BENSON ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER

ESSAYS

Arthur Christopher Benson

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Benson A.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

IT would be easy, if need were, to devise a theory of coherence for the Essays here selected for re-publication, but the truth is that they are fortuitous. The only claim that I can consistently make, is that I have always chosen, for biographical and critical study, figures whose personality or writings have seemed to me to possess some subtle, evasive charm, or delicate originality of purpose or view. Mystery, inexplicable reticence, haughty austerity, have a fascination in life and literature, that is sometimes denied to sanguine strength and easy volubility. I am well aware that vitality and majesty are the primary qualities to demand both in life and literature. I have nothing but rebellious horror for the view that languor, if only it be subtle and serpentine, is in itself admirable. But there are two kinds of languor. Just as the poverty of a man born needy, and incapable of acquiring wealth, is different in kind from the poverty of one who has sacrificed wealth in some noble cause, so the deliberate, the self-conscious languor "about three degrees on this side of faintness," of which Keats wrote in his most voluptuous mood, is a very different thing from the languor of Hamlet, the fastidious despair of ever realising some lofty conception, the prostrate indifference of one who has found the world too strong. I do not say that the note of failure is a characteristic of all the figures in my narrow gallery of portraits. But I will say that they were most of them persons about whom hung an undefined promise of greater strength than ever issued in performance. The causes of their comparative failure are difficult to disentangle. With one perhaps it was the want of a sympathetic *entourage*; with another a dreamy or mystical habit of thought; with this one, the immersion in uncongenial pursuits; with that a certain failure in physical vitality; with another, the work, accomplished in dignified serenity, has fallen too swiftly into neglect, and we must endeavour to divine the cause: and yet in no case can we trace any inherent weakness, any moral obliquity, any degrading or enervating concession.

Perhaps one of the greatest mistakes we make in literature and art is the passionate individualism into which we are betrayed. We cannot bring ourselves to speak or think very highly of the level of a man's work, unless the positive and tangible results of that work are in themselves very weighty and pure. We forget all about the inspirers and teachers of poets and artists. How often does the poet, and the artist too, in autobiographical allusion, speak with absorbing gratitude and devotion of some humble name of which we take no note, as the "fons et origo" to himself of enthusiasm and proficiency.

It is with no affectation of fastidious superiority, but with a frank confession of conscious pettiness, that I say that this book will only appeal to a few. The critic is no hero: he is at best but a skipping peltast, engaged as often as not in inglorious flight. To flounder in images, criticism is nothing but a species of mistletoe, sprouting in a sleek bunch in the chink of a lofty forest tree. I had rather have been Lovelace than Sainte-Beuve, and write one immortal lyric than thirty-five volumes of the acutest discrimination. But a minority has a right to its opinions, and may claim to be amused: a man who thinks the Rhine vulgar, and the Jungfrau exaggerated, may be foolishly delighted with a backwater on the Thames, and a view of the Berkshire downs. In fact, the only kind of criticism of which one may be impatient is the criticism which abuses an author for not writing something else. What critics can do, what I have attempted to do, is to strengthen and define the impression that a casual reader may derive from a book, a reader who wishes to see what is good, but has not the knack described by the poet, who says "what is best he firmly lights upon, as birds on sprays."

On the other hand we may reasonably doubt what is the exact worth of the cultivation, of the point of view which we meekly accept at the hands of a convincing critic. Does it not require a special

insight to understand even criticism? After all, we agree with, we do not accept criticism: we select from it some preference, strongly and convincingly stated, which jumps with our own preconceived ideas. If we merely swallow it down, like the camel, to be reproduced in fetid stagnation, whenever a necessity for it arises, are we so much higher after all? The delicate psychologist who has accepted my dedication, speaks in one of his latest stories of the expression on the face of a Royal Princess, who had been *told* everything in the world, and had never *perceived* anything. Culture, criticism, in certain sterile natures, are like Sheridan's famous apophthegm: they lie "like lumps of marl on a barren moor, encumbering what it is not in their power to fertilise."

In art, in literature, it is the periods of republicanism that have left their mark on the world: the periods that have been very conscious of, and very deferential to authority, have been invariably retrograde. What a dreary period in English literature was the reign of Dr. Johnson. The chief legacies of that era to literature are the letters of Gray and Horace Walpole, and the life of the Dictator himself. But these are not creative literature at all. Gray, as a poet, was comparatively sterile. Imagination, the jewel of the soul, had fallen from its elaborate setting. But the more that literature declined, the more sententious grew the critics. Nowadays, when literature is very active, and not very profound – impressionist, journalistic, supremely content if it can produce lively and superficial sensations – the bludgeoning of the early part of the century has gone out: no longer does the critic feel it a duty, as the oracle said to Oenomaus, to "draw the bow and slaughter the innumerable geese that graze upon the green." Indeed would not some have us believe that criticism of contemporaries is all a matter of private interest, apart from any just or earnest conviction?

But there is still a class of readers, not very large or important perhaps, haunted by a native instinct for literature, a relish for fine phrases, a hankering for style – to whom the manner of saying a thing is as important, or more important than the matter, readers, who are not satisfied with fiction, unless it be combined, as by Robert Louis Stevenson, with a wealth, a curiousness, a preciosity of phrase, to which in criticism only Walter Pater can lay claim, and which may secure for these two a station in literature to which the majority of our busy, voluble, graphic writers must aspire in vain.

A. C. B.

ETON, *July, 1895*.

THE EVER-MEMORABLE JOHN HALES

THE churchyard at Eton is a triangular piece of ground, converging into a sharp remote angle, bordered on one side by the Long Walk, and screened from it by heavy iron railings. On the second side it is skirted and overlooked by tall irregular houses, and on the third side by the deep buttressed recesses of the chapel, venerable with ivy and mouldering grey stone.

It is a strangely quiet place in the midst of bustling life; the grumbling of waggons in the road, the hoarse calling of the jackdaws, awkwardly fluttering about old red-tiled roofs, the cracked clanging of the college clock, the voices of boys from the street, fall faintly on the ear: besides, it has all the beauty of a deserted place, for it is many years since it has been used for a burial-ground: the grass is long and rank, the cypresses and yews grow luxuriantly out of unknown vaults, and push through broken rails; the gravestones slant and crumble; moss grows into the letters of forgotten names, and creepers embrace and embower monumental urns; here and there are heaps of old carven, crumbling stones; on early summer mornings a resident thrush stirs the silence with flute-notes marvellously clear; and on winter evenings when wet, boisterous winds roll steadily up, and the tall chapel windows flame, the organ's voice is blown about the winding overgrown paths, and the memorials of the dead.

Just inside the gate, visible from the road among the dark evergreens, stands a tall, conspicuous altar-tomb, conspicuous more for the miserable way in which a stately monument has been handled, than for its present glories. It has been patched and slobbered up with grey stucco; and the inscription scratched on the surface is three-quarters obliterated. Let into the sides are the grey stone panels of the older tomb, sculptured with quaint emblems of life and death, a mattock and an uncouth heap of bones, an hourglass and a skull, a pot of roses and lily-flowers – such is the monument of one of Eton's gentlest servants and sons. "I ordain," runs the quaint conclusion of his will, "that at the time of the next evensong after my departure (if conveniently it may be), my body be laid in the church-yard of the town of Eton (if I chance to die there), as near as may be [a strangely pathetic touch of love from the childless philosopher, the friend of courtiers and divines], to the body of my little godson, Jack Dickenson the elder; and this to be done in plain and simple manner, without any sermon or ringing the bell, or calling the people together; without any unseasonable commessation or compotation, or other solemnity on such occasions usual; *for as in my life I have done the church no service, so I will not that in my death the church do me any honour*."

And the prophecy is fulfilled to the letter; in such a tomb he rests; and by a strange irony of fate, the pompous title claiming so universal and perennial a fame – the "ever-memorable" – is the only single fact which is commonly mentioned about him – he has even been identified with Sir Matthew Hale of just memory.

John Hales was neither an Etonian nor a Kingsman: he was of a Somersetshire family; and was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he spent no less than six years before taking his degree (in 1603), from the age of thirteen to the age of nineteen.

The Warden of Merton at that time was Sir Henry Savile, Queen Elizabeth's Greek tutor, supposed the most learned savant of the time, founder of the Savilian professorships for astronomy and geometry, a severe, clear-headed student. It is recorded of him that he had a great dislike for brilliant instinctive abilities, and only respected the slow cumulative processes. "Give me the plodding student," he said: "if I would look for wits, I would go to Newgate: there be the wits." He was not popular among the rising young men in consequence; John Earle, the author of the *Microcosmography*, that delightful gallery of characters that puts Theophrastus into the shade, was the only man he ever admitted, on his reputation as a wit, into the sacred society of Merton. For such intellects as he desired, he made search in a way that was then described as "hedge-beating."

Savile was attracted by Hales; he found in him a mind which, young as it was, showed signs of profundity. Savile's choice is a great testimony to the *depth* of Hales' attainments; for his later

reputation was acquired more by his grace and originality of mind than for his breadth of learning. Savile was then at work on his *Chrysostom*, printed privately at Eton in the grave collegiate house in Weston's Yard, now the most inconvenient residence of the Præcentor. Hales became a congenial fellow-labourer, and in 1613 was moved to a fellowship at Eton, of which College Savile had for seventeen years been Provost.

A Fellow of Eton is now a synonym for a member of the Governing Body, that is to say, a gentleman in some public position, who is willing to give up a fraction of his time to the occasional consideration and summary settlement of large educational problems. Twenty years ago a Fellowship meant a handsome competence, light residence, a venerable house, and a good living in the country. In Hales's time it meant a few decent rooms, a small dividend, home-made bread and beer at stated times, a constant attendance at the church service, and the sustaining society of some six or seven earnest like-minded men, grave students, – at least under Savile, – mostly celibates. To such the life was dignified and attractive. Early rising, and a light breakfast. A long, studious morning, with Matins, an afternoon dinner, a quiet talk round the huge fire, or a stroll in the stately college garden with perhaps some few promising boys from the school – then merely an adjunct of the more reverend college, not an absorbing centre of life – more quiet work and early to bed. Busy, congenial monotony! There is no secret like that for a happy life!

