IRISH LITERARY PORTRAITS

by

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INTRODUCTORY

These little portrait-studies, some of which have appeared in *Life and Letter*s and in the N*ew York Dial*, are now offered as a slight contribution to an interesting chapter of literary history - the Irish Literary Movement of which Mr. W. B. Yeats was the leading spirit. Of the new Ireland I am not qualified to speak, having lived in England since the 'Treaty' of 1921, and I find myself wondering whether that event has not already begun to eliminate the elect breed of those to whom England and Ireland were equally dear. To the Unionist, Ireland was, exactly like England and Scotland, a mother-country, whose sons are over all the world: indeed, if a movement like Zionism were to originate among the members of the Irish race, the difficulty would arise that Ireland would not hold them all; and the parallel with the Jews might be extended further: the principal achievements of the Irish, for instance, have not been in Ireland (while on the other hand not a few of the greatest works in English literature, science and philosophy have been conceived and brought forth in Ireland). Again, the

ancient Irish language is no more a bond of union among the Irish than Hebrew has been among the modern Jews.

There has only been one accepted poet of this mother-country of exiles and revenants, Thomas Moore: and it is notable that with Moore Ireland's tragedy consists in the fact that her subordinate relation to England is part of then fixed order of things: as he put it beautifully enough:

> The emerald gem of the Western World
> Is set in the crown of the stranger.

He heard the authentic voice of Ireland in the national airs, those airs which, issuing out of old experience, seem to dissolve the very soul of a great race in *lacrimae rerum* - a proud and luxurious grief for which, to speak truly, the belated foreign conquest is hardly sufficient to account, and which must have been part of the original endowment of the Irish temperament. Moore himself, however, in his metrical reaction in English to this ancient influence, was almost vulgar, certainly shallow, facile

and sentimental. On the whole, it cannot be said that Ireland was fortunate in the character and personality of her interpreter. It was not until nearly a century after Moore that a far finer and a greater poet than he (a man, curiously, deaf to

music) - and not only a poet but an indefatigable organiser and propagandist - inaugurated a hopeful literary movement, the whole Irish race, not to speak of an applauding English public, looking on with pride and encouragement.

For a period of about a quarter of a century, Ireland had an opportunity of making its special contribution to literature. The great literary periods of Greece, England, Spain, did not last much longer. There seemed no reason whatever why Ireland should not prove to be one of the small nations which, however weak politically, exercise an imperial influence and authority in the world of literature and thought. Yet Ireland was not so fortunate as it seemed. All the great literatures, in their supreme moments, have seemed in retrospect to have risen like emanations from the life of a whole people, which has shared in a general exaltation: and this was not the case with Ireland. How could a literary movement be in any sense national when the whole interest of the nation lay in extirpating the conditions which produced it? While Yeats was busy and successful in raising the whole standard of literary expression in the English language, the youth of Ireland was zealously employed in conning the primers of another language. And in 1916 it was suddenly demonstrated that the

Irish people did not wish to have its name associated with the so-called Irish Literary Renaissance.

And it is here that Yeats's personal qualities as a leader must come in for some criticism, just as in a military campaign to which great issues have been joined it is inevitable that the attention of subsequent historians should be fixed on the personal qualities of the general in command, on whose decision so much has to turn. This commander-in-chief, then, of the literary forces in Ireland, had taken up his headquarters at Coole Park in the County Galway, the residence of the cultivated and talented Lady Gregory: an advantageous position, from which every hostile movement could be carefully watched, while contact was established with inexhaustible sources of literary supplies in the manners, beliefs and turns of speech of the surrounding Irish-speaking peasantry. But who then was the enemy? The answer was implied in a remark dropped by Lady Gregory in explaining why she had sent her son to Oxford: 'Oxford, you know, is much nearer Ireland than Trinity College!' The enemy, if you please, for Yeats and Lady Gregory, was nothing more or less than the naturally friendly entity of Anglo-Irish culture, bestarred with most of Ireland's illustrious names, and appearing still to possess an almost impregnable stronghold in

Queen, Elizabeth's famous foundation. Catholic Ireland's deep dissatisfaction with that culture was easily understood, and was even interesting, with its suggestion of some new development or extension of its own; but Yeats, in appropriating this sentiment to his literary movement, must be held to have allowed an undignified spirit of mischief to enter into his strategy. Similarly with the demarche of turning Catholic, which at moments tempted Lady Gregory as something which would bring her 'nearer to Ireland ': this can only be called a lapse from generalship into sentiment, which showed that she had learned nothing from her predecessor Thomas Davis's manuals of militant idealism. The most famous and successful 'coup 'was the establishment of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin: a point of literary offensive with which supplies from Coole could be regularly maintained; and here Yeats and Lady Gregory had a rare piece of good fortune in discovering an original dramatist, who with unexpected effectiveness carried the literary resources of Coole Park, with much that he himself contributed, to the highest artistic employment of which they were capable. Synge's plays, however, were far more successful in providing 'West Britons 'with entertainment than in bringing Yeats and Lady Gregory 'nearer 'to 'Irish Ireland '.

The latter, in fact, manifested a good deal of resentment when it caught the new literary movement at what it felt to be the old trick of exhibiting Irish foibles and absurdities for the delectation of the English public.

Amid the pleasant surroundings of Coole, then, congenial to a dreamer rather than to a man of action, Yeats's defects as a leader became evident. He lived completely in an Ireland of his own imagination, and without the least perception of the real trend of events. A capacity for action, however, is more than should be demanded of a poet: besides, it is overrated. Speaking generally, it is the man with nothing interesting in his own mind who is constantly prompted to action. We talk of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning, but from a certain point of view he is the very type of the artist's and even of the philosopher's enviable faculty of detachment. And so it was with Yeats at Coole. He revealed no instinct of inspired leadership, but that is not to say that he did not at the same time grow into one of the most distinguished poetic figures of his time. And the 'artifex' in Yeats did not perish with the faery-land of his imagination, which suddenly vanished for ever in the Easter Week of 1916.

The true vocation of Irish literature, which Yeats

conceited of in terms of a campaign, was something of a different nature. More than one solitary thinker in Ireland had dreamed of a national awakening, which should also be a transformation of the very soul of Ireland, in which nothing of its aboriginal quality should be lost, and even its age-long resistance and resentment atoned and justified. But this would be effected by a miracle rather than by a feat of militant idealism: it was for a new poet-philosopher, in face of all the lying prophets who flattered and seduced Ireland, to strike from the rock new sources of confidence and happiness. Thus an element was lacking which would have imparted to Yeats's literary movement a more serious character than has actually belonged to it. The edifying function of literature cannot indeed with impunity be entirely neglected as it was by Yeats; for unfortunate man, beset with a thousand evils, looks in his literature for some hint of what to make of it all, and those men who give tongue to his dumb apprehension, or can dissolve it in some individual source of joy, become inexpressibly dear to their compatriots. Yeats, no doubt, like other great generals, will be drawing up his own account of all that happened, and may throw a new light on the apparent omission from his movement of all moral seriousness.

Still, when all is said, Irish literature has done very' well, and Yeats's name will always be memorable in Ireland as that of the man who established the entity of modern Irish literature, and raised its whole standard of production; and Dublin will only honour itself if in the years to come it commemorates his striking figure with a monument placed somewhere in its public thoroughfares, and certainly outside the palings of his old enemy Trinity College. I should go now and see whether there is not a possible site in the neighbourhood of Thomas Moore's statue, but it is now many years since I left my native city, claiming as my birthright to belong to a larger political unity than that of Southern Ireland. Am I sorry now? Well, there is of course the doubt whether with entire impunity one can relinquish all the associations of childhood and youth with delectable places, not to speak of the duties imposed on the good citizen. But for me, Ireland has always been a country rather than a 'nation'; nor is an Irishman made more interesting to me, or more of an Irishman, by the fact that his country now has a government of its own. I was brought up to an inherited dislike for the green flags and reedy orchestration of nationalist demonstrations, and this remained at the back of my mind even when Yeats, A. E. and Arthur Griffith got hold of me and

tried to turn me into a nationalist. I did finally, by way of Thoreau and Wordsworth, evolve a certain patriotism of my own, but I dare say it might not have been essentially different if I had been born in

Newfoundland. The actual program of Irish nationalism, the escapade of having a separate language, the apotheosis of Wolfe Tone and Parnell, the jubilation over everything that embarrassed England, and a sort of jolly way of getting over religious differences, were entirely distasteful to me. Ireland will always appear to me to have been more interesting, both to itself and to the world at large, under the old conditions: a country which has rejected its natural spiritual destiny, and whose poets all made the mistake of going into politics.

These short studies were not originally written with any thought of their publication as a book, and as they all go over much the same ground there are, I fear, some repetitions. Yeats, in particular, is a more complicated subject than I should perhaps have attempted; and his life and work, happily, are not yet rounded to completion. Future criticism will probably recognise in him a poet comparable in his influence among his contemporaries with poets

of classic standing in English literary history*; but to enter on the consideration of his final phase would have brought me into competition with the formidable virtuosity of his disciples*

As to Moore, I feel some compunction in what I have written: it should have been a eulogy, such as he waited for in vain, and had some reason for expecting, for not a few regarded him with affectionate admiration; and amid the sufferings of his last years he was a notable example of stoic fortitude. Of his talk and vital presence, it is lamentable if there should be no memorial. Much was to be learned from his talk, for he was wise in many things. The tete-h-tete, he often said, was the only true conversation: when more than two or three were present it became what he called the ‘contemptible gift of public speaking 1; yet in any company his strong and penetrating voice would command attention, and more than once evoked an exclamation like that of the listener to Dr. Johnson:

* This is the most sensible man I ever listened to in my life! His humour most often was what humour really most often is - this being doubtless the reason that humourists never themselves laugh - a sudden flash of veracity. Amid the restraint of suspended conviction and pious opinion in which most of us habitually live, it is remarkable that

the truth should so frequently be amusing. But humourists like Shaw and Chesterton, to acquire their position of licensed jesters, must themselves belong to the court of life, sharing in all its tastes and interests, and Moore remained outside all companionship of causes and crusades, a pathetically lonely figure, lonely both as artist and man.

The sketch of Joyce is mainly guess-work, and Joyce himself wrote: ‘Most of the statements of fact are inaccurate - this, however, is of no importance/ I can only feel sure of what came under my own observation.

One or two criticisms of the short account of Edward Dowden have reminded me that I have done less than justice to that gracious though now nearly forgotten figure. There are still old pupils of his in all parts of the world whose life would have been different but for their memory of him in his college classes and the letters with which he delighted to maintain with them an almost parental relation. On such patient and uninfatuated workers in literature devolve tasks of interest to nearly everyone (such as helping to fix the chronological sequence of the Shakespeare plays); to them fall the main discoveries; and it is they who prepare the case of all poets for the final judgment of posterity. The essay is perhaps not so free as it

should be from any suggestion (almost ludicrous to those who knew him) that all the circumstances of the long friendship between Dowden and the lady who became his second wife were not fully understood and accepted by his family.

YEATS AND HIS STORY

Yeats's boyhood was passed in the great peace of Queen Victoria and amid all the social and spiritual conditions prevailing throughout her realms, especially perhaps among the Anglo-Irish, who in addition to the universal feeling of stability, enjoyed a special sense of 'possessing the earth'. a sublimation of the old Ascendancy feeling - a sense in the retrospect almost one of blessedness, but soon, alas! to engender in the spirit of youth a vague restlessness. I have read that there was something like it in the Southern States of North America before the abolition of slavery, when families, even without actual wealth, passed on from one generation to another the inheritance of privileged leisure. The Yeats family, members of a little patriarchal community of traders in the enchanting county of Sligo, were likewise born into a natural sense of aristocracy, and the poet, though his father was an impoverished artist, acquired a strong feeling of superiority - which has not been altogether serviceable to him as a national poet - to all phases of human activity except 'the arts'. It was long a

commonplace with critics of Ireland that among its chief requirements was a poet to give it new heart for life and work, but in Yeats Ireland has produced a poet who is almost the perfect antithesis to Robert Burns. In the new Ireland, from which this leisured class has been more or less eliminated, Yeats has been at some pains in recasting his character.

The idyll of these early years is narrated with much charm in Reveries over Childhood, and Youth. It is the story, told by a man who has now achieved something of the tolerance and disillusionment of age, of a youth so firmly set in temperamental grooves as to be incapable of the ordinary adaptation to society through education; and of a soul whose earliest preoccupation appears to have been the search within itself for a nucleus of reality, and which was often made melancholy by its inability to find there more than a vague histrionic instinct. He tells us that at the age of eighteen or thereabouts he had reached this definition of truth - 'the dramatically appropriate utterance of the highest man'; and to an early poem belongs the verse, 'Words alone are certain good'. The ideal which he began more or less consciously to propose to himself, a dramatic ideal, was quite a noble and exalted one; a mind of such a temper that in no situation could it fail of conscious self-expression, and perhaps it is the

presence of this ideal in the mind of Yeats, distinct at first from his ambition to excel in literature, but finally using literature as his chief instrument, which has given him his peculiar personal distinction, and the wide and I think always salutary influence that has emanated from him.

He tells us how he sought after self-realisation in debating societies, sometimes in uncongenial society; with one mentor only in those days to whom he really deferred, his imperturbably speculative father. A kind of mundane seer his father was, incurious about 'God and immortality 'but wistfully contemplative of the minds of his friends: and he pointed, not without justification, to his success with his own family in a theory of education which took no account of text-books. To his father the only real poetry was dramatic poetry, and under his influence Yeats began to write his first verses. It is curious to read how bunglingly he began: 'My lines but seldom scanned, for I could not understand the prosody in the books'. Few poets, I should think, have begun with a study of prosody; and few have been, like the whole Yeats family, entirely without ear for music. I have heard Yeats claim that this insensibility to the great art of the moderns has been an advantage to him, in helping him to preserve an 'antiquity of mind'.

My acquaintance with Yeats began in the High School in Dublin, where for some time I sat next to him in class. He lived out at Howth, and came and went as he pleased, a yellow-skinned, lank, loose-coated figure, for he was several years older than any of us, and even had the beginnings of a beard. He was remarkable for the manner in which he attached himself to the most unlikely boys, even those who were avoided by the others, as if they presented a problem to him, and 1 think we all felt it a kind of distinction

to be seen walking with him. Certainly I remember feeling honoured when he borrowed a copy of Gray's poems from me, and returned it scrupulously next day. He was strong in algebra and Euclid, and I recollect the readiness with which, during an examination, he would shift his position so as to make it convenient for me to 'cog 'from him. It is true that in another class-room, the classical master's, our relations were reversed, and I think I was able to be of some small assistance to him in translating Demosthenes. Yeats's manner of translating, with the crib laid inside his book for all to see, was an unfailing delight to the classical master - a cruel man to the rest of us - who sat quivering in all his fat while Yeats did his turn, and I can still see the doubtful look which would come over Yeats's face when he became aware of how his

efforts were being received. 'So that is your notion of Demosthenic fire? 'our tyrant would ask amid the general relaxation. We had to read aloud our weekly compositions, and I think Yeats's were a little above us all, the English master not excepted (I recollect a cryptic one beginning 'The Norway Rat has a litter of five'), and once there was a constrained pause in the proceedings when Yeats informed us that 'no one could write an essay now except Matthew Arnold. He held his manuscript thrust out in front of him and declaimed his sentences, just as he did with those of Demosthenes, and curiously I don't think anyone laughed. One week the master took it into his head to make us write our essays in verse, and we looked forward to Yeats's - it was already circulated that he was a poet - but on that day he was careful to be absent, though I remember that next day he enquired kindly about my own.

When Yeats left us at the High School, with 'small Latin and less Greek', we did not quite lose sight of him; presently we began to hear that he was a great poet, and read with wonder his contributions to the *Dublin University Review*. The loan of a book by him to one of the boys at the top of the school was an event, as it turned out, of some importance in certain developments in Irish literature: this was Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism, a book

which captured the intelligence of half a dozen youths who were preparing to enter Trinity College. The Head Master beheld with dismay the ravages of this spiritual infection, which touched his most promising pupils with the indifference of the Orient to such things as college distinctions and mundane success. I do not know whether Yeats actually had a share in founding a branch of the Theosophical Society, of which he once said that 'it had produced more in literature than Trinity College but I am quite sure that the Dionysiac spark was kindled about this time in Irish literature.

