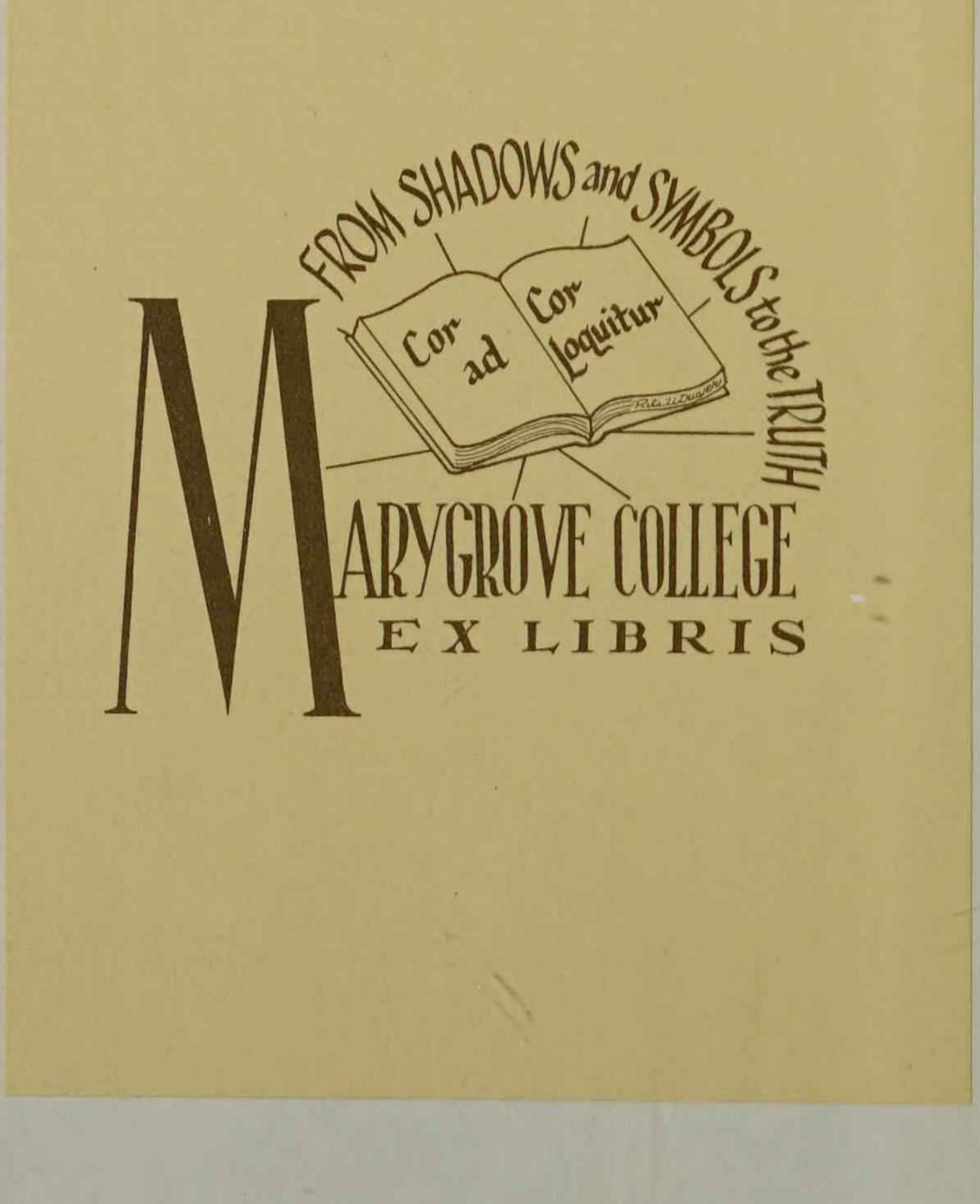
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The
SHORT STORY
by
Sean O'Faolain

THE DEVIN-ADAIR COMPANY

New York : 1951

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One is not at all free to write this or that. One does not choose one's subject. That is what the public and the critics do not understand. The secret of masterpieces lies in the concordance between the subject and the temperament of the author.

FLAUBERT *Letters*

Foreword

MOST short-stories have been written as if by a theory that the story is an explicit and objective record; something that A or B or X or Y could have told equally well if he had the 'technique,' if, as the uninitiated say, he could 'write.' I do not deny that there are some technical tricks to be learned, and quickly forgotten, having become second nature, and about a third of this book discusses them. But the essentials of a good story are indefinable; or one uses words to define them which will have private meanings for oneself. Thus, the things I like to find in a story are punch and poetry. I know what these words mean to me, and in various ways I have tried in this book to describe in other terms what they mean to me, making frequent use, for instance, of the term 'personality.' I have modest doubts as to whether I have succeeded in making myself quite clear, but I have some hope that I have at least made it clear that 'technique' is the least part of the business.

The punch and the poetry come, I think, from a combination of reality, in the simple sense of plausibility (hard-won), and personal voltage. The voltage does something to the material. It lights it up; it burns it up; it makes it fume in the memory as an aroma or essence which clings to us even when we have forgotten the details of the yarn. Without it we have the yarn and have not the man. Compare Conan Doyle's *The Red-headed League* and Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy*. They are plausible and entertaining anecdotes. Their melancholy weakness is that

either might, at a pinch, have been written by the author of the other. It would have given Kipling no trouble to write *The Red-headed League,* if he had cared to—he would have done it better; as Doyle could have written the Kipling tale if he had been attracted to it. Those who regard fiction strictly as entertainment may say, 'What's wrong with that? If I get the story who cares who wrote it?' Quite true; as if one said, on the same level, 'If I get a meal who cares who cooked it?' 'Ah!' the reply will come, 'But, of course, I mean a *good* story.' Which is where we really begin to get down to what differentiates a good chef from just a chef, and a good short-story from just a short-story.

As I have said, farther on, all modern art has realised this essential quality of distinctive personality so keenly that it has become more and more a sensation of communicated personality and leaves the theory of the objective record to fashionable portrait-painters and painters of historical subjects. For myself I believe this process has gone too far inward, become too subjective, and I have a respect for natural objects that makes me feel that modern painters often treat them far too arrogantly. In fiction the outer reality cannot be treated in this buoyant way (any more than food can by a cook) but, all the same, it *is* treated, and it is the treatment that counts. Indeed, on that, I have taken up a position in this book which will hardly be generally accepted. I speak of Realism as a veil or shadow of Reality. What this 'Reality' means I do not know. All I know is that Hemingway's story on page 363 is overtly, or in Realism, about two whores. It is about so much more, which neither we nor Hemingway can fully understand, that he calls it 'The Light of the World.'

If the short-story is a Will o' the Wisp chased hopefully, and generally in vain, by writers, editors and readers it is, I am here proposing, almost wholly because of this theory of the objective record that anybody might write. One

result is that we have had a surfeit of 'documentaries.' Another is that far too many poor short-stories are being published. Personality does not work as often as all that: the technique works, that is all, like a good sewing-machine. If to say so, at the length of a book, should discourage would-be writers of the short-story I cannot regret it. This is not a form to be attempted lightly or often and it is being vulgarised by commercialisation, and readers and editors must often feel discouraged. I hope, however, that I do not discourage any reader, and I do not think so. I may even help to awaken his livelier interest, for the pleasure both of playing a more critical eye over poor work and of discerning the full merits of the rare achievement.

Introductory

1

On Keeping the Lines Clear

MANY years ago I had the valuable experience of conducting a class in 'The Art of Writing' at one of those Evening Institutes which the London County Council maintains in every metropolitan district. I found that, out of a very large class, only one young woman had any literary gift; she later published two novels, she would have done so in any case, and she admitted that she had really come to my class to pass the time. If I had published more books at that date, if I had achieved some reputation, and had time to spare, I might have been at least of as much encouragement to her as any writer's interest is to another. As it was I can only hope that she was sufficiently entertained. I doubt if she got anything else from the course. Of the rest of the class, some wished to improve what they charitably called their English; others wished for a tabloid education in journalism; others possibly liked to hear somebody talking in general about books; only two or three really wished to write. It was for these, in theory the core and justification of the class, that I could do least of all. I soon found out that what they really needed was not instruction in the art of writing but in the art of living. Intellectually speaking they were not yet adult.

I remember vividly the story one of them showed me which made me realise how hopeless it is to speak of technique to an unawakened intelligence. The young man's story opened in his hero's library. It was midnight; as it

always is. The firelight flickered on the books; as it always does. The lights were dim; as they always are. The books were bound in calf; the lights of London twinkled outside; there was a decanter and an aroma of cigars. . . . I remember gazing in astonishment at this young man. It was not merely that he knew nothing about this kind of life (if it ever quite existed), for he actually lived in a single room on the Cromwell Road, and the smells with which *he* was familiar were petrol and paraffin from the mews. My difficulty was not merely that I could point this out to him—as I did—and beg him to tell me about what he knew. For when I did, and spoke of Coppard and O'Flaherty he cried in dismay:

'But I work in a bank! I go there every morning at nine and leave it at five, and return to my lodgings and, perhaps, go to a cinema, or play squash, and so to bed. It's all very well to talk to me about Coppard. He lives in Hertfordshire or some such place. He is continually meeting quaint characters, villagers and game-keepers, or in and out of the Blue Boar where they tell tall stories. And O'Flaherty has knocked about the world. What experiences have I to tell?'

This question silenced me utterly. How could I explain to the poor youth that his trouble was not that for him experience did not exist (which is nonsense) but that he himself did not exist? That since he had no perception of his own he had no existence of his own?

There was no use in my telling him that Dickens went to the blacking factory much earlier than nine in the morning and returned much later than five; that Trollope worked in the Post Office for the greater part of his life; or that T. S. Eliot had also worked in a bank; that Maupassant worked as checking-clerk in a government ware-

house from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., at thirty shillings a week, and in four years never had one holiday; that Daudet had been an usher in a school; or that Villon never worked at all. The young man would have gone home and read Daudet and hashed me up a Bouillabaisse Arlésienne; or come back with a story opening outside an old inn-door, with snow falling, and the coach rattling away with horns blowing, and a small boy, and a fat man and only Dickens knows what other borrowed plumes. It was impossible to say anything helpful to him about the technique of writing until his personality came alive.

But would it ever do so? I believed, rather, that I had, standing modestly and eagerly before me, one or other—I could not foretell which—of two of the most extraordinary and inexplicable phenomena of the profession of literature. He was either one of that great host of would-be writers who never get published (except at their own expense) but who never cease to believe that they ought to be published; or he was of that other enormous host who do get published, and who often make money, and whose books are utterly without merit except as gob-stoppers for the perpetual adolescent. Every publisher in the world is familiar with the manuscripts of the former. Every reviewer in the world is familiar with the books of the latter; he either refuses to review them, or gives them a few weary words, or amuses himself at their expense. The libraries are packed with them; people even read them; often, to one's astonishment, the authors achieve some sort of reputation on these books which end in the second-hand barrows, flank to flank with their blood-brothers from the nineteenth century, yellow-backs by authors now quite unknown. Even there, so vendors of second-hand books tell me, they are bought; for if displayed long enough every ragged book will find its ragged billet. Nothing, it

seems, can obliterate the worthless writer short of a world-war. And more go on appearing every week of the year from some of our best publishers. Since their authors' names will not figure even in the most learned bibliographies of the future, as their predecessors do not appear in the bibliographies of our time, it is and always will be impossible to give examples. One such writer occurs to me from the nineteenth century, and he is not quite unknown (though unread, as Mrs. Radcliffe is not unknown, though unread)—George W. M. Reynolds, a man quite famous in his day.

2

Why do these barren trees so eagerly want to bloom? To make money? Not at all. On the contrary, my young man—like these irrepressible middle-brow 'novelists'—was cursed with the highest ideals. If his idea had been to entertain—and be well paid for it—all would be splendid. Indeed if every writer bore in mind more often that it is a large part of his business to entertain—I don't say the main part—how much better all writing would become! Has anything else been more murderous to vitality in fiction than the solemnity that took hold of story-tellers from the time of that assassin Zola onward? But it is more important to ask why these people fail to write. There they are of real interest because their exaggeration of impercipience and insensibility magnifies as on a screen a malady that threatens every writer. There is no writer who has not, at some time, suffered from these same air-blocks in the mental ducts of the pseudo-writer which as effectively stop the personality from functioning as an air-block in a petrol-pipe stops a motor-car. There is no writer who is not horribly familiar with this sensation of seeing his talent cease to flow. 'I'm finished,' he wails. 'I'm written out. I'll never write again.' And then, something happens, and the man is writing as

freely as ever. (I note, for instance, that Shaw told Lady Gregory in 1923 that his imagination had vanished, that he was 'done.' [1])

The obstacles to the free flow of talent are often interpreted solely as external enemies, such as neglect, misunderstanding, contumely, domestic circumstances, local conditions. These enemies do exist; few writers have not known them. Yet, the truth is that there are only two 'enemies of promise' that are entirely external and objective, illness and poverty; and I am in doubt even about the poverty. The writer must know, at the start of his career, that he must not only expect all the others but must take them into himself; that they are part of himself, being part of the game; that a book is a writer's circumference, and that he can only reach his circumference through the radius of his experience. He must know that it will be his care to come to terms with his experience, at the centre; that it will be his chief hope to establish and maintain an equilibrium between his temperament and these, his milieu—an equilibrium that can only be otherwise described as his literary personality. His personality as a man is of no interest to anybody except the people who have to live with him, unless, as does not often happen, it is identical with his personality as a writer.

This, surely, is why some of the finest and most attractive writers have been such objectionable men, quite as scoundrelly as politicians and business-men. Like those, they have aims in view, and obstacles to surmount, and time and again some of the best writers in the world have surmounted them shamelessly and shamefully, by deceit, drink, drugs, hypocrisy, thievery, and even violence. Villon or Corvo or Burns. They are fighting for their own brand of success. They know that everything depends on this equilibrium that they create between temperament and

[1] *Lady Gregory's Journals.* (Macmillan, 1947, p. 213.)

circumstances; that if they fail it will be pointless to say, and indeed dishonest to say, 'Circumstances were too much for me'; that what must be said, rather, is, 'I was not able to cope with my circumstances.' What writer, for example, has not said, and has not felt ashamed immediately he has said it—'If only somebody would give me a private income!'—knowing that to say so is to run away from the battle whose end is always either a good or a bad piece of writing wrested from the tensions of his life.

This is the burthen of the whole matter: there can be no evasion for the writer. The man of affairs (like the scientist) can select, and constantly does select what elements in life he will work with; the Argentine, silk-stockings, Murphy, fuel-oil and a limited company, or Devonshire, fertilisers, Sullivan, steam, and private ownership. The writer must accept all the elements, absorb them, transmute them. Baudelaire said this for us, with terrifying persuasiveness, in two sentences in *Les Paradis Artificiels:*

> 'En effet il est défendu à l'homme sous peine de déchéance et de mort intellectuelle de déranger les conditions primordielles de son existence et de rompre l'équilibre de ses facultés avec les milieux où elles sont destinées a se mouvoir, de déranger son destin pour y substituer une fatalité d'un genre nouveau. Tout homme qui n'accepte pas les conditions de la vie vend son âme.'

3

It is in this interior world that we seek the first interest and mystery of the craft of writing. It is here that every artist will try to be most clever and cunning. It is here that he makes his greatest gambles and makes his greatest mistakes. How often has one not heard men plot the recipe for wise self-management. A writer will say, 'I am interested

in social questions. This is my real forte. I will concentrate on that.' And if he were Charles Reade he would write his dullest novels about social questions, and his best novels about Erasmus' father, or Peg Woffington, or a fisher-lass called Christie Johnstone. Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles decided to be a cleric; changed his plan and became a soldier; changed again and became a cleric; decided to write; wrote histories, memoirs, travel-journals, and casually dashed off a little book that made him famous, *Manon Lescaut*. When Daudet received a rebuff with a Provençal play he swore that he would make Fame his handslave; he sat down and spent the rest of his life writing novels which brought him honour and wealth and seemed to guarantee him immortality: he is largely famous because of those little innocent stories about Provence that he wrote in his youth. It was almost by accident that Manzoni, a poet and journalist, wrote what is still, perhaps, the greatest Italian novel. The Goncourts laboured over novel after novel: to-day nobody reads anything but their diaries, by which they will live for ever. One may easily imagine, since it happened, that a cultivated gentleman of means might say, 'I am interested in the classics. I will write a Platonic dialogue, then I'll translate Aeschylus. Then I might translate Calderon? Yes, this will be my task.' He does all these things, and then he translates an obscure Persian poem—to which nobody pays any great attention when it appears—and is, for ever, famous as the author of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. It was by chance that Cowper wrote *The Task*. *Robinson Crusoe* was a potboiler. Tennyson toiled at his epics and many now believe that he lives by his lyrics. Tom Moore is remembered not by *Lalla Rookh*, so widely read in the drawing-rooms of his day, but by the *Melodies* sung by ragged Irish emigrants. Flaubert was devoted to *Bouvard et Pecuchet;* nobody else is. Goldsmith wrote but one novel and it is immortal. Of all that John Gay wrote,

and wrote well, could he ever have counted most for fame on his dramatic piece *The Beggar's Opera*? The examples are endless. Success would seem to be a matter of chance, or of random happy concordance between the man and the subject and the moment, if also one did not recall on the one hand successful deliberate life-long vocations—Boswell, for example, or Proust, or James Joyce, or Goethe, or Milton or Gibbon—and, on the other hand, perceive obvious reasons for success in *The Vicar of Wakefield* (childhood memories), *Moore's Melodies* (natural patriotic feeling), *Les Lettres de Mon Moulin* (an ideal subject for the warm-hearted Provençal), *The Goncourt Journals* (the perfect work for the temperament of those two wonderful gossips).

It is not, in short, enough to say that if there is genius it will emerge. Genius is a fountain that does not always flow and it mostly wastes itself. 'Full many a flower . . .' It is not enough to say that there is no recipe for success. There is not, but there are dangers to be avoided, temptations to be overcome, obstacles to be manœuvred, opportunities to be seized. The great thing, I repeat, is not to treat the obstacles as external enemies merely—the stupidity of readers, the contumely of the public, embarrassing local circumstances, which are the stuff of every writer's struggle and which every biographer will record. For the percipient biographer knows that what is really important is what the writer does, within himself, with these obstacles. Indeed, the biographer will (if he is lucky enough to be able to define such occasions) be far less interested in a big material obstacle, such as poverty, than in what seems to be no obstacle at all, such as the influence of a rich wife. He probes for the *hidden* occasions of success or failure; for the vanity, obstinacy, intelligence or resilience of a writer *vis-à-vis* himself; or for the kink that makes the air-block

whose result is, perhaps, years of bad writing; or even final silence.

How trivial technique is by comparison with this art! Did Rimbaud become silent because his technical skill failed him? Did Hardy suddenly become less skilled when he wrote *Two on a Tower*? Had Balzac lost his craft when he wrote *Envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine*? Why are so many of Maupassant's stories dismally dull and poor stuff? Admirers of the later Joyce will say that he went from skill to skill, and perhaps he did, but did nothing happen inwardly? I have chosen to write of Daudet because he is one of the saddest examples of the collapse not of skill but of personality; of Chekov because he is one of the most heartening examples of skilful self-management, of the art of keeping the lines clear from beginning to end of the journey. Or, perhaps, it would be a better image to speak of the gardener's art, with hoe and secateurs, that lets in the universe; for when one sees that even the most neglected shrub will flower here and there one must think, 'What a pity that somebody did not give it more attention.'

Nor am I thinking here, solely of the very best writers. To me, at least, it is a pleasure to meet with any writer, even though he may not be a very good writer, the sap of whose personality seems to flow like an unchecked stream. (I say 'seems' for, of course, nobody's does, and one speaks only of their published works, not of the hours and the manuscripts in which it was dammed or failed.) I do not myself count W. W. Jacobs a very good writer, but the apparent ease of his personality gives me great joy. The extent and depth of our satisfaction in all such cases is, of course, limited by the complexity and purity of the personality before us, and chastened by the knowledge that some of the loveliest work has come from the most tor-

mented souls: though even this torment means struggle and effort, like a stream thrusting around boulders. Thus, a modern writer of short-stories whose inner spontaneity never seems to flag is William Saroyan. But our pleasure in this gushing fountain fluctuates according as we perceive, fearfully, some unattractive contamination draining into the fountain from the surrounding American marshes; and we may often have wondered whether the fountain would ever clean itself again. Indeed, this flow of personality is most like a fountain in its tremulous balance and its constant dependence on the source. Mauriac's 'Il faut purifier la source' is only half the truth. The necessary skill is more various than that. There is a lot of plumbing to be done, from time to time, between the source and the jet.

4

No Irish writer, living in a country where circumstances are particularly complicated and difficult for every type of artist—complicated by religion, politics, peasant unsophistication, lack of stimulus, lack of variety, pervasive poverty, censorship, social compression, and so on—can fail to make this observation, or to see the force of it once it is pointed out to him. All about him he can see talent fail or flourish because men are lucky or unlucky—or is it skilful or unskilful?—in this art of self-management. Which may be why Irish writers are far less interested in the technique of writing than in the conditions of writing, though inclined to think exclusively in terms of their own local conditions and to imagine them unique. It is the one theory about which they are as consciously and deeply concerned as French writers are about all sorts of intellectual ideas, including this one. Besides, Irish literature in our time came to its great period of efflores-

cence in a romantic mood whose concept of a writer was almost like the concept of a priest: you did not just write, you lived writing; it was a vocation; it was a part of the national resurgence to be a writer. A great deal of this was sheer romantic nonsense. There was more talk than work. Yet this art of establishing the conditions, or of avoiding temptations, had to be faced. It was a real, a practical problem. Yeats, for example, knew this art thoroughly: he was always on guard against allurements into which, as any observant biographer will record, he constantly fell, and from which he constantly dragged himself again. Joyce studied himself and the conditions deliberately and with theory. George Moore was translucently clear about what he could and could not get out of Ireland. Æ endlessly discussed the internal combustion engine of the artist.

The names remind us that on this subject there will always be two opposing theories. Æ represents the happy optimist who believes that the so-called 'enemies of promise' are God-sent manna and that the writer need do nothing about it since he is provided by Providence with a spiritual stomach fit to digest even the hardest nails. For example:

> 'I believe every great writer gets the environment which is right for him, and what the creative poet wants is not other creators about him, but men and women who, either by sympathy or by antagonism, help to evoke his genius. Some kindle by opposition, some by poverty, some by unhappiness as others by comfort and love. Carlyle laid up in brooding on his lonely farm in Scotland the wealth of passionate thought he spent so lavishly on literature, but who but God would have sent his soul to that misery for spiritual food? I feel sure Keats' circumstance, antagonistic or sympathetic, was

best for him and he did in fact in that circumstance write more beautiful poetry in his twenty-four years than any other of the English poets in their youth.'

I may say that I do not believe one word of this, unless it is implicit that the writer forcefully tames these enemies to serve him; as Æ explicitly says further on when writing on the power of genius to transform its own circumstances:

'Genius has a way of transfiguring those about it by its presence just as a woman in love with a man will reveal to him wit, tenderness and charm she can show to no other. The lover is the master who can evoke melodies others cannot evoke. I have no doubt that in Keats' society his friends were stimulated by his ardent imagination to be brilliant to him in a way they could never seem brilliant to us . . .'

But he relapses quickly into his optimistic faith:

'I feel the inevitability of Keats' genius. It evolved from within outward by a law of its own being as a flower does—taking, indeed, from the sun, the wind, the rain, the earth, but, all the time, transmuting what it takes inexorably to be of its own nature, to be rose and not another flower. I doubt if Keats would have been different in quality or character, though the choice of subject might have been different, if he had never met Hunt or others of his circle. He moved to his own perfection as irresistibly as the acorn moves to be oak and not another tree.'

Many of us who heard Æ say such things had to handle much more difficult material, and in much more exacting times, than he, and we were not greatly comforted by this optimism. But he had plenty else to say that Irishmen

interpreted accurately in terms of their local conditions. This on the chauvinists, for example, was a clear-headed advice to us all to avoid the temptation of patriotism:

> 'The idea that literature can be shaped from outside in response to the popular demand dies hard. When a genius is found he absolutely refuses to do any of the things the sentimentalist expects of him. He is just as likely to kick his country as to bless it. He follows a law of his own being which means that he can only express what is in him and not in the minds of other people.'

And this is wise: 'I think a poet ought to be shy about his public if not altogether unconscious of it.'

Or:

> 'If you think of fame, large circulations, income, you must be deflected from disinterestedness. What you do is no longer an exquisite soliloquy between yourself and heaven.'

Or this, against the danger of 'general ideas,' such as religious ideas:

> 'The slightest personal experience of the spirit is worth *as poetry* more than all the greatest ideas of the world's greatest teachers, repeated with no matter how much reverence.'

Or, one of his favourite and often-repeated aphorisms: 'The important thing about a poet is finally this: "Out of how deep a life does he speak." '[1]

Yeats, on the other hand, believed in a deliberately concocted personality. Indeed he developed, finally, an elaborate theory of Self and Antiself which, I think, was

[1] I take these quotations from *The Living Torch,* edited by Monk Gibbon. (Macmillan, 1937.)

no more than the device of a gregarious man to avoid the pitfalls of his own natural gregariousness on the one hand, and to compensate and comfort himself, on the other, for a constitutional inability to achieve successfully with that gregarious Self in the common gregarious world, the world of action in which he constantly craved to 'cut a dash.' Thus:

> 'To oppose the new ill-breeding of Ireland, which may in a few years destroy all that has given Ireland a distinguished name in the world . . . I can only set up a secondary or interior personality created out of the tradition of myself, and this personality (alas only possible to me in my writings) must be always gracious and simple. It must have that slight separation from interests which makes charm possible, while remaining near enough for passion.'

One could give dozens of examples of this; all implying that literature is not merely an external technique, or something that works of itself, but is dependent on a careful inward control of personality for a literary end. This truth is embedded in the excess, and even in the non-sequiturs, of many of his pontifications, such as this:

> 'As life goes on we discover that certain thoughts sustain us in defeat, or give us victory, whether over ourselves or others; and it is these thoughts, tested by passion, that we call convictions. Among subjective men (that is in all those who must spin a web out of their own bowels) the victory is an intellectual daily recreation of all that exterior fate snatches away . . .'

Which is but another way of saying that the literary personality is what we win from life for literature.

To this danger, and the remedy of inward withdrawal, he comes again and again; in the aphorism that 'We make

out of the quarrel with others rhetoric, out of the quarrel with ourselves poetry'; or in the warning, that:

> 'Argument, the moment victory is sought, becomes a clash of interests. One should not—above all in books, which sigh for immortality—argue at all if not ready to leave to another apparent victory. In daily life one becomes rude the moment one grudges to the clown his perpetual triumph.'

5

George Moore is one of the most interesting examples of the losses and the gains of the subjective plumber. Joseph Hone, in his biography of Moore, has an acute passage on Moore's technique in *Hail and Farewell:* it describes his method—in this book, his masterpiece, for it was wholly and magnificently successful—of deliberately coining a suitable literary personality for (and out of) the stresses of the occasion:

> 'For the purposes of his book his business was to cultivate an ironical and detached personality, constructing a complex humour out of an appearance of paradoxical simplicity, and to see himself, even in the matter of his anti-Catholic passion, as others saw him, while remaining the hero of his book.'

This is exactly the sort of position, or vantage point, that Moore kept seeking all his life; changing it from period to period; even from book to book; so successfully that no biographer can ever hope to define the man, since he was, in effect, not merely a work of art but many works of art. But he himself makes no secret of this fact that he passed from phase to phase, and, indeed, I think he becomes less amusing and less interesting, if not actually uninteresting, in the latter part of his life when he rests at one vantage

point, that of the accomplished and impersonal stylist to whom a Greek tale (*Daphnis and Chloe*), an Irish tale (*A Storyteller's Holiday*), or a Biblical tale (*The Brook Kerith*) comes with equal ease and without special mental adjustments or any apparent special convictions.

The influences to which Moore submitted himself were, for the most part, literary, though there were also friends, such as that Hawkins who is the 'Marshall' of *Confessions of a Young Man,* or John Oliver Hobbes (Mrs. Craigie) who, in his biographer's words, 'furbished him up,' or Lady Cunard; and his admiration for Degas and Manet must have encouraged him in his early naturalistic phase. Such bookish influences, a commonplace in every writer's development, have a special interest in Moore's case because of his suggestive vocabulary when describing them, and because he noted them, sifted them, accepted them and rejected them, when their work was done, with an unusually ruthless circumspection.

Zola's influence, for example, carried him through *A Modern Lover, A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin,* but not much farther. 'I owe you everything,' he says to Zola, after publishing the first; and while writing *A Mummer's Wife* he said, 'I have hopes of being Zola's offspring in England.' But while he is at *A Drama in Muslin* it appears that he has already begun to realise the deficiencies of Zola's instrument for rendering the more poetical aspects of life, although he still follows the 'master.' Two years later, however, in appreciating Turgenev in the *Fortnightly Review,* he makes it clear that he now realises that the naturalistic technique of objective reproduction (I quote Hone) "is a dream and not even a beautiful dream: Flaubert's so-called impersonality is the vainest of delusions, and Turgenev, even in his narration of physical phenomena, gives utterance to a thought and

manifests his own spirit.' Zola is thereupon not only cast aside, but overthrown with taunts and mockery that pursue the fallen idol to the end of his days. Not that Zola was troubled. 'It is the law of nature,' he said. 'Dans la littérature il faut toujours tuer son père.'

The same fate overtook Ireland, which gave Moore his best book *Hail and Farewell,* and, the turning point in his literary career, *The Lake*. Once he had sucked it dry he spat it out for ever. The same is true of his treatment of all his guides, save only Balzac. For what he says of one of his friends applies also to books—making all allowance for his usual bravado and his love of semi-comic exaggeration:

> 'I used him,' he says, 'without shame or stint, as I have used all those with whom I have been brought in close contact. I cannot recall a case of man or woman who ever occupied any considerable part of my thoughts that did not contribute towards my moral or physical welfare. In other words, and in colloquial language, I never had useless friends hanging about me.'

Or, again: 'Never could I interest myself in a book if it were not the exact diet my mind required at the time, or in the very immediate future.'

He has a curious phrase about books—he uses it more than once and it recalls Flaubert's phrase about choosing subjects in concordance with one's temperament: they awaken the voice of conscience.' He goes on:

> 'Books are like individuals; you know at once whether they are going to create a sense within the sense, to fever, to madden you in blood and brain, or if they will merely leave you indifferent. . . . Many are the reasons for love but I confess I only love woman or book

> when it is a voice of conscience, never heard before, heard suddenly, a voice I am at once endearingly intimate with.'

Elsewhere he speaks of a writer being 'out of tune with the spring of my aspirations'; in another place of Gautier introducing him to 'the plain simple conscience of the pagan world'; elsewhere, he refers to 'Affinities in literature corresponding to, and very analogous to sexual affinities'; and when, finally, he comes to Balzac, he hails him as 'the great moral influence of my life.' This vocabulary, clearly, has not a merely technical reference: it is the vocabulary of expanding personality, the more impressive in that it comes from a writer whose preoccupation with form and style is the first thing that his name suggests.

Moore is fair game for both the optimists and the pessimists, for those who believe that God does our spiritual plumbing for us and those who believe that we have to do it ourselves. For it can be said that the result of these equilibria that Moore thus established between his temperament and his milieu has not been, all told, a very interesting personality, or series of personalities. (One must not, in this, judge him by a few books; and one must consider whether his entire *oeuvre* has a recognisable unity. There are eighty-three items in the short bibliography appended to Hone's *Life*.) I would, myself, agree that the only indisputable success is the masterly concoction in *Hail and Farewell,* and that all his other personalities have a distinct air of contrivance and unpersuasiveness. But if the optimists were to say, with a mixture of impatience and good nature, 'Why did he not write out of his own simple, natural self?' what one has to reply is that the 'simple, natural self' of George Moore was that of an ignorant oaf, very vain, cunning it is true, fond of horses,

who could not spell, knew no grammar, had received no education, had, it is also true, an evident gift—for he dragged it out and put it to work like a slave-driver—but who, had he remained in Ireland and run true to type, would have been a typical country squireen, High Sheriff of Mayo and the possible breeder of Grand National winners like his grandfather. 'But he didn't, you see!' cry the Divine Plumbers. 'So there is no more to be said.' Surely, if there ever was a writer whose painful efforts to manage his own nature and circumstances make nonsense of this Divine Plumber theory, it is George Moore.

6

'The simple, natural self!' I wonder whether it has ever existed in any creative writer? I think it may briefly exist, though in what purity nobody can say, at the start of a writer's career. But very soon everything helps to make him self-conscious. His friends' comments on what he writes affect him even before he publishes at all; his struggles to take each new redoubt of experience; the critics' remarks when he does publish; a growing critical sense in himself, about life, culminating in the point where he begins to consider in his writing the implications of his experience as a man—a condition of mind induced hourly by love, lust, sorrow, death, illness, poverty, manifested in a thousand different incidents, every one of them a question-mark. There are writers whose 'simple, natural self' carries them a long way; to their thirties even. It is ultimately and inevitably overlaid, or it betrays the man. That period when a man is approaching forty is the dreadful test period for all artists. If they have prepared for it, if they have developed, if they have won resilience they will move into a new phase, and perhaps then go on to the end still creative. Otherwise they repeat themselves, mechanically, or stop.

There is something very affecting about a young writer's first book. One sees the youth fondling the petals of life, with the happy wonder of youth, or grasping life with the passion and pride of youth's self-confidence and naked strength. The readers of such books (one is presuming a book of some evident quality) always tend to over-praise them, so warm are our feelings at this spectacle, so full of affectionate apprehension for the future. And the young man or woman, full of confidence, accepts such praise as no more than due! What the critic rarely says, for it is pointless to say it at this stage, is that the very source of the charm of such books is also their weakness—that untutored wonder, that fearless eagerness, so breathless that it obviously does not in the least know what it is about. 'Ah, yes,' the older critic says to himself, 'you have life in your hands. It *is* lovely, it *is* dreadful, it *is* wonderful, isn't it? That you should feel this and convey that you feel this is why we praise you so much. You have the rude stuff of literature in you. Now, in your next book, and your next book after that, we shall see what you have to say about it all. Your stories have a natural vagueness and inconclusiveness now—your wonder and eagerness are the natural cause of that. The next time you will clarify with the personal, the original, the different-to-everybody-else comment? Won't you?' Or as Flaubert wrote to Madame Maupassant about young Guy's first stories: 'As time goes on he will gain in originality. He will get a personal way of seeing and feeling, and that is everything.' And what he adds is as significant, if we interpret it in the same sense of 'personal' as against 'general': 'The chief thing in this world is to maintain one's soul in a lofty region, far from the bourgeois and democratic mud and mire.'

It is at this stage that the 'simple, natural self' begins to disappear. The simple, natural self is a mere embryo self, a virginal self, as yet unmarried to and unmauled by

experience. But, to be sure, what we mean by experience is undefinable because it is as different for every writer as every writer is different from his neighbour—and grows more and more so as he develops this enlarged and assertively personal way of seeing and feeling. To revert to my young man of the Literary Institute, he thought that experience means adventure. The death of a cat will suffice; a child's tears; a friendship ruined; an unkind teacher; a sad day; a holiday in the country; the 'harebell's touch . . .' One thinks of Jane Austen and there is no more to be said. The adventure is interior. The personality can be developed, or concocted, or created out of apparently nothing at all. It all depends on the sensitivity of the person, and on his imperviousness to conventional ideas, 'the democratic mud and mire.'

When, therefore, I was asked to write a book on the Craft of the Short Story it seemed evident to me that this is the first lesson that the young writer must, I will not say learn, because it cannot be taught, but expect to endure. He can learn at least that he ought to be ready to endure thus. I have grown up in a country where young men and women are daily taught and have obediently imbibed the opposite; namely, that every large problem has been settled long ago and that there is no need to ask any more questions, because our two divinely appointed spiritual plumbers, the Church and Cathleen ni Houlihan, will look after all that *in vitam aeternam, amen*. How can one induce a young writer to see the truth that, on the contrary, the moment an opinion becomes popular he must, as a writer, at once abandon it? The moment an idea becomes general it is useless to the individual artist, except possibly as a general assumption like Balzac's Royalism. To be a Fabian when almost everybody else is a Tory can be of assistance to a writer: to be a Tory when everybody else is a Socialist may at least prevent him from becoming

the tool of the mob. It will always be difficult to make the young writer accept this proposition. Society is a conspiracy on the part of the many to defend the conventionality of the weak and to discredit the originality of the strong. It is constantly pillorying writers whose points of view offend its conventions—Flaubert, Maupassant and Hardy are modern examples. Every writer is subconsciously aware that this is so. One can see this unconscious self-protection at work in English writers to-day, for no sooner does the public take over their ideas, which have been the stuff of their poetry for years, than they at once sheer away from these ideas and look for others. There was hardly an Irish writer who was not on the side of the movement for Irish political independence; immediately it was achieved they became critical of the nation. It is this that makes all politicians say that writers are an unreliable tribe. They are. It is their *métier*.

7

It may be thought that this approach to the craft of writing is to strike a subjective note alien both to criticism and literature in English. I do not think so. Admittedly not many English writers have been interested in the subjective aspects of criticism; agreed, too, that the English mind tends, of its nature, to the sturdy belief that personal integrity is one of those things that looks after itself, or is attended to at School, and if not then nothing more can be done about it—a pragmatism that has, over large periods, been magnificently justified in literature. But it has not always sufficed, and it is one of the most dangerous delusions of the foreigner (and one of the most dangerous pretensions of Englishmen themselves) that the English nature has not a deeply subjective strain and an unpredictable emotional inflammability. E. M. Forster has an excellent image for the English genius: he

compares it to a dolphin, which is seen only when it is not diving. What dark, emotional stresses must have groaned behind the outward vigour of the Elizabethans! From the death of Shakespeare to the death of Dryden poetry was unashamedly subjective and, almost of theory, self-conscious. And who would say that seventeenth century prose was extrovert? The physical pride and conquest of the nineteenth century has overlaid this aspect of the Englishman's nature so effectively that it was not until our own generation that English poets began to realise again those other strains in their composition, and their possibilities, and by harking back to this secretive metaphysical note in the national character—I dare call it a self-lacerating note—helped poetry to recover from the impasse of nineteenth century optimism.

As for prose, English fiction has always been triumphantly extrovert: in this context I would say fatally triumphant. To the death of Dickens it had such a long line of triumphs that there might have seemed no earthly reason to believe that the tradition was not endlessly fertile. Before Elba it was already flourishing with (to mention only four novelists—two Irish and two English) Scott, Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, Lever; and then, what names!—Dickens, the Brontës, Thackeray, Trollope, George Eliot, R. L. S., Borrow. . . . But when the great names still went on, to the threshold of our own time, nobody in England sufficiently remarked that it was not the same novel, that Meredith, Henry James, Conrad and Hardy were not in the old extrovert English tradition, but in a subjective Continental tradition. They did not notice because criticism (James apart) was John Bullishly unaware that thanks to France and Russia the Novel had now surpassed the achievement of the Drama; that Shakespeare, for example, is equalled by Balzac; that nobody else in the theatre equals Dostoievsky, Tolstoy

or Turgenev for insight into human nature, wit, social interest or even—dare I say the horrid words?—mere 'educative value.' But that the Russian, French and English novel is, therefore, as fit a subject for study in the schools and universities is even not yet fully admitted anywhere outside America.

I suppose no university in Britain thinks the short-story other than a modern toy.

The nineteenth century's reverence for the purely English tradition in literature was fatal to the development of fiction. The French and the Russians were ready for that emotional and intellectual break-up of the nineteenth century which is scarcely reflected in Dickens or Thackeray or George Eliot. The implications of *Madame Bovary,* for example, did not even remotely touch Dickens who was at the date of its publication writing *Little Dorrit.* Life in Britain was too stable. English novelists (with rare exceptions, like that kindly man, Charles Kingsley) were either unaware of or indifferent to the rise of the worker, the decay of the Church, the increase in scepticism, the evil social effects of the industrial revolution, the growing influence of science on education, the crumbling away of the old traditional moral values. Britain was largely protected from all that the Continent was experiencing on its own body: compared to the social history of France from 1815 to 1914 the history of Britain is a blissful blank. This emotional turmoil reflected, indeed documented, in the French and Russian novel and short-story, and in the drama of the northerners, is not to be sought for in the English novel, which retains its extrovert, easy-going, good-natured and generally good-humoured attitude to life and to itself to, and beyond, the turn of the century.

French influence only came into English fiction around the 1880's. It was then a mere trickle. There was nobody

to 'boost' it as Brandes, Archer and Shaw 'boosted' Ibsen. In any case the library system was altogether against the realistic type of novel, faithfully reflecting the same sort of public feeling that made Hardy stop writing novels after the rebuffs to *Jude the Obscure* in 1895. Hardy aside, George Gissing must have been one of the first qualified practitioners of the new fiction: then Galsworthy; but was there an earlier popular success than Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale* in 1908? (It predates Wells' *Mr. Polly* by two years.) After that naturalism became a flood, an all too obvious flood that still swamps the English novel generations after it has been discredited abroad. Indeed Bennett was an example of a man who 'got' naturalism as another man might 'get' religion, and so little else: so little of the poetic feeling, the subtlety, wit, romantic lyricism, sceptical intelligence, truculence, passion, form and style that accompanied the mode in France and justified it, and, when it had exhausted itself, remained behind like treasures thrown up by the tide.

For this there is an interesting explanation (which also gives us a useful date) in an essay written as late as 1899 by Virginia Crawford on 'The Present Decadence in France':

> 'There never has been a time when French authors have been so widely studied, so freely translated as at present. Not an editor of a serious magazine but feels that an article on the newest French poet or novelist forms an essential feature of his monthly equipment. It is as indispensable as soup at a dinner-party. Unfortunately for our powers of discernment, not for long years has France been so poor in great men as at the present moment. . . . Of this the British public remains all unconscious, and the study and admiration which, thirty years ago we might have bestowed with advantage on Balzac and Flaubert, on Théophile Gau-

tier and the de Goncourts, we bestow to-day in foolish abundance on Marcel Prévost and Anatole France, on Bourget and "Gyp." '

As for the great Russian writers of novels and stories, they only began to trickle into England after Vizetelly started his publishing house in 1879.[1] (It was he who introduced Zola's works to the English public.) The 'Slavs,' as they used to be called, were admired, but with grave reservations as to their sanity, that indispensable English virtue more dear to husband and matron than chastity itself, more admired by writers and critics than anything else except humour, even more admired than passion or imagination. That same essay of Virginia Crawford's declares that Turgenev, for example, is still unknown at that date (1899) to the mass of British readers: but with some excuse (although the Constance Garnett translations had begun to appear) since even in Paris he is 'quite unfamiliar to the rising literary generation.' With this Henry James' essay on Turgenev (1884), in *Partial Portraits,* agrees. And I have gone through eight volumes of *Les Contemporains* by Jules Lemaître (*c.* 1884-1914) without finding a single essay on him, or on any Russian writer; though, for that matter, he does not consider any English book except Stanley's *Through Darkest Africa.* The result of this extraordinarily tardy and impure infiltration of European influence into the novel was that the transition away from the nineteenth century English tradition occurred imperceptibly, and it may yet not be admitted fully: although it would now be impossible for those who might deny it to name a modern novelist of genuine quality in English who writes in the tradition of Scott or Thackeray or George Eliot rather than in the tradition of Balzac and Flaubert and Zola.

[1] I believe the English put him in jail for it.

This change which, in our time, has come over the novel and poetry in England has not appreciably affected the short-story. If one were to list the first twelve or fifteen most interesting modern writers of short-stories in English that occur to the mind, who would they be? James Joyce, George Moore, Liam O'Flaherty, Elizabeth Bowen, Frank O'Connor, Lord Dunsany, H. E. Bates, A. E. Coppard, V. S. Pritchett, Ernest Hemingway, William Saroyan, Ring Lardner, John Steinbeck, Eudora Welty. . . . The observation that at once forces itself on us is that only three are English. There are, of course, other good American, Irish and English short-story writers: they will not be offended if they have not occurred to me as readily as these. Yet, though another critic would have other preferences, I think the proportion would not much alter. The Americans and the Irish do seem to write better stories. One is tempted to say that the English nature does not take kindly to the short form; that it requires scope; and James, Meredith, Hardy and Conrad seem to support this.[1] But, then, Turgenev's stories are not commonly brief, and I cannot think that it matters greatly if a writer prefers, say, six thousand words to three thousand.

Indeed I think every freedom of method must be granted to a writer, including scope, if he requires it. As Maupassant puts it, in the foreword to *Pierre et Jean:*

> 'Tous les écrivains, Victor Hugo comme M. Zola, ont réclamé avec persistance le droit absolu, droit indiscutable, de composer, c'est-à-dire d'imaginer ou d'observer, suivant leur conception personelle de l'art. Le talent

[1] 'The little story is but scantily relished in England, where readers take their fiction rather by the volume than by the page, and the novelist's idea is apt to resemble one of those old-fashioned carriages which require a wide court to turn round. In America . . . the short tale has had a better fortune.' Henry James, *Partial Portraits,* p. 264.

provient de l'originalité, qui est une manière spéciale de penser, de voir, de comprendre et de juger. Or, le critique qui prétend à définir le roman suivant l'idée qu'il s'en fait d'après les romans qu'il aime, et d'établir certaines règles invariables de composition, luttera toujours contre un tempérament d'artiste apportant une manière nouvelle.'

It is this essential personal freedom which, I feel, points the weakness of English writers of short-stories. They do not desire to avail themselves of it. The 'tempérament d'artiste apportant une manière nouvelle' does not ride them. The fact is that the English do not admire the artistic temperament: they certainly do not demonstrate it; nor do they cultivate avidly the 'manière spéciale de penser, de voir, de comprendre et de juger.' Yet, surely, the obvious distinctive element in the short-story—distinguishing it from every other art—is its shortness: i.e., the fact that the writer has deliberately selected some special incident or character; and that there can, or should be, only one reason for this—because it is (to quote Maupassant again) 'in good concordance with all the tendencies of his thought.' In other words the short story is an emphatically personal exposition. What one searches for and what one enjoys in a short story is a special distillation of personality, a unique sensibility which has recognised and selected at once a subject that, above all other subjects, is of value to the writer's temperament and to his alone—his counterpart, his perfect opportunity to project himself. The reader acknowledges this to be so when he speaks of a 'good Hemingway,' or 'a good Coppard'; or when he says—'That story is pure Chekov,' or admits ownership in a distinctive point of view by saying, 'That is a Maupassant situation.'

Why America should produce interesting personalities

in the short-story I simply do not understand unless it be that American society is still unconventionalised. The fact is that it does produce them. It is plain enough why Ireland does, an unconventional and still comparatively human people, in spite of our latter-day doctrinaire chauvinism. France, clearly, is, as she has always been, the breeding ground of the personal and original way of looking at things, expounded with intelligence and defended with disruptive passion, a virtue as fruitful in art as it is fatal in politics. It is the primary thing in the short-story which is, of its nature, a pointing finger.

One does not wish to pursue too far this subject of English diffidence about seeing things in an assertively personal way; any subject pursued too hard will turn on the hunter and eat him. I push it a little farther only because the point has to be made, sooner or later, by everybody who deals with the short-story; because, in turn, Maupassant insists on bringing it up, both in practice and theory. See the Preface to *Pierre et Jean* from which I have already quoted. It forced itself on Henry James when he wrote, so brilliantly, about Maupassant, extracting from him the shrewd remark that whereas the writer in the English tradition will always have the courage of his opinions ('when it befalls that we have opinions') it is the way of the French to have the courage of their perceptions. By this he means that the French say what they see—with the proper reservation that they tend to see too brutally, and, even, perhaps too often, to the exclusion of all indulgence, kindness or reticence; whereas it is in the English tradition to nourish the fruits of good-humour and piety, in the civil and domestic sense, of the love of sport, the sense of decorum, the habit of respect, the absence of irony, the expansive tendency of the race, the emphasis on pragmatic action, all of which mitigate the Englishman's emotional tensions, irritations and nervous exaspera-

tions; and all of which assuagement, one may add, the French will end up by calling Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy. In short, the English way of looking at life is much more social and much less personal and individual than the French, and this way of life, one may well think, does work more effectively inside the broad frame of the novel, which is in the nature of a sweeping gesture over a large landscape of life, rather than in the short-story, which is, no matter how lyrical, *ad hoc*. In dealing, later, with Maupassant and Chekov this may become more clear; at the moment I merely wish to underline that the 'artistic temperament' of which Maupassant speaks is essentially a personal temperament bringing to bear on life, as he insists, a personal way of seeing, and a personal way of saying.

I am back at my young man of the Literary Institute, our would-be writer of short-stories, wishful to learn the craft of writing before he has even begun to think of the craft of being himself. What better can I do for such young men than to draw their attention first of all to the inside story behind the work of three such masters of the short-story as Daudet, Chekov and Maupassant—the personal struggle behind the literary problem. Then we can pass on to the more popular idea of 'technique.'

The Personal Struggle

2

Alphonse Daudet

or *The Interrupted Romantic*

DAUDET was the local boy who made good; *le petit chose* who became *grand chose*. He has been compared, over and over, to Dickens, for this, for remaining this always, for his unspoiled sense of wonder as of perpetual boyhood, for his exuberant love of children, for his frequent autobiographical use of his childhood, for his readiness to be melodramatic about his first sorrows, triumphs and disappointments. He is at his best when he is most touching, most touching when he is remembering, and when he is remembering he is all 'Oh!' and 'Ah!' and 'Quels braves gens!' with such sighing, kindly laughter that one feels that even when he was very young he must have been what in Ireland we call 'crabit,' or 'crabbed,' meaning old-head-on-young-shoulders; so that for him to grow old meant little change. Those pages in his memoirs that describe his arrival in Paris, as a lad, one foggy wintry morning, shoving his bag in a truck across the dawn-grey city, waiting about for the *crèmerie* to open, after two days' journey up from the south, without food, then making great castles-in-the-air over the raisins and the nuts with his brother Ernest before he retired to his garret to write poetry for a year—those pages when set side by side with his charming account of his first play, to see which he travelled up again from the south, this time from Morocco, reveal that nor mood nor mind have changed over

the passing years.[1] Whether he is fifteen or fifty he is just as ready to feel madly gay at one moment and to weep the next. He was one of those people who are by nature so happy that they enjoy a good cry. It was Daudet's triumph never to grow up. It was also his great weakness to want to write 'grown-up.' That is the burthen of this essay.

If Æ was right in thinking that the gods send us misfortune for our own good then Daudet was lucky in having a father who was as unlucky as Micawber, and whose ruin bestowed on his children the ineffable blessing of an early introduction to the cruelty of life. It may, in that case, have been a misfortune for him that his mother, Adeline Reynaud, came (like Mrs Micawber) from a good family, the best people in Nîmes, a woman of a much more delicate soul than Vincent Daudet, who was a peasant's son. Alphonse's first step towards the scene of his triumphs, Paris, was due to his father's business difficulties: when he was nine they moved from Nîmes to Lyons, along that Rhône which he never forgot and which gave him so many delightful scenes, gave him, indeed, the stuff of immortality. It was in Lyons that his papa's fortunes failed and from there that Madame Daudet, poor soul, had to return to her own people at Nîmes; and it was from there that the others had to set out into the cold world to earn a living. Daudet's first job was to be usher in a college at Alais. His misery there, compared sometimes with little David Copperfield's, gave us his novel *Le Petit Chose,* or rather the first and better half of it, with himself as the Daniel and his brother Ernest as the Jacques of the story.

He fondled the petals of life early; at fifteen he had written a novel, now lost, and was already known in Lyons as a writer. When he found, at seventeen, that Ernest was

[1] *Quarante Ans de Paris.* Genève, 1945.

able to earn a living in Paris as a journalist he went there to join him, living in cold and hunger, as one may read in his memoirs or in the second and least affecting part of *Le Petit Chose*. In Paris he wrote pieces for *Figaro*, carefully pumicing every line. He wrote verse. At eighteen he published a book of poetry, *Les Amoureuses*, of which the pretty narrative poem 'Les Prunes' is deservedly well-known, both because it is charming in itself and because on the strength of it the Empress Eugénie induced the Duc de Morny to make the youth his secretary. (Blessed days when a book of verse was a recommendation to office.) These personalities remind us that he grew up in the hey day of the Second Empire.

'Les Prunes' has all his natural grace and effortlessness. It is a picture of a little boy and his girl-cousin meeting on his uncle's farm. They enter the orchard. She covets the plums. They gather them together:

Elle en prend une, elle la mord.
Et, me l'offrant: 'Tiens!' me dit-elle.
Mon pauvre coeur battait si fort,
Elle en prend une; elle la mord.
Ses petites dents sur le bord
Avaient fait des points de dentelle . . .
Elle en prend une, elle la mord.
Et, me l'offrant: 'Tiens!' me dit-elle.

Ce fut tout, mais ce fut assez;
Ce seul fruit disait bien des choses.
(Si j'avais su ce que je sais!)
Ce fut tout, mais ce fut assez.
Je mordis, comme vous pensez,
Sur la trace des lèvres roses:
Ce fut tout, mais ce fut assez;
Ce seul fruit disait bien des choses . . .

One is tempted to build on two verses a whole criticism and appreciation of Daudet's gifts; his tenderness, the lightness and slightness of his material, his gaiety, his butterfly fancy, and, above all, that impressively happy temperament, that famous 'charm' which defies analysis and of which nobody has ever been able to say anything better than Jules Lemaître, who described it as a wild flower of nature in the cultivated garden of literature.

Plays come next—fatal plays, for they gave him a taste of success and they introduced him to the humiliation of public failure, as we shall see. He collaborated with L'Epine for *La Dernière Idole,* which went on at the Odéon, and, at the age of twenty-five, he saw his *L'Oillet Blanc* at the Théâtre Français. His duties with Morny were slight. He had time to wander about a good deal, to Algiers, to Corsica, to Sardinia. He met fellow Provençals, including Mistral. In 1863 he retired to romantic solitude in the old ruined mill at Fontvieille, in the Rhône Valley, from which he was to send out, from 1866 on, the exquisite and immortal short stories collected in '69 as *Les Lettres de Mon Moulin.* He was sketching the outlines of *Le Petit Chose,* the first part of which appeared in Paris in 1867, when he was twenty-seven. He had been gathering since 1861 the materials for *Tartarin,* which appeared in '72. The much later novel *Numa Roumestan* stems from the same region and the same preoccupation with the ways and manner of the south. All his devotion, one observes, is still to Provence. It is his constant joy to recreate it, to tease it, even to mock at it, but always to desire to possess it. That first love seems to us, to-day, to have given him everything. All the magnificence of the 'Vénus terrestre' of the capital seemed, then, powerless against the dusty plains, the pines and oaks, the hot vineyards, the little towns, the exasperating, lovable people of Languedoc. The Rhône was more enchanting than the Seine.

Arles, Nîmes, Beaucaire, Tarascon were the names of his girls. These *Lettres* are love-letters to Provence, as *Numa Roumestan* is the sort of loving, bitter letter a man may write to a woman after it is 'all over.'

How shall one write the love-story of Alphonse Daudet? So natural in its course, so familiar, so fatal. It is one of the favourite themes of French novelists: the gradual domination of Paris. It is, with a difference of temperament and values but not of ambition, the story of Eugène de Rastignac. One cannot help thinking of Daudet when one reads the story of the provincial and tender-minded young man, de Gèry, in *The Nabab,* arrested, shocked, enthralled by the capital. In his memoirs Daudet tells of a pathetic and amusing fellow named Philoxène Boyer who became, he says, the victim of a book: he wished to squander his wealth, to kiss the tips of the fingers of duchesses, to be received in Paris society because he had read *Père Goriot,* and he did squander his patrimony, in six months; then he read *Hamlet* and spent his life amid mountainous piles of books writing, never finishing, *the* definitive comment on Shakespeare. Perhaps Daudet read too many books, also: the tyranny of Zola's documentary method lies heavily on every one of the novels; there are echoes all the while from Balzac—even in such sub-titles as 'Mœurs Parisiennes' or 'Mœurs Conjugales.'

But this young provincial did not take Paris as a mistress, in enslavement to her sensual and superficial excitements and delights. He married a very charming woman, Julia Allard, in '67, intelligent, of gentle birth like his mother, a sensitive and delicate writer, the daughter of two writers. It was one of the happiest marriages in the history of letters. It was too happy.

It is essential to notice how long Daudet resisted the 'Vénus terrestre.' He came to Paris in '57. He made no real effort to possess her until '74: that is the date of his

first novel of Parisian manners, *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné*. He had enjoyed Paris, been astonished and excited by it, but he was for years too palpitatingly southern, too reckless, too febrile, too uncalculating to be more than astonished and excited by this, to him, foreign city. For Paris, I think it is Henry James who first observed it, to its provincials, even to Parisians, seems to retain, always, a quality of being strange and foreign, difficult if not impossible to tame. It is true that French writers preserve a sense of the wonder of their capital that the writers of other countries do not feel about theirs. French writers apostrophise Paris, glorify it, abuse it, over and over again, in every period, like men assaulting a mystery. With the exception of Dickens I know no English writer who conveys anything of this sense of a lust to possess London, like Joyce's lust for Dublin. It came to Daudet only after he settled down in Paris; that is, after—had he only known it, had the critics only known it as they did not—he had already achieved his immortality through his stories of the South. Of this there is no question. What he wrote afterwards did, in the prudent words of Edmund Gosse, place him 'for the moment at all events, near the head of contemporary European literature.' Time has shown that his short stories had placed him there already, and that his later novels, which brought him so much fame and wealth, not only add little to his reputation but utter a challenge which idolaters of his stories would far prefer not to have to accept.

2

People do not read the books of Julia Allard nowadays. She wrote beautifully. She wrote as nearly all women write, with a delicate precision as to her impressions, a sensitive wariness about her own emotions, very alert, on the watch, sympathetic, minuscule. There is a fascinating

essay on her in Jules Lemaître's *Les Contemporains,* hung largely on her *Enfance d'une Parisienne.* He proposes there that the one gift women writers do not develop is the *don pittoresque,* the gift of making pictures. His example is amusing. 'L'oiseau fait entendre sous le feuillage son chant joyeux.' That, he suggests, is how a woman writer will say it. An observation dissolving into a feeling. But Madame de Sévigné very beautifully says, 'C'est joli! Une feuille qui chante.' Would not a man, however, have omitted the 'C'est joli?' (Daudet would not. Conrad was put off by him just because he could never cease from gripping one's arm, pointing, crying out in astonishment.)

Here is an example of her style: the Children's Ball as Madame Daudet remembered it, for she, too, is a lover of childhood memories—in Paris:

> Déjà dès en entrant on entendait un peu de musique, de petits pieds ébranlant le parquet, et des bouffées de voix confuses. Je prends la main d'une petite Alsacienne en corsage de velours, et maintenant voici l'éblouissement des glaces, des clartés. Le piano étouffé, assourdi par les voix de tout ce petit monde assemblé, cette confusion de la grande lumière qui faisait sous le lustre toutes les couleurs flottantes a force d'intensité, les rubans, les fleurs, les bruyères blanches des jardinières, les visages animés et souriants, tout m'est resté longtemps ainsi qu'un joli rêve avec le vague des choses reflétées, comme si, en entrant, j'avais vu le bal dans une glace, les yeux un peu troublés par l'heure de sommeil.

Indeed, Lemaître seems to be right. It is more of an impression than a picture. . . .

> 'The sudden dazzle of the mirrors, the light. The piano muted, drowned by this single voice of an infant

world, this confusion of blaze and brightness intensifying the colours floating underneath the chandelier, the ribbons, the flowers, the snowy heather in the *jardinières,* the faces, animated and smiling, all of which remained in my mind for a long time like a happy dream, though with the haziness of things seen in reflection as if, when I entered the room, I had seen the dancers in a mirror with eyes already a little troubled by the first intimation of sleep.'

Here is another extract:

'Mais ce qui me charmait surtout, c'était le Musée ouvert sur les parterres, le *On ferme!* des gardiens vous précipitant des galères de peinture aux allées du jardin, à l'heure où le jour tombant rend aussi vagues les tableaux et les arbres. Quoique petite fille, on sortait de là avec je ne sais quelle attention aux choses d'art, une susceptibilité d'impressions qui vous faisait regarder les becs de gaz allumés dans la brume ou des paquets de violettes étalés sur un éventaire comme si on les voyait pour la première fois dans un Paris nouveau.'