After three years, this was broken into by a piece of vivid experience – Hales accompanied Sir Dudley Carleton, Ambassador to Holland, as his chaplain, and was despatched by him in 1618 to the Synod of Dort.

It must be clearly borne in mind that theological and religious problems then possessed a general interest for the civilised world, and for Englishmen in particular, which it cannot be pretended that they possess now. Political gossip has taken the place of theological discussion. Then, contemporary writers thought fit to lament the time that common folk wasted in such disputes; when the Trinitarian controversy could be discussed on the benches of an alehouse, and apprentices neglect their work to argue the question of prevenient grace, we feel that we are in an atmosphere which if not religious, was at any rate theological.

Hales went to Dort a Calvinist – that, in those days, is equivalent to saying that he had never given his theological position much attention. What he heard there is uncertain, for a more unbusinesslike meeting was never held; "ignorance, passion, animosity, injustice," said Lord Clarendon, were its characteristics. There was no one to whose ruling speakers deferred. No one knew what subject was to be discussed next, often hardly what was under discussion. A third of the members disappeared, after what an eye-witness called a "pondering speech" from the President. Such a theological schooling is too severe for a reflective mind. Hales came home what was called a Latitudinarian, having, as he quaintly says, at the "well pressing" of St. John iii. 16, by Episcopius (a divine, present at the Synod), "bid John Calvin good-night." A Latitudinarian translated into modern English would be a very broad churchman indeed. For it is evident that Haley's native humour, which was very strong, prevented him from even considering religious differences in a serious light; "theological scarecrows!" he said, half bitterly, half humorously. When in later years he was found reading one of Calvin's books, he said playfully, "Formerly I read it to reform myself, but now I read it to reform him." And the delightful comparison which he makes in one of his tracts is worth quoting, as showing the natural bent of his mind to the ludicrous side of these disputes; he compares the wound of sin and the supposed remedy of confession, to Pliny's cure for the bite of a scorpion – to go and whisper the fact into the ear of an ass.

Only once did he encounter the little restless, ubiquitous, statesman-priest, who so grievously mistook and under-rated the forces with which he had to deal, and the times in which he had fallen – Laud.

The whole incident is dramatic and entertaining in the highest degree. Hales, for the edification of some weak-minded friends, wrote out his views on schism, treating the whole subject with a

humorous contempt for Church authority. This little tract got privately printed, and a copy fell into Laud's hands (as indeed, what dangerous matter did not?), which he read and marked. He instantly sent for his recalcitrant subaltern, to be rated and confuted and silenced. The matter is exquisitely characteristic of Laud, both in the idea and in the method of carrying it out. "Mr. Hales came," says Heylyn, "about nine o'clock to Lambeth on a summer morning," with considerable heart-sinking no doubt. The Archbishop had him out into the garden, giving orders that they were on no account to be disturbed. The bell rang for prayers, to which they went by the garden door into the chapel, and out again till dinner was ready – hammer and tongs all the time: then they fell to again, but Lord Conway and several other persons of distinction having meantime arrived, the servants were obliged to go and warn the disputants how the time was going. It was now about four in the afternoon. "So in they came," says Heylyn, "high coloured and almost panting for want of breath; enough to show that there had been some heats between them not then fully cooled." The two little cassocked figures (both were very small men), with their fresh complexions, set off by tiny mustachios and imperials such as churchmen then wore, pacing up and down under the high elms of the garden, and arguing to the verge of exhaustion, form a wonderful picture.

Hales afterwards confessed that the interview had been dreadful. "He had been ferreted," he said, "from one hole to another, till there was none left to afford him any further shelter; that he was now resolved to be orthodox, and declare himself a true son of the Church of England both for doctrine and discipline."

Laud evidently saw the mettle of the man with whom he had to deal, and what a very dangerous, rational opponent he was, so he made him his own chaplain, and got the king to offer him a canonry at Windsor in such a way that refusal, much to Hales's distaste, was out of the question thus binding him to silence in a manner that would make further speech ungracious. "And so," said Hales, quietly grumbling at his wealthy loss of independence, "I had a hundred and fifty more pounds a year than I cared to spend."

During all these years Hales was a member of the celebrated Mermaid Club, so called from the tavern of that name in Friday Street. Thither Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Donne, and many more repaired. There he must have seen the coarse, vivacious figure of Ben Jonson, the presiding genius of the place, drinking his huge potations of canary, and warming out of his native melancholy into wit and eloquence, merging at last into angry self-laudation, and then into drunken silence, till at last he tumbled home with his unwieldy body, rolling feet, and big, scorbutic face, to sleep and sweat and write far into the night; a figure strangely similar down to the smallest characteristics, in his gloom, his greediness, his disputatious talk, to the great Samuel of that ilk, in all but the stern religious fibre that is somehow the charm of the latter.

It was in London, at one of these convivial gatherings, that Suckling, Davenant, Endymion Porter, Ben Jonson, and Hales were talking together; Jonson, as was his wont, railing surlily at Shakespeare's fame, considering him to be much overrated, – "wanting art," as he told Drummond at Hawthornden.

Suckling took up the cudgels with great warmth, and the dispute proceeded; Hales in the background, sitting meekly, with the dry smile which he affected – deliberately dumb, not from want of enthusiasm or knowledge, but of choice. Ben Jonson, irritated at last beyond the bounds of patience, as men of his stamp are wont to be, by a silent humorous listener, turned on him suddenly and began to taunt him with "a want of Learning, and Ignorance of the Ancients." Hales at last emerged from his shell, and told Jonson, with considerable warmth, that if Mr. Shakespeare had not read the ancients, he had likewise not stolen anything from them – "a fault," adds the biographer, "the other made no conscience of – and that if he would produce any one topic finely treated of by any of them, he would undertake to show something upon the same subject, at least as well written by Shakespeare."

This is an extraordinary instance of perspicuity of literary judgment; that Hales should draw a favourable comparison between Shakespeare and his contemporaries, would not be surprising; but

to find him, classicist as he was, deliberately putting Shakespeare above all writers of any date is a very notable proof of critical acumen.

Neither did the combat end here. The enemies of Shakespeare would not give in: so it came to a trial of skill. The place agreed on for these literary jousts was Hales's rooms at Eton; a number of books were sent down, and on the appointed day Lord Falkland and Suckling, and several other persons of wit and quality came down; the books were opened, and Shakespeare was arraigned before antiquity, and unanimously (except for Sir John) awarded the palm. We may be sure it would have been different if old Ben Jonson had been present; there would have been less unanimity and more heat; but he was much troubled with symptoms of an old, recurrent paralysis, of which he had only partly got the better, and he was melancholic and therefore kept away. Still it is a scene to think of with envy – little Lord Falkland with his untuneable voice, brisk wit, and sweet manner, moderating the assembly; the summer afternoon, the stately collegiate room, overlooking the studious garden, girdled about by the broad and even-flowing Thames, among sedge and osier-beds, and haunted by no human presence. This period was probably the happiest time of Hales's life; he was at the height of his social reputation.

He was a man of an inveterately companionable disposition. He disliked being alone, except for study – in congenial company a sympathetic talker; once a year for a short time he used to resort to London for the polite conversation which he so much enjoyed, and when the Court was at Windsor he was greatly in request, being not only a good talker, but a better listener, as his biographer says; not only divines and scholars resorting to the rooms of this *bibliotheca ambulans*, as Provost Wotton called him, but courtiers, sprightly wits, and gay sparks from the castle. This it was that earned him his soubriquet. He was familiar with, or corresponded with, all the ablest men of the day, counting as he did, Davenant, Suckling, Ben Jonson, and Lord Falkland, and all that brilliant circle, among his intimate friends.

He was made Canon of Windsor in 1639. In two years the whole pleasant life breaks up before our eyes, never to be restored. Laud's death showed him that as his chaplain, he was in a dangerous position. Besides, the event itself was a frightful shock to him. He left his lodging in college, and went for a quarter of a year in utter secrecy to a private house at Eton, next door to the old Christopher Inn, the house of Mrs. Dickenson to whose lad he was godfather. Search was made for him unsuccessfully, though he says that his hiding place was so close that if he had eaten garlic he could have been nosed out. Here he subsisted for three months entirely on bread and beer (strange diet), fasting – as he appears to have done from mistaken medical notions – from Tuesday night to Thursday night. The reason for this retirement was the fear that certain documents and keys, entrusted to him as Bursar, should fall into the adversary's hands – for it is probable that at first he shared the belief with other enthusiastic royalists that the troubles would speedily blow over. He was, of course, ejected from fellowship and canonry, refusing with some spirit a proposal made to him by Mr. Penwarren, who succeeded him, that he should retain half – "All or none is mine," – though he was reduced to the greatest poverty. He sold his library, which was large and valuable, for £700, devoting a large proportion to others suffering from deprivation. The account of his conversation with Faringdon, an intimate friend, is absolutely heartrending.

Mr. Faringdon coming to see Hales some few months before his death found him in very mean lodgings at Eton, but in a temper gravely cheerful, and well becoming a good man under such circumstances. After a slight and homely dinner, suitable to their situation, some discourse passed between them concerning their old friends and the black and dismal aspect of the times; and at last Hales asked Faringdon to walk out with him to the churchyard. There this unhappy man's necessities pressed him to tell his friend that he had been forced to sell his whole library, save a few volumes which he had given away, and six or eight little books of devotion which lay in his chamber; and that for money, he had no more than what he then showed him, which was about seven or eight shillings; and "besides" says he, "I doubt I am indebted for my lodgings." Faringdon had not imagined that it

had been so very low with Hales and presently offered him fifty pounds, in part payment of the many sums he and his wife had received of him in their great necessities. But Hales replied, "No, you don't owe me a penny, or if you do, I here forgive you, for you shall never pay me a penny, but if you know any other friend that hath too full a purse and will spare me some of it I will not refuse that."