The whole subject matter of Irish literature had received a vast accession of dignity and interest through the labours of scholars and philologists, who laid bare to the imaginations of poets an ancient and still not entirely extinguished culture. A literature founded on this ancient culture, as the literatures of modern Europe were founded on the cultures of Greece and Rome, became the ideal of a group of Irish authors, and was in fact actually realised. Yeats from the first divined the spirit of that ancient culture as no one had done before him, although he is one of those men who are incapable of assimilating any language, ancient or modern, other than chat into which they are born. In Celtic mythology and legend, however, he was from the first as learned as

ever was Ronsard in the mythologies of Greece and Rome. Others had studied before him the Transactions of the Ossianic Society, O' Curry's MS. Materials of Irish History and the rest, but the true mind of the Gael had transpired neither in the heavy consonantal diction of Sir Samuel Ferguson nor in the Homericised Carlylese of Standish O' Grady: it was Yeats who, without knowing a word of Gaelic, penetrated to the esoteric world of Druidic magic; and if his phrase at times seemed coloured by Keats and Shelley, Morris and Swinburne, he was only reclaiming for the Gael that verbal magic which Matthew Arnold himself had declared to be derived from Celtic sources. It was from the East that Yeats snatched the clue to the interpretation of the Druidic culture; it was Theosophy which was

able to supplement the scanty hints of the Druidic 1 mysteries vouchsafed by Julius Caesar, and to furnish a living system of arcane teaching. Yeats's early poems are in fact as full of Hinduism as of Celticism.

Presently his family moved over to London, and his adventures there are narrated in Four Years. These years were the equivalent for him of the four years which most of us have spent, generally to much less purpose, in one of the universities: he came, I will not say under the influence of, but into fruitful contact with William Morris, W. E, Henley and

others, and forgathered with most of the 'poets of the nineties'. This was no doubt the time of his life. He did a good deal of journalism and bookmaking, wrote a distinguished novel, delighted everyone with his Celtic Twilight, engaged in the arduous undertaking of editing Blake's works, and it was during this period that most of the poems which have determined his place, at all events in the literature of his own country, were composed. The Countess Cathleen and various Legends and Lyrics was the most beautiful contribution yet made to Irish poetry. Also at this time he was at the top of his powers in debate and argument, and he created opportunities for their exercise in founding the Irish Literary Societies of London and Dublin. Literature with Yeats has always been a cause to defend, and all his life he has been addicted to founding societies: even at the High School he tried to start a Natural History society. The notion of 'schools' of poets, abhorrent to most poets, is congenial to him; and indeed, if he could have his way, I think he would make of the whole profession of literature one vast secret order, training its novices in the occult sciences and instructing them in a system of symbolic images, somewhat as they seem to have done in the bardic colleges of ancient Ireland.

Yeats's delightful gift of companionship had

brought him into intimate relations with a variety of remarkable people, of whom he gives in Four Years a series of portraits. It is to be noted how many of them are in various ways and degrees romantic or 'accentuated 'characters - on the way no doubt by the road of excess to the palace of wisdom; and in like manner, in literature, though he has a perfectly unerring sense for felicities of language and imagery, an unfailing appetite for life at the point of speech, he is for the most part indifferent to what Matthew Arnold called 'high seriousness' (Matthew Arnold; is in fact rather a butt with him). He is all for personality casting itself with passion into a part; where life becomes colourless, as it does for the most j part with those who attain unto the white light of, 1 truth, he is not much interested. In his later philosophy of the 'antithetical self' man in fact is almost necessarily an actor, for in his most intense words and actions he is engaged in moulding his own 'antithetical' image. We have seen that as he searched himself in youth he found within himself a vague histrionic instinct, and now in the reveries of his maturity it is as actors he sees the men he has known: Wilde, gathering his whole personal energy into Hamlet's power of epigram; Henley, 'human, like one of Shakespeare's characters'; William Morris (probably the chief literary influence by

which Yeats has been affected), in life 'an irascible blunderer'. who wrote long romances 'apparently with no other object than that his persons might show to one another through situations of poignant difficulty the most exquisite tact'.

With his belief, derived in part from Blake, in poetry as a form of magic he became less and less of what is called an 'open-air 'man. The enchanting poet of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* and *The Man who dreamed of Fairyland* was still the enchanting poet of *The Embroidered Cloths* and of *The Fiddler of Dooney* but his rhythms and imagery came to him more and more in visions of the night or from the ambiguous world of necromancy and seances. No wonder that Yeats and his friend A.E. who could conjure up the mighty heroes of Celtic lore and make of Erin's mysterious past part of that Eternal Moment of which the artist is the artificer - no wonder that they believed in Irish literature! And indeed it was this mystical Ireland, beheld clairvoyantly, an Ireland sunk in ancient memories, which turned

out to be the real one l Yeats, and the literary movement in which he was the commanding figure, may be said to have conjured up the armed bands of 1916.

It happened in this way. One gathers that Yeats and A. E. had almost reached the conclusion that the kingdom of the Gael, like that of the Jews, was a

spiritual kingdom and not of this world, and that the value of political agitation or of armed resistance to British authority was for the most part symbolical. The soul of Ireland was to be kept pure as within a wall of brass by its hatred of England, which represented the unclean outer world and a civilisation essentially detestable; but the amount of sympathy which they were able to afford for such movements as that for the revival of the Irish language, or for the political program of Sinn Fein, was not very satisfactory to the new Catholic generation. There was always something uncongenial to Catholic Ireland in Anglo-Irish literature: it galled the Catholic youth to be a subject race, subject not only politically but in a literary sense. They wanted a literature and a nationality which they could call their own, and the increasing vogue of Anglo-Irish literature made them the more resolute that their literature should be in the Irish language. A movement, of which Yeats and A. E. knew very little, which repudiated them as leaders, with a political program which seemed altogether incapable of realisation, began to recruit its forces among those youths who, a hundred years earlier, would have remained at home or in the public-house when the Protestant Robert Emmet made his sacrifice of blood.

What we may call Yeats's middle period is filled

up for the most part with work at the Abbey Theatre. We may or may not believe that he might have been better employed than in managing a theatre and writing plays, but if anyone says that Yeats had no real dramatic gift it might be answered that in The Land of Heart's Desire he had already succeeded in doing what the Shakespearian dramatists longed and tried unsuccessfully to do; and he was able to do so because that 'Celtic' element which survived in Shakespeare was the element in which Yeats moved with real power and understanding. In a word, Yeats had this advantage over Shakespeare, that he believed in the fairies; and though a belief in fairies is not a sufficiently central belief to serve a poet much in manipulating a drama of human destiny, yet an acquiescence in the supernatural was perhaps sufficiently characteristic of Irish writers to justify Yeats in his notable and bold design of founding a distinctive Irish drama. The drama he contemplated would apply itself to the reintegration of the folk-memory amongst men, a well of authentic symbolism, drawing from which the poets and artists would form an almost priestly order.7 The Abbey Theatre became famous; but though without Yeats's energy and eloquence it would never have become famous, it was not as a centre of mystical propaganda that it succeeded. The spirit which at

length prevailed in it, to the chagrin of its founder, was the traditional spirit of Anglo-Irish literature; and he who had refused Mr. Shaw's offer of John Bull's Other Island had to look on at the rapturous enjoyment with which various boisterous comedies were hailed. But the man who really broke up the mould of Irish drama as it existed in Yeats's mind was J. M. Synge, a writer who, caring little for Yeats's theories of a drama 'remote, spiritual and ideal', gave the Abbey Theatre itself an exciting part in the drama of Irish life.

In defending Synge, then, Yeats was fighting in a cause which was not really his own. Synge was more than an episode in Yeats's history: he was a disturbing event, which brought Yeats back from the abstract to the personal. The Abbey stage was frequently converted into a platform, from which, with never-falling heart of controversy and with admirable self-forgetfulness, he preached his doctrine of the imaginative arts from the ambiguous text of *The Playboy*. But there were his own plays too. He had dreamed of a folk-theatre, almost religious in character, to which his contribution was to be the dramatic presentation of the story of Cuchullin, and to this, perhaps the great ambition of his life, he had to bid farewell when he produced his short poetic plays. The beautiful lines which drifted down to

us, weighted with poetic imagery, the blank-verse which rose out of the babble of the meaner personages, made one think of the Shakespearians rather than of any new drama. The heroic element seemed a little crestfallen on the Abbey stage, and the Irish heroes, impersonated by actors who had gained their renown in peasant parts, gave one the feeling that they had fallen on very evil times, especially when one thought of their Teutonic compeers, moving amid the splendours of Wagnerian orchestration.

But if any regret remained with us that we had not done justice to Yeats, it was allayed when we heard eventually that he had himself renounced the poetic drama as inherited from the Shakespearians. In a London drawing-room this undaunted poet hailed in the Noh play of Japan the long-sought clue to a new art. Light had come once more to him from the East.

It seemed hardly likely now that he would produce the great poem we had expected from him. Every now and then a tiny volume came from his sisters' press, chiefly short personal poems, in which he seems often reminded of his enemies and thwarters; occasionally he is his lyric self again, as in *The Wild Swans at Coole,* or *The Cold Heaven,* or in *All Souls' Night*. Is Yeats a great poet? Poets are of two kinds, and a poet may be great in either kind: the poet who lives in a world of his own, to which in

certain moods we have the passport, like Spenser or William Morris; and the poet who invades our own most private world and lays hold upon our secret passions And aspirations. Yeats is, I think, a great poet in the first kind. Mr. George Moore, a critic whose literary judgments always stay in one's mind after one has resisted them a while, used to say that Yeats's contribution was at least equal to that of Coleridge. Almost unconsciously, in our estimate of Coleridge, we take into account the vague outlines of those poems which he never completed, and so attribute to him a massiveness which is more truly his suggestiveness. Moore, of course, was thinking of the amount and of the beauty of the best work of the two poets, rather than of establishing any 1 parallel', and his judgment, I think, fairly well indicates the standing of Yeats. Yet Yeats is more absolutely a poet than Coleridge. Poetry was an unclaimed precinct in Coleridge's mind, a tricksy spirit which fed on opium, and the author of Aids to Reflection is hardly on speaking terms with the author of Kubla Khan; whereas Yeats the poet and Yeats the philosopher axe one and the same person. Like Coleridge, he is a great theorist about the imagination; but for Coleridge imagination was a lamp with which he explored the 'abysmal depths of personality'; the spiritual world rather than the

world of spirits. For Yeats, on the other hand, imagination is the essence of personality, and is already the denizen of a world in which it can converse with like spiritual essences, and even hold communion with the dead. Yeats (in this respect like Coleridge) is almost as strong in prose as in verse, and the style in which he recounts his visions (or those of Owen Aherne), while as positive as that of Swedenborg, is as richly embroidered as that of Sir Thomas Browne. It is possible, however, to 'think nobly of the soul' and yet to attribute to the imaginative faculty a function more subordinate than is pleasing to most poets. Blake, on whom this doctrine is fathered, was a painter, and for a painter the world of imagination is almost necessarily the world of vision; yet there have been highly imaginative men - physicists, musicians, metaphysicians - who, even if they have possessed the power of communicating with spirits, have never thought of doing so. There is much in personality which Yeats is indifferent to, and even dislikes the names of - will, character, reason - and the proof of the survival after death of the whole composite system of personality, conscious and subconscious, rests on more than the testimony of the imagination.

The preface to the little book which contained the jubilant announcement of the discovery of the Noh

play bears the date, very notable in recent Irish history, ‘April, 1916’ For some time we had been seeing less of Yeats in Dublin, and like his predecessor Thomas Moore, who was also a poet of Kathleen ni Houlihan, he seemed to prefer to live with his chief audience, in England. His poems teemed with all kinds of repudiations of Irish political methods and even of his numerous Irish imitators. He had written of the Ireland immediately before the Great War:

> Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone.
> It’s with O’Leary in the grave.

I have sometimes wondered whether this scornful refrain was not the spark which fell upon the inflammable minds of the young Gaelic enthusiasts, poets most of them, and kindled their vague aspirations into a realistic purpose. Certainly it was about that time that Catholic Ireland began to be ‘romantic’, in Yeats’s sense. No one could have been more surprised than he when he learned that the Irish capital was rolled in battle smoke, yet upon no one was it more obligatory to applaud the insurrection. This was clearly the occasion for a palinode, and after a somewhat hurried consultation with his muse he sent forth his lines with the refrain

> A terrible beauty is born

- a personal and honourable confession of his mistake. The event meant much more both for Yeats and Ireland than either could have realised at the moment: for both almost a recasting of character.

Yeats was born to be the poet of Romantic Ireland, and perhaps the pose which he requires in a poet (he found John Davidson, for instance, ‘lacking in pose and gesture’)was most effective in his own case against the setting of the older Ireland, when provincialism still lay heavy upon it and nationality still belonged to the world of dream and of theory. A dislike of England, curiously combined with a preference for the society of English people, was fostered among the Anglo-Irish during the great Victorian peace, and is as evident in the life and works of Bernard Shaw as it has been in those of Yeats. Platonic hatred, one might almost call it; certainly there hardly seemed to be, for either of these writers, an actual *casus belli* between the two countries. In this sentiment, indeed, I am persuaded that neither Yeats nor Shaw represents the real Anglo-Irish attitude; for the Anglo-Irishman has proved over and over again that he is the ideal servant of the British Empire. Yeats’s nationalism, however, had from the first all the natural ardour of a congenital sentiment; and though neither in

literature nor in politics has it rung altogether true to his Catholic countrymen, he remains none the less so far Heaven’s answer to Ireland’s demand for a national poet.

A word as to the excellencies of Yeats’s prose style, one of the most exact in modern English literature. It must, I should think, be very nearly a torture to Yeats to read almost any current English writing, so inevitable to most of us are its pitfalls. There is always, I think, something of platform delivery in his tone, as though he were strung up to the consciousness of an audience, each sentence tried and tested by an inner ear; and indeed I have heard him say that public speaking is the best school of exactness for a writer. Though not altogether an orator, he is, as is well known, a most distinguished public speaker, more admired perhaps by other public speakers than by any average audience, which cannot quite reconcile itself to his pose; and this pose, which the audience is quite right in detecting, hardly lends itself to the same justification as the almost heroic pose of his writings. Both as a poet and as a philosopher he has created the true and legitimate outlet for that dramatic instinct which he discovered in early youth in his being’s core.

A.E. AND HIS STORY

Doubt, though often a devout mental attitude, is a spiritual malady, for not only is it painful in itself, but it has a tendency to develop malignant symptoms of denial, which, as Goethe taught, is of the Devil. The great Victorians, as is well known, suffered intensely from this malady, but there was nothing diabolic in Tennyson or Matthew Arnold, though I am not sure that in the later Victorians (Swinburne, Rossetti, William Morris) there were not some disquieting diabolistic symptoms. The rude physician of that age, Thomas Carlyle, certainly thought that the arts as practised in his time were not a little devilish; but though he said some stupid things about the poets, Carlyle was as much their true friend as Plato (whose criticism of poetry was almost equally petulant) when he declared that the solution of doubt lay in action only: spiritual action - what Blake called 'mental fight'. English literature is not an affirming literature; I will go so far with A. E. as to admit that in English poetry there is no consistency of vision; it is a profane literature in the sense that it is not in general prompted from

behind the veil, like, for example, the mediaeval literature of Persia. On the other hand it is full of 'mental fighters', from Hafiz's contemporary Chaucer with his 'Lat thy gost thee lede' to Kipling, with his 'I paid my price for findin' out!' They are all believers in action, in life, in effort, and in its transcendental reward. Perhaps they are only the mouthpieces of the elan vital Certainly they carry with them the authority of no robed priesthood.

There is a saying of some Frenchman, which Yeats used to be fond of quoting: 'It is the problem of literature to produce a sacred book - a specious saying, but one which will hardly bear to be considered closely; for if this were really the goal of literature, literature would surely show a progressively confident and sacred character, which is far from being true. No, sacred books are produced by races which have never parted with the beliefs of their childhood; and whatever moral earnestness has been developed in modern races, and whatever examples of individual illumination they can point to, there is no instance of any body of scripture, of the character which we call ethnic, coming into being in a race which has lost sight of its early beliefs, and has accepted an exotic religion. The mysterious wisdom which presides over the birth

of races, allotting to each a special character and perhaps function, has in some instances been preserved in a living tradition, of which individual but for the most part nameless sages have been the mouthpieces; and though it may well be that in forgetting the sacred lore of childhood, and in discarding everything that trammelled free development, the modern races to which we belong have entered on transmutations which shall yet work out their spiritual justification, we have still to seek in the ancient wisdom for clues which we have at least temporarily lost. The feeling of liberty inspired by modern literature has achieved an intuitive expression which has almost oracular authority, and I for one am for the most part satisfied with the confidence which it gives me. Yet certitude is our birthright, the faculty of belief craves its objects, and what R. H. Hutton called the 'solemn note of certainty' is still heard only out of the past.

Any acquaintance with the doctrines of Brahmanism and Buddhism suggests that mankind might have developed along other lines than have been chosen by the Western races. We have achieved to some extent the scientific conquest of Nature, but power over Nature might conceivably have been achieved in some other way, and the tradition has

always existed, and is far too widely diffused to be altogether ignored, that by the practice of austerities and of intense concentration faculties may be developed, in the first place of complete self-control and next of control over Nature, wherever Nature limits or obstructs the ascendant spirit of man. If this belief were not ineradicable in man, our European civilisation would have thrown over Christianity long ago, but even our scientific men often surprise us by avowing their continued belief in the religious attitude towards Nature, which cannot altogether exclude the possibility of miracles and magic. There might be as much difference, spiritually, between human beings developed on different lines as there is

physically between different species of the same group of animals. Anyhow, the divine beings assumed in Oriental scriptures are even now not less congenial to us than the implicit ideal of modern science, the being to whom the processes of the universe are no longer mysteries. From this point of view, the older races, who stood at the parting of ways and some of whom entered on the true path, were wiser than we, and remain still to instruct us and recall us to the true path; while those races which have lost their primitive beliefs have been guilty of a fatal backsliding.