This charming notion of a childish mind seeing life through a haze of art, with a new susceptibility, 'when the falling day dims alike the pictures and the trees,' sharpens, on the contrary, one's image of Madame Daudet. This mind is, perhaps, a little over-refined; it is the risk of every woman-writer, and then, especially, to be a lady-writer, to see writing as a decorative process,—not, indeed, for one would not be so cheap, of adornment like the adornment of the dressing-table but not, either, the search for that simplicity and harmony by which the Chinese reduce complexity to form and line—rather a process of 'being gracious,' even delicate-minded. She agreed herself that what she admired in literature was atmosphere and style.

How dangerously obtuse critics may be, under the influence of fashion, to the excellence of work that time puts *hors concours!* How easily they may divert a man from his real talent! That essay of Lemaître's on Madame Daudet illustrates this (and he is normally one of the most sure-footed of critics). It is puzzling in its failure to realise how wonderful those early stories of Daudet were; for while he admires them, he gives them a second place. For example, when it occurs to him to ask what role Julia Allard might have played in Daudet's life, the burthen of his answer is conditioned by the apparently accepted contemporary opinion that Daudet was not a short-story writer at all but a novelist.

> 'Without her Le Petit Chose would perhaps have gone on, all his life long, scribbling exquisite, fleeting fancies here and there at table-corners. She was to lead him (le forcerait) to work without noticing that he was working. She was to induce him to write fine books (de beaux livres).'

As if *Les Lettres de Mon Moulin* were a mere packet of trifles.

This is how he sees that happy marriage. Alphonse comes to Paris, all eager and thirsty, squandering his days, all the gifts of the gods, like a capricious young king scattering his treasures into the sea. She crosses his path.

> 'She has what it takes (ce qu'il faut) to understand him: the most refined appreciation of beauty, a taste wholly modern, an artist's imagination, and gifts of spiritual sanity and domestic virtue inherited from a family line well-buttressed by tradition and the rewards of honest industry.'

(This, I presume, is a delicate-minded way of saying that she had money: he must, I begin to guess, have written this essay for the *Revue Bleu,* a highly refined periodical of the day.[1])

He continues:

'She will take hold of him, wean him from bad influences, give him a dignified and happy home and, though younger than he, she will, for all that, be a mother to him. She will realise for him the dream of the poet[2] who, thinking of all the poor ailing artist souls of the world, said:

'Il leur faut une amie à s'attendrir facile
Souples à leurs vains soupirs comme aux vents de roseau,
Dont le coeur leur soit un asile
Et les bras un berceau.

'Douce, infiniment douce, indulgente aux chimères,
Inépuisable, en soins calmants ou réchauffants,
Soins muets comme en ont les mères,
Car ce sont des enfants.

'Il leur faut pour témoin, dans les heures d'étude
Une âme qu'autour d'eux ils sentent se poser;
Il leur faut une solitude
Où voltige un baiser.'

[1] Lemaître repeats all this, however, in his essay written at the death of Daudet. 'Transplanted from Nîmes to Lyons, he became Midi-conscious in that city of haze and, as I think, it gave him the capacity to become, one day, more than *un félibre superieur.* He comes to Paris, continues to squander his days and the gifts of the fairies, until a woman—his wife—takes him to her breast, at once calms and strengthens him and in bestowing on this gypsy the order and the peace of the home makes him capable of serious tasks and fine books.'

[2] Sully-Prudhomme.

She did collaborate with him directly in the making of those 'beaux livres,' now hardly read. Though the first novel, *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné,* has, I notice, just been reprinted in France, a high compliment in these days when one may tramp all Paris without being able to buy a set of Maupassant or any but the better-known Stendhal. Daudet describes this process of collaboration and so does she. This is her account:

> 'Our collaboration was a Japanese fan. On one side was the subject, people, atmosphere; on the other, twigs, flower-petals, a frail branch lightly carried over with the last drops of paint, the last flecks of gold on the painter's brushes. It was I who performed those minute tasks, ever mindful of the main design on the obverse. . . .'

He is more specific, in his Introduction[1] to *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné*. He tells how he would talk with her over and over again about his work in progress.

> ' "What would you say to it if I made Sidonie die, eh? Suppose I let Risler live? What ought Delobelle, or Frantz, or Claire say on such and such an occasion?" And that would go from morning to night, all the time, at meals, in the carriage, going to the theatre, coming back from a *soirée,* during those long journeys in cabs through the silence and the sleep of Paris. Ah! You poor wives of artists! It is the plain truth that mine is so much of an artist herself that she has been my partner in everything I wrote. Not a page that she has not checked, retouched, enriched with some of her lovely blue and gold. And yet so modest, so simple, so little about her of the "literary woman." '

[1] Le Nouvelle Revue, XIV, p. 361.

He describes how he would cover a page with writing, pass it to his collaborator, receive it back, copy it out in final form with infinite joy.

> 'At either end of the immense room, my long table here, my wife's little desk there, and trotting between us, passing the copy from one to the other, my eldest boy[1] . . . with his thick blonde curls falling on his little pinafore, black so as not to show the inkmarks of his first pothooks. It is one of the happiest memories of my life as a writer.'

Nor was it only those conversations or these wifely emendations: if he wanted some difficult factual detail he would, after the correct manner of the Zola-ist, go after it, direct to the source, with his family in train.

> 'That dinner of Risler's and Sigismond's after the crash—I had that dinner myself, with my wife and son, at the Palais Royal, with the band playing.'

No wonder Lemaître says:

> 'Were he to attempt some risky subject, did he wish to describe some particularly shameful misery, modesty would restrain him, he would remain chaste because of her who watched him as he wrote . . . so that in all his work, even on those pages that bear the evident stamp of the great writer, even where she did not collaborate other than by her looks and her silent encouragement, one feels this diffused and delicate influence of a Beatrix who was always invisible—but always present.'

All this is, once again, not about the exquisite short-stories but about the novels *Jack, Sapho, La Petite*

[1] This is Léon Daudet, whose literary philosophy reacted violently away from his father's—certainly from that of his father's group, the famous *auteurs sifflés,* Zola, De Goncourt, Flaubert and Turgenev.

Paroisse, L'Evangeliste, Le Nabab, Les Rois en Exil, Nouma Roumestan and *L'Immortel.*

I would not propose that Madame Daudet directly seduced Daudet away from Provence and his delicate meridional talent. There were, as we must see, all sorts of other and stronger influences. Her love for style and atmosphere might, in fact, be expected to encourage that talent. Yet, one must remember that style and atmosphere convey to her chiefly—or so I feel—a sense of seemliness and propriety, and that, to her as to all Daudet's later friends he always appeared an unstable 'gypsy,' a wild woodland sprite, a Bohemian from the Brasserie des Martyrs, to be saved as G. K. Chesterton and Francis Thompson were to be 'saved.' Lemaître's reference to 'bad influences' is the remark of a *bien pensant* looking askance at such habitués of the Brasserie des Martyrs as Delvau and Murger and Baudelaire. Even De Goncourt and Flaubert seem to have felt that he needed to be stabilised. Once only, as far as I know, did Daudet feel the strain:

> ' "Look here," he cried to De Goncourt, "it's most unfortunate. As a matter of fact you have upset me. Yes, you and Flaubert and my wife . . . I have no style. No, I have no style, and that's the truth of it. People born on the other side of the Loire don't know how to write French prose. . . . What I was, was an *improvisatore,* a man of imagination. Well, but for you I should never have bothered myself about this brute of a language and I should have brought forth and brought forth in peace and quiet." '

He does not, as one sees, fully realise what they are doing to him. It is not just a question of language, alone. He is exactly right when he sees himself as 'an *improvisatore,*' bringing forth and bringing forth. R. H. Sherard, quoting this outburst in his memoirs of Daudet, interprets

both better and worse, though we have to grant him, in excuse, that both Daudet and Madame Daudet were then still alive.

> ' "Here we have," he remarks, "the cry of the cicada constrained to husbandry, the querulous complaint of *Le Petit Chose* brought back by the ear from Rhone-side ramblings, and tied down to his desk, a complaint which is, in itself, the most eloquent testimony to the advantages which this writer has derived from his wife's influence." '

They 'buckled me down' said Daudet, on another occasion, happily and gratefully.

3

Before tasting the quality of those novels it is to be said that there were, apart from this (highly suspect) influence of Julia Allard, precise reasons why Daudet allowed himself to be lured from the humour and tenderness that he had hitherto conjured like a mirage from the haze of Provence. For one thing his Provençal tales were far from popular when first published. The critics admired them. They failed to realise that, in those tales, they had before them a major achievement in French literature. This is something with which every writer of short-stories may expect to have to contend: that unless he also writes novels the public will not accept him as a major talent. His work, like the poet's talent, is select and must make its way slowly, like poetry, through a narrow channel of reputation. Maupassant, for example, is now regarded as a major French writer; the caution and condescension with which even Lemaître first wrote of him has to be read to be realised. (The moral of which is that no writer should pay the slightest attention to contemporary criticism.) There was also a special occasion in Daudet's ca-

reer that made him deliberately throw his more delicate talent overboard.

Three years after the publication of *Les Lettres de Mon Moulin* he saw his play *L'Arlésienne,* another Provençal piece, at the Vaudeville. The play was laughed off the stage. He tells us that he fled from the theatre, heart-broken, his ears red from the inane laughter of the audience at the emotional scenes, vowing that he would never again write for the stage, convinced that his Provençal vein was much too simple and too poetical for Parisian audiences. Yet, although the play was revived in his life-time with success, and is still played—it was staged in May, 1947, at the Théâtre Français, a more suitable venue than the junction of the grand boulevards before giggling and sceptical pleasure-seekers—it is hard to see much merit in it. It was a love-story of a highly sentimental and unpersuasive order, set in a farmyard, with comic opera décor, in silk and velvet, music by Bizet—musicians are familiar with the 'Suite Arlésienne'—the lights sinking for nightfall and rising for daybreak, with incongruous choirs chanting in the background, and it may well be the music rather than the play which attracts. The public had been right the first time. It is a silly play, and what Daudet should have concluded was not that there was some inherent lack of interest in the material, but that he was a short-story writer, and not a writer of plays. Instead he rushed home, pulled out another half-finished play and decided to recast it as a novel. It was *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné,* which is about three hundred miles away from Arles and Arlésiennes. It was set in the Marais district of Paris, a quarter that had been fashionable in the eighteenth century, and was now given over to business and manufactures. He had some justification in choosing this background since his father had also been in the manufacturing business, in Lyons. The

novel, alas, was a huge success. The public which had condescended to care for his stories lapped up this melodramatic picture of Parisian life. He decided that he had at last found his real *métier*—it was his talent to be another Zola. From that day novels of Parisian life poured from his pen.

4

Of the novels I find *Le Nabab* the most readable, or least unreadable, and I ought to say that Henry James considered *Numa Roumestan* 'a masterpiece.' But James is surely right in saying that in Daudet's other novels—and I would include this one—there is a 'perceptible tendency to the factitious.' If you tap them they sound hollow. They do not seem at all to have come from the same man who wrote the delicate short-stories of the South and of Paris in the siege, which bud and break as lightly as flowers on a stalk. The novels have the air of being built, *voulu,* acts of will-power, invented, sewn together. Zola said a fine thing about Daudet which hits off his weakness as a novelist. 'Benevolent nature has placed him at that exquisite point where poetry ends and reality begins.' And James has another phrase which exactly expresses the dilemma of such a talent: 'he pressed it a little hard.' That is, he pushed it forward from that 'exquisite point' where nature placed it into a realm beyond its scope. To illustrate I will take here but two examples, this first novel and *Le Nabab,* and make but two points.

Le Nabab is a chiaroscuro of an Algerian adventurer, six weeks in Paris when the novel opens. His barbaric wealth is lavished on all sides to forward his childish, uncontrolled ambitions. It leads him finally, but briefly, to a seat in the Chamber of Deputies from which he is ignominiously ejected for commercial frauds; he dies, melodramatically, while pleasure-seekers indifferently enjoy

down-stairs the last of his largesse. This Jansoulet had a real prototype. Various other characters of Parisian life appear under disguised forms, including Daudet's patron, the Duc de Morny; it is said, Sarah Bernhardt; and the pivotal character, the Irish doctor, Jenkins, whose arsenical pills give temporary élan to the jaded frames of his wealthy clients, has been identified with a certain quack named Oliffe, who was probably originally a MacAuliffe. Other characters have been identified in the same way. To the public which first read this novel it had, therefore, a strong topical appeal—the Duc de Morny was only dead about thirteen years and the relatives of the prototype of Jansoulet were still there to object to Daudet's portrait. It seemed, furthermore, to the period, and to the critics of the decades immediately after Daudet's death, that the novel was guaranteed against the inherent danger of becoming 'dated' by its future permanent value as an historical document of the Second Empire, much as Balzac's novels have a (secondary) value as documents of an earlier period. Unfortunately a double fallacy undermines this opinion. Balzac exposed a whole society by his analysis of the types it produced. Daudet, essentially a short-story writer, concentrated on individuals, even on peculiar individuals, and his novel falls apart into a gallery of these separate portraits and of unconnected incidents. This is strikingly illustrated by the fact that a distinct short-story can be constructed, and has been constructed, out of the sewings and cuttings of three chapters in *Le Nabab*—'La Famille Joyeuse.' [1] Just as a short-story has been lifted out of 'Les Rois en Exil' and called 'Chez le Médicin.' This episodic technique has been remarked over and over again by critics, and it is largely responsible for another outstanding weakness in Daudet as novelist, his love for melodramatic effects, inconceivable in the

[1] See *Contes Choisies.* (Bibliothèque Verte. Hachette.)

work of a man seeing his book as a whole, and relying on it as a whole for its comprehensive effect—i.e. inconceivable in a novelist though natural enough in a writer of *contes* or *nouvelles*. And it may be remarked, here, that even though other conditions tended to produce episodic or over-dramatic treatment, as for instance the obligations imposed by serial publication—*Froment* first appeared in serial form—yet veritable novelists have been able to build on all-over plan or theme, apparently outside Daudet's range, while working under exactly the same conditions: e.g. Dickens and Hardy.

One might fairly adopt the metaphor of the sprinter and the long-distance runner. The short-story writer likes to see the tape at the end of the sprint: he does not like the prospect of going round and round the course, or on and on over hedges and ditches, apparently getting nowhere. Set any short-story writer to work on a novel and he will inevitably break it up into episodes. Time and again as we read Daudet's novels we see this happening; as when the Irish doctor Jenkins enters the studio of the sculptress Félicia Ruys and catches the Nabab on the 'throne' passionately kissing her hand. At once he wins a round by declaring to the Algerian that a decoration is about to be bestowed on him, which causes him to rush from the studio; and wins the fight by telling Félicia that the fellow is married and has a large family. Whereupon the curtain falls on Félicia dashing the bust of the Nabab in ruin to the ground. It is embarrassingly violent, theatrical and unpersuasive, and in no wise in line with Daudet's naturally gentle talents. It is typical of much throughout his later books. What *is* in line with Daudet's talents is the delicate and tiny touch, all too rare, like:

> ' "We have been at work since six o'clock this morning," added the child with a rueful yawn which the dog

caught on the wing, making him open wide his pink mouth with its sharp teeth.'

But, as I shall have occasion to remark later on, there is normally no time for such delicate touches as these in the novel, whose vast sweep demands long strides and no delays. The novel and the short-story are two totally different genres and few men have been equally at home in both.

There is another point of distinction to be observed. The short-story is a more personal genre than the novel. It is the kernel of the matter on hand as the writer sees it. The writer need not be explicit; but we are likely to have much more difficulty in saying what knot a novelist ties or unties. It is this very characteristic of the short-story which has developed the technique of 'suggestion' rather than 'statement,' a technique which is really an invisible cloak to cover the author, sensitive about intruding himself, fully conscious of the personal nature of his work, and just because he is so near at hand, for that very reason sensitive about being discovered prowling among his characters. No such sensibilities affected Daudet, the most eagerly personal of all writers, the charm of whose talent, as Henry James says, 'comes from its being charged to an extraordinary degree with his temperament, his feelings, his instincts, his natural qualities.' In the short-story Daudet could be as *personal* as he liked. It was his metier. But in the novel this personal intrusion has always been regarded as out of place, and is always resented by the reader. Daudet could *not* keep himself out of his novels. Only Dickens among novelists has intruded as blatantly as Daudet, and only a verve so immense can recompense for the habit. I think Daudet surpasses even Dickens in this. To quote James, again,

'Daudet is nothing if not demonstrative; he is always in a state of feeling; he has not a very definite ideal of reserve. . . . To be *personnel* to that point, transparent, effusive, gushing, to give oneself away in one's books has never been and never will be the ideal of us of English speech.'

Nor, since Flaubert, can one say that it is an ideal of writers (or readers) in France or anywhere else.

Take the last scene of *Froment*. The main character of *Froment* is a minx, Sidonie Chèbe, explicitly said by Daudet not to be a Bovary, yet deriving, I think, more than a little from her vicious romanticism. She is one of the poorest dwellers of the Marais, a friend of Clara Froment whose father owns the Wallpaper Factory of the Rue des Vieilles Haudriettes. Sidonie, devoured by ambition, jilts young Risler, is foiled in her scheme to marry George Froment—Clara marries him instead—and has to be satisfied with old Risler the designer, now Froment's partner. She becomes insensate with jealousy of Clara, wins her husband from her, ruins him and bankrupts the factory. It has to be confessed that when her husband, at last undeceived, drives her out of doors into the night, the snow is falling, and that as she flies in her ball-dress the dancers swirl heedlessly on. It has also to be confessed that he makes her go on her knees to Clara, having first stripped her of her ill-gotten jewels, saying as he does so, 'On your knees! It must be! Restitution! Reparation! On your knees! Wretch!' She had earlier caught in her toils Frank Risler, her husband's brother, and extracted from him a love-letter which she finally shows to her husband. He has survived his wife's treachery; his brother's kills him. When he has duly hanged himself, his faithful old friend, Sigismond Planus, the cashier, brings down the final curtain by gazing out of the window at dawn breaking over Paris. . . .

'In the distance, far above Paris whose roar he heard but which he could not see, there rose a heavy and warm mist, moving sluggishly, touched at its rim with red and black like a cloud over a battlefield. Bit by bit, steeples, white façades, a golden cupola rose out of the mist, bursting forth at last in all the splendour of the dawn. Then, a thousand factory chimneys, towering above this medley of clustered roofs, began to belch into the wind their panting smoke as feverishly as a steamer leaving a harbour. Life was beginning again! Onward, machine! And so much the worse for those whom you leave behind!

'At the sight, old Planus gave way to a movement of terrible indignation.

' "Ah! You jade! You jade!" he cried, shaking his fist. And it was hard to say whether he was addressing the city—or the woman.'

As a final outburst can one forgive the 'Onward, machine!' etc.? And if one compares it, say, with that last cold line of *Père Goriot* one quickly measures the chasm between the two writers. Perhaps Conrad has made the most just and generous comment on this demonstrative technique.

'But it is hard,' he says, 'it is sometimes very hard to forgive him the dotted i's, the pointing finger, this making plain of obvious mysteries. *Monsieur de Montpavon marche à la mort.* . . . We feel we cannot forgive until suddenly the naïveté of it all touches us with the revealed suggestion of a truth. Then we see the man is not false; all this is done in transparent good faith. The man is not melodramatic; he is only picturesque.' Conrad, however, concludes—'His characters' fate is poignant; it is intensely interesting; and of not the slightest consequence.'

How can it be? It is Daudet whom we like, it is Daudet who comes out best of all the farrago; the kind Daudet who cries, aghast at the wickedness of his own Sidonie, 'But in this venal little mind the first kiss of love had only given birth to plans of ambition and luxury!'; who cries, in boyish delight, when her first lover comes back to expose her, 'Frank Risler thinks only of avenging the honour of the Rislers. He comes not as a lover but an avenger! And Sidonie must beware!' It is of his awe that we are aware, not of the awe of the situation, when the deceived husband meets the man who has betrayed him, and the author cries, with a grip on our arm, a pointing finger and rolling eyes—'The first few minutes of that meeting were *terrible!*' This writer who is, and so effectively, self-exposing and self-giving in the stories, still touches us; but Conrad and James are right—in the tales, where he is so much part of the emotion, we are one with him; in the novels the factitious contrivances stand between.

5

Daudet's surrender to the modish Naturalism is a warning to every writer to be suspicious of his milieu. Let us pursue the trail further into the general history of the idea of Naturalism; first taking a swift view of the whole terrain of this subject of Realism and Naturalism in fiction, most easily considered, for the moment, in the Novel. We can then close in on Daudet's personal dilemma.

What is realism, simply? Realism (without the capital letter) has always been found in literature. Every writer of fiction wishes to convey, in some fashion, an illusion of reality. It is an elementary part of his task to overcome his reader's natural disinclination to treat, for the moment, as physical fact what is a mere arrangement of words. In this the novelist differs from the poet in so much as the

poet does not generally wish to be as representational as the novelist, is not so eager to make a photograph with words. The poet dominates the imagination by transporting us out of the physical world into a more 'insubstantial existence' where words and images become hierophantic. He intoxicates us into that realm with a swirl of eloquent sound and imagery that is not, as a rule, so much descriptive as suggestive. '*The fat weed that rots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf,*' is not a picture of an actual botanical process. One cannot take literal meanings out of the individual words in even so simple a poem as—

Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower 4ems
Of beauty is thy earthly dower;
Twice seven consenting years have shed
Their utmost beauty on thy head. . . .

It is only by a series of conventions, slowly developed over centuries, that we understand the connotation of those lines, although, of course, we have grown up so naturally in those conventions that we now have long ceased to realise how conventional they are, and find no difficulty in understanding the idea that 'years' can 'consent' to anything. But if we were children again we would. And if a child could be educated without reference to the hundred-and-one conventions of poetry it would, if it grew to be a writer, either write quite literally, or, such being the natural urge to transcend reality, it would invent conventions of its own to express its imaginations. Thus my small daughter, when aged eleven, saw no oddity in her first efforts at writing verse in saying that the rising sun got up on a chair to look at the world. And this is to make no mention at all of the language of the actual *metre* itself, which is such a vast imbroglio of conventions that only the really cultivated critic can translate them fully.

The novelist employs less of those conventions, being more anxious to dominate the senses and the mind than to excite the imagination. His method, I do not say his object, is to create the illusion that we are having actual, physical experiences of all the senses. This, of course, is itself another colossal convention or series of conventions of which it is enough that the dictionary definition of fiction equates it with 'a conventionally accepted falsehood' —the falsehood being, primarily, but not wholly, that the human reason is mesmerised into accepting that a description of a sensation is a sensation. Thus when we read that 'Henry sighed' these words are not words but Henry and his sigh, and indeed, by sympathy, we partake of the existence of Henry and his sigh—we are Henry sighing.

The further intellectual and imaginative experience which we share is what makes a novel a moral 'experience' and not merely a physical 'experience.' This is where we come up against the distinction between Realist and Naturalist novels.

The total *object* of the novelist, of any writer, of any artist, cannot be merely to create an illusion of physical reality. If that were so the cinema gives a better illusion than any painter or any writer could ever hope to give. The illusion of physical reality cannot be more than a technique towards a larger end. On that Henry James has a good passage in which he compares the novel to an orange which one squeezes for the juice: and, so often, when we read and read and read through some long novel it is like squeezing a dummy orange—you have all the appearances, the texture, the illusion, the colour, the lifelikeness—but where is the juice? As we might say today, having read these empty novels one is inclined to ask, 'So what?' A novel, says Henry James, changing his image, is a monument; but it is a monument to something.

Had he known Ireland and seen those many curious monuments which kindhearted people erected during the Famine to give employment, all deliberately non-functional and irrelevant, lest this cheap labour compete with regular labour, he might have compared those empty novels to those empty monuments. Empty novels also give employment to cheap labour, and the public visits those meaningless monuments of a hundred years ago in much the same vacant, undemanding spirit that it approaches the unrewarding fictions of to-day.

This is equally true of the 'realistic novel.' It was Brunetière who said, speaking of the technique of Realism, that it is merely *un tremplin*—a spring-board. From the illusion there leaps whatever the novelist has in his heart to make leap. To use a loose word, some generalisation emerges; not, indeed, some close-packed moral (Heaven forbid!); not even, of necessity, something capable of definition—rather an attitude, a characteristic mood, a sudden wash of colour drawn across the landscape of experience. Where the realistic novel broke new ground was in the greater hardihood of its generalisations, the challenge of its colouring. The sentimental novelist's generalisations about life and society once lay in the mere vicissitudes of the hero and heroine; or rather in their inevitable conclusion, which the reader awaited with a barely-shaken imperturbability—as when in a melodrama one is only pleasantly disturbed at seeing the circular-saw approach the body of the heroine. Love was thwarted, but it came right in the end; the good were inevitably rewarded; the wicked inevitably slunk away—as in *The Vicar of Wakefield,* which was the Novel barely beginning to break away from the sentimental convention. Partly due to the fact that the charm of these ingenuous devices of suspended *dénouements* became exhausted by habit, and partly because literature ceased gradually to

be the titillation of the privileged classes, these pretty imaginary worlds began to disappear out of the Realistic Novel. The rise of the middle-classes in the eighteenth century gave them a right to a place in literature, both as readers and writers. An early effect was the novels of Jane Austen. The emancipation of the poor followed slowly, and as these gradually began to take a larger and larger place in literature, the romantic view of life died. There were other influences to which we must return à propos of Daudet and Maupassant.

One small result, for example, was the disappearance of the pleasant convention that 'they lived happily ever after.' Love was treated much more circumstantially. Once it had inevitably led to marriage, and that was the end of the story. The realists did not *know* better, in this regard, than the romantics; but they did have the courage to say some things that the sentimental novelist knew but could not bear to admit. And when the *Quarterly* reviewed *Emma* it strongly protested against this insult to 'Cupid,' and warned the new school that they might, at this rate, for all their honesty, thereby induce many more mean and sordid and selfish motives than the romantics did with their fairy-tales. Which is a sufficiently intriguing defence for telling lies to have been invented by Gilbert Chesterton. For it was not at first realised that Realism had its own high morality. The lesson of Balzac's *Père Goriot* (1834), which may be taken as the classic of Realism, could not be bettered by a Redemptorist preacher. Accepted codes in their fundamentals were always present. Virtue might not be rewarded—Is it in Life? —but if it was not, neither was wickedness.

But the novelists were not yet satisfied. There were still inherent conclusions even in the Realistic Novel which they questioned, and conventions which they disliked. They said that, in practice, life does not round to *any* con-

clusion. The novel of actual existence does not end with page 365. Some romantic trappings, such as plot, counter-plot, the oppositions of good men and bad men, the Missing Letter, the Overheard Conversation, the Happy Coincidence, the moral assumptions, the conventional solutions, were further lies to be eradicated without pity. To this end there arose key-words, or slogans, such as 'exact anatomy,' 'human documents,' 'experimental novel' to indicate that, in future, for everything stated in a novel there must be, as far as possible, scientific proof. The influence of nineteenth century scepticism and positivism is apparent here, as it is apparent that, in praising science, in demanding facts and in assailing the imagination, what the new school was really doing was denying that there was any mystery in life, any inexplicable miracle at all.

The premise on which the new 'naturalistic' novel was based was philosophical determinism. The man who most ruthlessly formulated it was Daudet's friend Zola. And he had no doubt where Daudet stood.

> 'My literary friends' . . . opinion on literary matters is the same as mine in every respect. . . . I am only the younger brother of Flaubert and of De Goncourt just as I am the brother-in-arms of Daudet.'

The classical statement of the theory of Naturalism in fiction is Zola's 'Le Roman Expérimental.' This is one of a series of articles which Zola contributed at Turgenev's instigation to the 'Messager de l'Europe' of Saint Petersburg in 1875. (Zola began to write for this review when the French papers were afraid to touch him: the *Corsaire* had just then been suppressed owing to an article of his.) It is to be noted, however, that this is a very late date in the history of Naturalism. Zola himself had been issuing the Rougon-Macquart series since 1869, and he is

quite right in saying, as he did, that he invented nothing new. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary,* the classic of Naturalism, had appeared in 1857. De Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux* had studied the life of the common people in characteristic fashion in 1865. It had all been there before him: all he did was to take to their logical and often absurd conclusions, ideas that had been in the air for years.

It is usual to treat *Le Roman Expérimental* superciliously; to say, in effect, 'Of course, there is really nothing at all in this nonsense of Zola's.' When anybody makes this sort of remark about a popular idea one may be sure that the idea is firmly established. It is as if one said today, 'Really does psychoanalysis tell us as much about human nature as is commonly imagined?' And when, around 1884, Jules Lemaître said about psychology in fiction, in the course of an essay on Maupassant, 'Really, this business of psychology in fiction is overdone,' we may take it as a date at which the mechanics of Naturalism have become an accepted technique. That there is a good deal of force in Zola's *Roman Expérimental* is proved by the fact that all subsequent writers of fiction, even men and women who probably have never read a line he wrote, faithfully follow his precepts. In our day, it seems to me, his method is almost universally and disastrously triumphant.

Zola bases his exposition of his literary theories on the writings of Claude Bernard (1813-1878), a physiologist of genius whose *Introduction à la médicine expérimentale* has been compared to the *Discours sur la Méthode* of Descartes. In sum Bernard applied to living creatures the technique of physics: i.e. clinical and controlled observation, followed by a hypothesis to interpret what the observer has dispassionately recorded, rounded off by the verification of this hypothesis by experiment. By this

method he discovered the sugar-making secretion of the liver and the vaso-motor system of the nerves. Zola was entranced by this rational approach to the study of the human organism, and saw in it a clear parallel for the study of human character. An experiment, he said, is merely an observation which one has been provoked to make. An experimental novel is merely something which one has been provoked to write in order to test and prove a rational hypothesis. 'It is the official report of an experiment (the *procès-verbal*) read in public.' Just as a scientist submits his subjects to certain tests to prove his theory, so the novelist will move his characters this way and that to show that the succession of incidents will be that which is dictated by the determinism of the phenomena which he is studying. Thus, in Balzac's *Cousine Bette,* we have a temperamentally amorous man, Baron Hulot, submitted to certain tests, or incidents, to show us how the mechanism of his passion functions. That is the 'Roman Expérimental.' It is, in Zola's words, the novelist continuing the work of the physiologist.

Zola was quite aware that it would be pointed out to him that the human liver is an inert, obedient mass without a will which reacts passively to experiments, whereas man has a will of his own and, being free, is therefore unpredictable. His answer to that was not that he did not believe in the will but that he believed more in the milieu. 'Le déterminisme,' he said, categorically, 'domine tout.' There is an external milieu and there is an internal milieu, or 'mechanism of the passions,' and once these are granted, stated and measured, everything must inevitably follow. To those who said that he must therefore be a fatalist he replied that, on the contrary, fatalists suppose that things manifest themselves independently of conditions, whereas his stress was all on the conditions. If anybody declared that his theory was a doctrine of hope-

lessness he replied, warmly, that to master good and evil, to regulate life and society, to resolve all the problems of socialism, to erect a solid basis for justice by solving problems of criminality according to experimental techniques was to do the most useful and moral work possible; and he poured scorn on the so-called idealists who 'take refuge in the Unknown for the mere pleasure of it.'

He was equally aware that it would be pointed out to him that every novelist is subject to his own personal quality of mind and nature, so that no observer could ever be utterly objective. This, he asserted, was the whole point of the experimental idea, and he quoted Bernard to the effect that the nature of the observer and of his theories must, inevitably, be quite individual. 'C'est un sentiment particulier un *quid proprium* qui constitue l'originalité, l'invention, ou le génie de chacun.' It is the essence of the theory that the observer will doubt and doubt, will remain quite free-minded and sceptical, and only cease to doubt when he sees that the 'mechanism of the passions, having been taken to bits and put together again, still functions according to the laws of its nature.' So the novelist, willy-nilly, must continue the work of the physiologist, reducing all things to responsive machines (*rouages obéissants.*) The experimental method alone proclaims liberty of thought without any *parti pris.*

Granted his own *parti pris,* his theory is unassailable. That the results, as novels, must also be intensely boring he and his successors down to our own time have demonstrated perfectly. The only other fault I have to find with his theory is not, as has been said, that he took a moderate idea too far but that he did not take it far enough: it would be the logical conclusion that the physiologist should so operate on the living organism, on, for example, the brain of Zola, that it would be directed like a *rouage obéissant* to create fiction to order. Lyrics, novels

and short-stories painlessly extracted. Alternatively we might have a moral novel about the major gut. An intestinal tract.

It is interesting that it was not Zola the inexorable Naturalist but Balzac the moderate Realist whom Engels acclaimed, saying that from his novels he had 'learnt more (about French society from Napoleon to '48) than from all the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period put together.' And this was the Balzac who had proclaimed himself 'a monarchist, a legitimist and a Catholic.'

Zola naturally chose the material most suitable to his theory—laying, for example, much stress on the social milieu, and on heredity. One of his Rougon-Macquart novels deals with the life of Les Halles: he called it *Le Ventre*—the belly of Paris. (He did not disregard the major gut.) Another novel studies the life of the railways; a third, art-life; a fourth, the life of the big shops; another, the life of the peasants. Naturally, too, his people tend to move in great masses, as in *Germinal,* where the miners come out on strike. He loves, too, to give life to inanimate things. When he read, with keen pleasure, a description in Daudet's *Jack* of a steam-engine being hoisted aboard-ship as if it were a struggling, panting, living thing, it seems to have suggested to him the idea of making a steam-pump in *Germinal* also pant and strain as if it were alive. Not unnaturally, also, his people refuse to be *rouages obéissants* and take on urges of their own, independently of conditions and in defiance of his own deterministic philosophy. Thus, M. Denis Saurat observes[1] that the same Jean who is a stupid dumb beast in *La Terre*—as a peasant might be clinically supposed to be, in his conditions—becomes 'brave, sensible and effective in *La Débâcle* (Zola's novel about 1870) where the war makes

[1] *Modern French Literature,* 1870-1914. Denis Saurat, London, 1946.

a man of him although it is a calamity and a failure.' Is one to draw some 'provoked observation' from this about war in general? And, if so, what is it? That peasant-life brings out the beast in men, but that war brings out the man in what, before it, was a beast? This may be quite true, or it may not. The doubt indicates the weakness of the Naturalistic or experimental theory since it means that two novelists, with opposing hypotheses, might quite easily show their characters behaving in opposite ways under similar conditions. What is really at work here, however, as M. Saurat has also pointed out, is Zola's (unwilling) sense of the miraculous. He cannot deny that there are inexplicable flashes of goodness and beauty in all men; the artist in him sweeps aside his theories to insist on it. 'Zola has suppressed God but he has scattered the divine qualities all over his human material, and among the worst something which seems to be festering is really germinating. The forces are at work, and their movement is upwards.' Again we may agree, while gently asking of the shade of Zola, 'What forces?'

6

Now, what was Daudet, the gentle poet of Provence, doing in this deterministic *galère?* Why did he think he belonged here? I think the answer is that Daudet was a rather simple soul; frank, spontaneous, eager as a boy, enthusiastic and generous beyond limits, very trusting, easily influenced. He also wanted success, as who does not. His nature, his ambition and his milieu combined to persuade him that this was the proper way to write *de beaux livres.*

Whatever went into Daudet had to come out. When he was younger his simple, natural self had simply and naturally responded to the attraction of the South, and he wrote of it, with infinite care and artistry. When he came

up to Paris he still went on, for a time, writing about Provence, still went back there—to that old windmill which he made famous. When he went, for his health, to Corsica, he wrote, on his experiences there, those unforgettable impressions, *Le Phare des Sanguinaires* and *L'Agonie de la Semillante*. When he was poor in Paris he haunted the bohemian cafés around Notre Dame de la Lorette, drinking and idling with, to mention from among those scores of wasted lives a few names that have survived, Murger, Malassis, Dupont, Alfred Delvau, and, the greatest of them all, Baudelaire. And as it went in so it came out—in *Jack* and in his memoirs. When he married and was climbing the ladder, at the time of his first novel, he belonged to the group calling themselves *les auteurs sifflés,* Flaubert, Zola, De Goncourt, Turgenev. This was to move in the very heart of naturalism. The influences were too much for him.

He was touchingly imitative. Thus it is sad to see Daudet, like Zola, compiling mountains of facts in piles of note-books: as he made use of an item he would strike it out with a coloured pencil lest he should use it again. It was merely comical to see him imitating Barbey D'Aurevilly's dandy's clothes. It is rather charming when he refuses the Duc de Morny's appeal to cut his hair. It is odd to see this naturally sanguine creature buckling down to his big books. ('There is too much paper in it,' Flaubert said of *Jack*.) It is most of all revealing to find him buried in the modish gloom.

Lemaître is good on this, for, as he truly says, gloom is inherent in Zola, it is part of his nature, his philosophy, the colouring of his mind, it is internal; whereas in Daudet one does not feel that this is so. The passage is well worth quoting at length, for all that he says equally needs to be said to-day: it might be called 'In Defence of the Happy Ending':

'If the rest of a man's book, however sad it be, does not imply a philosophy of complete negation and despair; if the ferocity of the dénouement is not forced on him by the logic of his subject and the nature of his own mind, I fail to see what aesthetic advantage there is in the writer's constant and systematic refusal to yield to the universal feeling that the good should be rewarded. What, in brief, I reproach Daudet for is a tendency to force pity, a pessimism which is not innate in this happy Provençal, but to which he buckles himself—and which, moreover, he frequently forgets. . . . The novels of Zola are pessimistic *au fond,* internally pessimistic. It is vain for him to make the action and dénouement of his books other than tragic. From beginning to end we are left with a feeling of disgust, a black melancholy which leaves our eyes dry—and thereby sins against the light all the more.'

When misery is held to be irresponsible, pity declines into bitterness. There is no reason to believe that Daudet had any philosophy of irresponsibility, and in such bitterness as we find in his novels he was lightly false to everything that he essentially was. It is not just that the solemn personality he created for himself as a novelist was factitious—all created literary personalities partake of this: it is that it bore such little relation to his talents. So, the truth is that he could not compass bitterness, he could not be farouche, his gloom is fake-gloom and does not impress us: the natural sweetness and goodness of his nature defeats him, or, may one say, saves him, as Conrad, by the percipient generosity of his own nature, was able to see. It is not pleasant when Zola perceives this in another way, noting that one still entangled in idealism and poetry seems destined by Providence, and his feminine charms, to lead to the new literature souls whom human documents *tout crus* would frighten off completely. As it

has transpired it has worked the other way round. Daudet's novels are readable for their Daudet-ism; unreadable for their Zola-ism. They can only remind us of another sort of *cru*—the good Rhône wine of the stories of his true nature.

For writers and philosophers, in the end, do not, as Emile Faguet has said in a most charming and civilised essay on *La Tristesse Contemporaine,* produce current ideas: they reflect current feelings. The gloom of Zola is not Zola's gloom: it is a reflection of a contemporary melancholy, creeping into life for many generations, at least since the revolution hoped impossible hopes and science dreamed impossible dreams of perfectibility, all proven less likely than they at first seemed. But neither is Daudet's gloom the gloom of Daudet; nor is it the gloom of Zola which was not Zola's; nor is it the gloom which Zola reflects; his gloom is just a bad joke. The man was a happy man; he loved people; he loved life, *as it is;* he accepted, he rejoiced, he was a gentle Pantagruelist. Just because he was so happy he put on a mask and growled Fee-fo-fum. We are not frightened. We can see the happy eyes of *le petit chose*. Besides, as Faguet well says, this current gloom was largely the 'misères des grands seigneurs': the mass of men did not feel it profoundly; the current feeling was confined to the lords of fortune and of thought. Daudet was not one of those—he was a good fellow, he was a simple fellow, he was a very normal and natural fellow, or, as I said in the beginning, he was simply a local boy who made good.

7

These are the two outstanding characteristics of his short-stories, an almost greedy happiness, and the tears of that supreme happiness. It has been suggested indeed that the apple in his Eden was his discovery that the most

extraordinary thing in the world was the world itself: that because he could not be content any longer to look at life he ate it: i.e. that because he rejoiced in its fantasy he fell in love with its reality—and was fool enough to call it Realism.

The stories tell of such *little* things, things almost fanciful, so light and slight they are. They are not things that anybody could have observed deliberately. They have been felt as a child feels, with intensity. (Zola had no such remembering, feeling eye. To a friend when writing *Nana:*—'Oh, by the way I forgot. I shall want an exact, scientific and very detailed description of the death-mask of a woman who died of common small-pox. Thanks in advance.') Indeed with Daudet fancy and observation are one act. It is this which makes analysis of his work impossible: to take them to pieces is like pulling a flower apart; it is his personality which one would pull apart.

Take up *Les Vieux*. It opens with a letter from Paris, received at the mill. It is a letter as odd as a Phiz drawing, only more kind, and more shot with poetry.

> ' "You must do me a favour, old chap. You must shut your mill for a day and go off to Eyguières at once. It's a big market-town about seven or eight miles from you —just a pleasant walk. When you get there ask for the orphanage. The first house after that is a lowbuilt house with gray shutters and a little back-garden. Go in, without knocking—the door is always open; and as you walk in shout out, very loud, 'Hello, folks! I'm Maurice's pal.' Then you'll see two little old people, Oh, so old, so very old, as old as old, stretching up their hands to you from the depths of their big armchairs, and you'll kiss them for me, with your whole heart, as if they were your own people. Then you'll chat, and they'll talk to you about me, all the time about me, and they'll tell you a thousand silly nonsensical things that you must listen to without

a smile. . . . Not a smile, remember! . . . They're my grandparents, those two. I'm the whole world to them. They haven't seen me for ten years. . . . Ten years! Yes, it's a long time, but hang it, I'm stuck in Paris and they're so old. They're so old that if they came here to see me they'd crumble into little bits on the way. However, by great good luck you're down there, my dear old miller, and when they kiss you the poor old things will imagine they're kissing a bit of me. I've talked such a lot to them about us two and the lovely friendship which . . .' The devil fly away with him and his friendship . . .'

And so on. And the devil fly away with the word 'charm' that comes at once to one's pen, for what is it to say 'charm' but to say 'alchemy.'

Touch upon touch does it. The fine day, his nook in the rocks where he lies like a lizard and listens to the pines, his key put into the cat's hole—there is one intimate *remembered* detail—and his pipe, and his stick and the long dusty road to Eyguières. It is the details that do it but it is the heart which remembers that really does it.

'All my life long I'll be seeing that long corridor, so cool and fresh, the high walls pink-washed, and at the end the little garden quivering at me across a luminous windowblind, and on all the door-panels fading flowers and violins. . . . At the end of this corridor, on the left, through a half-open door, the tick-a-tock of a grandfather clock and a child's voice, a school-girlish voice, reading, halting at every syllable. "And there . . . up . . . on . . . Saint . . . Ir . . . en aeus . . . excl . . . aimed . . . I . . . am . . . the . . . wheat . . . of . . . the . . . Lord. . . ." I approached the door very quietly and looked in. In that calm and demi-dusk of a tiny room I see an old chap, with two rosy cheeks, wrinkled to the tips of his fingers, asleep in the deeps of an armchair,

his mouth open, his hands lying on his knees. At his feet sits a little girl dressed in blue, with a big cape and a little cap, the orphanage uniform, and she is reading the "Life of Saint Irenaeus" from a tome as big as herself. The legend had laid its finger on its lips. The old man slept in his chair, the flies slept on the ceiling, the canaries slept in their cage in the window. The great clock snored, *Tick-a-tock, tick-a-tock*. Nothing was awake in the room but a great wide band of sunlight shooting straight and clear between the closed shutters, brilliant with dancing flecks and waltzing atoms.'

Not all the note-books in the world could contain one detail of that; nothing but a memory moist with tears of joy. But what pains, what care, or else what 'natural selection' must have been at work: as one soon learns when one tries to render in English a line like 'le jardinet qui tremblait au fond à travers un store de couleur claire.' This is the language of poetry on loan to prose.

This is, also, humour so delicate that the pattern is faint on the plate. A light touch laid it on, it is already ancient, already classic, it will never fade, it will always be faint, like the smell of bergamot from the old cupboard where the cherries-in-brandy were hidden. They had been waiting there ten years for the selfish Maurice, and now his friend must broach it.

'In spite of the appeals of Mamette the old chap insisted on going after the cherries himself and, mounted on the chair, to the terror of his wife, he was trying to reach up to them. . . . You see it? The old man tremblingly stretches upward, the two little bluecoated girls clutch the chair, Mamette stands behind him, panting, her arms upward, and over it all their hangs the frail perfume of bergamot from the open cupboard and the great layers of russet linen.'

(Why russet, I have always wondered.) But I must add what Daudet cannot refrain from adding—'C'était charmant.' (Like Madame de Stael's '*C'est joli,* une feuille qui chante.') How easily it could all be too *charmant.* But Daudet is either clever by art or by nature, for he lays his irony beside his sentiment to salt it. You remember? The cherries had not been sweetened. 'Elles étaient atroces, vos cerises, ma pauvre Mamette.' He ate them to the end without a grimace.

How does it end, this islet of reality conjured from the haze of Provence, a mirage, a little dream of delight? One must return to one's mill. The old man must, to prove himself a man, walk some of the way with his guest, though on his arm. The little child in blue creeps after them, unseen, to lead him back, so proud, unseeing, of being a man, still. 'Mamette, beaming, saw his pride from the doorstep and as she watched us her chin nodded and nodded as much as to say, "All the same, my poor old man can walk still!" ' And there the little masterpiece ends. For if it is not a little masterpiece, worth all the long fat books that Daudet ever wrote, then literature and criticism are bedlamites, and we can all go and boil our heads and stop writing.

Of what *is* it composed? As Lemaître says—truth, fancy, wit, tenderness, gaiety, melancholy, all in one little tale. 'There is no plot!' the editor may say. 'It is nice but slight,' the writer of yarns may say. 'There is no psychology,' the realist may say. 'It is a little thing,' the novelist may say. 'The best and most pleasing writers,' Montesquieu says, 'are those who excite in the soul the greatest number of simultaneous sensations.'

What delights us in those tales, too, is not only the unanalysable quality of the technique alone but the unmodern *lightness* of his personality. The very choice of subject is so old and, one might say, traditional; as simple

as Theocritus. He should have delighted George Moore, who loathed the moralising of the moderns, that mark of intellectual malady which Faguet calls the ransom-price of our latter-day sense of superiority, and of which we have made the poisonous pastry we call 'serious literature.' To-day young men choose for subjects the most enormous and monstrous themes. A pair of old children like 'Les Vieux' would seem beneath them, effeminate, unserious. But we like labour in our day! And Lemaître is right, charm and labour do not lie together; and Daudet proved it when he 'buckled down,' for in his labour his charm was to die. But that is a modern curse, too, to want to *faire grand* before one is able to make at all. No subject is too small for genius. M. Séguin's goat; M. Cornelle's empty mill; two inns, one empty the other full; a child idling on the river (that delightful thing, *Le Pape est Mort*); an old monk making wine (that perfect story *L'Élixir du révérend Père Gaucher*); a starry night.

Daudet is a pagan in that he begins with his senses and ends with his heart, and his mind would seem sound asleep if all his being were not so evidently awake. But that was where we came in, was it not? That by technique we cannot mean tricks but an art that is not much learned as practised—practised for us, perhaps, by race, by tradition, by our blood, but, naturally, as far as we ourselves are concerned, practised chiefly by ourselves: the art of fully being. It is in the putting of ourselves to work that the difficulties begin, for few writers are so lucky as Daudet as to be unaffected and unselfconscious, and to have subjects in concordance with this, their awakened being, ready to hand, and, though so poor, to have so much courage, and to be so blessedly ignorant of the world, and of fame, and publishers, and critics, or, when these must be met, few so lucky as to meet editors like Villemessant of

Figaro. For sooner or later the world says, 'Do come in, little writer!' And then, as happened to poor Daudet in the end, indeed so soon, we may never get out of the parlour again.

3

Anton Chekov

or *The Persistent Moralist*

Russian novelists are more stupid than their readers, their heroes are wan and insignificant, and the life they treat is bare and uninteresting. A Russian writer lives in the gutter and eats woodlice, loves frowsy women and laundresses, knows nothing of history or geography or natural sciences, and is ignorant of the religion of his native land, its administration and its legal procedure . . . in a word he knows absolutely nothing.

CHEKOV to SOUVORIN *May 15th, 1889*

He who desires nothing, hopes for nothing, and is afraid of nothing, cannot be an artist.

CHEKOV to SOUVORIN *November 25th, 1892*

WHILE preparing to write this book I again re-read all Chekov's tales. I began, casually, with his *Verotchka.* It was years since I had read it because I had for long had a feeling that it is just a dreamy, romantic, pretty, atmospheric tale, with a lovely scenery of mists over the fields under the moon—that and no more. Having re-read it I feel, once again, that nobody should read more than he can in ten years re-read; that first reading is a pleasure for youth, second reading an instruction for manhood, and third reading, no doubt, the consolation and despair of old age. For *Verotchka* re-read is simply another thing altogether.

Do you remember *Verotchka?* All I got from it in my youth was that a young man, Ognev, goes to the country

and meets an old man and his pretty daughter, Vera or Verotchka. Leaving them, he walks away from the house through the moonlit fields, full of fine sentiments:

> He walked along thinking how frequently one met with good people, and what a pity that nothing was left of those meetings but memories. At times one catches a glimpse of cranes on the horizon, and a faint gust of wind brings their plaintive ecstatic cry, and a minute later, no matter how greedily one scans the blue distance, one cannot see a speck nor catch a sound: and like that people, with their faces and their words flit through our lives and are drowned in the past, leaving nothing except faint traces in the memory.

Then Verotchka comes towards him and they talk, and she does not seem to want to leave him and he wonders why and he talks about never having had a romance, and drools on and on about how they will, perhaps, meet in ten years' time and not have a memory of one another. Suddenly she blurts out that she loves him so they need never part. He is aghast, and confesses that he does not love her, and she hurries away from him. His fine sentimental bubble is burst; and he thinks that something precious is lost to him, part of his youth never to be repeated. He goes back to the house, looks at it, sighs, throws up his hands, and goes away.

It is the father of a hundred imitative Chekov-stories of our day, but the imitators have either harshened it with a cruder Naturalism, or diluted it with rose-water sprinkled with cherry-blossoms. They have not noticed the sentence:

> For the first time in his life it was his lot to learn by experience how little that a man does depends on his own will, and to suffer in his own person the feelings of

a decent, kindly man who has against his will caused his neighbour cruel, undeserved anguish.

They have missed the ironic detachment; and, above all, that this is one of the most frequent subjects of Chekov—the motif most often heard from beginning to end, sometimes satirised in his so kindly way that it can hardly be called satire (as in *The Three Sisters*)—the frustration that descends on the sentimental mind which deceives itself, which evades reality, and which ultimately breeds lies, smugness and cant. They have who imitate merely the romantic atmosphere failed to see that there is here a quality of *mind* that is always in Chekov, controlling his emotions, so that he does not bathe in the thing, but contemns it all while he writes of it so sensitively—an approach which is uniquely his own. Later he developed, with greater strength, this motif and this approach in *The Wife* (1892; frustration and self-deception); *Gooseberries* and *About Love* (1898; lies and smugness); *Ionitch* (1898) or *Excellent People* (sham; the neurotic sentimental male and female).

One could really write a book on Chekov with no other illustration than this story *Verotchka*—which would be printed in the first few pages, and referred to throughout. It was published in his third volume of stories, in 1887 (he was born in 1860), the first book to bring him any reputation—including the Poushkin Prize. With it were *At Home, The Witch, A Trifling Occurrence, On the Road* and *A Nightmare*.[1] Before that he had been writing for the comic papers, without regard for his talent, merely to earn a few roubles for clothes and food: then had come Gregorovitch's letter of encouragement in 1886 and the essential Chekov began to show himself. In embryo that essential Chekov is in *Verotchka*.

[1] The references are to the Constance Garnett translations.

One thing he is always saying is—'I hate violence and falsehood in all their aspects.'

> 'I detect them in science, in religion, in the younger generation. For these reasons I have no partiality for gendarmes, or butchers, or savants, or writers, or the younger generation. I look upon labels and trade-marks as prejudices. My Holy of Holies is the human body, health, mind, talent, inspiration, love, and the most absolute freedom—freedom from violence and falsehood in whatever they may be manifested.'

Again he speaks of the framework of a novel he is planning as 'the absolute freedom of man, freedom from violence, from prejudices, from ignorance, the devil, freedom from passions, etc.'

This gospel of normality informs a great deal of his work as well as his life, and one cannot say too emphatically that Chekov's work was the affirmation of normality. 'Dinner at the Continental,' he enters in his diary, 'to commemorate the anniversary of the great reform (abolition of serfdom). Tedious and absurd. To dine, drink champagne, make a noise, deliver speeches about the national consciousness, the conscience of the people, freedom and such things, whilst slaves in tail-coats are running round your tables, veritable serfs, and your coachmen wait outside, in the street, in the bitter cold—that's lying to the Holy Spirit.' The same earnest spirit gives us the bitter mocking laughter of *The Grasshopper*—taken direct from life with, as models, the painter Levitan and a Moscow lady of his acquaintance, both presented so veritably that Chekov nearly incurred a libel action over it. It gives the fire of honest loyalty to his stories of such simple decent people as the provincial doctors in *The Princess, The Wife, A Doctor's Visit,* or the priest in *Nightmare*. It gives us such types, which he often draws,

as the cruel father, or the selfish husband, or the stupid bully, in *The Man in a Case, The Head of the Family, The Husband, An Upheaval, At a Country House, Difficult People.* All this is implicit in Verotchka.

This simple manliness of the boy whose father had been a serf and with hard work bought himself free and kept a little store in Taganrog, down in the territory of the Don Cossacks, this hatred of nonsense, this desire for 'personal freedoms,' gives us, secondly, the simplicity of Chekov's subjects. He is free of the Romanticism of the 1860's, as he is free of the Naturalism of the 1860's. 'He demanded from writers, ordinary topics from life, simplicity of narration and absence of effects or tricks. One has simply to write about how Peter got married to Marie.' (*Chekov.* Koteliansky, p. 20. London, 1927.) And in his sympathy with the people who had no nonsense about them, the common Russian people, we get many stories of great tenderness, or sometimes frank avowal, about the peasants. *Easter Eve,* a story of the Ukraine, is so tender in its moody fusion of self with the spirit of the dead canticle-writer, and the dark night and the ferry, and the gathering peasants that it has an unreserve of emotion rare in Chekov.

'I did not see (the dead) Nikolay. God knows, perhaps if I had seen him I should have lost the picture my imagination paints for me now. I imagine that lovable, poetical figure, solitary and not understood, who went out at nights to call to Ieronim over the water, and filled his hymns with flowers, stars and sunbeams, as a pale, timid man with soft, mild, melancholy features.'

The other side of the picture is in *The Murder* or *In the Ravine,* or, *The Witch.* He wrote of them with sympathy that never failed him: but he wrote of them without a shadow of sentimentality. 'There is peasant blood

in my veins,' he said once, 'and you cannot astonish me with peasant virtues.' Gorki and Bunin, after him, it is said, alone spoke with the same directness about the peasant. There are no peasants in *Verotchka*: but there is the foil of that bourgeois stupidity and sentimentalism which made and kept them what they were.

Thirdly, and this is clear in *Verotchka,* and is one of the most important things to note in him:—'You may weep and moan over your stories, you may suffer together with your characters, but it should be done in such a way that the reader does not detect it. The more objective, the stronger the impression.' His reserve was immense: he might fuse himself with his people so that what he wrote they spoke; but at the same time—again, I say, it is an approach uniquely Chekovian—he would withdraw himself, as author, from participation in their self-belief. Not otherwise could he be truthful and at the same time natural. 'One ought to write only when one feels completely calm,' he said once, and that was what he doubtless meant by it. It is the mark of his ironic sympathy, as if a man smiled at the follies of his wife and still loved her for them. It is all part of his integrity as a man, which made him so hate sham, and like simple people, and yet not write of the shams without a twinkle or of the simple people without control over his affection.

Fourthly, and linked with this, is something which may have come to him by accident of his profession as doctor, and partly, also, no doubt, from his admiration for Flaubert and Maupassant—the coldly objective, scientific eye of the student of physical diseases. It gives many of his stories a secondary interest which serves to buttress their emotional interest: an intellectual veracity, a content idea. You get something of a feeling that Doctor Chekov would have liked to cure these people of their neuroses, their extravagances, their insanity: for he was loyal to

his profession and acknowledged the help it gave him as an author.

> 'I have no doubt that the study of medical sciences has had an important influence on my literary activity; they have considerably widened the range of my observations, and enriched me with knowledge, the true value of which to me as a writer, can be understood by one who is himself a doctor. They have also had a directing influence and it is probable that, thanks to my knowledge of medicine, I have managed to avoid many mistakes. My acquaintance with the natural sciences and with the scientific method has always kept me on my guard, and I have tried wherever possible to take the scientific data into consideration, and where this was impossible *I have preferred not to write at all.*'

Similar emphases on the 'scientific method' are all over his letters. It helped him to keep his interest attached to the subject without engaging his emotions beyond what was proportionate to the cause.

So far I have listed:—

1. Hatred of sham; but the keenest interest in it, as in everything.
2. Liking for simple subjects, simple people.
3. Reserve.
4. Scientific approach.

Now we must note something that enlivens and exalts all these things, a quality of his nature that became more and more personal to him as time went on, and which we might call the element of belief in him. He did sincerely believe in humanity. 'I am not a grave man,' he said, and he could not understand why people called him a pessimist. Also—'From the days of my childhood I have believed in progress.' And his favourite phrase was:—'Look

here, don't you see? There is sure to be a Constitution in Russia in ten years' time. Kuprin records that, in Yalta, towards the end of his life,

'. . . he looked lovingly after his flower-beds, as if he saw in them the symbol of beauty to come, and watched new paths being laid out by human intellect and knowledge. He looked with pleasure at new and original buildings and at large, seagoing steamers: he was eagerly interested in every new invention and was not bored by the company of specialists. With firm conviction he said that crimes such as murder, theft, and adultery are decreasing, and have nearly disappeared among the intelligentsia—teachers, doctors and authors. He believed that in the future true culture would ennoble mankind.'

His last work, *The Cherry Orchard,* expresses this eager, loving hope. 'How beautiful life will be in three or four hundred years!' Planting his garden he would joke about what he had done to change that one bit of wilderness. Then he would say, solemnly, 'Do you know that in three or four hundred years all the earth will become a flourishing garden?'

A man does not say such things unless he has grave need for optimism. You do not find optimists in palaces. I have prefaced this essay by one of his bitter condemnations of the Russia of his day, and he had, as a doctor, and as the investigator of Saghalien, the convict settlement, and as the poor boy of Taganrog, and as a man under sentence of death by consumption, grave need to believe in the future as an adjustment of the present. But he was no dreamer. He wanted to do things. How he scourges Souvorin in his letter of March 9th, 1890, for saying that Saghalien is of no use to anyone, nor of any interest to anyone!

'It is evident from the books I have read and am reading that we have sent millions of people to rot in prisons, we have destroyed them at random, without reflection, barbarously: we have driven men through the cold in iron chains for thousands of miles: we have inflicted them with syphilis, depraved them, mutiplied criminals, and for all this we have thrown the blame on the red-nosed prison superintendents. Now all Europe knows it is not the superintendents who are to blame, but all of us. But we do not care; it does not interest us. The glorified sixties did *nothing* for the sick and the prisoners and thus violated the chief commandment of Christian civilisation.'

Later he wants to go into the famine-stricken areas and work, and he goes about cadging money from his friends to help people.

How could he, then, as an artist fail to see that life posed questions, and that life had no answer for them? It is obligatory for an artist, he affirmed, to pose questions. As a man, a doctor, a friend in conversation he might try to answer these questions. But as an artist the sense of the inscrutable mystery of human suffering makes him stop when the problem has been stated. And so there thence comes into his work that sense of tears in human things which used to be foolishly taken for 'Russian Pessimism.'