For a few months he went as nominal chaplain and tutor to the children of a lady living at Richings Park, near West Drayton, where there was a little college of deprived priests, among them being Bishop King of Chichester. But when this society was declared treasonous, he retired again to Eton to the same faithful friends, the Dickensons, the house being called his own lest the accusation of harbouring malignants should fall on the real owner.

A charming contemporary description of him at this date is left by John Aubrey, the antiquary, who went to see him.

"I saw him, a prettie little man, sanguin [*i. e.*, fresh-coloured], of a chearful countenance, very gentele and courteous. I was received by him with much humanity; he was in a kind of violet-coloured cloth gowne with buttons and loopes (he wore not a black gowne), and he was reading Thomas à Kempis. It was within a year before he deceased. He loved Canarie, but moderately, to refresh his spirits; he had a bountiful mind."

At last the end came very quietly. He was in his seventy-third year, "weary of this uncharitable world," as he said. Only a fortnight ill, and then dying so quietly that Mr. Montague, who had been talking to him, left the room for half-an-hour and found him dead on his return.

He was one of those great men who have a genuine dislike of publicity. He could not be induced to publish anything in his lifetime except a Latin funeral oration – not that it mattered, as one of his contemporaries hinted, "for he was so communicative that his chair was a pulpit and his chamber a church." In fact it became so much a matter of habit that his friends should propound questions on which he should discourse, that he is recorded to have made a laughing refusal; "he sets up tops," he said, in his allusive way "and I am to whip them for him." But it is plain that he had a genuine contempt for his own written style: he says that on the one side he errs by being "overfamiliar and subrustic;" on the other as "sour and satyrical." He evidently had the ironical quality in great perfection; his writings and recorded conversation abound in quaint little unexpected turns and capricious illustrations; he had one of those figurative minds that love to express one idea in the terms of another, and see unexpected and felicitous connections. His sermons are strange compositions; they straggle on through page after page of thickly printed octavos, "he being a great preacher according to the taste of those times," says an antique critic of them, going on to object that they keep the reader in a "continued twitter throughout." He must have been very light of heart who could have "twittered" continuously through the good hour that the very shortest of them must have taken to deliver. Quotations from Homer, mystically interpreted, strange mythological stories, well worn classical jests; perhaps the sense of humour was as different among the men of that era from ours as their sense of theology undoubtedly was – more discursive if not deeper!

It has struck more than one writer about John Hales, that the following is a curious trait: he was a remarkably good man of business: he was bursar of Eton for many years, and his precise, formal signature may still be seen in the audit books, and it is told of him that he was accustomed to throw into the river at the bottom of the college garden any base or counterfeit coin that he chanced to receive on behalf of the college, paying the loss out of his own pocket.

Pure-minded, simple-hearted little man, reading Thomas-à-Kempis in his violet gown; poor, degraded, but not dishonoured; what a strong, grave protest your quiet, exiled life, self-contained and serious, is, against the crude follies, the boisterous energies of the revolution seething and mantling all about you! the clear-sighted soul can adopt no party cries, swears allegiance to no frantic school; enlightened, at the mercy of no tendency or prejudice, it resigns all that gave dignity to blessed quiet, and takes the peace without the pomp; with unobstrusive, unpretentious hopes and prospects shattered in the general wreck, the true life-philosopher still finds his treasures in the old books, the eternal

thoughts and the kindly offices of retired life. This is a gentle figure that Eton's sons may well be glad to connect with her single street, her gliding waters and her immemorial groves; though as yet the reverence of antiquity sate lightly upon her, though she was not yet in the forefront of the loud educational world, yet in her sequestered peace there was a cloistral stateliness that she somewhat misses now. Not that we grudge her the glory of a nobler mission, a wider field of action, a more extended influence, in days when the race and battle are more than ever for the fleet and strong. But we lament over the nooks that the ancient years so jealously guarded and fenced about from the world and its incisive voice, where among some indolence and some luxury and much littleness the storage of great forces was accomplished, and the tones of a sacred voice not rarely heard. Ah! it is an ideal that this century has lost the knack of sympathising with! Perhaps she is but creating the necessity for its imperious recall.

A MINUTE PHILOSOPHER

AT Lord Falkland's court of intellect at Great Tew, – that delightful manor thrown open like a perpetual *salon* to worthy visitors, where Oxford scholars would arrive, order their bedroom, give notice of their intention to be present at dinner, and betake themselves to the library to read or talk, – there was at one time a constant and an honoured guest.

This was a certain Fellow of Merton, by name John Earles,[1] some ten years older than his host, and so devoted to his lordship that, as he himself tells us, he gave all the time that he could make his own to cultivating his society. And at first this was a good deal, for Earles was not a busy man; besides his Fellowship at Merton, he was merely chaplain to Lord Pembroke, and vicar of a distant Wiltshire parish to which he paid but few visits. Between him and Lord Falkland there was a kind of intellectual bargain; they read Greek together, and John said that he learnt more than he taught, and that he was amply repaid for his exertion by the fresh, lively light which that sympathetic mind cast upon the great variety of subjects which passed under review in that high argumentative atmosphere.

John was known to his friends as a singularly sweet-tempered, amiable man, one who could count no enemies – with the faults of a scholar, it is true, his hair tangled, his canonical coat dusty, slovenly and negligent in his habits; a bad man of business, and a forgetful, absent-minded fellow. But they condoned these faults as being so unconscious, the externals of a character which could afford to dispense with social ornament; the habit of a dreamy yet active mind, so bent upon reverie and so strenuous in thought, that it could not bear to waste time and trouble upon things that were undeniably unimportant. Genuine absent-mindedness has a great charm for thoughtful men; when it is the index of deliberate abstraction, they are apt to look upon it almost enviously, as the sign of a high aloofness from ordinary sublunary anxieties, an aloofness which they are themselves unable to command.

John was in the habit of thinking a great deal about his fellow-men; he was not philosophising nor calculating nor recording in those ruminating periods. He had keen eyes, this untidy, peering scholar, and when others talked he listened. He examined their features curiously; he dwelt with inward delight upon their instinctive gestures – the tones of their voices, the twinkling of their brows, the twitching of their hands; he did not brood and generalise; his taste was for the special, the particular, the individual, the characteristic. And every now and then, when pen and paper lay in his way, he would scribble off a rough sketch, as an artist jots down heads and limbs, towers and copses on his blotting-paper, a mental caricature of one of the strange fellows that he was for ever encountering in the world. Written on loose sheets, sometimes lying in his desk, sometimes left on the table, sometimes dropped over a friend's shoulder, he set no store on these fragments; he did not hand them round with affected carelessness, and come down with his candlestick to search for them when all the world was upstairs. He had no idea of rushing into print, no ambition connected with the publisher. The figure with all its oddities had risen in his mind, and he had the whim to describe it. Done for the moment, he had but a momentary interest in it; and, like the Sibyl, he saw the wind whirl the leaves about, without regard to the precious characters they bore.

Once or twice the humour took him to sketch himself, to outline such lineaments of his own as he had seen reflected in the looks and welcomes of his friends; to recall for his own amusement a humorous situation or two over which he had often made secret merriment. In words too intimate not to be autobiographical he had written of the downright scholar, whose "perplexitye of mannerliness will not let him feed, and he is sharp set at an argument when he should cut his meate." With a twinkling eye, thinking of the stable-gate at Tew and the big horse-block, he says how such an one

[1] The name seems to have been spelt quite indifferently, Earl, Earle, or Earles. John Earles' father was Registrar of the Archbishop's Court at York; John Earles seems to have matriculated at Christ Church, on June 4, 1619. But, according to Wood's Fasti, he took his B.A. degree on July 8, 1619, at Merton, and obtained a Fellowship there in the same year.

"ascends a horse somewhat sinisterly, though not on the left side, and they both goe jogging in grief together;" he tells how he "cannot speak to a Dogge in his own dialect, and understands Greeke better than the language of a Falconer."

But like the squire who excuses trespassing and yet draws the line at poaching, he had suddenly to show his hand. To have his witty distinctions quoted, to see them go to form another's stock-in-trade – that he could put up with; it was merely another grotesque turn among the oddities of humanity that he was never tired of observing. But when, without his leave, those fly-sheets, those scrawls and sketches on which he had set so little store, suddenly appeared in print, garnered by some careful hand, then he flung himself into the world with a kind of challenge. Like Virgil he dared them to finish what they had professed to begin, and for himself he proceeded to finish what some one else had begun for him.

He did not set his name to the book, but allowed the world to know who was the author. It was published in 1628 by Edward Blount, stationer and translator, with a preface signed by the latter, but almost certainly inspired by Earles himself, in which he professes to bring forth to the light, as it were, infants which the father would have smothered; but the preface is so void of partiality, it makes so little attempt to compliment the book, or to insist, as even the most judicial friend would have done, on the merits of the work, that it is evidently by the hand of the author – and the author is no less evidently a modest man.

Authors have only been able to wake and find themselves famous since the days of improved communication; yet John Earles found himself famous as soon as the little ripple of delight could permeate to the outskirts of society. The book was so new and bright, the humour was so penetrating and yet so kind, and it was above all so innocent in its wisdom, that the reading world seized upon it with delight.

This fame resulting from so slender and nugatory a performance was a strange surprise to Earles, and had he not been a man who was apt all through his life to be surprised at his own successes, it might have turned his brain; but he broke off and wrote no more, at least in that manner. In five years the book ran through eight editions; and with the exception of adding a score of pieces to one of the editions – pieces which at his friends' earnest solicitation he gathered out of accumulated papers – he wrote nothing else in that kind. Nay, he was so austere, that he had suppressed many sheets in the first edition, because there was a dash of coarseness which had somehow invaded their fibre.

He rose quickly in the world after this, and no one envied him or would have detracted from him; he bore his greatness so quietly and salted it so well with gratitude that it never was anything but pure and fragrant.