All this is something like the thought of A.E.,

who is less, I think, a natural mystic of the order of Blake than one who accepted most whole-heartedly those Oriental doctrines which found so remarkable a welcome, in the late eighties of the last century, among a little group of Anglo-Irish youths. I say Anglo-Irish, for the belief in the peculiar spirituality of the Gael, the 'Celtic Twilight 1 and the rest of it, was another matter, to which I shall come presently. I have already spoken of the stir caused among the top boys of the High School, then preparing for their flight into the universities and the great world, by the loan to one of them, by W. B. Yeats, of a wonderful book - I hesitate to give its name. Though a junior, I shared in this spiritual exaltation through my elder brother, who with a novel condescension lent me the book - I read it and believed! Necessarily, we found ourselves lifted above the wisdom of our elders, but none of us was offensively priggish, though we had now our own view of what the universities could teach us, and those of us who looked into modern philosophy found that it was groping after those truths of which we had entered into possession. A good many converts were made, one of our High School apostles being especially distinguished by his audacity: he would engage at night in dialectics with policemen and courtesans, and on one occasion,

at the booking office of a railway station, directed searching questions to the astonished clerk who sat within.

A branch of the Theosophical Society was founded, which, if all were told, was as truly the nucleus from which the Irish Literary Renaissance originated as were the contemporary Gaelic and literary societies: indeed, Yeats once declared that in a few years it had done more for Irish literature than Trinity College in its three centuries. I soon began to hear of George Russell, whom Yeats had brought in from the Art School, and readily made friends with him: a tall youth, with shoulders stooped in the eagerness of perpetual talk, grey and kindly quizzical eyes twinkling behind his glasses, a mass of mouse-coloured hair, and a pugnacious mouth presently hidden behind a benevolent-looking beard. At that time he was engaged all day as a clerk in a large Dublin warehouse, and most of his evenings were given to 'the lodge' where, as the original apostolic group began to disperse, he became the life and soul of the little community. He lived near me with his parents outside Dublin, plain, silent people - unless their silence was intended to express disapproval of their too independent son. I did not in those days think of him as a poet, nor do I think it was as a poet that he regarded himself, though it was often

to recite verses which he had just composed that he hailed me out of my late train as I was passing his little station, breaking at once into a sonorous chant as we walked methodically to a little cemetery about a mile inland, where on the slab of a certain tomb we would sit till near midnight, while he narrated his visions, smoking pipe after pipe or twopenny cigars. Speech poured from him in an impetuous stream, the words occasionally tripping over one another as he caught a glimpse of what he wanted to say next: it was for the most part of that august world reached in meditation, from which for our sins we are outcast, and one listened a little uneasily sometimes to the narration of his encounters with lofty beings who occasionally 'spake unto him'. Nothing, however, is so quickening to the intelligence generally as a new religious outlook, and in the field of literature and art he was a bold and often illuminating critic. With his powerful and athletic memory he could fetch up the complete story of any novel he had ever read, and could repeat any poetry which had impressed him; and he was fond of compiling an extempore anthology to illustrate some particular quality in poetry, 'the gay'. 'the

heroic'. Literature was only one of his activities, and everyone agreed that he had it in his power to become a great painter. - Later on, when he was

well known, Mahaffy after some conversation with him summed him up as an 'autodidact - a kind of man the Greeks could not tolerate '. Russell had certainly no turn for scholarship, and having acquired some acquaintance through translations with most of the world's authors, would assume a complete understanding of them which may have nettled Mahaffy. But there is a great difference between the reader who judges by comparative standards and one who has before him constantly the spiritual significance of what he reads. Who would not choose to have heard Blake discoursing on Milton's Satan rather than Bentley? Moreover, if Russell were at all right about the true relation of the Orient to the West, he was versed in an elder lore than that of Mahaffy, on whom he might have retaliated with the famous rebuke addressed to Solon by the Egyptian priest.

In the talk of young men about literature a subject will often suggest itself for a poem, a novel, a drama; and in most cases (certainly it was so in mine) a glimpse of the great work which might be written is enough. But Russell, when you next met him, had written the poem, or was already well advanced in the novel or drama. This swooping celerity of the executive faculties awakened in me, I must confess, more doubt than admiration. The

incubation of a work of art is surely an almost involuntary and subconscious process, of which the artist himself most often knows little between the moments, of conception and deliverance. But to Russell an attractive subject was rather a challenge than an inspiration. He would do what other men could do. A trifling incident, which I should not refrain from telling because I cut a poor figure in it, will illustrate as well as anything his impetuous temperament. We used on Sunday afternoons to sit on the wall of the churchyard, which descended on the outside to a field ten or twelve feet below. A tree rose opposite, extending a long arm towards us. I happened to remark that it would be a fair jump to reach this branch, whereupon Russell promptly stood up, sprang out to the bough, and dropped to the ground, challenging me to follow. But I felt I could not do it, and had to endure his raillery; though in self-defence I might add that he had a considerable advantage of me in height and reach of arm.

Sometimes when he had a holiday we took long walks over the Dublin Mountains, and once late in the afternoon it occurred to me to wonder what time it was. He concentrated his attention for a moment and said, 'Twenty-three minutes past five'. I looked at my watch and found it was exactly as he

said. 'And yet', he observed, 'you don't believe in the soul!'

The 'Celtic Renascence 'was already in the air, and Charles Weekes, the friend of all # its poets and a poet himself, conceived the notion of turning publisher. When he told me one day that he had persuaded Russell to publish a volume of poems, my first feeling was one of surprise, almost of disappointment: similar to my feelings a little later when Yeats looked into the National Library to say that he had just met Russell - who was married! My feelings in the first case Russell himself would have understood and even shared, for at that time he was torn between two ambitions, one of which was hardly realised by himself: the spiritual ambition which is sufficiently evident in his poems, and the ambition natural to a man of so much power and energy, to distinguish himself in the world of action, art and literature. Had I heard that he had suddenly taken flight into the Orient and assumed the yellow robe of a Bhikku in a Burmese forest, it would have seemed a more appropriate translation from Pirn's warehouse than that which the destinies had prepared for him.

The poems appeared, and the favourable reception they met with proved how widely diffused was the interest in those beliefs and doctrines, some know-

ledge of which, one would think, was necessary for their comprehension. There is no doubt about Russell's poetic gift. To help myself again with a remark of George Moore, replete with discouragement for most of us who have had the notion of writing poetry ourselves: 'What is the use of
writing verse unless verse is your natural instrument - as it was for example with Swinburne? 'Well, verse is Russell's natural instrument. What is essential in his mind can only find expression poetically. The gift has remained with him all through life, and in his Collected Poems we find a progressive mastery of the lofty diction which he has elaborated for himself. The workmanship is not always fine; 'mystic', 'dreamy', 'diamond', 'starry', are tawdry substitutes for the 'inevitable 'word, which is often avoided. And though there is a good deal about Beauty in the poems, beauty in his sombre twilight world is rather an object of belief than of delighted apprehension. I can only think of one or two instances of that loving exactitude in observation which always delights us in poetry.

> Each chimney's vapour, like a thin grey rod,
> Mounting aloft through miles of quietness.
> ... Far up they break or seem to break their line,
> Mingling their nebulous crests that bow and nod.

But as a poet of ideas there is no poet of Iris time quite like Russell Sometimes his verses are the expression, almost crude, of the beliefs which have rooted themselves in him: the best of them are the embodiment and often perfect expression of moral intuitions; and not seldom he has been moved to utterance on public matters, as in the lines 'On behalf of some Irishmen not followers oj tradition'. which Ireland will carry in its memory like an arrow in the wound. The poems tell of spiritual agonies and triumphant spiritual perceptions, and often the impression one receives is of a terrible sadness, for the attitude with which this proud soul confronts the universe has not infrequently drawn upon him a response, or laid bare an irresponsiveness, which would have crushed any but the most pertinacious conviction. It seemed a pity sometimes that he was not a Christian, for in a fixed and inherited tradition he would have ranked high as a devotional poet. As it was, his moments of illumination alternated with disconcerting avowals of doubt, and the very 'kingliness 'and 'lordliness 'of the beings to whose world he aspired, seemed to indicate a non-religious and even non-philosophic dissatisfaction with his own earthly lot. Yet the consolatory power of Russell's poetry was to my knowledge more than once manifested: as when Dowden, who visited the

beautiful Duchess of Leinster in her last illness, mentioned that she had found much comfort in *Homeward: Songs by the Way*.
The publication of Russell's early poems was the first important transition in his life. The next was his introduction by W. B. Yeats to Sir Horace Plunkett, and the beginning of his connection with the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. Neither in his first nor in his second volume of verse was there anything to show that he was an Irishman, but I think that even before his association with Plunkett's Co-operative Movement he had begun through vision to enter into the Druidic world of ancient Ireland and of the divine beings whose memories are perpetuated in the names of her gods - Mananaan, the Dagda, Lir, Lugh, Angus and the rest. I never could quite make out whether he regarded these beings as actual entities or as thought-forms with an existence of their own in the world of imagination: anyhow - to the enrichment at all events of Ireland's spiritual inheritance - these forlorn figures of Irish folklore took shape in his mind as a lucid company of immortals, akin to the Greek and Hindu divinities. Hints remain throughout Gaelic folklore of a symbolism, fragments possibly of the ancient Druidic system - enough at least for Russell, whose poems now began to teem

with Gaelic instead of Hindu names and images. And there was a further belief: a form of it appears among the speculations of the German philosopher Fechner, of which William James has given an account in *A Pluralistic Universe*. This Earth is a *zöon*, a divine being, the Mighty Mother:

> I look with sudden awe beneath my feet,
> As you with erring reverence overhead.

And there are places where this 'dark divinity of earth' has been specially recognised: Central America, ancient Greece, India and certain other localities, amongst which some mystical authorities have mentioned Ireland.

It was by way of esoteric belief, then, that Russell gradually became a nationalist. He had entered on his new work with many misgivings, but now a plenary belief in the sacred mission of Ireland proved an ample compensation for the life of private illumination which he had regretfully abandoned. The belief in a 'Holy Ireland 'has always given a kind of religious fervour to Irish patriotism, and since ever I remember, it was mixed up, as it still is, with the belief that materialistic England is tottering to its fall. But the Ireland envisaged by Russell was not quite the Ireland of P. H. Pearse and Arthur Griffith, though both these men were

influenced directly or indirectly by Russell's ideas. Pearse, a pious Catholic, in my hearing avowed his belief in the divine inspiration of the epic of Cuchullin; and I remember in an expedition to Tara in company with Griffith and another friend, how, as we sat at the top of the Hill, Griffith left us, and as we watched him standing motionless under a group of trees my companion whispered: 'There's a good deal of A.E. in Griffith lately!' But what Russell at this time contemplated for Ireland was a resurgence of the old heroic spirit which would overthrow amongst other things the dogmatic religion now in possession of the Irish intelligence: would do the work, in short, which surely ought to have been done by the Druids themselves, if they were the masters of spiritual wisdom Russell took them for, when they succumbed with such inexplicable weakness to the first assault of St. Patrick.

Russell's Eri of divine beings, heroes and fairies had in truth no more resemblance to the real Ireland of this period than Blake's Albion had to the England of George the Third. Its most attractive figure was certainly Sir Horace Plunkett; but the patient and constructive wisdom of that mild and noble Triptolemus of modern Ireland was not combined with the daemonic attributes of a leader, and his civilising mission was soon threatened by the

dragon of the old unregenerate Irish nationalism which once again began to creep out of the bogs. Now this dragon was a very potent enchanter, and could change itself at will into the likeness of a beautiful woman known as Kathleen ni Houlihan, who by her seductions could allure the young men of Ireland back into the dragon-world, and in this lovely transformation it would naturally be on the look-out for Russell, as his new work took him, on his bicycle or on outside cars, into every part of Ireland. He was now brought into direct contact with all the practical problems of Irish life, and his work, first as travelling organiser, when he had to expound the principles of co-operation at farmers' meetings with the parish priest in the chair, and presently as editor of *The Irish Homestead*, proved a valuable training in national economics. He soon became the literary spokesman of Plunkett's movement and expanded marvellously in his knowledge of the world and of literature, for he saw every new book and every distinguished stranger that came to Ireland. There were now two remarkable nationalist journalists in Ireland: Griffith, inspired directly by dragon-worship; and Russell, who, as I have suggested, was now a familiar of the dragon in its dazzling manifestation as Kathleen ni Houlihan, but repudiated utterly any suggestion that his aims had

anything in common with the dark propaganda of Griffith. And yet the secret identity of Griffith's dragon and Yeats's and Russell's Kathleen was patent to most people; and to a general consciousness

of this identity is attributable the slight degree of ridicule which, for some otherwise undeterminable reason, Sir Horace Plunkett's movement always encountered, in spite of the recognised disinterestedness and beneficence of his labours. The problem, in fact, which Sir Horace and A.E. proposed to themselves appeared as hopeless as it would have been to try to bring about a reasonable understanding between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: namely, to create in Ireland an economic initiative and to unite this with the spirit of nationalism. Plunkett, a visionary only in a political sense, and temperamentally a Unionist, supposing that the sentiment of nationality was mainly an inspiration for poets, succeeded with the help of Russell in attracting to his cause a good proportion of the writers of the new literary movement. Russell, of whose religious idealism nationalism was now an essential part, began to formulate the doctrine finally embodied in his book *The National Being*: a philosophical justification of Irish nationalism elaborated with skill and beauty, but which no longer pointed to the drastic transformation in Ireland's thought and

religion which he had contemplated in the fiery pamphlets of his youth.

Suddenly broke out the Great War, which altered everything in this world, and not least the politics and prospects of Ireland. Russell was deeply stirred, and not, at least at first, specially as an Irishman. His horror of the slaughter was like that of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where the hero stands with Krishna in the interspace between two vast hosts drawn up for mutual destruction:

> 'What if they, whose minds are depraved with the lust of power, see no sin in the extirpation of their race, is that a reason why we should not resolve to turn away from such a crime?'

In like manner Russell lifted up his voice, and in a series of poems, in which his diction and sentiment reached their highest elevation, addressed the British public through the columns of *The Times* on the iniquity of war and of the statesmen who had brought it about. It is perhaps evidence of the bewilderment prevailing at that hour that the editor should have published these poems, which were not of a nature likely to hearten or console either civilians or combatants. We read in the most sublime of dialogues how when Arjuna had uttered his cry, Krishna 'smiled gently' upon him, and then pro-

ceeded to go into the whole subject of conscientious objection to warfare with an exhaustiveness which left no doubt as to the part which a true believer should take. 'A soldier of the Kshatriya tribe hath no duty superior to lawful war/ And the god deigned to rehearse some of the political calamities which would follow the hero's refusal. But with Russell the ethical problem was complicated by the fact that as a good Irish nationalist he would probably have reconciled himself easily enough to the collapse of the 'bubble Empire 'as a thing good for the world, good for his own country, good perhaps for England itself; and this attitude, though intelligible, was hardly one to elicit any consolatory response from divine wisdom, like the agonised perplexity of Arjuna. Cods of War, privately printed in Dublin, with supplementary poems, in 1915, was nevertheless, in dignity of poetic expression, one of Russell's most remarkable volumes of verse.

But now the great Irish enchanter, judging this a fitting moment to abandon his gracious disguise as Kathleen, appeared suddenly in Dublin in all the fire-breathing enmity of his dragon-form. The British Government also was constrained to abandon all the blandishments with which it had endeavoured to cajole Irishmen into fighting for it; and after a

grim struggle in the streets of Dublin, Sir John Maxwell announced that he had slain the dragon (he omitted, however, to dispose of its teeth). Simultaneously, all the beauty faded from the countenance of Kathleen ni Houlihan, who has not since been heard of. Russell had felt a good deal of sympathy with the heroes of 1916, as appeared later in his poem *Michael*; but his experience of men and affairs, and especially his association with Plunkett, had tempered the secret counsels of Kathleen with worldly wisdom, and in the business-like deliberations over a settlement of the whole Irish problem towards the

conclusion of the war, and after peace was proclaimed, he took a considerable part, being called over for consultation by the British Prime Minister. The transformation, which happened under our eyes, of a formerly obscure and felonious organisation into a paternal Government, probably at least as good as any other, afforded most of us a profoundly instructive and perhaps disillusioning insight into the way history is made. When the Irish Free State was constituted, Russell might no doubt have held high office, but he chose the part of commentator and counsellor, and as editor of the *Irish Statesman* he helped to guide public opinion with dignity and wisdom, rallying round him the broken forces of the Irish Literary Movement.