'You scold me for my objectivity, calling it indifference to good and evil, lack of ideals and ideas and so on. When I describe horse thieves you would always have me say, 'Stealing horses is evil.' That was known long ago without me. Let the jury judge them: my business is simply to show what they are like. . . . I must tell you that they are not beggars but well-fed people, and that horse-stealing is not simple theft but a passion.'

These, as I re-read him, strike me as the essential notes in the man's character. The note I find most important is the last, his faith in man. It is the element in him that induces me to think that had he not been a prosewriter he would have been a satirical poet.

2

Chekov began as a Naturalist. His models were Maupassant, Flaubert, Turgenev, Tolstoy. After Maupassant, indeed, he often felt that such high demands had been imposed on the craft of the short-story that it was most difficult to work at all. His scientific approach, his insistence on conciseness, his truthfulness to fact, his clinical exactness when dealing with abnormalities or any physical phenomena, his willingness to pose a problem and leave it at that, his detachment—these are all in harmony with the ideals of naturalism. He is not a Naturalist *pur sang*, however, and it is most interesting to note how he imposes on Naturalism his own personality, and yet how Naturalism crops up repeatedly and often spoils his stories, although it obviously helped him considerably to avoid the evils of sentimentality and cheap romanticism.

He touches whimsically on this when he describes to Souvorin the "romantic" atmosphere of Suomy:

> 'Nature and life here are built on a pattern which has become old-fashioned now, and is discarded by editors. Not to speak of nightingales, which sing day and night, the barking of dogs heard in the distance, old neglected orchards, sad and poetical manor houses, nailed up and deserted, where live the souls of beautiful women. . . . Everything I see and hear now seems to be long familiar to me from old stories and tales. . . . There is a novelty of another kind. . . . On the eve of Whitsuntide all the maniacs will spend the night on the island and fish all night: I too. They are superb types.'

And:

> 'A writer is a man bound, under contract, by the awareness of his duty and his conscience: taking the rope he must not say he can't pull: and whatever aversion he may feel he must overcome his fastidiousness, he must sully his imagination with the dirt of life.'

There, if one left out Chekov's optimism, his thirst to believe, his sense of what was decent in life, his pervasive kindliness, one might get the notion of another Maupassant. But though he admired these earlier writers as craftsmen, he had nothing in common with their pessimism. 'I wrote *Ivanov,*' he confessed, 'to summarise all that had been written about whining and gloomy people and to put an end to such writings.'

What distinguishes Naturalism from Chekovism is not matters of craft but matters of faith. Test this by characterisation. He goes half-way with the Naturalists, or to put it correctly the Naturalists go half-way with him—as with everybody else before and after him, there being not five-hundred ways of drawing a character, but only two or three, and Naturalism, or Realism, or Impressionism and so forth do no more than emphasise one of the two or three ways. For example, like the Naturalists, he is at pains to describe people by their outward appearance, but this is never done, except in his early or less satisfactory stories, for its own sake: which would be merely to give us a photograph of somebody who can be of no interest to us if we do not also know his inner nature. Take *Mire,* for instance—1888:

> 'The lieutenant sprang gaily out of his saddle, handed over his horse to a man who ran up, and stroking with his finger his delicate black moustache went in at the front door. On the top step of the old but light and softly car-

peted staircase he was met by a maidservant with a haughty, not very youthful face. . . . Exactly opposite the entrance, he saw sitting in a big, low chair, such as old men use, a woman in an expensive Chinese dressing-gown, with her head wrapped up, leaning back on a pillow. Nothing could be seen behind the woollen shawl in which she was muffled but a pale, long, pointed, somewhat aquiline nose, and one large dark eye. Her ample dressing-gown concealed her figure, but judging from her beautiful hand, from her voice, her nose and her eye, she might be twenty-six or twenty-eight.'

This is a photograph of any stranger in a photographer's show-case. It is not the real Chekov, and there is simply no point to it. Chekov did not work in this manner when at his best, and to return to our *Verotchka,* a year or two earlier, we see his more typical method there—still using externals, but with what different effect!

'When Ognev later on remembered her, he could not picture pretty Verotchka except in a full blouse which was crumpled in deep folds at the belt and yet did not touch her waist: without her hair done up high and a curl that had come loose from it on her forehead: without the knitted red shawl with ball fringe at the edge which hung disconsolately on Vera's shoulders in the evenings, like a flag on a windless day, and in the daytime lay about, crushed up, in the hall near the men's hats or on a box in the dining-room, where the old cat did not hesitate to sleep on it. This shawl and the folds of her blouse suggested a freedom of feeling and laziness, of good-nature and sitting at home. Perhaps because Vera attracted Ognev he saw in every frill and button something naïve, cosy, something nice and poetical, just what is lacking in cold, insincere women that have no instinct for beauty.'

There are two people's natures in that. This impressionistic method is his favourite one. So:

> 'Whenever I saw his neat spare figure, his high forehead and long mane of hair, when I listened to his speeches, *it always seemed to me* . . . etc. [*Excellent People.*]'

Or, wound into the narrative, speaking of a railway-manager:

> 'If you had asked him what his work was, he could look candidly and openly at you with his large bright eyes, through his gold pince-nez, and would answer in a soft velvety lisping baritone—"My work is literature." '

From *The Lady with the Dog,* the libertine's wife:

> 'She was a tall, erect woman with dark eyebrows, staid and dignified, and as she said of herself, intellectual. She read a great deal, used phonetic spelling, called her husband not Dmitri, but Dimitri, and he secretly considered her unintelligent, narrow, inelegant, was afraid of her, and did not like to be at home.'

Externals are, in truth, of slight interest to Chekov, though he does not fail to value them in their place. For the minor character of the husband in *The Lady with the Dog,* he uses them well:

> 'He bent his head at every step and seemed to be continually bowing. Most likely this was the husband whom at Yalta, in a rush of bitter feeling, she had called a flunkey. And there really was in his long figure, his side-whiskers, and the small bald patch on his head, something of the flunkey's obsequiousness: his smile was

> sugary, and in his buttonhole there was some badge of distinction like the number on a waiter.'

There, two natures, the libertine's who watches, and the husband who is described, emerge from this impression. The complete objectivity of Maupassant's description of *Boule de Suif* is rare in Chekov, and it is much more natural to him to say something like this:

> 'Her expression was still childish and her figure was soft and slim: and her developed girlish bosom healthy and beautiful, was suggestive of Spring, real Spring.'

An incident, a suggestive touch here and another little touch there, from the deeps of character—that is his method: and that these touches are carefully observed and selected one may easily see.

Now why do I say that what distinguishes this impressionistic, suggestive, penetrative method from the objective externalisations of the Naturalists is less a matter of craft than of faith? Because he believes, in spite of everything, in men; their characters are to him an inner battlefield; it is to that personal battle that he wishes to penetrate. This is not the method of Zola, who does not believe in man, or indeed free-will at all; who sees man less as a man than as an animal, subject to powerful, irresponsible forces; who loves to make his battlefields out of the movements of great masses of men (as in *Germinal*) and not out of the struggles in individual creatures. Zola, as has often been remarked, is not interested in individuals, whom he is content to describe by *signes particuliers,* the label of a trick of voice, or a habit of speech, or a perpetual way of being silent and disdainful, like Souvarine in *Germinal,* or a perpetual way of always shouting like La Brûlé: beasts with no more than the infinitesimal dis-

tinctive marks of beasts. To Chekov there is in every man, even if he be a fool or a scoundrel, a sacred mystery to be plumbed. His 'touches' are like the entries of a doctor's notebook, recording each nature in the light of an implicit norm of health and sanity and decency. The artistic, giddy wife of the honest doctor in *The Grasshopper*—a detail from life as Alexander Chekov tells us—will illustrate this. All Olga Ivanovna's friends and acquaintances are at her wedding:

> ' "Look at him; isn't it true that there is something in him?" she said to her friends with a nod towards her husband as though she wanted to explain why she was marrying a simple, very ordinary, and in no way remarkable man. . . . "Now his face is turned three-quarters towards us in a bad light, but when he turns around look at his forehead. Ryabovsky, what do you say to that forehead? Dymov," she called to her husband, "hold out your honest hand to Ryabovsky." '

That 'honest hand' touch hits off the factitious quality of her nature to perfection. Later when the foolish grasshopper has an affair with Ryabovsky, she feels that he has painted some good pictures only because, 'thanks to her influence he had greatly changed for the better.' There we realise her conceit: and when her husband continues, in his kind way, to be gentle with her, and she says to Ryabovsky, and to everybody else who is aware of what is going on, 'That man crushes me with his magnanimity.' We know that she is a vain fool. When her husband falls ill with diphtheria she turns chill with horror, but what she says is, 'Why it's dangerous!' and we realise her selfishness. Lastly when he is dying and she is filled with remorse, she only thinks:

> 'That silent, unrepining, uncomprehended creature, robbed by his mildness of all personality and will, weak

from excessive kindness, had been suffering in obscurity somewhere on a sofa and had not complained. And if he were to complain even in delirium, the doctors watching by his bedside would learn that diphtheria was not the only cause of his sufferings. They would ask . . . etc.'

It is a story whose touches give the typical Chekov, who is now the character he depicts, now the calm observer, now the doctor full of sympathy for his colleague whose life he has summed up in a few pages, but always the moral judge.

Of course he also relished odd detail for its own sake: that is the humorist in him. Such is the entry in his diary about the man who always spat at the University when he passed it, so that the cabby would pull up until he heard the spit go out behind them, and then—off again. Examples of these humorous details are the touch about the Lady with the Dog who 'was not sure whether her husband had a post in a Crown Department or under the Provincial Council—and was amused by her own ignorance.' Or when the Grasshopper's husband had to have his head shaved and she put a handkerchief around it and painted him as a Bedouin. Or the touch about the broken-down waiter in the fifth-class railway-bar who had once kept a buffet at a first-class station, and worn a dress suit and a gold chain: he now sells tea and vodka and sausages smelling of tar 'which he himself sarcastically said were only fit for the orchestra!' In the same story (*The Murder*), Matvey writes into every book he borrowed from other people, considering it an obligation of politeness to do so, such inscriptions as:

'I, Matvey Terehov, have read this book, and think it the very best of all the books I have read, for which I express my gratitude to the non-commissioned officer of

> the Police Department of Railways, Kuzma Nikolaev Zhukov, as the possessor of this priceless book.'

Or there is the queer character in *Rothschild's Fiddle* who keeps on thinking of his losses, due to the number of days on which he would not work, Sundays because it was a sin, Monday because it was unlucky, Saint's days, and so on.

> 'The thought of his losses haunted Yakov, especially at night: he laid his fiddle on the bed beside him and when all sorts of nonsensical ideas came into his head he touched a string. The fiddle gave out a sound in the darkness and he felt better.'

> He gets into such a melancholy condition after he has buried his 'old woman'—that too was a loss, for he himself made the coffin and would not be paid for it—that he imagines all the things he might have done, gone fishing and sold fish, played the fiddle from house to house, bred geese, 'Why the feathers alone would very likely mount up to ten roubles a year!', run boats—all losses, 'Ah, what losses, what losses!'

Yet, these too are touches that do not define but suggest, tease the heart and tickle the imagination until one becomes, in Chekov's hands, like Yakov's fiddle that gives out a sound in the darkness. One remembers them and one throbs again—the *Privy Councillor* who went to the country and said of everything, 'Come now, isn't that charming'; and he so upset everyone with ideas of his grandeur that the drivers took off their hats when they merely lifted down his trunks; and he was to have made the fortune of the little boy in the story, his nephew, and on the last day when he was actually bribed to go away he turned around and saw the child and cried out with a look

of the utmost astonishment (he had seen the boy a hundred times), 'What little boy is this?'

No photographs, no absolute externality as of the Naturalists, then, for Chekov, and I find it the most admirable thing in him. He did say that he wished only to depict what he saw—but all writers say that, and he saw far more than most. Perhaps it is that he saw in his characters moments as well as men. That was the poet in him. He constantly wrought his people into situations that would satisfy this side of him, situations that opened little windows into their souls where they saw and confessed the mystery of a wider orbit of life than they or we commonly see, let alone admit, as we go about our daily trivialities.

3

To pass from people, his method of describing things and places affirms this difference between him and the Naturalistic writers whom he took as models. Here, too, he never ignores the value of external detail. He never over-estimates it. He will not be content, in one story, to say that a man hung his hat on a nail. He says, he hung his hat 'on a huge, misshapen nail.' But we note that the furniture of that man's house—it is Father Yakov, the poor priest of *The Nightmare*—has been described with care just before, and that even this tiny detail of the nail is in some way proper to the character of the priest, and not there just for the sake of idle verisimilitude. We may note, too, that when he describes a snow-storm or a summer's day, it is fitted, by its tone-value or by its sub-audible comment on the action, into the story. Thus *The Murder* opens with a religious service at a wayside station; he tells us that

> 'all stood in silence, fascinated by the glare of the lights and the howling of the snow-storm which was aimlessly

disporting itself outside, regardless of the fact that it was the Eve of the Annunciation.'

We know that this is not simple picturesqueness; it impresses us with a sense of the mute suffering that holds these peasants in a kind of fatalistic effortlessness. The scene is part of them. The background of *Easter Eve* creates, similarly, a sense of awe suitable to this story of the dead canticle-writer, mingled with joy for the feast and the resignation that falls benignly on the narrator because of it. Note how un-photographic the description is, how near to poetry:

'The world was lighted by the stars, which were scattered thickly all over the sky. I don't ever remember seeing so many stars. Literally one could not have put a finger in between them. There were some as big as a goose's egg, others tiny as hempseed. . . . They had come out for the festival procession, every one of them, little and big, washed, renewed and joyful and every one of them was softly twinkling its beams. The sky was reflected in the water: the stars were bathing in its depths and trembling with the quivering eddies. The air was warm and still. Here and there, far away on the further bank in the impenetrable darkness, several bright red lights were gleaming . . .'

The same suggestibility that we see in his personal descriptions occurs over and over in these descriptions of nature.

'When the service was over and the people going home it was warm and sunny: the water gurgled in the gutters, and the unceasing trilling of the larks, tender, telling of peace, rose from the fields outside the town. The trees were already awakening and smiling a welcome, while,

above them, the infinite fathomless blue sky stretched into the distance, God knows whither.'

Or, again—entirely impressionistic:

'When the bishop got into his carriage to drive home, the gay melodious chime of the heavy, costly bells was filling the whole garden in the moonlight. The white walls, the white crosses on the tombs, the white birch-trees and black shadows, and the far away moon in the sky exactly over the convent, seemed now living their own life, apart and incomprehensible, yet very near to man.'

It is all fused moodily into the heart of the story, welding Chekov and the Bishop who drives, and us who read, into a oneness that lasts as long as our memory of the story.

All the usual superfluous descriptions of the Naturalists he avoids. When the priest dictates and the deacon writes the letter, in the story called *The Letter,* is there a word about sitting down, getting paper or ink, scratching pen, 'the hand moving across the page' and so forth and so on? There is only this:

'He made the deacon sit down to his table and began—"Write . . . Christ is risen . . ." (etc. to the end of the letter). When he had finished writing the deacon read it aloud, beamed all over and jumped up.'

Nor is there any of the Naturalist's brutality in Chekov —this again annotating what I have said about his nearness to poetry. A wealthy landowner is seen entering a poor church, which he is intended to hate and despise: and with all his natural tenderness and sympathy Chekov says only:

'The wooden church was old and grey. The columns of the porch had once been painted white, but the colour had now peeled off and they looked like two ungainly shafts. The ikon over the door looked like a dark, smudged blur. But its poverty touched and softened Kunin.'

How Chekov must have worked, and cut, and cut, to fashion everything, like that small bit, into the unity of his mood. Or is it that he was really, instinctively a poet and with a poet's intuition could not conceive of an idea except as a perfect unity in all its parts?

4

One cannot write of Chekov without at least making mention of his irony—mention being all that is possible with so subtle an element of his nature and his work. It enters into his work from the beginning, but it does not deepen into full strength for many years—it is one sign of his constant growth.

His life falls, as the lives of so many men seem to do, into three parts, of which the middle part lies roughly between 1888 and 1898, contains a greater proportion of first-class work and is marked by a firmly-controlled ironic humour. (It is, in passing, a great pity that we have no chronological edition of his work.)

After he had matriculated from the grammar-school at Taganrog in 1879 he had gone to Moscow where he lived with his people in such poverty that he wrote comic stories as much from necessity as desire. These were collected in *Stories of Melpomena* (1884) and *Motley Stories* (1885). He had regarded them 'lightly, carelessly, casually'—so he said—and could not remember a story that took longer than a day to write. (Later on he was to keep stories by him for more than a year.) This kind of thing he was still

writing in 1885 when he was a doctor, and a few lines of one will show the level of his work, and suggest, too, that Gorki is right in saying that a great deal of cruelty and disgust lie hidden behind the humorous words and phrases, observed and concealed. He calls this squib *Life Is Wonderful:*

> 'Life is quite an unpleasant business but it is not so very hard to make it wonderful. . . . When your matches suddenly go off in your pocket rejoice and offer thanks to heaven that your pocket is not a gunpowder magazine. When your relations come to pay you a visit during your holiday in the country, don't get pale but exclaim triumphantly, How very lucky it's not the police. . . . Rejoice that you are not a tram-horse, nor a Koch bacillus, nor a trichina, nor a pig, nor an ass, nor a bear led by a gypsy, nor a bug. . . . If you are flogged with a birch rod, kick your legs in rapture and exclaim, How very happy I am that I am not being flogged by nettles. If your wife has been unfaithful to you, rejoice that she has betrayed merely yourself and not your country.'

Indeed it is hardly humorous. It is the kind of bitter thing a thousand poor hacks turn out daily for our newspapers, except that they dare not go even so near the bone of satire. Yet he was sufficiently merry and content during those years and was too hard at work on his medical studies to have time to collect himself, to ponder quietly. Grigorovitch's letter of encouragement came after he had managed to get out of the funny papers into the *Petersburg Gazette* and, from that on, he worked for Souvorin and other reputable editors; the volume of 1887, *At Twilight,* marking his first output of serious work, and the tone of his letters from '86 onward marking a new note of self-confidence. He was by this date working as Medical Attendant at the Zemstvo Hospital of Zvenigorod, some fifty

miles from Moscow. But he had, already in 1884, seen in himself the first signs of consumption, and in April, 1886, had a second and more serious hæmorrhage. In *The Steppe,* to probe no deeper—it was the result of a journey in South Russia in 1887—we find a note of deeper irony and melancholy that, taken with, say, *The Nightmare* (1887), may be said to mark the end of his first period.

By 1890 the iron has entered his blood. In that year he makes his journey across Siberia to examine conditions in the convict settlement of Saghalien, and his letters, I have quoted a few lines of one, reveal how much he has begun to ponder on the harder and more cruel side of life in Russia. Plescheyev had about this time spoken of a 'tendency' in his work; at the end of '89 he already writes:

> 'You once told me that my stories lack the protesting element, that there are no sympathies and antipathies in them. But in this story (*A Tedious Story*) do I not from beginning to end protest against falsehood? Is not that a tendency? No? Well, then, I cannot bite, or I am a flea.'

He protests, 'comments' I would say, a good deal in this period, in *The Duel, The Grasshopper, The Wife, Neighbours,* and bitterly, I think over-naturalistically, in such stories as *The Chorus Girl,* all between 1891 and 1894. The peasant stories, such as *Murder* (1895) are a terrible comment on the Russia he was now seeing, while *The Black Monk* (1894) and *My Life* (1896) comment on the banality of the bourgeois life of the provinces. Meanwhile he is never free of illness and is being constantly ordered by the doctors to the Crimea or the South of France.

His letters of these years are often serious, 'protesting,' analysing, troubled, concerned with current ideas, and must be taken with his medical and humanitarian work from 1892 on when he buys a farm at Melikhovo some seventy-five miles south of Moscow, fights cholera, or

builds schools, mostly out of his own pocket. Thought and work are here of a piece, as when (1889) he curses the French and lashes the Russian intelligentsia and praises the Germans—our 'drowsy, apathetic, lazily philosophising, cold intelligentsia'; 'Germany knows nothing of authors like Bourget and Tolstoy and in that she is lucky: in Germany there is science, love of country, diplomatists . . .'; 'She will beat France, and her allies will be French authors.' This interest in ideas, this sturdy attitude to live in his private work, active and even hopeful, mingled with frequent depressions; 'We writers have neither immediate nor remote aims, and in our souls a great emptiness' (1892); or sudden enthusiasms, as for Zola in the Dreyfus affair, are reflected in his stories, which like *A Man in a Case, Ionitch,* or *The Lady with the Dog* are now never free of an ironic mood. An instinctive artist, he did in this period from, say, 1888 to 1898, both his best work and his worst. Wherever pity fails and cruelty enters, an alien quality in him, one may guess at a low period of health and spirits. He was so much a man who wrote out of his whole self that there is nothing in him of the evenness of the pure 'artist' like Flaubert or Turgenev. Irony was his one defence against despair. Without it he tended to write out of an abstract disgust. With it he could retain pity and love. A born humorist, too, he always had to laugh at something—smile wanly might be a better word —even if only at himself.

He emigrated to Yalta, his 'warm Siberia,' in 1899, and was married in 1901. Of this third period it is not in his stories but in the calm gentle tenderness of *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* that we find the true expression of the man; and if one does not see in these plays a constant smile of, now, most gentle irony one will see nothing but atmosphere. He wrote *The Cherry Orchard* in 1903, planned it in January, began it about July,

and had it finished by September. He died in Badenweiler on July 2nd, 1904.

He had lived a comparatively lonely and private life, and even after his marriage he lived alone, his wife more often living in Moscow than with him. 'It is so dull here,' he said to Bunin, in Yalta. 'The only excitement is when the telephone rings and Sophie Pavlovna asks what I am doing and I answer "I am catching mice." ' (Which, by the way, when he had caught he would take to the end of the garden and release again.) He wrote, 'As I shall lie alone in the grave so, indeed, do I live alone.' A thoughtful, kindly, merry-hearted, sensitive man, always brooding, always smiling ironically over the result of his thoughts.

5

There is one thing about him that will specially interest Irish writers. He was Russian in his work, but he was never regionalist in his thought. You may find in his work traces of his life in Taganrog, in Melikhovo, in Saghalien, in the Ukraine—a writer does not invent life!—but the things that were the foundation of his attitude to life, his gospel of normality, was wide as the world: he never concerned himself as an artist with such things as Slavophilism, or with any other kind of 'movement.' He detested movements. 'Labels' or 'prejudices' were his words for any kind of 'warfare' in literature. He concerned himself only with decency, lies, the frustration of the individual soul, personal freedom, sham, cant, human folly and human virtue in all its oldest forms: he believed in Christianity, much as Balzac did, and made it the framework of his personal idea of what life should be like, though he had no definite creed and did not believe in personal immortality. He had only one conscious aim, to depict life faithfully so as to show how it departed from *the norm*.

As to what the norm was, it was certainly not any specifically Russian idea of normality. 'I do not know, and you do not know,' he said, 'what the norm is.' 'We all know what a decent act is but what honour is we do not know. I shall keep to the framework nearest my heart, which has already been tried by men stronger and wiser than I. The framework is the absolute freedom of man, freedom from violence, from prejudices, ignorance, the devil, one's passions, etc.' The result was that his stories are valid wherever they are read. They have none of the merely peculiar or picturesque interest of the regionalist writer whose characters live as he himself lives by a local norm. Their validity is not abstract or doctrinal, such as is asked for by social and religious regionalists. Chekov was a man who was content to know little, in an abstract way, about life and its meaning. He was content to put down what he saw, truthfully, kindly and without rancour, as an honourable and decent-minded man-of-the-world—a Russian man-of-the-world, no doubt, steeped in Orthodoxy—and let his readers draw from his work what conclusions they could or would, each according to his power and deserts. As such he wrote the universe into Russia.

The source of Chekov's attraction is not hard to see. It is his personal quality of mind—his sanity in the face of a chaos of moral and social values no less perplexing then than now. He had the personal integrity and wit to see that the French writers of the 1830's onward, and their Russian offshoots like Lermontov and Tyutchev, were fine craftsmen but had no adequate 'gospel of normality.' He rejected them because he was integrated as they never were. He broke down in his work the wall that they erected between art and life, and if he did not as Balzac said of his own work, 'make Society wear upon its brow the reasons of its being' he did demand from life in Russia what Balzac, also, called 'an inward meaning.' His work

was, in its effect, a constructive criticism of life. The foundations of that criticism, its standards of reference, were with him, as with Balzac, Christian foundations. It is true that neither of them, as far as one can see, gave to a supernatural Christianity their utter and absolute belief: but they did believe in the Christian 'system' and gave it their loyalty with heart and admiration, and based on it all they had to say or think about human behaviour. It is this thirst for normality that, to my mind, gives his firmness to Chekov. He never forces it. It need hardly be said that he never preaches. At most one is aware of his ironically critical eye. But the implications are always there —even in so apparently slight and gossamer a tale as *Verotchka*. It means that his stories are always vertebrate.

6

For the purposes of this book one other question poses itself. Was Chekov fundamentally a romantic or a realist? A reader who may think of his tales and plays in such terms as charming, evocative, atmospheric, poetic, even picturesque, may also easily find himself thinking of them as romantic. And yet, if Chekov is a moral writer, as I think he insistently is in the sense that Balzac was a moral writer, how can one use such an adjective about the one without using it about the other? And nobody would wish to call Balzac a romantic except as a challenge to finer definitions as Faguet does when he calls Zola 'a debauched romantic.'

Both Balzac and Chekov are realists in the sense that for both there is an established norm of decent human nature and behaviour, a standard and a touchstone, solid, permanent and widely accepted, their common earth on which their characters stand or fall, and which is their notion of reality. They are gregarious men, men in society, men with social consciences and an historical sense and

such men need permanent references and checks. The romantic not only does not need these controls but dislikes them because they tie him down, compel him to make comparisons and come to conclusions when he would prefer to let his subject expand and vanish as rhetoric or gesture, exhaust itself orgiastically or evaporate into mood or poetic feeling, as so often happens, and so delightfully, with Daudet.

This sense of space is denied to the realist; its delights and freedoms and illusions are not for him; he finds his recompense in Time, in the past, present and future, in that shadow which guarantees to everybody with a historical sense the pleasure and pain of memory, intense interest in the present, some hope and frequent despairs for the future. This time-sense gives to the realist sorrows and visions so intensely felt that your extremist in realism —among whom we must count Maupassant—will easily become a misanthrope or a madman. For Time cheats. It takes away more than it gives. A too-great awareness of it always induces unhappiness, and the happiest people are those with no sense at all of time. This is why realists are always more likely to be gloomy than cheerful, and why romantics are not so much gloomy as melancholy—for the autumn, before a dying fire, at twilight, thinking of love elsewhere, or of an imaginary better life elsewhere. 'Fade far away, dissolve and quite forget': the romantic Keats. 'How beautiful life will be in three or four hundred years': the realist Chekov.[1] It is this realist hope, or sense, of development, sense of history, of change, of man in action which demands of the realist an objectivity which is of secondary interest to the romantic. To-day when we are

[1] My idea that the romantic has no time-sense might seem to be contradicted by his notorious love of the past. But it is a dream-past, never an historical past. Compare, for example, the Pre-Raphaelites' idealisation of the Middle Ages with an historian's picture.

all, to some degree or other, realists, we find critics unconsciously proving the truth of this by their way of picking out from the romantics, like Tennyson, the more objective runs, and so praising them for being such good romantic poets on the head of far from characteristically romantic achievements. I must add that I am here consciously avoiding the same pitfall. I am suggesting no *critical* comparisons between realist and romantic. They are merely different temperaments, attitudes, needs, gifts and names. Indeed the whole burthen of these first two essays on Daudet and Chekov is that the first unwisely forced his temperament out of its mould, borrowed attitudes, imagined needs he did not have, and that Chekov wisely kept to his gamut. Chekov did not write novels, and when he wrote plays he invented a special technique for his special temperament. All one can say is that he was, as a writer, evidently much more intelligent than Daudet.

It is evident, equally, that he was a realist of his own special sort and not of anybody else's sort. He held on to poetry, to mood, to poetic feeling. He found an original way of doing this and at the same time of being true to common life. There are no characters in Chekov whom Flaubert might not have written about; no situations that are abnormal; there is no psychology which the average man in the street could not recognise. Indeed what puzzles most ordinary readers coming on him for the first time is not that his subjects and people are unusual but that they are, apparently, banal. 'They just wander around the stage talking!' Conversely what sometimes deludes the sophisticated is the poetry in which he seems to drown this banality, so that they see the beautiful mists and fail to see behind these mists the hard, mocking mind of the doctor, the moralist and the judge. Both simple and sophisticated thus lose contact with the author's personality. It is not that he is over-subtle. It is, simply, that he is a doctor who

writes his diagnoses as poetry, so that he sometimes reminds me of Italian primitives at whose work one looks in such delight that not for a long time does one perceive that it is as lifelike as it is lovely. This balance is, to me, what he meant by saying that a writer needs maturity and a sense of personal freedom: it is his way of saying, I suggest, that a writer must be a civilised man. As for what he meant by that—it is his own nature projected in his stories.

4

Guy de Maupassant

or *The Relentless Realist*

ANY young man who may think that the best short-stories are written by the best technicians would do well to get hold of Emile Faguet's *Propos Littéraires* and read the essay, in the third volume, on Maupassant.

To Faguet, in this essay, Maupassant was simply a man who took the banana of life and ate it. 'His mind was a sort of mechanical cutter' (what printers and tailors would, I suppose, call a guillotine—when they do not, in Dublin at any rate, call it a *gullotin*) 'which he levelled consistently on the confused flux and flow of things.' His mind, that is, chopped off such bits of reality as had a certain unity or central point capable of being worked up into a story or a novel. He had no theories, no doctrines, no technical method such as Zola had, for example. He was the least *livresque* of writers. All his friends agree on this. At a dinner-table he would enjoy talking about the water-cure but hate talking about octavos. He almost disliked books. He never even tried to observe life. That is, he was not a deliberate and scientific observer. 'He knew that if you accost reality you cannot help deforming it by the very impact of your ambush.' Meaning that we can provoke life into making the sort of answers that we would like it to make, much as we can do with a man by putting him through a third-degree. Life, in short, fell into Maupassant's mould and came out as stories. That is all there was to it, concludes M. Faguet, smiling blandly.

'And so, his books, without telling us anything about his life, follow the course of his life. He is a Norman: ergo, stories about Normans—Norman peasants, Norman squireens, Norman fishermen, Norman publicans. He was twenty in 1870: ergo, stories about the war in Normandy, and always in so far as he actually saw it himself, with the middle-classes terrified and the peasants playing possum cunningly and craftily, and here and there in some passionate soul a sudden outburst of accumulated hate or of anger too long restrained. He next becomes a Parisian and mingles with the literary and journalistic world: the result, *Bel-Ami*. He is employed for some time in the Ministry—*L'Héritage*. He goes hiking in the mountains—*Mont Oriol*. In Italy—*Les Sœurs Rondoli*. Towards the end of his all too-short life he enters the worldly world, and then we get artists and *femmes du monde—Fort Comme la Mort, Notre Cœur*. He penetrates the demi-monde—*Yvette*.'

I have a profound respect for the critical faculties of Emile Faguet but this does not impress me. (Which does not mean that it ought not to impress the young man I have imagined: no young man has the right to be unimpressed by his elders.) We others do no more than say, 'And so Daudet went hiking in the hills and out came *Mont-Oriol,* and Maupassant went hiking in the hills and out came *Tartarin de Tarascon*.' For all that, what Faguet has done is only to overstate a sound point. It is true that Maupassant's realism is so real that we might well think we find in his books neither a man, nor a style, nor an author—only people and things. Nothing has flawed that translucent mirror in which we see those things. The mirror does not exist. Maupassant does not exist. It is a most forcible way of saying that his realism is the peak of its kind.

It is also nonsense. No writer can put down just what he

sees if to say so carries the implication that he has chosen not to see other things. As we shall notice later what Maupassant leaves out is as much as what Maupassant puts in. Not that this affects his merits since it is equally true of every writer in the world, barring only the three or four giants who must not be introduced into any form of literary criticism since they are above and beyond it; which means that he is, therefore, at least as inclusive as any other writer, and that the only opinion we are entitled to utter on this count is that he is not among those very few whom we call the Great; and that we might know without having to think about it. Likewise it does not matter to his merits if we conclude, therefore, that he does undoubtedly select what he chooses to see. But it does obviously, and literally, mean that he has, contrary to M. Faguet's opinion, a *manière de voir.*

What has led Faguet to adopt so extreme an attitude is three-fold. (1) He is what he himself calls a Pantagruelist, that is, a man who takes things as they are and does not keep on hoping they will presently become something else; a man who so loves life that he does not need to hope for a better; a man who has therefore a consistent *mépris des fortuits,* who never takes a ticket in the Lottery; and who, as for religion, will at most, if hard-driven, raise his eyes to the majestic consolation of another life better even than this excellent one. (2) This leads him, in this essay at any rate, dangerously near to what I call the Divine Plumber theory of literature, which is first cousin to the God's-in-His-Heaven theory, and the All-for-the-best-in-the-best-possible world theory. In this theory the gods attend to every writer's spiritual fountain—supply the pipes, the source, the jet, the necessary compression, and even the sun to sparkle on the spray, and if a gold-fish gets stuck in the pipes . . . why, the gods will attend to him too. In other words, a writer is just a fellow who

writes. (3) Lastly, what has drawn Faguet into this extreme position is that he not only agrees with all Maupassant's judgments but cannot see how Maupassant could possibly have formed any other judgment, since to do so would be to disagree with M. Faguet. For this is what he, too, would have judged, would have selected, would have *seen*, i.e. decided to see, if he had been a writer.

> 'Without thinking of it he has, in the process (of painting the middle order of human nature), drawn up certain statistics. They are pretty well exact. The number of egoists, passionate men, imbeciles and misfits that he has indicated seems just about right. . . . The middle order of human beings really are more or less like that: very few real sinners, a great many weak souls, an infinite number of egoists, that is Maupassant's world, and it agrees roughly with my own estimate. The impartial tranquillity of his observation has produced results which are not far from absolute exactitude.'

Put any normal man (i.e. a Maupassant or a Faguet) on this job and this is what he must chop out of the 'confused flux and flow' of things. In other words, Maupassant is the perfect Pantagruelist. Should all literature, then, and all life, be tested by Maupassant's 'statistics'? One turns the pages hastily to see what M. Faguet thinks about, say, Eugénie de Guérin or Barbey d'Aurevilly. The reading is pleasant, because he is so kind and sympathetic—as pleasant as his own essay 'Sur le Mensonge.' As one would expect of so civilised a man he approves of lies to pretty ladies, to the sick, and in poetry, which is to make the circuit of realism, back to Maupassant, the man who never told a lie, who never flattered, whose incorruptible, unassuageable, unalterable low opinion of mankind is what the happy Stoic naturally loves to hear and to believe since it absolves him from the least urge towards

hope. Not that Faguet is a pessimist but that he knows that only optimists are sad men—for them it will always be jam to-morrow.

At this point the young man who wants to learn about 'technique' will be completely at his ease. He will observe that there is a point of view in the writer, and a point of view in the critic, and a point of view in the critic's critic, and he must presume that a point of view is expected of him, too, towards all three, and towards everything else as well. He will be at his ease because it is precisely this which puts every writer at his ease, liberating him from all compulsions by inviting him to surrender to himself. For the theory of the impersonal writer, he will begin to perceive, is an illusion, and no story-writer so fully betrays himself (i.e. surrenders to himself), in practice, as the man who cultivates complete impersonality. It is no trouble to any critic to write an essay on the personal views of Flaubert; the sangfroid of Stendhal does not conceal the man; the silences (i.e. the omissions) of Maupassant are eloquent of his personal views of life.

2

Here our young man meets the inevitable two schools of thought. They are, in this case, the romantic and the realists; for whether Maupassant is or is not a realist in any historical meaning of the word, he is definitely an anti-romantic; and so is Faguet. Our young man cannot avoid partiality; the question poses itself inexorably. If he loves Daudet's stories, if he loves Chekov beyond all other writers of the *nouvelle,* he must do so either because he thinks of Daudet and Chekov as romantics or because he thinks of them as realists. If he likes or if he detests Zola it must be for the same reason that induced him to like or detest Chekov. At an earlier period there was a sort of split-alternative—one could say that Balzac

or Flaubert were half-romantic, or that Stendhal was half-realist. By Maupassant's day it is a case of 'Under which flag?'

The question is not simple. As an approach to the 'realism' of Maupassant it is informative to reassess the 'realism' of Zola. Zola imposed himself on the world as a realist; he is, like Daudet in his novels, bubbled with romanticism. All his contemporaries suspected this; every critic has since accepted it that Romance was his father and his mother and his *bête-noire;* he feared it himself and was sensitive to any criticism that suggested it. The result was that those who wished to praise his temperament and his work without adverting to the overblown character of both said that he wrote epics; those who wished to advert to his romantic quality and yet to flatter him said that he was a poet; those who wished, gently, to define his temperament and his work proposed to him that he had a lyrical nature which tended a little (?) to exaggerate the truth. Confident that he was relying on documents and facts, and on his reason rather than his imagination, Zola felt that he was unassailably a realist and did not therefore mind being called a poet. (Who would?) He had his own formula to defend his exaggerations.

> 'I exaggerate. That is quite true. But I do not exaggerate as did Balzac, just as Balzac did not exaggerate as did Victor Hugo. The whole point is there: the work proceeds from the conditions of the operation. We all of us tell some lies, but the question is what is the mechanism and what is the quality of the lie? Now I believe that I lie in the direction of truth. I am afflicted with a hypertrophia of whatever is true in point of detail, rising starwards from the spring-board of observation. For reality soars upward with a stroke of the wing towards the symbol . . .'

He could say this without realising that it is a form of definition of the romantic flight.

We may leave it to Faguet to list the marks of the 'romantic' in the 'realist.' He saw big, a sort of mirage between him and fact that so swelled it that every hillock became a mountain. Things with him were more alive than men. This delicate and brooding sense of the mysterious life of the inanimate universe had been one of the greatest inventions of the original romantic spirit. With him what happens? Shops, mines, locomotives are living villains and heroes in his tales. With him, as with all romantics, descriptions spill over—become ponds, lakes, very oceans of picture-making. In him the romantic melancholy had its apogee. He says he uses his reason, but what depth or edge has this reason of his? He loathes finesse; wit is beneath him; an agile thought, a penetrating observation, an epigram are, to a prodigious degree, beyond his ken. He alleged that he used *only* his reason; in fact he swam in his imagination like a fish; for he did not really like truth-to-life at all, being in that like all romantics who feel that it limits them, represses their flights, chokes their eloquence. And all this goes side by side with the most painstaking documentation, creeps into its interstices, crumbles it, and topples it, so that while the details, as he calls them, are almost all concrete and correct (he made slips of fact here and there, but that is no matter) the characters are never concrete human beings; they are abstractions recognisable and distinguishable only by his awful trick of giving to each a single posture, even no more than a *tic* (a device which Daudet also practised in his novels), but never those nuances, complexities or contradictions which an elementary psychology discovers in all men. Zola had another formula for this technique of 'the abstraction of the personage'

as he called it. Defending its use in *Germinal* against Henri Céard, he said:

> 'My novel is a great fresco in which each major character had to be foreshortened, and minor characters sketched by a line. But each has his own proper movement, as for instance Etienne, whose mind fills gradually with Socialist ideas. I do not therefore understand your regret that I did not create individuals instead of limiting myself to a picture of the crowd. My subject was the action and reaction of crowd and individual. How could I then have produced this effect if I did not, as you allege, create individuals?'

Patently the man does not know what an individual person is: how could he, inside the deterministic philosophy which was the basis of his literary creed?

What he is, cries Faguet, is a debauched romantic. He is what romanticism becomes in the hands of any uncultivated man who is ignorant of the classics and of foreign literature, its picturesque quality debased into blaring colour and loud noise, so that, as painters say, it makes things scream instead of making them sing; its wealth of feeling and its variety of sensations reduced to the poverty-stricken and brutal simplicity of a formula in which man is less than a brute; its despairing sorrow coarsened into a general hatred of society, and indeed human nature; all being exactly what the equally uncultivated reader entirely approves because it drags him along, forcibly, without effort on his part, by its vehemence, exaggeration and continual hyperbole. Tchaikowsky's D flat and the bawling of the last Act in *La Bohème*.[1]

[1] As everybody knows, Zola was never approved by the élite of French criticism—e.g. Brunetière, Lemaître or Anatole France. The French Academy rejected his application thirty-seven times. The judg-

To turn from this *poète barbare* to Maupassant might not at first glance seem to be to turn to a very resounding contrast on any count, especially if our first impression of Maupassant should be gathered from that type of anthology with which British and American publishers have tended to exploit his popular reputation for salacity. But if he be read in French and in bulk, the two first requisites for the full appreciation of his genius; and if, further, his achievement be related to the conventions of French life and literature, his distinct position will gradually assert itself. His realism is cleansed of all romantic impurities.

He is the most uncompromising of all the French realists: he presents, that is to say, the more bitter element in French literature and French character with a devastatingly quiet assumption that no other way of regarding life is possible. He does not preach or moralise, or praise, or condemn: he simply presents. His main quality is persuasiveness combined with chilliness. He is so cold that even if we feel that he is being hateful we cannot be angry; we can only laugh uncomfortably without even the comfort of feeling that he responds with a smile, since, if that stolid Norman face ever does smile, it is with the famous *sourire caché* of his great teacher Flaubert. Compared to his immobile features the 'Mona Lisa' grins from ear to ear. Nor has this misanthropic sang-froid any

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ment of Anatole France was savage: 'His work is bad. He is one of those unfortunates of whom one may say that it would have been better had he never been born. I do not, to be sure, deny him his detestable glory. No man ever so clearly disowned, as far as that is concerned, all humanity's ideals.' Faguet does not deny him qualities, such as his marvellous power in painting crowds, some splendid openings and moving climaxes. 'Un poète barbare, un Hugo vulgaire et brut, mais puissant, un démiurge gauche, mais robuste . . . une sorte de démon étrange qui tenait le milieu entre Promethée et Caliban.' This does not mean that Anatole France could not admire Zola as a man; e.g. in the Dreyfus Affair.

of the modern American's swagger of toughness. Somebody has called him a *Huron de génie*. Our American friends, familiar with the wooden Indian figures outside their old tobacco-shops, will appreciate the image. In any case the toughness of American toughs is only skin-deep. It is a purely physical brutality. They are never half so brutal about the sentiments as they are about the senses, whereas he is ruthless straight through to the heart. Their toughness is never the result of an opinion about life; it is partly a reflection of the surface of their own lives, partly a technique of dealing with life, never an opinion about it—they burk at drawing the logical conclusion of their own behaviour; whereas the brutality of the French is a judgment, all inclusive. The readiest illustration of this is to compare the sentimental treatment of woman in American fiction with the equality of the sexes as demonstrated in Maupassant's impartially low opinion of both. It is touching that the American realists should show themselves chivalrous romantics immediately a little powdered snout appears among the gorilla backs and the hairy chests, but it is not logical and it makes one very suspicious of the totality of their work.

With this coolness goes something in Maupassant which readers of English literature take some time to appreciate, for it is more in accord with the French way of looking at things than our way. He has made upon French readers the impression of being, in every sense of the word, one of their most healthy writers. Zola may have been partly responsible for his contemporary reputation in this regard, for he first described to the public Maupassant's vigorous way of life—his love of physical exercise, of the open-air, his high spirits, his fondness for boating and hunting. A French Hemingway?

'We all,' says Lemaître, 'began talking about his *santé;* in fact it became his mark in popular opinion and nobody

was more often proclaimed sound and sane than this young man who was to die unsound and insane.'

In any case something of the young 'Huron' emerges from his books themselves: his evident sympathy for strong masculine peasant types, such as old Hautot in that excellent story *Hautot père et fils;* the satisfaction with which he describes physical sounds, colours, smells—*Une Idylle, Les Sœurs Rondoli;* the sense of oneness between man and nature, especially in regard to the passions; see those strangely affecting passages of natural description which lighten the savagery of *L'Héritage;* add the fact that he skipped the reflective side of man, as Henry James has pointed out, or at any rate reflection as addressed to anything higher than the gratification of an instinct, and that, even so, he addresses himself to the most elementary instincts—for instance, Norman avarice, as in *Le Diable;* and that his line was as hard and clear as a diamond on glass; add that in all he did one feels his own enormous pride and self-assurance. All this builds up a general impression of clean, muscular force. Beside him Flaubert smells of the study; and there is a mustiness as of accumulated note-books about Zola; both seem (as indeed they are) paunchy and preserved. As for any suggestion that this writer was a subjective, or introspective or dreamy romantic soul—what mainly emerges is what Henry James called 'the hardness of form, the hardness of nature.'

Add, next, his rude, even crude, health in the moral sense; that which so pleased the Pantagruelist in Faguet; which made Lemaître distinguish between sensuality, which he recognises in Maupassant as a form of faun-like ignorance of good and evil, and obscenity, or *grivoiserie,* which is, of its offensive nature, in Europe, a Christian characteristic—that is, it offends and implies offence, and so is at least a back-handed acknowledgment of what it

offends. Of this leering obscenity we find no trace in Maupassant. This quality Henry James also recognised while insisting that the innocence of the faun involves much savagery and more ignorance. (These are not his words but they are his meaning.) Arthur Symons went so far as to find him a writer in whom we always find a moral idea, though not necessarily the moral idea we might approve, contrasting him with Kipling, in whom he can find no moral idea. Wrong, crass, savage, simpliste in his view of life, absurd, mad with arrogance—we may feel him one or all of these things, but we cannot feel that he is evil or touched by evil since this is a term that simply does not enter into his vocabulary. On the contrary, in this man's writings, whose life was certainly far from chaste and pure, we feel the sheerness and coldness of early morning light—of March, or perhaps November—for one cannot suggest that there is anything in him even so near the sunny season as to be autumnal or of the spring. There are no suggestive half-lights in Maupassant. We see the prostitute, the beastly peasant, the timid bourgeois, the civil servant—his favourite subjects—in an unpitying light that exposes their wrinkled faces, their painted gums, their frayed cuffs, their shifty eyes, their hearts that have dried like peas. There is in his tales nothing of the diaphanous prurience of de Kock, the wet lips of Zola, the sense of sin that is all over Mauriac. Indeed there is in much of Maupassant the healthy disgust and contempt of what somebody has called a Pagan puritan.

But in many other ways he is the most ascetic of writers —no prolonged descriptions, no indulgence in 'atmosphere,' no elaborate psychology, the simplest of subjects, the most unexceptional characters, a classical discipline of the imagination that not so much prunes as excludes all irrelevancies, and rigidly subordinates everything to the indicated aim, as complete an effacement of self as

seems possible this side of a *procès-verbal,* and a style as laconic as a judgment from the bench. He touched the uttermost boundaries of classical realism. Anybody who persisted beyond him could only do what Zola did, round the world and find himself back in the romantic morass.

3

How much does one pay for this? For in literature one always pays. A writer chooses his gamut and, having chosen, cannot go outside it, as Daudet proved to his cost. Let us take three examples of Maupassant's work to observe his gain and loss. I choose, first, a story in which we can the more easily, though for that reason somewhat unfairly, observe the loss.

Une Soirée is a story in which a cavalry-sergeant, suddenly hard-up, decides to visit, after many years, a married sister living in a country town in Brittany. Now this is one of the oldest romantic subjects in the history of the short-story. Twenty Years After is as appealing a theme as Snow at Christmas or The Return of the Prodigal. *Une Soirée,* however, illustrates Maupassant's way of treating all romantic situations in a realistic way. To start, the sergeant's motive is such as a gentler writer like Chekov (*a*) would never have considered sufficient and (*b*) would never have revealed bluntly at the beginning.

> 'It was not that he loved Mme. Padoie, who was a little pious creature much given to moralising and always in a state of nerves; he needed money, badly, and he had just remembered that of all his relatives the Padoies were the only ones he had never touched.'

There is the clean hard line without an iota of indulgence. And if one should say, 'But surely Sergeant Varajou must have felt some little sentimental feeling?' one

will merely run full tilt against Maupassant's uncompromising 'morality,' and his habit of deliberately choosing extrovert characters whose nature does not contain any such nuances. If the romantic or the humanist further insists that even the simplest natures possess these nuances—and if Chekov is one's love one will call him to bear witness to this—Maupassant will seem to look at us with his heavy-lidded eyes and give an all but imperceptible shrug. That may be our view of life: it is not his.

'So, Varajou, alighting from the train, drives to his brother-in-law's house.' No waste of words there. Old Padoie is in his office; he looks up and says, 'Wait.' Not a very romantic re-union. Varajou looks at him, as he waits, and says to himself, 'What a moron!' Straight and plain. Can we say, too straight and plain? But:—

> 'This man was one of those brawling noisy fellows for whom life has no pleasures more refined than the pub and the prostitute. Beyond those two poles of existence he understood nothing. A boaster and a blatherer, full of contempt for everybody, he despised the entire universe from the pinnacles of his ignorance. Once he had said, "Good Lord, what fun I'm having!" he had climbed the highest peak of admiration of which he was physically capable.'

He meets his sister. At once she tells him the fine things she's heard about his goings on, and that is that. He goes off with a flea in his ear, to wander around the utterly dull and sleepy town, groaning, 'Lord, this is going to be a trial,' and returns for supper in the damp dining-room 'with the paper peeling near the wainscot.' When he foresees an evening alone with his sour-spirited sister, for the husband has to go out to M. the Minister—the Padoies are recognised as most respectable and religious folk and move in the highest 'society' of Vannes—he makes

some excuse to escape for the night, seeks out the biggest café, and sits to his coffee and brandy. The dull plonk of billiard-balls is the only sound in the café, except when five or six clients come in to chat, in low voices, elbows on tabletops. The sergeant has another bottle of brandy. Soon he wants to sing, to shout, to beat-up somebody. He begins to laugh. He decides to have a girl.

'"Hey! Boy!"

'"Yessir."

'"Listen lad, where does a fellow have a bit of fun here?"

'The man looked at him stupidly.

'"I dunno, sir. Here I suppose?"

'"Here! What do *you* call having a bit-of-fun, in God's name?"

'"I dunno, sir. Good beer? Good wine? Eh?"

'"You go to hell, you bastard! What do you do for women?"

'"Oh? Women?"

'"Yes! Women!"

'The waiter leaned closer, and whispered.

'"Is it . . . Are you asking me . . . Do you mean the brothel?"

'"What else? Yes!"

'"Second on the left, first on the right, number fifteen."

'"That's more like it, laddie! For you."

'"Thank *you*, sir."'

He goes out, gets the wrong house, finds himself with three or four dressed-up women in a room, starts some horse-play, demands drink, sees his brother-in-law come in, cheers like a zany—So the old boy has some blood in him!—sees another old chap come in—It is M. the Minister!—cheers louder. General horror and confusion with the ladies in flight and the brother-in-law hammering him and screaming, 'Canaille! Canaille! Canaille!'

Before considering what price has been paid for the effect obtained consider the effect that has been obtained. One puts it down, not quite persuaded, yet quite amused. Afterwards it comes back to one more effectively, and it sticks in the memory like the taste of a sour sloe. It is raillery rather than humour. There is nothing objectionable about it. It is the fun of horse-play, of high spirits, and recalls those practical jokes that he loved to play on his friends. It is a caricature, a silhouette, a red-nosed mask. It has the merits of a caricature's spareness and speed—there is the laugh and you can laugh if you want to. Above all it makes no pretensions—the premises were stated at the beginning, and we must have known that from those three simple or extrovert creatures no profound message would emerge.

None-the-less the reflective, the cultivated, and the sensitive reader will answer Maupassant's shrug with another shrug, meaning,

> 'I laugh, but so what? You have jeered away the life of a little town. After all, mon vieux, other writers have been amused at small-town life. Daudet; Mrs. Gaskell; Mark Twain; Gogol; René Behaine; Chekov. They make us laugh without truculence, and even evoke an aftersigh of sympathy. Is there nothing at all to Madame Padoie and old Padoie but piety and stupidity and meanness? Have you not got your laugh a little too easily? Have you not, to use a vulgarism which is hardly likely to offend you, been more than a little bitchy?'

What, again, could we fairly imagine Maupassant replying to that? He might easily be truculently contemptuous:

> 'There are men like Varajou, brutes, bullies, call them extroverts if you want to be very refined, just as there are

> mean peasants and cowardly shopkeepers. You want me to keep a ledger of their bits and scraps of goodness, do you? You want me to say that they have their nice points, do you? Well, I suppose Varajou may have thrown a scrap to a dog, or given a whore an extra franc now and again. The hell with him and his scraps and francs, and with British hypocrisy—always wanting to soften things down. "We don't much care to discuss such people, Monsieur Maupassant." I stand on the side of decency and straightforwardness. I like to see things as they generally are; you like to blink your eyes and be sentimental.'

We may, for ourselves, make another observation, which applies to a great many of Maupassant's stories. It is that there are twenty ways of being realistic. When we say that he might have done this or that, are we saying what we would prefer or what would be better? Take *Boule de Suif,* that peak of Maupassant realism: the little whore who gave herself to the Prussian officer at the border in order to win his permission for the passage of the rest of her fellow-travellers. There is one element here which Maupassant has not mentioned, and which Mauriac, for example, would have had to mention. Mauriac would have remembered the rosary-beads and the pious pictures jumbled in prostitutes' purses with hard-earned fifty-franc notes and contraceptives. He would have felt compelled at least to mention the matter of mortal sin. But if he were to say that this element *ought* to be introduced his reasons would not be literary reasons, and many criticisms of Maupassant's work are, likewise, not so much literary criticisms as expressions of social or moral viewpoint, or, perhaps, of mere personal taste.

If, then, I say that *Une Soirée* is a thin story I must mean only that its effect is slight; or that the characters are thin, or that their affairs seem of little consequence

to us, or that their misadventure is not very credible, though not impossible, or that it all adds up to a sufficiently amusing but trivial total. Chekov also wrote tales like this, 'funny stories,' and they have been reprinted in his collected works. One would not say they were typical of his work.

Let us now take a middle-weight Maupassant story, that is to say one of his really good and more typical stories, though not of the first dozen: *Le Diable*. This is a story of Norman peasant life. (And it is possibly true, as has often been said, that it is in his stories of Norman peasants that Maupassant did his most solid work.) An old peasant-woman is dying. Her son wants to sow the wheat and does not want to waste precious time watching by her death-bed. The doctor, furious at his avarice, forces him to go for the local corpse-washer and offer to pay her to watch by the dying woman. The son reluctantly goes to this woman, refuses to pay her by the day lest his mother should take too long about shutting her eyes, and demands, instead, a contract price. The sum agreed is six francs. The woman comes and the son goes to the fields. But, now, as the old mother lingers on and on the corpse-washer feels cheated, and the son seems to be smiling to himself. In despair the attendant begins to talk to the old woman about the Devil who, so she says, always visits the dying, and having thus frightened her sufficiently she goes behind a curtain, dresses herself up fantastically, and making hideous noises, appears suddenly beside the bed, waving her arms and growling horribly. The old woman's heart leaps, she struggles to escape, and falls dead. All the last duties are thereupon performed carefully, methodically, and honourably, and everybody is content.

The force of this tale is inescapable. All Maupassant's disgust with life as he saw it among his Norman peasantry is packed into it. To the romantic—and romantics are

never so romantic as when they are thinking about peasants—it is beastly, and they will refuse to admit that it is true.

Here we must at once stop ourselves from taking part in a foolish discussion. 'How true is it?' is not, and never can be, a fair question about any tale. Truth in literature is an aggregate, taken over the whole of a literature, and not even to be taken over the whole of any one writer's work—excepting always those three or four giants who, as I have insisted, must never be dragged into a discussion on the general run of literature. If we want to know the 'truth' about the French peasant we must read some half-dozen French authors, not just one—Daudet, Maupassant, Bazin, Balzac, Bernanos, Mauriac, Beaumarchais, Mérimée, or such; just as, if we want to know the 'truth' about the English countryman, we must balance Hardy, George Eliot, Emily Brontë, Mark Rutherford, Mrs. Gaskell, Fielding, Bates, Coppard and others. Which is why 'truth' in literature can only be protected, not by moralists, but by liberals who will allow it to flourish in variety rather than attempt to narrow it by compulsion.

What we may ask, in the presence of *Le Diable,* is not, 'How true is it?' but 'How persuasive is it?' The avarice of the Norman peasant seems to have hurt Maupassant deeply: he returns to it again and again. He sees this vice as riding their entire lives, a master theme that dominates everything, colours everything. We may grant it to him. We have to. As to persuasiveness, once again he has taken creatures of an uncomplex, elementary nature, from whom the most aboriginal sort of behaviour may be expected. That they had counter-balancing qualities we may suppose, and other stories of his give us reason to believe there were: such as *Pierrot,* to quote but one, which is about a dog that an old peasant woman was too

mean to feed, and had enough heart not to want to kill. She dropped it down a hole into a cave where all the stray dogs of the region were thrown—until, horribly, in their hunger the stronger ultimately ate the weaker. Her natural decency led her, in her first revulsion of pity, to throw bits of food to Pierrot; still he howled; her avarice would not let her pay a man to go down and recover it; when she heard another bark, and knew that there were now two dogs in the cave, she abandoned Pierrot to his fate. There, at least, we have a struggle between avarice and decency. And, in *Le Diable,* the peasant did pay the corpse-washer to watch by his mother's bed; and before he went to sow his wheat he had asked his mother if he should not do so, and she, avaricious even when death is taking her hand, had feebly said that he must, of course, attend to the land. Are *these* nuances?

What one questions about Maupassant's stories is not what this or that one over-emphasises or under-emphasises: it is that the bulk of his work passes such an exclusively bitter and misanthropic judgment on life. No writer has been so aggressively individualistic in this. He ignores all social and philosophic generalisations—those large conclusions and positions which assuage away the sharp detail of existence under benign or optimistic abstractions. Agreed that in doing so he is based on a position, himself; and that this position is almost piratical in its primitiveness; beyond and outside all those refinements, and elaborations, and disinfections of crude human nature that we call civilised life. For it is his satisfaction to peel off every shred of convention, in thought and action, and to reveal the elemental passions hidden but boiling beneath it. The elemental passions are his *métier.* Though there again is where we may wish to differ with him, since to him the elemental is almost always vulpine and it may be that a great many of his readers have found

in elemental human nature the seeds of a nobler fire. However, Maupassant is not always on the side of the savage, and to prove this it is time I came to my third story, which I think one of his great tales, and which I have selected for this very reason that it shows him on his third plane of a realism that is still uncompromising but is not, at least as I read it, without sweetness and gentleness. It is *Hautot Père et Fils.*

Hautot is a powerful, ruddy, bony old Norman, a man who could lift a whole cartload of apples on his back; half-peasant, half-gentleman, rich, respected, domineering, with a son, César, who is a quiet, gentle, obedient youth filled with respect for his father. With a couple of friends the father and son go out shooting one morning. The scene is brilliantly and swiftly painted, with three lines for the countryside and six for the sportsmen. At the end of the second page old Hautot has met with the fatal accident; they find him holding his entrails into his belly. At the end of the third page he is in bed, alone with his sobbing son, confessing, through his racking deathpains, that since his wife died some years ago he has had a mistress in Rouen:

‘ “She’s a fine girl. A grand girl. And if it wasn’t for you, and thinking of your mother, and then this house—we’ve all lived here, the three of us—I’d have brought her here and married her. By God I would! Listen! Listen, boy! I could have made a will. But I didn’t. A man mustn’t write about things. . . . I mean that sort of thing. . . . It’s bad for the other children . . . it messes up everything . . . it’s bad for everybody. All writs, legal papers, stamped papers. Bad! Never use ’em! If I’m rich it’s because I never used ’em. Do you know what I’m talking about?”

‘ “Yes, dad.”

‘ “Listen. Carefully. What was it? I made no will. . . .

I didn't want to. And I know you're a good lad. You're not tight, you're not mean. What? I said to myself, when I'm going, I'll tell him and ask him not to forget that poor little kid Caroline Donet. Rue de l'Eperlan. Eighteen. Third floor. The second door. Don't forget. Will you? And listen! When I'm gone, you go over to her, and fix it up so she won't have any grouse against me. You'll have all the cash now. You can do it. I'm leaving you enough. And listen! Go on a Thursday. That's the day she expects me. She works the rest of the week. Poor kid, she's going to have something to cry about. I'm telling all this to you because you're my son. A man doesn't tell this sort of yarn to a lawyer or a priest. Nobody but the family in the secret. Family all one. Get me?"