The Earl of Pembroke was Lord Chamberlain, and took his chaplain to Court, where he conciliated so many, and showed himself of such even and gracious temper, and possessed of so genial an authority, that when Dr. Duppa was made Bishop of Sarum, John Earles stepped quickly into the post of tutor to the Prince of Wales, afterwards that most gracious monarch, Charles II.

When kings were kings, Arsenius was something of a potentate. A prince's tutor might without absurdity reflect that he held a high and solemn charge. The education of any human being is that; and the education of one born to rank and greatness will always be a serious undertaking, just because he is capable of being such a power in the world, and of influencing so large a number of people; but the education of a king had something national about it, and a tutor who could really affect such a pupil's character might hope to react upon a large section of the community.

Charles II. was undeniably a clever man, and made the most of a very difficult position. He was not a high-minded man in any sense of the word, and he was hopelessly, irretrievably frivolous. If he had been ambitious or serious, terrible complications might have ensued; he would either have fretted himself into madness, or the country into civil war. Fortunately he did neither, but stood in a spectatorial attitude, watching the world through wicked, humorous eyes, living a low kind of life among lazy friends, and sauntering through difficulties which would have wrecked an earnest man.

A character like this is sure to have appreciated such a tutor, but Charles was probably far too cold and careless for Earles to have deeply influenced him. Charles II. must have been a hopeless case from the beginning. A clever man in a very great position, without a touch of generosity or affection in his nature, is for the educational experimentalist an impossible pupil; but though we cannot trace any good strain in Charles to the effect of Earles' influence, yet it was something to have conciliated such a prince's liking and to retain his esteem.

John had been made Chancellor of Sarum Church, and had just taken possession of one of those sweet gabled and mullioned houses of grey stone, where gardens run down to the placid, clear chalk-stream, wandering through its water-meadows, – when the troubles began. A man such as John had never a doubt as to his policy: he had no sort of sympathy with the Puritans; their total lack of humour and delicacy disgusted him as much as anything human could disgust him; and he was not a man who clung with any hankering to houses and lands. He threw up all his appointments and went across the sea to his master; and at one time or another gave him in instalments all the scanty fortune he had put aside.

He lived to be rewarded; no one was so eminently in his master's eye. At the Restoration he was made Dean of Westminster, then Bishop of Worcester, and then, on the death of Bishop Henchman, Duppa's successor, in 1663, he went back to Sarum as its Bishop; and he remained through it all the most simple-minded ecclesiastic that ever sat upon a throne. An easy task enough nowadays, when priests move among statesmen as a lamb moves among wolves, – so far as worldly prospects are concerned. If a Body has to face the possibility of disendowment within a few decades, that anticipation will preserve humility under worldly trappings, like the skull-beaker at Norwegian feasts; but in those days, when a bishop was in reality a petty prince, when he and his brethren made up nearly a third of the House of Peers, when their title to Church revenues was held (as it was in the first flush of the Restoration) as safer than many a country gentleman's, and as rather more sacred than the king's, – a courtier and a scholar, clad in pomp, dignified by secular observance and sanctified by heavenly authority, may be excused if he is a little elated by the flush of dignity; and to be gentle and natural and simple-minded under such an accession of respect signifies an unfailing plenitude of humility's saving spring.

Perhaps ill-health may have contributed a little to this balance and sanity of mind; it is a wonderful tonic in the midst of riotous prosperity. At any rate the Bishop died of a very painful disease which had long troubled him, in the sixty-fifth year of his age; he died at his own dear Oxford, and was buried in the chapel of his college, where he had first practised the piety that made his life so wholesome all along. A quaint and pompous epitaph there describes him as "Angel of the Church of Worcester, afterwards Angel of the Church of Sarum, and now Angel of the Church Triumphant. (*Ecclesiæ Angelus Vigornensis, postmodo Sarisburiensis, jam Triumphantis.*)"

At Salisbury, in the Palace, there is no portrait of him, but there is one at Westminster; and in a Wiltshire farmhouse, not far from Sarum, there are portraits, rude and ill-drawn, of himself and his wife. This lady is buried in a little churchyard, Stratford-sub-Castle, that lies below the huge embanked mound of Old Sarum, overshadowed by a pleasant avenue of limes. It was still rather an unpopular thing for a bishop to marry. Hardly more than half a century before, Abbot, a predecessor of Earles at Sarum, had been soundly scolded and threatened by his actual as well as spiritual brother, the Primate for marrying when in Episcopal Orders. Earles was not so severely handled: we hear little of the marriage, except that he was happy in it. His wife lived and died unnoticed: in those days bishops' wives were made even less of than they are now. He himself took no prominent place; it is probable that he was unconsciously drawn into the tide of practical affairs. At any rate for some reason he left next to nothing behind him besides the little book aforesaid; he wrote a few epitaphs and dedications, translated the *Icon Basilike* into Latin, and had nearly finished translating Hooker's *Polity* into the same language, when he died. The latter was lost through the carelessness of servants, who threw it into a waste-paper bin, and used it to wrap up butter and cheese. And perhaps one may

be excused for saying that it was not a very inappropriate ending for it; why a man of brisk and original mind should ever have engaged in this dismal hack-work is the real problem. His contemporaries echo the loss with a howl of dismay that could hardly have been greater had Hooker's original manuscript itself been lost. Perhaps the Bishop wished to correct the impression he had created by his earlier book, – as Maurice used to buy up copies of *Eustace Conway*, – and so engaged in a graver and more appropriate work; he could hardly have selected one which could have been at once so decorous and so dull. Anyhow, the destruction of this document will be received by the modern student with, to say the least, equanimity.

We may now turn to a closer study of the book by which he still deserves to be well known, *The Microcosmography*, or, to give a free rendering, "Jottings from the Note-book of a Minute Philosopher."

This kind of writing was a favourite with the age; men were beginning to turn from the solemn impersonalities of chivalry and from the restricted limitations of the drama, to a more minute analysis of character, to a spectatorial interest in the more unpleasing types of which humanity affords such numerous instances. It was the foreshadowing of the modern novel; but it remained of course a somewhat elementary form of delineation of character. Its elementariness consists in the fact that the characters are labelled and classified: there can be no mistake about the effects intended to be produced, and the success of such work must depend upon the humour, the verisimilitude, the liveliness of the portraiture. There is consequently a great want of that complexity which is at once the delight and the despair of the draughtsman of human character, and such sketches are therefore as inferior to fine creations of character, as studies of expression like Le Brun's, where the whole skill of the artist is directed to the production of a single effect, are inferior to a noble portrait.

The aim of the Microcosmographist is to add touch after touch, every one of which shall indicate in different phases, from different points of view, the same actual characteristic; just as the physiognomist in imaginary portraits endeavours to make eyes, ears, mouth and brow all bear the same stamp, and illustrate the same expression. It is a concentration of effects as opposed to a combination of causes. Theophrastus, of course, and Aristotle are the fathers of the art; besides Earles, Hall and Overbury are the best of the English School.

What will at once strike the reader is the exceedingly miscellaneous and at the same time humorous nature of the contents. Under the general designation of character we have "A Childe, a meere dull Physitian, an Alderman, a younger Brother, a Tavern, an old College Butler, a Pot-poet, a Baker, The Common Singing Man, a Bowle-alley, a She-precise Hypocrite, a Trumpeter, a meere Complemental man, Paul's Walk, a Stayed Man," &c.; still the character-sketches formed by far the most considerable parts of these.

As instances of Earles' humour take the following extract:

"The Antiquary. – Hee will go you forty miles to see a Saint's well, or ruined Abbey; and if there be but a Crosse or a stone footstool in the way, hee'll be considering it so long till he forget his journey… His very attire is that which is the eldest out of fashion, and you may pick a criticism out of his Breeches. He never looks upon himself till he is grey-haired, and then he is pleased at his own antiquity. His grave does not fright him, because he has been us'd to sepulchers, and he likes Death the better, because it gathers him to his fathers."

Or the following, from "A Plaine Country-Fellow":

"He seems to have the judgment of Nebuchadnezar; for his conversation is among beasts, and his tallons none of the shortest, only he eats not grasse, because he loves not Sallets [salads]. He expostulates with his Oxen very understandingly, and speaks Gee and Ree better than English. His mind is not much distracted with objects, but if a good Fat Cow come in his way, he stands dumb and astonisht, and though his haste be never so greate, will fix here half an houre's contemplation."

Or this, from "A Universitie Dunne":

"He is like a rejected acquaintance, hunts those that care not for his company, and he knows it well enough; yet he will not away. The sole place to supply him is the Buttery, where he takes grievous use upon your name, and he is one much wrought upon with good Beere and Rhetorick."

This may illustrate Earles' penetration and sagacity of observation:

"A Suspicious Man. – It shall goe hard but you must abuse him whether you will or no. Not a word can be spoke but nips him somewhere… You shall have him go fretting out of company with some twenty quarrels to every man, stung and gall'd, and no man knows less the occasion than they that have given it."

Or this, from "The Blunt Man":

"He is exceedingly in love with his Humour, which makes him always profess and proclaim it; and you must take what he says patiently, because he is a plaine man; his nature is his excuse still, and other men's Tyrant, for he must speake his mind, and that is his worst, though he love to teach others he is teaching himself."

"The Scepticke in Religion," a habit of mind with which Earles had little sympathy, is well drawn:

"The Fathers jostle him from one side to the other; now Sosinas and Vorstius afresh torture him, and he agrees with none worse than himself. He puts his foot into Heresies tenderly, as a cat in the water, and pulls it out again, and still something unanswered delays him; yet he bears away some parcell of each, and you may sooner pick all Religions out of him than one. He cannot think so many wise men can be in error, nor so many honest men out of the way, and his wonder is doubled when he sees these oppose one another. In summer his whole life is a question and his salvation a greater, which death only concludes, and then he is resolved."

But there is, beside these sharp stinging sentences, a lovely vein of gentle tenderness in his writing. "A Childe," which opens the series, is one of the most exquisite and feeling delineations in literature:

"His father has writ him as his own little story, wherein he reads those days of his life that he cannot remember; and sighs to see what innocence he has outlived. The elder he grows he is a stair lower from God, and like his first parent much worse in his breeches. Could he put off his body with his little coat, he had got eternity without a burthen, and exchanged one heaven for another."