For Several years after its establishment, the Irish Free State gave promise of becoming one of the most stable and prosperous of small nations. The garish light of common sense and reasonableness beat upon every region of the island; the lazy Shannon now had work to do; and captains of industry - German, Saxon, Jewish - began to take most of the practical problems of Irish life out of the hands of politicians; soon perhaps factories would rise beside the round towers and ruined crosses, and electrified towns cast a gleam over lonely inland waters and rocky solitudes. Was Russell disappointed or disconcerted by the turn things had taken? If so, I do not think he would acknowledge it; indeed, I do not think he would know it, for it is part of his superb philosophy to accept with more than equanimity the results of our actions, and to believe that a just Karma brings to each man his friend and to each country its destiny. His dream of an independent Irish nationality and culture, in which the Gaelic leaven will work more and more, may now in the course of a generation or two quite possibly be to some extent realised. Yet never in the darkest hours of oppression under the English Government have the gods and heroes of ancient Ireland been more inactual, or the triumph of the Gaelic mind over the spells of St. Patrick been more remote than in the new Irish

Free State, And there were vexatious indications that the solution, in which Russell had taken a distinguished part, of the age-old Irish problem was after all a solution mainly from the point of the English Government, It has been mentioned that the teeth of the dragon had never been accounted for, and its devotees had not failed to scatter them throughout the fields of the four provinces. Armed men sprang from them in a night, and among other exploits blew up the mansion of Sir Horace Plunkett, the scene of many an anxious conference and lonely vigil over the weal of Ireland. It was a symbol of the rejection by Ireland of the life-work of one who should have been saluted, much rather than Arthur Griffith, as the Father of his Country.

Russell’s part too had been played. In the Isle of Wight, Standish O’Grady, who had unveiled before the enchanted eyes of the young poets of the nineties the eternal youth of the Irish heroic world, had died, full of years and disillusionment. Old Sir Horace Plunkett, in his new home near London, was taking flights into the air, far above the teeming soil which perhaps vexed him with the memory of baffled hopes. Even the ‘dear old devil ‘of British misgovernment had left a kind of blank; and the seed of the dragon, now multiplying, had not inherited the power of transformation into the adorable figure of Kathleen

ni Houlihan. The face of things was changed in Ireland. And at length Russell himself, in his seventh decade, yielded to the instinct which has impelled most of Ireland’s most hopeful sons to go forth from it - to begin life again as a poet and artist.

Yeats, who is sometimes a little unfeeling in his characterisations, once summed up Dowden as a ‘man born into the world to write a life of Southey’. Such criticisms, besides being a little unkind, betray in the mind of the critic himself a false criterion, that of ‘success’. Yeats would of course reply that Dowden was a great ‘success 9; he had made a world-wide reputation by writing about Shakespeare, Goethe, Shelley; but then, instead of becoming a ‘fatherly figure ‘in Irish literature, instead of saying a word for ‘us’. he chose to write about second-rate English and foreign authors, about anything in fact rather than the subject at his doors. And there is no doubt that Dowden had something to learn from nationalism, something which many good friends had been anxious to teach him - Sir Samuel Ferguson, Aubrey de Vere, John Todhunter, J. B. Yeats (the poet’s father) - something which he steadfastly refused to learn: and he paid the penalty, not only in the isolation of his last years, but - if that matters - in the oblivion which descended upon his name and personality after his death. Yet in

insisting that literature, like religion, is essentially international, Dowden was certainly right; and even now, when Ireland’s national aspirations have been miraculously realised, the presence there of such a scholar would have no less significance than in the slack days of Irish provinciality. The question of nationality did not in fact arise for Dowden, who was fully satisfied to be a citizen of the United Kingdom. All his combative instincts were aroused on behalf of the Union, which had given him, what Swift, Goldsmith, Berkeley never really felt that they possessed, a country. Situated in the eastern province of the island, with equal liberty to visit the manufacturing towns of England and to range through the ‘fair fields of Holy Ireland’, the Anglo-Irish appeared to themselves to be fortunately placed.

> Each time I come to England’. wrote Dowden in a letter of 1873, ‘it seems newer and more foreign. I think on the whole I am glad to be Anglo-Irish rather than English ... life is something quite dreadful in a city like Manchester. The air is a thick grey damp; the river a foul stream; the buildings a medley of every kind of incongruous attempt at beauty; the statues are black with soot and the trees grimy. Even near

> St. Patrick’s (Dublin) the people are not so marred ... I should like to know the intelligent artisan who loves to profess atheism of a crude kind and a crude republicanism; but setting him aside, I should say that you have to go high up in the social scale in England to get real humanity - a good deal higher than in Ireland.’

And the Union was justified of its children. Looking back on the early nineties of last century, I can recall a crowd of eminent scholars, amongst whom the most ornamental figure was certainly Dowden. No one caught a more respectful attention from the Dublin citizen, who would muse on him wistfully for a moment, hurrying to his tramcar with an armful of books, his looks emanating a kindly radiance. It was with a far more quizzical eye that the same citizen would glance at Yeats himself or any other poet; for a poet after all, to the Irish citizen, is in the world like himself for what he can get out of it. Of all types of men the most pleasing to contemplate is the disinterested scholar. There were far greater scholars in Dublin in those days than Dowden: Dr. Ingram, stepping along neat and meagre, with his beautiful silvery hair and beard, whom Tyrrell used to declare to be ‘the best-read man in Europe ‘; Mahaffy, large

and confident in his clerical attire, brandishing his arm to you in genial recognition; or young-looking little Mr. Bury, with his great red head, whom one met in his solitary walks far out on the country roads on the north side of Dublin. None of them, however, appeared to belong so completely to the world of books as Dowden. His colleagues in Trinity College were a little inclined to look down on him, with his facile subject of English literature; in revenge, it was his name more than any of theirs which carried the repute of Trinity College about the world. And it is well for literature that there are minds like Dowden’s, which create what they behold, the great entity of a country’s literature, composed of disparate and vari-coloured fragments of human experience, which the Dowdens keep furbished from

accretion and oblivion, and weave into an imposing fabric, the living counterpart and voice of history, A nimbus of poetry justly invests the head of the poets' interpreter.

Yet it is by no means the full account of Dowden to say that he was a critic. A critic, in proportion to the depth of his insight into the world of literary creation, has in all likelihood adventured in that world himself. So it certainly was with Dowden, who, to himself, was a very different person from the altruistic professor who seemed no less interested

in the careers of his young friends than if he was their father; or even from the stoic to whom his friend J. B. Yeats used to point as an example to be shunned of the tragic mistake of erecting duty and self-discipline into the rule of life. There stood out in his memory a period of exaltation, gilded with romance. In his correspondence there is frequent reference to the year 1872 as his '*annus mirabilis*'. He was then just under thirty, married and with a family, and was already the well-known 'Professor Dowden'. having been appointed to his chair at the age of twenty-four.

Conceive, then, this little romance of the late sixties of last century, long before any dissonant note had sounded in Irish literature: the hero our youthful professor, the impersonation of culture and literary promise and with the indefinable attractiveness of the poet in his looks and mien; the heroine, a young lady of about his own age, whose face of vivid intelligence he had noted in the lecture-room of Alexandra College. She too was a student of literature, passionate and keen as he, and had written essays and verses: what could be more important for her than the judgment upon them of this young Abelard? He is surprised and delighted by the mind revealed in them, as a year or two later Robert Browning was surprised and delighted by

her criticism of his poetry. An ardent friendship, supplemented by an intimate correspondence, sprang up between the pair, and about the year we have mentioned, 1872, Dowden had fully realised that she was essential to him. This 'Platonic' relationship was entirely independent of his family life, which was a happy one. The situation can best be understood in the light of the idealism of Robert Browning, which reigned over it. Browning clearly taught that in every man's life there is one chance of salvation, through a woman. I never could quite make out the practical application of this doctrine, in such passages as the epilogue to *The Statue and the Bust*; but he would not have been the great Victorian that he was if he had repudiated convention or the ordinances of society, and the lover carried on the tide of emotion to poetic production would be for Browning the perfect example of 'emancipation through passion'. This Dowden appears to have believed might be his own case, during a brief period of exaltation, in which he more than once thought of sacrificing everything for poetry.

No one who heard Dowden in later life declaiming his verses could doubt that he still believed himself to be a poet. And no one certainly could call Dowden a poetaster. There are lines of his which live in one's mind like the lines of the greatest.

Yet the true poetic reader will probably find in Dowden's poetry something of which he cannot approve; like Blake, when he shook his head over Wordsworth's poetry and muttered: 'I fear this man loves Nature!' It is to be feared that to Dowden, perhaps because he did not live it more whole-heartedly, life itself was good - indeed he says so more than once in his *Letters*. Now, no poet can hold such an opinion, though a poet may well believe in the sacramental redemption of life through love, courage, abnegation, religious devotion, or even, in an Augustan age, through good taste and felicitous correctness. This was indeed the grand heresy of the mid-Victorian period, in which Tennyson and Browning shared, when the whole territory of poetry began to subside to a lower level, until, threatened by the first disastrous changes, poetry began to purge itself of this error. Dowden in his verse never effected the transition from contemplative placidity to causal energy. No influence proceeds from him: his verse is static, derivative, literary. And here it must be admitted that the Muse, who, in Wordsworth's language, possesses a 'metropolitan temple in the hearts of mighty poets'. has never been known to visit with her

favours the contented member of a provincial society. The ideal of comfort and respectability is not easily transcended in such a

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society. Dowden was not past middle age when, in the heart of this society, a rebellious movement began, led by W. B. Yeats, his old friend's son, who, crossing over the Pale, made Anglo-Irish literature # more Irish than the Irish themselves'.

Dowden left directions that no Life of him should be written, and his wish was respected by his widow (for he had been at length united in marriage to his H^loise), who served his memory better, probably, in deciding to publish his Letters: first, a collection of his correspondence with his friends, and then, in two volumes, Fragments from Old Letters: E.D. to E.D.W., 1869 to 1892. It is possible that the latter series of letters will be 'rediscovered' from time to time as the record of a phase of social and literary history hardly likely to be repeated. They chronicle the ardent pursuit of culture by two souls in the days when the book-life of the world seemed incredibly rich: the days of the plenary influence of Carlyle and Goethe, of the big thoughtful reviews, of the reverent reception of new works by Browning, Tennyson, George Eliot. Dowden's letters are not specially brilliant or witty, and they are too broken and inconsecutive to form a consistent record of his life. They fail therefore to establish for him a place among the letter-writers of English literature. The great letter-writers have been 'characters like

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Edward FitzGerald; or full to overflowing of themselves like Carlyle, R. L. Stevenson and probably Shaw; or profoundly rich natures like Keats; or lonely souls like Cowper, closed into this form of communion with their kind; or socially privileged persons with a pretty gift for chit-chat, like Horace Walpole. Dowden is like none of these. Almost cynically indifferent to environment, and contemptuous of eccentricity, he lived an indistinguishable life in the Dublin suburbs, a good family man and citizen, a prompt performer of distasteful duty, a man of whom I have heard it said that at a committee meeting business never went so well as when he was in the chair; yet he shrank inward to himself from personal contacts and never truly belonged to himself unless he had his pen in his hand. He needed the outer life of men and women as much as any, and, with his family, was for long an ornament to Dublin social life; but with his friends he was satisfied for the most part with the epistolary relation. It is only in his letters that he achieves intimacy, and even to his dearest friend he could write:

> 'It is satisfactory to be at writing distance. It is only now and then I am friendly to you in bodily presence.'

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Thus it is the real Dowden who speaks in his letters: a far more genial and companionable being than the somewhat uneasy and unforthcoming professor whose hall-door shut with disconcerting suddenness at one's heels.

One would think, for instance, that he and Gosse would have had much in common. They had corresponded affectionately, exchanged photographs, and it was arranged that they should at length meet during a visit of Dowden to London. When safely back in Dublin again, Dowden wrote that he had called at Gosse's office at Whitehall:

> 'But there I was disappointed. I saw the official nest but not the singer. Did you find my card?'

Gosse replied:

> 'I wonder where it was you called at - not at No. 1 Whitehall, where no card of yours is forthcoming, and where the servants declare you were not seen? Besides, I was in my office all that day.'

To which Dowden:

> ‘It was wicked of you to have put on your cap of darkness while I was searching 1 Whitehall. I thought I heard an ironical snigger as I stooped to write on my card some splutterings of grief and

> incoherent friendship. 1, Whitehall, yes! - and Mr. Gosse’s office, yes! The servant said so, the room was pointed out, I turned away disappointed, and then turned back and went into a neighbour den to ask its occupant whether Mr. Gosse would soon be back. No denial as to Mr. Gosse’s usual presence was given, but the official young man looked bored, and seemed ’igh and ’aughty, so that I instantly became apologetic, confessed it was the most frivolous curiosity that brought me, declared that if it displeased him I didn’t want to see Mr. Gosse at all, and begged that he wouldn’t remember it against me. To feel a little less small I hurried off to see the Midgets’, etc.

What really happened? The damning fact is that Dowden did not part with the valuable book which he was bringing Gosse. I am convinced, however, that he satisfied his conscience by making enquiries, took advantage of some misunderstanding, and felt relieved when he was outside and round the corner, safe from an invitation to some gathering at which he would have had to deplete his never opulent store of nervous energy.

Again, lecturing at Birmingham in 1883, he might surely have consented to stay over-night when he had an invitation to meet Newman. He was much

impressed by George Eliot, who seems to have liked him - everybody liked Dowden - but he never went back to her. His comradely feeling for Whitman flourished in the sense of the leagues between them. By means of correspondence he maintained connection with a large circle of friends, and poets young and old, famous and obscure, were his confidants. But in books alone he could feed his soul with ‘something understood’. Books were to him more than to other men the ‘best society’. for in all literature he sought above all things to discover the soul of the author. Thus Shakespeare was to him primarily a person; and he certainly had his share in setting up that possibly illusory figure of the actor-poet, who rested at length in the contemplative prosperity of the Stratford period. Yet Dowden’s work on Shakespeare is a reminder to us of what we are a little inclined to forget, that Shakespeare must really have been a person. The Shakespearian wisdom, indeed, does not impress us generally as a wisdom gained in the school of personal experience: it is a hearsay wisdom, expressed in a language of the texture of the national proverbs, which the dramatist freely adopted and to which he added a good many. This very fact, however, that he was a man who made the national wisdom his own, gives a definitely conceivable type of human character, though not one in

which we should look for conviction or moral responsibility; and it is open to doubt whether such a character would now attract universal admiration or even attention. This, however, was hardly the Shakespeare of Dowden’s imagination, to whom he put himself in the relation of pupil. He tells us a good deal in his letters of what Shakespeare meant to him, as where he says:

‘ His discovery of truth is one which makes a man somewhat independent of accidents, namely, that there are real powers and objects in the world which are good beyond limit, and that there is no illusion or idealisation, but fact outside and beyond a man’s self/

And in one of his early letters, writing of King Lear, he goes even further:

> ‘The great thing (it makes us feel) is not happiness or unhappiness of an outward kind, not life or death, but noble faith and passion. This thing no Destiny can influence. We can at least go towards and into death divinely. And this being so - a future life is, after all, an impertinence. It is no way needed except, perhaps, for beasts; and it is, at best, a surmise. So Shakespeare’s positivism - according to the answer of my heart - issues in a severer, more stoical and

greater morality than Browning's, and has the advantage of being certain - whereas Browning's is problematical - Shakespeare relies so much on the nobleness of men's nature that he can afford to exhibit 'apparent failure', and without, as Browning does, carrying on the debate into the doubtful futurity, leave it to be felt as each one must feel, that such failure is only apparent, that even here it is the highest success/

It will be seen that it is almost a religion which Dowden extracts from the plays; and we may compare with these opinions a saying of Wordsworth, quoted in a very interesting letter from Aubrey de Vere included in the *Correspondence*:

> 'In general the religious sentiment in Shakespeare's plays is less than that which may be called the average in actual life.'

It is a questionable doctrine that life is 'good', or that it contains within itself the possibility of satisfying us. All religion denies it. Even though we may feel that life might have satisfied us if at some point we had not taken the wrong turning, yet as it would be only by an inconceivable miracle of good luck or guidance that any mortal should unfailingly choose the right one, we may take it as a

universal experience that life is intrinsically unsatisfactory. Yet Dowden in one of his early letters could write:

People talk of disappointments and disillusions, but I have never found them. My father and mother I find better than I thought them, and Shakespeare better worth reading; and Beethoven and Turner better. I find that my own poor little idealisings were poor things, but every reality was as good as I expected, and most of them better.