' "Yes, dad."

' "Promise?"

' "Yes, dad."

' "Swear it?"

' "Yes, dad."

' "Don't forget . . . I'm asking you. It's a favour. For God's sake. I'll hold you to it."

' "Yes, dad."

' "Go alone. You'll see . . . I can't tell you any more. On your oath?"

' "Yes, dad. . . ."'

He dies. Poor César weeps and weeps. And then, awkwardly, shyly, embarrassed, he goes to Rouen and seeks out the girl. When she opens the door she is astounded to see the son instead of the father, and when she hears the news she is overcome. In the flat there is also a little child who thinks this stranger is cruel to make its mamma weep so, and as César recounts every detail of his father's death the little boy kicks and kicks his shins. As he tells the whole story he looks around at his father's second home; the table ready; the wine warming; his chair; his picture; his little son. The three, full of sorrow, comfort one an-

other. César fondles his little brother. He sees that Caroline is no hard-fisted strumpet: that she loved his father; that she cares little for his money. And since she *is* kind it is natural for her to force César to eat the meal simmering on the hob. When the time comes for them to part he finds that he has said nothing about money-matters. But he will come once again to fix all that up with her.

> ' "If it's all the same to you, Monsieur César, can you come next Thursday? I won't lose any working-time that way. My Thursdays are always free."
> ' "All right. On Thursday."
> ' "Will you come in time for lunch?"
> ' "Well, I don't know. I can't promise about that."
> ' "It's only that we can talk easier over the food. And it leaves us more time."
> ' "Very well then. At twelve." '

And off he goes, after kissing the little boy once more, and shaking hands with Mlle. Donet. He returns the next Thursday, and he has, indeed, in his misery and loneliness after his father's death, been rather looking forward to it. For she is evidently a very decent woman, and he cannot help thinking fondly of his little brother. He comes to her flat, kisses the child on both cheeks, shakes her hand, notices how pale and worn she is—the poor thing has been crying—and then over the meal he fixes everything just as his father has bade him to do, his heart full, a sense of his father about him, a sense of home. After coffee she begs him to smoke; he has forgotten his pipe; she hands him, from a cupboard, one of his father's pipes. As he smokes, and as she clears the table, he takes little Emile on his knee and plays horsey with him, listening to her in the kitchen tidying up the ware. At three he gets up to go, regretfully.

Here is how the story ends:

'She stood before him, blushing, her heart moved, and as she looked at him she was thinking of the other man.

' "Shan't we ever see one another, ever again?" she murmured. He replied, quite simply,

' "Why, yes, if you like, mam'zelle."

' "Why, of course, I would like, Monsieur César. Say next Thursday, if that would suit you?"

' "That suits me, Mam'zelle Donet."

' "And you *will* come to lunch?"

' "But . . . Well, if you insist I won't say no."

' "That's agreed, then, Monsieur César. Next Thursday, at twelve, the same as to-day."

' "Thursday at twelve, Mam'zelle Donet." '

So the tale ends.

What is left out this time? Is there, indeed, anything? Or is it not a perfect story? Only one possible doubt may intrude: that Maupassant may not have written it quite as we may read it, or at any rate as I read it; he may not have intended the tenderness and softness, for example, which comes up to me from this tale like the warm breath of Spring. He *may* have written it in the misanthropic mood in which he wrote so many of his earlier stories.

For here I must annotate this third choice and interpolate a few details of Maupassant's life-story. *Hautot Père et Fils* comes from the volume called *La Main Gauche,* which is dated 1889. He was then forty-nine. He died four years later. About this date a development of unexpected tenderness has been observed in his work. Perhaps even a little earlier, in his novel *Mont Oriol,* one might persuade oneself to see signs of a less brutal Maupassant, although I think one could only maintain the idea with some hardihood for '89 and the arrival of the novel *Fort comme la Mort* and this volume of stories, *La Main Gauche.* Even then, tenderness may not be the

word, or the note we observe. All I can say is that a new note has been observed widely, and mention that whereas Lemaître speaks of him as becoming 'plus fraternal, attentif, incliné' (more brotherly, considerate, well-disposed), Emile Faguet regards this new quality as 'une sorte de tristesse,' though still robust and masculine, and contrasts his earlier work and his later as that of a gay and a sombre pessimist. There was in his life at the time reason for both orientations: he was heart broken when his brother Hervé, having gone slowly mad, died in an asylum, and he himself had cause to be uneasy as to his own fate. The same disease, which was to finish him too, was gaining control of his body; indeed when he was brought to Dr. Blanche's private asylum at Passy, in a strait-waistcoat, in 1892, after trying to cut his throat at Cannes, one doctor there declared that he had been mad for two years, i.e. since 1890. The point (in literary criticism) is that, in *Hautot Père et Fils,* we are dealing with a story from a special period in its author's career. Whether more tender, or more *triste,* as one considers fit to call it, we have here Maupassant's realism softened by the addition of another note.

These, then, are three examples of Maupassant's realism, of its achievements and its limitations. We are now in a position to take one last story in order to balance both and so come to grips with our question as to how much he chose to pay for what he chose to win from life as literature. The question is a particularly interesting one for this reason, that although—as every reader of his stories knows—the marks of his realism are marks common to all realism, what he did was to select the three main paths of the tradition, each naturally leading into the next one, and follow them farther than anybody before or since. They are individualism, scepticism and elementalism. He followed these three roads or sections

of the same road to the cliff's edge, there built his house, and faced the abyss.

4

Take them in order. The exit from classicism into romanticism, like the exit from romanticism into realism, was the individualist assertion. It has been, indeed, the beaten path of all modern thought from the French Revolution to our own time. In prose fiction nobody took this road as boldly and fearlessly as Maupassant.

What the individualist assertion has amounted to in practice has been the alteration, almost the obliteration, of the specific gravity of the mind, a lifting of thought away from the hub or centre of established order. This centripetal attraction of the centre is patent in such a poet as Pope, or even a semi-romantic like Chenier. (In England where the revolt came late the centre functioned right up to our own day.) Writers in this old tradition swing, however freely, or apparently freely, about a fixed point. They present us always with characters, ideas and emotions that gyrate about the centre of gravity of a fixed morality. What the romantic revolt did was to break this law of gravity so that thought began to float away from the centre, and what one may call generalised Man began to fissurate into individual men. In another image, the atoms, once clustered about a nucleus, fled apart, free, untrammelled, often arrogantly self-assertive. Ever since, and in increasing discomfort and unease, we have become aware that although there is great joy and excitement and freedom in thus being free, disparate and mathematical, there are also great advantages and civilised rewards in unity of thought; indeed our greatest problem of to-day is how again to find cohesion plus variety, without falling into such extremes as Fascism or Communism or the traditionalism of a despotic church, the revolt from

which foreshadowed the whole modern process four centuries ago.

Realism, as we know, was not at first, as Romanticism was not, a complete break. Balzac and Chekov, as we have seen, were intensely social men, and both were moralists. Not until the Naturalists took Realism a step further was the umbilical cord finally cut in literature, and many even of these naturalists or semi-naturalists (Daudet as a novelist, for example) still cherished the old traditional outlook. Flaubert's relentless *mépris du convenu* is the first clean cut, and Maupassant was his all-too-eager pupil. The preface to Maupassant's *Pierre et Jean* takes this individualism—and its accompanying scepticism—so far that in asserting his own individualistic 'realism' he denies all objective 'reality,' quite without seeing the illogicality of his position and the subjective morass into which he has plunged:

> 'How childish,' moreover, he says, 'to believe in "reality" since we each carry out own reality in our thought and organs. Our eyes, our ears, our sense of smell, of taste, differing from one person to another, create as many truths as there are men on earth. And our minds, taking instruction from these organs, so diversely impressed, understand, analyse and judge as if each of us belonged to a different race. Each one of us, therefore, forms for himself an illusion of the world which is poetic, sentimental, joyous, melancholy, unclean or dismal according to his nature. The writer has no other business than to reproduce faithfully this illusion with all the contrivances of art that he has learned or can command.'

He then goes on to speak of these curious illusions of life:

'The illusion of beauty, which is a human convention. The illusion of ugliness, which is a changing opinion. The illusion of truth, which is never immutable. The illusion of the ignoble, which attracts so many. The great artists are those who force humanity to accept their illusion. Let us not therefore get angry with any one theory since every theory is the generalised expression of a temperament asking itself questions.'

Which is why he concludes that it is better that every man should paint what he sees and cut out all 'explanations,' since in sum, no explanations are possible.

The distance which any fashion of thought can travel in twenty years is strikingly illustrated by this exaggeration of Flaubert's brand of Naturalism in the hands of Maupassant. Flaubert had been his teacher, his second father, welcoming him Sunday after Sunday for years to his home, reading his manuscripts, chiding him for their faults, encouraging him, making him come back again and again with new drafts. His influence was enormous and Maupassant acknowledged it fully and gratefully. In the main Flaubert's work was to disillusion him—if he needed disillusioning—about all conventional viewpoints; to open his eyes, *le deniaiser:* to impart to him his own relentless philosophy. But in that philosophy, even in Flaubert, even though it makes a chasm with traditional thought, there had still been a vestigial romantic streak, a lyric note that sweetens his realistic novels and floods out unrestrained in his romantic novels. This lyric note was rejected almost completely by the pupil. In those twenty years Naturalistic realism went to its limits, and beyond them. It only took twenty years, for Flaubert was born in 1821, and both Zola and Maupassant were born in 1840. What died, in the meantime, as far as fiction was concerned, was free-will, the basis of the old psychology.

The struggle between the will and the passions collapsed in favour of the passions. Love became desire. The most elementary forces now alone provided the tension, the drama and the pain. There occurred what Zola was to call the continuation in fiction of the physiology of science.

With this individualism and scepticism, sometimes hardening into determinism, went the lesser notes of naturalistic realism, such as the interest in the lives of common people, though, as had been remarked, an interest little informed by that profound sympathy for the humble toiler which is the very soul of English realism, as, for example, in *Silas Marner, The Revolution in Tanner's Lane, David Copperfield, Jude the Obscure, Esther Waters,* or *The Old Wives' Tale.* The common people were not chosen out of affection but because in them the elemental was nearer the surface and because sophistication and convention did not have to be cut away, layer by layer, to get at it.

These are the most obvious marks of Maupassant's mind—individualism, scepticism, elementalism. To these, and to the general literary milieu, we can trace most of his individual technique; for, as cannot be said too often, literary technique does not exist in a vacuum, it is a man's device for projecting his own nature in his own time and place. Indeed, as Henry James shrewdly remarks, time and place affect even the technique of the reader as he reads, pointing out that not only does the impression of life that goes into a story vary according to the man and place that produces it, but the impression of life that comes out of a story will often vary 'according to the place that takes it, the particular structure and mixture of the recipient.'

To see, now, how Maupassant exhausts these three elements, let us turn to another of his stories and consider there just one of the characteristics of his method—his

'elementalist' refusal to indulge in elaborate psychology. Let us test this by one of his more feeling and more subtle tales, *Miss Harriet*.

This is a sketch of an English woman of middle years, a tourist on holiday in a Norman seaside village. She is an evangelical Protestant; virginal; as we would say nowadays repressed; finding in her love of nature all the satisfaction that sex gives to others. She meets a painter, a gay young libertine, feels for him a painful emotion that throws her off her balance, is then so horrified and pained when she catches him locked in the arms of the servant-girl that she kills herself. It is a painful story and it must have given Maupassant a good deal of trouble to hold the reins, much more than it would have given to some writer who had not limited himself to such a severely laconic technique. For Henry James, or Turgenev, or Chekov would have expanded on the theme; they would have, so to speak, poetised it, sorrowed over it, been plangent over it, even allowed themselves at least a sub-audible comment, a suggestion of regret.

Maupassant handles his painful story with extreme cunning. To begin, he draws back a little from the scene; he sinks it into the personality of a narrator which is a useful, however risky, device whenever a theme is too crude or harsh for direct impact. Next he surrounds the theme with a more elaborate and lyrical atmosphere of natural beauty than is usual with him. We note, however, how spare and sharp his technique is in these natural descriptions. There is no description for description's sake; no luxuriating in irrelevant beauty:

'C'était l'automne. Des deux côtés du chemin les champs dénudés s'étendaient, jaunis par le pied court des avoines et des blés fauchés qui couvraient le sol comme une barbe mal rasée. La terre embrunée semblait fumer . . .'

Turgenev could hardly have achieved in the same number of words this sensuous aspect of morning:

> 'Le soleil enfin se leva devant nous, tout rouge au bord de l'horizon: et, à mesure qu'il montait, plus clair de minute en minute, la campagne paraissait s'éveiller, sourire, se secouer, et ôter, comme une fille qui sort du lit, sa chemise de vapeurs blanches.'

These notes occur in a brief preamble. Then the art-student tells his tale, in his own character. He appears as a *bon vivant,* yet not selfish, insensitive or callous. The wandering student will, he says, pause where he feels attracted by a smell of clematis or by the naïve glance of a servant-girl in an inn.

> 'But you must never make little of these tokens of country tenderness. These girls have a soul, they have their feelings, as well as firm cheeks and fresh lips. And their violent kisses are as sweet and as stinging as wild apples. Love is precious no matter where you find it. A heart that flutters when you appear, eyes that grow wet when you leave—these are too rare, too sweet, too dear to make little of them at any time.'

This spontaneous note of natural affection is necessary to the tale. It is necessary for him to grow warm about lovemaking in a ditch, or a stable, or in hay still hot from the sun; to speak of coarse linen on soft skin; about the rough sincerity of country passions that can be more delicate than the subtle pleasures offered by charming and distinguished women of fashion. He must talk of the cold spring-water on moustache and nose-tip; of swimming naked in some icy pool; of the happy idle melancholy of the falling twilight. It helps to form a pagan contrast

with the cold nature of Miss Harriet, his fellow-lodger in the little Breton inn.

'She was thin, very tall, so tightly wrapped in a scotch-plaid shawl with red checks that you might think she had no arms at all if you did not see a long hand emerging at her side, holding a white tourist's sunshade. Her face was like a mummy's; it reminded me, I don't know why, of a red-herring wearing butterfly bows. She passed me swiftly, dropping her eyes, and retired into the chimney-corner.'

Miss Harriet is one of those English travellers who leave in their wake a trail of educative or pious leaflets:

'Who haunt the *tables d'hôtes* of Europe, spoil Italy, poison Switzerland . . . petrified virgins carrying with them the odours of their indescribable *toilettes* and a smell of rubber as if somebody slipped them at night into a sheath.'

Whenever our student saw her he fled like a bird at the sight of a scarecrow.

But she had one frailty, if it can be called that. She was in love with nature.

'Sometimes when I was painting among the rocks I would suddenly see her at the edge of a cliff as erect as a semaphore signal. She would be gazing, with passion, at the vast sea dusted with gold and at the sky purple with fire. Sometimes I would perceive her in a valley, walking fast, with her elastic Englishwoman's step; and I would come up with her, attracted by I don't know what, solely to see her visionary's face, her desiccated face, glowing with an interior and profound happiness.'

Every reader, and writer, will at once recognise here a wonderful subject for a short-story—a character, a situation and a promise, a Henry James situation. It develops as we expect. The painter paints 'her' cliff one day and in his enthusiasm for the picture shows it around. Miss Harriet looks at it in stupefaction, so moved that she speaks to him:

> '"Oh, monsieur, you understand nature in a most moving way." I confess to you that I blushed, more affected by that compliment than if it had come from a queen. I was conquered, her victim, her slave. I could have kissed her!'

At about this point the story of Miss Harriet begins to pass from the gentle hands of Henry James (or Turgenev) into the uncompromising hands of Maupassant. Never once does the young painter soften his coldly watchful eye. When she says, one gorgeous evening by the sea, that she wishes she were a little bird and could fly away into the firmament, the gushing remark is recorded coldly. He wishes only that he could have sketched her then and there for his album, a caricature of ecstasy. Pity is the only emotion permitted.

> 'Poor lonely creatures, poor wandering ghosts of the *table d'hôte,* poor, ridiculous, regrettable people, I love you because I once knew her.'

She is by now evidently under his 'influence,' using the word in its mesmeric sense. This gradual development is recorded with great intelligence and persuasive observation: the palpitations, the silences, the brusque speeches, the blushes, her furious pleasure when he gallantly and jocosely says, 'Why, you're as lovely as a star this evening, Miss Harriet'; her flights and returns; a crisis of nerves,

a last revelation when he shows her one of his best efforts and after looking at it for a long while she bursts into tears . . .

'I jumped up, stirred by the sight of this misery that I did not understand, and took her hands with a movement of sudden affection, the sort of thing a Frenchman will do quicker than he can think about it. For a few seconds she left her hands in mine and I felt them tremble as if all her nerves were being twisted. Then she pulled them from me, brusquely: rather she tore them away. I recognised that shivering. I'd felt it before. There is no mistaking that shiver of love in a woman, whether she is fifteen or fifty, whether she is poor or rich. It goes so straight for the heart that I always recognise it at once.'

The direct physiological treatment has by now established the story as a Maupassant story. No other eye could compass this brusque and blunt observation of pitiable feminine weakness. The dénouement clinches the ownership of the tale like a label on a box. The young painter realises that he must fly. He tells the aubergiste that evening that he must leave. Miss Harriet does not flinch. But he catches the little maid, Céleste, looking at him. When he goes out after dinner, to smoke a pipe, he is stirred and troubled by the events of the day, the proposition of love directed at himself, passionately however grotesquely, bringing in train memories that charm and excite, and a certain gay humour roused in him by Céleste's quick glance. He is in a mood to do foolish things. All he does, in fact, is to seize Céleste in the dusk of the farmyard and shower her with kisses which she resists, laughingly, used to these amorous assaults. It is all he does because Miss Harriet surprises them. She says nothing, flits away, and is not seen again. 'I went back into the house, much trou-

bled, more embarrassed at having been surprised than if she had caught me in some criminal action.'

She has drowned herself. Nothing is spared in the description of the recovery of the poor, half-naked body and the preparation of this skinny corpse for the burial. ('My God, she *is* thin!') Pity is once more bestowed on her, the last kindness of wild flowers that the painter himself collects, and of his vigil through the night; and there is the bitter-sweet tribute of his thought that she will become part of the earth, of the God, whom she so loved:

> 'She would decompose and become a plant herself. She would bloom in the sun, be munched by the cattle, carried off by the birds as seed, and as the flesh of the beasts of the field would become human flesh again. But as for this thing they call the soul it was quenched in the depths of a dark pit. She would suffer no more. She had given her life to other lives who would be born of her.'

Morning comes; the hours she adored:

> 'I opened the window wide, drew the curtains so that the whole sky should see us, and leaning over the icy corpse I took her battered head in my palms and then, slowly, without fear, without any sense of disgust, I placed a kiss, a long kiss, on those lips that had never been kissed before.'

There can scarcely be any need to underline the individualism, scepticism and elementalism of Maupassant's treatment of this unhappy theme; beyond, perhaps, the need to remark that it is unusually kind, for him, and that, before him, nobody except Flaubert would have dared either to select such a subject or to treat it with such cold unelaboration. I doubt if, even to-day, any writer would be either so cold in choice of subject or so laconic

in treatment; certainly not the Americans, with all their supposed brutality, for when they deal with women they always reveal by sentimentality or savagery their emotional and sexual disturbance.

As to our specific point—Maupassant's refusal to indulge in elaborate psychology: somebody has called this picture of Miss Harriet 'a bizarre silhouette' and the adjective seems fair, but 'silhouette' is less just. The woman is persuasive; her emotions are sufficiently elaborate; her conflict sufficiently disturbing. What prompted the word was, probably, Maupassant's interest in elemental passion and his almost savage insistence on keeping to that plane. This is where he pursues his path to the cliff's edge, as he does consistently throughout his work. This is where he forces people to call him such names as *un Huron de génie*. This is where, at the end, we are in a position to appraise his power and measure his weakness—his price that he willingly pays, believing it to be not a weakness but a final and irrefragable strength.

The truth is that Maupassant saw life as a puritan moralist: he saw it, as he believed, without sentiment, and saw it therefore as evil; he saw what a Christian would call the seven deadly sins, and he saw little else. He saw men and women ridden by pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth: Norman farmers, Parisian civil-servants, small-town bourgeoisie. What he denied was the slightest trace of soul in any one of them, the least speck of godliness, all hope of redemption here or hereafter. That was *his* reality, and it was in pursuit of it that he reduced human nature to its most elemental passions. Miss Harriet might be a Pantheist; she would die as a dog dies; the most that even an artist could strew on her grave was pity and flowers, and the thought that she would persist as a flower or as grass and as the flesh of an ox and the flesh of those after her who would eat her body and drink

her blood. He reduced life to the senses and he revelled in them as a man and as a writer—not gaily, though he could be gay and did write gay, or at least gaily bitter, stories like *Le Trou*. Before this philosophy of a Red Indian could ever weaken he would have had to suffer as terribly as a Red Indian under the torturer's knife and would he even then emit anything nearer to surrender than a groan? It is, therefore, more in anxious hope, I think, than in any real assurance that Lemaître wrote, though finely, that such realism as this has two great enemies, grief and death, and that in face of them it is futile to say that what is must be and that nothing needs to be explained:

> 'We suffer, and by that door of suffering there enters thought and wonder and disquiet and fear of the unknown and under one form or another reflection and dreams and the need to explain what the senses cannot compass.'

Maupassant may have softened a little towards the end. The mass of his work is clean and classical in its raillery, its optimism, its stoical acceptance of a most ascetic and uncompromising view of life.

One's quarrel with such a writer, and one's admiration of him, will never be purely literary: they will be coloured by what, for short, one may call our philosophies, our own personal view of life, and we will approve or disapprove of Maupassant not as a writer but as a man with a similar, or with another (and unacceptable) view of life. It would not have troubled him, but the fact remains that he challenges such approvals and disapprovals more than any other writer of short stories. There is room in the house of Chekov, Stevenson or Henry James for men of many philosophies. Maupassant invites a select company,

or else a very tolerant one. That was his choice. He chose his way; he never diverged from it; he succeeded in it. He defined his own notion of reality early in his career—in *Boule de Suif,* his first published story; which is to say he defined his own temperament and its needs. When he had finished he looked into the abyss and it received him.

The Technical Struggle

SOLVITUR SCRIBENDO

5

On Convention

WE FORGET when enjoying the pleasure of any art, of music, poetry, painting or the theatre, that a very great part of our pleasure has been dependent on convention. We are expected to forget it. In the theatre we have all tacitly agreed to see nothing odd about a room that, on the stage, has only three sides; or, in painting, it does not seem odd to us that we see a view as if our heads were held in a vice whereas in life we let our eyes wander east and west, shift position a dozen times and see the landscape under fifty changing lights. The point is elementary; that is why it is so important; because it is so very obvious it is constantly forgotten, and this forgetting has, as I will show in this chapter, profound implications. I will here barely hint at one of them by recalling how a humorous philosopher once pointed to a cow in a field and said to me, 'What do you see there?' I obligingly said that I perceived a cow. 'But you do not,' he replied. 'You deduce a cow. All you see is the appearance of one-half of the outside of a cow. And when you look at a portrait of your aunt all you see is a picture of the outside of one-half of your aunt. You go through a series of lightning processes before accepting this superficies as a portrait of your aunt, and many critics (who examine those mental processes more carefully than the rest of us) would probably deny that it comes anywhere near being a portrait of your aunt. It is, for instance, the whole case against Realism that it concentrates on giving us the outside of the one-

half of everything.' In other words the convention of realism depends for its success on our forgetting that realism is a convention. So does every other convention.

The chief purpose of these conventions is, of course, the simple purpose of communication. Every art has its own hieroglyphics. These are its language, its technique, its conventions. In the short-story the speaker of this language is the writer; he has to learn its conventions, know what can be done with them, understand their limitations, adapt them to his own purpose, and often add to them. The listener to the language is the reader, and he, also, if he wants to get the most out of the art before him, has to familiarise himself with its conventions. The writer, however, must always presume that his reader is practised in these essential conventions, otherwise there can be no artistic communication at all. If therefore there is anything of a technical order which *can* be taught to would-be writers of the short-story it is in this field of accepted conventions. As in Bridge.

Let us take an example. One of these conventions concerns the beginnings of stories. A thousand years ago—or to-day in places like the Irish or Scottish highlands where the folk-mind is a thousand years old—a man could begin his story in this simple way, and nobody made the slightest demur:

> 'Once upon a time, in a distant land, there lived a giant. This giant dwelt in a great castle on top of a mountain. He was the most powerful and dreaded giant in all that land. He had six arms and he had eyes at the back of his head as well as at the front, and when he roared the villagers a hundred miles away looked at the sky and said, "The Thunder-Giant is angry to-day." '

Even that 'once-upon-a-time' was a convention, which meant that people agreed to believe the most fantastic

impossibilities provided they occurred long ago and far away enough; and they did so for the sufficient reason that it amused them to do it. We still do this. To-day, a story may begin like this, and, again, nobody will make the slightest demur:—'The underworld shivered. Word had gone out that Two-gun Hawkeye had escaped from Dartmoor and was on the loose again. For Hawkeye was the man-eating spider at the centre of a vast network of criminal conspiracy that stretched from end to end of Europe. . . .' A business man who would refuse to pay fifteen shillings carriage on a gross of gentlemen's suspenders until he saw the invoice, will roll himself up like a dormouse in an armchair and swallow this whole, simply because it suits his pleasure.

As we become more sophisticated, however, we begin to nourish the tendency to disbelieve, so that the author has to make it all seem a little more plausible. We all know, for example, the story that begins with a preamble in which the writer tells us how he came into possession of the facts; for one of the natural concerns of every author is not merely to make fiction seem like authentic fact but to make us overlook his omniscience about it all, and omniscience reaching even to the secret thoughts and desires of complete strangers. He may begin, therefore, by telling us that he has found an old diary in an old chest in an attic, and that his story is based on that diary; or tell the whole story in the form of letters. Balzac's *La Grande Bretèche* is pieced together from three conversations. Another device is to tell it all in the first person. One of the very loveliest short-stories ever written is *Punin and Baburin* by Turgenev: it has the self-explanatory sub-title 'Piotr Petrovich's Story,' and not until Turgenev has written away two hundred and fifty precious words about his Piotr Petrovich do we come on the sentence, 'But I will begin my story consecutively and in proper order.' Inevi-

tably that story runs to thirty-thousand words and is really not a short story at all.

Now one of the most successful inventions of the true modern short-story has been a convention which cuts out all that. Maupassant more than anybody else showed readers that if they were, as we say colloquially, 'quick on the uptake,' they could dive into the narrative without any explanations, preambles, elaborate introductions, apologies, or other notations as to place, time or occasion. Thus *La Parure* bluntly opens:—'She was one of those pretty and charming girls who . . .' We take this abrupt 'she' for granted nowadays. The convention has been established. Or take this opening to one of Thomas Hardy's short-stories—it is in *Life's Little Ironies*:—'To the eyes of a man viewing it from behind, the nut-brown hair was a wonder and a mystery . . .' In Defoe's time a reader would have said, 'What *is* he talking about?' To-day we should have no difficulty in understanding a story that began at the end: e.g. 'The first thing Mullins knew after that was the nurse saying, "Feeling better now?" '

This is what I mean by the hieroglyphics of technique. It is shorthand, now an established device or convention, well-known to the merest amateur. Its main achievement is to shorten the preamble. 'Beginners,' says Chekov, 'have often to do this—fold in two and tear up the first half. Usually they try, as they say, "to take you right into the story." ' (Meaning the opposite.) 'So, the first half is superfluous. One must write so that the reader should understand, without the author's explanations . . . what it is all about.'

A further convention is inherent in this shorthand convention of abrupt openings, of which I have given examples: the technique of informing by means of suggestion or implication. Telling by means of suggestion or implication is one of the most important of all the mod-

ern short-story's shorthand conventions. It means that a short-story writer does not directly tell us things so much as let us guess or know them by implying them. The technical advantage is obvious. It takes a long time to tell anything directly and explicitly, it is a rather heavy-handed way of conveying information, and it does not arrest our imagination or hold our attention so firmly as when we get a subtle hint. Telling never dilates the mind with suggestion as implication does. Take the following example. It is the opening of Chekov's story *The Lady with the Dog*. Here is the first sentence:—'It was reported that a new face had been seen on the quay; a lady with a little dog.'

The amount of information conveyed in that sentence is an interesting example of the shorthand of the modern short-story. What do we gather from it? 'It was reported that a new face had been seen on the quay; a lady with a little dog.' We gather, altogether by implication, that the scene is laid in a port. We gather that this port is a seaside resort, for ladies with little dogs do not perambulate on commercial docks. We gather that the season is fine weather—probably summer or autumn. We gather that this seaside resort is a sleepy, unfrequented little place: for one does not observe new faces at big, crowded places like Brighton or Deauville. Furthermore, the phrase 'it was reported' implies that gossip circulates in a friendly way at this sleepy resort. We gather still more. We gather that somebody has been bored and wakes up at this bit of gossip; and that we shall presently hear about him. I say 'him,' because one again guesses, when it is a question of a lady, that the person most likely to be interested is a man. And sure enough the next sentence confirms all this. 'Dimitri Gomov who had been a fortnight at Yalta and got used to it . . .' And so on.

We may imagine how much time it would take, and

how boring it would be to have all that told at length. This compression by suggestion and implication is one of the great charms of the modern short-story. And if the reader happens to be a person who wants to write short stories this is one of the first things to learn—that information must be conveyed in the most indirect manner possible. There is a famous example of this in one of Chekov's letters. He had been reading a story by a friend in which the moonlight was described at length in a highly poetic passage. 'No! No!' said the master. 'Not that way. If you want to describe the moon just mention that the old broken bottle on the side of the mill-dam was glinting in the moonlight.'

Some more examples. Consider Maupassant's *La Parure;* about the poor civil-servant in the Department of Education, and his pretty wife who girds constantly at their poverty. Maupassant, to impress their poverty on us, mentions the food they eat, the simple and rarely-varied meals. When she brings in the inevitable *pot-au-feu,* or as we would say 'the Wednesday stew,' the husband rubs his hands and says, 'Ah! The good old *pot-au-feu!*' Note that he does not say, 'What? Stew again!' He is quite pleased. We are to imagine by contrast with this easy-going satisfaction the greater exhaustion of his wife; his lack of spirit, of ambition, underlines her helplessness and hopelessness in being spanceled to such a long-suffering beast of burthen. If he had only said, 'God! I'm fed up with this blessed stew!' there might be some hope that out of that spark of rebellion something might happen. His dumb acquiescence emphasises her despair. Of course a lazy reader will miss this implication: but, once more, every short-story writer must presume that his reader is not lazy but alert, or otherwise we could have no short-stories at all.

Take another sentence from the same story. 'She

washed the dishes, using her rosy nails on the greasy pots and pans.' The word *rosy*. It is obvious how much pathetic misery the word conveys; but consider also how much else it implies. She will polish her pretty fingers in the evening; in the morning the dried grease on the pans will mock her efforts to keep the flag of her spirit flying. But she persists—she will polish them again and again. A story can be subtle in proportion as it manages to convey a greater and greater amount of information by means of these suggestions, and if a reader fails to catch the suggestions that is his loss.

Having made clear what is implied by the word convention I can now say that the short-story is itself one vast convention. There is in life no such thing as a short-story; all life's stories are long, long stories; or perhaps one may say that life is one long (or short) story; either way, to chop up life is to pretend that life is not continuous but spasmodic or intermittent. One may retort that life is episodical. The very word is a further convention, so long established that we do not realise it or have forgotten it. Is it an episode in our popular meaning of the word, i.e. something quite disjunct, when the cat dies or the cow calves or boy meets girl? It is the end of the cat's short-story, the beginning of the calf's, the middle of the cow's, and the climax, or a climax, of the boy's and the girl's. If you retort that the death of your cat is an episode in your life I must be pedantic and insist that the episode, in its Greek meaning (which takes us back to the origin of the convention), is that which 'comes in besides.' Besides what? Aristotle's *Poetics* explains that episodes describe dramatically all that happens in between, or besides, the choric songs which give us the main continuity, and in whose continuity those episodes are a break or rift. In later drama the choruses dropped out (a prologue or epilogue their main vestiges) and the dramatic episodes re-

mained, and either by their own poetry, or by inserted poetry, e.g. soliloquies, often felt as interruptions (thus reversing the process), sustained the continuity in another way.

All this has long been accepted, though often discussed, as for the novel. Nobody minds that a novel, instead of starting with, 'It was in the year 1900,' should either begin in the middle of a man's life with, 'In the year 1920 a lone traveller might have been seen . . .' or, more abruptly, with '"Yes, Mr. Catchpole," said the tall man . . .' leaving us to decipher the characters and situation by degrees; and nobody minds either (much) if a novel 'ends' with, 'And Norma still sat singing on the balcony.' Perhaps this acceptance is easier because there is a sort of notion that the novel is a long book like life; and an even more kindly notion that a very long novel is even more like life; and if a novel has a genealogical table and refers to several generations, still more so; while it may be felt that a series of novels, like Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, is almost as long as life itself. As for the ten thousand and one things that a man does and thinks during his day, not to mention during his life, which a novelist cannot be bothered with. . . . What the novel leaves out is then an old question and it is an old convention that all art leaves out something; such as the other half of my aunt and all her inside. Nor would it ever trouble anybody but an art critic that Italian painters before Caravaggio left out the sun, i.e. those dramatic Italian shadows that the sun slashed across everything they saw.

But if the novel, to keep to fiction, may omit so much, how much may the short-story omit—and pretend not to? For instance, the illusion of completeness and continuity can be easily created and sustained in a novel by reference to passing time, by movements from place to place, by incidental births and deaths, and so forth. With a short-

story it is one of the anxieties of the writer that the episode shall *seem* more than an episode or disjunction. His devices to suggest this illusion are many.

I have spoken of the beginnings of stories; the ending of a short-story is one of the points where this problem of continuity will most acutely concern every writer. The one thing he must avoid is a sense of bump. We know, for example, the 'poetic' endings whose purpose is to float the narrative into the 'poetic' continuity of place whose image the reader will carry away in his thoughts, unaware of any sense of disjunction. Thus, in Andreyev's story *Silence* an unhappy girl commits suicide for no evident reason. Her harsh father is left in the torment of ignorance as to the reason. Andreyev feelingly describes the old man's efforts to make his wife speak, to make the girl's empty room speak, to make her grave speak. He is tortured by silence. The tale concludes, 'And silent was the dark, empty house.' Another Andreyev tale ends, 'A bluish light filtered through the curtained window and ushered in a new day.' A Gorki story ends:

> 'Behind them rose the dark wood like a wall, mururing softly to itself; the flames crackled merrily in the fire around which the silent shadows danced and an impenetrable darkness lay across the fields.'

An Artsibashev tale ends, 'Over the broad fields the strong free wind blew evenly and sadly.' Daudet's lovely little story, *The Pope Is Dead,* ends:

> 'Thinking so, my eyes closed in spite of myself and I had visions of little boats painted in blue, stretches of the Saône made drowsy by the great heat, and the long legs of the water-spiders darting in every direction, marking the glassy surface of the river like diamonds.'

These are slight tricks but they have a real use.

Then there are those endings which merge the episode into a general moral picture. Gauthier's *The Pavilion on the Lake:* 'Did it make them happier? That we dare not affirm, for happiness is but a shadow in the water.' De Musset's *Camille:* '"Now you see clearly," said Uncle Giraud, "that God pardons everything and for ever."' George Sand's *The Marquise:* '"Well," she said with a smile, "do you not believe now in the ideality of the eighteenth century?"' Victor Hugo's *Claude Gueux:* 'What Nature has begun in the individual let society carry out. Look at Claude Gueux. There was a man . . . etc.' Balzac's *The Christ in Flanders:* '"Belief," I said to myself, "is Life. I have just witnessed the funeral of a monarchy, now we must defend the Church."' Balzac's *A Passion in the Desert:* 'In the desert there is everything and there is nothing. . . . It is God without man.'

Most modern writers of the short-story would probably despise such easy and obvious devices to suggest continuity. There is a story by Chekov called *Neighbours* whose conclusion illustrates one of his favourite methods of evading the disjunctive bump. He, too, invokes the 'poetic' mood of place and delicately he implies a general idea or moral; he also suggests a favourite trick, the present tense while using the past tense, and finally he alludes to the prospect of the future.

> 'From Koltovitch's copse and garden there came a strong fragrant scent of lilies of the valley and honey-laden flowers. Pyotr Mihalitch rode along the bank of the pond and looked mournfully into the water. And thinking about his life he came to the conclusion that he had never said or acted upon what he really thought, and other people had repaid him in the same way. And so the whole of life seemed to him as dark as this water in

which the night-sky was reflected and water-weeds grew in a tangle. And it seemed to him that nothing could ever set it right.'

This mood may be expressed as 'And so it goes on.' It is one of his favourite moods, and endings. So, *Expensive Lessons:*

'She still comes to this day. Four books have already been translated but Vorotov knows no French but the word Mémoires, and when he is asked about his literary researches he waves his hand, and without answering turns the conversation to the weather.'

This is the end of *The Princess,* where past tense merges at the end into a firm suggestion of present tense, and the typically Chekovian ironic comment is embedded in the last words:—

'The peasants she passed bowed to her, the carriage rustled softly, clouds of dust rose from under the wheels and floated over the golden rye, and it seemed to the princess that her body was swaying not on carriage cushions but on clouds, and that she herself was like a transparent little cloud . . . "How happy I am," she murmured, shutting her eyes. "How happy I am!" '

Likewise *The Chemist's Wife:*

' "Oh, how unhappy I am," she repeated, suddenly melting into bitter tears. "And nobody knows, nobody knows."

' "I forgot fourpence on the counter," muttered the chemist, pulling the quilt over him. "Put it away in the till, please."

'And at once he fell asleep again.'

Present tense again in *Ivan Matveyitch:* 'He sits down and smiles broadly. Almost every evening he sits in this study and always feels . . . etc.' And in *Zinotchka:*

> '. . . but still she did not treat me quite like a relation. And even now in spite of my good-humoured baldness, meek corpulence, and unassuming air, she still looks askance at me and . . . etc.'

Let us not forget what all these illustrations illustrate. These are writers mesmerising us into forgetfulness of the vastness of this convention which makes tiny bits of life speak for the whole of life.

As the form has become more and more known, of course, the convention needs less and less concealment; which brings us face to face with the *rationale* of all artistic conventions. It is dual. Firstly, if I leave out anything, even in a sentence, I am able to do so only on the presumption that my listener and I share a common mass of knowledge. If I say, 'Cat dead,' I presume that he knows all that is necessary to know about cats and this cat. If I say at a pantomime, to calm a frightened child, 'Fake lion,' I presume that he knows what a real lion is. This last example brings us to the second half of the matter; for we are, with this example, in the realm of fiction or pretence, and what I have said means that in fiction not merely do we share knowledge with the author but by tacit agreement we suppress it, or some of it. The child, that is, will enjoy the terror of watching the lion only when it knows that it is not a lion at all and tacitly agrees to suppress this knowledge. Our excitement at hearing a fatal shot on the stage is based on our suppressed knowledge that it is not a real shot, that the villain who falls dead is only an actor, and that he (unfortunately) is not dead. In simple words, we imagine, thanks to our knowledge of reality.

This is where the convention of Realism, so inadequately seen as a mere convention by most of those who practise it, asserts its complete artificiality. Chekov once offered a nice illustration of the purely conventional quality of Realism by pointing out that on the stage it is impossible to depict a death by poisoning as it would actually occur; but in order that it may nevertheless be done, he observes, in such a way that the onlookers will be satisfied that the dramatist knows what an actual death by poisoning does look like, there must be sufficient reference to scientific fact to set the onlooker at his ease. What does this mean? It means that in the old romantic convention a man on the stage died by poisoning without bothering about scientific fact. In *Hamlet* the queen drank the goblet, cried, 'O my dear Hamlet, I am poisoned,' and flopped on the stage, stone-dead. The onlookers, that is to say, had accepted *that* convention. To-day, our imaginations function less freely; we suspend our disbelief more grudgingly; but, in the end, we do suspend it; in just the same way as of old we use our imaginations and to just the same degree. The only difference lies in our *slowness* of imagination which must see a real gun before we will be pleased to forget that the shot it fires is all my eye and Betty Martin. Our technical interest in this is that the important thing in Realism is not its supposed reality but something behind and beyond it. All those tricks for concluding stories are therefore merely ways of reminding us, at the end of a story, that there was more to it than met the eye.

Some of the best stories, however, blatantly chop up life, with 'bumps,' and we agree not to mind, though it is probable that what we have actually agreed to accept is that all that was explicit in the older forms of the story is understood in the new: that 'so it goes on' (though there is now no need to say so); or that it is a moral tale, or a

comment (though now there is no need to be explicit about it); or that it is 'typical,' i.e. that it is a tale of, perhaps, Java or Italy but that it is microcosm of everywhere.

From the point of view of these technical conventions there is one more thing to be said about the knowledge which writer shares with reader: some of it is suppressed, as I have shown, but some of it is very wide-awake. When the poet wrote 'Hail to thee, blithe spirit, bird thou never wert,' he presumed that we know what a skylark is, and that we know that he is not addressing an emanation but a normal man addressing a real bird, that we know that he knows that it is a bird although he says that it is not, that we understand that he knows quite well that the bird does not hear him, and that we nevertheless are likely to be pleased because our imagination is functioning thanks to its opposite, if knowledge of reality be the opposite of imagining an unreality. This is the suppressed knowledge basic to all convention. But the poet has ventured to presume much more. He must have presumed that he would be read by people who would at least not be completely at a loss before his fancy that Nature can sympathise with us and teach us: indeed he has used language which presumes an understanding of the most esoteric ideas, such as—'like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.' He presumed that this overt understanding would function explicitly.

Every writer appeals therefore to a complex mass of emotions, of sensory experiences, of accepted, or acceptable ideas whose existence he presumes. If the reader cannot respond to this appeal out of his own experience he will not fully understand the writer. No boy, for instance, can fully understand the agony of the image of Joy putting its fingers to its lips and bidding adieu. Nobody who has not been bereaved can fully understand the anguish of the simple statement,

'But she is in her grave, and Oh,
The difference to me.'

The writer, of short or long stories, making the brief part do for the whole, is thus referring in the shorthand of his art to a knowledge, sometimes suppressed, sometimes openly responding, which he both presumes to exist and hopes to enlarge. The more there is of the latter the more there is of the former. A freemasonry talks in passwords. And when readers reject a writer as false to life, as exaggerated, or even as unintelligible they may be right, but they may also simply be lacking in knowledge: they may be outsiders, like people who say golf is silly.

The supremely important technical point here is that while no writer can directly refer to more than is already half-perceived, he must, by every detail, *suggest* a whole 'idea' which may never be clearly perceived. Detail for its own sake is therefore pointless. Realism is only a veil and shadow of Reality.

Consider, now, in the light of all this the following two descriptions of women from two stories by Chekov. The first is, to me, quite meaningless. It appeals to nothing in me. It invokes no ulterior knowledge in me. It does not invite me to expand my knowledge. It does not invite me to imagine anything. It throws away the whole purpose of suggestion in a short-story because it does not suggest anything which it does not contain. It is the extract I have already given to show that Chekov has normally surpassed this level of Naturalism:—

> 'On the top step of the old but lightly and softly carpeted staircase he was met by a maidservant with a haughty but not very youthful face. . . . Exactly opposite the entrance he saw sitting in a big, low chair, such as old men use, a woman in an expensive Chinese dressing-gown, with her head wrapped up, leaning against

a pillow. Nothing could be seen behind the woollen shawl in which she was muffled but a pale, long, pointed, somewhat aquiline nose, and one large dark eye. Her ample dressing-gown concealed her figure, but judging from her beautiful hand, from her voice, her nose and her eye, she might be twenty-six or twenty-eight.'

Compare this with the description of *The Lady with the Dog*, noting how much fewer are the details and how suggestive they are:—

'She was a tall, erect woman with dark eyebrows, staid and dignified, and as she said of herself intellectual. She read a great deal, used phonetic spelling, called her husband not Dmitri but Dimitri, and he secretly considered her unintelligent, narrow, inelegant, and did not like to be at home.'

I am invited to do a lot there: to see an original type, to plumb her character, to let my imagination expand her inward nature from a few outward signs. Or consider this description of the lady's husband, and note how Chekov again makes use of externals to suggest the inner nature of two men:—

'He bent his head at every step and seemed to be continually bowing. This was the husband whom, in a rush of bitter feeling, she once called a flunkey. And there really was in his long figure, his side-whiskers, and the small bald patch on his head, something of the flunkey's obsequiousness; his smile was sugary and in his buttonhole there was some badge of distinction like the number on a waiter.'

I have said 'two men' for it is an interesting technical point that, in its place in the story, this outline has the double function of suggesting the nature of the man who

is observed and of the man who, in watching this 'flunkey,' is understood to have gathered the impression which I have just quoted. Generally, Chekov is, of all writers of short-stories, the most careful to use detail in this suggestive way, although, as I have said, he had a period when even he succumbed to the dull realism of the Zola school. The very word 'suggestive' comes into the few lines describing the impression which a young girl makes on one of his characters: 'Her expression was still childish and her figure was soft and slim: and her developed, girlish bosom, healthy and beautiful, was suggestive of Spring, real Spring.' What a charming use of realism that is.

Realistic detail, in short, is a bore if it merely gives us an idle verisimilitude: its function is to be part of this general revelation by suggestion. It is a fruitful realism when external reality releases the imagination: it is a barren realism when a reader says, 'I could almost see that tree; or smell that pond.' Why should anybody want *almost* to see a tree or smell a pond when he can go out in the fields and see a real tree and smell a real pond? Nowhere so much as in a short-story are such irrelevant descriptions out-of-place; there is no time for them: however striking they may be they are among the many things which have to be dropped in this general struggle to make a very tiny part do for the whole.

In the end that 'whole' is, of course, whatever a writer is 'getting at.' He has favourite themes, favourite subjects, favourite details to connote this, and when we come on them we subconsciously react to them, saying to ourselves, 'Ah! He's at it again.' What this 'it' is nobody can define; it is himself, his tang, his tingle, his personality, his *manière de voir*, and it may take him years and years to force that personal tingle on the public. The conventions by means of which he gets himself over to us are

often invented by himself; they will be new to us when we first meet his work, and they may be so simple or odd that we may not at first notice them, or quite understand them. Saroyan is one example. The first time I read a story by Saroyan he seemed to be merely wandering on and on. A great many of Henry James' first readers found it difficult to know what he was 'getting at'—and so do a great many of his later readers—but all now are prepared to slip softly into his sea and let his tingle wash over them. All this process of being 'washed over' comes from the same origin, that no artist nowadays will be objectively explicit in the manner of former artists. He is not interested in that sort of thing. All modern art has become more and more a sensation of communicated personality. Somebody like Mr. Somerset Maugham would, possibly, sniff furiously at this and say, 'I am content to entertain.' There is much to be said for this, especially since so many moderns (and ancients) have no personality worth communicating: but it has also to be said that there are many levels of 'entertainment,' and that in fiction the more explicit one is the more one is likely to drop down and down to the level in painting of 'A Hopeless Dawn,' 'Derby Day,' or 'Stag at Bay,' and in fiction to a realism as obvious and as pointless. You get a good yarn and that is all you get. I agree, however, that if a man has no special *manière de voir,* he had certainly better tell a yarn well than drool about his sensibilities. Far too many people with too much sensibility and no personality are playing at being writers (and painters) to-day.

I will give one more illustration of this convention of suggestion and be done. Characterisation is something that can be no more than assumed in a short-story. If one looks for a detailed characterisation one finds only puppets; one does not therefore look for it—another tacit agreement between author and reader. Instead we are

given further hieroglyphics. We may, for example, be given situation, which always exposes some temperament or character; or conversation, which, if bright enough, reveals it; or gestures which express it, by which I do not mean that people make gestures—they are gestures, that and no more.

Turn to a story by a modern writer, Elizabeth Bowen. *The Good Girl* is a characteristic story, among her best twelve. It is witty, malicious, intelligent, satirical, amusing. Uncle Porgie, who is not really an uncle, is Rolls-Royceing in Italy with his niece Monica, who is not his niece, and the lovely Dagmar who is not Monica's aunt though Captain Montparnesi is polite enough to pretend to think so. (We are left in no doubt as to Uncle Porgie's relations with Dagmar.) The Captain proposes to Monica who, rather helplessly, for she is a bit of a goose, permits an attachment, if not an engagement. One night she stays out late in his company—to the horror of Uncle Porgie, Dagmar and the proprietors of the hotel. Ladies and gentlemen do not do *this* sort of thing. Is not the hotel fully appointed? The gallant Captain disappears, having found that Monica is not an heiress. The 'good girl' is whirled off to Rome, very exhausted with Virtue, her own especially, and sadly sensible that it is her doom.

Now, the methods Miss Bowen employs to outline her characters—no short-story writer can do more—are of the swiftest. Monica has charm as well as virtue, we gather:—

> 'Uncle Porgie, lifting his glass to twinkle in the pink lamplight, paid Monica tribute: "She's a damn pretty girl and a good girl, too!" Yet, all the time under the table he had been pursuing Dagmar's foot.'

It is almost a statement. She is a good girl whom one admires while playing footy with some other girl. That dis-

poses of two characters. Captain Montparnesi is outlined brutally. He proposes, he kisses Monica's hands, she asks for time to think (she would), and when she has walked away:—'Captain Montparnesi brought his pocket-book from against his heart and made some calculations.' No more need be said.

The story can now proceed to display its wit and malice at its ease, and further minor elaborations of character may be picked up on the way, or not, according as the reader is alert or merely passing the time. Thus when Monica finishes reading a book on Leonardo da Vinci (poor child) she takes a walking stick and the hotel-dog (poor child) and walks down to the lake (poor child): if you do not bother to note the little stabs you will not mur-mur 'poor child.' At the end of her walk

> 'she found mud-flats, washing, stark damp reeds, no one about. The lake was intended for distant scenery. She spoke Italian to a child who ran away, then she walked up again. On the terrace she had come upon Captain Montparnesi, engaged in sadness. He patted the dog. "I love dogs," he said: "it is almost a passion with me."'

Naturally, he being a solitary man . . . and so on, with poor Monica gulping it all in. Or one may appreciate her natural resentment at Dagmar's smooth progress through the bewildering narrows of passion where she alone is lost; or Uncle Porgie's kindness in giving her a pair of coral ear-rings, since a good girl must have some compensations; or we may be amused by Captain Mont-parnesi's solemn family-council. But, whatever one does or does not find amusing and illuminating, one cannot fail to observe that this entire comedy creates its illusion with a minimum of characterisation.

If anybody should imagine that this treatment of char-acter is too, too simple, too, too puppet-like, he would do

well to examine a story by even so discursive and leisurely a writer as Henry James. Take *Owen Wingrave,* the youth at the military crammers who suddenly rejects the army, for reasons of scruple, although descended from aeons of Wingraves who 'fell in battle.' (In no sense is it a short-story except that it ends abruptly; it unfolds itself rather than reveals itself.) We observe that the couple of pages of conversation which open the story reveal the temper of the youth and his crammer Mr. Coyle. Then follows a page of leisurely Jamesian commentary on both. Notice with what an illusion of penetration these two puppets, these two 'gestures' are posed; with what elaboration they are pared to the skin:—

'Mr. Coyle was a professional coach; he prepared young men for the army, taking only three or four at a time, to whom he applied the irresistible stimulus of which the possession was both his secret and his fortune. He had not a great establishment; he would have said himself that it was not a wholesale business. Neither his system, his health nor his temper could have accommodated itself to numbers; so he weighed and measured his pupils and turned away more applicants than he passed. He was an artist in his line, caring only for picked subjects and capable of sacrifices almost passionate for the individual. He liked ardent young men (there were kinds of capacity to which he was indifferent) and he had taken a particular fancy to Owen Wingrave . . .'

I interrupt to insist that this is very finely said; but has very much really been said? We proceed:—

'. . . This young man's facility really fascinated him. His candidates usually did wonders and he might have sent up a multitude. He was a person of exactly the stature of Napoleon, with a certain flicker of genius in his light blue eyes; it had been said of him that he

looked like a pianist. The tone of his favourite pupil now expressed, without intention indeed, a superior wisdom which irritated him. He had not especially suffered before from Wingrave's high opinion of himself, which had seemed justified by remarkable parts; but to-day it struck him as intolerable . . .'

I cannot burthen the reader any further with this rather repetitious record. It is like a boxer who spars but won't fight. These are, evidently, fine spirits. They are presented to us with the true Jamesian delicacy. His grand manner is so impressive that, by reflection, these his children also impress us; we must feel that their feelings (such as they are) do them such great credit that it is almost bad manners on our part to observe that these characters are none-the-less just as flat and as puppet-like as any of Dickens' flattest characters. This is not, in the least, to find fault since they give us (unless we are as tiresomely critical as the present writer is doubtless being) a sufficient illusion of depth and roundness. Still, the only difference between them and any of Dickens' characters is that Dickens chose more vigorous and, perhaps, too explicit qualities and vices to emphasise—avarice, hypocrisy, optimism —whereas James generally chose more subtle and 'social' qualities which enlarged his characters by referring their elements to the sanctions of a select company.

I may suggest in passing that the reason why Dickens used flat characters or label-characters, is twofold; he had a great many characters to handle and had to stamp them clearly and simply; he also wrote serially, therefore episodically, and therefore became largely subject to the same limitations as the writers of short-stories who came after him. To one important point I will barely refer here. The instrument of characterisation may be composed of no more than a couple of strings; it is the virtuosity of the

writer to play subtle tunes upon this simple instrument. If the reader turns to the study of the examples I have given he will see this for himself. We will, however, consider its point more fully in the chapters called *On Subject* and *On Construction*. For his own assurance he should study many examples of short-stories to test this matter of characterisation: he will find that there is no time for explanation. The characterisation of short-stories is always of the simplest. It is the cunning of the writer which conveys a contrary illusion, if he does.

The short-story, then, is an immense confidence-trick, an immense illusion, as immense a technical achievement as the performance of an adept magician. But there is no deception, or rather, the illusion here depends on our always knowing how it is done. The writer says, 'You observe, I have everything up my sleeve.' We wish, when we read him, for Life *in petto:* we can have it only on certain, rather obvious, terms, and I have indicated a few of the terms. But there is one great difference between the two illusions. It is the height of the magician's art to make people appear to disappear; it is the height of this writer's art to make people appear to appear. The one does not really vanish and the other is also an illusion. It would be an embarrassment if the magician and his assistants pressed all the knobs and pulled the wires and arranged all the mirrors and if the lady in the cabinet still stood there as large as life. It is an even greater bore when short-story writers display an endless virtuosity and at the end of their performance the silk-hat is as empty as it was at the beginning.

The purpose of all these tricks or conventions is to communicate personality while appearing only to 'tell a story.'

The most interesting thing to me about them is that they are so threadbare, few and obvious that I sometimes doubt if there is any craft worth talking about in the

short-story. For that matter, I believe that in all art about one tenth is skill and the rest is personality. (Or call it genius. Or call it a mystery.) 'I have in me,' said Berlioz, 'a mysterious machine which I cannot control and which functions in a manner that I do not understand, and which I permit to function as it does only because I cannot prevent it from doing otherwise.'

6

On Subject

WHAT subjects are suitable for short stories? To begin, I think if we examine some of the best stories of modern times in order to distinguish the essential and more valuable elements from the accidental and less valuable elements, we will find that the least essential element of all is the actual story or anecdote on which the tale hangs. For the moment, and for clearer understanding, let us speak of this subject as the anecdote.

The anecdote is, in fact, the greatest tempter of the writer of stories. Take the example of that excellent anecdotal story of O. Henry's about the poor couple in New York. She had lovely golden hair: he had a golden watch. She was too poor to buy the rich Spanish comb she coveted; he was too poor to buy the watch-chain he desired. So, he and she, without telling one another, decided on a sacrifice. He sold his watch and bought her a lovely Spanish comb; meanwhile she went to the wig-maker, had her beautiful tresses cut, sold them to the wig-maker, and bought her beloved a watch-chain. Now one may well imagine how O. Henry rejoiced in that anecdote the first time he heard it or invented it. It is, deservedly, a famous story. It is nevertheless, by the highest tests, an inferior story—would that I had written it!—because the first time it is told it pleases you, the second time it is told you get less pleasure out of it (because there is nothing to it but the anecdote) and the third time it is told it bores you stiff. Whereas we can read a story by a master like Chekov

or Henry James over and over again, where every turn is playing on the great instrument on which all stories worthy of the name, long or short, must play—the instrument of human nature—so various, so complex, so contradictory, so subtle, so amusing and so unexpected.

If one considers it, this is only natural. There is a primitive appeal in narrative, or anecdote. The earliest sagas contain little else; but as we develop we want to go a little deeper. A plain and simple record of incident, however heroic or amusing, could never satisfy the temper of our day. We have come to expect from the short-story much more than a series of incidents, however interesting they may be in themselves. Indeed this was probably always true among sophisticated readers. If, for example, we go back to the short stories of Boccaccio a great many of them may appear to consist wholly of an incident which is more or less—often less—surprising. But, if we weigh up Boccaccio we find that he did not win his reputation so easily: the lasting interest of Boccaccio is not the anecdote but the ironical comment of the whole collection of his *Decameron* on the foolish ways of human nature.

I think it is safe to say that unless a story makes this subtle comment on human nature, on the permanent relationships between people, their variety, their expectedness, and their unexpectedness, it is not a short-story in any modern sense. I can never be impressed by those people who tell us that the story of Jonah is a great short story, though, for its comment on human nature, I do believe that the story of Samson and Delilah is a great story. To put the matter quite simply, there is no reason on earth why any story should not contain an anecdote, and some of the greatest stories do, but an anecdote is not a story if that is all the story contains. In fact, it is an interesting matter to consider just how much anecdote even a good story can stand without appearing artificial.

Not until a writer has been a long time at his craft does he really harden his heart towards anecdotes. And I suspect that the reason why the practised writer avoids them is a wise reason: that the anecdote is a finished thing in itself, and that all that seems necessary is to get it down on paper at once. This in practice is what is wrong with it. A writer's mind is so much soil; an idea is the seed; the seed grows in his mind, swells and burgeons in his imagination, excites him as it stirs there, awakens other cells that stir and dance and form strange patterns and combinations, touch the cell of memory, the cells of desire, sets up in the uncharted geography of the brain a bubbling fermentation that finally overflows as the liquor of his art. It will have to be purified and matured and go through a whole lot of other painstaking processes after that—but there it is in its primal form. But the anecdote is already finished and complete! It is generally a husk, as far as its effects on the soil of the mind is concerned.

Over and over again one has this experience. Somebody comes to you bubbling with 'a good story.' At first one gets excited, and if the giver-of-gifts stopped there one might even still do something with the idea. But he goes on and on, developing, adding and completing, and the excitement evaporates slowly. What has happened is simply that he is not giving you an idea for a story at all. He has been giving you a finished thing which, for months, he has been writing in speech; which may be why so often good talkers, good raconteurs rarely make good writers. Writing is done at the point of the pen, in private, a secret business—a private communion with one's own daemon. All writers, while they are writing, are cave-dwellers; witch-doctors; poteen-makers.

Let us turn for contrast with that anecdote of O. Henry's to the lovely story of Chekov's called *Gooseberries.* (See page 248.) Here, a civil servant dreams of the day when

he will retire—as so many civil servants do. He will have a farm, a very little farm, just three or four acres, and a little cottage, and a gooseberry bush. The gooseberries become to him the symbol of the Simple Life. Time goes on, as time does, and he begins to amass rouble after rouble, as men do. But, then—and this is one of those unexpected touches with which human nature always surprises us—as the roubles accumulate the idealistic civil servant begins to get avaricious and ambitious. There is the first sly comment. Do not the dreams of youth always harden a little as we grow old? Lose their urgency, become in fact mere dreams—day dreams—deceiving us into constant procrastination? When we think of it do we not all know a dozen dreams of our own that we have silently discarded —so many little unrecorded defeats of the spirit?