But it would be easy to quote and quote, yet give no real idea of the fertility, the wit, the pathos of the man. All humanity is before him, and must be handled tenderly because he is a part of it himself, and because faults, like ugly features, are sent us to be modified, perhaps; to be eradicated, no!

The one strain in character which throughout afflicts him most, and for which he reserves his most distilled contempt, is the strain of unreality – the affectation whose sin is always to please, and which fails so singularly of its object. Hypocrisy, pretension, falseness – against everything which has that lack of simplicity so fatal to true life he sets his face. For the rest he can hardly read the enigma; he only states it reverently. Like the old Persian poet, he seems to say:

Oh Thou, who Man of baser earth didst make,
And e'en with Paradise devise the Snake,
For all the Sin wherewith the face of Man
Is blacken'd – Man's forgiveness give – and take,

HENRY MORE, THE PLATONIST

ABOUT the middle of the seventeenth century, Hobbes and Descartes, clear-headed and unprejudiced thinkers, caused a kind of panic in the devotional world: they resolved that they would not take anything for granted. Starting from a Socratic ignorance, they determined to verify, to try (and it was time) if they could not find a little firm ground among the vast and bewildering mass of rash dogmas and unsupported assertions that lumbered the scene of thought. Such an attempt cut very hard at Revelation. The religious fabric was so perilously elaborate – the removal of a brick was likely to set so much tumbling – its defenders felt themselves bound to believe that the part was as important, if not more so, than the whole; and they had pledged themselves so widely and rashly that they made no attempt at organised rational resistance, but attempted to overwhelm the rough intruders with torrents of solemn imprecations.

But there were in many places earnest-minded, faithful thinkers, profoundly attached to the revealed truths, who saw another way open. Authorities and ancient names were being called into court; philosophers who had written from a Christian point of view were supposed to speak professionally; a daring thought struck them: what if they could trace a connection between the earlier sources of Revelation and the noblest name that philosophy had ever enrolled? What if they could show that Plato himself owed his highest ideas to the transient influence of that teaching – the Law of Moses – which they themselves possessed in the entirety of a broad development? Pythagoras was said to have sojourned on Carmel and interviewed the priests of Jehovah; the Cabbala – the Law embroidered by metaphysical and mystical minds – was in their hands, and even their adversaries would "allow to Plato the spiritual insight that they denied to St. Paul."

At Cambridge this idea took shape in four remarkable minds: Dr. Cudworth, Master of Clare and afterwards of Christ's, Dr. Whichcote, Provost of King's, John Smith, Fellow of Queen's, and Dr. Henry More, Fellow of Christ's, applied themselves to the solution of the problem.

The interest of the situation lies in the fact that these men were pure and devoted beyond measure in life as well as in thought. Smith did more by direct influence and personal weight than even by his "Select Discourses." Dr. Patrick at his death preached on the cry of Elisha, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horses thereof: " he said that a light had been extinguished in Israel. Cudworth had perhaps the most logical mind. He wrote an "Intellectual System" that was supposed to give Hobbes a death-blow. Whichcote wrote discourses delivered at St. Laurence, Jewry, and originated an immense mass of aphorisms, afterwards published.

But, of the four, More was the man of genius: he was divinely gifted in body and mind; with passionate earnestness he combined humour and delicacy of thought, a trick of suggestive style, and a personality at once genial and commanding. The following pages profess to give a slight account of him.

The movement had unhappily no coherence. We class the four together as Cambridge Platonists because they were possessed by the same idea and worked it out on individual lines; but they did not write or think in concert. They were acquaintances – More and Cudworth close friends, and Whichcote died in Cudworth's house – but it can never have occurred to them that their names would have been connected in later times, because they had no scheme of concerted action, – they originated no movement.

Their unique interest lies in this – that, in an age when both religion and philosophy were making huge strides into materialism, they discerned and strove to indicate this truth, – that the capacity in the human soul of conceiving ideals, and in part transfusing them into life, is at once its highest boast and the most potent factor of its eternal quest.

Henry More was the son of a gentleman who lived near Grantham on a small estate of his own. The principles of the family were those of the straitest Calvinism, though sufficiently cultivated for

the father to read the "Faerie Queene" aloud in the evenings; and the boy, after being carefully trained in a private school, kept by a master of this persuasion, was sent to Eton, with strict injunctions from his father and uncle to hold to the faith delivered by Calvin to the Saints.

But the boy's instinct for philosophy was greater than his loyalty to family principles. He had, moreover, none of that gloomy and business-like habit of mind that demanded an accurate and severe disposal of the future of the entire human race as the basis for a creed. Though melancholy as a boy, he had the beginnings of that serene and even temperament, that afterwards was so conspicuous. He was immaturely an optimist: the beauty and kindliness of the world occupied a large share in his thoughts; and, when his elder brother came down to see him at Eton, he maintained the brutal inadequacy of Predestinarianism so strongly, that his uncle, to whom this scandalous position was reported, fell back upon threats of personal chastisement.

He gives us a strange picture of himself at Eton, walking slowly in the Playing Fields while his comrades were at their games, with his head on one side, kicking the stones with his feet, while he murmured to himself the lines of Claudian:

> Saepe mihi dubiam traxit sententia mentem;
> Curarent Superi terras; an nullus inesset
> Rector, et incerto fluerent mortalia casu.

Such a precocious, anxious childhood is generally, alas! only a sign of deficient vitality – a disposition to embrace a religious life and die early; but the event proved a singular contradiction to this.

More was, it seems, a lovable lad – very simple-minded and sweet; resolving that, should the horrid phantom of inevitable destruction be true, should he be destined to that bitter place, yet that he would even there behave himself with such submissive patience that God should not have the heart to keep him there. In his studies he made great progress, troubled more than elated by success, because he was too diffident to believe anything in his triumphs but that he would break down next time.

The Provost of Eton at that time was Sir Henry Wotton – ambassador, courtier, poet, and philosopher. It was an encouraging and stimulating time to be at the school, for Sir Henry, with his romantic past and his courtly, affectionate manners, must have been a fascinating figure for the boys; and he was, moreover, fond of their society; had constantly one or two about him; put up pictures of great orators and statesmen in their schoolroom; and used frequently to walk in to their lessons, never leaving the room without dropping some aphorism or epigram worthy of a place in the memory of a growing scholar.

At the age of seventeen More went up to Christ's College, Cambridge, just at the time when Milton was leaving it; and at his earnest desire was entered under a tutor that was not a Calvinist. On getting established at Cambridge he found himself in an atmosphere, which then, at least, teemed with inducements to study, for the studious. There was little of the social life of a modern university – hours were longer, earlier, and more regularly kept; there was no prejudice in favour of bodily exercise as a means of improving health: for the more absorbed students a turn in the cloisters as a remedy for cold feet was deemed sufficient – the fen invaded Cambridge on every side; the wild birds screamed in the pools, and snipe were snared where Downing now stands. The high-road to Ely was fenced from the marsh by a few farms, and the ruins – still ugly – of a religious house; beyond Ely lay the interminable lagoons, with here and there an island farm.

In going to Cambridge, a scholar who meant to use the place, did not go with any idea of enjoying life in ordinary ways, of finding society, of amusing himself: no, he went where there were honest, silent, like-minded men, too intent on study to do more than occasionally discuss the subjects with which they were grappling, or give the young student a word of encouragement —*alere flammam*; and besides this, a plain but adequate living, food and shelter, books and lectures – and all

not without a certain severe grace and dignity – grace thrown over life by the stately courts of grey stone, retired gardens full of grassy butts and old standard trees, grave parlours and venerable halls, talks in galleries or cloisters; and for the young hearts that gathered there the unvarying march of the seasons: the orchards whitening and blushing over the stately stone walls of college gardens; the plunge of the water in the fountain, the snow on the ground throwing up mysterious light on to the ceilings of studious chambers, and choking the familiar street sounds; or there was some great preacher to hear; my lord of Ely travelling post-haste through the town with his long train of servants and gentlemen, and just stopping for compliments and refreshment at a Lodge, or the grave figures of the doctors, passing through the street, to be watched with bated breath and whispered names; some scholar, with worn spiritual aspect, stealing from his rooms, some nobleman with his flourishing following; or, best of all, the quiet services in the dark chapel, the droning bell ceasing high in the roof, the growing thunder of the organ, the flickering lights, and the master moving to his stall, accompanied by some scholar or writer of mighty name; and then the liturgy, the reviving in prayer and meditation of the old ideals, the thankful consciousness that God could so easily be sought and found.

Into this quiet society More was lovingly received, and it gave him deep content. He plunged into his studies with a kind of fury, like a man transported, digging for treasure; and one day it happened that his father came upon him unexpectedly as he sat with all his books about him, and, being rapturously delighted with the serious intentness of the young man, used a curious phrase about him, suggested no doubt by a certain glory, hardly human, transfiguring the boy's face, "That he spent his time in an angelical way," and then this old Puritan, to mark his sense of satisfaction by some practical testimony, went home and wrote the lad down for a handsome legacy in his will, in token of complete reconciliation: and this legacy was never revoked; but it moved Henry's heart when he discovered it, as the surest sign that he had been forgiven, knowing his father's concrete mode of thought as he did.

He tells us that his tutor, when he first arrived, received him kindly, and asked him, after some talk, observing the boy's melancholy and thoughtful disposition, whether he had a discernment of things good and evil, to which he replied in a low voice, "I hope I have." He says that as he uttered this he was all the time conscious of being the possessor of a singularly sensitive discrimination in these matters, and besides of an insatiable and burning curiosity after all kinds of knowledge. This, however, his diffidence did not allow him to confess. The tutor seems to have watched him carefully, for not long after, seeing his intense and unflagging zeal in study, he asked him rather brusquely why he was so intent on his work, hinting that mere ambition, if that were the motive, was too low an end. On this he confessed that his only aim was knowledge, an aim in itself. The mere consciousness of knowledge was exquisitely pleasurable to him.