But call no man happy until he has lived a little beyond thirty. In public no less than in personal affairs, things have a trick of taking a wrong turn; and there came a time when the course of events in Ireland began to alter altogether the relation to it of the purely English culture which he impersonated. It was not really life which was 'good', but certain things in life without which it ceased to wear its friendly face. The British connection was good, Protestantism was all to the good, and it was good that Irish nationalism in the British House of Commons should demonstrate its futility and squalidity. But now all these things, even in Dowden's lifetime - he died in 1913 - began to change. Luckily for him 'books were the best

thing in life '; and he sat in his sunny room - lined with the spoils of many a surprising adventure at the book-carts - not too much depressed by the gradual cessation of calls upon him from the outer world. 'Him, poor man, his library was dukedom large enough/

There was an appealing opportunity for him at this period, when he had failed to become, in Yeats's phrase, a 'fatherly figure' in his country's literature, to become at least a prophet of the things he valued. His name might then have been one of lasting significance in Irish literature. But he was honestly unable to see much in Irish literature as a separate entity, though more than one of its poets sought him out secretly for counsel and encouragement. The only work of the young writers which I have heard him praise, to my mind extravagantly, was, curiously enough, Synge's Deirdre. He was a man of noble appearance - of the ornamental, ambassadorial order - especially when age had whitened his upright hair and Chaucerian beard, his large body sitting erect and expectant, his black tie setting off his old-fashioned expanse of spotless linen; a quick delicate flush would mantle his shaven cheek at any maladroit statement of news or opinion.

' Very interestin-ng!' he would say, in his slightly Cork accent. This would happen perhaps as we

talked of Yeats or Standish O' Grady, for bitter words had passed in public between him and these leaders of nationalist literature. Nature, which had made him sufficiently combative, had not inspired him with sacred confidence, and he once avowed that he 'found in himself little disposition to make the kingdom of God prevail'.

It was easy to make little of Dowden in his later phase, when he found himself on platforms from which Rome and all its works were denounced, to the satisfaction chiefly of Protestant old ladies. The Intellectuals always smiled when the 'question of religion' was dragged in. But what they advocated, and at length succeeded in setting up, was nothing more or less than a Catholic Ireland. Well, the Ireland contemplated by Dowden was a Protestant Ireland; that is to say, an Ireland in which Protestant ideals were paramount. And he was perfectly entitled to conceive of a Protestant Ireland. What is more, Protestant Ireland was really the proper name for the Ireland conceived of by the Intellectuals. It was in Irish Protestantism that Ireland, dumb through the ages, had found a voice. The conception of Ireland as 'a great capacity not yet brought into action '(Grattan's words) was a Protestant conception. The ideal Ireland, as conceived of by Dowden, was the rounding forth of

the English connection, a luminous filling in of a hitherto blank space, a country in a word for which the glorious part remained of realising in these islands the perfect entelechy of an ideal for which he was ready to accept the name 'English'.

The real joke was that Calvin or even Hooker would have held up his hands in horror at the notion of calling Dowden's hesitating agnosticism by the name of Protestantism, Protestantism, however, no less than its great rival, has a sempiternal basis in the illogicality of human nature, and its name, which continues to have a good sound for the agnostic, serves to reconcile the twin, but often equally devout, mental attitudes of affirmation and denial. The persistence in Ireland of this controversy, and the fact that a man like Dowden should have been drawn into it, may be looked upon as a belated testimony to the reality of the principle of nationality in Ireland; for, in the seventeenth century, all the nations found it necessary to come to some kind of terms in this matter; and in Ireland the recent 'civil war 'was the last 'war of religion'. The matter was a vital one for Dowden: it was the question whether Irishmen like himself were to have a country at all.

RECOLLECTIONS OF GEORGE MOORE

It was at a picture-show in Dublin about the year 1898 that Lady Gregory called me over to introduce me to Mr. George Moore. He was at this time turned forty, erect and coldly genial, and but for the curious appearance of his sloping shoulders he looked, with his bowler hat and cane, more like an army officer than a distinguished writer. He had offered himself as a champion of the Gaelic Revival, and had announced his intention to establish himself in Dublin, an accession of strength to the literary movement over which Yeats was in high exultation, though the romanticist and the satirist were soon to quarrel: 'the Aristophanes of Ireland' was the phrase with which Yeats hailed his new ally. On the occasion which I am recalling, Moore was no doubt looking round curiously at the people with whom he was destined to consort. He looked me up and down (rather insolently, I thought), rapidly as it seemed to me comparing me with the probably favourable accounts he had heard from A. E., and in a strong harsh voice which impressed me disagreeably, told me he had read my articles in the

Daily Express. He did not say what he thought of them, and I for my part could think of nothing to say, so that he turned off at once to be introduced to some other hole-and-corner man of letters. An inauspicious beginning to a long and serious friendship! Yet now, after the lapse of more than thirty years, I have in mind a very different interview with Moore. He is lying ill in a London nursing-home, to which I have been summoned by a telegram, and as we talk over the past he is pleased to say that I have been 'part of his life '; 'and I am pretty sure'. he added, rising on his elbow,

‘ that I have counted for a good deal in yours!’ It was true. This man, whom I judged at first to be completely alien to me, was to be the most familiar of my acquaintance, peering curiously into my privacy, and opening his soul to me more I believe than to others: a soul in contact with some perennial source of caustic insight and salutary disillusionment, yet one that craved for affection.

Presently he carried out his plan of settling in Dublin, and at first consorted mainly with the enthusiasts of the Gaelic movement. From the first there had been no clear understanding with Yeats, who was really not much interested in the Irish language, and in importing Moore had thought chiefly of the discomfiture of the bigwigs of Anglo-

Irish culture like Dowden and Mahaffy. Indeed, one of the first employments found for Moore was to pen an atrocious personal attack on Mahaffy, afterwards much regretted by him in the isolation which was presently to befall him in Dublin. A play in which Yeats and he collaborated, Diarmuid and Grant a, was to have been a great manifesto of the new departure in Irish literature, but it proved a lamentable failure. Moore for his part was genuinely interested in the Gaelic movement, and in the conception of an ancient language ready to dwell once more among men and to renew in the hearts of Irishmen all the lost secrets of an attractively enigmatic pagan civilisation. If people only had something to read in it! He fussed and worried Hyde with suggestions for the translation of some foreign masterpiece. He was still sufficiently in favour with the clerical supervisors of the movement to be allowed to contribute some stories to a magazine under Jesuit control: they were translated into Irish and then back again into English, much improved, according to Moore, by their ‘bath in Irish’. A rather mischievous intention looked out of them a little too plainly as they proceeded for the taste of his ecclesiastical patrons. The stories in Irish were published in ‘a very pretty little book of which no one took any notice and all the stories

were embodied subsequently in The Untilled Field: intended, as he wrote a little patronisingly, ‘to serve as models for young Irish writers in the future ‘. Models indeed! Moore had no suspicion that he had come back to a little Russia, which before very long was to find an outlet in the politics of Mr. De Valera and the turbulent genius of Mr. Liam O’Flaherty.

He soon began to be left a good deal to himself in Dublin, with a contracted circle of intimates, of whom rather unwillingly at first I became one, for I had not cared to suppress the feeling of antipathy with which my first encounter with him had impressed me. Nothing in my antecedents had prepared me for such a friend, and I remember the solemn conviction with which a venerable female relative who took a great part in my upbringing warned me against him as a ‘child of Hell ‘. For some reason, however, Moore set himself to conquer me, and from the first decided to take me as seriously as privately I took myself. How clearly I can still see him at a table in the book-stores of the National Library, his large white face lit up with an inquisitive smile, his pale blue eyes (ordinarily rather fishy) every now and then caught in a side-light and converted into soft azure depths (old Mr. Yeats, the poet’s father, was the only person I ever heard

remarking on this peculiarity of Moore’s eyes).

‘ Could there be lovelier poetry than The Scholar Gypsy? ‘he would begin; and instantly I told myself in my self-conscious soul, ‘Someone has been telling him, “Try him with Matthew Arnold”!’ And actually the impressionable man had ‘tears in’s eyes’ one day when, knowing that I was a Wordsworthian, he wanted to know which of the two poems he had just been reading was the more beautiful, Yarrow Visited or Unvisited. There was no resisting him, and presently I became a regular frequenter of his Saturday evening gatherings.

Dublin was an interesting place in those years, and Moore, even when all the Gaelic glamour of his first arrival had fallen from the air - so far at least as he was concerned - tried to persuade himself that he had made no mistake in coming to Ireland. For one thing, where else would he have found a friend like

the perpetually alert and resourceful A. E.? Academic and professional Dublin, however, was hardly aware of him, and he was never really at home with the people to whom he had come at the bidding of the voice in the Chelsea Road, in whose Bohemian assemblies he could be seen more than once looking on with a constrained smile at the company, which for the most part shunned him. A foreigner called in as an ally in a domestic feud is always likely

to become a disconcerting presence, and this new idealistic Ireland was so different from the Ireland to which Moore had long ago bidden farewell in the acrid pages of Parnell and his Island that he had re-entered it almost as a foreigner. But with Yeats, A. E. and others whose portraits are hung in the various sections of Hail and Farewell - that series of scenes and episodes opening one into the other like the rooms of a picture-gallery - he could persuade himself that he had the best that Dublin could offer him. He gave us dinners, far better dinners than we were accustomed to, and mellowed by his unwonted wines we listened to his trenchant talk or turned out like schoolboys into the playground of ideas. The ascendancy which he exercised over us was not derived from any new ideas he brought us. In Dublin we were already pretty strong in ideas. A. E. pullulated ideas; Yeats walked with his head in a cloud of ideas; in the little room where we wrangled over abstractions the air towards midnight would grow dim and overcharged with ideas; and I fancy it was a great relief to Moore to get away from us from time to time to London or Paris. He had probably never before heard so much talk about religion; and what was new to him, as he more than once confessed to me, was the apparent compatibility in his new friends of puritanism in morals

with speculative licence. When he became now and then reminiscent of the intimacies of his Parisian experiences we would listen with smiling interest, and would even suggest emendations and embellishments, always accepted with delight by him: until A. E., watching his opportunity, would suddenly raise the whole subject-matter to the sphere of abstraction, and conversation would once more become general and whole-hearted. Privately I think Moore was a good deal amused by our unquenchable appetite for ideas. Seated stiffly in his chair, his glass beside him though seldom lifted, and smoking his excellent cigar, he would dominate the little company with his strong voice and vivacious presence. He had a place in his mind for every unusual turn of speech he heard and every little quaintness in what he observed, and was watching us all the time, as the pages of *Hail and Farewell* bear witness. A favourite device with him for making conversation was to feign ignorance, as when with a look of childish embarrassment he asked us once for an explanation of an extraordinary line he had seen quoted from Burns, ‘A man’s a man for a that!’ Yet a question like ‘Is Prescott or Motley the better writer? ‘would almost reveal the virtuosity of a natural bookman; and when the subject of discussion was one of his bugbears of

English fiction, he would soon show to anyone who stood up to him that he knew very well what he was talking about.

‘Oh, he is deep, that man! Those friends of his have no notion how deep he is!’ This remark by a distinguished Dublin lady was passed on to me, and she was doubtless nearer the truth than A. E., who thought Moore ‘as simple as a child’. Yet Moore was almost helplessly himself, and there was an elemental simplicity in his mind like that of genius, with which his pose of ignorance accorded very well, and which carried off his foibles. He often protested that he was not a vain man, yet he loved notoriety, and it may be surmised that his life was darkened to some degree by jealousy of certain of his more successful contemporaries. He never achieved that pure success in his work which frees the artist from this evil. He felt always that the world was against him and that he was a kind of Ishmael among men. Once he said that he had always a feeling of being disliked by people, and that it was a pleasant surprise to him to find sometimes that he had been mistaken.

Moore's simplicity - mixed like his ignorance with affectation - was shown in his 'conversion to Protestantism'. a piece of play-acting which impressed no one, though it made him still more disliked in

Dublin. He amused us one evening by his account of the interview in the clergyman's study, where they had knelt down together 'for a little prayer'. I could hardly conceive of Moore subjected to a moving spiritual experience without wishing to turn it to literary account, but he declared that he felt after the interview 'as if he had had a bath', and his detestation of Catholicism was genuine enough, particularly of Irish Catholicism. Later, when he had left Ireland behind him, this feeling passed into an avowed detestation of Christianity in general: and curiously it was when he denounced Christianity that he seemed most to reveal a cast of mind due to his Catholic upbringing. For the natural Protest- ant never really hates Christianity, the distinction between Christ and the historical mess made of Him being always present in his mind. Perhaps it was because Moore felt at heart that the only real Christianity is Catholicism that he loved to call himself a Protestant, often declaring that he never felt at home with anyone but Protestants. 'I even like', he said, 'their dirty little hymn!'

It was not perhaps altogether a compliment to be chosen by Moore for special friendship. He tells somewhere of a saying of Whistler about him, to the effect that he was incapable of friendship as he thought of nothing but his work; and certainly

friendship with Moore was always accompanied by the idea of utility. There were periods in our long friendship during which I lost sight of him, coinciding with periods in which I could be of no use to him. But what after all is disinterested friendship? It is utility which gives substance to friendship, and it is certain that out of my small services a real friendship arose. It happened that I was so situated in Dublin as to be just the man for him, his notion of a librarian being the common one of a man with nothing to do all day but read; and as I was often on duty till ten o'clock I became a great resource with him when, in his house close by, he was left alone in the evenings. 'O my good friend!' he would say as he came in, 'may you never know what it is to be left alone after dinner! Marry!' It was a little hard to realise that this rather lonely man, who, after a long day of writing and dictating, could find nothing better to do than to sit at a table in the office with anything to read with which I could supply him, was a big landowner in the county Mayo, with a pleasant Georgian mansion 'set on a green hill above a winding lake'.

I once told him that his neglect of Moore Hall was his great mistake, and what a picturesque figure he would have been there, issuing his fulminations against Irish Catholicism, English industrialism,

Newman, Hardy and the various objects of his animosity, making it perhaps as famous a place in its way as Yasnaya Polyana. 'But what would I do with myself there?' he asked a little ruefully. I suggested that he might, for instance, ask us down to visit him. But though the possession of Moore Hall had an important ideal value for him in his mind, its occupation would have meant, no doubt, for one thing, a disturbance of the rigid economy with which, increasingly as he grew older, he chose to manage his affairs.

'I think', he would announce again in his large way, 'there must be something in reading!' He had never acquired the habit of reading, and had even something of the puzzled admiration of an illiterate person for those who could content themselves with this resource - a not uncommon attitude towards books, it may be remarked, in those whose time is mostly spent in writing them. In his own house, books were not much in evidence, and if he saw anything on a friend's table, he would ask or take leave to carry it off; or, as I have said, he would come to the Library. It was in fact a pleasure to find him 'something to read': for one thing, it disposed of him for a while, if one fancied there was work to do, and when a book got hold of him he was a great reader, as I pleased him by telling him, in

spite of his affectation of never reading anything. In this way it fell to me to be the occasion of his making or extending his acquaintance with authoritative masterpieces such as *Don Quixote*, Rousseau's *Confessions* (which he read more easily in an English translation), Borrow's *Bible in Spain*, Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance*. He had abused Stevenson, but was entranced with the *Travels with a Donkey*. And when I came back to him at his table, he would tell me how some passage should have been written, where the author went wrong, the prodigious skill or monstrous bungling in some incident or transition, all that an arduous and attentive worker was eager to note in style and language. Sometimes he himself was the discoverer, as when he found at last how Homer should be translated, in Samuel Butler's audacious rendering. And when the Library closed we would go to his house or walk out through the suburbs, talking always of the writing of books. The ideas of several of his books started up in these walks and talks: I remember particularly the subject of *The Brook Kerith*. Indeed, I can please myself with the fancy that had we fallen in with the Weird Sisters in one of our nightly rambles, they might have had a word for myself at this time as a kind of literary Banquo: 'Thou shalt get books though thou write none!'

Moore was changing. It was not merely that he grew dissatisfied with his early writings, but even the forward-beckoning image of 'the ideal George Moore', who had sacrificed everything to audacity, began to put on a new semblance with him. His mind had taken its permanent shape in the French language; his standards were French standards; the liberators and instructors of his spirit were those who held sway in Paris in the eighties. With a French subject he was serious and circumspect, but in most English authors everything seemed to him, just as to a Frenchman, a little odd and often a little ludicrous. This general fact is the explanation of a good deal in Moore; but now the curious outcome of his Irish adventure was that he felt he had not perhaps been serious enough, certainly not English enough; and he was soon to speak of The Lake as the book in which he had 'learned to write'. It was the beginning of the much-lauded prose style of his later period, which was the outcome of an endless preoccupation with the niceties of the English language. The general impression left in my mind by the prose style of his long narratives (not the prose in which he told his reveries, thoughts and experiences, which is a beautiful achievement) is one of monotony, due to a uniformity in the structure of the sentence; and it is disfigured by his pet

locutions and mannerisms. But what is beyond praise in Moore is his sense of language, his diction. One noticed this in his talk no less than in his writing - an instinctive use of the right word, the word which an intelligent man, meaning fully what he said, would use. I once pleased him by saying that to use cliche with distinction is the mark of a good style. It might be said of Moore that he came to love the proved and genuine usages of the English speech as if he had been their father. He would dearly have liked to have contributed one or two of his own, and, as he said, jestingly, to have 'got into the Oxford Dictionary' but his attempts in this direction - 'of all', 'think for' and one or two other pets of his - were never very successful.