So our civil servant gets older and older, and we find him marrying—not for love so much as for her money. And does this not suggest another comment on humanity —that it can fool itself into believing that the end justifies every means: so different from that noble ethic of the great Epicureans who held that the means justify the end? Presently the lady dies, and now the civil servant has a good deal of money, and at last he does retire, and he does buy a farm. But where has the Simple Life gone to? For it is an enormous farm; hundreds and hundreds of acres; and there is no gooseberry bush at all. (How the dream deceives us! Or rather how we deceive the dream!) However, he buys a score of gooseberry bushes and plants them, and one day his brother—who recounts the tale—comes to visit him, and finds him living in a very real sort of slatternly discomfort, the whole place shabby and untended —oh! very far from the simple dream in its pristine purity!—and they eat, and after the meal, in comes a plate of those symbolical gooseberries. They are the sourest, hardest, hairiest, toughest old gooseberries that Nature ever

produced out of a cross between a rubber-tree and a cactus bush. But the face of the civil servant glows. He beams. He takes the sour fruit and as he savours it, it is plain that, at that moment, he is the happiest man on earth!

It is one of the loveliest of stories. So much irony; so much humour; so kind and understanding; and wrapped up in the most delicate poetic mood. It is probably one of the most perfect stories in the whole of the world's literature. At the end of it the brother moralises—wondering how on earth people can so *deceive* themselves into being happy. Which gives the tale a double edge—for the brother is himself not happy; he has been cast into a most melancholy mood. By what? By the happiness of the man with the gooseberries. What is happiness?—asks Chekov, with a kindly ironical smile on his face, inviting us to answer as we will but never to forget that human nature is like that, an instrument playing tricks on itself.

There, then, are two famous stories. One is an anecdote, an ingenious tale, and the other has no anecdote worthy of the name. O. Henry has written a yarn—'a good one' as we say—perhaps a 'tall' story, perhaps in the after-dinner sense a good 'story,' but not, in any reputable sense, what we mean by A Short Story. In practice, we have to come to make an easy distinction. We speak of stories like O. Henry's as commercial stories—and I think we all understand the significance of that definition. In a commercial story there is either no ultimate comment or it is as obvious as a kick from a mule.

It would, one must insist, however, be absurd to go too far here and say that there is no place in the short-story for anecdote; far from it. All one may insist on is that anecdote alone does not make a story, and that it has to be kept severely in its place. I do not even think that the short-story has come to absolute perfection in the hands of Chekov. I would not agree that what perfection he has

achieved is the only kind of perfection; or deny that others have not written on other lines as finely as he did on his. His countryman, Gogol, for example; or Maupassant; or Robert Louis Stevenson. But I do believe that no writer of short-stories contradicts the fundamental principle about the very inferior importance of anecdote. To test this, let us take one of Maupassant's most famous tales which contains a well-turned anecdote: *La Parure*.

Here we have another civil-servant, with a pretty little wife. They are poor, as, no doubt, civil servants occasionally are. And being pretty and young she wants to go to dances, and receptions, and mix with people from the Legations and so on, as even poor folk do. One day they get an invitation to an important function, a dance—and for the occasion she naturally wants to look her very best. She can make do with her best frock, but she has no jewels, and she fears that without them she will look just as poor as she is. So she borrows a diamond necklace from a rich school-friend, and delighted, off she goes to the dance and has a thoroughly happy time. When it is all over she has to wake up her husband—who has gone to sleep in an anteroom, as husbands will—they go out, get a cab, and off they go, back to their home.

But when she puts her hand to her throat to remove the necklace it is gone! She has lost those priceless diamonds. They go back; they search: they put advertisements in the paper. All in vain. She dare not face her rich friend without them, so what does she do? She goes to the best jeweller in the city and she buys, on the instalment system, an identical necklace. So, that one really happy night of all her life becomes thereby the last happy night of her life; for, now, their poverty is ten times worse than before: they are sunk under this load of debt; and for years and years the two poor creatures slave to pay for those diamonds. Her pretty looks go. Her hair dries

up. The wrinkles come. And, then, after about ten years of this penury she meets her old school-friend once again and when her friend commiserates with her on her changed appearance, the once-pretty, still-plucky little woman says, proudly: 'It was all because of you.' And she recounts the sad tale. 'O, my dear child!' says her friend, in agony. 'But how unnecessary! Those diamonds were paste. I bought them for a few francs.'

Now, that is probably the most famous example in literature of what is known as the 'whip-crack ending.' Those who like Chekov do not like it—it is so hard and so cruel. Personally, I do not particularly like it, but that, I realise, is a mere matter of taste and not of judgment. But the essential point is that this story would still be an excellent story, and some have even held that it would be a better story, if the thing stopped short with the slavery of the little wife and if there were no revelation about the diamonds being paste, no whip-crack ending at all. Those critics maintain that the whip-crack ending is too artificial, too unlikely, too ingenious. In any case, the real merits of the tale as read, do not lie in the cleverness of that ending. The tale has won its spurs long, long before we come to the ending. It has revealed a segment of society in which life is cruelly compressed and wounded. Those two people, man and wife, are real; their surroundings are real—real, perhaps, in a large typical way rather than in the individualised way which is Chekov's way. They evoke our pity. In short, the story makes its comment on human relationships; though in this case the relationship is social rather than personal. And as I said at the beginning, every story that is a story will, unconsciously, do that.[1]

[1] It is, of course, a very good point that *paste*-diamonds had made her happy. But I doubt if Maupassant meant this ironical comment on the nature of happiness.

The test is the old test. Can we re-read *La Parure?* I think so; not as often, perhaps, as we can re-read a story with greater shades and subtleties, but still as often as, in forgetting the anecdote, we wish to make acquaintance with that little pretty wife and her patient husband and wish to be reminded of all they stand for. But we do not go back to it for the whip-crack ending, since the virtue of that ending ended when we first met it. We go back for the emotion which the seed of the idea created in Maupassant's mind long before he thought of the ending; and, in fact, it is pretty evident that the anecdote was a secondary thing to Maupassant's mind (if not an afterthought) —which, apparently, is what the anecdotal part of every short-story has to be.

There is a simple way of demonstrating the inferior interest of the anecdote in any story. Restate it in a sentence and how banal it will appear! Thus Prosper Mérimée's *Tamango* seems, in summary, merely to record how a shipload of slaves killed their masters and were, by hunger and disease, reduced to one, their black captor who had sold them in the first instance and then been shipped as a slave himself. Or suppose one were to say, 'I once read a story about a Frenchman lost in the desert who fell in love with a panther,' would that suggest the mystery and force of Balzac's *A Passion in the Desert?* Or could any summary even suggest (to one who had not read it) that Balzac's *The Atheist's Mass* is one of his most impressive tales: as—'It is about an atheist who went to Mass four times a year for the repose of the soul of a poor man who had helped him in his youth.' Or:

'One day the monks in a monastery where a famous *liqueur* was distilled found that their father-distiller was drunk, and indeed, for their sakes, damning his soul in drink; however, they got over this by saying every night, on his behalf, the prayer of Saint Augustine to

which is attached a plenary indulgence.' (Daudet's *The Elixir of Père Gaucher.*)

It is obvious that before any of these acorns can become trees two things must occur: the words will take flesh and the flesh will take after the father. In other words the created personalities will bring the fable alive and these personalities will seem projections of the creator's personality. The truth is that a writer imagines his subject into his own likeness. The subject of every story is therefore eternally virginal, eternally fructive. Nothing living has ever been written before. It is also true that every writer chooses (or imagines) like subjects all his life. Writers have a hundred wives and they are all after a pattern. It is not the subject that a man writes; it is himself. I cannot say it too often.

There is another test of the value of the ingenious anecdote. If we try to carry it forward a little beyond the point where the writer tends, so conveniently, to drop it we often find that its contrivance exposes itself. For example, the story of the little woman in *La Parure* is not wholly tragic. Maupassant does not remind us that since she had given back a diamond necklace for a paste one she is now entitled to the diamonds, and is therefore comparatively rich. It is, one may say, a small recompense; yet, the franc is such an important item in so many of Maupassant's other tales that one might well ask why he neglects it here. Likewise the O. Henry story which I have summarised need not have stopped where it did. Indeed it is, to a degree, a swindle. The girl's hair will grow again in a year and then she can wear the comb proudly and happily. Or she can return the comb, and he the watch-guard, and so buy back his watch and they will soon at least be where they were at the start of the tale. Realists are rarely as realist as they imagine.

All this leads us to observe, finally, that there are some fables which prove more solid than others as the basis of a story—fables that have none of the hollows that are always liable to occur wherever there is too much ingenuity. The strength of such simple subjects lies in the fact that the surprise they give us (usually a modest one) comes not from their complex contrivance but from the complex contrivance of human nature which they innocently reveal. To quote a modern example, I recall, with constant pleasure, a simple story by Ernst Ahlgren called *Mother Malena's Hen*.

This tale concerned a hen which old Mother Malena kept in the poorhouse and which was a seed of continual dissension among the inmates. She has a rival, Pernilla, whose son, Nils, has a horrid and annoying way of mimicking and teasing the hen. (One must accept that this is all built up in an amusing and vivid way and that one really does feel, smell and see the poorhouse, with the two old women, the hen, the horrid boy, the little daily round, the comically vast dissensions arising from so small a cause.) One day Nils flings a stone at the hen, which flies to the woodpile and lies there to recover. The hen is thus 'lost'; not until it is lost do the poor old women realise that they had enjoyed bickering about the hen, and that Pernilla has been a cruel baiter of old Mother Malena, and that, in effect, they are bereaved and lonely without the hen. In a few days' time the hen staggers out of the woodpile; the joy of the old women is boundless; they have a feast to welcome the prodigal hen home, and all are reconciled.

The anecdote here is so innocent that when we apply our simple test of restating it in a sentence we find that it vanishes completely. Thus one might say:—'The old women in our poorhouse were always bickering about a hen belonging to one of them, until it was lost, and then

they found that they had really enjoyed having it.' But, we observe, though the anecdote, such as it is, vanishes, the statement is not unmoving. Or if the reader finds it so I can only assure him that this is just the kind of sentence, casually dropped in conversation, that sets the imagination of a story writer to work. He will see the women, begin to formulate the atmosphere, guess vaguely at the possible humour of the characterisation, become eager to re-create the whole thing in his own terms. What will have interested him is not the incident—which had not been mentioned—but the play of personalities, and the accord between this human ballet and some music in his own head which is, so to speak, his theme-song. One can imagine him saying, 'Yes, yes, this is the sort of thing *I* like.' In brief, he is choosing a subject (to quote Maupassant once again) 'in full concordance with all the tendencies of his thought.' Or, as I have said, he is writing himself.

The stories of Henry James are good possible illustrations of this. True, they are not, properly speaking, short-stories. It is true, also, that they are not light stories, by which I mean that the handling is somewhat ponderous—they give us the feeling that a very stately gentleman in a very ornate coat, gilded and tasselled and tailed, with fine calves of white silk, is approaching us with a cup of aromatic tea in elegant china-ware on a vast silver-salver. It is also true that there are few of his stories that a modern writer could not, to their advantage, reduce to at least half their length; mainly because he *tells* too much, i.e. has almost no power of indirect suggestion.[1] But he does illustrate beautifully how much less important character is than incident; and he also makes for us the two distinctions which we have to make sooner or later, that situa-

[1] This will astound and infuriate his admirers. I can only say, 'Go back to the short-stories and see.' *The Real Thing* is printed at the end of this book, page 301.

tion is much more fructive than anecdote and that construction plus situation can supply all the plot we need.

Think of that amusing story *The Real Thing*. Two elegant people, a man and wife, approach an artist explaining they wish to be painted. They are evidently of a type that James particularly likes, people with a splendid façade, of elegance and worldliness, which conceals poverty and vacuity; though they are nice people and we come to like their ingenuousness and simple decency. This pair wishes to be painted for money, as models. To cut this rather longish story short the painter (who pot-boils with illustrations for novels and magazines) finds that 'the real thing,' i.e. a real gentleman and a real lady, are too rigidly what they are to be good models for what they are. The perfect model for the gentlemanly type is an Italian ice-cream vendor, and for the lady a clever little Cockney slut, both of whom can suggest grace and elegance without freezing it into a convention. The point is subtle; its gradual elucidation keeps us in amused suspense; when Major Monarch and his wife are confronted with Miss Churm and Oronte the situation is ravishing. But, the concocter of stories will say—'What happens? Where's the plot?' There is none, in his sense. The story does contain, however, as readers of the story will vividly recall, all those elements which the word plot suggests, such as contrivance, situation, suspense, invention, action; or all except, perhaps (and this is the one thing editors and public most insist on), climax. Climax in, at any rate, the conventional sense has to be sacrificed to that deeper verisimilitude which is the conscience of the modern writer. In *The Real Thing* what climax there is suffices; indeed it is searing to find Oronte and Miss Churm posing successfully as a gentleman and a lady while Major Monarch and his wife wash up the tea things.

It is, by contrast, almost painful when Henry James

attempts, or is tempted by anecdote in the old sense; as in *Paste*. There a dead parson's widow, once an actress, leaves behind her a quantity of stage-jewellery, which includes one valuable pearl necklace. Her stepson chooses, not unnaturally, to presume that, like the rest of the worthless stuff, the necklace is paste. The implications would otherwise be unpleasant. He hands over the entire heap of junk to his cousin. She discovers that the pearls are real and returns it to him, expecting him to persist, loyally, in denying that they are real. So he does. She next discovers that he has secretly sold them. One feels that the comment on the stepson's all-too-human nature is genuine, but that it has been at the price of an over-elaborate structure.

The Pupil is more pleasing, and more characteristic of Henry James' mind and technique. Here a tutor is employed by an apparently wealthy American family to coach their precocious but lovable child, Morgan. When the façade peels off gradually it appears that the tutor has fallen into the hands of a clutch of adventurers who rely on him to suffer penury and humiliation for the sake of his affectionate and sensitive pupil, who, it transpires, knows about his parents' shady technique of living, hates it and is ashamed of it. This is a wonderfully promising situation, though for a novel rather than a short-story. It ends with the final collapse of the rickety fortunes of the family and the death of the child: a climax, to be sure, but the climax of a novel rather than a short story. We can only be grateful that no effort has been made here to develop a plot: instead we move contentedly from one slight incident to another until it becomes evident that some catastrophe must bring down the house-of-cards, which is what so satisfactorily occurs.

The modern story-teller, then, has not dispensed with incident or anecdote or plot and all their concomitants,

but he *has* changed their nature. There is still adventure; but it is now an adventure of the mind. There is suspense, but it is less a nervous suspense than an emotional or intellectual suspense. There is surprise, and plenty of it; but it is no longer the surprise of the man who opens a door and finds that a corpse falls out, but the surprise of a man who opens a cupboard and finds that a skeleton falls out. There is climax, but it is not the climax of the woman who discovers her lost jewels in the hat-box but the climax of the woman who discovers her lost happiness in a memory. There is contrivance, but it is not the contrivance of the gangster who deceives his enemy, but of the citizen who deceives his friend. A great stock-scene in the old-fashioned stories of adventure is when the hero unmasks the villain. It has become a stock-scene in the modern short-story when the author unmasks the hero; or it is one of the commonest themes of Chekov when the hero unmasks himself.

For all these things some incident is, of course, necessary: one of the best definitions ever given of the technique of fiction is that action reveals character, and that character demonstrates itself in action—and action is only another word for incident. But incident now is merely a trigger—a tiny piece of mechanism which explodes a projectile that smashes some façade, or explodes some concentration of laughter, fancy, tragedy, or delight. And while we enjoy the external scenes of action, as in a play, and find therein all the natural pleasure of their vivid and rounded reality, yet it is surely not the mechanism we enjoy but the effect.

Let us take yet another example. There is a short story by Chekov called *The Chorus Girl*. It has all the things that any story with an anecdote has; yet, in the old, accepted sense of the word, it cannot surely be said to have a plot and certainly not an anecdote.

In this tale we find Nikolay Kolpakov and his chorus-girl mistress, Pasha, suddenly startled by a knock on the door of her summer-bungalow where the two lovers are staying. He hides in the bedroom while Pasha opens the door. It is Kolpakov's wife come to inform Pasha that Kolpakov has embezzled nine-hundred roubles and that the money must be replaced to avoid prosecution; Madame Kolpakov thereupon begs Pasha, emotionally and abusively, to give her the presents which her husband has presumably bought with the money so that she may replace it at once. Poor Pasha denies, truthfully, that she has ever received more than a few light baubles from the man, but she is harassed by the woman's tale and tears—Madame Kolpakov actually offers to go on her knees before the girl. Moved by the mother's picture of her children starving at home the chorus-girl finally and impulsively gives her every bit of jewellery she possesses. When Madame Kolpakov has gone away Kolpakov emerges, shaken and weeping at having seen his wife humiliate herself before his mistress.

'She! A Lady! So pure! So proud! Ready to go on her knees to a thing like you! And I brought her to this. I shall never forgive myself. Never! Go away, you slut! She'd have gone down on her two bended knees to *you!* O God forgive me!'

And contemptuously shoving Pasha aside he goes after his wife. Pasha already regrets her baubles, and flinging herself on the sofa begins to bawl. . . . So the story ends.

Can we say, by any stretch of the accepted meaning of the word, that this story is a plot-story? Yet, it has suspense, contrivance, climax, surprise, action, narrative. Let us, if necessary, call it a plot: but it is a plot in a quite new and purer meaning of the word. This refinement is one of the great achievements of the modern story.

The Chorus Girl is, incidentally, that typical Chekov theme—the unmasking theme. It is not an exposure of villainy. We are left wondering, rather, which character is at bottom the most decent: for all three of these unhappy people have revealed, in this trigger-incident of the husband's embezzlement, the admirable side of their natures—the loyalty of the wife, the impulsive generosity of the chorus-girl, even the husband's capacity for making some kind of honest admission of his own weakness; though he is, obviously, here merely a foil to the two women and is, indeed, a type commonly unmasked and mocked by Chekov.

The modern adventure, then, is an adventure through the jungle of human-nature. Permanent relationships that human nature cannot deny, and cannot conceal, are found hidden away in the depths of the heart. Some incident like the final act of a play is taken by the author, and with it he fires his rocket into the air, and things otherwise hidden in the darkness are for a moment revealed in the sizzling light. If he is a pessimistic man with a sad view of human nature he will reveal the unpleasant things. It is necessary that we should remember them. If he is, like Chekov, a born optimist, his little starlight crackling overhead may show us the better side of humanity. It is necessary that we should never forget it. He makes no moral observation; he leaves that to us. If his incident had revealed none of these things he would have been like a child ringing the fire-alarm when there was no fire.

With these examples before us we may conveniently drop the word 'anecdote,' replace it by the word 'incident,' and apply to it an adjective that would have been meaningless earlier; we may speak of 'significant incident'—significant, that is, of some aspect of human relations or of the way personalities reveal comically or tragically some aspect of life which interests the writer. On such

incidents the story-teller seizes joyfully. He has formed his image of life, desirable or undesirable; his notion of 'reality,' pleasant or unpleasant, and in such incidents he finds corroboration for it. It may (we may now use our words a little less pedantically) be a very romantic sort of reality; his image of life may be high fantasy; he may love to see personalities, for instance, not so much reveal themselves in terms of psychology as transfigure themselves in terms of poetry; he may be a comic writer or a satirist and love to depict the bizarre side of human nature; or be a pure lyrist; even have less interest in individual personality than in personality generalised—I am thinking here of Ronald Firbank, and the reader will readily think of writers who illustrate the other types. In every case a chosen incident is significant to a writer for his notion of the way things are, as some wash of light on a landscape may make a moment and a place so significant to a painter that he will want to paint it at once, or as some quality in a woman may make her so desirable to one man that he must possess her, while leaving another man indifferent or even averse. And these writers will quarrel a little with each other, and may prefer, each one, his own notion of the way things are. But none will deny his friend's truth; he will merely assert the greater importance of his own—unless, like Maupassant, he is supremely arrogant, or, like Zola, a narrow doctrinaire.

The incident is, then, supremely important after all, though not to the story but to the story-teller. In theory any incident will do for the story; but only certain incidents will do for the writer. We can only hope to see why this is so when we read a short-story writer's work in bulk and begin to perceive that certain like incidents have appealed to him, at which point his literary personality may begin to emerge coherently in terms of his favourite situations or favourite types. We may see, too, that once the

incident is embedded in the story its importance ceases, and that importance was and is purely subjective. Besides, in this the variety is endless and the nuances are not to be counted, and I have properly said only that we *may* observe a pattern, for it is a large hope and the writers themselves if asked why they chose certain incidents would be at a loss, being as a rule, and very naturally, unaware of their own prepossessions. Stevenson, for instance, had a very interesting prepossession, The Closed Door. Yet he does not mention it when speaking of the force of certain places and events. 'There is,' he says,

> 'a fitness in them; something, we feel, should happen. We know what, yet we proceed in quest of it. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry out for a murder. Certain old houses demand to be haunted, and certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck.'

We must add, on his behalf, that certain doors are fated to open on adventure; for he used this image, or symbol, or incident of The Closed Door with great effect more than once. He used it in that superb piece of outrageous romanticism, *The Sire de Malétroit's Door,* when a soldier fleeing from his pursuers presses back against a great oaken door in a dark alley and, on oiled hinges, it opens silently and closes automatically, holding the fugitive in an unknown darkness. He used The Closed Door in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*—that common door on the street, opening into Terror. It occurs in his story of François Villon, *A Lodging for the Night.*

Chekov once picked up an ash-tray and said he could write a story about anything—even an ash-tray—but it is not true; and he never did write a story about an ash-tray. He may have meant to convey something else; the cheerful advice which writers give to others is rarely intelli-

gible, as when he also said, helpfully, 'One has simply to write about how Peter got married to Marie.' We do know what he is trying to say there: that we must choose simple subjects, and be unaffected about them; one might as well tell a young man in search of a wife to 'choose a simple girl and to be unaffected about her.' A fat lot of help that would be!

When I come to sum up what I have so far said about the subjects of short-stories, I find that I, too (in that, at least, like Chekov), have said little that is not of a very general nature; that any young writer will only waste his time and invite disappointments and court base temptation by poking about for ingenious situations, or composing clever plots, and then some day he will suddenly discover that in the innocence of his heart, which this kind of whoring after cleverness destroys, he has remembered something that moved him, written it down without affection, and found it good.

Is there no more particular and positive advice that one can give to a young writer on this matter of suitable Subject? Very little, and at any moment a practised writer is liable to disprove it. The stories of Henry James, for example, suggest one particular point very forcibly—that there are subjects which, of their nature, are unsuitable for short-stories. Since James, with constant arrogance, chose these subjects and used them successfully, all one can say is that these subjects are most suitable for writers of Henry James' calibre. None the less he also fails from time to time, and his successes are of varying merit. Consider two of his best tales—I have already mentioned them—*The Real Thing* and *The Pupil*. The first is, in my opinion, both more successful and far more suited to short-story treatment because it lent itself to dramatic compression. This will become clearer when we are considering Construction; here it is enough to point to one

element in the tale which automatically makes for dramatic compression—it is localised in one place, the artist's studio. For reasons that, I presume, are obvious this frame of place will always appeal to a writer of short-stories. *The Pupil,* on the contrary, is obliged to sprawl since the boy's family and the tutor must wander from capital to capital, and likewise it must sprawl in time. Evidently the sprawling theme is more suitable for a novel, though short-stories do, occasionally, take big leaps both in time and space. We are not surprised to find that inevitably *The Pupil* took about twenty-thousand words; *The Real Thing* took about twelve-thousand. A careful pruner could have reduced *The Real Thing* to ten-thousand without loss and without difficulty, and as I dare to try to show further on, it could have been cast in a form of about five-thousand words.

The same is even more true of his delightful story *Brooksmith.* Here there is only one character, the Admirable Crichton who had been unassumingly essential to the success of Oliver Offord's *salon,* but who had himself so enjoyed the company that, on Offord's death, he is unable to fit into any less distinguished home. There is, here too, as in *The Real Thing,* a natural frame of place, Offord's fireside. And had James been forced to write *Brooksmith* for publication in a modern periodical I see no reason why he could not have discovered also a frame of time to keep the story within bounds. Both *The Real Thing* and *Brooksmith,* that is to say, are natural short-story subjects; but *Brooksmith* more so than *The Real Thing,* and either more so than *The Pupil.* The result is that *Brooksmith* fell into a mere eight-thousand words or so, and a writer less given to indulging a constitutional, if not professorial loquacity could have written *Brooksmith* in far less.

It is open to any devotee of Henry James to declare

that he would not sacrifice one word of these delightful Jamesian amblings. Neither should I. But this has nothing to do with criticism. It is as when people declare that *The Shaving of Shagpat* is better than *The Egoist,* or that Peacock is the most pleasing novelist in English, or that Corvo is a better guide to Venice than Ruskin, or that San Stephano Rotondo is a more wonderful church than Saint Peter's—the sort of perverse affection that marks a weariness with all criticism, and the stage when one prefers personality to perfection. The fact remains that Henry James' short-stories are not short, and that some of them are so monstrously ill-constructed that if they were buildings they would have fallen down long ago, *The Marriages,* for example, and that what one often most enjoys about these discursive tales is their discursiveness, a quality hardly to be recommended in anybody else but, perhaps, Henry James, and certainly not to be commended generally in a book of criticism.

The outstanding weakness of Henry James' short stories sums up a good deal of this chapter about Subject: he did not recognise enough that in short-story writing there can be no development of character. The most that can be done is to peel off an outer skin or mask, by means of an incident or two, in order to reveal that which is—as each writer sees this 'is.' The character will not change his spots; there is no time; if he seems likely to do so in the future the story can but glance at that future; if he seems likely to change at once, like Kolpakov in *The Chorus Girl,* we will have small reason to believe the change permanent. Naturally a writer will be attracted to subjects thus circumscribed and shirk subjects that require a series of incidents, or a prolonged experience, as development of character always does. If he cannot avoid a subject which will involve the passage of time he will labour to enclose it in some other frame—place, for example. See one of

James' best stories, *A Man of Fifty,* which is confined to Florence in order to compensate for the sprawl of time, and this time element is itself deceptively enclosed in the framework of a Diary. Once development comes in, it increases a writer's task enormously and few can surmount the difficulties. That story of James is a magnificent exception.

We must be cautious, finally, when sitting at the feet of the great. There are charming tales that wander: Chekov's *The Steppe*. A young writer might so fall in love with it as to find himself writing *Steppes* for years. It is well to know that Chekov did not see *The Steppe* as a short, or even a long-short story, but as 'a series of tiny stories, set in one general frame.' [1] Nor would one take *Gooseberries* as a model for a chapter of a novel because Chekov intended it to be that, any more than one would see as model short-stories those segments of novels which Henry James has presented to us under the guise of short-stories.

But it would appear that we are, imperceptibly, changing trains in our exploration of the short-story, and of Subject. We are, that is, beginning to think how subjects can be so handled as to make them 'suitable,' and may as well admit the fact with a fresh chapter-heading.

[1] *Anton Chekov.* Trans. and edited by S. S. Koteliansky. Page 20. (Routledge, 1927.)

7

On Construction

LET us look over the shoulder of a writer of short-stories after he has chosen his subject; after he has started with his idea. The word 'idea' is not a good word but it will have to do. It may, as I have intimated, be a prepossession of some kind, some scene or character that excites him, something which, in a manner inexplicable to himself, has an almost symbolical significance in his mind. I have mentioned one of Stevenson's prepossessions, The Closed Door. Let us watch him at work on *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*. He has got to the point where a soldier, fleeing from his pursuers, presses his back against a great oaken door and feels it, on oiled hinges, open silently and as silently close behind him, holding him imprisoned in an unknown darkness.

Let us watch Stevenson mould his principle about this image; by which I mean mould his idea of Life, as he himself has defined it, or made one of his characters in *The New Arabian Nights* define it:—'By Life I do not mean Thackeray's novels but the crimes and secret possibilities of our society and the principles of wise conduct among exceptional events.' It is the definition of a particular kind of romantic, or realist-romantic, but it is not very different to the ideas of other writers. It is mainly not a new idea but another literary vocabulary; for in 'exceptional events' we find 'incident' and in 'principles of wise conduct' we find that assertion of permanent 'human values,' or that adumbration of a civilised idea of society to

which Balzac or Chekov would have subscribed in other words but with like sense.

But, first, I must make one point quite clear. I have said 'mould his story . . .' I borrow that phrase from one of Stevenson's critics, Marcel Schwob. He said, 'As the smelter casts his bronze about the core of clay, Stevenson casts his story about the image he has called up.' This is an excellent phrase to describe the close construction of the short story, because it means that the tale clings to the original idea. Clings! Let me seem to digress further, with a very simple example. The other day a young man sent me a story to read. An old man was dying, and as he approached, day after day, nearer to his end, he kept asking that his son should come to him. This son had been away from home, and, unknown to the old man, the boy had been killed. The wife persuaded a friend of the family, a young man of about the same build and colouring as her dead boy, to go upstairs and impersonate her son. The friend went upstairs, and the old man accepted him as his son. Now, so far, good. There is an idea and the story so far clings to it. But at that point the casting slowly broke. When he had gone down the old man told his wife that he had known in his heart all the time that his son was dead. At that completely disconnected anti-climax the story fell away from the idea and the whole casting was ruined.

A story follows step by step the main idea. In that story the story followed its idea up to the point where the old man accepted the impersonation. Everything had so far followed logically. It was conditioned by the first step. The wife, her dying man, her scheme, her plan, then . . . the stairs stops in mid-air, and by another stairs a hundred miles away, and entirely unconnected with the first stairs, we get quite a new idea, or angle, namely the second-sight of the old man. I felt at first that the trouble

about that story was that the writer was uncertain as to his original image; so I asked him what he was driving at—what exactly it was that made him want to write it. Was it the old man, or his wife, or the impersonation, or what? To my surprise he said that what he was after was the contrast between the old man's vision of death and the quite human scheming of his wife—very much, for all its kind motivation, on the same plane as any wife's everyday scheming with any husband. This, I think, is a good poetic idea: this sudden sword of light thrust by Death down into the human, frail, workaday heart of petty life. It becomes apparent that, in that event, the weakness is that the bronze of the tale was cast about the wrong image. It was cast about the wife instead of about the husband. Naturally the tale does not 'cling.' A clever writer might, I agree, have inserted a contrapuntal technique between husband and wife. It would have given him a devil of a lot of trouble!

We may now come back to Stevenson's story *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*. The young soldier has meanwhile been hesitating in the hallway behind the door. What next? Stevenson makes him explore the house, and in the first room that he enters he finds, to his amazement, an old man, who is the Sire de Malétroit, sitting waiting patiently for him. Now, this strikes us as both astonishing and absolutely right, because if the door was prepared it must have been prepared for some purpose, by somebody, and somebody astute and cunning enough to do it. True, the question uppermost in our minds is, 'How did the Sire de Malétroit know that, by chance, the young man would come at that very hour to that door of all doors in the town?' Therefore the tale must cling to this conundrum. The Sire de Malétroit, an unpleasantly leering old gentleman, tells the young man that *the* young lady is waiting for him, and presently she is introduced. The young man

is further told that he must marry the lady before dawn—or die. The Sire de Malétroit retires and the young woman explains. She has been kept in that house as closely as if she were in a convent, but she has managed nevertheless to gain the attention and affection of a young officer in the town whom she had first seen at church. The unfortunate young hero of the story has been so unlucky as to come upon the door hitherto used nightly by this unknown lover. Her uncle has decided that she has disgraced him and that she shall marry her officer. A coincidence has been boldly foisted on us.

Stevenson has now got his characters into a first-class romantic situation. As we watch him proceed from this point we know that every step is crucial. One false note will wreck the story. But how is he to proceed? How is he to get his hero and this young woman out of the dilemma into which he has put them? First of all, the young soldier is the instrument. Secondly, the key-note is Romance. Thirdly, the atmosphere is Danger. The 'principle,' by implication, is Honour and Happiness. For this story is a prologue-story, as I venture to call all romantic stories, as compared with the epilogue-story, which I apply as a convenient term to all tragic stories. This story does not end somebody's illusions. It begins them. We may, however, rely on Stevenson. He had, as somebody said, a great art of embroidery. His stories weave themselves into a tapestry of purple and scarlet and marigold. If it were only on style alone he is certain to carry it off.

But let us keep our eyes glued on the construction. The night passes. These two young people are alone. To save the lady's honour the young man has decided to refuse to marry her, which is highly romantic though rather inconvenient for everybody, not excluding Stevenson. Then, as both he and she look at the great cliff outside and think of the armed men waiting in the ante-rooms, their hearts

are stirred towards one another, towards life, towards a great admiration on her part, and a great pity on his. There comes, just when it is emotionally due, the first touch of dawn—one of the most delicate descriptions of dawn in literature (and Stevenson was always excellent at natural description, and as it comes, the two young people are drawn irresistibly towards one another. By their love the problem is solved in honour and in happiness.

There is no need to examine the tale more closely here, but it is well worth the reader's while to examine it at his leisure, and when he does re-read it he will see how closely the tale clings to the line of its original image. It moves from darkness to morning, from danger to salvation, from storm to calm, in tune throughout with its own impulse and the expectation that it arouses, as logical as a sonnet whose opening theme dictates its end, never divagating from its own character, and though it is not a closely compacted story—for that was not Stevenson's way—it is in every part wholly relevant to the original mood.

As to what final 'principles of wise conduct' emerge from this highly exceptional event I think it would be straining a point to extract them explicitly. What we get, rather, is a feeling of elevation such as we always get when we live vicariously through some gallant enterprise in which a man carries himself bravely. A fresh and happy light has been flung across the face of life. A bright wash of colour has been drawn over the landscape of experience. Human nature seems a little nobler. But we must not strain the point, and it is no more really than happens when we read any romantic tale, such as one of Scott's, or any story in which the sight of men acting and doing is always invigorating. The point is that there is some point, and that the story is built up, or constructed, to carry it like a pennant, and that without it *The Sire de Malétroit's Door* would be merely a film-romance.

So much for the analysis, admittedly sketchy, of Stevenson's treatment of this subject. So analysed it looks straightforward and simple. 'Anybody could do it.' If he could think of it. But of what did Stevenson think? That we cannot know. What was the subject in the crudest alloy before Stevenson refined it to this perfection? That is the essential question about the construction of stories; not how a writer handles what one reads but what matter it was that he handled. What angle did the writer adopt to that matter? What line, what simplification, compression or distillation was it that made the subject fit into the mould of the short-story and so become a short-story? Perhaps the only answer is that given by Stevenson himself in *Memories and Portraits,* an answer which is sybilline but suggestive. (I italicise the parts which seem to me the more suggestive):—

> 'The threads of a story *come from time to time together and make a picture* in the web; the characters fall from time to time into *some attitude to each other or to nature,* which stamps the story home *like an illustration.* Crusoe recoiling from the footprint, Achilles shouting over against the Trojans, Ulysses bending the great bow, Christian running with his fingers in his ears —these are each *culminating moments in the legend* and each has been printed on the mind's eye for ever. . . . This, then, is the plastic part of literature: *to embody character, thought or emotion in some act or attitude* that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye.'

Sybilline, to us, because we would know what moment, which attitude, and which picture allured him in this tale, if, indeed, it 'came off' as he foresaw, and was not (as so often happens) replaced by some other arrangement which 'came together' or happily 'fell' into position, un-

planned. At least, however, we see the dramatic approach, and the compactness that resulted, as distinct from the discursive way of, say, Henry James. It would seem, in fact, that because of this approach Stevenson might be considered a better writer of episodes than of novels, as James was certainly a better writer of novels than of episodes.

One element of Stevenson's story reminds us of what we saw in examining *Owen Wingrave*. There is no real characterisation. The two or three people here are noble, pathetic or wicked gestures rather than recognisable individuals. As we saw, Henry James and Elizabeth Bowen permit themselves some little outlines of character. That is the realist convention, just enough reality to assure us that Mr. James and Miss Bowen are knowledgeable 'men of the world' and could expatiate further on character if they so wished. In this romantic convention situation does the work of characterisation. It is always so in romance; there is rarely even an outline of character; for in romance, as Yeats would have said, all character drops away and we are left with 'hard, gem-like flame.' True, realists as well as romantics exploit situation; but situation *alone* suffices for the romantic.

Balzac was almost a pure romantic when writing *La Grande Bretèche* and he used therein nothing but situation to prise out his kernel. What his kernel is, who can say? As Sir Walter Raleigh put it, in writing about R. L. S., the kernel of a romantic story appeals 'to the blood . . . to the superstitions of the heart,' never to the reason, and it is true that Balzac's story appeals to we know not what fears, hates, or 'anonymous desires and pleasures' (Stevenson's words). The Comte de Merret, the bald summary would run, discovers that his wife is unfaithful to him; taken one night by surprise her Spanish lover hides in a closet; the husband, having made the Countess swear that the closet is empty, bricks it up, and to all sub-

sequent entreaties he replies coldly that she has sworn on the cross that the closet is empty. This is elemental drama; Elizabethan in its diabolism; or else it is a fairy-tale of Beauty and the Beast, or of an Ogre and a Damsel in Distress. Like much of Balzac the theme and the figures are more than life-size, more pathetic and more cruel than normal. (Which is typical of all romantics. 'Art,' says Thomas Hardy, 'is a disproportioning of realities.') A more natural woman, a more Flaubertian woman, might have fallen into the same situation as the Countess; but since no Flaubertian man would have handled it with the diabolism of the Comte de Merret, she would not have been so angelically helpless. Balzac presumably knew this as well as anybody else. He knew that he was handling something as primitive as a folk-tale. Here, certainly, all character falls away and passion burns blue, for there is no explaining emotions so primitive. Characterisation is irrelevant here, even in the realist's outline. All one can do is re-create the mood, the atmosphere, affect our emotions and abandon rational persuasion.

It was this, I suggest, rather than the realist habit (though that, also was present) which made Balzac construct his tale in a manner that must, otherwise, be thought merely cumbersome. He first describes the abandoned château in all its mysterious gloom, isolation and decay; then the local lawyer who warns him to cease trespassing and reveals just a little of its strange story; then he describes how, in increasing curiosity, he tries to wheedle the whole tale from his landlady, and how she lifts another corner of the curtain, or, one is inclined to say, of the shroud. By this time we have heard of the death of the unhappy Comtesse de Merret, and of the unexplained disappearance of the Spanish refugee who had formerly stayed in this inn nearby. The narrator, having worked on our nerves and on our sympathy, finally prises

from the maid Rosalie the secret of the Comte de Merret, and it is significant that Balzac does not recount this interview with the maid, as he has recounted his earlier interviews with the lawyer and the landlady, but, having created his atmosphere of awe, tells the story in straightforward narration. In all this from start to finish the only efforts to characterise the Comte and Comtesse are, for her, the bare adjectives 'kindhearted' and 'pleasant'; and for him, 'quick-tempered,' 'proud' and 'lively' and 'agreeable to women,' adjectives so general that they might be applied to millions of men and women. All Balzac's labour has been concentrated elsewhere, on the creation of mood in preparation for the final situation.

One cannot say that the impressiveness of this tale lies wholly in this preliminary 'softening process,' for the final tale is told with a very real dramatic power; but if we make the test of omitting all the preliminaries and going straight for the last four pages, beginning 'The room which Madame de Merret occupied at *La Grande Bretèche* was on the ground floor,' we will find that the effect is far less impressive. I do not say that this form of construction is neat, and I think that the realistic desire for external verisimilitude and plausibility has affected the construction, though it did not dictate it. Stevenson's story shows that it is by no means necessary to such stories. Other good examples of the method used in *La Grande Bretèche* are Turgenev's *Punin and Baburin;* the preamble to Chekov's *Gooseberries* (which is linked with two other tales that should be read with it); Turgenev's *The Brigadier;* or, to a lesser degree, Maupassant's *Miss Harriet.*

Modern story-tellers have sought for greater compression than this. They aim to make situation and construction merge into a single movement and when they succeed they bring the short-story to its peak of technical

achievement. Elizabeth Bowen's *Her Table Spread* is a lovely example, in the romantic convention, of this merging. It compresses into the usual modern length of three thousand words material for which Turgenev would have needed twice or three times the space. The scene is Ireland, a castle on the coast, a rainy summer night, the candle-lit dinner table, a friendly party which includes the unromantic Mr. Alban from London, whom the heiress Valeria Cuffe is vaguely expected to marry. In the bay there is a British destroyer whose ambience, all the more romantic by its nearness combined with its inaccessibility, emotionally disturbs them all. Valeria is especially affected. She is a very romantic young lady indeed who has, apparently, dreamed much of 'the Navy' and of marrying one Mr. Garrett who had visited them the previous Easter, when another destroyer was anchored in the estuary. Mr. Alban plays Mendelssohn, and then a Viennese waltz, while Valeria, now quite overbalanced, rushes out into the wet bushes to look at the misty portholes, and hug her dreams under the leaves in the moist night-air, and wave a mad lantern out to the rain-pocked sea. Her uncle and poor, abandoned, self-pitying, civilian Mr. Alban go in agitation to the boat-house to search for her. There is a bottle of whisky in the boat and a bat in the rafters, and the uncle talks of marriage and the parlour-maid. The Irish are, it is evident to Mr. Alban from London, just as dotty as people say. He flies from the bat and the bottle, and runs into Valeria, now beside herself, crying joyously that Mr. Garrett has landed; indeed Mr. Alban *is* Mr. Garrett. It becomes a moment when even Mr. Alban is unmanned and manned, a fleeting mad moment of sheer abandonment to the excitement of the dark, wet summer's night, the creaking satin and the bare shoulders of the woman, a moment of rampant Celtic emotion. . . . The story concludes, or rather exhausts itself:—

'Perhaps it was best for them all that early, when next day first lightened the rain, the destroyer steamed out—below the extinguished Castle where Valeria lay with her arms wide, past the boat-house where Mr. Rossiter lay insensible and the bat hung masked in its wings—down the estuary to the open sea.'

The compression of this story is in such enormous degree due to the suggestive style (e.g. a word like 'extinguished' above, saves a whole phrase; or the word 'lightened,' which gives a double sense of brightness and diminution) that we should keep this most difficult part of the analysis for our chapter *On Language*. When we try to separate construction from situation the subtle management of the tale likewise resists dissection. I have long wondered whether the situation, the group, the place, or the atmosphere may have been felt first by the author; and whether Valeria came first, or Mr. Alban, and felt that nobody would ever know, least of all the author; for the story has such thirst and urge that it looks as if it had sprung from Jove's forehead fully armed, complete when first conceived. When I asked Miss Bowen this question she said that she saw a castle like this and wanted at once to write 'something' about it; only a somewhat odd and rather dotty girl seemed to fit the mood of the place. The 'mood'? But whose mood? We are back at the indefinable; a writer's own personality seeing things in her own unique way.

One may appreciate the cohesion of *Her Table Spread* by trying to imagine the story as Turgenev might have written it: the lonely girl (*a*), the remote place (*b*), the timid suitor (*c*), the anxious aunt (*d*), the Navy arriving (*e*)—step by step, leaf laid on delicate leaf, lyric note on lyric note. Here all occurs together. The three unities of Place, Time and Character weld everything like a

handgrip. For Place we keep to the castle dining-room, with a slight extension in lamplight to the garden (and for Mr. Alban and Mr. Rossiter a slightly wider but brief extension to the boathouse), all but Mr. Rossiter coming back to the dining-room for the climax. For Time, all occurs within about an hour, possibly two, except for the epilogue I have quoted, which passes to the following dawn. For character Alban is the focus. I cannot explain how much skill all this involves without a digression to what, for convenience, I call the technique of the camera-angle.

By camera-angle I mean the technique by which the writer of short-stories 'sights' his characters one by one without creating an uncomfortable feeling that we are wandering all over the caste; and without breaking the form of the story. As we read a short-story by Maupassant, or Chekov, or O. Henry, or Frank O'Connor, or Liam O'Flaherty, or A. E. Coppard—and as I mention the names a score or more of their stories pass quickly before me—we do not notice how the mental camera moves, withdraws to a distance to enclose a larger view, slips deftly from one character to another, while all the time holding one main direction of which these are only variations. This mobility as to the detail combined with the rigidity of the general direction is one of the great technical pleasures of the modern short-story.

One notes how, at the start, the writer decides on one character, or scene, for his general focus: e.g. in Stevenson's story the main character is the young man, Denis de Beaulieu. One may not note that while our attention is not deflected from him at any time in the course of the story several other characters join him from time to time unobtrusively; for it is only by a watchful re-reading of the story that one observes how gently these transitions are effected, and it is really only when one tries to write a

short-story for oneself that one realises how difficult it is not only to decide on the angle, but to make those variations on it.

Technically that story of Stevenson's is pretty elementary since nothing is easier than to make an entire story pass through the mind of one character, or to make one character the direct centre; which is how most stories are written. There are many interesting ways of doing it. I have underlined the fact that in the short-story suggestion is everything, and that direct telling is employed as little as possible. Likewise it becomes the highest craft in a tale if the angle is, so to speak, concealed. Read for instance (page 333) one of the finest of modern Irish short-stories, Frank O'Connor's *In the Train*. This is a story about a woman who poisoned her husband. What is O'Connor's angle? He takes the story long after its obvious climax; he shows us the acquitted woman, the Guards, and the witnesses, all *coming back* in the train to their home. But within that general setting with what subtlety the camera slowly approaches, one might almost say coyly approaches, the central figure. We get glimpses of her through the minds of almost everybody else before at last the camera slews full face on to the woman the story is about. That is a beautiful piece of technique. Beside it, technically speaking, Stevenson's story is child's play. It is in such stories as *In the Train* that the alertness of the reader, on which every short-story writer counts, is tested to the full, and I cannot say too often that the modern short-story is based on the most highly perfected technique in prose-fiction; and that we read short-stories not only for their matter or content but for the joy we get out of seeing a craftsman doing a delicate job of work. It would be the obvious thing, in O'Connor's story, to show us the woman actually in the thick of the crime. It would be less obvious to follow the crime through the course of

the trial, and this device has frequently been employed. But what O'Connor was interested in was the kind of life the woman was going to lead in that little western village for the rest of her years. There, again, the obvious thing to do would be to depict her living that outcast life. Or it might be less so to show her as a very old woman, and to extract from her or from some friend in her old age, the story of her life. That device has also been employed. There are many ways in which the author might have fixed his camera. The time and position he chose, midway between the woman's past and future, in those few hours in the train joining her two lives, proposing her story as her friends and neighbours will see it, has the great merit of keeping a unity of time and place, a compact unity, while suggesting a large range of events and ideas.

This matter of the angle is paramount. It is a way of answering the question, 'What is the story about?' without being too obvious in the answer. So, I remember reading a story somewhere about a daughter which was really a story about the father, as did not appear until the last few lines. Or, in that story of Chekov's *Gooseberries,* the story was ostensibly about one man, and was so, but when we close the book we find that the narrator, the brother of the subject of the tale, has also unconsciously been revealing himself.

This kind of delayed action, this subtlety in the exposure, is not achieved easily, and no young writer of stories should attempt it at the start. He should be content if he succeeds in making his little human revelation in the simplest way, and as he becomes more sure of himself, and as his 'personality' becomes more complex the technique of construction will have to become subtle and complex also.

Having explained what I mean by camera-angle we can now come back to *Her Table Spread,* and observe how

Elizabeth Bowen, while presenting a number of characters, has kept her Unity of Character. I have said that Alban is the focus. The story opens with him. 'Alban had few opinions on the subject of marriage . . .' When the other characters steal into the story we may still feel that it is he who is observing them; some reaction from him is indicated in each paragraph to convey this impression of his pervasiveness. The fourth paragraph breaks into conversation, and the atmosphere of excitement is gradually released. Conversation is every writer's favourite way of escaping from his centre to his circumference. Everybody may share it. All overhear. The writer vanishes. And Mr. Alban may see as well as hear. They have been speaking of the Navy's visit last Easter:—

'Will they remember? Valeria's bust was almost on the table. But with a rustle Mrs. Treve pressed Valeria's toe. For the dining-room also looked out across the estuary, and the great girl had not once taken her eyes from the window. Perhaps it was unfortunate that Mr. Alban should have coincided with the destroyer. Perhaps it was unfortunate for Mr. Alban too. For he saw now he was less than half the feast . . .'

That rustle of Mrs. Treve's skirt is delicate. He could have heard that. One may presume that he looked up and saw Valeria staring out of the window. The next two sentences belong to anybody. Mrs. Treve's thought? Guessed at by Mr. Alban? They are interesting sentences, technically, because they illustrate how a writer may, having slipped his camera across a scene which includes the main character, quietly pick up other characters on the way. There is, as it were, an elastic bond of thought that ties us to the main character; we may stray from him quite a distance.

There is a nice example of this gentle truancy in the

paragraph which follows; the reader will observe the sentence where we slip from Alban to their thoughts of him, and, later, where the writer slips in her own comment on him. (Valeria has meanwhile skipped out into the garden.)

> 'In the drawing-room, empty of Valeria, the standard-lamps had been lit. Through their ballet-skirt shades, rose and lemon, they gave out a deep welcoming light. Alban, at the ladies' invitation, undraped the piano. He played, but they could see he was not pleased. It was obvious he had always been a civilian, and when he had taken his place on the piano-stool—which he twirled around three times rather fussily—his dinner-jacket wrinkled across his shoulders. It was sad they should feel indifferent, for he came from London. Mendelssohn was exasperating to them—they opened all four windows to let the music downhill. They preferred not to draw the curtains; the air, though damp, being pleasant tonight, they said.'

To be sure, we do *not,* in reading for pleasure, observe anything very technical here. It would be obtrusive technique if we did. Indeed, it would not be technique at all since the function of technique is to create illusion, not to break illusion by poking its nose through it. There are hints and suggestions in that paragraph which we will quite unwittingly take; for example, they do not listen well—they get up in the middle of the music to open windows; they speak of the weather. There is more to it than that. They are troubled by Valeria's behaviour and seek to excuse it. 'The air is damp, but it's pleasant,' they said. It is natural for Valeria to have wished to stroll in it. This is true short-story writing; beautiful suggestibility all through.

The camera has stayed long enough away from Alban, so the next sentence returns full-face. 'The piano was damp but Alban played all his heart out . . .' etc. 'The piano was damp.' What compression of suggestion there! This is genuine poetic realism. Damp. The wet night. Neglect all round. The untended castle. And poor Alban playing his civilian heart out on the damp keys while they chatter. More general conversation allows the camera to wander again and this time the atmosphere becomes hysterical, and floating away on it, in the middle of a waltz played by Mr. Alban (still, doubtless, brooding on himself, on her, on everything), Valeria is given the stage, racing past the window with her mad lantern. This is the most daring part of the story, and it comes off. She has robbed the stage from Alban and done it triumphantly. After two pages in which she and her crazy romantic dreams hold all our interest we return to Alban. He and the uncle go down to the boat-house in the rain after her and there is some secret drinking and maudlin chatter about marriage. When he flies from the boat-house he and she will rush into one another in the darkness, and she will take him into her dream and he will, in his woe and excitement, respond to her wild fancy and the climax will mount and topple. That moment is an emotional *tour de force*.

Not until we are thinking back on the story, perhaps days after, do we realise that it all began and ended with Mr. Alban, and yet was called *Her Table Spread*. It had been a story about a *girl's* romance all the time.

Naturally, Elizabeth Bowen was probably unaware of her own cleverness in all this; long practice, a gift of emotional combustibility, a great gift of words, an eye of a hawk, a special sympathy for the Valeria type—in one form or another Valeria turns up in all Miss Bowen's

novels—combined to cast this perfectly fashioned story as freely and as unconsciously and as perfectly and as successfully as a fisherman casts his invisible line.

If one wishes for a criticism of comparison I suggest that one might read, after *Her Table Spread,* Henry James' *The Beast in the Jungle*. If there ever was a waste of words here is utter squander. Everything is presented with an air of the greatest subtlety which, since the point is not subtle, can only make any normal reader resent the masculine self-importance of the presumption that we must approach the obvious on tip-toe. It is a tale about a gentleman who believes his solemn self to be fated for some appalling catastrophe. A kind woman agrees to watch beside him, through the years, for the coming of the Beast. She dies, telling him that the visitation has happened but that he will never know it. I really cannot say which must seem the more humourless, James in recounting (at great length), or I in repeating, that the Horror which this ass —the word is used early on with a brief flash of good-sense that lamentably disappears—has experienced is his failure to love the lady. He makes the momentous discovery in the last lines (about forty pages after the reader has presumed it), flinging himself with an appalling obviousness on his silly face across her tomb. Somebody like Oscar Wilde would have written the fable in a couple of thousand words, perhaps far less, and he would have done it simply by presuming that his readers had at least enough of his own mother-wit to be able to see a haystack without needing to be buried in it.

The stories of Henry James offer us many pleasures. One pleasure, to be expected of the short-story, which they do not offer is the eloquence of form. It is not merely that his stories are too discursive; in a sense they are not —in the sense that since he does not aim at form he may as well give us this other pleasure, and that no amount of

pruning will therefore give us an alternative pleasure: I have printed here (see page 301) his delightful study *The Real Thing* with possible, and indeed legitimate, prunings, indicated by square brackets. They are legitimate on such counts as that what I would excise has told us only what we might presume; or that he has indulged in passing personal comment irrelevant to the kernel of the tale, or in illustrations, or elaborations which savour of self-indulgence, or even of sheer laziness. Thus, when he says that his two characters 'were visibly shy' we might be expected to gather this for ourselves; or when he says 'after all they were amateurs' this is something too obvious to need statement; and the largest pruning would remove a whole character and incident, the conversation with Hawley, a cumbersome piece of machinery which bursts apart the shape of the story, simply because James could not be bothered to convey the point which Hawley makes in a more subtle and economised way. Such pruning, which is quite different to the vulgarity of 'digesting,' comes to a total of about six-thousand words, and reduces the story to about four-thousand. But it does not give it literary form. Form is living and conceived, not subtracted or amputated.

The Real Thing might have been written in as many ways as there are writers to respond to the theme, but whoever should write it as a genuine short-story must see it in a framework of unity. James omitted only one thing. He placed it in the artist's studio from beginning to end, and saw it through the artist's eyes. This compactness pleases. He focused his camera clearly on Major and Mrs. Monarch and this clarity is satisfying. The passage of time is not obtrusive though it is felt sufficiently to suggest a certain degree of sprawl. The reader will observe that there is virtually no characterisation—Major and Mrs. Monarch are little more than social types, nicely defined,

though her kindness is evident, and in my prunings I have been careful to leave in the incident of her rearrangement of the model's hair, since that is a nice and useful touch of character; and the loyal affection of husband and wife is also touching. This is quite enough characterisation for the realist convention (a point I have fully dealt with in the chapter *On Convention*). Situation is, as usual, necessary to fill in these light outlines, and the story is based on one of the happiest of situations. We have, therefore, almost everything requisite. All that is needed is that construction shall be added or merged with situation to give dramatic compression and eloquent form. This is the one thing missing. Henry James either would not or did not know how to construct his shorter tales into a satisfying form.

It must be said, however, that his stories have a special vertebrate quality of their own which, if not exactly form, is at any rate anatomy: he moulded the flesh about an *intellectual* idea. Perhaps he merely hung it on his idea? Here his idea is that 'the real thing,' e.g. a real gentleman, may be such a conventional reality that it loses all the plastic quality of life. He may even be proposing that the lower orders, as represented by the Cockney and the Italian ice-cream vendor, have more plasticity because more reality? It will rest with each reader to measure the interest of this proposition which James chases hither and over like a retriever, though I am not sure that he does not also tend to chew the game. But though one may happen to have a strong personal liking for stories with an intelligent point to them the fact remains that point is not form. Henry James' stories dangle from his point like tapestry trailing from a hook.

Tugenev also liked to unfold his stories, but just when one begins to be a little oppressed by the long dangling scroll he will very quietly fold it up again. Think back on

The Brigadier. A narrator, an 'I,' comes to fish and hunt in a remote country house; his host does not arrive for some days; in the interval he meets an old character, the Brigadier, whose story he unravels bit by bit—the story of a life well, or ill, lost for love. It is true that the narrative trails, but it does not trail more aimlessly than woodbine through the hedges, whereas the trailings of Henry James are old-man's-beard. Furthermore, the typical Turgenevian lyrical atmosphere hangs over it all, and at the end, when the friend arrives and an old key-letter from the Brigadier is produced it has the effect of a sad summary and recapitulation, a sort of fugal *da capo*. Finally there is a slight epilogue to murmur *Requiescat*. These are slight tricks, one may say. They are graceful. One appreciates them.

James, working in a somewhat similar leisurely way, does not make these efforts. Perhaps he prized his intellectualisations so much that they over-absorbed him? Recall the story once more. Major and Mrs. Monarch come, ask for a sitting, are mistaken for patrons, prove to be models, and induce the artist to test them. The intellectual idea enters at once, with the 'real' model, Miss Churm. So does a new situation, or a restatement in even more intriguing terms of the old one, which has also the great merit of merging the two problems, the intellectual and the human. So far the movement of the story is perfect. All I would excise are some prolixities amounting to repetition; the 'cutting' process which any writer may legitimately do after his first draft. It is after this that the story begins to sprawl. There is too much by far about Miss Churm, and although the second, or Italian model is a defensible extra character on the grounds that he balances the Major as Miss Churm balances his wife, he is a mere repetition of the same idea. (He has great charm, and one would be sorry to lose him, but in short-stories

one is always sorry to lose something or somebody.' But the Hawley intrusion is quite indefensible since it means that what should be integral to the situation is managed quite apart from it in a sort of choral interlude of some sixteen hundred words! It is also regrettable that we have to allow so much time to pass over our heads before we come to the point where it is realised that the 'real thing' is not so real after all. Unity of time and character have by this quite gone by the board and the sense of dramatic compression has evaporated under the benevolent sunning of the Jamesian style.

It can only be said that a more skilful, or a less indulgent writer would have laboured to compress the theme into, if it should be possible, a single occasion. For that Hawley must go, and either Miss Churm or Oronte should go, and the artist might come to his sad, and interesting, conclusion quickly. Some incident is demanded which will cap the situation so well arranged in the first two sections: or some further twist of character, such as (I throw out the suggestion more to illustrate what could be done than to suggest what might be done) a greater degree of perception in Mrs. Monarch. It would help her to see, at once, face to face with the grace and suggestibility of Miss Churm that she and her husband would never do. It may be that it would have been wiser to focus the camera on her alone from the start. This is what I mean by saying that it is not a question of cutting to produce compression but of recasting the whole situation in terms of form; in short of tearing it all down and reconstructing it from the start. It would, of course, be stupid to have suggested this to Henry James. His temperament and talent were not of this order. Yet, it would not have been obtuse to point out to him that Turgenev, whom he so much admired, found ways of satisfying a temperament and exploiting a talent not inferior and not

very different (the intellectual bent apart) to his own, while labouring equally on the shape as well as the content of his tales.

Before closing this chapter I must foresee one very natural criticism. Somebody may well say, 'What is all this elaborate nonsense about? Take any story by Hemingway and what part does all this wonderful technique play in it?' First of all, I confess that I have no great liking for the dissecting-room; though if there is no other way of demonstrating the skill and beauty of Nature's work it must be done. Secondly, not even a Hemingway can do without technique, though he may pare it to the bone. Read again that story of Hemingway's which is probably one of the best stories he ever wrote, *The Light of the World*. It is the one about the three fat whores and the two peroxides in the station ticket-office, the homosexual cook who washed his hands in lemon juice, the three Indians, the Swedes and the hang-abouts who say nothing, and the two bums on whose behalf the story opens with the marvellous sentence: 'When he saw us come in the door the bartender looked up and then reached over and put the glass covers on the two free-lunch bowls.' While they all sit round, chaffing, somebody mentions one Steve Ketchel and one of the peroxides, hitherto silent, breaks into a histrionic threnody of praise and lamentation for the 'greatest, finest, whitest, most beautiful man that ever lived, Steve Ketchel, and his own father shot him down like a dog.' Whereat the fattest of all the whores, who has been shaking with laughter at everything up to this, begins to shake with tears, and a quarrel lights up between her and the peroxide, who, she says, is a dirty liar (as she obviously is) who never in her life layed Steve Ketchel. But Steve Ketchel, she sobs, did speak to me once. He said,

> ' "You're a lovely piece, Alice."
>
> ' "He said it," Alice said and smiled. "And I remember when he said it, and I *was* lovely then exactly as he said, and right now I'm a better piece than you, you dried-up old hot-water bottle."
>
> ' "You can't insult me," said Peroxide. "You big mountain of pus. I have my memories. . . . Leave me with my memories, with my true, wonderful memories." '

So they quarrel over their past, miserably and unhappily, and everybody is moved and embarrassed. But Alice is smiling now, and the first bum sees that she is really pretty, and kind, and attractive and he believes in her. ('But my God she was big. She was as big as three women.') The second bum sees him looking at her and drags him away. That is all. A warm, human story, full of emotion.