Until he took his B.A. in 1635 he occupied himself chiefly in the works of the natural philosophers – Aristotle, Cardan, and Julius Scaliger; but they were a bitter disappointment to him. Their acute and solid observations pleased him, but they seemed to make hasty and obscure assertions on very trivial grounds; and he became a complete sceptic. Not, says Tulloch, as he carefully tells us, regarding the existence of God, or the duties of morality – "for of these he never had the least doubt" – but regarding the origin and end of life. This step he recorded, as his habit was, in a double quatrain of elegiacs, a metre to which he more than once resorted to summarise the turning-points of his career.

Being now able to please himself, he attacked the Platonists – not only Plato himself, but Plotinus and his followers – and gradually he was led to doubt the serious value of mere knowledge. Down into the valley of humiliation he stept; in the bitterness of the fruit of the intellect he could presume to believe, for he had tasted of it and strenuously bruised the savour from it, – and he came to see that it is not the origin and method of life, but life itself that it behoves the true man to know.

That was the point at which so many of his contemporaries were stopping all round him; they, too, had penetrated the secrets of the mind. A few of them, more enthusiastic, continued to pursue

it: the others, mistaking the sensuous region for the higher way, fell back on life in its grosser forms; they ate and drank, they buried themselves in local politics and temporary interests. Such things had no charm for More; he pushed through and out into a purer air.

The mysterious and fascinating doctrine of the divine illumination opened before him – uncleanness of spirit, not distance of place, he said, divide men from God: to purge the mind from vice and impurity and the subtle temptations of sense, so as to leave the spiritual eye clear and undimmed – this holy art of life became his dream.

There fell into his hands Tauler's "Theologia Germanica," that precious treatise that, through similitudes, spoke so clearly of God; the work that had been so beloved of Luther. It spoke of the surrender of the will to God – the loosing it from selfish impulses to sail like a ship upon the free sea – the nameless but unerring instinct that falls upon the soul if such a course is faithfully pursued.

He awoke like a man out of sleep, and the conflict began. The old man, which, like Proteus, assumes so many and so bewildering shapes, stood revealed: but the struggle was a matter of time, though sharp at first, so clearly was the truth grasped; and this growing purity and simplicity of mind which he discovered, together with a superhuman assurance, which began to stir and rise within him, constitute what may be called his conversion. Another quatrain records this:

I come from Heaven, am an immortal ray
Of God; O joy! and back to God shall go.
And here sweet love on wings me up doth stay.
I live, I'm sure; and joy this life to know.
Night and vain dreams begone – Father of lights,
We live, as Thou, clad with eternal day.
Faith, wisdom, love, fixed joy, free winged might —
This is true life: all else death and decay.

He wrote also to record this a long mystical poem, called *Psychozoia* (Life of the Soul), in 1640, at the age of twenty-six. He was flooded with a perpetual content.

In the pursuit of mysticism there are often several painful facts to record. In the first place, it is common to find a mystical temperament in those whose physical nature is not very strong or passionate. It seems as if certain natures, by the very fact that the ties which hold them to the earth are more than half-loosened already, have a strong affinity to the world of abstractions – as if the very weakness of their corporeal organisation held open a door through which strange shapes are seen moving, and airy voices heard to call; and again the mystical life is, more than any other, subject to deep depressions of spirit, dumb insensibilities, and heavy overshadowings from the towers of death. In the history of More's life no trace of either of these failings can be even faintly discovered. In the first place, he was of a strong and sound constitution; he did not know what it was to be languid or out of health; he was gifted with an extraordinary spring and plenty of pure animal spirits – "a rich ethereal sort of body, for what was inward," to use his own Pythagorean phrase; he says of himself that his body seemed built for a hundred years; that he had a high warmth and activity of thought that never flagged – notably too, that, after a long day of incessant thought, when he came to sleep he had a strange sort of narcotic power; and he was no sooner in a manner laid on his bed, that the falling of a house would scarce wake him, and that he woke in the morning to an inexpressible life and vigour, so that his thoughts and notions "rayed" about him.

There would seem to be little of the visionary here; and yet he confesses to a consciousness of what he calls "Enthusiasm" – which we should almost call madness: he could summon up a material object with such distinctness – visualise it, as it is now called – that it produced on him all the sensations of being seen with the outward eye: that is, he could at any moment, with his eyes open, command a scene or a person, so that the vision passed before and effaced the furniture of his room

or the page of his book: and he says that all his life he could, with an almost inconsiderable effort of the will, fix his mind so intently on any subject or line of thought that he could spend as much as three hours in an intent uninterrupted reverie.

Such a man would be sure to fling himself with rapture into ascetic and mortifying practices – and so he did: the result was a prolonged exaltation of soul, apparently unaccompanied by any symptoms of exhaustion and depression, which is almost miraculous. One reverie, which he records, lasted for fifteen days, during which he slept and rose, ate and drank, went about his ordinary business, without, he asserts, any one suspecting that he was all the time occupied in a serene and rapturous contemplation. In this "lazy activity," he said, "he passed from notion to notion without any perceptible images or words in the mind;" as he walked in the street he could have fallen, he said, and kissed the stones for joy; when playing the theorbo, for he had considerable musical talent, he says that he sometimes became almost mad with pleasure – so overcome that he was forced to desist.

"I am not out of my wits [as he writes in a touching passage in one of his mystical dialogues] in this divine freedom, for God does not ride me as a horse, and guide me I know not whither, but converseth with me as a friend: I sport with the beasts of the earth; the lion licks my hand like a spaniel; the serpent sleeps upon my lap and stings me not. I play with the fowls of heaven, and the birds of air sit singing upon my fist. Thou canst call down the moon so near thee by thy magic charm that thou mayst kiss her, as she is said to have kissed Endymion – or control and stop the course of the sun; or, with one stamp of thy foot, stay the motion of the earth.

"He that is come hither, God hath taken him to be His own familiar friend; and though He speaks to others aloof off, in outward religions and parables, yet He leads this man by the hand, teaching him intelligible documents upon all the objects of His providence: speaks to him plainly in His own language, sweetly insinuates Himself and possesseth all his faculties, understanding, reason, and memory. This is the darling of God, and a prince among men, far above the dispensation of either miracle or prophet."

There is no figure in literature that comes very close to this, except the solemn form of Prospero in the enchanted land:

> The isle is full of noises.
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.

Henry More's life was a very simple one. His private means were large; we hear of his possessing the advowson of a living in Lincolnshire, Ingoldsby, to which he presented Mr. Ward, who wrote his life, and a large farm in the same county; he had also other sources of income. Thus he had no temptation to seek for wealth, or for preferment for the sake of wealth, since his tastes were extraordinarily simple. He did, as a matter of fact, give very largely in charity; his door, it was said, was like the door of an hospital; indeed, he was so liberal with his money, that in later life he made over to a nephew, Gabriel More, who had fallen into misfortunes through no fault of his own, not only his Lincolnshire estates, but a large legacy which he received from Lady Conway.

He was elected a Fellow of Christ's soon after taking his M.A. degree: his solitary and contemplative habits, his ascetic practices – for these, though not marked, were sure to be discussed in so small and intimate a society as a college – and the slight suspicion of fanaticism that he incurred, led some to doubt whether he would not be a melancholy addition to the Combination Room; but those who knew him better assured the authorities that, though he was studious and serious, yet he was a very pleasant companion, and in his way one of the merriest Greeks they were acquainted with.

He was offered several important posts. Great efforts were made to get him over to Ireland. On one occasion he was offered the Deanery of Christ Church, Dublin, and on another occasion the Provostship of Trinity College combined with the Deanery of St. Patrick's; as he never even considered these for a moment, he was offered two Irish Bishoprics in succession, the Lord-Lieutenant

writing to him to press his acceptance of the latter. "Pray be not so morose or humoursome," he wrote, "as to refuse all things you have not known so long as Christ's College."

Once even he was offered an English Bishopric, and his friends got him as far as Whitehall to kiss hands, but they concealed the real object of their designs, and when he understood it, he was not on any account to be persuaded.

Late in life he accepted a prebend at Gloucester, urgently pressed on him by Heneage Finch, Earl of Nottingham, the Lord Chancellor, brother of an old pupil, but he resigned it almost immediately in favour of one of his friends; and once, too, the Fellows offered to elect him to the Mastership of Christ's, when it fell vacant, but this also he declined.

He was tutor of the College for a time, and was brought thus into close relations with Sir John Finch, afterwards Ambassador to Turkey, younger brother of Lord Nottingham, then an undergraduate. Finch's sister, Lady Conway, had been converted to the tenets of the Quakers, and Henry More, whose interest in his pupil extended itself to his pupil's sister, laboured to reclaim her for several years; he was thus brought into contact with Penn and the leaders of the Quietist party.

Lady Conway, the original of Lady Cardiff in "John Inglesant," was afflicted by mysterious and incurable pains in the head, and not only travelled to consult physicians, but was accustomed to assemble quacks and specialists in her house at Ragley; there More spent most of his time, and composed several books at her ladyship's special request. There, too, he met the faith-healer Greatrakes, a moody man who had lived for some time in seclusion at his own ruined castle of Capperquin in Ireland; as well as the famous Van Helmont, Baron of Austria, Quaker and physician, son of the famous chemist of the same name. This man was all that Greatrakes was not; he had considerable medical skill, and a quiet pious character. To us the union of the preacher and physician is somewhat repugnant. We take it to mean that a man supplies the gaps in his practical knowledge by the pretensions of spiritual insight; we believe him to be proficient in neither. Van Helmont, however, seems to have been a genuine man, and to suffer from an undeserved contempt. As a matter of fact the possession of keen moral insight and sympathy is one of the most powerful instruments that a physician can claim; the physical and mental constitution react so invariably, that without it a man must be at a loss; the healing art need not necessarily halt at the threshold of hypochondria.