Moore, as I have already indicated, talked to us broadly enough of sex, but I knew him only as a laborious and austere liver. Later on, when we both lived in England, and when he wished me to undertake his biography (a task from which I finally excused myself, preferring to help him in other ways), he made more than one journey down to me in the country, especially to put me right on two points in his life which he considered important. One of these was the definite ambition, avowed to Zola, with which he had returned from Pans to

England, of winning 'freedom 'for English fiction. The other was the story of a grand passion. As in the case of Romeo, its sudden arrival had been heralded by a preparatory experience, during his

collaboration with Mrs. Craigie (John Oliver Hobbes) in writing a play. Mrs. Craigie in her letters to Moore at this time expresses a fervent admiration of his genius, but from what I have read of her I should say that like Romeo's Rosaline she 'had Dian's wit', and that 'from love's weak childish bow she lived unharmed'. At any rate, when Moore began making love to her he met with a decided rebuff, and for some time wandered about London, a disconsolate figure. One day, when he was lunching in some fashionable restaurant, a lively party entered, and Moore, who was known to some of its members, was haled over to their table, where he exerted himself to entertain the company. Seated opposite to him was a brilliant young lady, destined to become one of the principal figures in society, who listened delightedly to his sallies, and with a sudden inspiration called out to him,

'George Moore, you have a soul of fire!' It was the compliment of his life, the remembrance of which he constantly cherished, and the incident was the beginning of a romantic attachment, all that was wanted to complete the sentimental equipment

of this Balzacian young Irishman, (1) I did not doubt the main facts of the story, but frankly I never knew how much to believe of what he told me, and had a suspicion that the account was given simply because he had decided that this would be 'the best way of telling' what really happened. In any case, it did not seem to matter much, for Moore the lover and Moore the literary fabricator were hardly separable. There was only one real passion in his life, that for writing well, and whether what was 'well invented' ever really happened was a consideration hardly worth attending to. There was the famous story of the lady who conceived the heroic plan of bringing literature to Texas by making Moore the father of her son, which he related to us on one of his Saturday evenings as an incident of the week. But, as a wit of the Arts Club remarked, it could be proved that at the time of the alleged occurrence Moore had been closeted with the present writer.

All the infatuations of his first arrival in Ireland were now remembered by him with a certain rancour, tempered with a disposition to recognise in himself a comic figure. His association with Yeats in the Irish Literary Theatre had led to a quarrel, and

1. Moore must at this time have been forty, but even ten years later his appearance was youthful.

Hyde and other leaders of the Language Movement had turned away from him with a smile as an impracticable ally. He had not been long in Dublin before he was writing to a friend in Paris,

' I have absolutely renounced all my Celtic hopes', and he began to make plans for leaving Ireland; yet he was destined after all to play a considerable parr in the little drama of the Irish Literary Renaissance, and stayed on for ten years. As already mentioned, the only employment found for him had been to discharge a few bolts at some reputable persons who might, as things turned out, have been his good friends; but the tittering that followed was an irritatingly inadequate reward, and what might have been expected began to happen. His quizzical attention was diverted more and more from the enemy to these new friends; and as the profitlessness of his adventure became more and more apparent to him, the notion of exacting from them a recompense which they had not bargained for began to shape itself in his mind. In other words, he saw that it was they rather than the powers he had come to make war upon who could provide him with a literary subject. At what point he veered round to this view of his Irish adventure it would be difficult to determine: probably when he was half-way through with it, for he seemed about that time to

give up the idea of leaving. Nor do I know whether he was consciously disobedient to the voice that came to him on the Chelsea Road, which after all had chimed in marvellously well with his natural instinct as an Irishman, on hearing of the new Irish Literary Theatre and of the revival of the Irish language, to have a finger in that pie. What is certain is that in Hail and Farewell he is exercising his true vocation, to the satisfaction of himself and most of his readers. And it was not merely an artistic

vocation, for into Moore's mouth were put the words of judgment on the Ireland that was passing away, the Ireland of old ideals in which people had ceased to believe and of new ones which had no relation to fact. His voice is the voice of common sense, just as the voice of Cervantes is the voice of common sense. It is not perhaps a great book, but it is the book in which he found a novel and spacious field for all his talents as a writer. And with all its trivialities, its rather snobbish egotism, its occasionally unjust and sometimes feeble characterisations, it is a document of permanent interest, for his whimsical intelligence caught many things in the activities of Irishmen at this period which deserved his caustic comment. He has here a real subject and writes in plenary possession of himself. Hail and Farewell is then that book of

Moore's which will probably continue longest to give enjoyment.

When at last he bade farewell to Ireland (which he did chiefly I think for reasons of literary appropriateness, for he had come to feel fairly well established in Dublin), he had still twenty years before him, which he was to spend in the composition of his historical romances, dialogues, essays, and in the revision of all his previous writings in the light of his developed notions of literary style. Had he remained in Ireland, there might have been events in his life, particularly in the exciting times which followed his departure. It seemed now unlikely that I should see much more of him, but it was only now that I began to experience the constancy of his friendship, and a stream of letters came from him, relating mostly to his literary work. Hearing at the time of the Treaty that I was taking advantage of the new arrangements to go out on a pension, he wrote me a long letter, beginning:

> We are friends, but we are not reader and writer. We are friends because we are both animated by a dislike of the Irish character and papistry. No country is so foreign to me as Ireland, but I am not sure if this last sentence represents you. I think it does; you will never

> be at home in Ireland, and since the burning of my house I don't think I shall ever be able to bring myself to set foot in Ireland again. Wherefore I hope that you will come to England and that I shall spend some more evenings with you and renew a friendship which was laid many years ago and build again upon it. Our dislike of Ireland is a sufficiently broad basis for us to rear a noble fane of friendship; dislike of Ireland is deep enough in us, strong enough, close enough, intimate enough, for us to be able to scorn our literary differences. ...'

All this will not be taken very seriously; and merely from the fact that he lost no opportunity of abusing Ireland we cannot be sure of the part he would have taken had he remained there. The part of a wise man in Ireland is mostly that of silence, but this would hardly have suited Moore. On the whole, he was well out of it. He would hardly have been allowed to grow into the dignified Landorian figure he became in his old age in London, a die-hard Britisher of the old type. A sympathetic biographer would win our admiring interest in this lonely figure, toiling through the long summer days in that dingy street, bombs at one time crashing round him, with Landor for his exemplar and master.

His letters to me are sometimes finished pieces of writing, typed and corrected, and I rather think he meant me to make use of some of them in the biography I was to write of him; for he had made me his literary executor and official biographer. He felt himself to have been a vital figure in the literature of his time, and was extraordinarily anxious to be commemorated as a man, fame being the only immortality he cared about; and he would have been satisfied to have been made an occasionally farcical hero in the narrative of his literary adventures and love-affairs provided his identity were perpetuated in this way. 'You could not', he declared, 'have a better subject'. and he encouraged me not to spare him. Once, even, he challenged me to say the most offensive thing I could about him, and chortled when I retailed a phrase I had picked up. I did nor, however, feel qualified for the task he set me, and the proposal finally fell through, though I retained his friendship to the end.

I think what deterred me as much as anything was the careful consideration which would have been necessary of the long narrative works of his later years. Do we ever feel in reading Moore that we are in the presence of a master? Hardly, if by a master we mean one who can admit us into a world of enchantment of which in his art he possesses the

key. There is no enchanted or even clearly defined Moore-world, as there is a Hardy-world, a Dickens-world, even a Gissing-world. But he was distinguished from far more successful novelists than himself in being, what he loved to think of himself as being, a ‘man of letters’, and wrote to please himself. He despised most of modern fiction, and had no patience at all with the novel in which the ordinary reader delights to lose himself, a good story about the life he knows. ‘You may guess how bad it was’, he said once of some novel, ‘when I had to sit up last night to finish it/ Finally he elaborated his notion of what he called, though hardly with his usual felicity and pungency, the ‘aesthetic novel ‘: a kind of novel almost as remote from the common interests of men nowadays as the Greek novel or the Elizabethan.

I happened to be in Moore’s company when he heard of Zola’s death, and I remember his exclamation: ‘Zola was the beginning of me!’ The contemplation of that prodigious toiler at work had awakened in him the literary artist, and his return to England to win ‘freedom ‘for English fiction had been in the nature of a campaign. Since then, English fiction has grown rich enough in novels of every kind, but I believe it is those writers who have carried it to its most interesting developments who

have most highly valued Moore’s initiative and originality. No doubt there is a great deal more to be said for the English novel - which after all has played a great part in European literature - than Moore allowed; and when he said, for example, that Marius the Epicurean was ‘the great atonement for all the bad novels which have been written in the English language’. we have to ask ourselves whether this pupil of Balzac and Zola ever entertained even for a moment a sympathetic understanding of the English novel. To him it was negligible, almost non-existent: and his indifference to its vitality and good spirits, its incomparable sense of romance, its thoughtfulness, its gift of humour, its affiliation to drama and poetry rather than to the arts of painting and drawing, not to speak of its natural comprehension of the psychology of a race which still remembers Puritanism, only showed how completely his early baptism in French culture had estranged him from all ideals that were purely English. The reticences imposed by English prudery might have been supposed to be at least as prejudicial, from the Parisian point of view, to the art of poetry, yet England has contrived to express itself intimately and tearfully in its poetry. When all is said, however, A Mummer s Wife and Esther Waters were events in English fiction, in a sense, for example, in

which we cannot use the phrase of the far more English and perhaps more interesting novels of his contemporary Gissing.

He was a great theorist about his art of story-telling, and after much association with him it was not possible to think of the whole subject of fiction quite as one had done before. One learned to distinguish between the telling of what is merely a good story, complete in itself, and the art manifested in the long-sustained narrative-line, in which the English masters (if there are any!) are not the recognised novelists like Dickens, Thackeray, Hardy, but rather writers like Defoe, Borrow, even Pater. In fact he used the word ‘novel ‘very loosely. Rousseau’s Confessions, for instance, was to him almost a novel, in which what roused his admiration were Rousseau’s miraculous powers of manipulation and ‘invention Moore himself was almost a philosopher, who found a contemplative satisfaction in looking at life in the spirit of a landscape-painter; and just as he would praise a line of hills as being ‘beautifully drawn’, so he seemed to himself to understand a subject like the origin of Christianity if he could see it as ‘story’. The belief that he possessed a special faculty of this sort distinguishing him from his fellows was strong within him, and perhaps was partly justified, but it led him into

enterprises for which his lack of scholarship and the poverty of his spiritual experience alike disqualified him. Indeed, what the gain was in uplifting the story of the Gospels, or even of H^loise and Abelard, into the tenuous atmosphere of 'pure narrative', I never could see. It is not in this way that the crowded figures of imaginative literature have been brought into being. It was not even the way in which Moore himself had produced Esther Waters or A Mummer s Wife.

He took prodigious pains with the composition of *The Brook Kerith*, studying Philo Judaeus, Josephus and everything he could get hold of, becoming quite a doughty controversialist in matters of Biblical criticism, and finally undertaking a journey in his father's footsteps to the Holy Land. In these studies, Jesus vanished from his mind as a historical figure, and in the story he is far more interested in the entirely imaginary figure of Joseph of Arimathea. I was present at the inception of this work, when we were talking one evening in the National Library of the theory that Jesus had survived the crucifixion, and the extraordinarily interesting idea of a subsequent meeting of Paul and Jesus, with the staggering blow this would be to Paul's doctrine of the Resurrection, flashed at once upon his mind. I was eager to see what he had made of this conception,

and was rather disappointed to find that he was writing a long book, in which the early adventures of Joseph sometimes recall the author's youth in County Mayo. The presence of a mysterious and authoritative teacher is not realised at all; and his Peter (with regard to whom, thinking of Irish Catholicism, he cherished a particular grudge) and the rest of the apostles are a sorry crowd. Paul, however, he looked on as a kind of discovery of his own, regarding him as one of the greatest because most personal of writers; he thought he understood Paul perfectly, and had not a doubt about the 'thorn in the flesh'. Certainly in writing of Paul he had conceived a vivid character, endeared to him through his being privy to the processes of the Apostle's mind in still determining, after the discovery of the living Jesus, to proclaim the doctrine of the Resurrection. Paul surely never had a stranger champion than Moore; and I sometimes wonder what the sin-tortured Apostle would have thought of a curious assertion often made by Moore: 'I could not do anything that I believed to be wrong '.

But I did Moore less than justice in saying that he did not achieve 'enchantment'. When he wrote of himself he was a master. There is hardly any portion of his life on which he has not directed his

visionary retrospection, and a collection of these passages might form his best memorial. Nor would he have written so well of himself had he not been to himself the strange puzzle he was to other men.

ST. WINIFRED'S WELL

Moore has been in the habit all his life of contracting friendships with men totally dissimilar from himself; and his whim, while in Dublin, of contracting a particular friendship with the present writer puzzled and amused our circle. Watching us with our heads together, people may have pleased themselves by saying that Moore had found his Boswell; but in this case it was the greater man who had sought out the lesser. And perhaps it is true that I have neglected an opportunity which came in my way of conveying to posterity the image of a unique personality, for it is certain that, if done with even a modicum of literary talent, a veracious account of any remarkable character will please and interest a great many readers. Perhaps Moore himself, while he unbosomed himself to me, may have had some such thought; but I must confess that any time the thought occurred to myself, it was with an accession of lively admiration of the art manifested by Boswell in his immortal *Life*. The

1. Written in 1927.

mere reproduction of Johnson's conversation is a wonderful feat; but what is so admirable in Boswell, what proves him to have possessed the soul of an artist, is that he could always regard his great friend as a 'subject'. Even when he was trampled upon, misunderstood, he preserved an artist's imperturbable detachment and serenity, Moore, as a subject, always escaped me; he is a man with a strange power of exciting an interest in himself wherever he goes, but to enter into his mind his presence would be necessary, with the strong raucous voice which give an equal weight to all his utterances; and his mind is by no means one in which I could lose myself, as Boswell did in Johnson. Johnson was above all things for Boswell an immensely congenial subject; and possibly even Boswell might have had much the same experience as I with Moore, if he had succeeded in his attempt to attach himself to Voltaire. All of the Doctor's enormous weight was thrown into the support of received opinions and these were for the most part the burden of his irrefutable statements. Moore, on the other hand, with an almost equal air of irrefutability, enunciates opinions and principles which, to say the least of them, awaken no intuitive assent in the mind of the average British citizen. Here are a few of them:

'There is no moral law.'
'Literature is entirely without influence on conduct/
'All education is harmful.'
'No Catholic can produce literature.'
'There was no vulgarity in the world before the nineteenth century.'
'There is no English novel.'
'The third greatest English man of letters is Landor.'
'No actor can be a dramatist, therefore William Shakespeare could not have written the plays.'

One or other of these questionable opinions might be the subject of an endless wrangle during one of our walks: it was in talk that he discovered the resources of his own mind, and phrases struck out by him in the heat of discussion would reappear in his writings, so that perhaps his vigorous understanding did not wholly waste itself on these occasions. But in contrast to Johnson, who was never particularly anxious to know what Boswell thought, it is Moore's single interest in conversation to find out what his companion really thinks, which in my own case, I do not mind saying, is a little hard to do. It is this which makes him most excellent company in a *tête-à-tête*, especially in a country

ramble, where his interest in everything is that both of a connoisseur in landscape and of a natural sportsman. I found this to be true during various rambles in the neighbourhood of a little town in Flintshire where I lived after leaving Dublin, where Moore would occasionally descend on me. It might happen that I would draw his attention to some object of interest, and he would say with a little impatience, 'I am missing nothing'. And this was proved more than once, as when, interrupting his argument, he would point to a long neck sticking out of the grass a hundred yards away and exclaim, 'Why, that is a heron!' Or when he surprised me by a minute account of some fellow-passenger in a railway carriage whom neither of us appeared to have noticed. Yet he revealed to me a curious fact which no one would suspect, that he has only the proper use of one eye.

One day I was pleased when he accepted my proposal that we should visit St. Winifred's Well, taking the train along the coast to Holywell Junction. A little branch line runs up to the old town by the side of a winding valley, much broken and defaced by factories, and the ruin which only industry inflicts, yet with peaceful and fertile aspects remaining out of old time, freshness in the sheets of water detained now for artificial purposes, and

pastoral glimpses through the abundant foliage which brushed against the carriage windows. Moore, as usual, did not appear to notice anything, and all the way up to Holywell he was demonstrating that just as religious dogma had destroyed the arts of the ancient world, so industrialism was already well advanced with the destruction of modern art and literature - a melancholy opinion truly, which itself appeared to me to savour of dogma. I mentioned that Goethe and Nietzsche seemed agreed that the world is a kind of hell from which art is the redemption, and let fly the haphazard assertion that the most beautiful pastoral poetry had been written in the sandhills of Alexandria. But this irritated him, perhaps because of its inexactitude, and we were not getting on very well in the little train when we arrived at the top of the town and were glad to step out and look about us. Then the little diversion of refreshment at an inn. An inn is always an adventure, and Moore's unusual strain of comment on a comfortable tom-cat extended in front of the fire brought a lady, the only guest beside ourselves, into the conversation. I am sure we left with her the impression that she had fallen in with an eccentric bachelor who had yielded to that curious tendency of unrequited human affection which has proved so advantageous to cats.