Technique? Unity of place, a railway-station; of Time as long as it takes to tell; of Character, two bums. Characterisation; nil. Poetry; full of it, unanalysable. Principle, idea, kernel, core, comment; it is in the title. Construction; two bums are thrown out of a bar and fall into a station, and fall out of it again, and pick up misery and pathos on the way. Form; in and out and in and out; as simple as could be. Suggestibility; nothing whatever is 'told,' except for the first sentence, and that compresses two lives in two lines and three words. Subject; a whore's despairs? Nobody ever wrote a good story without as much technique as that.

But I am willing to agree that it is, perhaps, unnecessary to write a book to explain all this, and if some reader says that all one has to do in order to write short-stories is, apparently, to feel something desperately and to say it in the least possible number of words, I agree to that also.

I may have used too many words in saying so.

8

On Language

THE short-story writer's problem of language is the need for a speech which combines suggestion with compression. One could underline the 'with,' because there is, of course, a great deal of suggestibility also in the novel, but the effects aimed at are, as it were, at artillery range. In the short tale it is hand-to-hand fighting all the time: one may, to keep up the metaphor, win a height at the end of the struggle and see a large perspective, but there can be little or no loose movement up to that point. If I have to choose one word to describe short-story language I would either say that it is engrossed, or that it is alert.

At the very opening a writer, at any rate a modern writer, must make an immediate and intimate contact with his story. For this reason, I confess, I tend to judge most of the stories I read by the opening sentences. When I say this I am not thinking of beauty of phrase, or the rhythm of the sentences, or anything of that sort. I am thinking only of this one kind of effectiveness: do we strike the key-note at once?

Hemingway's story which we have just looked at has a perfect opening. Here is a caricature of the kind of language which absolves one, immediately, from reading beyond the first two or three sentences. (Nor is it very much of a caricature. These four sentences have come from manuscripts sent to me by would-be writers of the short-story):—

> 'The sun was tinged with gold. The perfume of the roses mingled with the warm heavy scent of evening. The last bird was warbling on a hawthorn. It was a breathtaking moment. . . .'

Now, this is not merely atrocious English (we are not chiefly interested in that, for the moment), but it is also specifically quite unworkable as short-story English. In a novel it would still be atrocious, but it would not be unworkable, though admittedly on a low level. What is wrong with it is that it is not particular to any special occasion. It is not getting us anywhere. It is entirely general and vague; and a short-story is not a general or vague experience; it is isolated and special.

How could such language get anywhere! This warm, heavy scent of evening? What is this particular evening smell? Does one state some phenomenal incident in saying that the roses mingled their smell with this other smell, whatever it was? Are these rose-smells not already part of this general undefined smell? The writer is merely waving words vaguely around his head like a child with a veil at a suburban ballet-class. Can anyone *see* the sun 'tinged' with 'gold'? What dying gladiators of words! While as for 'warbling'! And 'breath-taking'! One can only advise such sinners to purchase Fowler's *Modern English Usage* and masticate such meaty bits as the articles on 'Novelese,' 'Working and Stylish Words,' 'Formal Words,' 'Stock Pathos'—e.g. 'a lump in his throat'—and 'stricken,' and so on. This general vagueness and fuzziness might—though not by any person of discrimination—be tolerated in a novel where the mere interest of the anecdote induces one to read on for that entirely meretricious purpose of 'seeing what happened'; but a short-story has chosen to lift some particular and special expe-

rience out of the maze of life for close diagnosis, and no moment of life worth special experience could possibly be introduced by such sleepy slaves as those sentences.

There is something so unmistakably alert about the language of the short-story that we could not often, for instance, mistake the openings of short-stories (of even not-so-modern stories) for the openings of novels. Try it for yourself. Here are six openings; some of them are from short-stories, some from novels: and I may remark that it is quite difficult to give even tolerably fair examples, so obvious are the novelist's openings, such as:—'On the 15th of September, 1840, about six o'clock in the morning, the *Ville-de-Montereau* was ready to sail from the Quai Saint-Bernard, and clouds of smoke were pouring from the funnel,' which is the opening of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*. Here are the six examples. As you read I invite you to say which opens a short-story and which a novel:—

1. 'For several days on end remnants of the routed army had been passing through the town, mere crowds of disorderly fugitives that had once been soldiers.'

2. 'The rambler who, for old association's sake, should trace the forsaken coach-road running almost in a meridional line from Bristol to the south shore of England, would find himself during the latter half of his journey in the vicinity of some extensive woodlands, interspersed with apple-orchards.'

3. 'Since the days of Adam there has been hardly a mischief done in this world but a woman has been at the bottom of it.'

4. 'There they sat, the three of them, Old Bertelsen and his two sons, Karl and Kristian, talking together in subdued voices.'

5. 'The professor received a telegram from the Lyalikov's factory: he was asked to come as quickly as possible.'

6. 'Take a smoky Western city. Call it Omaha or Kansas City or Denver, only let the Mississippi flow past it.'

I am sure you will at least have picked out as novels, numbers two and six. In fact you will be wrong, but not to be blamed for it. The second opening is from Hardy's *Woodlanders;* but the sixth is a short-story by a man not good at short-stories, and in essence a novelist, Theodore Dreiser, and his opening is a novelist's opening. Numbers one, four and five are characteristically nervous openings to short-stories. If you think the first not so nervous you might again feel justified, for it opens Maupassant's *long*-short-story *Boule de Suif,* and has just a shade of that story's leisureliness. There is one extract which is deceptive: the third, from *Barry Lyndon.* A short-story might well open that way, direct and to the point.

This eagerness to make immediate contact dictates something which may at first sight appear contradictory. It is that the style is retarded accordingly. The apparent contradiction will arise, if it does arise, from a confusion between alertness and speed. They are two different things. A man may be standing still and yet be alert. The immediate contact implies an intimate contact, and intimacy comes from alertness as to the value of detail and alertness as to the best way to exploit it. The inexperienced writer may think that in a short-story one must hurry since always at his back he hears Time's winged chariot; and there is so little Space. The contrary is true. The more space and time you have the faster you can go in fiction. The reason is simple: if you have much space, as in a novel, you will choose a large theme, probably have many characters, a complex design, and you have to get on with it. In a short-story one concentrates. Naturally the style is retarded. In a novel the effect is large and

heavy and the mood establishes itself by an imperceptible mass-movement, all possible subtlety and delicacy notwithstanding. But although the whole mass moves as a mass, and so looks slow, it is really sweeping onward rapidly.

One may, it is true, build up a novel touch by touch; but the touches are farther apart since so much has to happen in between, and if one tries to put in too many the effect is breathless. One may want to wind oneself into every cranny, but these thrusts of event insistently block the crannies. We know the fate of novelists who deliberately hold up the event to describe minutely or to moralise: it is the Select Audience or else the Abridged Edition. One may wrap every chunk with sensibility and point it with the slyest intelligence; it is the *chunk* that one so colours, not the detail inside the chunk. Let us see some examples.

Take this incident by Stephen Crane—the author of the famous *The Open Boat* and *The Red Badge of Courage*. It is from a story called *The Monster,* and describes how, during a fire, the acid on a laboratory bench topples over and drips on the face of an unconscious man lying on the floor. Note the slow style, as well as the accumulation of detail:—

> 'There was a row of jars upon the top of this desk. For the most part they were silent amid this rioting, but there was one which seemed to hold a scintillant and rioting serpent.
>
> 'Suddenly the glass splintered, and a ruby-red snake-like thing poured its thick length out upon the top of the old desk. It coiled and hesitated, and then began to swim a languorous way down the mahogany slant. At the angle it waved its sizzling molten head to and fro over the closed eyes of the man beneath it. Then, in a moment, with a mystic impulse, it moved again, and the

red snake flowed directly down into Johnson's upturned face.

'Afterwards the trail of this creature seemed to reek, and amid flames and low explosions drops like red-hot jewels pattered softly down it at leisurely intervals.'

A novelist employing so carefully incised an English as this would produce but few books; their movement would be of the slowest; and the effect would probably become intolerable after a time.

Compare this slow meticulous style with that of a novelist, even of a novelist who does load every rift with ore, who does caress her details, who makes every word work: the first page of Elizabeth Bowen's *The House in Paris.* Note that there is no lack of detail, but note, too, that, as I have said, the entire chunk is working towards the observation of the final sentence of the paragraph. For where the short-story writer seems to work with the sentence, and the word in it, the novelist works with the paragraph, or even with the chapter. Then note the unexpected thing, that the style in this unit is swifter than if there were less time and space:—

'There was just enough light to see. Henrietta, though dazed after her night journey, sat up straight in the taxi, looking out of the window. She had not left England before. She said to herself: This is Paris. The same streets, with implacably shut shops running into each other at odd angles, seemed to unreel past again and again. She thought she saw the same kiosks. Cafés were lit inside, chairs stacked on the tables: they were swabbing the floors. Men stood at a steamy counter drinking coffee. A woman came out with a tray of mimosa and the raw daylight fell on the yellow pollen: but for that there might have been no sky. These indifferent streets and early morning faces oppressed

Henrietta, who was expecting to find Paris more gay and kind.'

I have deliberately chosen a paragraph by one of the most subtle and sensitive modern prose-writers, whose novels are, indeed, to be read almost with as much care as a short-story. Yet, even here, note the difference. Note the information conveyed—the sweep of the pure fact: that Henrietta has been travelling all night, is English, has not been in Paris before, and is touched by foreboding. Note, especially, that for the first two or three sentences that might be the opening of a short-story: but the paragraph moves quicker and quicker, and finally debouches, like an estuary, into the large expectation, or expansive delta of a novel. It is not that eel-trap on a weir with which a short-story closes in the attention to a fine point of some constricted, temporal and local preoccupation. (Compare with the opening of *Her Table Spread*, which narrows at once to a junction between two people: page 352.)

If we turn to almost any short-story by the same writer we note two things: the eel-trap or immediate convergence on the moment; and that the paragraph is not the unit here—the sentences are all of equal value. Take the opening paragraph of a story called *The Little Girl's Room* in the volume *The Cat Jumps*. Word is laid on word, sentence on sentence; the writer is as completely engrossed as Stephen Crane was:—

'This is Geraldine's moment. At a nod from Mrs. Letherton-Channing, carefully guarding the flame of her taper, she passed round the circle from cigarette to cigarette. The little girl's serious movements, the pretty shell of her hand, the soft braids of her hair as she stooped, swinging over her shoulders, the soft creak

of her plaited sandals as she stepped, cast some kind of spell on the talk: silence followed her like a shadow.

'At first Clara Ellis frowned: talk of a first-rate scandalous quality had been held up. But: "Why," she exclaimed, glancing at Geraldine's arm, "you freckle just like a cowslip!"

'"Do I?" blushed Geraldine . . .'

By comparison with the novel, whose paragraph had so much completeness, we have got nowhere as to the action; yet, we are in the middle of the effect, to use Poe's word: though what that total effect will be we shall not know until the very end. The short-story is one elaborate self-contained chunk, and the language is engrossed to match.

How much engrossed? We hardly realise, to-day, so accustomed have we become to modern style, how far the process has gone.

Madame de Sévigné, we remember, said, 'Une feuille qui chante.' Not 'L'oiseau fait entendre sous le feuillage son chant joyeux.' The leaf sings. Language makes these leaps, of right, in poetry, by extension in prose; but only momentarily, under pressure of emotion. Normally, prose has, as I say, to get on with the job. Still, there are demands, even in prose, which evoke this dilation of language. When space presses, language speaks shorthand. The short-story makes this demand insistently, and readers, over the last fifty years, have come more and more insistently to demand it of writers. Readers are spry and knowing nowadays and do not like to be told things of which they can guess quite well, thank you. From this point of view of language Maupassant seems old-fashioned to-day. So does Chekov, if the English translations do justice to his Russian. It is a measure of the speed of this latter-day intensification of language that we can already read much

of the earliest Joyce with a shock of surprise at the innocence of their style and the superficiality (in the literal sense of surface-ness) of their English. He tells us things delicately but explicitly:—

> 'Night after night I had passed the house (it was vacation time) and studied the lighted square of window: and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew that two candles must be set at the head of a corpse . . .'

When we read *Dubliners* long ago (first published in 1914) we had a different sensation. We admired the intensity, as we then thought, of the struggle to grapple with the shapes and faces of things, the vivid graphic quality of the descriptive detail. To-day there is little of this kind of pleasure in his descriptions. They do not, we observe, grapple to compress, they peer and catalogue painstakingly, and the words are not always well-chosen:—

> 'Ignatius Gallagher took off his hat and displayed a large closely-cropped head. His face was heavy, pale and clean-shaven. His eyes, which were of a bluish slate colour, relieved his unhealthy pallor and shone out plainly above the vivid orange tie he wore. Between these rival features the lips appeared very long and shapeless and colourless. He bent his head and felt with two sympathetic fingers the thin hair at the crown . . .'

Is it true that Ignatius Gallagher 'displayed' his head? That word implies that he wished to show his baldness. 'His eyes . . . relieved his unhealthy pallor.' 'Rival features.' Is a tie a feature? The later Joyce must sometimes have smiled at this ingenuous English.

In the same volume we can find a comparison which shows both how language can be dilated or extended, and a foretaste of how Joyce would do it. Re-read the famous conclusion with an eye not on the meaning but on the choice of words which convey it:—

'He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves . . .'

Knowing, now, Joyce's sensitiveness to the ultimate vibrations of words we might read too much subtlety into the passage; yet, even if we pretend to know nothing of the compression of the style of *Ulysses,* we may feel that the word 'obliquely' has a more than visual connotation, though the pictorial value of the oblique angle is, I agree, paramount and excellent.[1] We admire the risk successfully taken with the fine adjective 'mutinous waves'; for Joyce's danger, as this story alone would show, always was to be 'literary.' ('His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead.' Soul . . . approached . . . region . . . where dwell . . . vast hosts. All bookish words; though breathed on.) We admire the lilt, another magnificently successful risk, which enlarges the value of the words. But one single word is most daring in the rest of this passage:—

'It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried.

[1] I mean that the word could suggest perversity and something of obliquity.

It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.'

'Spears' is good, and 'swooned' has a charm, but the word on which I would pounce is 'descent,' in 'the descent of their last end.' The word, which chimes with the image of descending snow, 'ascending to Heaven,' 'the Lord will descend,' etc. is taken out of its niche in the dictionary and given unique life.

One could find many other stray examples. In the dark streets 'a sound of low fugitive laughter made him tremble like a leaf.' 'She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue.' 'The high cold empty gloomy rooms liberated me.' 'A coachman shook music from the buckled harness.' Still, there were more similes than dilations, and most of what we had to admire was less a matter of language than of observation; not the force of 'he gnawed the rectitude of his life' but how 'the cabbage began to deposit a cold white grease on his plate' or 'the shapely cylinder' of a cigarette, or labourers in a pub 'dragging the sawdust over their spits with their heavy boots'—laborious words conveying what they contained and no more. In the later Joyce the interest shifts. Language is down beyond the Plimsoll line. He is less interested in direct picture-making. He deliberately sacrifices clarity to suggestibility.

In between *Dubliners* and *Finnegans Wake* English took on a more general liberty than we yet realise. One might expect this in romantic themes where the imagination itself is dilated. But even humorous writers may take these liberties. So, in V. S. Pritchett's *The Chestnut Tree*,

a story which rivals the best scenes in Dickens, this is how we see the elder Miss Browne:—

> 'Sometimes the elder Miss Browne sat beside Mr. Drake, calling over the big ledgers. High on their stools these two looked like a King and a Queen. She had a romantic queenly air, sighed majestically or made little regal yawns behind her hands, sometimes stretching her arms to the back of her head and looking at us from a great, pale pillow of voluptuousness . . .'

An impression of a picture, not a direct picture. He speaks of 'the white clouds smoking in the sky,' of 'looking out into the leather darkness,' 'the moon spinning on the tail of a dying wind.' Before the last war only somebody like Ronald Firbank would take these chances, and be called precious.

I do not suggest that short-story writers ought to use this sort of language—scores of excellent stories have been written in a more explicit language. But writers are now free to use it and to exploit it if they will, for readers will now co-operate with them if they ask for the extra attention needed; whereas Maupassant's readers, Chekov's, Ambrose Bierce's, Poe's would take such language in poetry only, or in a certain kind of privileged hierophantic prose. Poe's prose says everything; it proposes nothing other than the traditional meaning. And *how* traditional its metaphors and similes are! 'Death approaches and the shadow which fore-runs him has thrown a softening influence over my spirit.' 'In truth it was a dreamlike and soothing place, that venerable old town.' 'But the house! —how quaint an old building this was! (misprint: 'was this!')—to me how veritably a place of enchantment!' These sentences are from the opening pages, and pages (and pages) of *William Wilson*.

Here is the opening of Elizabeth Bowen's *Her Table Spread,* a story both humorous and romantic, its heroine unbalanced and its hero unmanned. What individual words in the opening passage strike us by their suggestiveness?:—

'Alban had few opinions on the subject of marriage; his attitude to women was negative but in particular he was not attracted to Miss Cuffe. Coming down early for dinner, red satin dress cut low, she attacked the silence with loud laughter before he had spoken. He recollected having heard that she was abnormal—at twenty-five, of statuesque development, still detained in childhood . . .'

For me the word 'red' seems deliberately chosen. It may, lightly, suggest Miss Cuffe's dramatic taste in dress. The word 'attacked' (the silence) suggests her strident personality; the word 'recollected' implies that Alban is disturbed, thinks back, perks up, is suddenly alert. The word 'detained' in childhood has ominous undertones as applied to this slightly batty lady. It suggests the dog-house.

This language of undertones is Miss Bowen's specialty. Thus, when Miss Cuffe becomes 'preoccupied' with attempts at gravity we may see her as looking even more vacant in her efforts to look less flighty. When Mr. Alban begins to feel miserable by this 'indifferent shore' the adjective has a treble meaning—heedless, not so hopeless, quite hopeless. When Miss Cuffe proposes a row in the bay, rain or no rain, and the ladies 'produced indignation' we may feel that even these dotty Irish ladies are not wholly averse to the idea which they condemn; they have to force their indignation.

As the excitement mounts the language becomes more and more charged and less and less literal. Mr. Alban's state of mind is proposed metaphorically.

> 'Wandering among the apples and amphoras of an art school he had blundered into the life room; woman revolved gravely. "Hell," he said to the steps, mounting, his mind blank to the outcome.'

Words now begin to extend freely, quite dilated.

> 'Behind, through the windows, lamps spread great skirts of light, and Mars and Mercury, unable to contain themselves, stooped from their pedestals. . . . Close by Valeria's fingers creaked on her warm wet satin. She laughed like a princess, magnificently justified. Their unseen faces were all three lovely, and, in the silence after the laughter, such a strong tenderness reached him that, standing there in full manhood, he was for a moment not exiled. For the moment, without moving or speaking, he stood, in the dark, in a flame, as though all three said, "My darling . . ."'

Elsewhere in the story 'a smothered island' gives an immediate bosky effect without labouring for the picture. We see, or do not see, an 'extinguished Castle.' The striking image of 'The bat hung masked in its wings' is a sentence which gives the clue: this is the language of poetry magnificently taken over by prose. 'La poésie ne consiste pas,' says Saint Beuve, 'à tout dire mais à tout faire rêver.'

It is difficult to find a label for this modern use of English. Some of it is frankly neologistic. Some almost catachresis, or extravagant metaphor: cf. our now-common use of the word to 'jockey'; Miss Bowen's 'attacked' the silence. Most of it is what is technically known as radiation of meaning, which is not only legitimate but the normal process of dilating language in poetry.

> 'By a succession of radiations the development of meaning may become almost infinitely complex. No

dictionary can ever register a tithe of them, for, so long as language is alive, every speaker is constantly making new specialised amplifications of its words. . . . The limits of the definition must always be vague and even within these limits there is always scope for variety. If the speaker does not transgress these limits in a given instance we understand his meaning. . . . He has given us a conventional sign or symbol of his idea. Our interpretation of the sign will depend partly on the context, partly on what we know of the speaker, partly on the associations which we ourselves attach to the word . . .'[1]

All these three elements are at work in the witty phrase 'detained in childhood,' with its radiated meanings: that Miss Cuffe has got stuck (in the queue), is engaged (in the nursery), has not been allowed to proceed (by Nursey), or is already in the Big House.

It may be said that such use of language does not make for clarity; it does not. Neither does it make pictures; it is impressionistic, in letters a special feminine strength or weakness. It makes stringent demands on the wit and the intelligence lest it become just too, too clever or an end in itself, or 'transgress the limits.' Yet in this language some of the wittiest things in English have been written and without it we should not have had the romantic music of such as Carlyle or Browne. Its value for the writer of short-stories is at least indisputable in one respect: so alert a language helps to make short-stories shorter.

The opposite kind of language whose words are more precise, literal and factual is generally, at least hitherto, found in realistic fiction. It is a more ponderous English, and naturally so since every word conveys but one sense, as opposed to the variety of senses suggested by 'radiated'

[1] Greenough and Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech*. Chapter on 'Special Process.' (New York, 1926.)

English, and these conscientious words sway in long strides from tip to tail of a sentence like the camels of a caravan, very much, indeed, after the manner of this sentence I am now writing. Not to suggest that the one language is 'better' or 'less interesting' than the other, but to make clear that the two styles are quite different, I will end by quoting a few sentences from a good modern writer of realism, Mr. William Sansom. The sentences are taken from his story *The Boiler Room* and I think they well illustrate how this style of realistic subject and treatment almost inevitably invites a correspondingly factual and unsuggestive English:—

'The two big boilers stood side by side, separated by a few feet and a protective railing. Their massive round iron sides were rusted brown and then greyed over with dust, but the railings encircling them had been painted bright green, so that in their rough-cast heavy skins the two boilers looked like huge dormant pachyderms enclosed by a bright fence, truncated featureless monsters, but alive. They never moved, never quivered, made no sound. Yet they seemed to live. Of huge weight, they enclosed within their bellies a tremendous sleeping power, hundreds of compressed degrees of heat, piled up energy bursting to split free.'

I do not here remark on the content, e.g. on the fact that Mr. Sansom has twice said that the monsters were or seemed alive, and twice that they were sleeping. It is the words to which I draw attention: no one word contains or suggests more than it says. One will not insist, therefore, that every word is 'working,' since none is working very intensely; it is a very English kind of English, quiet, methodical, phlegmatic, unimaginative and admirable for its domestic virtues. The reference to heat brings to my mind an adjective used in a story by Elizabeth Bowen

to convey the effect of summer heat on a room: she said that one got the smell of pitched pine 'exasperated' by heating. The word 'exasperated' is at the opposite pole from this language of conscientious realism.

I began by saying that language in the short-story has, in our time, become much more alert or engrossed, and I set out to illustrate what I mean. I cannot help thinking that the factually meticulous realistic style is a step backward technically (away from this engrossed alertness) though, in my taste, it is a brutal and spiritless and sluggish weapon at all times. Wherever there is wit, or an imaginative stir of humour or passion, or concentration of feeling or observation, we will find the more suggestive language leaping across deserts of literalness, and we chase after it to its glittering oasis. Emma Bovary listening to the romantic melancholy of the *Génie du Christianisme* hears it 'se répétant à tous les échos de la terre et l'éternité'; and as she looks at the picture-hooks, 'en soulevant de son haleine le papier de soie des gravures, qui se levait à demi-plié et retombait doucement contre la page,' she saw ladies 'qui effeuillaient une marguerite de leurs doigts pointus,' and the 'paysages blafards des contrées dithyrambiques' and lakes 'où se détachent en écorchures blanches, sur un fond d'acier gris, des cygnes qui nagent.' And this is the language of the master of Naturalism whose *mots justes* dilate even while they define. For, it does not matter in what school a writer establishes himself, his language must, under challenge, expand its normal voltage by becoming, in the literal sense, more radiant, throwing off new extensions of meaning like an exploding star, if he will but let it—if he has the passion to make it do so. The besotted realists, like Zola, never could do this. Their method always was to pile words on words, detail on detail. Zola never could have used words in such a way as Anatole France did in—'Les cieux, qu'on

croyait incorruptibles, ne connaissent d'éternel que l'éternel écoulement des choses'; or 'La voûte solide du firmament est brisée'—two sentences in the first two pages of *Le Jardin d'Epicure* that I chance to open. In the short-story, where the challenge, by virtue of deliberate concentration on a specially selected episode, is always being made, this language, it seems to me, is the chosen weapon.

Illustrative

NOTE

These stories have been selected to illustrate points which I have elaborated in the chapters on 'Technique.' They are all masterly stories, but it must not be thought that I have selected them as the most masterly stories I could find. I think it well to say this lest readers should be pained by the absence of such other masters of the craft as, say, Turgenev or Saroyan, or other favourites of their own.

9

Father Gaucher's Elixir[1]

By ALPHONSE DAUDET

"DRINK this, neighbour; you'll like it."

And, drop by drop, with the meticulous care of a jeweller counting pearls, the Curé of Graveson poured out two fingers of a green-gold liquid, warm, sparkling, exquisite . . . I felt my stomach bathed in sunshine.

"That's Father Gaucher's Elixir, the health and joy of our Provence," the worthy man proclaimed triumphantly.

"It is made at the Premonstratensian Monastery, not half a dozen miles from your mill. It's as good as any Chartreuse in the world, isn't it? . . . And if you only knew what a funny history it has! Listen and I'll tell you. . . ."

Then, in all simplicity, without meaning a scrap of harm by it, in this presbytery dining-room, so pure and so calm, with its Stations of the Cross in little pictures round the walls, and its pretty, bright curtains starched as stiff as surplices, the priest started off to tell me this slightly sceptical and irreverent story, like a tale from old Erasmus or Assoucy. . . .

"Twenty years ago, the Premonstratensians, or rather the White Fathers, as the Provençal calls them, had fallen into deep poverty. If you could have seen their house at that time it would have wrung your heart. The big wall and the Pacôme Tower were both falling to bits. All around the grass-grown cloister the little pillars were split

[1] Translated by Andrée Skeffington.

open, the stone saints were crumbling in their niches. There wasn't a stained-glass window left, not a door that would shut. In the quadrangles, in the chapels, the wind from the Rhône blew as it does over the Camargue flats, puffing out the candles, breaking the lead in the casements, dashing the holy-water from the fonts. But, saddest of all was the Monastery bell-tower, silent as an empty dove-cote; and the holy fathers, for want of the money to buy a bell, were forced to sound Matins with almond-wood castanets!

The poor White Fathers! I can see them still, in the Corpus-Christi procession, filing past sadly in their patched capes, pale and thin, living on pumpkins and water-melons; and behind them the Lord Abbot, with head bowed down, mortified at having to show in the light of day his tarnished crozier, and the moth-eaten white wool of his mitre. The Sodality ladies wept tears of pity as they walked, and the fat standard-bearers cackled in undertones among themselves as they pointed at the poor monks. "Skinny starlings fly in flocks." And in very fact the wretched White Fathers had come themselves to the point of wondering whether they would not do better to scatter and take flight over the world, each one seeking his daily bread.

Now, one day, when this grave question was being discussed in the Chapter, it was announced to the Prior that Brother Gaucher wanted to be heard in council. You must know that this Brother Gaucher was the cow-herd of the Monastery; in other words, he spent his days wandering from arcade to arcade in the cloister, driving before him two half-starved cows which foraged for grass between the broken flags. Brought up till he was twelve by a half-crazed woman from down by Les Baux, an old lady known as Aunty Bégon, taken in after that by the Monks, the wretched cow-herd had never been able to

learn anything but to drive his animals and to say his Our Father; and even that he said in Provençal; for he was a bit thick in the head, and his brain was about as sharp as a wooden knife. An ardent Christian for all that, although a bit of a mystic, quite at home in the hair shirt, scourging himself with sturdy conviction. And a pair of arms . . .

When he was seen coming into the Chapter House, simple and awkward, bowing to the assembly with one leg stuck out behind him, the Prior, the Canons, the Bursar all burst out laughing. But this was always the effect produced by his kindly greybeard face, whenever it appeared anywhere, with its goat's whiskers and its wild eyes, so Brother Gaucher was not at all put out.

"Holy Fathers," he said in a simple kindly tone as he twisted his olive-stone rosary, "it is said that empty barrels ring best. Just fancy now! By racking what little brain I have I think I have found a way out of our troubles. Here it is. You remember Aunty Bégon, the good woman who looked after me when I was small? God take her soul, the old baggage! She used to sing very naughty songs when she had a drop taken. Anyway, Holy Fathers, Aunty Bégon knew in her life-time as much, and more, about mountain herbs as any old bird on the Corsican hills. Better still, she compounded towards the end of her days a peerless elixir, by mixing five or six kinds of simples which we used to go and gather together in the Alpilles hills. That's a good while back; but I think that with St. Augustine's help and our Holy Abbot's permission, I might be able—by careful searching—to dig up the formula for this mysterious elixir. All we'd have to do then would be to bottle it, and sell it at a pretty good price, which would let the community grow rich nicely and gently, as our brothers the Trappists have done, and those of the Grande . . ."

He didn't get time to finish. The Prior jumped up to embrace him. The Canons grasped him by the hands. The Bursar, more deeply moved than all the others, respectfully kissed the frayed hem of his cowl. Then every one went back to his place to take counsel; and, there and then, the Chapter decided to entrust the cows to Brother Thrasybule, so that Brother Gaucher might be free to devote himself entirely to the manufacture of his elixir.

How did the good Brother succeed in resurrecting Aunty Bégon's recipe? After how many efforts? After how many sleepless nights? History does not record all this. All we know is that by the end of six months the White Fathers' elixir was already popular. Throughout the Avignon district and all around Arles, there wasn't a farm or barn that hadn't got tucked away at the back of its store-room, between the bottles of brewed wine and the jars of pickled olives, a little earthenware flagon with the Arms of Provence as its seal and a silver label portraying a monk plunged in ecstasy. Thanks to the popularity of its elixir, the house of the Premonstratensians rapidly increased in wealth. The Pacôme tower was set up once more. The Prior got a new mitre, the church a set of prettily-worked stained-glass windows; and into the delicate stone lace-work of the steeple a whole flock of bells, big and small, swooped down, one fine Easter morning, pealing and jangling for all they were worth.

As for Brother Gaucher, this poor lay brother whose uncouthness used to provoke so much merriment in the Chapter, he was never heard of again in the monastery. Thenceforward, one heard only of the Rev. Father Gaucher, a man of intellect and great learning, who lived quite apart from the many trivial day-to-day tasks of the monastery, and shut himself up the whole day long in his distillery, while thirty monks scoured the mountainside in search of fragrant herbs. . . . This distillery, into

which no one, not even the Prior, had the right of entry, was a disused chapel right at the end of the Canons' garden. It had become in the simple minds of these good fathers a thing of mystery and awe; and if, perchance, a stripling monk, inquisitive and bold, clinging to the creepers on the wall, clambered up to the rose-window over the door, he quickly scrambled down again, scared by the sight of Father Gaucher with his necromancer's beard bent over his stoves, the oenometer in his hand; and, all around him, pink stoneware retorts, monstrous stills, spirals of glass, a whole vast and strange entanglement which flamed as if bewitched in the red light from the stained-glass windows.

At night-fall, when the last Angelus was ringing, the door of this house of mystery opened gently and the good Father made his way to the church for the evening service. You should have seen the reception he got as he went through the monastery! The monks lined the way as he passed. They would say:

"Hush! He holds the secret!"

The Bursar would follow him and parley with him with lowered head. In the midst of this adulation, the priest would walk along dabbing at his forehead, his broad-rimmed three-corner hat set on the back of his head like a halo, looking complacently about him at the big quadrangles planted with orange trees, and the blue roof tops on which swung new weathercocks, and in the cloister of dazzling whiteness—between the elegant and flower-decked little pillars—at the freshly-frocked canons stepping past in pairs, peace upon their brows.

"They owe all that to *me!*" the worthy Father would say to himself; and when he thought of it, a hot swell of pride rose within him.

The poor man paid dearly for it, as you shall see.

One evening, just imagine, right in the middle of the

service, he arrived at the chapel in an extraordinary state of agitation; red in the face, out of breath, his cowl all sideways, and so upset that in taking holy water he dipped his sleeve in up to the elbow. They all thought at first that he was put out because he was late; but when they saw him genuflecting low to the organ and the gallery instead of towards the main altar, dashing across the church, wandering for five minutes around the choir before finding his place, and then, once installed, bowing and smirking to right and left, a murmur of amazement ran down the three naves. From breviary to breviary the whisper went:

"What *is* the matter with our Father Gaucher? What is the matter with our Father Gaucher?"

Not once, but twice, the Prior, moved to impatience, tapped with his crozier upon the flags to recall them to silence. Across the way, in the heart of the choir, the psalm was continued; but the responses lacked conviction.

Suddenly, right in the middle of the *Ave Verum,* didn't Father Gaucher lean right back in his stall and intone in a ringing voice:

"In Paris town there's a father white
Patatin, patatan, taraban, tarabin . . ."

Consternation throughout the church. Every one was standing up. They shouted:

"Take him away! He is possessed!"

The canons crossed themselves. The Lord Abbot's crozier did not remain still. . . . But Father Gaucher saw nothing, listened to nothing and two sturdy monks had to drag him off through the little door which led to the choir, struggling like a devil exorcised and keeping up louder than ever his *patatins* and his *tarabins.*

The next day at day-break, the wretched man was on

his knees in the Prior's oratory making his confession in a flood of tears:

"It's the elixir, Holy Father, it's the elixir that took me unawares," he kept saying as he struck his breast.

And to see him there so dejected, so repentant, the good Prior was himself quite moved.

"Come, come, Father Gaucher, compose yourself, all that will dry up like dew before the sun! After all, the scandal was not as great as you think. True, there was that song which was a little bit . . . Ahem! Well, we must hope that the novices did not hear it. And now, let us see, tell me how the thing came to pass. It was when you were testing the elixir, wasn't it? You must have had a rather heavy hand. Yes, yes, I understand. . . . It is like Brother Schwartz, the inventor of gunpowder: you were the victim of your own invention. But tell me now, my dear friend, is it really necessary for you to try out this terrible elixir upon yourself?"

"Unfortunately it is, Father. True, the test-tube gives me the strength and the degree of alcohol; but for the finish, the smoothness, I can't trust anything but my tongue."

"Ah, yes! Good, good. But just listen a while to what I have to say to you. When you are obliged to taste the elixir, does it taste *nice* to you? Do you get any pleasure from it?"

"Alas! I do, my Lord," said the luckless friar, getting quite red. "For the past two evenings I have been getting a *bouquet,* a fragrance! Beyond a doubt, it was the Devil that played this dirty trick on me and so I have decided that from now on I will use only the test tube. It can't be helped if the liqueur is not delicate enough, if it doesn't *bead* as it should . . ."

"Do nothing of the kind," interrupted the Prior hastily. "We mustn't run the risk of displeasing our customers.

All you have to do, now that you are forewarned, is to be on your guard. Let's see, how much of it do you need to make sure of the quality? Fifteen or twenty drops, wouldn't that be right? For that matter, to forestall any accident, I dispense you in future from the necessity of coming over to the chapel. You will say the evening service in the distillery. And now, peace be with you, Father, and above all, count the drops carefully."

Alas! In vain the poor father counted the drops. The Devil had got him, and did not let him go again. The distillery heard some pretty queer services, I can tell you!

During the day, nevertheless, all went well, the good father was pretty quiet; he was preparing his stores, his stills; he was carefully sorting his herbs, herbs of Provence every one of them, dainty, grey, jagged-edged, burnt up by their fragrance and by the sun. But, in the evening, when the samples had been brewed and the elixir was warming in the big red copper pans, the poor man's martyrdom would begin:

". . . seventeen . . . eighteen . . . nineteen . . . twenty!" The drops fell from the straw into the silver gilt goblet. These twenty the good father swallowed at a gulp, almost without any enjoyment. The twenty-first was the one he really longed for. Ah! that twenty-first drop! To escape from the temptation he went then and knelt down at the far end of the laboratory and plunged into his Paternosters. But from the still warm liqueur there arose a faint vapour, laden with aromatic odours, which stole across and lurked around him and, willy-nilly, brought him back towards the pans. The liqueur was a beautiful golden green. Leaning over it, his nostrils wide, the friar stirred it very gently with his straw, and in the little sparkling spangles borne upon the emerald swell, he thought he saw Aunty Bégon's eyes laughing and twinkling up at him:

"Come on! One more drop!"

And from drop to drop, the unhappy man wound up by having his goblet full to the brim. Then, utterly exhausted, he would drop into a big armchair, and, his body relaxed, with half-closed eyelid, he would savour his sin, sip by sip, murmuring to himself with an exquisite remorse:

"Ah! I'm damning my soul. I'm damning my soul."

The worst of it all was that at the bottom of this devil's brew, he found again, by the same strange spell, all Aunty Bégon's naughty songs:

There were three merry wives, and they planned
a fine feast:

or:—

Master André's little shepherdess, went off to the
woods alone-o . . .

and every now and again, the famous one about the White Fathers: *Patatin, patatan.*

Imagine his mortification the next day when his cell neighbours would say to him with a knowing look:

"Oho! Father Gaucher, you were as merry as a lark last night when you were going to bed!"

Then would come tears, despair, fasting, the hair shirt, the scourge. But nothing was of any avail against the elixir devil; and every evening at the same time the possession began again.

Meanwhile, orders poured in upon the Abbaye, as if by Divine favour. They came from Nîmes, from Aix, from Avignon and Marseilles. As the days went by, the Monastery took on the appearance of a little factory. There were the packing friars, and the labelling friars, others for the correspondence, and more again for the deliveries;

to tell the truth, with all this, God's office lost a few ringings of the bells but the parish poor didn't lose anything by it, I can tell you that . . .

And so, one fine Sunday morning, while the Bursar was reading out to the assembled Chapter his yearly statement of accounts, and while all the good fathers were listening to him with shining eyes and smiling lips, didn't Father Gaucher come rushing into the middle of the meeting shouting:—

"It's finished. I won't make any more of it. Give me back my cows."

"Why, what's the matter, Father Gaucher?" asked the Prior, who had a pretty good idea of what the matter was.

"The matter, is it, Father Abbot? The matter is that I'm spending my time preparing a nice eternity of flames and pitchforks for myself. I'm drinking, that's the matter, and I'm drinking like a miserable wretch."

"But I told you to count your drops."

"Oh, yes! That's right, count my drops! It's goblets I'd have to count now. Yes, holy Fathers, that's where I've got to now. Three glasses an evening. You can easily understand that this can't go on. So get the elixir made by anyone you like. May God's fire roast me if I meddle with it again!"

I can tell you the Chapter was very far from laughing now.

"But, you unhappy man, you are going to ruin us!" the Bursar cried waving his ledger.

"Would you rather have me damn myself?"

On that the Prior got up.

"Holy Fathers," he said, stretching out his beautiful white hand on which glittered the episcopal ring, "there is a way in which the matter can be settled. It is in the evening, is it not, my son, that the devil tempts you?"

"Yes, father, regularly every evening. And so now, when I see night coming on, I break out in a sweat, saving your presence, like Capitou's donkey when he saw the saddle coming."

"Very well then, set your mind at rest. From now on, every evening we will recite for you the orison of St. Augustine which carries a plenary indulgence. With that, no matter what happens, you are safe. It gives you absolution at the very moment of sinning."

"Oh? Good! In that case, Father . . .. thank you very much!"

And without more ado, Father Gaucher went back to his stills as light-hearted as a lark.

And sure enough, from that day on, every evening at the end of Compline, the officiating priest never failed to say:

"Let us pray for poor Father Gaucher, who is sacrificing his soul for the sake of the Community. . . . *Oremus Domine* . . ."

And while over all the white cassocks, prostrate in the shadow of the naves, there ran this orison, rustling like a gentle breeze across the snow, away out there, at the far end of the monastery, behind the flaming stained-glass of the distillery, Father Gaucher could be heard singing at the top of his voice:

"In Paris town there's a father white,
Patatin, patatan, taraban, tarabin;
In Paris town there's a father white
Who leads the sisters many a dance,
Tra-la-la-la, in the garden bright—
Who leads the . . ."

Here the good priest broke off, aghast:—

"Mercy on us! Suppose my parishioners heard me!"

10

Gooseberries[1]

By ANTON CHEKOV

FROM early morning the sky had been overcast with clouds; the day was still, cool, and wearisome, as usual on grey, dull days when the clouds hang low over the fields and it looks like rain, which never comes. Ivan Ivanich, the veterinary surgeon, and Bourkin, the schoolmaster, were tired of walking and the fields seemed endless to them. Far ahead they could just see the windmills of the village of Mirousky; to the right, stretched away to disappear behind the village, a line of hills, and they knew that it was the bank of the river; meadows, green willows, farmhouses; and from one of the hills there could be seen a field as endless, telegraph posts, and the train, looking from a distance like a crawling caterpillar, and in clear weather even the town. In the calm weather when all Nature seemed gentle and melancholy, Ivan Ivanich and Bourkin were filled with love for the fields and thought how grand and beautiful the country was.

"Last time, when we stopped in Prokufyi's shed," said Bourkin, "you were going to tell me a story."

"Yes. I wanted to tell you about my brother."

Ivan Ivanich took a deep breath and lighted his pipe before beginning his story, but just then the rain began to fall. And in about five minutes it came pelting down and showed no signs of stopping. Ivan Ivanich stopped

[1] Translated by S. S. Koteliansky. For comment on this story see page 173.

and hesitated; the dogs, wet through, stood with their tails between their legs and looked at them mournfully.

"We ought to take shelter," said Bourkin. "Let us go to Aliokhin. It is close by."

"Very well."

They took a short cut over a stubble-field and then bore to the right, until they came to the road. Soon there appeared poplars, a garden, the red roofs of granaries; the river began to glimmer and they came to a wide road with a mill and a white bathing-shed. It was Sophino, where Aliokhin lived.

The mill was working, it drowned the sound of the rain, and the dam shook. Round the carts stood wet horses, hanging their heads, and men were walking about with their heads covered with sacks. It was wet, muddy, and unpleasant, and the river looked cold and sullen. Ivan Ivanich and Bourkin felt wet and uncomfortable through and through; their feet were tired with walking in the mud, and they walked past the dam to the barn in silence as though they were angry with each other.

In one of the barns a winnowing-machine was working, sending out clouds of dust. On the threshold stood Aliokhin himself, a man of about forty, tall and stout, with long hair, more like a professor or a painter than a farmer. He was wearing a grimy white shirt and rope belt, and pants instead of trousers; and his boots were covered with mud and straw. His nose and eyes were black with dust. He recognised Ivan Ivanich and was apparently very pleased.

"Please, gentlemen," he said, "go to the house. I'll be with you in a minute."

The house was large and two-storied. Aliokhin lived downstairs in two vaulted rooms with little windows designed for the farm-hands; the farmhouse was plain, and the place smelled of rye bread and vodka, and leather. He rarely used the reception-rooms, only when guests arrived.

Ivan Ivanich and Bourkin were received by a chambermaid; such a pretty young woman that both of them stopped and exchanged glances.

"You cannot imagine how glad I am to see you, gentlemen," said Aliokhin, coming after them into the hall. "I never expected you. Pelageya," he said to the maid, "give my friends a change of clothes. And I will change, too. But I must have a bath. I haven't had one since the spring. Wouldn't you like to come to the bathing-shed? And meanwhile our things will be got ready."

Pretty Pelageya, dainty and sweet, brought towels and soap, and Aliokhin led his guests to the bathing-shed.

"Yes," he said, "it is a long time since I had a bath. My bathing-shed is all right, as you see. My father and I put it up, but somehow I have no time to bathe."

He sat down on the step and lathered his long hair and neck, and the water round him became brown.

"Yes, I see," said Ivan Ivanich heavily, looking at his head.

"It is a long time since I bathed," said Aliokhin shyly, as he soaped himself again, and the water round him became dark blue, like ink.

Ivan Ivanich came out of the shed, plunged into the water with a splash, and swam about in the rain, flapping his arms, and sending waves back, and on the waves tossed white lilies; he swam out to the middle of the pool and dived, and in a minute came up again in another place and kept on swimming and diving, trying to reach the bottom. "Ah! how delicious!" he shouted in his glee. "How delicious!" He swam to the mill, spoke to the peasants, and came back, and in the middle of the pool he lay on his back to let the rain fall on his face. Bourkin and Aliokhin were already dressed and ready to go, but he kept on swimming and diving.

"Delicious," he said. "Too delicious!"

"You've had enough," shouted Bourkin.

They went to the house. And only when the lamp was lit in the large drawing-room upstairs, and Bourkin and Ivan Ivanich, dressed in silk dressing-gowns and warm slippers, lounged in chairs, and Aliokhin himself, washed and brushed, in a new frock coat, paced up and down evidently delighting in the warmth and cleanliness and dry clothes and slippers, and pretty Pelageya, noiselessly tripping over the carpet and smiling sweetly, brought in tea and jam on a tray, only then did Ivan Ivanich begin his story, and it was as though he was being listened to not only by Bourkin and Aliokhin, but also by the old and young ladies and the officer who looked down so staidly and tranquilly from the golden frames.

"We are two brothers," he began, "I, Ivan Ivanich, and Nicholai Ivanich, two years younger. I went in for study and became a veterinary surgeon, while Nicholai was at the Exchequer Court when he was nineteen. Our father, Tchimsha-Himalaysky, was a cantonist, but he died with an officer's rank and left us his title of nobility and a small estate. After his death the estate went to pay his debts. However, we spent our childhood there in the country. We were just like peasant children, spent days and nights in the fields and the woods, minded the house, barked the lime-trees, fished, and so on. . . . And you know once a man has fished, or watched the thrushes hovering in flocks over the village in the bright, cool, autumn days, he can never really be a townsman, and to the day of his death he will be drawn to the country. My brother pined away in the Exchequer. Years passed and he sat in the same place, wrote out the same documents, and thought of one thing, how to get back to the country. And little by little his distress became a definite disorder, a fixed idea—to buy a small farm somewhere by the bank of a river or a lake.

"He was a good fellow and I loved him, but I never

sympathised with the desire to shut oneself up on one's own farm. It is a common saying that a man needs only six feet of land. But surely a corpse wants that, not a man. And I hear that our intellectuals have a longing for the land and want to acquire farms. But it all comes down to the six feet of land. To leave town, and the struggle and the swim of life, and go and hide yourself in a farmhouse is not life—it is egoism, laziness; it is a kind of monasticism, but monasticism without action. A man needs, not six feet of land, not a farm, but the whole earth, all Nature, where in full liberty he can display all the properties and qualities of the free spirit.

"My brother Nicholai, sitting in his office, would dream of eating his own *schi*, with its savoury smell floating across the farmyard; and of eating out in the open air, and of sleeping in the sun, and of sitting for hours together on a seat by the gate and gazing at the fields and the forest. Books on agriculture and the hints in almanacs were his joy, his favourite spiritual food; and he liked reading newspapers, but only the advertisements of land to be sold, so many acres of arable and grass land, with a farmhouse, river, garden, mill, and mill-pond. And he would dream of garden hedges, flowers, fruit, nests, carp in the pond, don't you know, and all the rest of it. These fantasies of his used to vary according to the advertisements he found, but somehow there was always a gooseberry-bush in every one. Not a house, not a romantic spot could he imagine without its gooseberry-bush.

" 'Country life has its advantages,' he used to say. 'You sit on the veranda drinking tea and your ducklings swim on the pond, and everything smells good . . . and there are gooseberries.'

"He used to draw out a plan of his estate and always the same things were shewn on it: (*a*) Farmhouse, (*b*) cottage, (*c*) vegetable garden, (*d*) gooseberry-bush. He used to

live meagrely and never had enough to eat and drink, dressed God knows how, exactly like a beggar, and always saved and put his money into the bank. He was terribly stingy. It used to hurt me to see him, and I used to give him money to go away for a holiday, but he would put that away, too. Once a man gets a fixed idea, there's nothing to be done.

"Years passed; he was transferred to another province. He completed his fortieth year and was still reading advertisements in the papers and saving up his money. Then I heard he was married. Still with the same idea of buying a farmhouse with a gooseberry-bush, he married an elderly, ugly widow, not out of any feeling for her, but because she had money. With her he still lived stingily, kept her half-starved, and put the money into the bank in his own name. She had been the wife of a postmaster and was used to good living, but with her second husband she did not even have enough black bread; she pined away in her new life, and in three years or so gave up her soul to God. And my brother never for a moment thought himself to blame for her death. Money, like vodka, can play queer tricks with a man. Once in our town a merchant lay dying. Before his death he asked for some honey, and he ate all his notes and script with the honey so that nobody should get it. Once I was examining a herd of cattle at a station and a horse-jobber fell under the engine, and his foot was cut off. We carried him into the waiting-room, with the blood pouring down—a terrible business—and all the while he kept on asking anxiously for his foot; he had twenty-five roubles in his boot and did not want to lose them."

"Keep to your story," said Bourkin.

"After the death of his wife," Ivan Ivanich continued, after a long pause, "my brother began to look out for an estate. Of course you may search for five years, and even

then buy a pig in a poke. Through an agent my brother Nicholai raised a mortgage and bought three hundred acres with a farmhouse, a cottage, and a park, but there was no orchard, no gooseberry-bush, no duck-pond; there was a river but the water in it was coffee-coloured because the estate lay between a brick-yard and a gelatine factory. But my brother Nicholai was not worried about that; he ordered twenty gooseberry-bushes and settled down to a country life.

"Last year I paid him a visit. I thought I'd go and see how things were with him. In his letters my brother called his estate Tchimbarshov Corner, or Himalayskoe. I arrived at Himalayskoe in the afternoon. It was hot. There were ditches, fences, hedges, rows of young fir-trees, trees everywhere, and there was no telling how to cross the yard or where to put your horse. I went to the house and was met by a red-haired dog, as fat as a pig. He tried to bark but felt too lazy. Out of the kitchen came the cook, barefooted, and also as fat as a pig, and said that the master was having his afternoon rest. I went in to my brother and found him sitting on his bed with his knees covered with a blanket; he looked old, stout, flabby; his cheeks, nose, and lips were pendulous. I half expected him to grunt like a pig.

"We embraced and shed a tear of joy and also of sadness to think that we had once been young, but were now both going grey and nearing death. He dressed and took me to see his estate.

" 'Well? How are you getting on?' I asked.

" 'All right, thank God. I am doing very well.'

"He was no longer the poor, tired official, but a real landowner and a person of consequence. He had got used to the place and liked it, ate a great deal, took Russian baths, was growing fat, had already gone to law with the parish and the two factories, and was much offended if the

peasants did not call him 'Your Excellency.' And, like a good landowner, he looked after his soul and did good works pompously, never simply. What good works? He cured the peasants of all kinds of diseases with soda and castor-oil, and on his birthday he would have a thanksgiving service held in the middle of the village, and would treat the peasants to half a bucket of vodka, which he thought the right thing to do. Ah! Those horrible buckets of vodka. One day a greasy landowner will drag the peasants before the Zemstvo Court for trespass, and the next, if it's a holiday, he will give them a bucket of vodka, and they drink and shout Hooray! and lick his boots in their drunkenness. A change to good eating and idleness always fills a Russian with the most preposterous self-conceit. Nicholai Ivanich who, when he was in the Exchequer, was terrified to have an opinion of his own, now imagined that what he said was law. 'Education is necessary for the masses, but they are not fit for it.' 'Corporal punishment is generally harmful, but in certain cases it is useful and indispensable.'

" 'I know the people and I know how to treat them,' he would say. 'The people love me. I have only to raise my finger and they will do as I wish.'

"And all this, mark you, was said with a kindly smile of wisdom. He was constantly saying: 'We noblemen,' or 'I, as a nobleman.' Apparently he had forgotten that our grandfather was a peasant and our father a common soldier. Even our family name, Tchimsha-Himalaysky, which is really an absurd one, seemed to him full-sounding, distinguished, and very pleasing.

"But my point does not concern him so much as myself. I want to tell you what a change took place in me in those few hours while I was in his house. In the evening, while we were having tea, the cook laid a plateful of gooseberries on the table. They had not been bought, but were his own

gooseberries, plucked for the first time since the bushes were planted. Nicholai Ivanich laughed with joy and for a minute or two he looked in silence at the gooseberries with tears in his eyes. He could not speak for excitement, then put one into his mouth, glanced at me in triumph, like a child at last being given its favourite toy, and said:

" 'How good they are!'

"He went on eating greedily, and saying all the while:

" 'How good they are! Do try one!'

"It was hard and sour, but, as Pushkin said, the illusion which exalts us is dearer to us than ten thousand truths. I saw a happy man, one whose dearest dream had come true, who had attained his goal in life, who had got what he wanted, and was pleased with his destiny and with himself. In my idea of human life there is always some alloy of sadness, but now at the sight of a happy man I was filled with something like despair. And at night it grew on me. A bed was made up for me in the room near my brother's and I could hear him, unable to sleep, going again and again to the plate of gooseberries. I thought: 'After all, what a lot of contented, happy people there must be! What an overwhelming power that means! I look at this life and see the arrogance and the idleness of the strong, the ignorance and bestiality of the weak, the horrible poverty everywhere, overcrowding, drunkenness, hypocrisy, falsehood. . . . Meanwhile in all the houses, all the streets, there is peace; out of fifty thousand people who live in our town there is but one to kick against it all. Think of the people who go to the market for food: during the day they eat; at night they sleep, talk nonsense, marry, grow old, piously follow their dead to the cemetery; one never sees or hears those who suffer, and all the horror of life goes on somewhere behind the scenes. Everything is quiet, peaceful, and against it all there is only the silent protest of statistics; so many go mad, so many gallons are

drunk, so many children die of starvation. . . . And such a state of things is obviously what we want; apparently a happy man only feels so because the unhappy bear their burden in silence, but for which happiness would be impossible. It is a general hypnosis. Every happy man should have someone with a little hammer at his door to knock and remind him that there are unhappy people, and that, however happy he may be, life will sooner or later show its claws, and some misfortune will befall him —illness, poverty, loss, and then no one will see or hear him, just as he now neither sees nor hears others. But there is no man with a hammer, and the happy go on living, just a little fluttered with the petty cares of every day, like an aspen tree in the wind—and everything is all right.'

"That night I was able to understand how I, too, had been content and happy," Ivan Ivanich went on, getting up. "I, too, at meals or out hunting, used to lay down the law about living, and religion, and governing the masses. I, too, used to say that teaching is right, that education is necessary, but that for simple folk reading and writing is enough for the present. Freedom is a boon, I used to say, as essential as the air we breathe, but we must wait. Yes—I used to say so, but now I ask: 'Why do we wait?' " Ivan Ivanich glanced angrily at Bourkin. "Why do we wait, I ask you? What considerations keep us fast? I am told that we cannot have everything at once, and that every idea is realised in time. But who says so? Where is the proof that it is so? You refer me to the natural order of things, to the law of cause and effect, but is there order or natural law in that I, a living, thinking creature, should stand by a ditch until it fills up, or is narrowed, when I could jump in or throw a bridge over it? Tell me, I say, why should we wait? Wait, when we have no strength to live, and yet must live and are full of the desire to live!"

"I left my brother early the next morning, and from that time on I found it impossible to live in town. The peace and the quiet of it oppress me. I dare not look in at the windows, for nothing is more dreadful to see than the sight of a happy family, sitting round a table, having tea. I am an old man now and am no good for the struggle. I commenced late. I can only grieve within my soul, and fret and sulk. At night my head buzzes with the rush of my thoughts and I cannot sleep. . . . Ah! If I were young!"

Ivan Ivanich walked excitedly up and down the room and repeated:

"If I were young."

He suddenly walked up to Aliokhin and shook him first by one hand and then by the other.

"Pavel Konstantinich," he said in a voice of entreaty, "don't be satisfied, don't let yourself be lulled to sleep! While you are young, strong, wealthy, do not cease to do good! Happiness does not exist, nor should it, and if there is any meaning or purpose in life, they are not in our peddling little happiness, but in something reasonable and grand. Do good!"

Ivan Ivanich said this with a piteous supplicating smile, as though he were asking a personal favour.

Then they all three sat in different corners of the drawing-room and were silent. Ivan Ivanich's story had satisfied neither Bourkin nor Aliokhin. With the generals and ladies looking down from their gilt frames, seeming alive in the firelight, it was tedious to hear the story of a miserable official who ate gooseberries. . . . Somehow they had a longing to hear and to speak of charming people, and of women. And the mere fact of sitting in the drawing-room where everything—the lamp with its coloured shade, the chairs, and the carpet under their feet—told how the very people who now looked down at them from their frames once walked, and sat and had tea there, and the

fact that pretty Pelageya was near—was much better than any story.

Aliokhin wanted very much to go to bed; he had to get up for his work very early, about two in the morning, and now his eyes were closing, but he was afraid of his guests saying something interesting without his hearing it, so he would not go. He did not trouble to think whether what Ivan Ivanich had been saying was clever or right; his guests were talking of neither groats, nor hay, nor tar, but of something which had no bearing on his life, and he liked it and wanted them to go on. . . .

"However, it's time to go to bed," said Bourkin, getting up. "I will wish you good night."

Aliokhin said good night and went downstairs, and left his guests. Each had a large room with an old wooden bed and carved ornaments; in the corner was an ivory crucifix; and their wide, cool beds, made by pretty Pelageya, smelled sweetly of clean linen.

Ivan Ivanich undressed in silence and lay down.

"God forgive me, a wicked sinner," he murmured, as he drew the clothes over his head.

A smell of burning tobacco came from his pipe which lay on the table, and Bourkin could not sleep for a long time and was worried because he could not make out where the unpleasant smell came from.

The rain beat against the windows all night long.

11

Hautot, Father and Son[1]

By GUY DE MAUPASSANT

1

IN FRONT of the door of the house—farm-house and mansion all in one, one of those half-and-half country dwellings which could have once been called manors and were now the residence of big farmers—the dogs, tied to the apple-trees in the yard, were barking and howling at the sight of the game-bags that the game-keeper and the young lads were carrying. In the big kitchen-dining-room, Hautot senior, Hautot junior, Monsieur Bermont, the tax-collector, and Monsieur Mondaru, the village lawyer, were having a bite and a drink before setting off for the shooting; the season opened that day.

Hautot senior, full of pride in all his possessions, was praising in advance all the game that his guests would find on his land. He was a tall Norman, powerfully built, full-blooded, a big-boned man, who could lift on his shoulders a cartload of apples. Half peasant and half gentleman, wealthy, respected by all, influential, strong-willed, he had sent his son, Hautot César, to school, up to the fourth form, so as to give him an education, which he had then cut short for fear he might turn into a gentleman with no interest in land.

Hautot César, almost as tall as his father, but thinner, was a good son, docile, pleased with everything, full of

[1] Translated by Andrée Skeffington.

admiration, respect and deference for the wishes and opinions of his father.

Monsieur Bermont, the tax-collector—a tubby little man whose red cheeks showed a fine network of purple veins like the winding courses of rivers and their tributaries on a map—was asking:

"And what about hare—have you got any hare?" Hautot senior replied:

"As many as you want, especially in the Puysatier bottoms."

"Which way do we start off?" asked the lawyer, a fat and pallid attorney who did himself well; his pot-belly was squeezed into a tight-fitting, brand-new shooting suit bought in Rouen the week before.

"Why, that way, by the bottoms. We'll send up the partridges in the flat, and we'll beat down towards them."

And Hautot senior got up. The others followed suit, took their rifles in the corners, checked the breeches, stamped their feet to get them used to their rather stiff boots, not yet softened by the warm blood of the foot, then they went out, and the dogs straining upwards on their leashes uttered piercing howls, beating the air with their paws.