As I have touched on Lady Conway and Van Helmont, I may as well follow out the part that Henry More plays in that fascinating romance —*John Inglesant*. The life and works, down even to the style and mode of expression, of Henry More have interested and influenced Mr. Shorthouse very strongly. I have heard the conversation between John Inglesant and Dr. More, which is said to have taken place at Oulton, instanced as an admirable *tour de force* of Mr. Shorthouse's style. The fact is that Henry More speaks there, not in character, but actually; nearly three-quarters of the conversation being sentences and aphorisms extracted straight from More's works. It is very ingeniously done, though a little too elaborate to be lifelike when regarded as conversation.

But the effects of Henry More's writings are traceable in several other parts of *John Inglesant*. In the conversation to which I have alluded, More is made to sketch what he considers to be Inglesant's character and physical constitution. He says:

"There would seem to be some that by a divine sort of fate are virtuous and good to a great and heroical degree, and fall into the drudgery of the world rather for the good of others, or by a divine force, than through their own fault or any necessity of Nature; as Plato says, they descend hither to declare the being and nature of God, and for the greater health, purity, and perfection of the lower world."

He goes on to describe the "luciform vehicle" in which such a soul as this is apt to display itself; and the great need of scrupulous temperance and purity to keep it undimmed.

Now these passages are, in the places where they occur in Henry More's works, undoubtedly and in reality autobiographical: they are extracted word for word from passages where he is obviously referring to himself.

The fact thus remains that, though Inglesant and More are represented as holding converse together, it is in reality More talking to himself – himself, that is, differently circumstanced and developed by other fortunes and influences. The figure of More was not quite romantic enough for Mr. Shorthouse, and his religious system lacked the vivid sense of the personal presence of Christ that is so marked a feature in Inglesant's career; but there is no reasonable doubt that Dr. More affords in the main outlines of his character and temperament the basis for that delicately drawn, laborious book which has made such a mark upon our late literature.

After Lady Conway's death, More was so far identified with her family and friends, as to write a preface, in the character of Van Helmont, for her *Remains*. At one time he thought of abandoning his collegiate life for his rectory of Ingoldsby in Lincolnshire; he intended to settle there with some friend as curate, and spend his time in quiet parochial work and study – but the scheme came to nothing. It may be doubted whether even he would have been proof against the trials of a country rectory; at Cambridge, indeed, he had quiet as much as he wished, but he had stimulus too: at Ingoldsby he would have had enforced quiet without the stimulus.

He was elected into the Royal Society, before its establishment by charter, in order to add lustre to it; for, though he never aimed at it, he had acquired long before his death a great reputation by his writings, which, as Mr. Chishull, the eminent bookseller of the day, said, ruled all the other booksellers in London.

He was a very laborious writer; his works fill folio volumes, and are full of curious learning, with a strange streak of humour, descending at times to a coarseness of expression which would not be tolerated now.

His voice, as was said, was somewhat inward, and not suited to the pulpit; and so he determined to give the world his thoughts in writing.

The *Divine Dialogues* are the *Mystery of Godliness* and the *Mystery of Iniquity*; the first of these being an exhaustive inquiry, in many books, into the nature and spirit of heathen religions. It may be said at once that his method of treating the subject is unjust; he is far too anxious, in his zeal for the Truth, to attribute to them a licentious or contemptible origin and obscene or meaningless ceremonies. The "Mysteries of Eleusis," which, according to Socrates, had much symbolism of a strangely exalted type, are treated by More as both superstitious and dissolute – even Apollonius of Tyana, who, whether he existed actually or not, at least exhibits a high type of the Stoic ideal, is a solemn puppet in his eyes. When he has, then, to his satisfaction demonstrated the worthless and debasing character of these rites – which is surely to shut the eyes to the inextinguishable hunger for the holy expression of life, in worship, that has never really deserted the human race – he proceeds to bring the Christian faith upon the stage, and to show how it satisfies the deepest and highest instincts of humanity.

But More cannot be said to have been a Christian in the sense that Thomas-à-Kempis or Francis of Assisi were Christians; he did not hunger for the personal relation with Christ which is so profoundly essential to the true conception of the Christian ideal. He was a devout, a passionate Deist; he realised the in-dwelling of God's spirit in the heart, and the divine excellence of the Son of Man. But it was as a pattern, and not as a friend, that he gazed upon Him; the light that he followed was the uncovenanted radiance. For it is necessary to bear in mind that More and the Cambridge Platonists taught that the Jewish knowledge of the mysteries of God had passed through some undiscovered channel into the hands of Pythagoras and Plato; and that the divinity of their teaching was directly traceable to their connection with Revelation. They looked upon Plato and Pythagoras as predestined vehicles of God's spirit, appointed to prepare the heathen world for the reception of the true mysteries, though not admitted themselves to full participation in the same.

Besides these books, which are profound and logical, and composed in a style which is admirable by comparison to the ordinary writing of the times. More drilled away into some rather grotesque speculations on the subject of Apocalyptical interpretation; of this, he says, humorously,

himself, that while he was writing it "his nag was over free, and went even faster than he desired, but he thought it was the right way" – and there is something pathetic indeed in the mode in which the passionate seekers after truth of those times beat their heads against the various theories of the direct communication of God with man, such as warning dreams and visions, and the face of the heavens by night. The idea is beautifully presented in *John Inglesant*, where the hero says to his brother, who has produced a false horoscope of himself: "I would have you think no more of this, with which a wicked man has tried to make the heavens themselves speak falsely… Father St. Clare taught it me among other things, and I have seen many strange answers that he has known himself – but it is shameful that the science should be made a tool of by designing men."

This is said so naturally, with so simple and melancholy a faith, that it seems to me to reproduce the feeling of even the more refined and cultivated men of the time about such things in an infinitely affecting way.

Besides these there are published letters of Henry More's, prolix for the general reader, but interesting enough if the man's own personality appeals to you: some very disappointing hymns and didactic poems, stiff and unlovely to a strange degree for so deep and graceful a writer; and many other scattered works, such as the *Enchiridion Ethicum*, which it is impossible to analyse here.

More had a very facile style: he used to say that his friends had been always wanting him to go up upon a stall and speak to the people; but that was not his way: he should not have known what to have done in the world if he could not have preached at his fingers' ends. He said that when he sat down to write, though his thoughts were perfectly clear, yet they were too numerous; and that he had to cut his way through them as through a wood. However, he would never correct: the thing must go as he first wrote it; "if he saw any faults in the first draft, he could correct them, though it was not easy to him – that this correction went against the grain and seldom seemed to him so savoury as the rest." He was not inclined to overvalue his work. "Like the ostrich," he said, "I lay my eggs in the sand, and hope they will prove vital and prolific in time."

Though he produced very voluminous writings, yet he sometimes manifested a strong and healthy repugnance to the task of expressing himself: he had none of the gloomy laboriousness that is never satisfied with its performance, and yet never takes a lively pleasure in it. When he had finished one of his more lengthy works, he said pleasantly to a friend, as he threw down his pen: "Now for three months I will neither think a wise thought, nor speak a wise word, nor do a wise thing." Once in the middle of some troublesome work he said, with considerable irritation, to a friend who was sitting with him, "When I once get my hands out of the fire, I shall not very suddenly thrust them in afresh." In a letter to Dr. Worthington, Master of Jesus, he says: "I am infinitely pleased that I find my obligation of writing books not too fierce in me, and myself left free to my own more private meditations. I have lived the servant of the public hitherto: it is a great ease to me to be manumitted thus and left to the polishing of myself, and licking myself whole of the wounds I have received in these hot services;" adding, that as soon as he was free from his present business, his purpose was to recoil into that dispensation he was in before he wrote or published anything to the world – in which he says he very sparingly so much as read any books, but sought a more near union with a certain life and sense (the sixth sense), "which I infinitely prefer before the dryness of mere reason or the wantonness of the trimmest imagination."

He had no turn for dry and laborious criticism: he studied things more than words: of his own skill in dead languages, though it was in reality very considerable, he spoke jestingly, in that depreciating ironical way that he always used of himself – that he was like the man that passed by a garrison with a horseshoe hanging at his belt, when a bullet being shot at him struck right upon it, upon which he remarked, "that a little armour was sufficient, if well placed;" – and he often said, in writing his books, that when he came to criticism and quotation, it was "like going over ploughed lands."

I subjoin a few extracts from an ode by the "Ingenious and Learned" Mr. Norris, which is prefixed to Ward's *Life of More*. The composition has great merit; it is in Cowley's manner, but

is the precursor of the art of Gray. It serves, I think, to emphasize both the opinion which his contemporaries deliberately held of him, as well as the points in his life and work which seem most worthy of our attention.

Norris writes:

> Truth's outer courts were trod before,
> Sacred was her recess: that was reserved for More.
>
> Thou our great catholic professor art,
> All science is annexed to thy unerring chair.
>
> Some lesser synods of the wise
> The Muses kept in Universities;
> But never yet till in thy soul
> Had they a council œcumenical.

And again:

> Strange restless curiosity!
> Adam himself came short of thee:
> He tasted of the fruit, thou bear'st away the tree.

And this is a well-conceived epigram:

> How calm thy life, how easy, how secure
> Thou intellectual epicure.

The conclusion is:

> Thy stage of learning ends ere that of life be done;
> There's now no work for thy accomplished mind
> But to survey thy conquests, and inform mankind.

More was a tall, spare man, well-proportioned and graceful; his face was noted for its serene and lively air. He was of ruddy complexion, which grew pale in later life, though always clear and spirited; and "his eye," says a friend who was often with him, "was hazel," and as vivid as an eagle's. He had luxurious tastes in dress, and the air of a courtier: none of the clownishness of the retired scholar was in the least perceptible in his motions, words, or general bearing.

His portrait represents him in his later years as much such a man as we should have imagined: he wears his hair, which was light and long, over his shoulders, and a faint streak of moustache upon his upper lip; the face is grave but not displeasing; it has the broad arched forehead, strongly indented, that is characteristic of masculine intellect; very high and prominent cheek-bones, big firm lips, and a massive chin; the cheek is healthy and not attenuated; the eyes clear and steady, the right eyelid being somewhat drooped, thus conveying a humorous look to the face; he wears the black gown, with girded cassock, and a great silk scarf – the *amussis dignitatis*– over his shoulders; the gown is tied at the neck by strings; and the broad white bands give a precise and quiet air to the whole.

