Shelley likewise felt that this natural realm about us was the embodiment of an unseen Spirit of Joy, and that the countless forms and forces of Nature

were like strings of a great world-harp on which the Archangels played songs of triumph and hymeneal chants more exquisite far than any they could draw from the sad heart of man. Indeed, it seemed to him as though all the elements and parts of this material world—the earth, the air, the cloud, the bird, the flower—were moving mirrors on which the eternal principle of Beauty cast its rays, and that their very life was instinct with an exuberant and imperishable joy.
Nor is this attitude towards Nature merely a fancy or an overwrought personification. It is rather the result of his spiritual and exquisitely vivid sense of the unity of all existence. Behind, and through, and within all this changing world of the senses, he saw One changeless and eternal Being, “whose smile kindled the universe”, and whose joy reached down to the lowliest of its creatures.
When one observes that Nature has this power of awakening in the heart of a spiritually-minded man the deepest religious emotion, when she can stir at times thoughts too deep for tears, or, opening the vision of eternal love, can touch the soul to ecstasy, one understands how Nature and the countryside were so loved by the seers and poets of the Bible, by the Precursor and by the Builder of our Christian faith. Abraham, with all his wealth, left the city and went forth to wander among the hills of Palestine, and the plains of Egypt. Moses was born on the reedy banks of the Nile, carried out the chief part of his life-work in

the wilderness, and was buried in the lonely recesses of the mountains. David, the sweet singer of Israel, was a shepherd, and loved to tell of the splendours of Nature and the beneficence of the Creator Who made it for man’s sake. In the desert, far from man, the Baptist received the training which made him the herald of a new spiritual order, the forerunner of

the Messiah. Jesus Himself was country born and country bred. His teaching breathes of the open air, the open road, of ripening corn, of mountain and of sea. His images are taken from the occupation of the fanner, the vine-dresser, the fisherman, from the sunset or the veering wind, from the beauty of the wild flower or the happiness of the birds. Those who were able to understand His meaning, or to appreciate the Truth while it walked among them, were not the men of the forum nor the dwellers in a great city. The boasted civilisation and culture of the day ignored Him. Only the toilers of the land and of the sea, the shepherd and the tiller of the soil, the village-girl and the busy cottage-wife, only these accepted His message and believed in Him. Among that chosen band of twelve who have to-day an unique honour among mankind are many drawn from the rude life of the countryside, and not one drawn from the metropolis. The city knew Him not. Sophisticated, selfcomplacent, blind, it scorned Him, persecuted Him, arraigned
Him, condemned Him, and at last crucified Him.

Is it not a fact of history that the teaching of Christ was - first given and first accepted in the country, and that ever since the country has been beloved of seers, of poets, and of all spiritual minds, and has been more especially the place for religious meditation and attainment? It would not be difficult to argue that the exaltation of the city at the expense of the country has involved the sacrifice of what is simple and the enthronement of what is superficial, that to the country belong intuition and receptiveness of mind, and that in it inspiration has been born and the loftiest genius quickened.

How easily might one maintain that the country has been the dawning place of vision and spiritual knowledge, that in the countryside those constructive movements which mould and re-mould civilisation, and that (in fact) in the higher forms of progress the country has been dragging a reluctant city in its wake!

But such a conclusion would be unprofitable. Town and country are not in reality struggling together for mastery; they are not in competition. In Ireland the discord (so strident in other lands) has not yet become acute; and if we take warning in time it may never become so. It may even be our destiny to show how true a concord may be wrought between them! For their existing alienation is artificial, and their supposed rivalry a mere illusion. The adage that God made the one and

man the other is the most deceitful of truisms. For their manifest and everlasting differences are ordained for the enrichment of human life. Their potential harmony is fixed in

the nature of things. Indeed, it has been realised already on a small scale. Who has not seen many a farmhouse or village, nestling among the trees or on the flank of mountain, that added a pleasant touch of contrast and completeness, and gave a sense of home and happy human activity to a natural scene? Will not man someday conceive, and the co-operation of many arts and crafts carry out a like harmony on a far larger scale—a scale as large as that of a metropolis? Such an ideal has already glimmered into the minds of men, but the master thought which alone will ensure its realisation lies in the Bible yet unused. Those allegories of the heavenly state which open and which close the Book show that the Archetypal City is as beautiful as Eden. A town, as well as a garden, may be a Paradise. Both are made to be a dwelling-place for man, and both in equal measure are fit to receive the glory of the divine presence. But in these allegories there lies another truth which has its meaning for art as much as for religion. The Author and Designer of Eden and the New Jerusalem alike is God. And when at length civilisation produces an authentic and veritable city—a city worthy of the name—not only will it prove to be an harmonic of the country, in complete accord with the surrounding landscape;

but they who design and build it will have gone to school to the Original and Supreme Architect and will have learned how to turn the principles of His consummate workmanship to the everyday uses of mankind.