They set out towards the bottoms. These formed a little valley, or rather a big dip in a poor patch of land which had remained uncultivated for that reason, furrowed with ravines, covered with bracken, a splendid game-preserve.

The sportsmen spread out, Hautot senior keeping to the right, Hautot junior taking the left, and the two guests in the middle. The game-keeper and the carriers brought up the rear. It was that solemn moment when you are waiting for the first shot, when your heart beats a little faster, when your finger keeps straining tensely on the trigger.

Suddenly this first shot went off! Hautot senior had

fired. They all stopped and saw a partridge falling out of a covey which was in full flight, and falling into a ravine covered by thick undergrowth. The excited sportsman began to run, stepping over and tearing away the brambles which held him back, and he disappeared in his turn into the thicket, in search of his "bag."

Then almost at once a second shot rang out.

"Aha, aha, the rascal," cried Monsieur Bermont, "he must have started a hare in under all that."

Everyone was waiting, all eyes on that heap of branches which they could not see through.

The lawyer, making a megaphone of his hands, shouted: "Have you got them?" Hautot senior did not reply; then César, turning to the keeper, said to him: "Go on and give him a hand, Joseph. We've got to keep in line. We'll wait here."

And Joseph, an old tree-trunk of a man, dry and gnarled, whose every joint was a knob, ambled off and went down into the hollow, seeking out the gaps with the wariness of a fox. Then all at once he cried:

"Oh! come over here! come over here! There's been an accident."

They all rushed up and plunged into the brambles. Hautot senior, on his side in a faint, was holding his two hands to his belly, from which, through his canvas jacket, torn by the shot, long streams of blood flowed on to the grass. In letting go his gun to lay hold of the dead partridge, which was just within his grasp, he had let the weapon fall; its second barrel, going off at the shock, had torn open his entrails. They pulled him out of the ditch, undressed him, and saw a frightful wound through which his intestines protruded. Then, after they had bound him up as best they could, they carried him back home, and waited for the doctor who had been sent for, and the priest.

When the doctor arrived, he shook his head gravely, and

turning towards young Hautot who was sobbing in a chair said:

"My poor boy, this doesn't look good."

But when the wound was dressed, the wounded man moved his fingers, opened his mouth, then his eyes, stared before him with dim, haggard eyes, then seemed to be searching about in his memory, to be remembering, to grasp the situation. He murmured:

"Rot it! I'm finished."

The doctor was holding his hand:

"No, no, just a few days' rest, it won't be much."

Hautot went on:

"I'm finished! My belly is burst open! I know!"

Then suddenly:

"I want to talk to the lad. If I've got time."

Young Hautot, in spite of himself, was whimpering and saying over and over again, like a little boy:

"Daddy! Daddy! Poor daddy."

But his father said in a steadier voice:

"Come now, stop crying. No time for it. I've something to say to you. Come over here, close to me. It won't take long and I'll be easier in my mind. The rest of you will excuse us, please."

They all went out, leaving the son face to face with his father.

As soon as they were alone he said:

"Listen, son, you're twenty-four, I can speak plainly to you. And besides, there isn't so much mystery about all this kind of thing as we let on. I don't have to tell you that your mother died seven years ago, isn't that right? And that *I*'m not more than forty-five, seeing that I was married when I was nineteen. Isn't that right?"

The son stammered:

"Yes, that's right."

"So, for seven years since your mother died, I've been a

widower. Well, a man like me can't remain a widower at thirty-seven. Isn't that right?"

The son replied:

"Yes, that's right."

The father, panting, very pale, his face distorted, went on:

"God, how it hurts! Well, you understand. Man isn't made to live alone. But I didn't want to bring in anyone to take your mother's place. I'd promised her I wouldn't. So . . . Do you understand me?"

"Yes, father."

"So, I took up with a little woman in Rouen, rue de l'Eperlan, No. 18, third floor, the second door—I'm telling you all this, mind you don't forget it—and she couldn't have been nicer to me, loving, devoted, a real wife and that's the truth! You see the way it was, lad?"

"Yes, father."

"So, if I pass over, I owe her something, I mean, something really big, to make her safe. Do you see?"

"Yes, father."

"She's a good girl. I tell you, a real good girl. And if it hadn't been for you here, and your mother's memory, and this house where we all three lived, I'd have brought her here. And I'd have married her. That's one thing sure! . . . Listen . . . Listen. . . . I could have made a will . . . but I didn't! I didn't want to. . . . A man mustn't put these things down in writing. . . . Not these things. . . . It's bad for the family. . . . And it makes a mess of things. . . . It's bad for everybody! Legal documents, see, don't want them! Never use 'em! If I'm rich, it's because I've never used them all my life. Do you understand, lad?"

"Yes, father."

"Now listen to this. . . . Listen carefully. . . . So, I didn't make a will. . . . I didn't want to . . . and be-

sides, I know you. You've a kind heart, not close-fisted, not mean, you know. I said to myself: when I'm near the end I'll tell him everything, I'll beg him not to forget the poor girl. Caroline Donet, rue de l'Eperlan, No. 18, third floor, second door. Don't forget. Listen again. Go there immediately I'm gone. See that she's no reason to grouse about me. You'll have enough to see to that. You'll be able to. I'm leaving you enough. . . . Listen. . . . During the week you won't find her at home. She works at Madame Moreau's, rue Beauvoisine. Go and see her on a Thursday. That's the day she expects me. That has been my day for the last six years. The poor kid! She's going to cry! . . . I'm telling you all this because I know you well, son. Other people can't be told things like this, not even the lawyer, nor the priest. This kind of thing is done. Everybody knows it, but nobody admits it, unless they have to. And then no outsiders, nobody but the family. The family is all one. Understand?"

"Yes, father."

"You promise?"

"Yes, father."

"Swear?"

"Yes, father."

"I beg you, I implore you. Son, don't forget. It means a lot to me."

"No, father."

"You'll go there yourself. I want you to make sure of everything."

"Yes, father."

"And then you'll see. . . . You'll see. . . . She'll explain to you. *I* can't tell you any more. Swear?"

"Yes, father."

"Good lad! Give me a kiss. Good-bye. I'm going to peg out. I'm sure of it. Tell them to come in now."

Hautot junior kissed his father, moaning the while.

Then, obedient as ever, he opened the door, and the priest appeared, in a white surplice, carrying the holy oils.

But the dying man had closed his eyes, and he refused to open them again, he refused to answer. He refused to show, even by a sign, that he understood.

He had talked enough. He was exhausted. Besides, he felt his heart at ease now and he wanted to die in peace. What need had he to confess to God's representative; he had just confessed to his own son; one of the family.

He was given the sacraments, anointed, absolved, his friends and servants kneeling around him, without a single movement on his face to reveal that he was still alive.

He died towards midnight, after four hours of shuddering which betrayed terrible suffering.

2

He was buried on a Tuesday; the shooting season having opened on Sunday. When César Hautot got back home, after having accompanied his father to the cemetery, he passed the rest of the day in tears. He hardly slept at all that night. He felt so sad when he woke up that he wondered how he could go on living.

Yet all day long he had it in his mind that, to carry out his father's last wish, he would have to go to Rouen the next day and see this girl, Caroline Donet, who lived at 18 rue de l'Eperlan, third floor, second door. He had whispered the name and this address, over and over again, as one mutters a prayer, whispered it an incalculable number of times, so as not to forget it, and he wound up by stammering it ceaselessly without being able to stop or to think about anything, so obsessed were his tongue and his mind by the words.

So the next day, about 8 o'clock, he gave orders for Graindorge to be harnessed to the gig, and set off behind

the heavy Norman horse cantering along the main road from Ainville to Rouen. He was wearing his black frock coat, his big silk hat on his head, his legs encased in the trousers which strapped under his shoes. He had been unwilling in the circumstances to slip over his fine clothes the blue smock which swells out in the wind, keeps the cloth from getting stained and dusty, and which can be so quickly slipped off again as soon as you have jumped from the car.

He got into Rouen as ten was striking, stopped, as he always did, at *l'Hôtel des Bons Enfants,* Rue des Trois-Mares, let himself be embraced sympathetically by the innkeeper, his wife and his five sons, who had heard the sad news; then he had to tell them the details of the accident, which made him cry; reject the offers of help of all these good people, so eager to be of assistance because they knew he was rich; he even refused their luncheon, which much offended them.

Having shaken the dust off his hat, brushed his coat and wiped his boots, he set out to look for the Rue de l'Eperlan without daring to ask anybody the way for fear of being recognised and arousing suspicion. In the end, not being able to find it, he saw a priest, and relying on the professional discretion of the clergy, he inquired of him. He only had to walk a hundred yards. It happened to be the second turn on the right.

There he hesitated. Up to that moment he had obeyed the dead man's will like an animal. Now he stood, quite disturbed, confused, humiliated at the idea of bringing his father's son face to face with the woman who had been his father's mistress. All that morality which slumbers within us, pressed into the background of our emotions by centuries of hereditary teaching, all that he had learnt from his catechism about loose-living women, and the instinctive contempt for them that every man carries within

him even if he marries one of them, all his narrow peasant respectability; all this was stirring within him, holding him back, bringing the blush of shame to his cheek.

But he thought: "I gave my word. I mustn't go back on it." So he pushed the half-open door of the house marked No. 18, came upon a dark stairway, went up three floors, saw one door, then a second, found a bell cord and pulled it.

The tinkle which echoed in the neighbouring room sent a shiver through him. The door opened and facing him was a very well dressed young woman, with dark hair, and a high colour. She was staring at him in amazement.

He did not know what to say to her, and she, suspecting nothing, and expecting quite another man, did not ask him to come in. Thus they stared at each other for nearly half a minute.

At last she inquired:

"Can I do anything for you?"

He said in a whisper:

"I am Hautot junior."

She gave a start, turned pale, and stammered, as if she had known him for years:

"Monsieur César?"

"Yes."

"Well . . . ?"

"I have something to say to you on behalf of my father."

She cried—"Oh! dear God!"—and drew back to let him in. He closed the door and followed her. Then he caught sight of a little boy of four or five, who was playing with a cat, sitting on the floor in front of a range from which arose the steam of a dinner being kept hot on the fire.

"Sit down," she said.

He sat down. . . . She asked:

"Well . . . ?"

He was now afraid to speak, his eyes riveted to the table in the middle of the room, laid for three, including a child's plate. He stared at the chair with its back to the fire, at the plate, the napkin, the glasses, the opened bottle of red wine and the untouched bottle of white. That was his father's place, with his back to the fire. He was still expected. The bread he was looking at was *his* bread, near the fork; he knew it, because the crust had been cut off on account of Hautot's bad teeth. Then, looking up, he saw his father's portrait, on the wall, the big photograph taken in Paris the year of the Exhibition, the same as the one which hung over the bed in his bedroom at Ainville.

The young woman started again:

"Well, Monsieur César?"

He looked at her. Anguish had made her turn livid, and there she waited, her hands shaking with fright.

Then he summoned up courage.

"Well, Mam'zelle, Dad was killed last Sunday as he was opening the shoot."

She was so shocked that she did not stir. After a few moments of silence she murmured in an almost inaudible voice:

"It can't be true!"

Then suddenly tears came to her eyes, and raising her hand she covered her face and began to sob. On that the little boy turned his head and seeing his mother crying began to howl. Then, understanding that this sudden grief came from the stranger, he rushed at César, seized his trousers with one hand and kept hitting him with all his might on the leg with the other, while César stood still, completely at a loss, touched to the heart, between this woman who was crying for his father and this child who was defending its mother. He too was beginning to feel

the effect of this emotion; his eyes were swelling with grief; to keep himself in countenance he began to talk:

"Yes," he was saying, "the accident happened on Sunday morning, at about eight . . ."

And he went on telling the story as if she was listening to him, forgetting no detail, telling the smallest thing with peasant meticulousness. And the little boy kept kicking against his ankles.

When he came to the moment when Hautot senior had spoken of her, she heard her name, uncovered her face, and asked:

"Excuse me, I wasn't following, I *would* like to know. . . . If you didn't mind beginning over again."

He began again in the same words:

"The accident happened on Sunday morning at about eight o'clock. . . ."

He told everything at length, with pauses and full-stops, with reflections of his own from time to time. She was listening to him eagerly, seizing with her tense woman's sensibility all the incidents he was relating, shuddering with horror, sometimes giving an "Oh! Dear God!" The little boy, thinking her appeased, had stopped beating César in order to take his mother's hand, and he too was listening as if he understood.

When the story was over, Hautot junior said:

"And now we must come to an arrangement. The way he wanted it. Please listen carefully to me. I'm comfortably off; he has left me a good bit of property. I don't want you to have any reason to complain . . ."

But she interrupted him sharply:

"Oh! Monsieur César, Monsieur César, not to-day. I'm too miserable. . . . Another time, another day. . . . No, not to-day. . . . If I do accept, listen. . . . It's not for myself. . . . No, no, no! I swear it. It's for the little fellow. If it comes to that we'll settle this legacy on him."

Then César, startled, guessed, and stammered:

"So . . . it's his . . . this little chap?"

"Yes, of course," she said.

And Hautot junior looked at his brother with a confused emotion which was at once strong and painful.

After a long silence, for she was again crying, César, very much embarrassed, said:

"Very well, Mam'zelle Donet. But I must be going. When would you like us to talk this over?"

She cried:

"Oh, no, don't go away! Don't go away, don't leave me all alone with Emile. I'd die! I have nobody left, nobody but my little boy. Oh! What a terrible thing! What a terrible thing, Monsieur César. Look! Please sit down. You must talk to me some more. You'll tell me what he used to do out there all the week?"

And César sat down, accustomed as he was to obey. She drew another chair for herself up to his, in front of the range where the dishes were still simmering, took Emile on her knees, and asked César a thousand questions about his father, intimate things in which he felt unconsciously that she had loved Hautot with all her poor heart. Then by a natural sequence of ideas, which at best were not very numerous with him, he came back to the accident, and began to tell it all over again with all the same details. When he said:

"He had a hole in his belly that you could have put two fists into," she gave a kind of cry, and the tears sprang once more from her eyes. Then, seized by the same infectious emotion, César too began to cry, and since tears always soften the fibres of one's heart, he bent towards Emile, whose forehead was close to his mouth, and kissed him.

The mother, getting back her breath, was murmuring:

"Poor lad, now he's an orphan."

"So am I," said César.

And they said no more.

Suddenly, the practical instinct of the housewife, accustomed to think of everything, awoke in the young woman.

"Maybe you haven't ate anything all morning, Monsieur César?"

"No, Mam'zelle."

"Oh! You *must* be hungry. You'll eat a bit here."

"No thank you," he said, "I'm not hungry. I've been through too much."

She replied:

"We have to live. You won't refuse me that? And besides you'll stay a little longer. When you are gone I don't know what will become of me."

He gave in after another short struggle, and sitting down with his back to the fire, facing her, he ate a plateful of the tripe which had been sizzling on the range, and drank a glass of red wine. But he did not allow her to open the bottle of white. Several times he wiped the little chap's mouth and chin which had got all smeared with gravy. As he was getting up to leave he asked:

"When would you like me to come back and discuss things, Mam'zelle Donet?"

"If it was all the same to you, next Thursday, Monsieur César. I wouldn't lose any time that way. I'm always free on Thursdays."

"That's all right with me. Next Thursday."

"You'll come for lunch, won't you?"

"Oh, that's a thing I can't promise."

"It's just that one can talk better over a meal. There's more time too."

"All right, then. Twelve o'clock?"

And he departed, after kissing little Emile once more, and shaking hands with Mademoiselle Donet.

3

The week seemed long to César Hautot. He had never been left to himself, and he felt the loneliness unbearable. Up till now he had lived beside his father like a shadow, followed him into the fields, saw to it that his orders were carried out, and when he happened to leave him for a little while, saw him again at dinner-time. They spent their evenings smoking their pipes opposite each other, talking about horses, cows, sheep. The very handshake with which they greeted each other on waking seemed to mark the exchange of a deep family affection.

César was now all alone. He went wandering about in the Autumn ploughlands, ever expecting to see rising, at the far end of the plain, the tall gesticulating figure of his father. To kill the time he dropped into neighbouring farms, told the tale of the accident to all those who had not heard it, sometimes told it again to those who had. Then, having no more to do or to think, he would sit down by the road-side, wondering how such a life could last.

He often thought about Mademoiselle Donet. He had liked the look of her. He had found her well-mannered, gentle, a good soul, just as his father had told him. Yes. No doubt about it, she *was* a good soul. He had resolved to do things in a big way, to give her two thousand francs income, from capital to be settled on the child. He even felt a certain pleasure at the thought that he would see her again the following Thursday and settle all this with her. And then, the thought of this brother, of this little chap of five, who was his father's son, would worry him, put him out a bit, and yet give him a kind of warm feeling at the same time. It was a family, of a sort, which he had there, in this tiny tot who had been kept hidden and who would never bear the name of Hautot, a family, to

be sure, that he could take up or drop as he liked, but still something to remind him of his father. So when he found himself once more on the road to Rouen on Thursday morning, borne along to the echoing trot of Graindorge, he felt his heart lighter, more at peace, than he had yet felt it since his misfortune.

When he entered Mademoiselle Donet's little flat, he saw the table set just as it had been on the previous Thursday, with one single exception—the crust had not been removed from the bread.

He shook the young woman's hand, kissed Emile on both cheeks and sat down, feeling almost at home, though with a somewhat heavy heart all the same. Mademoiselle Donet seemed a little thinner, a little paler. She must have cried a lot. She now seemed a bit embarrassed in his presence, as if she had understood what she had not felt the week before under the first impact of her misfortune. She treated him with excessive respect, with a kind of stricken humility and touching little attentions as if to repay by her care and devotion his kindness to her. They spent a long time over the dinner, talking about the business which had brought him there. She did not want all that money. It was too much, far too much. She herself earned enough to live on; she only wanted Emile to be able to have a little money to look forward to when he grew up. But César stood firm, and even added a present of a thousand francs for herself, to console her a little in her grief.

When he had finished his coffee, she asked:

"Do you smoke?"

"Yes . . . I have my pipe."

He felt his pocket. Damn it, he had forgotten it! He was quite upset about it until she offered him one of his father's pipes out of the cupboard. He took the pipe, recognised it, sniffed it, pronounced it excellent in a moved

voice, filled it with tobacco and lit it. Then he placed Emile astride his leg and played horsey with him, while she cleared the table and put away the dirty dishes to be washed when he was gone.

Towards three, he got up regretfully, quite sorry to be leaving.

"Well, Mam'zelle Donet," he said, "I wish you good evening, and I'm very happy to have found you so nice."

She stood before him, blushing, very moved, and looked at him, the other man still in her mind.

"Shan't we see each other ever again?" she asked.

In all simplicity he answered:

"Why yes, Mam'zelle, if you like?"

"Surely, Monsieur César. Next Thursday? Would that suit you?"

"Yes, Mam'zelle Donet."

"You'll come to lunch, of course?"

"Why . . . if you really want me to, I won't say no."

"That's settled then, Monsieur César. Next Thursday at twelve, just like to-day."

"Thursday at twelve o'clock, Mam'zelle Donet."

12

The Sire de Malétroit's Door[1]

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

DENIS DE BEAULIEU was not yet two-and-twenty, but he counted himself a grown man, and a very accomplished cavalier into the bargain. Lads were early formed in that rough, warfaring epoch; and when one has been in a pitched battle and a dozen raids, has killed one's man in an honourable fashion, and knows a thing or two of strategy and mankind, a certain swagger in the gait is surely to be pardoned. He had put up his horse with due care, and supped with due deliberation; and then, in a very agreeable frame of mind, went out to pay a visit in the grey of the evening. It was not a very wise proceeding on the young man's part. He would have done better to remain beside the fire or go decently to bed. For the town was full of the troops of Burgundy and England under a mixed command; and though Denis was there on safe-conduct, his safe-conduct was like to serve him little on a chance encounter.

It was September, 1429; the weather had fallen sharp; a flighty piping wind, laden with showers, beat about the township; and the dead leaves ran riot along the streets. Here and there a window was already lighted up; and the noise of men-at-arms making merry over supper within, came forth in fits and was swallowed up and carried away by the wind. The night fell swiftly; the flag of England,

[1] For comment on this story see page 193.

fluttering on the spire-top, grew ever fainter and fainter against the flying clouds—a black speck like a swallow in the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the sky. As the night fell the wind rose and began to hoot under archways and roar amid the tree-tops in the valley below the town.

Denis de Beaulieu walked fast and was soon knocking at his friend's door; but though he promised himself to stay only a little while and make an early return, his welcome was so pleasant, and he found so much to delay him, that it was already long past midnight before he said good-bye upon the threshold. The wind had fallen again in the meanwhile; the night was as black as the grave; not a star, nor a glimmer of moonshine, slipped through the canopy of cloud. Denis was ill-acquainted with the intricate lanes of Château Landon; even by daylight he had found some trouble in picking his way; and in this absolute darkness he soon lost it altogether. He was certain of one thing only—to keep mounting the hill; for his friend's house lay at the lower end, or tail, of Château Landon, while the inn was up at the head, under the great church spire. With this clue to go upon he stumbled and groped forward, now breathing more freely in open places where there was a good slice of sky overhead, now feeling along the wall in stifling closes. It is an eerie and mysterious position to be thus submerged in opaque blackness in an almost unknown town. The silence is terrifying in its possibilities. The touch of cold window bars to the exploring hand startles the man like the touch of a toad; the inequalities of the pavement shake his heart into his mouth; a piece of denser darkness threatens an ambuscade or a chasm in the pathway; and where the air is brighter, the houses put on strange and bewildering appearances, as if to lead him farther from his way. For Denis, who had to regain his inn without attracting notice, there was real danger as well as mere discomfort in the walk; and he

went warily and boldly at once, and at every corner paused to make an observation.

He had been for some time threading a lane so narrow that he could touch a wall with either hand, when it began to open out and go sharply downward. Plainly this lay no longer in the direction of his inn; but the hope of a little more light tempted him forward to reconnoitre. The lane ended in a terrace with a bartizan wall, which gave an outlook between high houses, as out of an embrasure, into the valley lying dark and formless several hundred feet below. Denis looked down, and could discern a few tree-tops waving and a single speck of brightness where the river ran across a weir. The weather was clearing up, and the sky had lightened, so as to show the outline of the heavier clouds and the dark margin of the hills. By the uncertain glimmer, the house on his left hand should be a place of some pretensions; it was surmounted by several pinnacles and turret-tops; the round stern of a chapel, with a fringe of flying buttresses, projected boldly from the main block; and the door was sheltered under a deep porch carved with figures and overhung by two long gargoyles. The windows of the chapel gleamed through their intricate tracery with a light as of many tapers, and threw out the buttresses and the peaked roof in a more intense blackness against the sky. It was plainly the hotel of some great family of the neighbourhood; and as it reminded Denis of a town house of his own at Bourges, he stood for some time gazing up at it and mentally gauging the skill of the architects and the consideration of the two families.

There seemed to be no issue to the terrace but the lane by which he had reached it; he could only retrace his steps, but he had gained some notion of his whereabouts, and hoped by this means to hit the main thoroughfare and speedily regain the inn. He was reckoning

without that chapter of accidents which was to make this night memorable above all others in his career; for he had not gone back above a hundred yards before he saw a light coming to meet him, and heard loud voices speaking together in the echoing of the lane. It was a party of men-at-arms going the night round with torches. Denis assured himself that they had all been making free with the wine-bowl, and were in no mood to be particular about safe-conducts or the niceties of chivalrous war. It was as like as not that they would kill him like a dog and leave him where he fell. The situation was inspiriting but nervous. Their own torches would conceal him from sight, he reflected; and he hoped that they would drown the noise of his footsteps with their own empty voices. If he were but fleet and silent, he might evade their notice altogether.

Unfortunately, as he turned to beat a retreat, his foot rolled upon a pebble; he fell against the wall with an ejaculation, and his sword rang loudly on the stones. Two or three voices demanded who went here—some in French, some in English; but Denis made no reply, and ran the faster down the lane. Once upon the terrace, he paused to look back. They still kept calling after him, and just then began to double the pace in pursuit, with a considerable clank of armour, and great tossing of the torchlight to and fro in the narrow jaws of the passage.

Denis cast a look around and darted into the porch. There he might escape observation, or—if that were too much to expect—was in a capital posture whether for parley or defence. So thinking, he drew his sword and tried to set his back against the door. To his surprise, it yielded behind his weight; and though he turned in a moment, continued to swing back on oiled and noiseless hinges, until it stood wide open on a black interior. When things fall out opportunely for the person concerned, he is not

apt to be critical about the how or why, his own immediate personal convenience seeming a sufficient reason for the strangest oddities and revolutions in our sublunary things; and so Denis, without a moment's hesitation, stepped within and partly closed the door behind him to conceal his place of refuge. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to close it altogether; but for some inexplicable reason—perhaps by a spring or a weight—the ponderous mass of oak whipped itself out of his fingers and clanked to, with a formidable rumble and a noise like the falling of an automatic bar.

The round, at that very moment, debouched upon the terrace and proceeded to summon him with shouts and curses. He heard them ferreting in the dark corners; and the stock of a lance even rattled along the outer surface of the door behind which he stood; but these gentlemen were in too high a humour to be long delayed, and soon made off down a corkscrew pathway which had escaped Denis's observation, and passed out of sight and hearing along the battlements of the town.

Denis breathed again. He gave them a few minutes' grace for fear of accidents, and then groped about for some means of opening the door and slipping forth again. The inner surface was quite smooth, not a handle, not a moulding, not a projection of any sort. He got his finger-nails round the edges and pulled, but the mass was immovable. He shook it, it was as firm as a rock. Denis de Beaulieu frowned and gave vent to a little noiseless whistle. What ailed the door? he wondered. Why was it open? How came it to shut so easily and so effectually after him? There was something obscure and underhand about all this that was little to the young man's fancy. It looked like a snare; and yet who would suppose a snare in such a quiet by-street and in a house of so prosperous and even noble an exterior? And yet—snare or no snare, intention-

ally or unintentionally—here he was, prettily trapped; and for the life of him he could see no way out of it again. The darkness began to weigh upon him. He gave ear; all was silent without, but within and close by he seemed to catch a faint sighing, a faint sobbing rustle, a little stealthy creak—as though many persons were at his side, holding themselves quite still, and governing even their respiration with the extreme of slyness. The idea went to his vitals with a shock, and he faced about suddenly as if to defend his life. Then, for the first time, he became aware of a light about the level of his eyes and at some distance in the interior of the house—a vertical thread of light, widening towards the bottom, such as might escape between two wings of arras over a doorway. To see anything was a relief to Denis; it was like a piece of solid ground to a man labouring in a morass; his mind seized upon it with avidity; and he stood staring at it and trying to piece together some logical conception of his surroundings. Plainly there was a flight of steps ascending from his own level to that of this illuminated doorway; and indeed he thought he could make out another thread of light, as fine as a needle and as faint as phosphorescence, which might very well be reflected along the polished wood of a handrail. Since he had begun to suspect that he was not alone, his heart had continued to beat with smothering violence, and an intolerable desire for action of any sort had possessed itself of his spirit. He was in deadly peril, he believed. What could be more natural than to mount the staircase, lift the curtain, and confront his difficulty at once? At least he would be dealing with something tangible; at least he would be no longer in the dark. He stepped slowly forward with outstretched hands, until his foot struck the bottom step; then he rapidly scaled the stairs, stood for a moment to compose his expression, lifted the arras and went in.

He found himself in a large apartment of polished stone. There were three doors; one on each of three sides; all similarly curtained with tapestry. The fourth side was occupied by two large windows and a great stone chimney-piece, carved with the arms of the Malétroits. Denis recognised the bearings, and was gratified to find himself in such good hands. The room was strongly illuminated; but it contained little furniture except a heavy table and a chair or two, the hearth was innocent of fire, and the pavement was but sparsely strewn with rushes clearly many days old.

On a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Denis as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast; not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar; something equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal, and dangerous. The upper lip was inordinately full, as though swollen by a blow or a toothache; and the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small, strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all round his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and moustache were the pink of venerable sweetness. Age, probably in consequence of inordinate precautions, had left no mark upon his hands; and the Malétroit hand was famous. It would be difficult to imagine anything at once so fleshy and so delicate in design; the tapered, sensual fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women; the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed; the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead, surprising whiteness. It rendered his aspect tenfold more redoubtable that a man with hands like these should keep them

devoutly folded in his lap like a virgin martyr—that a man with so intense and startling an expression of face should sit patiently on his seat and contemplate people with an unwinking stare, like a god, or a god's statue. His quiescence seemed ironical and treacherous, it fitted so poorly with his looks.

Such was Alain, Sire de Malétroit.

Denis and he looked silently at each other for a second or two.

"Pray step in," said the Sire de Malétroit. "I have been expecting you all the evening."

He had not risen, but he accompanied his words with a smile and a slight but courteous inclination of the head. Partly from the smile, partly from the strange musical murmur with which the Sire prefaced his observation, Denis felt a strong shudder of disgust go through his marrow. And what with disgust and honest confusion of mind, he could scarcely get words together in reply.

"I fear," he said, "that this is a double accident. I am not the person you suppose me. It seems you were looking for a visit; but for my part, nothing was further from my thoughts—nothing could be more contrary to my wishes—than this intrusion."

"Well, well," replied the old gentleman indulgently, "here you are, which is the main point. Seat yourself, my friend, and put yourself entirely at your ease. We shall arrange our little affairs presently."

Denis perceived that the matter was still complicated with some misconception, and he hastened to continue his explanations.

"Your door . . ." he began.

"About my door?" asked the other, raising his peaked eyebrows. "A little piece of ingenuity." And he shrugged his shoulders. "A hospitable fancy! By your own account, you were not desirous of making my acquaintance. We

old people look for such reluctance now and then; and when it touches our honour, we cast about until we find some way of overcoming it. You arrive uninvited, but believe me, very welcome."

"You persist in error, sir," said Denis. "There can be no question between you and me. I am a stranger in this countryside. My name is Denis, damoiseau de Beaulieu. If you see me in your house, it is only——"

"My young friend," interrupted the other, "you will permit me to have my own ideas on that subject. They probably differ from yours at the present moment," he added with a leer, "but time will show which of us is in the right."

Denis was convinced he had to do with a lunatic. He seated himself with a shrug, content to wait the upshot; and a pause ensued, during which he thought he could distinguish a hurried gabbling as of prayer from behind the arras immediately opposite him. Sometimes there seemed to be but one person engaged, sometimes two; and the vehemence of the voice, low as it was, seemed to indicate either great haste or an agony of spirit. It occurred to him that this piece of tapestry covered the entrance to the chapel he had noticed from without.

The old gentleman meanwhile surveyed Denis from head to foot with a smile, and from time to time emitted little noises like a bird or a mouse, which seemed to indicate a high degree of satisfaction. This state of matters became rapidly insupportable; and Denis, to put an end to it, remarked politely that the wind had gone down.

The old gentleman fell into a fit of silent laughter, so prolonged and violent that he became quite red in the face. Denis got upon his feet at once, and put on his hat with a flourish.

"Sir," he said, "if you are in your wits, you have af-

fronted me grossly. If you are out of them, I flatter myself I can find better employment for my brains than to talk with lunatics. My conscience is clear; you have made a fool of me from the first moment; you have refused to hear my explanations; and now there is no power under God will make me stay here any longer; and if I cannot make my way out in a more decent fashion, I will hack your door in pieces with my sword."

The Sire de Malétroit raised his right hand and wagged it at Denis with the fore and little fingers extended.

"My dear nephew," he said, "sit down."

"Nephew!" retorted Denis, "you lie in your throat"; and he snapped his fingers in his face.

"Sit down, you rogue!" cried the old gentleman, in a sudden harsh voice, like the barking of a dog. "Do you fancy," he went on, "that when I had made my little contrivance for the door I had stopped short with that? If you prefer to be bound hand and foot till your bones ache, rise and try to go away. If you choose to remain a free young buck, agreeably conversing with an old gentleman —why, sit where you are in peace, and God be with you."

"Do you mean I am a prisoner?" demanded Denis.

"I state the facts," replied the other. "I would rather leave the conclusion to yourself."

Denis sat down again. Externally he managed to keep pretty calm; but within, he was now boiling with anger, now chilled with apprehension. He no longer felt convinced that he was dealing with a madman. And if the old gentleman was sane, what, in God's name, had he to look for? What absurd or tragical adventure had befallen him? What countenance was he to assume?

While he was thus unpleasantly reflecting, the arras that overhung the chapel door was raised, and a tall priest

in his robes came forth and, giving a long, keen stare at Denis, said something in an undertone to Sire de Malétroit.

"She is in a better frame of spirit?" asked the latter.

"She is more resigned, messire," replied the priest.

"Now the Lord help her, she is hard to please!" sneered the old gentleman. "A likely stripling—not ill-born—and of her own choosing, too? Why, what more would the jade have?"

"The situation is not usual for a young damsel," said the other, "and somewhat trying to her blushes."

"She should have thought of that before she began the dance. It was none of my choosing, God knows that: but since she is in it, by our Lady, she shall carry it to the end." And then addressing Denis, "Monsieur de Beaulieu," he asked, "may I present you to my niece? She has been waiting your arrival, I may say, with even greater impatience than myself."

Denis had resigned himself with a good grace—all he desired was to know the worst of it as speedily as possible; so he rose at once, and bowed in acquiescence. The Sire de Malétroit followed his example and limped, with the assistance of the chaplain's arm, towards the chapel door. The priest pulled aside the arras, and all three entered. The building had considerable architectural pretensions. A light groining sprang from six stout columns, and hung down in two rich pendants from the centre of the vault. The place terminated behind the altar in a round end, embossed and honeycombed with a superfluity of ornament in relief, and pierced by many little windows shaped like stars, trefoils, or wheels. These windows were imperfectly glazed, so that the night air circulated freely in the chapel. The tapers, of which there must have been half a hundred burning on the altar, were unmercifully blown about; and the light went through many

different phases of brilliancy and semi-eclipse. On the steps in front of the altar knelt a young girl richly attired as a bride. A chill settled over Denis as he observed her costume; he fought with desperate energy against the conclusion that was thrust upon his mind; it could not—it should not—be as he feared.

"Blanche," said the Sire, in his most flute-like tones, "I have brought a friend to see you, my little girl; 'turn round and give him your pretty hand. It is good to be devout; but it is necessary to be polite, my niece."

The girl rose to her feet and turned towards the newcomers. She moved all of a piece; and shame and exhaustion were expressed in every line of her fresh young body; and she held her head down and kept her eyes upon the pavement, as she came slowly forward. In the course of her advance, her eyes fell upon Denis de Beaulieu's feet —feet of which he was justly vain, be it remarked, and wore in the most elegant accoutrement even while travelling. She paused—started, as if his yellow boots had conveyed some shocking meaning—and glanced suddenly up into the wearer's countenance. Their eyes met; shame gave place to horror and terror in her looks; the blood left her lips; with a piercing scream she covered her face with her hands and sank upon the chapel floor.

"That is not the man!" she cried. "My uncle, that is not the man!"

The Sire de Malétroit chirped agreeably. "Of course not," he said; "I expected as much. It was so unfortunate you could not remember his name."

"Indeed," she cried, "indeed, I have never seen this person till this moment—I have never so much as set eyes upon him—I never wish to see him again. Sir," she said, turning to Denis, "if you are a gentleman, you will bear me out. Have I ever seen you—have you ever seen me—before this accursed hour?"

"To speak for myself, I have never had that pleasure," answered the young man. "This is the first time, messire, that I have met with your engaging niece."

The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"I am distressed to hear it," he said. "But it is never too late to begin. I had little more acquaintance with my own late lady ere I married her; which proves," he added with a grimace, "that these impromptu marriages may often produce an excellent understanding in the long run. As the bridegroom is to have a voice in the matter, I will give him two hours to make up for lost time before we proceed with the ceremony." And he turned towards the door, followed by the clergyman.

The girl was on her feet in a moment. "My uncle, you cannot be in earnest," she said. "I declare before God I will stab myself rather than be forced on that young man. The heart rises at it; God forbid such marriages; you dishonour your white hair. Oh, my uncle, pity me! There is not a woman in all the world but would prefer death to such a nuptial. Is it possible," she added faltering, "is it possible that you do not believe me—that you still think this"—and she pointed at Denis with a tremor of anger and contempt—"that you still think *this* to be the man?"

"Frankly," said the old gentleman, pausing on the threshold, "I do. But let me explain to you once for all, Blanche de Malétroit, my way of thinking about this affair. When you took it into your head to dishonour my family and the name that I have borne, in peace and war, for more than three-score years, you forfeited, not only the right to question my designs, but that of looking me in the face. If your father had been alive, he would have spat on you and turned you out of doors. His was the hand of iron. You may bless your God you have only to deal with the hand of velvet, Mademoiselle. It was my duty to get you married without delay. Out of pure goodwill,

I have tried to find your own gallant for you. And I believe I have succeeded. But before God and all the holy angels, Blanche de Malétroit, if I have not, I care not one jackstraw. So let me recommend you to be polite to our young friend; for, upon my word, your next groom may be less appetising."

And with that he went out, with the chaplain at his heels; and the arras fell behind the pair.

The girl turned upon Denis with flashing eyes.

"And what, sir," she demanded, "may be the meaning of all this?"

"God knows," returned Denis gloomily. "I am a prisoner in this house, which seems full of mad people. More I know not; and nothing do I understand."

"And pray how came you here?" she asked.

He told her as briefly as he could. "For the rest," he added, "perhaps you will follow my example, and tell me the answer to all these riddles, and what, in God's name, is like to be the end of it."

She stood silent for a little, and he could see her lips tremble and her tearless eye burn with a feverish lustre. Then she pressed her forehead with both hands.

"Alas, how my head aches!" she said wearily—"to say nothing of my poor heart! But it is due to you to know my story, unmaidenly as it must seem. I am called Blanche de Malétroit; I have been without father or mother for —oh! for as long as I can recollect, and indeed I have been most unhappy all my life. Three months ago a young captain began to stand near me every day in church. I could see that I pleased him; I am much to blame, but I was so glad that anyone should love me; and when he passed me a letter, I took it home with me and read it with great pleasure. Since that time he has written many. He was so anxious to speak with me, poor fellow! and kept asking me to leave the door open some

evening that we might have two words upon the stair. For he knew how much my uncle trusted me." She gave something like a sob at that, and it was a moment before she could go on. "My uncle is a hard man, but he is very shrewd," she said at last. "He has performed many feats in war, and was a great person at court, and much trusted by Queen Isabeau in old days. How he came to suspect me I cannot tell; but it is hard to keep anything from his knowledge; and this morning, as we came from mass, he took my hand in his, forced it open, and read my little billet, walking by my side all the while. When he had finished, he gave it back to me with great politeness. It contained another request to have the door left open; and this has been the ruin of us all. My uncle kept me strictly in my room until evening, and then ordered me to dress myself as you see me—a hard mockery for a young girl, do you not think so? I suppose, when he could not prevail with me to tell him the young captain's name, he must have laid a trap for him: into which, alas! you have fallen in the anger of God. I looked for much confusion; for how could I tell whether he was willing to take me for his wife on these sharp terms? He might have been trifling with me from the first; or I might have made myself too cheap in his eyes. But truly I had not looked for such a shameful punishment as this! I could not think that God would let a girl be so disgraced before a young man. And now I have told you all; and I can scarcely hope that you will not despise me."

Denis made her a respectful inclination.

"Madam," he said, "you have honoured me by your confidence. It remains for me to prove that I am not unworthy of the honour. Is Messire de Malétroit at hand?"

"I believe he is waiting in the sálle without," she answered.

"May I lead you thither, madam?" asked Denis, offering his hand with his most courtly bearing.

She accepted it; and the pair passed out of the chapel, Blanche in a very drooping and shamefast condition, but Denis strutting and ruffling in the consciousness of a mission, and the boyish certainty of accomplishing it with honour.

The Sire de Malétroit rose to meet them with an ironical obeisance.

"Sir," said Denis with the grandest possible air, "I believe I am to have some say in the matter of this marriage; and let me tell you at once, I will be no party to forcing the inclination of this young lady. Had it been freely offered to me, I should have been proud to accept her hand, for I perceive she is as good as she is beautiful; but as things are, I have now the honour, messire, of refusing."

Blanche looked at him with gratitude in her eyes; but the old gentleman only smiled and smiled, until his smile grew positively sickening to Denis.

"I am afraid," he said, "Monsieur de Beaulieu, that you do not perfectly understand the choice I have to offer you. Follow me, I beseech you, to this window." And he led the way to one of the large windows which stood open on the night. "You observe," he went on, "there is an iron ring in the upper masonry, and reeved through that, a very efficacious rope. Now, mark my words; if you should find your disinclination to my niece's person insurmountable, I shall have you hanged out of this window before sunrise. I shall only proceed to such an extremity with the greatest regret, you may believe me. For it is not at all your death that I desire, but my niece's establishment in life. At the same time, it must come to that if you prove obstinate. Your family, Monsieur de Beaulieu, is

very well in its way; but if you sprang from Charlemagne, you should not refuse the hand of a Malétroit with impunity—not if she had been as common as the Paris road—not if she were as hideous as the gargoyle over my door. Neither my niece nor you, nor my own private feelings, move me at all in this matter. The honour of my house has been compromised; I believe you to be the guilty person; at least you are now in the secret; and you can hardly wonder if I request you to wipe out the stain. If you will not, your blood be on your own head! It will be no great satisfaction to me to have your interesting relics kicking their heels in the breeze below my windows; but half a loaf is better than no bread and if I cannot cure the dishonour, I shall at least stop the scandal."

There was a pause.

"I believe there are other ways of settling such imbroglios among gentlemen," said Denis. "You wear a sword, and I hear you have used it with distinction."

The Sire de Malétroit made a signal to the chaplain, who crossed the room with long silent strides and raised the arras over the third of the three doors. It was only a moment before he let it fall again; but Denis had time to see a dusky passage full of armed men.

"When I was a little younger, I should have been delighted to honour you, Monsieur de Beaulieu," said Sire Alain; "but I am now too old. Faithful retainers are the sinews of age, and I must employ the strength I have. This is one of the hardest things to swallow as a man grows up in years; but with a little patience, even this becomes habitual. You and the lady seem to prefer the salle for what remains of your two hours; and as I have no desire to cross your preference, I shall resign it to your use with all the pleasure in the world. No haste!" he added, holding up his hand, as he saw a dangerous look come into Denis de Beaulieu's face. "If your mind revolts against hanging,

it will be time enough two hours hence to throw yourself out of the window or upon the pikes of my retainers. Two hours of life are always two hours. A great many things may turn up in even as little a while as that. And, besides, if I understand her appearance, my niece has still something to say to you. You will not disfigure your last hours by a want of politeness to a lady?"

Denis looked at Blanche, and she made him an imploring gesture.

It is likely that the old gentleman was hugely pleased at this symptom of an understanding; for he smiled on both, and added sweetly: "If you will give me your word of honour, Monsieur de Beaulieu, to wait my return at the end of the two hours before attempting anything desperate, I shall withdraw my retainers, and let you speak in greater privacy with Mademoiselle."

Denis glanced at the girl, who seemed to beseech him to agree.

"I give you my word of honour," he said.

Messire de Malétroit bowed, and proceeded to limp about the apartment, clearing his throat the while with that odd musical chirp which had already grown so irritating in the ears of Denis de Beaulieu. He first possessed himself of some papers which lay upon the table; then he went to the mouth of the passage and appeared to give an order to the men behind the arras; and lastly he hobbled out through the door by which Denis had come in, turning upon the threshold to address a last smiling bow to the young couple, and followed by the chaplain with a hand-lamp.

No sooner were they alone than Blanche advanced towards Denis with her hands extended. Her face was flushed and excited, and her eyes shone with tears.

"You shall not die!" she cried, "you shall marry me after all."

"You seem to think, Madam," replied Denis, "that I stand much in fear of death."

"Oh, no, no," she said, "I see you are no poltroon. It is for my own sake—I could not bear to have you slain for such a scruple."

"I am afraid," returned Denis, "that you underrate the difficulty, madam. What you may be too generous to refuse, I may be too proud to accept. In a moment of noble feeling towards me, you forgot what you perhaps owe to others."

He had the decency to keep his eyes upon the floor as he said this, and after he had finished, so as not to spy upon her confusion. She stood silent for a moment, then walked suddenly away, and falling on her uncle's chair, fairly burst out sobbing. Denis was in the acme of embarrassment. He looked round, as if to seek for inspiration, and seeing a stool, plumped down upon it for something to do. There he sat, playing with the guard of his rapier, and wishing himself dead a thousand times over, and buried in the nastiest kitchen-heap on France. His eyes wandered round the apartment, but found nothing to arrest them. There were such wide spaces between the furniture, the light fell so badly and cheerlessly over all, the dark outside air looked in so coldly through the windows, that he thought he had never seen a church so vast, nor a tomb so melancholy. The regular sobs of Blanche de Malétroit measured out the time like the ticking of a clock. He read the device upon the shield over and over again, until his eyes became obscured; he stared into shadowy corners until he imagined they were swarming with horrible animals; and every now and again he awoke with a start, to remember that his last two hours were running, and death was on the march.

Oftener and oftener, as the time went on, did his glance

settle on the girl herself. Her face was bowed forward and covered with her hands, and she was shaken at intervals by the convulsive hiccup of grief. Even thus she was not an unpleasant object to dwell upon, so plump and yet so fine, with a warm brown skin, and the most beautiful hair, Denis thought, in the whole world of womankind. Her hands were like her uncle's; but they were more in place at the end of her young arms, and looked infinitely soft and caressing. He remembered how her blue eyes had shone upon him, full of anger, pity, and innocence. And the more he dwelt on her perfections, the uglier death looked, and the more deeply was he smitten with penitence at her continued tears. Now he felt that no man could have the courage to leave a world which contained so beautiful a creature; and now he would have given forty minutes of his last hour to have unsaid his cruel speech.

Suddenly a hoarse and ragged peal of cockcrow rose to their ears from the dark valley below the windows. And this shattering noise in the silence of all around was like a light in a dark place, and shook them both out of their reflections.

"Alas, can I do nothing to help you?" she said, looking up.

"Madam," replied Denis, with a fine irrelevancy, "if I have said anything to wound you, believe me, it was for your own sake and not for mine."

She thanked him with a tearful look.

"I feel your position cruelly," he went on. "The world has been bitter hard on you. Your uncle is a disgrace to mankind. Believe me, Madam, there is no young gentleman in all France but would be glad of my opportunity to die in doing you a momentary service."

"I know already that you can be very brave and gener-

ous," she answered. "What I *want* to know is whether I can serve you—now or afterwards," she added, with a quaver.

"Most certainly," he answered with a smile. "Let me sit beside you as if I were a friend, instead of a foolish intruder; try to forget how awkwardly we are placed to one another; make my last moments go pleasantly; and you will do me the chief service possible."

"You are very gallant," she added, with a yet deeper sadness . . . "very gallant . . . and it somehow pains me. But draw nearer, if you please; and if you find anything to say to me, you will at least make certain of a very friendly listener. Ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu," she broke forth—"ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu, how can I look you in the face?" And she fell to weeping again with a renewed effusion.

"Madam," said Denis, taking her hand in both of his, "reflect on the little time I have before me, and the great bitterness into which I am cast by the sight of your distress. Spare me, in my last moments, the spectacle of what I cannot cure even with the sacrifice of my life."

"I am very selfish," answered Blanche. "I will be braver, Monsieur de Beaulieu, for your sake. But think if I can do you no kindness in the future—if you have no friends to whom I could carry your adieux. Charge me as heavily as you can; every burden will lighten, by so little, the invaluable gratitude I owe you. Put it in my power to do something more for you than weep."

"My mother is married again, and has a young family to care for. My brother Guichard will inherit my fiefs; and if I am not in error, that will content him amply for my death. Life is a little vapour that passeth away, as we are told by those in holy orders. When a man is in a fair way and sees all life open in front of him, he seems to himself to make a very important figure in the world. His

horse whinnies to him; the trumpets blow and the girls look out of window as he rides into town before his company; he receives many assurances of trust and regard—sometimes by express in a letter—sometimes face to face, with persons of great consequence falling on his neck. It is not wonderful if his head is turned for a time. But once he is dead, were he as brave as Hercules or as wise as Solomon, he is soon forgotten. It is not ten years since my father fell, with many other knights around him, in a very fierce encounter, and I do not think that any one of them, nor so much as the name of the fight, is now remembered. No, no, Madam, the nearer you come to it, you see that death is a dark and dusty corner where a man gets into his tomb and has the door shut after him till the judgment day. I have few friends just now, and once I am dead I shall have none."

"Ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu!" she exclaimed, "you forget Blanche de Malétroit."

"You have a sweet nature, Madam, and you are pleased to estimate a little service far beyond its worth."

"It is not that," she answered. "You mistake me if you think I am so easily touched by my own concerns. I say so, because you are the noblest man I have ever met; because I recognise in you a spirit that would have made even a common person famous in the land."

"And yet here I die in a mouse-trap—with no more noise about it than my own squeaking," answered he.

A look of pain crossed her face, and she was silent for a little while. Then a light came into her eyes, and with a smile she spoke again.

"I cannot have my champion think meanly of himself. Anyone who gives his life for another will be met in Paradise by all the heralds and angels of the Lord God. And you have no such cause to hang your head. For . . .

Pray, do you think me beautiful?" she asked, with a deep flush.

"Indeed, Madam, I do," he said.

"I am glad of that," she answered heartily. "Do you think there are many men in France who have been asked in marriage by a beautiful maiden—with her own lips—and who have refused her to her face? I know you men would half despise such a triumph; but believe me, we women know more of what is precious in love. There is nothing that should set a person higher in his own esteem; and we women would prize nothing more dearly."

"You are very good," he said; "but you cannot make me forget that I was asked in pity and not for love."

"I am not so sure of that," she replied, holding down her head. "Hear me to an end, Monsieur de Beaulieu. I know how you must despise me; I feel you are right to do so; I am too poor a creature to occupy one thought of your mind, although, alas! you must die for me this morning. But when I asked you to marry me, indeed, and indeed, it was because I respected and admired you, and loved you with my whole soul, from the very moment that you took my part against my uncle. If you had seen yourself, and how noble you looked, you would pity rather than despise me. And now," she went on, hurriedly checking him with her hand, "although I have laid aside all reserve and told you so much, remember that I know your sentiments towards me already. I would not, believe me, being nobly born, weary you with importunities into consent. I too have a pride of my own: and I declare before the holy mother of God, if you should now go back from your word already given, I would no more marry you than I would marry my uncle's groom."

Denis smiled a little bitterly.

"It is a small love," he said, "that shies at a little pride."

She made no answer, although she probably had her own thoughts.

"Come hither to the window," he said, with a sigh. "Here is the dawn."

And indeed the dawn was already beginning. The hollow of the sky was full of essential daylight, colourless and clean; and the valley underneath was flooded with a grey reflection. A few thin vapours clung in the coves of the forest or lay along the winding course of the river. The scene disengaged a surprising effect of stillness, which was hardly interrupted when the cocks began once more to crow among the steadings. Perhaps the same fellow who had made so horrid a clangour in the darkness not half an hour before, now sent up the merriest cheer to greet the coming day. A little wind went bustling and eddying among the tree-tops underneath the windows. And still the daylight kept flooding insensibly out of the east, which was soon to grow incandescent and cast up that red-hot cannon-ball, the rising sun.

Denis looked out over all this with a bit of a shiver. He had taken her hand, and retained it in his almost unconsciously.

"Has the day begun already?" she said; and then, illogically enough: "the night has been so long! Alas! what shall we say to my uncle when he returns?"

"What you will," said Denis, and he pressed her fingers in his.

She was silent.

"Blanche," he said, with a swift, uncertain, passionate utterance, "you have seen whether I fear death. You must know well enough that I would as gladly leap out of that window into the empty air as lay a finger on you without your free and full consent. But if you care for me at all do not let me lose my life in a misapprehension; for I love you better than the whole world; and though I will die

for you blithely, it would be like all the joys of Paradise to live on and spend my life in your service."

As he stopped speaking, a bell began to ring loudly in the interior of the house; and a clatter of armour in the corridor showed that the retainers were returning to their post, and the two hours were at an end.

"After all that you have heard?" she whispered, leaning towards him with her lips and eyes.

"I have heard nothing," he replied.

"The captain's name was Florimond de Champdivers," she said in his ear.

"I did not hear it," he answered, taking her supple body in his arms and covering her wet face with kisses.

A melodious chirping was audible behind, followed by a beautiful chuckle, and the voice of Messire de Maletroit wished his new nephew a good morning.

13

The Real Thing[1]

By HENRY JAMES

1

WHEN the porter's wife (she used to answer the house-bell) announced "A gentleman—with a lady, sir," I had as I often had in those days, for the wish was father to the thought, an immediate vision of sitters. Sitters my visitors in this case proved to be; but not in the sense I should have preferred. However, there was nothing at first to indicate that they might not have come for a portrait. The gentleman, a man of fifty, very high and very straight, with a moustache slightly grizzled and a dark grey walking-coat admirably fitted, both of which I noted professionally [—I don't mean as a barber or yet as a tailor—] would have struck me as a celebrity if celebrities often were striking. [It was a truth of which I had for some time been conscious that a figure with a good deal of frontage was, as one might say, almost never a public institution. A glance at] the lady [helped to remind me of this paradoxical law: she] also looked too distinguished to be a "personality." [Moreover one would scarcely come across two variations together.]

Neither of the pair spoke immediately—they only pro-

[1] For comment on this story see page 182. The round brackets are James's. The square brackets are mine to indicate how some greater compression might have been achieved; but see page 211.

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longed the preliminary gaze which suggested that each wished to give the other a chance. [They were visibly shy; they stood there letting me take them in—which, as I afterwards perceived, was the most practical thing they could have done. In this way their embarrassment served their cause. I had seen people painfully reluctant to mention that they desired anything so gross as to be represented on canvas; but the scruples of my new friends appeared almost insurmountable. Yet the gentleman might have said "I should like a portrait of my wife," and the lady might have said "I should like a portrait of my husband." Perhaps they were not husband and wife—this naturally would make the matter more delicate. Perhaps they wished to be done together—in which case they ought to have brought a third person to break the news.]

"We come from Mr. Rivet," the lady said at last, with a dim smile [which had the effect of a moist sponge passed over a "sunk" piece of painting, as well as of a vague allusion to vanished beauty]. She was as tall and straight, in her degree, as her companion, and with ten years less to carry. She looked as sad as a woman could look whose face was not charged with expression; that is her tinted oval mask showed friction as an exposed surface shows it. The hand of time had played over her freely, but only to simplify. [She was slim and stiff, and so well-dressed, in dark blue cloth, with lappets and pockets and buttons, that it was clear she employed the same tailor as her husband. The couple had an indefinable air of prosperous thrift—they evidently got a good deal of luxury for their money. If I was to be one of their luxuries it would behove me to consider my terms.]

"Ah, Claude Rivet recommended me?" I inquired: [and I added that it was very kind of him, though I could reflect that, as he only painted landscape, this was not a sacrifice.]

The lady looked very hard at the gentleman, and the gentleman looked round the room. Then staring at the floor a moment and stroking his moustache, he rested his pleasant eyes on me with the remark: "He said you were the right one."

"I try to be, when people want to sit."

"Yes, we should like to," said the lady anxiously.

"Do you mean together?"

My visitors exchanged glances. "If you could do anything with *me,* I suppose it would be double," the gentleman stammered.

"Oh yes, there's naturally a higher charge for two figures than for one."

"We should like to make it pay," the husband confessed.

"That's very good of you," I returned, appreciating so unwonted a sympathy—for I supposed he meant pay the artist.

A sense of strangeness seemed to dawn on the lady. "We mean for the illustrations—Mr. Rivet said you might put one in."

"Put one in—an illustration?" I was equally confused.

"Sketch her off, you know," said the gentleman, colouring.

It was only then that I understood [the service Claude Rivet had rendered me; he had told them that I worked in black and white, for magazines, for story-books, for sketches of contemporary life, and consequently had frequent employment for models. These things were true, but it was not less true (I may confess it now—whether because the aspiration was to lead to everything or to nothing I leave the reader to guess), that I didn't get the honours, to say nothing of the emoluments, of a great painter of portraits out of my head. My "illustrations" were my pot-boilers; I looked to a different branch of art

(far and away the most interesting it had always seemed to me) to perpetuate my fame. There was no shame in looking to it also to make my fortune; but that fortune was by so much further from being made from the moment my visitors wished to be "done" for nothing. I was disappointed; for in the pictorial sense I had immediately *seen* them. I had seized their type—I had already settled what I would do with it. Something that wouldn't absolutely have pleased them, I afterwards reflected].

"Ah, you're—you're—a——?" I began, as soon as I had mastered my surprise. I couldn't bring out the dingy word "models"; it seemed to fit the case so little.

"We haven't had much practice," said the lady.

["We've got to *do* something, and we've thought that an artist in your line might perhaps make something of us," her husband threw off. He further mentioned that they didn't know many artists and that they had gone first, on the offchance (he painted views of course, but sometimes put in figures—perhaps I remembered), to Mr. Rivet, whom they had met a few years before at a place in Norfolk where he was sketching.

"We used to sketch a little ourselves," the lady hinted.

"It's very awkward, but we absolutely *must* do something," her husband went on.

"Of course, we're not so *very* young," she admitted, with a wan smile.

With the remark that I might as well know something more about them, the husband had handed me a card extracted from a neat new pocket-book (their appurtenances were all of the freshest) and inscribed with the words "Major Monarch." Impressive as these words were they didn't carry my knowledge much further; but my visitor presently added: "I've left the army, and we've had the misfortune to lose our money. In fact our means are dreadfully small."

"It's an awful bore," said Mrs. Monarch.

They evidently wished to be discreet—to take care not to swagger because they were gentlefolks. I perceived they would have been willing to recognise this as something of a drawback, at the same time that I guessed at an underlying sense—their consolation in adversity—that they *had* their points. They certainly had; but these advantages struck me as preponderantly social; such for instance as would help to make a drawing-room look well. However, a drawing-room was always, or ought to be, a picture.

In consequence of his wife's allusion to their age] Major Monarch observed: "Naturally, it's more for the figure that we thought of going in. We can still hold ourselves up." On the instant I saw that the figure was indeed their strong point. His "naturally" didn't sound vain, but it lighted up the question. "*She* has got the best," he continued, nodding at his wife, with a pleasant after-dinner absence of circumlocution. I could only reply, as if we were in fact sitting over our wine, that this didn't prevent his own from being very good; which led him in turn to rejoin: "We thought that if you ever have to do people like us, we might be something like it. *She*, particularly—for a lady in a book, you know."

I was so amused by them that, to get more of it, I did my best to take their point of view; and though it was an embarrassment to find myself appraising physically, as if they were animals on hire or useful blacks, a pair whom I should have expected to meet only in one of the relations in which criticism is tacit, I looked at Mrs. Monarch judicially enough to be able to exclaim, after a moment, with conviction: "Oh yes, a lady in a book!" She was singularly like a bad illustration.

"We'll stand up, if you like," said the Major, and he raised himself before me with a really grand air.

[I could take his measure at a glance—he was six feet two and a perfect gentleman. It would have paid any club in process of formation and in want of a stamp to engage him at a salary to stand in the principal window. What struck me immediately was that in coming to me they had rather missed their vocation; they could surely have been turned to better account for advertising purposes. I couldn't of course see the thing in detail, but I could see them make someone's fortune—I don't mean their own. There was something in them for a waistcoat-maker, an hotel keeper or a soap-vendor. I could imagine "We always use it" pinned on their bosoms with the greatest effect; I had a vision of the promptitude with which they would launch a table d'hôte.]

Mrs. Monarch sat still, not from pride but from shyness, and presently her husband said to her: "Get up, my dear, and show how smart you are." She obeyed, but she had no need to get up to show it. She walked to the end of the studio, and then she came back blushing, with her fluttered eyes on her husband. [I was reminded of an incident I had accidentally had a glimpse of in Paris—being with a friend there, a dramatist about to produce a play —when an actress came to him to ask to be entrusted with a part. She went through her paces before him, walked up and down as Mrs. Monarch was doing. Mrs. Monarch did it quite as well, but I abstained from applauding. It was very odd to see such people apply for such poor pay. She looked as if she had ten thousand a year. Her husband had used the word that described her: she was, in the London current jargon, essentially and typically "smart." Her figure was, in the same order of ideas, conspicuously and irreproachably "good." For a woman of her age her waist was surprisingly small; her elbow moreover had the orthodox crook. She held her head at the conventional angle; but why did she come to *me*? She

ought to have tried on jackets at a big shop. I feared my visitors were not only destitute, but "artistic"—which would be a great complication.] When she sat down again I thanked her, observing that what a draughtsman most valued in his model was the faculty of keeping quiet.