If industrialism and dogma be the twin foes of literature and art there would appear to be small hope for Holywell, which is a pity, for the dual life of this place might offer a theme for an interesting social study, its twin souls of industrialism and religiosity, the internal relations and reciprocal comment of the two ends of the town, the top part given over to a thriving acquisitive life which pleased Moore so much, in spite of his principles, that he wanted to know why I had not come to live here. By way of answer, I referred unguardedly to our recent discussion, whereupon he stopped in the road and, wheeling round upon me, exclaimed: 'Eglinton, will you never allow yourself to be rolled out of your own ideas? What I was attempting to convey to you was that the vulgarisation of the world through industrialism is quite a recent thing. Of course, there has always been commerce, but there was no vulgarity in the world before the nineteenth century. There has always been the chaffering of the market-place, just as there has always been a pot on the kitchen fire, and a hearth-stone with perhaps a tom-cat in front of it. ... Have you got it now?' There was nothing more to be said and we walked on. The sloping street now changed completely in character: instead of shops, Georgian houses with brass plates indicating the

tenancy of religious orders; a Catholic church with tall open doors; rows of little houses perched along the former level of the road, flights of steps, walled gardens; no suggestion here of Wales, rather of some provincial town in Ireland, especially when we found Protestantism in possession of the old church adjoining the shrine of the Well. A steep lane brought us round to the entrance, and on the railings we read the inscription: 'St. Winefride's Well, famous for over one thousand years for miraculous cures, and in great repute as a place of pilgrimage'.

What is the becoming mood in which to approach the seat of a faith of this kind, still living but held only by those who have fallen far in the wake not only of the intellectual but of the moral companionship of humanity? Certainly not merely one of ridicule; on the other hand it is weak to find excuses for ignorance and imbecility. Moreover, many of those who journey to the Well are only half-convinced, and do not mind a little rallying on the subject of their credulity: it is an off chance with many of them that they may thus rid themselves of their rheumatism or sciatica. And especially I would not be tender to the feelings of those who, with money to spend, neglect this Jordan at their door in favour of the costlier and genteeler

pilgrimage to Lourdes. In general, it is in proportion to the abject spiritual condition of the pilgrim that the problem deepens; and while a single wretched cripple believes with his whole soul in the miracle,

most of us would hesitate to demolish the venerable masonry which enshrines it, if only out of consideration for him. Luckily for the Church, which draws no doubt some inappreciable revenue out of the maintenance of this questionable cult, the Lucians of our day, whose ridicule falls in bright shafts among the wrecks of the religious ideals of their countrymen, belong frequently, from one cause or another, to its fold.

George Moore entertains none of these hesitations, and when we asked what was the charge for admission, he added the query, 'and how much for the cure? 1 The woman threw back her head and glared at him fiercely. 'At your age you ought to know that it is by the grace of God!' she answered, and I must say that any repartee which may have occurred to him died on his lips as we passed through the turnstile. We descended some steps into a long chamber resembling a public bath, with boxes along each side of the reservoir, and here a solitary woman sat bowed in prayer; then passed along into the vaulted shrine of the Well. Moore had just been saying that no man is complete aesthetically, and had

mentioned the feeling for architecture as the sense in which he was himself deficient; but he was now full of admiration of the tall columns surrounding the Well, exclaiming that men do not build like that now! Stacks of crutches, votive offerings of all kinds, were fixed around the walls, with certified inscriptions attesting cures, many of the names being Irish; and leaning over the enclosure of the Well we peered into its copious and silent depths, a pagan spring, profound, pellucid, with a perennial dimple in the midst of its surface. The legend of St. Winefride is not a beautiful one, and indeed it is remarkable how seldom the attribute of beauty belongs to these mediaeval legends, which nevertheless have inspired or been the occasion of miracles of architecture. It seems likely enough that we owe many edifying marvels to the inability of the folk tale-teller to find any way out of critical situations without having recourse to the expedient of the *deus ex machina*. Yet the setting of the story and the figures in it are romantic enough: a chieftain's daughter of surpassing beauty; a saintly hermit (it will soon be a knight) who has won the soul (it will soon be the heart) of the maiden; and a wicked young prince who approaches her with infamous proposals. That is the situation, which is solved in the legend through the supernatural powers of the

saint, who, when the baffled prince has cut off the maiden's head, replaces it on the body and brings her back to life; while the earth opens to swallow up the prince, and a healing stream gushes from the spot where the head has fallen. All that the Church will vouch for in this story is that St. Winefride was a virgin and a martyr; and as neither virginity nor martyrdom is interesting to Moore, he hardly listened to it, having been put off frequently enough by such stories in his search for more congenial and less edifying matter for his *Story-Teller s Holiday*.

But nowhere have I felt more disposed to yield some kind of spiritual obeisance to the element of water. The dimple as we gazed began to look almost roguish, and one no longer thought of rescuing a nymph from confinement, so aloof seemed the Well from all the reminders of disease and decrepitude which surrounded it, so ignorant of its sacrosanctity and of the numberless miracles which it had worked, itself its own joy as much now in this gloomy prison as when it gushed from a sod and ran down this valley through groves as fair as Tempe's. It was hard to remember even that it was a river, an individual entity of which it is so difficult to form a complete conception from source to sea, that the Greeks, with their sculptor minds, had recourse to their trick of personification in the human form. But

> If wish were mine some type of thee to view,
> Thee and not thee thyself, I would not do
> Like Grecian artists, give thee human cheeks,
> Channels for tears; no Naiad should'st thou be!

There are people who seem to think that the mountains lack honour if they are not venerated as holy places, or springs if they are not worshipped, but I don't know what I should do in a world in which wherever one turned one stumbled on holy places,. like the wretched Oedipus, who could not sit down to rest himself under some trees at Colonus without bringing out the king of the neighbouring town in horror at his unconscious sacrilege; and if my wanderings took me to the neighbourhood of Benares or of Bethlehem, I should be afraid of my life of satisfying my thirst out of the top of my hat from what appeared to be only a prattling wayside brook. In fact, I began to agree with the redoubtable companion at my side in thinking that an artist must be badly handicapped in an excessively theological atmosphere.

As we came through the turnstile, Moore and the woman stared hard at each other, and I was glad to get him out on the road again. I suppose I am to blame for the frequently speculative and even theological cast of Moore's conversation when it is addressed to me: anyhow, our talk, as we walked

down the long hill to the railway station, drifted into the curious enquiry whether life was a more wonderful thing for Darwin or for Kant. The name of Kant calls up a world of interest which may be guessed to be alien to the mind of George Moore, yet there was a time, as he tells us in his *Confessions of a Young Man*, when he carried about with him in his pocket the *Kritik of Pure Reason* and was called 'Mr. Kant 'by his lady friend. This was no doubt a transient phase of youthful development, but theology, in particular, has always remained with him a favourite field for conversation; and he is never so crudely positive in his negations as was, for instance, his brother Augustus, who used, George Moore once told me, to express impatience with those who raised the question of the 'existence of God': for his part he 'jolly well knew there isn't one'. On the present occasion, however, Moore as we walked along was denying that there is any transcendental element in human experience, and asserted his disbelief in all 'mysticism'. When I asked whether he would not admit that there is a mystery, he reflected for a moment and then replied that there is none. 'Of course'. he added, 'there are many things in life which we do not understand, and it is possible to admit that there are minds which understand more than others, but life is no

less wonderful for the materialist than for the transcendentalist - for Darwin, if you like, than for Kant/ This appeared to me to be well said, a fitting apology for a man for whom, pre-eminently, 'the visible world exists'. Men are generally most confident on the side of their limitations, and it is probable that Moore, while admitting his deficiency in the speculative instinct, is pretty sure that he is not missing much thereby. To myself, for instance - whom perhaps he credits with a more vigorous speculative capacity than I possess - he is fond of pointing as a victim of devotion to the ideal expressed in Matthew Arnold's line, 'To see life steadily and see it whole', 'which means about as much as, - I forget the line which he extemporised: '"To see life all at once and all the time"'. Life at any rate remains perennially wonderful to George Moore. His original endowment from Nature was a gift of startled curiosity about everything that life was to unfold before his gaze, and he must have disconcerted his nurse with the same amazed and speculative pair of eyes which in early manhood he directed upon Manet while the latter painted his portrait.

THE BEGINNINGS OF JOYCE

As I think of Joyce a haunting figure rises up in my memory. A pair of burning dark-blue eyes, serious and questioning, is fixed on me from under the peak of a nautical cap; the face is long, with a slight flush suggestive of dissipation, and an incipient beard is permitted to straggle over a very pronounced chin, under which the open shirt-collar leaves bare a full womanish throat. The figure is fairly tall and very erect, and gives a general impression of a kind of seedy hauteur; and every passer-by glances with a smile at the white tennis shoes (borrowed, as I gather from a mention of them in Ulysses). It was

while walking homeward one night across Dublin that I was joined by this young man, whose appearance was already familiar to me; and although I cannot remember any of the strange sententious talk in which he instantly engaged, I have only to open the Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man to hear it again. ‘When we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction I require a new terminology and a new personal experience/ I have never felt much interest

in literary aesthetics, and he seemed to set a good deal of store by his system, referring, I recollect, to some remark made to him by ‘one of his disciples’. but I liked listening to his careful intonation and full vowel sounds, and as he recited some of his verses, ‘My love is in a light attire’, I remember noticing the apple in his throat, the throat of a singer; for Mr, Joyce has turned out to be an exception to a sweeping rule laid down by the late Sir J. P. Mahaffy, who used to say that he had never known a young man with a good tenor voice who did not go to the devil. Some ladies of the pavement shrieked at us as we crossed over O’Connell Bridge. I remember that we talked of serious matters, and at one point he impressed me by saying: ‘If I knew I were to drop dead before I reached that lamp-post, it would mean no more to me than it will mean to walk past it’. Why did this young man seek out my acquaintance? Well, writing folk are interested in one another, and there were peculiarities in the occasion of the present writer’s inglorious attempts at authorship about which it may be well to say something, as the relation may help indirectly to define the nature of Joyce’s own portentous contribution to Irish literature.

James Joyce was one of a group of lively and eager-minded young men in the University College

(a Jesuit house), amongst whom he had attained a sudden ascendancy by the publication in the Fortnightly Review, when he was only nineteen, of an article on Ibsen’s play, ‘When we Dead Awaken’. The talk of these young men, their ribald wit and reckless manner of life, their interest in everything new in literature and philosophy (in this respect they far surpassed the students of Trinity College) are all reproduced in Joyce’s writings; for his art seems to have found in this period the materials on which it was henceforth to work. Dublin was certainly at this moment a centre of vigorous potentialities. The older culture was still represented with dignity by Dowden, Mahaffy and others; political agitation was holding back its energies for a favourable opportunity, while the organisation of Sinn Fein was secretly ramifying throughout the country; the language movement was arrogant in its claims; the Irish Literary Theatre was already famous; and besides Yeats and Synge, A. E. and George Moore, there were numerous young writers, and even more numerous talkers, of incalculable individuality. There was hardly anyone at that time who did not believe that Ireland was on the point of some decisive transformation. What, then, was wanting to this movement? for it has passed away, leaving Ireland more intensely what it has always been, a

more or less disaffected member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. That Ireland should achieve political greatness appeared then to most of us to be an idle dream; but in the things of the mind and of the spirit it seemed not a folly to think that Ireland might turn its necessity of political eclipse to glorious gains. A regenerate and thoughtful Ireland, an Ireland turned inwards upon itself in reverie, might recover inexhaustible sources of happiness and energy in its own beauty and aloofness, through a generous uprush of wisdom and melody in its poets and thinkers. It was not in the interest of the constituted spiritual authorities in Ireland that such a dream should ever be realised: a new movement of the human mind in Ireland was indeed precisely what was feared; the noisy language movement, the recrudescence of political agitation, outrage, assassination - anything was preferable to that! There was a moment nevertheless when it seemed possible that this might be the turn events would take. Among other hopeful indications, a little magazine was started, under the editorship of the present writer, and A. E. boldly recommended ‘The Heretic’ for a title, but the somewhat less compromising name, *Dana*, a magazine of independent thought, was chosen. The fruitfulness of the moment was revealed in the

number of eminent writers who contributed freely to its pages (Shaw and Chesterton promised contributions): Joyce, who chortled as he pocketed half a sovereign for a poem, was the only one to receive remuneration, Yeats held aloof, talking cuttingly of 'Fleet Street atheism.

Joyce is, as all his writings show, Roman in mind and soul; for, generally speaking, to the Romanised mind the quest of truth, when it is not impious, is witless. What he seemed at this period I have attempted to describe, but what he really was is revealed in his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, a work completed in Trieste just ten years later. Religion had been with him a profound adolescent experience, torturing the sensitiveness which it awakened; all its floods had gone over him. He had now recovered, and had no objection to 'Fleet Street atheism', but 'independent thought' appeared to him an amusing disguise of the proselytising spirit, and one night as we walked across town he endeavoured, with a certain earnestness, to bring home to me the extreme futility of ideals represented in Dana, by describing to me the solemn ceremonial of High Mass. (Dost thou remember these things, O Joyce, thou man of meticulous remembrance?) The little magazine laboured through a year, and the chief interest of the

volume formed by its twelve numbers is now, no doubt, that it contains the series of sketches by George Moore, Moods and Memories, afterwards embodied in *Memoirs of my Dead Life*. It might have had a rare value now in the book market if I had been better advised one evening in the National Library, when Joyce came in with the manuscript of a serial story which he offered for publication. He observed me silently as I read, and when I handed it back to him with the timid observation that I did not care to publish what was to myself incomprehensible, he replaced it silently in his pocket.

I imagine that what he showed me was some early attempt in fiction, and that I was not really guilty of rejecting any work of his which has become famous. Joyce at this time was in the making, as is shown by the fact that the friends and incidents of this period have remained his principal subject matter. Chief among these friends was the incomparable 'Buck Mulligan'. Joyce's name for a now famous Dublin doctor - wit, poet, mocker, enthusiast, and, unlike most of his companions, blest with means to gratify his romantic caprices. He had a fancy for living in towers, and when I first heard of him had the notion of establishing himself at the top of the Round Tower at Clondalkin; afterwards he rented from the Admiralty the Martello Tower at Sandycove,

which presently became the resort of poets and revolutionaries, something between one of the 'Hell-Fire Clubs' of the eighteenth century and the Mermaid Tavern. Joyce was certainly very unhappy, proud and impecunious: no one took him at his own valuation, yet he held his own by his unfailing 'recollectedness' and by his sententious and pedantic wit, shown especially in the limericks on the various figures in the literary movement, with which from time to time he regaled that company of roysterers and midnight bathers. Buck Mulligan's conversation, or rather his vehement and whimsical oratory, is reproduced with such exactness in Ulysses that one is driven to conclude that Joyce even then was 'taking notes 9; as to Joyce himself, he was exactly like his own hero Stephen Dedalus, who announced to his private circle of disciples that 'Ireland was of importance because it belonged to him'. He had made up his mind at this period, no doubt with vast undisclosed purposes of authorship, to make the personal acquaintance of everyone in Dublin of repute in literature. With Yeats he amused himself by delivering the sentence of the new generation, and 'Never', said Yeats, 'have I encountered so much pretension with so little to show for it'. He was told that Lady Gregory, who was giving a literary party at her hotel, had refused to

invite himself, and he vowed he would be there. We were all a little uneasy, and I can still see Joyce, with his air of half-timid effrontery, advancing toward his unwilling hostess and turning away from her to watch the company. Withal, there was something lovable in Joyce, as there is in every man of genius:

I was sensible of the mute appeal of his liquid- burning gaze, though it was long afterwards that I was constrained to recognise his genius.

As already noted, Nature had endowed him with one remarkable advantage, an excellent tenor voice, and there is still, I have read, in existence a copy of the program of a Dublin concert, in which the names of the singers appear thus, perhaps only in alphabetical order:

1. Mr. James A. Joyce
2. Mr. John McCormack

He had persuaded himself to enter as a competitor in the Irish Musical Festival, the Feis Ceoil, but when a test-piece was handed to him, he looked at it, guffawed, and marched off the platform. Who but Joyce himself could have surmised at this moment the inhibition of his daemon, or the struggle that may have been enacted in his dauntless and resourceful spirit? Perhaps it was then that he slipped past the Sirens' Rock on the road to his

destiny. Our daemon, as Socrates pointed out, will only tell us what not to do, and if Joyce's daemon had made the mistake of saying to him in so many words, 'Thou shalt be the Dante of Dublin, a Dante with a difference, it is true, as the Liffey is a more prosaic stream than the Arno: still, Dublin's Dante!' he might quite likely (for who is altogether satisfied with the destiny meted out to him?) have drawn back and 'gone to the devil 'with his fine tenor voice. He chose, what was for him no doubt the better part, his old vagabond impecunious life. One morning, just as the National Library opened, Joyce was announced; he seemed to wish for somebody to talk to, and related quite ingenuously how in the early hours of the morning he had been thrown out of the tower, and had walked into town from Sandycove. In reading the early chapters of *Ulysses* I was reminded of this incident, for this day, at least in its early portion, must have been for Joyce very like the day celebrated in that work, and I could not help wondering whether the idea of it may not have dawned upon him as he walked along the sands that morning.