Though temperate and abstemious in life and diet, he was not in the least what we should call an ascetic: he tried some experiments in diet in early life, such as vegetarianism, which he practised for a whole year, but found it did not suit him, and came back to meat; in fact, though he usually

dined in Hall, yet he absented himself on Friday, when fish was eaten, and dined in his own rooms, eating meat because he found it more wholesome; and he was not an abstainer – his regular drink was small beer, of which he uttered an enthusiastic panegyric, saying that it was a divine drink. He loved the open air; he said he would always be in it if possible; that he studied best in an arbour without his hat, so that the air might play on his temples. He was very sensitive to weather, and found that the autumn brought with it a melancholy which distressed him.

At the age of sixty-six he wrote his last book, and returned to the quiet contemplative life which suited him so well, and he says that he never had enjoyed so long a period of serene light and inward happiness; but clouds began to gather in his mind – in reality it was the failing body, but he attributed it to the mind, and was rather unhappy about himself. He was then attacked by a kind of low fever, and fainted one evening in the Combination Room after supper: however, as a healthy man is apt to do, he paid no attention to this, but he found himself growing weaker. Once pathetically, as he sat talking in his room, he spread out his hands in the sun; they were thin and delicate with growing weakness. "My body," he said, "is strangely run out." He then began to suffer from sleeplessness; for weeks together he could get no rest. "I thought I should have died laughing," he said to Dr. Ward, "but I find myself like a fish out of its element, that lies tumbling in the dust of the street." Then, after a pause: "I am but the remains of an ordinary man." His mind began to fail him; he could no longer read or think. He said to Dr. Davies, an old friend, that some one had said to him that this, if known, might prejudice his writings; "but," he added, "I have read of a person, an excellent mathematician, who at last came to dote, but none will say that any of his former demonstrations were any the worse for that."

At last he got very weary of the weakness and the long strain. "Never any person," he said, "ever thirsted more after his meat and drink than I do for a release from the body. Yet," he added, "I deserved greater afflictions from the hand of God than those I have met with."

He dwelt much on the next world. "I am glad to think when I am gone," he said, "that I shall still converse with this world in my writings. But it is a greater satisfaction to me that I am going to those with whom I shall be as well acquainted in a quarter of an hour as if I had known them many years."

The day before he died an old friend came to see him. Henry More was very silent, but at last broke out: "Doctor, I have marvellous things to tell you." "Sir," said the other, "you are full, I suppose, of Divine joy." "Full," he said, with tears in his eyes. The other saw he was so extremely weak that he forebore to question him further. When his nephew came to see him in the evening, he said that he should soon be gone. "I am going to play you no tricks," he added; "I am not going to trot and loll and hang on."

The next morning he understood that he had only a few hours to live. "O praeclarum illum diem!" he said, quoting from Cicero. They were almost his last words. He died as the day was dawning, so quietly that the nurse who sat by him did not know when the passage was. He was laid to rest in the College Chapel, having just entered upon his seventy-third year.

The great and singular charm of such a life is its union of mystical tendencies with such perfect sanity. For nearly half a century Henry More lived in a light which he did not invent, but found. He cannot be suspected of fanaticism or weakness; from the day that he found peace in life to the day that he entered into rest, he lived in the strength of a magnificent ideal. His great discovery burst upon him like a flash of light – the nearness and accessibility of God, whom he had been seeking so far off and at such a transcendent height; his realization of the truth that the kingdom of God does not dwell in great sublimities, and, so to speak, upon the mountain tops, but that it is within each one of us. But this very simplicity he saw was the cause of the unpopularity of the greatest ideals. Men prefer their own Abana and Pharpar to the little river rushing in desolate places. A doctrine does not recommend itself to the busy thinkers of the world unless it be huge and arduous; and thus he made up his mind to be lonely in the world, to face and support the isolation of greatness. "At first, indeed," he said, "the truth appeared so very clear, as well as glorious to me, that I fancied I should

have carried all before me; but a little experience served to cure me of this vanity. I quickly perceived that I was not likely to be over-popular."

And yet, by facing and adopting this difficulty, he gained the very thing on which he had turned his back. He made a success of life. He was not for ever dying to the world; he lived in it. Though diseased and shattered moralists may talk of the vanity of human aims and the worthlessness of this world, life surely has its meaning. We are not thrust into a pit from which our only duty is to escape. Something of the greatness and glory of the higher region dwells in the grace and beauty of the nether world. Shadows they may be of far-off transcendent realities, but the very shadows of divine things are from their origin divine. To gain a true standard; to trace the permanent elements; to fight the darkness at every inch: this is to live life to the uttermost – not to slink out of it, not to despise it, not to make light of it. These are the resources of the cynic, the disappointed man, the involuntary saint; but to live in the world and not be of it – this is the secret of the light that emanates from but is not confined to heaven.

ANDREW MARVELL

FEW poets are of sufficiently tough and impenetrable fibre to be able with impunity to mix with public affairs. Even though the spring of their inspiration be like the fountain in the garden of grace, "drawn from the brain of the purple mountain that stands in the distance yonder," that stream is apt to become sullied at the very source by the envious contact of the world. Poets conscious of their vocation have generally striven sedulously, by sequestering their lives somewhat austerely from the current of affairs, to cultivate the tranquillity and freshness on which the purity of their utterance depends. If it be hard to hear sermons and remain a Christian, it is harder to mix much with men and remain an idealist. And if this be true of commerce in its various forms, law, medicine, and even education, it seems to be still more fatally true of politics. Of course the temptation of politics to a philosophical mind is very great. To be at the centre of the machine, to be able perhaps to translate a high thought into a practical measure; to be able to make some closer reconciliation between law and morality, as the vertical sun draws the shadow nearer to the feet, – all this to a generous mind has an attraction almost supreme.

And yet the strain is so great that few survive it. Sophocles was more than once elected general, and is reported to have kept his colleagues in good humour by the charm of his conversation through a short but disagreeable campaign. Dante was an ardent and uncompromising revolutionary. Goethe and Lamartine were statesmen. Among our own poets, the lives of Spenser and Addison might perhaps be quoted as fairly successful compromises; but of poets of the first rank Milton is the only one who deliberately abandoned poetry for half a lifetime, that he might take an active part in public life.

It is perhaps to Milton's example, and probably to his advice, that we owe the loss of a great English poet. It seems to have been, if not at Milton's instigation, at any rate by his direct aid, that Andrew Marvell was introduced to public life. The acquaintance began at Rome; but Marvell was introduced into Milton's intimate society, as his assistant secretary, at a most impressionable age. He had written poetry, dealing like *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* mainly with country subjects, and was inclined no doubt to hang on the words of the older poet as on an oracle of light and truth. We can imagine him piecing out his aspirations and day-dreams, while the poet of sterner stuff, yet of all men least insensible to the delights of congenial society, points out to him the more excellent way, bidding him to abjure Amaryllis for a time. He has style, despatches will give it precision; knowledge of men and life will confirm and mature his mind; the true poet must win a stubborn virility if he is to gain the world. The younger and more delicate mind complies; and we lose a great poet, Milton gains an assistant secretary, and the age a somewhat gross satirist.

At a time like this, when with a sense of sadness we can point to more than one indifferent politician who might have been a capable writer, and so very many indifferent writers who could have been spared to swell the ranks of politicians, we may well take the lesson of Andrew Marvell to heart.

The passion for the country which breathes through his earlier poems, the free air which ruffles the page, the summer languors, the formal garden seen through the casements of the cool house, the close scrutiny of woodland sounds, such as the harsh laughter of the woodpecker, the shrill insistence of the grasshopper's dry note, the luscious content of the drowsy, croaking frogs, the musical sweep of the scythe through the falling swathe; all these are the work of no town-bred scholar like Milton, whose country poems are rather visions seen through the eyes of other poets, or written as a man might transcribe the vague and inaccurate emotions of a landscape drawn by some old uncertain hand and dimmed by smoke and time. Of course Milton's *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* have far more value even as country poems than hundreds of more literal transcripts. From a literary point of view indeed the juxtapositions of half a dozen epithets alone would prove the genius of the writer. But there are no sharp outlines; the scholar pauses in his walk to peer across the watered flat, or raises his eyes

from his book to see the quiver of leaves upon the sunlit wall; he notes an effect it may be; but his images do not come like treasures lavished from a secret storehouse of memory.

With Andrew Marvell it is different, though we will show by instances that even his observation was sometimes at fault. Where or when this passion came to him we cannot tell; whether in the great walled garden at the back of the old school-house at Hull, where his boyish years were spent; at Cambridge, where the oozy streams lapped and green fens crawled almost into the heart of the town, where snipe were shot and wild-duck snared on the site of some of its now populous streets; at Meldreth perhaps, where doubtless some antique kindred lingered at the old manor-house that still bears his patronymic, "the Marvells." – Wherever it was, – and such tastes are rarely formed in later years – the delicate observation of the minute philosopher, side by side with the art of intimate expression, grew and bloomed.

We see a trace of that leaning nature, the trailing dependence of the uneasy will of which we have already spoken, in a story of his early years. The keen-eyed boy, with his fresh colour and waving brown hair, was thrown on the tumultuous world of Cambridge, it seems, before he was thirteen years of age; a strange medley no doubt, – its rough publicity alone saving it, as with a dash of healthy freshness, from the effeminacy and sentimentalism apt to breed in more sheltered societies. The details of the story vary; but the boy certainly fell into the hands of Jesuits, who finally induced him to abscond to one of their retreats in London, where, over a bookseller's shop, after a long and weary search, his father found him and persuaded him to return. Laborious Dr. Grosart has extracted from the Hull Records a most curious letter relating to this incident, in which a man whose son has been inveigled away in similar circumstances, asks for advice from Andrew Marvell's father.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.