Certain it is that he had now had his draught of experience: all the life which he describes in his writings now lay behind him. Suddenly we heard that he had married, was a father, and had gone off

to Trieste to become a teacher in the Berlitz School there. It must have been two or three years later that he looked into the National Library for a few minutes, marvellously smartened up and with a short trim beard. The business which had brought him back had some connection, curiously enough, with the first introduction into Dublin of the cinema. The mission was a failure, and he was also much disgusted by the scruples of a Dublin publisher in reprinting a volume of short stories, of which all the copies had been destroyed in a fire. (It was not until 1914 that *Dubliners* was published in London). 'I am going back to civilisation', were the last words I heard from him. He has not, I believe, been in Dublin since.

From this point Joyce becomes for me, in retrospect, an heroic figure. He had 'stooped under a dark tremendous sea of cloud'. confident that he would 'emerge some day': 'using for my defence the only weapons I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning'. Pause on that word 'exile', a favourite one with Joyce. Why was it necessary for him to conjure up the grandiose image of his rejection by his countrymen? Ireland, though famous for flights of Wild Geese, banishes nobody, and Dublin had no quarrel with her Dante; and we have seen what he thought of the little group of

those who were intent on blowing into flame the spark of a new spiritual initiative: the only people, be it said, of whom Catholic Ireland could be conceived of as anxious to rid herself. Still, a sensitive artist, reduced to impecunious despair as Joyce was at this period, might feel, in the very obscurity in which he was suffered to steal away out of Dublin, a sentence of banishment no less stern in its indifference than Florence's fiery sentence on her Dante:

> ‘I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated consciousness of my race.’

He must have met with many curious adventures and suffered many a grief in the winning of his soul: but the strange thing is that in all his experience of the cities of men and of their minds and manners; while a new life claimed him and the desire of return departed from him; while his intellect consolidated itself through study and the acquisition of many languages: the city he had abandoned remained the home and subject matter of all his awakening invention. Dublin was of importance because it belonged to him. Demonstrably, he must have carried with him into his exile a mass of written material, but it was long before he learned

how to deal with it, or to recognise, probably with some reluctance, in the merry imp of mockery which stirred within him, the spirit which was at length to take him by the hand and lead him out into the large spaces of literary creation.

His mind meanwhile retained some illusions: for example, that he was a poet. He has in fact published more than one volume of poems; but I will take A.E.’s word for it that most of them ‘might have been written by almost any young versifying sentimentalist’. Another illusion was that he could write, in the ordinary sense, a novel; for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which took him ten years to write, is no more a novel than is *Moore’s Confessions of a Young Man*. In style it is, for the most part, pompous and self-conscious, and in general we may say of it that it is one of those works which becomes important only when the author has done or written something else. That Joyce should have been able to make Ulysses out of much the same material gives the book now an extraordinary interest. It tells us a great deal about Joyce himself which we had hardly suspected, and both its squalor and its assumption wear quite a different complexion when we know that the author eventually triumphed over the one and vindicated the other. Genius is not always what it is supposed

to be, self-realisation: it is often a spirit to which the artist has to sacrifice himself; and until Joyce surrendered himself to his genius, until he died and came to life in his Mephistopheles of mockery, he remained what Goethe called ‘*ein trüber Cast auf der dunklen Erden*’.

I confess that when I read *Ulysses* I took Stephen Dedalus (Joyce himself) for the hero, and the impression seemed justified by the phrase at the end of the book when Stephen falls asleep: ‘at rest, he has travelled’. The commentators, however, all appear to be agreed that Mr. Leopold Bloom is *Ulysses*, and they refer to the various episodes ‘Nausicaa’. ‘The Oxen of the Sun’, ‘The Nekuia’ and so forth, with an understanding which I envy them. All the same, I am convinced that the only person concerned in the narrative who comes out as a real hero is the author himself. What kind of hero after all is brought to mind by the name Ulysses if not a hero long absent from his kingdom, returning, after being the sport of the gods for ten years, in triumph and vengeance? And it was after nearly as many years of absence as Ulysses from the country ‘which belonged to him’. that Joyce turned up again for us in Dublin, with a vengeance! Certain it is that when he decided to scrap the scholastic habiliments of his mind, the poor disguise

of a seedy snobbishness, and in lieu thereof endued himself with the elemental diabolism of *Ulysses*, he was transfigured. A thousand unexpected faculties and gay devices were liberated in his soul. The discovery of a new method in literary art, in which the pen is no longer the slave of logic and rhetoric, made of this Berlitz School teacher a kind of public danger, threatening to the corporate existence of ‘literature’ as established in the minds and affections of the older generation.

He found this method, as the concluding pages of the *Portrait* suggest to us, in his Diary: a swift notation, at their point of origination, of feelings and perceptions. In one way Joyce is no less concerned with style than was R. L. Stevenson: yet we mark in this pupil of the Irish Jesuits a spirit very different

from the goodwill of the Scottish Protestant towards English literature. He is aware, like Stevenson, of every shade of style in English, and there is a chapter in *Ulysses* which presents a historic conspectus of English prose from its Anglo-Saxon beginnings down to the personal oddities of Carlyle, Henry James and others, and modern slang. But whereas, with Stevenson, English prose style, according to his own cheerful comparison, is a torch lit from one generation to another, our Romano-Celtic Joyce nurses an ironic

detachment from the whole of the English tradition. Indeed, he is its enemy. Holding his ear to the subconscious, he catches his meanings unceremoniously as they rise, in hit-or-miss vocables. English is only one of the languages which he knows: they say he speaks Italian like a native, German, Spanish, Portuguese and various other idioms; and he knows these languages not through books but as living organisms, their shop-talk and slang rather than their poets; they are companions to him, powerful agents, genii who bear him into the caverns whence they originated. And at the end of it all, it must have seemed to him that he held English, his country's spiritual enemy, in the hollow of his hand, for the English language too came at his call to do his bidding. George Moore used to talk with envy of those English writers who could use 'the whole of the language', and I really think that Joyce must be added to Moore's examples of this power - Shakespeare, Whitman, Kipling. This language found itself constrained by its new master to perform tasks to which it was unaccustomed in the service of pure literature; against the grain it was forced to reproduce Joyce's fantasies in all kinds of juxtapositions, neologisms, amalgamations, truncations, words that are only found scrawled up in public lavatories, obsolete words, words in limbo or belike

in the womb of time. It assumed every intonation and locution of Dublin, London, Glasgow, New York, Johannesburg. Like a devil taking pleasure in forcing a virgin to speak obscenely, so Joyce rejoiced darkly in causing the language of Milton and Wordsworth to utter all but unimaginable filth and treason. Such is Joyce's Celtic revenge, and it must be owned that he has succeeded in making logic and rhetoric less sure of themselves among our younger writers. As an innovator in the art of fiction I conceive him to be less formidable. Mankind has never failed to recognise a good story-teller, and never will. They say that Joyce, when he is in good humour among his disciples, can be induced to allow them to examine a key to the elaborate symbolism of the different episodes, all pointing inward to a central mystery, undivulged, I fancy. *Ulysses*, in fact, is a mock-heroic, and at the heart of it is that which lies at the heart of all mockery, an awful inner void. None but Joyce and his daemon know that void: the consciousness of it is perhaps the 'tragic sense' which his disciples claim that he has introduced into English literature. But is there then no serious intention in *Ulysses*? As Joyce's most devout interpreters are at variance with respect to the leading motive, we may perhaps without much

loss assume its seriousness to be nothing but the diabolic gravity with which the whole work is conducted throughout its mystifications. Yet the original motive may have been quite a simple one. Near the centre of the book, in that chapter known as the 'Oxen of the Sun'. which, in Mr. Stuart Gilbert's words, 'ascends in orderly march the gamut of English styles', 'culminating in a futurist cacophony of syncopated slang'. there is a passage over which the reader may pause:

> 'There are sins or (let us call them as the world calls them) evil memories which are hidden away by man in the darkest places of the heart but they abide there and wait. He may suffer their memory to grow dim, let them be as though they had not been and all but persuade himself that they were not or at least were otherwise. Yet a chance word will call them forth suddenly and they will rise up to confront him in the most various circumstances, a vision or a dream, or while timbrel and harp soothe his senses or amid the cool silver tranquillity of the evening or at the feast at midnight when he is now filled with wine. Not to insult over him will the vision come as over one that lies under her wrath, not for vengeance to cut him off from the living but shrouded in the

piteous vesture of the past, silent, remote, reproachful.'

The 'timbrel and harp 'make me a little wary, but though some writer is doubtless parodied (Ruskin?),[1] does there not seem here for once to be a relaxation of some significance, in the strain of mockery?

The conception of the Irish Jew, Leopold Bloom, within whose mind we move through a day of Dublin life, is somewhat of a puzzle. Buck Mulligan we know, and the various minor characters; and in the interview of the much-enduring Stephen with the officials of the National Library, the present writer experiences a twinge of recollection of things actually said. But Bloom, if he be a real character, belongs to a province of Joyce's experience of which I have no knowledge. He is, I suppose, the jumble of ordinary human consciousness in the city, in any city, with which the author's experience of men and cities had deepened his familiarity: a slowly progressing host of instincts, appetites, adaptations, questions, curiosities, held at short tether by ignorance and vulgarity; and the rapid notation which I conceive Joyce to have discovered originally in his diary served admirably

1. A friend has referred me to Letter XVII. in Ruskin's *Time and Tide*, as the passage possibly in Joyce's mind.

well to record these mental or psychic processes. Bloom's mind is the mind of the crowd, swayed by every vicissitude, but he is distinguished through race-endowment by a detachment from the special crowd-consciousness of the Irish, while his familiarity with the latter makes him the fitting instrument of the author's encyclopedic humour. Bloom, therefore, is an impersonation rather than a type: not a character, for a character manifests itself in action, and in Ulysses there is no action. There is only the rescue of Stephen from a row in a brothel, in which some have discovered a symbolism which might have appealed to G. F. Watts, the Delivery of Art by Science and Common Sense. But the humour is vast and genial. There are incomparable flights in Ulysses: the debate, for instance, in the Maternity Hospital on the mystery of birth; and above all, I think, the scene near the end of the book in the cabmen's shelter, kept by none other than Skin-the-Goat, the famous jarvey of the Phoenix Park murders. Here the author proves himself one of the world's great humorists. The humour as always is pitiless, but where we laugh we love, and after his portrait of the sailor in this chapter I reckon Joyce after all a lover of men.

When Joyce produced *Ulysses* he had shot his bolt. Let us put it without any invidiousness. He is a

man of one book, as perhaps the ideal author always is. Besides, he is not specially interested in 'literature', not at all events as a well-wisher. A man who adds something new to literature often hates the word, as the poet shrinks from the tomb even though it be in Westminster Abbey. Usually he is interested in something quite apart from literature, added unto it by him. As for Joyce, his interest is in language and the mystery of words. He appears at all events to have done with 'literature'. and we leave him with the plea for literature that it exists mainly to confer upon mankind a deeper and more general insight and corresponding powers of expression. Language is only ready to become the instrument of the modern mind when its development is complete, and it is when words are invested with all kinds of associations that they are the more or less adequate vehicles of thought and knowledge. And after 'literature'perhaps comes something else.

It was destined that I should meet Joyce again, after just a quarter of a century. I waited for him in the lounge of his hotel, and presently a slim tallish man advanced into the room, gazed helplessly about him through large round glasses and then stood for a few moments with bent head. He was moving away again, when I touched him on the shoulder and looked into a face which I clearly recognised. It had grown unexpectedly massive, through toil, no doubt, and suffering, and the handsome brow beetled in a manner I had forgotten, but the Dublin brogue and the musical intonation remained unaltered; the liquid-burning eyes were now, alas, hidden behind large dark glasses, and as we turned towards an unoccupied corner of the room I felt a surge of pity for his Miltonic affliction. Except for our altered relationship, and the deference now due from me to one whom I once regarded with a certain amount of condescension, we talked much as of old, our subject, however, now being no longer the abstractions of literary aesthetics but his own extraordinary achievements. He did not say much, allowing one to run

on even when one had little to say, and having confessed my inability to understand his later work, I found myself endeavouring to express the common- place thought that literature seemed to be entering on developments akin to those of music and painting. ‘In other words.’ he struck in, ‘you find fault with literature for being an art?’ ‘No,’ I made bold to retort, ‘but I think it possible that any art may go wrong.’ A little commotion began somewhere inside Joyce, and the same sudden, hearty, spasmodic guffaw rang forth which many a night in Dublin had startled the quiet side streets. But I elicited from him one interesting avowal. ‘I write in that way’. he said, ‘simply because it comes naturally to me to do so, and I don’t care if the whole thing crumbles when I have done with it.’ That people should find him incomprehensible seemed a stumbling-block on which he had hardly reckoned. He mentioned that he had read very little and had no beliefs; also that, besides Moore, he had little personal acquaintance with the English writers. We were getting on quite well, it seemed; and presently Madame Joyce came in, tall as himself, simple and kindly, supplementing my new conception of Joyce as a gentle, companionable human being, anchored in domesticity, and secure in the exercise of his curious talent. Before I parted from him, he was good enough to promise to

send me from Paris his latest publication, Anna Livia Plurabelle, on the understanding that I would tell him what I thought about it.

I never kept that promise, feeling that what I thought could not possibly matter to Joyce; but his curiosity to know simply whether I could understand his new work was natural enough. For Joyce - in whom, with his scholastic training, something of the mediaeval hankering still lingers for that aspect of knowledge which is power - has conceived the possibility of creating a language, much as Faust and Mephistopheles between them contrived to produce the Homunculus. The origin of language is indeed almost as baffling a mystery as the origin of life. A strange monstrosity Joyce has succeeded in setting in motion, amenable neither to logic nor syntax, with an appearance of English and a funny impetus to deliver itself of meanings which half transpire, half are caught back into the matrix of the author’s own consciousness through the unsevered connection. The most pleasing part of the spectacle, perhaps, is the manifest enjoyment of the author in his creation. The whole experiment seems to belong to the age of the ‘talkies 9: we are supposed to do more than read - to see and hear, and at the same time to call into play various subconscious processes. I suspect in this later Joyce a mechanical inventor almost as

much as an artist; and his buoyant faith in his new method, his almost professional desire that any reader (myself for instance) shall understand him, is like the anxious sympathy of the mechanical inventor, whose moment of real satisfaction comes when he has made things fool-proof.

The theme of the new Work in Progress is Night, as Day was the theme of Ulysses, and the subject of this episode - Anna Livia Plurabelle - which is complete in itself, is the life and history of a river, the LifFey, and incidentally of Dublin. Human interests and events are dissolved in water-consciousness, unacquainted with time or succession, and with the prattling vocables are blended the names of half a

thousand rivers. The comparison with music is inevitable. I have no notion how such things are done, but if there be such a composition as a river-symphony, I can imagine that the train of images and feelings in the composer's mind need not be identical with those awakened in the listener. Much would be personal to himself, yet something real communicated. In reading Joyce, nothing passes from the author's mind to my own; the extent of my comprehension is that certain images, grotesque imaginations and composite allusions are present in the author's mind, but what I understand is never enough to excite the energy of continuous attention.

In its normal use, language is a transparent medium of communication between one mind and another, but here it is as if the word itself had intercepted the meaning and become a thing. This ought to imply that Joyce's experiment breaks down as language: but no, this is just what he intends, that the meaning should inhere in the word. As one of his most skilful interpreters puts it: 'When the sense is sleep the words go to sleep; when the sense is dancing the words dance'. It may very well be that this kind of verbal notation is directed to an order of intelligence likely to become more general, and already the poets seem inclined to abjure both melody and logic. Meanwhile, I must confess that for me, at all events, the clues to the incessant riddles which arise in reading Joyce remain in the mind of the author; and it is noteworthy that those who appear to understand him - and he is fortunate in retaining a company of very able henchmen, his interpreters - are those who enjoy personal relations with him, and have heard him from time to time, with that accomplished articulation of his, reading his works aloud.

It will be seen that I am the last person in the world who should be asked for an opinion on Joyce. I am all for lucidity and logic; and the writer who in his work raises a problem not of life and thought

but of what he means, appears to me to bring into annoying prominence his own idiosyncracy. These new 'telescoped 'words affect me as monstrosities, like the Siamese twins, repulsive in their congenital deprivation of the inborn right of words to individuality. Words should exist to do the bidding of the mind, but Joyce's palace of art is an unruly house in which words are masters. What end is served by using words with a score of simultaneous meanings, or of trying to say half a dozen different things in one breath? One thing at a time, is the law of the mind, not less for Oriental contemplation than for Western committee meetings. I demur especially to the claim made on behalf of Joyce, that he is of the company of the Greeks, the inventors of science and logic, and apportioned of literary art into the service of the Nine Muses; and am much more disposed to think that Joyce, in whom the epic spirit has awakened, exhibits the disabilities of epic in a world sadly in need of Greek simplicity and synthesis.

THE END