"Oh, *she* can keep quiet," said Major Monarch. Then he added jocosely: "I've always kept her quiet."

"I'm not a nasty fidget, am I?" Mrs. Monarch appealed to her husband.

He addressed his answer to me. "Perhaps it isn't out of place to mention—because we ought to be quite business-like, oughtn't we?—than when I married her she was known as the Beautiful Statue."

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Monarch ruefully.

["Of course I should want a certain amount of expression," I rejoined.

"Of *course!*" they both exclaimed.

"And then I suppose you know that you'll get awfully tired."

"Oh, we *never* get tired!" they eagerly cried.]

"Have you had any kind of practice?"

They hesitated—they looked at each other. "We've been photographed, *immensely*," said Mrs. Monarch.

"She means the fellows have asked us," added the Major.

["I see—because you're so good-looking."

"I don't know what they thought, but they were always after us."

"We always got our photographs for nothing," smiled Mrs. Monarch.

"We might have brought some, my dear," her husband remarked.

"I'm not so sure we have any left. We've given quantities away," she explained to me.]

"With our autographs and that sort of thing," [said the Major.]

"Are they to be got in the shops?" I inquired, as a harmless pleasantry.

"Oh, yes; *hers*—they used to be."

"Not now," said Mrs. Monarch, with her eyes on the floor.

2

I could fancy the "sort of thing" they put on the presentation-copies of their photographs, and I was sure they wrote a beautiful hand. [It was odd how quickly I was sure of everything that concerned them. If they were now so poor as to have to earn shillings and pence, they never had had much of a margin. Their good looks had been their capital, and they had good-humouredly made the most of the career that this resource marked out for them. It was in their faces, the blankness, the deep intellectual repose of the twenty years of country-house visiting which had given them pleasant intonations. I could see the sunny drawing-rooms, sprinkled with periodicals she didn't read, in which Mrs. Monarch had continuously sat; I could see the wet shrubberies in which she had walked, equipped to admiration for either exercise. I could see the rich covers the Major had helped to shoot and the wonderful garments in which, late at night, he repaired to the smoking-room to talk about them. I could imagine their leggings and waterproofs, their knowing tweeds and rugs, their rolls of sticks and cases of tackle and neat umbrellas; and I could evoke the exact appearance of their servants and the compact variety of their luggage on the platforms of country stations.

They gave small tips, but they were liked; they didn't do anything themselves, but they were welcome. They looked so well everywhere; they gratified the general

relish for stature, complexion and "form." They knew it without fatuity or vulgarity, and they respected themselves in consequence. They were not superficial; they were thorough and kept themselves up—it had been their line. People with such a taste for activity had to have some line. I could feel how, even in a dull house, they could have been counted upon for cheerfulness. At present something had happened—it didn't matter what, their little income had grown less, it had grown least—and they had to do something for pocket-money. Their friends liked them, but didn't like to support them. There was something about them that represented credit—their clothes, their manners, their type; but if credit is a large empty pocket in which an occasional chink reverberates, the chink at least must be audible. What they wanted of me was to help to make it so. Fortunately they had no children—I soon divined that. They would also perhaps wish our relations to be kept secret: this was why it was "for the figure"—the reproduction of the face would betray them.]

I liked them—they were so simple; and I had no objection to them if they would suit. But, somehow, with all their perfections I didn't easily believe in them. After all they were amateurs, and the ruling passion of my life was the detestation of the amateur. Combined with this was another perversity—an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they *were* or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question. There were other considerations, the first of which was that I already had two or three people in use, notably a young person with big feet, in alpaca, from Kilburn, who for a couple of years had come to me regularly for my illustrations and with whom I was still—perhaps ignobly

—satisfied. I frankly explained to my visitors how the case stood; but they had taken more precautions than I supposed. They had reasoned out their opportunity, for Claude Rivet had told them of the projected *édition de luxe* of one of the writers of our day—the rarest of the novelists—who, long neglected by the multitudinous vulgar and dearly prized by the attentive (need I mention Philip Vincent?) had had the happy fortune of seeing, late in life, the dawn and then the full light of a higher criticism—an estimate in which, on the part of the public, there was something really of expiation. [The edition in question, planned by a publisher of taste, was practically an act of high reparation; the woodcuts with which it was to be enriched were the homage of English art to one of the most independent representatives of English letters.] Major and Mrs. Monarch confessed to me that they had hoped I might be able to work *them* into my share of the enterprise. They knew I was to do the first of the books, *Rutland Ramsay,* but I had to make clear to them that my participation in the rest of the affair—this first book was to be a test—was to depend on the satisfaction I should give. [If this should be limited my employers would drop me without a scruple. It was therefore a crisis for me, and naturally I was making special preparations, looking about for new people, if they should be necessary, and securing the best types.] I admitted [however] that I should like to settle down to two or three good models who would do for everything.

"Should we have often to—a—put on special clothes?" Mrs. Monarch timidly demanded.

"Dear, yes—that's half the business."

["And should we be expected to supply our own costumes?"

"Oh, no; I've got a lot of things. A painter's models put on—or put off—anything he likes."

"And do you mean—a—the same?"

"The same?"

Mrs. Monarch looked at her husband again.

"Oh, she was just wondering," he explained, "if the costumes are in *general* use." I had to confess that they were, and I mentioned further that some of them (I had a lot of genuine, greasy last-century things) had served their time, a hundred years ago, on living, world-stained men and women. "We'll put on anything that *fits*," said the Major.

"Oh, I arrange that—they fit in the pictures."

"I'm afraid I should do better for the modern books. I would come as you like," said Mrs. Monarch.]

"She has got a lot of clothes at home: they might do for contemporary life," her husband continued.

["Oh, I can fancy scenes in which you'd be quite natural."

And indeed I could see the slipshod arrangements of stale properties—the stories I tried to produce pictures for without the exasperation of reading them—whose sandy tracts the good lady might help to people. But I had to return to the fact that for this sort of work—the daily mechanical grind—I was already equipped; the people I was working with were fully adequate.]

"We only thought we might be more like *some* characters," said Mrs. Monarch mildly, getting up.

Her husband also rose; he stood looking at me with a dim wistfulness that was touching in so fine a man. "Wouldn't it be rather a pull sometimes to have—a—to have——?" He hung fire; he wanted me to help him by phrasing what he meant. But I couldn't—I didn't know. So he brought it out awkwardly: "The *real* thing; a gentleman, you know, or a lady." [I was quite ready to give a general assent—I admitted that there was a great deal in that. This encouraged Major Monarch to say, following

up his appeal with an unacted gulp: "It's awfully hard—we've tried everything." The gulp was communicative; it proved too much for his wife. Before I knew it Mrs. Monarch had dropped again upon a divan and burst into tears. Her husband sat down beside her, holding one of her hands; whereupon she quickly dried her eyes with the other, while I felt embarrassed as she looked at me. "There isn't a confounded job I haven't applied for—waited for—prayed for. You can fancy we'd be pretty bad first. Secretaryships and that sort of thing? You might as well ask for a peerage. I'd be *anything*—I'm strong; a messenger or a coal-heaver. I'd put on a gold-laced cap and open carriage-doors in front of the haberdasher's; I'd hang about a station, to carry portmanteaus; I'd be a postman. But they won't *look* at you; there are thousands, as good as yourself, already on the ground. *Gentlemen,* poor beggars, who have drunk their wine, who have kept their hunters!"]

I was as reassuring as I knew how to be, and [my visitors were presently on their feet again while,] for the experiment, we agreed on an hour. We were discussing it when the door opened and Miss Churm came in with a wet umbrella. Miss Churm had to take the omnibus to Maida Vale and then walk half a mile. She looked a trifle blowsy and slightly splashed. I scarcely ever saw her come in without thinking afresh how odd it was that, being so little in herself, she should yet be so much in others. She was a meagre little Miss Churm, but she was an ample heroine of romance. She was only a freckled cockney, but she could represent everything from a fine lady to a shepherdess; she had the faculty, as she might have had a fine voice or long hair. She couldn't spell, and she loved beer, but she had two or three "points," and practice, and a knack, and mother-wit, and a kind of whimsical sensibility, and a love of the theatre, and seven sisters, and not an ounce of

respect, especially for the *h*. The first thing my visitors saw was that her umbrella was wet, and in their spotless perfection they visibly winced at it. The rain had come on since their arrival.

"I'm all in a soak; there *was* a mess of people in the bus. I wished you lived near a stytion," said Miss Churm. I requested her to get ready as quickly as possible, and she passed into the room in which she always changed her dress. But before going out she asked me what she was to get into this time.

"It's the Russian princess, don't you know?" I answered; "the one with the 'golden eyes,' in black velvet, for the long thing in the *Cheapside*."

"Golden eyes? I *say!*" cried Miss Churm, while my companions watched her with intensity as she withdrew. She always arranged herself, when she was late, before I could turn round; and I kept my visitors a little, on purpose, so they might get an idea from seeing her, what would be expected of themselves. I mentioned that she was quite my notion of an excellent model—she was really very clever.

"Do you think she looks like a Russian princess?" Major Monarch asked, with lurking alarm.

"When I make her, yes."

"Oh, if you have to *make* her——!" he reasoned acutely.

"That's the most you can ask. There are so many that are not makeable."

"Well now, *here's* a lady"—and with a persuasive smile he passed his arm into his wife's—"who's already made!"

"Oh, I'm not a Russian princess," Mrs. Monarch protested, a little coldly. I could see that she had known some and didn't like them. There, immediately, was a complication of a kind that I never had to fear with Miss Churm.

This young lady came back in black velvet—the gown was rather rusty and very low on her lean shoulders—and with a Japanese fan in her red hands. I reminded her that

in the scene I was doing she had to look over someone's head. "I forget whose it is; but it doesn't matter. Just look over a head."

"I'd rather look over a stove," said Miss Churm; and she took her station near the fire. She fell into position, settled herself into a tall attitude, gave a certain backward inclination to her head and a certain forward droop to her fan, and looked, at least to my prejudiced sense, distinguished and charming, foreign and dangerous. We left her looking so, while I went downstairs with Major and Mrs. Monarch.

["I think I could come about as near it as that," said Mrs. Monarch.

"Oh, you think she's shabby, but you must allow for the alchemy of art."

However, they went off with an evident increase of comfort, founded on their demonstrable advantage in being the real thing. I could fancy them shuddering over Miss Churm. She was very droll about them when I went back, for I told her what they wanted.

"Well, if *she* can sit I'll tyke to book-keeping," said my model.

"She's very lady-like," I replied, as an innocent form of aggravation.

"So much the worse for *you*. That means she can't turn round."

"She'll do for the fashionable novels."

"Oh yes, she'll *do* for them!" my model humorously declared. "Ain't they bad enough without her?" I had often sociably denounced them to Miss Churm.

3

It was for the elucidation of a mystery in one of these works that] I first tried Mrs. Monarch. [Her husband came with her, to be useful if necessary—it was sufficiently

clear that as a general thing he would prefer to come with her. At first I wondered if this were for "propriety's" sake —if he were going to be jealous and meddling. The idea was too tiresome, and if it had been confirmed it would speedily have brought our acquaintance to a close. But I soon saw there was nothing in it and that if he accompanied Mrs. Monarch it was (in addition to the chance of being wanted) simply because he had nothing else to do. When she was away from him his occupation was gone—she never *had* been away from him. I judged, rightly, that in their awkward situation their close union was their main comfort and that this union had no weak spot. It was a real marriage, an encouragement to the hesitating, a nut for pessimists to crack. Their address was humble (I remember afterwards thinking it had been the only thing about them that was really professional), and I could fancy the lamentable lodgings in which the Major would have been left alone. He could bear them with his wife—he couldn't bear them without her.

He had too much tact to try and make himself agreeable when he couldn't be useful; so he simply sat and waited, when I was too absorbed in my work to talk. But I liked to make him talk—it made my work, when it didn't interrupt it, less sordid, less special. To listen to him was to combine the excitement of going out with the economy of staying at home. There was only one hindrance: that I seemed not to know any of the people he and his wife had known. I think he wondered extremely, during the term of our intercourse, whom the deuce I *did* know. He hadn't a stray sixpence of an idea to fumble for; so we didn't spin it very fine—we confined ourselves to questions of leather and even of liquor (saddlers and breeches-makers and how to get good claret cheap), and matters like "good trains" and the habits of small game. His lore on these last subjects was astonishing, he managed to interweave

the stationmaster with the ornithologist. When he couldn't talk about greater things he could talk cheerfully about smaller, and since I couldn't accompany him into reminiscences of the fashionable world he could lower the conversation without a visible effort to my level.

So earnest a desire to please was touching in a man who could so easily have knocked one down. He looked after the fire and had an opinion on the draught of the stove, without my asking him, and I could see that he thought many of my arrangements not half clever enough. I remember telling him that if I were only rich I would offer him a salary to come and teach me how to live. Sometimes he gave a random sigh, of which the essence was: "Give me even such a bare old barrack as *this,* and I'd do something with it!" When I wanted to use him he came alone; which was an illustration of the superior courage of women. His wife could bear her solitary second floor, and she was in general more discreet; showing by various small reserves that she was alive to the propriety of keeping our relations markedly professional—not letting them slide into sociability. She wished it to remain clear that she and the Major were employed, not cultivated, and if she approved of me as a superior, who could be kept in his place, she never thought me quite good enough for an equal.]

She sat with great intensity, giving the whole of her mind to it, and was capable of remaining for an hour almost as motionless as if she were before a photographer's lens. [I could see she had been photographed often, but somehow the very habit that made her good for that purpose unfitted her for mine.] At first I was extremely pleased with her lady-like air, and it was a satisfaction, on coming to follow her lines, to see how good they were and how far they could lead the pencil. But after a few times I began to find her too insurmountably stiff; do what I would with it my drawing looked like a photograph or a

copy of a photograph. Her figure had no variety of expression—she herself had no sense of variety. [You may say that this was my business, was only a question of placing her. I placed her in every conceivable position, but she managed to obliterate their differences. She was always a lady certainly, and into the bargain was always the same lady.] She was the real thing, but always the same thing. [There were moments when I was oppressed by the serenity of her confidence that she *was* the real thing. All her dealings with me and all her husband's were an implication that this was lucky for *me*. Meanwhile I found myself trying to invent types that approached her own, instead of making her own transform itself—in the clever way that was not impossible, for instance, to poor Miss Churm. Arrange as I would and take the precautions I would, she always, in my pictures, came out too tall—landing me in the dilemma of having represented a fascinating woman as seven feet high, which, out of respect perhaps to my own very much scantier inches, was far from my idea of such a personage.

The case was worse with the Major—nothing I could do would keep *him* down, so that he became useful only for the representation of brawny giants. I adored variety and range, I cherished human accidents, the illustrative note; I wanted to characterise closely,] and the thing in the world I most hated was the danger of being ridden by a type. [I had quarrelled with some of my friends about it —I had parted company with them for maintaining that one *had* to be, and that if the type was beautiful (witness Raphael and Leonardo), the servitude was only a gain. I was neither Leonardo nor Raphael; I might only be a presumptuous young modern searcher, but I held that everything was to be sacrificed sooner than character. When they averred that the haunting type in question could easily *be* character, I retorted, perhaps superficially:

"Whose?" It couldn't be everybody's—it might end in nobody's.

After I had drawn Mrs. Monarch a dozen times I perceived more clearly than before that the value of such a model as Miss Churm resided precisely in the fact that she had no positive stamp, combined of course with the other fact that what she did have was a curious and inexplicable talent for imitation. Her usual appearance was like a curtain which she could draw up at request for a capital performance. This performance was simply suggestive; but it was a word to the wise—it was vivid and pretty. Sometimes, even, I thought it, though she was plain herself, too insipidly pretty; I made it a reproach to her that the figures drawn from her were monotonously (*bêtement,* as we used to say) graceful. Nothing made her more angry: it was so much her pride to feel that she could sit for characters that had nothing in common with each other. She would accuse me at such moments of taking away her "reputytion."

It suffered a certain shrinkage, this queer quantity, from the repeated visits of my new friends. Miss Churm was greatly in demand, never in want of employment, so I had no scruple in putting her off occasionally, to try them more at my ease. It was certainly amusing at first to do the real thing—it was amusing to do Major Monarch's trousers. They *were* the real thing, even if he did come out colossal. It was amusing to do his wife's back hair (it was so mathematically neat), and the particular "smart" tension of her tight stays. She lent herself especially to positions in which the face was somewhat averted or blurred; she abounded in lady-like back views and *profils perdus.*] When she stood erect she took naturally one of the attitudes in which court-painters represent queens and princesses; so that I found myself wondering whether, to draw out this accomplishment, I couldn't get the editor

of the *Cheapside* to publish a really royal romance, "A Tale of Buckingham Palace." [Sometimes, however, the real thing and the make-believe came into contact; by which I mean that Miss Churm, keeping an appointment or coming to make one on days when I had much work in hand, encountered her invidious rivals. The encounter was not on their part, for they noticed her no more than if she had been the housemaid; not from intentional loftiness, but simply because, as yet, professionally, they didn't know how to fraternise, as I could guess that they would have liked—or at least that the Major would. They couldn't talk about the omnibus—they always walked; and they didn't know what else to try—she wasn't interested in good trains or cheap claret. Besides, they must have felt—in the air—that she was amused at them, secretly derisive of their ever knowing how. She was not a person to conceal her scepticism if she had had a chance to show it. On the other hand Mrs. Monarch didn't think her tidy; for why else did she take pains to say to me (it was going out of the way, for Mrs. Monarch) that she didn't like dirty women?

One day when my young lady happened to be present with my other sitters (she even dropped in, when it was convenient for a chat), I asked her to be so good as to lend a hand in getting tea—a service with which she was familiar and which was one of a class that, living as I did in a small way, with slender domestic resources, I often appealed to my models to render. They liked to lay hands on my property, to break the sitting, and sometimes the china—I made them feel Bohemian. The next time I saw Miss Churm after this incident she surprised me greatly by making a scene about it—she accused me of having wished to humiliate her. She had not resented the outrage at the time, but had seemed obliging and amused, enjoying the comedy of asking Mrs. Monarch, who sat

vague and silent, whether she would have cream and sugar, and putting an exaggerated simper into the question. She had tried intonations—as if she too wished to pass for the real thing; till I was afraid my other visitors would take offence.

Oh, *they* were determined not to do this; and their touching patience was the measure of their great need. They would sit by the hour, uncomplaining, till I was ready to use them; they would come back on the chance of being wanted, and would walk away cheerfully if they were not. I used to go to the door with them to see in what magnificent order they retreated. I tried to find other employment for them—I introduced them to several artists. But they didn't "take," for reasons I could appreciate, and I became conscious, rather anxiously, that after such disappointments they fell back upon me with a heavier weight. They did me the honour to think that it was I who was most *their* form. They were not picturesque enough for the painters, and in those days there were not so many serious workers in black and white. Besides they had an eye to the great job I had mentioned to them—they had secretly set their hearts on supplying the right essence for my pictorial vindication of our fine novelist. They knew that for this undertaking I should want no costume-effects, none of the frippery of past ages—that it was a case in which everything would be contemporary and satirical and, presumably, genteel. If I could work them into it their future would be assured, for the labour would of course be long and the occupation steady.]

One day [Mrs. Monarch came without her husband—she explained his absence by his having to go to the City.] While she sat there in her usual anxious stiffness there came, at the door, a knock which I immediately recognised as the subdued appeal of a model out of work. It was followed by the entrance of a young man whom I

easily perceived to be a foreigner and who proved in fact an Italian acquainted with no English word but my name, which he uttered in a way that made it seem to include all others. I had not then visited his country, nor was I proficient in his tongue; but as he was not so meanly constituted—what Italian is?—as to depend only on that member for expression he conveyed to me, in familiar but graceful mimicry, that he was in search of exactly the employment in which the lady before me was engaged. I was not struck with him at first, and while I continued to draw I emitted rough sounds of discouragement and dismissal. He stood his ground, however, not importunately, but with a dumb, dog-like fidelity in his eyes which amounted to innocent impudence—the manner of a devoted servant (he might have been in the house for years), unjustly suspected. Suddenly I saw that his very attitude and expression made a picture, whereupon I told him to sit down and wait till I should be free. There was another picture in the way he obeyed me, and I observed as I worked that there were others still in the way he looked wondering, with his head thrown back, about the high studio. He might have been crossing himself in St. Peter's. Before I finished I said to myself: "The fellow's a bankrupt orange-monger, but he's a treasure."

[When Mrs. Monarch withdrew he passed across the room like a flash to open the door for her, standing there with the rapt, pure gaze of the young Dante spellbound by the young Beatrice. As I never insisted, in such situations, on the blankness of the British domestic, I reflected that he had the making of a servant (and I needed one, but couldn't pay him to be only that), as well as of a model; in short I made up my mind to adopt my bright adventurer if he would agree to officiate in the double capacity. He jumped at my offer, and in the event my rashness (for I had known nothing about him) was not

brought home to me. He proved a sympathetic though a desultory ministrant, and had in a wonderful degree the *sentiment de la pose*. It was uncultivated, instinctive; a part of the happy instinct which had guided him to my door and helped him to spell out my name on the card nailed to it. He had no other introduction to me than a guess, from the shape of my high north window, seen outside, that my place was a studio and that as a studio it would contain an artist. He had wandered to England in search of fortune, like other itinerants, and had embarked, with a partner and a small green handcart, on the sale of penny ices. The ices had melted away and the partner had dissolved in their train.] My young man wore tight yellow trousers with reddish stripes and his name was Oronte. He was sallow but fair, and when I put him into some old clothes of my own he looked like an Englishman. He was as good as Miss Churm, who could look, when required, like an Italian.

4

I thought Mrs. Monarch's face slightly convulsed when, on her coming back with her husband, she found Oronte installed. It was strange to have to recognise in a scrap of a lazzarone a competitor to her magnificent Major. It was she who scented danger first, for the Major was anecdotically unconscious. But Oronte gave us tea, with a hundred eager confusions (he had never seen such a queer process), and I think she thought better of me for having at last an "establishment." They saw a couple of drawings that I had made of the establishment, and Mrs. Monarch hinted that it never would have struck her that he had sat for them. "Now the drawings you make from *us*, they look exactly like us," she reminded me, smiling in triumph; and I recognised that this was indeed just their defect. When I drew the Monarchs I couldn't, somehow,

get away from them—get into the character I wanted to represent; and I had not the least desire my model should be discoverable in my picture. Miss Churm never was, and Mrs. Monarch thought I hid her, very properly, because she was vulgar; whereas if she was lost it was only as the dead who go to heaven are lost—in the gain of an angel the more.

[1][By this time I had got a certain start with "Rutland Ramsay," the first novel in the great projected series; that is I had produced a dozen drawings, several with the help of the Major and his wife, and I had sent them in for approval. My understanding with the publishers, as I have already hinted, had been that I was to be left to do my work, in this particular case, as I liked, with the whole book committed to me; but my connection with the rest of the series was only contingent. There were moments when, frankly, it *was* a comfort to have the real thing under one's hand; for there were characters in "Rutland Ramsay" that were very much like it. There were people presumably as straight as the Major and women of as good a fashion as Mrs. Monarch. There was a great deal of country-house life—treated, it is true, in a fine, fanciful, ironical, generalised way—and there was a considerable implication of knickerbockers and kilts. There were certain things I had to settle at the outset; such things for instance as the exact appearance of the hero, the particular bloom of the heroine. The author of course gave me a lead, but there was a margin of interpretation. I took the Monarchs into my confidence, I told them frankly what I was about, I mentioned my embarrassments and alternatives. "Oh, take him!" Mrs. Monarch murmured sweetly, looking at her husband; and "What could you want better than my wife?" the Major inquired, with the comfortable candour that now prevailed between us.

[1] This cut goes on to page 328.

I was not obliged to answer these remarks—I was only obliged to place my sitters. I was not easy in mind, and I postponed, a little timidly perhaps, the solution of the question. The book was a large canvas, the other figures were numerous, and I worked off at first some of the episodes in which the hero and the heroine were not concerned. When once I had set *them* up I should have to stick to them—I couldn't make my young man seven feet high in one place and five feet nine in another. I inclined on the whole to the latter measurement, though the Major more than once reminded me that *he* looked about as young as anyone. It was indeed quite possible to arrange him, for the figure, so that it would have been difficult to detect his age. After the spontaneous Oronte had been with me a month, and after I had given him to understand several different times that his native exuberance would presently constitute an insurmountable barrier to our further intercourse, I waked to a sense of his heroic capacity. He was only five feet seven, but the remaining inches were latent. I tried him almost secretly at first, for I was really rather afraid of the judgment my other models would pass on such a choice. If they regarded Miss Churm as little better than a snare, what would they think of the representation by a person so little the real thing as an Italian street-vendor of a protagonist formed by a public school?

If I went a little in fear of them it was not because they bullied me, because they had got an oppressive foothold, but because in their really pathetic decorum and mysteriously permanent newness they counted on me so intensely. I was therefore very glad when Jack Hawley came home: he was always of such good counsel. He painted badly himself, but there was no one like him for putting his finger on the place. He had been absent from England for a year; he had been somewhere—I don't remember where—to get a fresh eye. I was in a good deal of dread of any such

organ, but we were old friends; he had been away for months and a sense of emptiness was creeping into my life. I hadn't dodged a missile for a year.

He came back with a fresh eye, but with the same old black velvet blouse, and the first evening he spent in my studio we smoked cigarettes till the small hours. He had done no work himself, he had only got the eye; so the field was clear for the production of my little things. He wanted to see what I had done for the *Cheapside,* but he was disappointed in the exhibition. That at least seemed the meaning of two or three comprehensive groans which, as he lounged on my big divan, on a folded leg, looking at my latest drawings, issued from his lips with the smoke of the cigarette.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked.

"What's the matter with *you?*"

"Nothing save that I'm mystified."

"You are indeed. You're quite off the hinge. What's the meaning of this new fad?" And he tossed me, with visible irreverence, a drawing in which I happened to have depicted both my majestic models. I asked if he didn't think it good, and he replied that it struck him as execrable, given the sort of thing I had always represented myself to him as wishing to arrive at; but I let that pass, I was so anxious to see exactly what he meant. The two figures in the picture looked colossal, but I supposed this was *not* what he meant, inasmuch as, for aught he knew to the contrary, I might have been trying for that. I maintained that I was working exactly in the same way as when he last had done me the honour to commend me.

"Well, there's a big hole somewhere," he answered; "wait a bit and I'll discover it." I depended upon him to do so: where else was the fresh eye? But he produced at last nothing more luminous than "I don't know—I don't like your types." This was lame, for a critic who had never

consented to discuss with me anything but the question of execution, the direction of strokes and the mystery of values.

"In the drawings you've been looking at I think my types are very handsome."

"Oh, they won't do!"

"I've had a couple of new models."

"I see you have. *They* won't do."

"Are you very sure of that?"

"Absolutely—they're stupid."

"You mean *I* am—for I ought to get round that."

"You *can't*—with such people. Who are they?"

I told him, as far as was necessary, and he declared, heartlessly: *"Ce sont des gens qu'il faut mettre à la porte."*

"You've never seen them; they're awfully good," I compassionately objected.

"Not seen them? Why, all this recent work of yours drops to pieces with them. It's all I want to see of them."

"No one else has said anything against it—the *Cheapside* people are pleased."

"Every one else is an ass, and the *Cheapside* people the biggest asses of all. Come, don't pretend, at this time of day, to have pretty illusions about the public, especially about publishers and editors. It's not for *such* animals you work—it's for those who know, *coloro che sanno;* so keep straight for *me* if you can't keep straight for yourself. There's a certain sort of thing you tried for from the first—and a very good thing it is. But this twaddle isn't *in* it." When I talked with Hawley later about "Rutland Ramsay" and its possible successors he declared that I must get back into my boat again or I would go to the bottom. His voice in short was the voice of warning.

I noted the warning, but I didn't turn my friends out of doors. They bored me a good deal; but the very fact

that they bored me admonished me not to sacrifice them —if there was anything to be done with them—simply to irritation. As I look back at this phase they seem to me to have pervaded my life not a little. I have a vision of them as most of the time in my studio, seated, against the wall, on an old velvet bench to be out of the way, and looking like a pair of patient courtiers in a royal antechamber. I am convinced that during the coldest weeks of the winter they held their ground because it saved them fire. Their newness was losing its gloss, and it was impossible not to feel that they were objects of charity. Whenever Miss Churm arrived they went away, and after I was fairly launched in "Rutland Ramsay" Miss Churm arrived pretty often. They managed to express to me tactitly that they supposed I wanted her for the low life of the book, and I let them suppose it, since they had attempted to study the work—it was lying about the studio —without discovering that it dealt only with the highest circles. They had dipped into the most brilliant of our novelists without deciphering many passages. I still took an hour from them, now and again, in spite of Jack Hawley's warning: it would be time enough to dismiss them, if dismissal should be necessary, when the rigour of the season was over. Hawley had made their acquaintance —he had met them at my fireside—and thought them a ridiculous pair. Learning that he was a painter they tried to approach him, to show him too that they were the real thing; but he looked at them, across the big room, as if they were miles away: they were a compendium of everything that he most objected to in the social system of his country. Such people as that, all convention and patent-leather, with ejaculations that stopped conversation, had no business in a studio. A studio was a place to learn to see, and how could you see through a pair of feather beds?

The main inconvenience I suffered at their hands was that, at first, I was shy of letting them discover how my artful little servant had begun to sit to me for "Rutland Ramsay." They knew that I had been odd enough (they were prepared by this time to allow oddity to artists) to pick a foreign vagabond out of the streets, when I might have had a person with whiskers and credentials; but it was some time before they learned how high I rated his accomplishments. They found him in an attitude more than once, but they never doubted I was doing him as an organ-grinder. There were several things they never guessed, and one of them was that for a striking scene in the novel, in which a footman briefly figured, it occurred to me to make use of Major Monarch as the menial. I kept putting this off, I didn't like to ask him to don the livery —besides the difficulty of finding a livery to fit him.] At last, one day late in the winter, when I was at work on the despised Oronte (he caught one's idea in an instant), and was in the glow of feeling that I was going very straight, they came in, the Major and his wife, with their society laugh about nothing (there was less and less to laugh at), like country-callers—they always reminded me of that—who have walked across the park after church and are presently persuaded to stay to luncheon. Luncheon was over, but they could stay to tea—I knew they wanted it. The fit was on me, however, and I couldn't let my ardour cool and my work wait, with the fading daylight, while my model prepared it. So I asked Mrs. Monarch if she would mind laying it out—a request which, for an instant, brought all the blood to her face. Her eyes were on her husband's for a second, and some mute telegraphy passed between them. Their folly was over the next instant; his cheerful shrewdness put an end to it. So far from pitying their wounded pride, I must add, I was moved to give it as complete a lesson as I could. They bustled about to-

gether and got out the cups and saucers and made the kettle boil. I know they felt as if they were waiting on my servant, and when the tea was prepared I said: "He'll have a cup, please—he's tired." Mrs. Monarch brought him one where he stood, and he took it from her as if she had been a gentleman at a party, squeezing a crush-hat with an elbow.

[Then it came over me that she had made a great effort for me—made it with a kind of nobleness—and that I owed her a compensation. Each time I saw her after this I wondered what the compensation could be. I couldn't go on doing the wrong thing to oblige them. Oh, it *was* the wrong thing, the stamp of the work for which they sat—Hawley was not the only person to say it now. I sent in a large number of the drawings I had made for "Rutland Ramsay," and I received a warning that was more to the point than Hawley's. The artistic adviser of the house for which I was working was of opinion that many of my illustrations were not what had been looked for. Most of these illustrations were the subjects in which the Monarchs had figured. Without going into the question of what *had* been looked for, I saw at this rate I shouldn't get the other books to do. I hurled myself in despair upon Miss Churm, I put her through all her paces. I not only adopted Oronte publicly as my hero, but one morning when the Major looked in to see if I didn't require him to finish a figure for the *Cheapside,* for which he had begun to sit the week before, I told him that I had changed my mind—I would do the drawing from my man. At this my visitor turned pale and stood looking at me. "Is *he* your idea of an English gentleman?" he asked.

I was disappointed, I was nervous, I wanted to get on with my work; so I replied with irritation: "Oh, my dear Major—I can't be ruined for *you!*"

He stood another moment; then, without a word he

quitted the studio. I drew a long breath when he was gone, for I said to myself that I shouldn't see him again. I had not told him definitely that I was in danger of having my work rejected, but I was vexed at him not having felt the catastrophe in the air, read with me the moral of our fruitless collaboration, the lesson that, in the deceptive atmosphere of art, even the highest respectability may fail of being plastic.

I didn't owe my friends money, but I did see them again.] They re-appeared together, three days later, and under the circumstances there was something tragic in the fact. [It was a proof to me that they could find nothing else in life to do. They had threshed the matter out in a dismal conference—they had digested the bad news that they were not in for the series. If they were not useful to me even for the *Cheapside* their function seemed difficult to determine, and I could only judge at first that they had come, forgivingly, decorously, to take a last leave. This made me rejoice in secret that I had little leisure for a scene; for] I had placed both my other models in position together and I was pegging away at a drawing from which I hoped to derive glory. It had been suggested by the passage in which Rutland Ramsay, drawing up a chair to Artemisia's piano-stool, says extraordinary things to her while she ostensibly fingers out a difficult piece of music. I had done Miss Churm at the piano before—it was an attitude in which she knew how to take on an absolutely poetic grace. I wished the two figures to "compose" together, intensely, and my little Italian had entered perfectly into my conception. The pair were vividly before me, the piano had been pulled out; it was a charming picture of blended youth and murmured love, which I had only to catch and keep. My visitors stood and looked at it, and I was friendly to them over my shoulder.

They made no response, but I was used to silent com-

pany and went on with my work, only a little disconcerted (even though exhilarated by the sense that *this* was at least the ideal thing) at not having got rid of them after all. Presently I heard Mrs. Monarch's sweet voice beside, or rather above me: "I wish her hair was a little better done." I looked up and she was staring with strange fixedness at Miss Churm, whose back was turned to her. "Do you mind my just touching it?" she went on—a question which made me spring up for an instant, as with the instinctive fear that she might do the young lady a harm. But she quieted me with a glance I shall never forget—I confess I should like to have been able to paint *that*—and went for a moment to my model. She spoke to her softly, laying a hand upon her shoulder and bending over her; and as the girl, understanding, gratefully assented, she disposed her rough curls, with a few quick passes, in such a way as to make Miss Churm's head twice as charming. It was one of the most heroic personal services I have ever seen rendered. Then Mrs. Monarch turned away with a low sigh and, looking about her as if for something to do, stooped to the floor with a noble humility and picked up a dirty rag that had dropped out of my paint-box.

The Major meanwhile had also been looking for something to do and, wandering to the other end of the studio, saw before him my breakfast things, neglected, unremoved. "I say, can't I be useful *here?*" he called out to me with an irrepressible quaver. I assented with a laugh that I fear was awkward and for the next ten minutes, while I worked, I heard the light clatter of china and the tinkle of spoons and glass. Mrs. Monarch assisted her husband —they washed up my crockery, they put it away. They wandered off into my little scullery, and I afterwards found that they had cleaned my knives and that my slender stock of plate had an unprecedented surface. When

it came over me, the latent eloquence of what they were doing, I confess that my drawing was blurred for a moment—the picture swam. [They had accepted their failure, but they couldn't accept their fate. They had bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal; but they didn't want to starve. If my servants were my models, my models might be my servants. They would reverse the parts—the others would sit for the ladies and gentlemen, and *they* would do the work. They would still be in the studio—it was an intense dumb appeal to me not to turn them out. "Take us on," they wanted to say—"we'll do *anything*."

When all this hung before me the *afflatus* vanished—] my pencil dropped from my hand. My sitting was spoiled and I got rid of my sitters, who were also evidently rather mystified and awestruck. Then, alone with the Major and his wife, I had a most uncomfortable moment. He put their prayer into a single sentence: "I say, you know—just let *us* do for you?" I couldn't—it was dreadful to see them emptying my slops; but I pretended I could, to oblige them, for about a week. Then I gave them a sum of money to go away; and I never saw them again. [I obtained the remaining books, but my friend Hawley repeats that Major and Mrs. Monarch did me a permanent harm, got me into a second-rate trick. If it be true I am content to have paid the price—for the memory.]

14

In the Train[1]

By FRANK O'CONNOR

1

"THERE!" said the sergeant's wife. "You would hurry me."

"I always like to be in time for a train," replied the sergeant with the equability of one who has many times before explained the guiding principle of his existence.

"I'd have had heaps of time to buy the hat," added his wife.

The sergeant sighed and opened his evening paper. His wife looked out on the dark platform, pitted with pale lights under which faces and faces passed, lit up and dimmed again. A uniformed lad strode up and down with a tray of periodicals and chocolates. Farther up the platform a drunken man was being seen off by his friends.

"I'm very fond of Michael O'Leary," he shouted. "He is the most sincere man I know."

"I have no life," sighed the sergeant's wife. "No life at all! There isn't a soul to speak to, nothing to look at all day but bogs and mountains and rain—always rain! And the people! Well, we've had a fine sample of them, haven't we?"

The sergeant continued to read.

"Just for the few days it's been like heaven. Such inter-

[1] For comment on this story see page 205.

esting people! Oh, I thought Mr. Boyle had a glorious face! And his voice—it went through me."

The sergeant lowered his paper, took off his peaked cap, laid it on the seat beside him, and lit his pipe. He lit it in the old-fashioned way, ceremoniously, his eyes blinking pleasurably like a sleepy cat's in the match-flame. His wife scrutinised each face that passed, and it was plain that for her life meant faces and people and things and nothing more.

"Oh dear!" she said again. "I simply have no existence. I was educated in a convent and play the piano; my father was a literary man, and yet I am compelled to associate with the lowest types of humanity. If it was even a decent town, but a village!"

"Ah," said the sergeant, gapping his reply with anxious puffs, "maybe with God's help we'll get a shift one of these days." But he said it without conviction, and it was also plain that he was well pleased with himself, with the prospect of returning home, with his pipe and with his paper.

"Here are Magner and the others," said his wife as four other policemen passed the barrier. "I hope they'll have sense enough to let us alone. . . . How do you do? How do you do? Had a nice time, boys?" she called with sudden animation, and her pale, sullen face became warm and vivacious. The policemen smiled and touched their caps but did not halt.

"They might have stopped to say good evening," she added sharply, and her face sank into its old expression of boredom and dissatisfaction. "I don't think I'll ask Delancey to tea again. The others make an attempt, but really, Delancey is hopeless. When I smile and say "Guard Delancey, wouldn't you like to use the butter-knife?" he just scowls at me from under his shaggy brows and says without a moment's hesitation, 'I would not.' "

"Ah, Delancey is a poor slob," said the sergeant affectionately.

"Oh, yes, but that's not enough, Jonathon. Slob or no slob, he should make an attempt. He's a young man; he should have a dinner-jacket at least. What sort of wife will he get if he won't even wear a dinner-jacket?"

"He's easy, I'd say. He's after a farm in Waterford!"

"Oh, a farm! A farm! The wife is only an incidental, I suppose?"

"Well, now from all I hear she's a damn' nice little incidental."

"Yes, I suppose many a nice little incidental came from a farm," answered his wife, raising her pale brows. But the irony was lost on him.

"Indeed, yes; indeed, yes," he said fervently.

"And here," she added in biting tones, "come our charming neighbours."

Into the pale lamplight stepped a group of peasants. Not such as one sees in the environs of a capital but in the mountains and along the coasts. Gnarled, wild, with turbulent faces, their ill-cut clothes full of character, the women in pale brown shawls, the men wearing black sombreros and carrying big sticks, they swept in, ill at ease, laughing and shouting defiantly. And, so much part of their natural environment were they, that for a moment they seemed to create about themselves rocks and bushes, tarns, turf-ricks and sea.

With a prim smile the sergeant's wife bowed to them through the open window.

"How do you do? How do you do?" she called. "Had a nice time?"

At the same moment the train gave a jolt and there was a rush in which the excited peasants were carried away. Some minutes passed; the influx of passengers al-

most ceased, and a porter began to slam the doors. The drunken man's voice rose in a cry of exultation.

"You can't possibly beat O'Leary!" he declared. "I'd lay down my life for Michael O'Leary."

Then, just as the train was about to start, a young woman in a brown shawl rushed through the barrier. The shawl, which came low enough to hide her eyes, she held firmly across her mouth, leaving visible only a long thin nose with a hint of pale flesh at either side. Beneath the shawl she was carrying a large parcel.

She looked hastily around, a porter shouted to her and pushed her towards the nearest compartment, which happened to be that occupied by the sergeant and his wife. He had actually seized the handle of the door when the sergeant's wife sat up and screamed.

"Quick! Quick!" she cried. "Look who it is! She's coming in! Jonathon! Jonathon!"

The sergeant rose with a look of alarm on his broad red face. The porter threw open the door, with his free hand grasping the woman's elbow. But when she laid eyes on the sergeant's startled countenance, she stepped back, tore herself free, and ran crazily up the platform. The engine shrieked, the porter slammed the door with a curse, somewhere another door opened and shut, and the row of watchers, frozen into effigies of farewell, now dark now bright, began to glide gently past the window, and the stale, smoky air was charged with the breath of open fields.

2

The four policemen spread themselves out in a separate compartment and lit cigarettes.

"Ah, poor old Delancey!" said Magner with his reckless laugh. "He's cracked on her all right."

"Cracked on her," agreed Fox. "Did ye see the eye he gave her?"

Delancey smiled sheepishly. He was a tall, handsome, black-haired young man with the thick eyebrows described by the sergeant's wife. He was new to the force and suffered from a mixture of natural gentleness and country awkwardness.

"I am," he said in his husky voice, "cracked on her. The devil admire me, I never hated anyone yet, but I think I hate the living sight of her."

"Oh, now! Oh, now!" protested Magner.

"I do. I think the Almighty God must have put that one in the world with the one main object of persecuting me."

"Well, indeed," said Foley, "I don't know how the sergeant puts up with the same damsel. If any woman up and called by me an outlandish name like Jonathon when all knew my name was plain John, I'd do fourteen days for her—by God, I would, and a calendar month!"

The four men were now launched on a favourite topic that held them for more than an hour. None of them liked the sergeant's wife, and all had stories to tell against her. From these there emerged the fact that she was an incurable scandalmonger and mischief-maker, who couldn't keep quiet about her own business, much less that of her neighbours. And while they talked the train dragged across a dark plain, the heart of Ireland, and in the moonless night tiny cottage windows blew past like sparks from a fire, and a pale simulacrum of the lighted carriages leaped and frolicked over hedges and fields. Magner shut the window, and the compartment began to fill with smoke.

"She'll never rest till she's out of Farranchreesht," he said.

"That she mightn't!" groaned Delancey.

"How would you like the city yourself, Dan?" asked Magner.

"Man, dear," exclaimed Delancey with sudden brightness, "I'd like it fine. There's great life in a city."

"You can have it and welcome," said Foley, folding his hands across his paunch.

"Why so?"

"I'm well content where I am."

"But the life!"

"Ah, life be damned! What sort of life is it when you're always under someone's eye? Look at the poor devils in court!"

"True enough, true enough," said Fox.

"Ah, yes, yes," said Delancey, "but the adventures they have!"

"What adventures!"

"Look now, there was a sergeant in court only yesterday telling me about a miser, an old maid without a soul in the world that died in an ould loft on the quays. Well, this sergeant I'm talking about put a new man on duty outside the door while he went back to report, and all this fellow had to do was to kick the door and frighten off the rats."

"That's enough, that's enough!" cried Foley.

"Yes, yes, but listen now, listen can't you? He was there about ten minutes with a bit of a candle in his hand and all at once the door at the foot of the stairs began to open. 'Who's there?' says he, giving a start. 'Who's there I say?' There was no answer and still the door kept opening quietly. Then he gave a laugh. What was it but a cat? 'Puss, puss,' says he, 'come on up, puss!' Thinking, you know, the ould cat would be company. Up comes the cat, pitter-patter on the stairs, and then whatever look he gave the door the hair stood up on his head. What was coming

in but another cat? 'Coosh!' says he, stamping his foot and kicking the door to frighten them. 'Coosh away to hell out of that!' And then another cat came in and then another, and in his fright he dropped the candle and kicked out right and left. The cats began to hiss and bawl, and that robbed him of the last stitch of sense. He bolted down the stairs, and as he did he trod on one of the brutes, and before he knew where he was he slipped and fell head over heels, and when he put out his hand to grip something 'twas a cat he gripped, and he felt the claws tearing his hands and face. He had strength enough to pull himself up and run, but when he reached the barrack gate down he dropped in a fit. He was a raving lunatic for three weeks after."

"And that," said Foley with bitter restraint, "is what you call adventure!"

"Dear knows," added Magner, drawing himself up with a shiver, " 'tis a great consolation to be able to put on your cap and go out for a drink any hour of the night you like."

" 'Tis of course," drawled Foley scornfully. "And to know the worst case you'll have in ten years is a bit of a scrap about politics."

"I dunno," sighed Delancey dreamily. "I'm telling you there's great charm about the Criminal Courts."

"Damn the much charm they had for you when you were in the box," growled Foley.

"I know, sure, I know," admitted Delancey, crestfallen.

"Shutting his eyes," said Magner with a laugh, "like a kid afraid he was going to get a box across the ears."

"And still," said Delancey, "this sergeant fellow I'm talking about, he said, after a while you wouldn't mind it no more than if 'twas a card party, but talk up to the judge himself."

"I suppose you would," agreed Magner pensively.

There was silence in the smoky compartment that jolted and rocked on its way across Ireland, and the four occupants, each touched with that morning wit which afflicts no one so much as state witnesses, thought of how they would speak to the judge if only they had him before them now. They looked up to see a fat red face behind the door, and a moment later it was dragged back.

"Is thish my carriage, gentlemen?" asked a meek and boozy voice.

"No, 'tisn't. Go on with you!" snapped Magner.

"I had as nice a carriage as ever was put on a railway thrain," said the drunk, leaning in, "a handsome carriage, and 'tis losht."

"Try farther on," suggested Delancey.

"Excuse me interrupting yeer conversation, gentlemen."

"That's all right, that's all right."

"I'm very melancholic. Me besht friend, I parted him thish very night, and 'tish known to no wan, only the Almighty and Merciful God (here the drunk reverently raised his bowler hat and let it slide down the back of his neck to the floor), if I'll ever lay eyes on him agin in thish world. Good night, gentlemen, and thanks, thanks for all yeer kindness."

As the drunk slithered away up the corridor Delancey laughed. Fox resumed the conversation where it had left off.

"I'll admit," he said, "Delancey wasn't the only one."

"He was not," agreed Foley. "Even the sergeant was shook. When he caught up the mug he was trembling all over, and before he could let it down it danced a jig on the table."

"Ah, dear God! Dear God!" sighed Delancey, "what killed me most entirely was the bloody ould model of the house. I didn't mind anything else but the house.

There it was, a living likeness, with the bit of grass in front and the shutter hanging loose, and every time I looked down I was in the back lane at Farranchreesht, hooshing the hens and smelling the turf, and then I'd look up and see the lean fellow in the wig pointing his finger at me."

"Well, thank God," said Foley with simple devotion, "this time to-morrow I'll be sitting in Ned Ivers' back with a pint in my fist."

Delancey shook his head, a dreamy smile playing upon his dark face.

"I dunno," he said. "'Tis a small place, Farranchreesht, a small, mangy ould *fothrach* of a place with no interest or advancement in it."

"There's something to be said on both sides," added Magner judicially. "I wouldn't say you're wrong, Foley, but I wouldn't say Delancey was wrong either."

"Here's the sergeant now," said Delancey, drawing himself up with a smile of welcome. "Ask him."

"He wasn't long getting tired of Julietta," whispered Magner maliciously.

The door was pushed back and the sergeant entered, loosening the collar of his tunic. He fell into a corner seat, crossed his legs and accepted the cigarette which Delancey proffered.

"Well, lads," he exclaimed. "What about a jorum!"

"By Gor," said Foley, "isn't it remarkable? I was only talking about it!"

"I have noted before now, Peter," said the sergeant, "that you and me have what might be called a simultaneous thirst."

3

The country folk were silent and exhausted. Kendillon drowsed now and again, but he suffered from blood pres-

sure, and after a while his breathing grew thicker and stronger until at last it exploded in a snort, and then he started up, broad awake and angry. In the silence rain spluttered and tapped along the roof, and the dark window-panes streamed with shining runnels of water that trickled on to the floor. Moll Mor scowled, her lower lip thrust out. She was a great flop of a woman with a big coarse powerful face. The other two women, who kept their eyes closed, had their brown shawls drawn tight about their heads, but Moll's was round her shoulders and the gap above her breasts was filled by a blaze of scarlet.

"Where are we?" asked Kendillon crossly, starting awake after one of his drowsing fits.

Moll Mor glowered at him.

"Aren't we home yet?" he asked again.

"No," she answered. "Nor won't be. What scour is on you?"

"Me little house," moaned Kendillon.

"Me little house," mimicked Moll. "'Twasn't enough for you to board the windows and put barbed wire on the ould bit of a gate!"

" 'Tis all dom well for you," he snarled, "that have someone to mind yours for you."

One of the women laughed softly and turned a haggard and virginal face within the cowl on her shawl.

" 'Tis that same have me laughing," she explained apologetically. "Tim Dwyer this week past at the stirabout pot!"

"And making the beds!" chimed in the third woman.

"And washing the children's faces! Glory be to God, he'll blast creation!"

"Ay," snorted Moll, "and his chickens running off with Thade Kendillon's roof."

"My roof, is it?"

"Ay, your roof."

" 'Tis a good roof. 'Tis a better roof than ever was seen over your head since the day you married."

"Oh, Mary Mother!" sighed Moll, " 'tis a great pity of me this three hours and I looking at the likes of you instead of me own fine bouncing man."

" 'Tis a new thing to hear you praising your man, then," said a woman.

"I wronged him," said Moll contritely. "I did so. I wronged him before the world."

At this moment the drunken man pulled back the door of the compartment and looked from face to face with an expression of deepening melancholy.

"She'sh not here," he said in disappointment.

"Who's not here, mister?" asked Moll with a wink at the others.

"I'm looking for me own carriage, ma'am," said the drunk with melancholy dignity, "and whatever the bloody hell they done with it, 'tish losht. The railways in thish country are gone to hell."

"Wisha, if 'tis nothing else is worrying you wouldn't you sit here with me?" asked Moll.

"I would with very great pleasure," replied the drunk, "but 'tishn't on'y the carriage, 'tish me thravelling companion.

". . . I'm a lonely man, I parted me besht friend this very night, I found wan to console me, and then when I turned me back—Good took her!"

And with a dramatic gesture the drunk closed the door and continued on his way. The country folk sat up, blinking. The smoke of the men's pipes filled the compartment, and the heavy air was laden with the smell of homespun and turf smoke, the sweet pungent odour of which had penetrated every fibre of their garments.

"Listen to the rain, leave ye!" said one of the women. "We'll have a wet walk home."

" 'Twill be midnight before we're there," said another.

"Ah, sure, the whole country will be up."

" 'Twill be like daylight with collogueing."

"There'll be no sleep in Farranchreesht to-night."

"Oh, Farranchreesht! Farranchreesht!" cried the young woman with the haggard face, the ravished lineaments of which were suddenly transfigured. "Farranchreesht and the sky over you, I wouldn't change places with the Queen of England this night!"

And suddenly Farranchreesht, the bare boglands with the hump-backed mountain behind, the little white houses and the dark fortifications of turf that made it seem the flame-blackened ruin of some mighty city, all was lit up within their minds. An old man sitting in a corner, smoking a broken clay pipe, thumped his stick upon the floor.

"Well, now," said Kendillon darkly, "wasn't it great impudence in her to come back?"

"Wasn't it now?" answered a woman.

"She won't be there long," he added.

"You'll give her the hunt, I suppose?" asked Moll Mor politely, too politely.

"If no one else do, I'll give her the hunt myself."

"Oh, the hunt, the hunt," agreed a woman. "No one could ever darken her door again."

"And still, Thade Kendillon," pursued Moll with her teeth on edge to be at him, "you swore black was white to save her neck."

"I did of course. What else would I do?"

"What else? What else, indeed?" agreed the others.

"There was never an informer in my family."

"I'm surprised to hear it," replied Moll vindictively,

but the old man thumped his stick three or four times on the floor requesting silence.

"We told our story, the lot of us," he said, "and we told it well."

"We did, indeed."

"And no one told it better than Moll Mor. You'd think to hear her she believed it herself."

"God knows," answered Moll with a wild laugh, "I nearly did."

"And still I seen great changes in my time, and maybe the day will come when Moll Mor or her likes will have a different story."

A silence followed his words. There was profound respect in all their eyes. The old man coughed and spat.

"Did any of ye ever think the day would come when a woman in our parish would do the like of that?"

"Never, never, ambasa!"

"But she might do it for land?"

"She might then."

"Or for money?"

"She might so."

"She might, indeed. When the hunger is money people kill for money, when the hunger is land people kill for land. There's a great change coming, a great change. In the ease of the world people are asking more. When I was a growing boy in the barony if you killed a beast you made six pieces of it, one for yourself and the rest for neighbours. The same if you made a catch of fish, and that's how it was with us from the beginning of time. And now look at the change! The people aren't as poor as they were, nor as good as they were, nor as generous as they were, nor as strong as they were."

"Nor as wild as they were," added Moll Mor with a vicious glare at Kendillon. "Oh, glory be to You, God, isn't the world a wonderful place!"

The door opened and Magner, Delancey and the sergeant entered. Magner was drunk.

"Moll," he said, "I was lonely without you. You're the biggest and brazenest and cleverest liar of the lot and you lost me my sergeant's stripes, but I'll forgive you everything if you'll give us one bar of the 'Colleen Dhas Roo.' "

4

"I'm a lonely man," said the drunk. "And now I'm going back to my lonely habitation."

"Me besht friend," he continued, "I left behind me —Michael O'Leary. 'Tis a great pity you don't know Michael, and a great pity Michael don't know you. But look now at the misfortunate way a thing will happen. I was looking for someone to console me, and the moment I turned me back you were gone."

Solemnly he placed his hand under the woman's chin and raised her face to the light. Then with the other hand he stroked her cheeks.

"You have a beauful face," he said, "a beauful face. But whass more important, you have a beauful soul. I look into your eyes and I see the beauty of your nature. Allow me wan favour. Only wan favour before we part."

He bent and kissed her. Then he picked up his bowler which had fallen once more, put it on back to front, took his dispatch case and got out.

The woman sat on alone. Her shawl was thrown open and beneath it she wore a bright blue blouse. The carriage was cold, the night outside black and cheerless, and within her something had begun to contract that threatened to crush the very spark of life. She could no longer fight it off, even when for the hundredth time she went over the scenes of the previous day; the endless hours

in the dock; the wearisome speeches and questions she couldn't understand and the long wait in the cells till the jury returned. She felt it again, the shiver of mortal anguish that went through her when the chief warder beckoned angrily from the stairs, and the wardress, glancing hastily into a hand-mirror, pushed her forward. She saw the jury with their expressionless faces. She was standing there alone, in nervous twitches jerking back the shawl from her face to give herself air. She was trying to say a prayer, but the words were being drowned within her mind by the thunder of nerves, crashing and bursting. She could feel one that had escaped dancing madly at the side of her mouth but she was powerless to recapture it.

"The verdict of the jury is that Helena Maguire is not guilty." Which was it? Death or life? She couldn't say. "Silence! Silence!" shouted the usher, though no one had tried to say anything. "Any other charge?" asked a weary voice. "Release the prisoner." "Silence!" shouted the crier again. The chief warder opened the door of the dock and she began to run. When she reached the steps she stopped and looked back to see if she were being followed. A policeman held open a door and she found herself in an ill-lit, draughty, stone corridor. She stood there, the old shawl about her face. The crowd began to emerge. The first was a tall girl with a wrapt expression as though she were walking on air. When she saw the woman she halted suddenly, her hands went up in an instinctive gesture, as though she wished to feel her, to caress her. It was that look of hers, that gait as of a sleep-walker that brought the woman to her senses. . . .

But now the memory had no warmth in her mind, and the something within her continued to contract, smothering her with loneliness and shame and fear. She began to mutter crazily to herself. The train, now almost empty,

was stopping at every little wayside station. Now and again a blast of wind from the Atlantic pushed at it as though trying to capsize it.

She looked up as the door was slammed open and Moll Mor came in, swinging her shawl behind her.

"They're all up the train. Wouldn't you come?"

"No, no, no, I couldn't."

"Why couldn't you? Who are you minding? Is it Thade Kendillon?"

"No, no, I'll stop as I am."

"Here! Take a sup of this and 'twill put new heart in you." Moll fumbled in her shawl and produced a bottle of liquor as pale as water. "Wait till I tell you what Magner said! That fellow's a limb of the divil. 'Have you e'er a drop, Moll?' says he. 'Maybe I have then,' says I. 'What is it?' says he. 'What do you think?' says I. 'For God's sake,' says he, 'baptize it quick and call it whiskey.' "

The woman took the bottle and put it to her lips. She shivered as she drank.

" 'Tis powerful stuff entirely," said Moll with respect.

Next moment there were loud voices in the corridor. Moll grabbed the bottle and hid it under her shawl. The door opened and in strode Magner, and behind him the sergeant and Delancey, looking rather foolish. After them again came the two country women, giggling. Magner held out his hand.

"Helena," he said, "accept my congratulations."

The woman took his hand, smiling awkwardly.

"We'll get you the next time though," he added.

"Musha, what are you saying, mister?" she asked.

"Not a word, not a word. You're a clever woman, a remarkable woman, and I give you full credit for it. You threw dust in all our eyes."

"Poison," said the sergeant by way of no harm, "is hard to come by and easy to trace, but it beat me to trace it."

"Well, well, there's things they're saying about me!"

The woman laughed nervously, looking first at Moll Mor and then at the sergeant.

"Oh, you're safe now," said Magner, "as safe as the judge on the bench. Last night when the jury came out with the verdict you could have stood there in the dock and said, 'Ye're wrong, ye're wrong, I did it. I got the stuff in such and such a place. I gave it to him because he was old and dirty and cantankerous and a miser. I did it and I'm proud of it!' You could have said every word of that and no one would have dared to lay a finger on you."

"Indeed! What a thing I'd say!"

"Well, you could."

"The law is truly a remarkable phenomenon," said the sergeant, who was also rather squiffy. "Here you are, sitting at your ease at the expense of the State, and for one word, one simple word of a couple of letters, you could be lying in the body of the gaol, waiting for the rope and the morning jaunt."

The woman shuddered. The young woman with the ravished face looked up.

" 'Twas the holy will of God," she said simply.

" 'Twas all the bloody lies Moll Mor told," replied Magner.

" 'Twas the will of God," she repeated.

"There was many hanged in the wrong," said the sergeant.

"Even so, even so! 'Twas God's will."

"You have a new blouse," said the other woman in an envious tone.

"I seen it last night in a shop on the quay," replied the woman with sudden brightness. "A shop on the way down from the court. Is it nice?"

"How much did it cost you?"

"Honour of God!" exclaimed Magner, looking at them

in stupefaction. "Is that all you were thinking of? You should have been on your bended knees before the altar."

"I was too," she answered indignantly.

"Women!" exclaimed Magner with a gesture of despair. He winked at Moll Mor and the pair of them retired to the next compartment. But the interior was reflected clearly in the corridor window and they could see the pale, quivering image of the policeman lift Moll Mor's bottle to his lips and blow a long silent blast on it as on a trumpet. Delancey laughed.

"There'll be one good day's work done on the head of the trial," said the young woman, laughing.

"How so?" asked the sergeant.

"Dan Canty will make a great brew of poteen while he have yeer backs turned."

"I'll get Dan Canty yet," replied the sergeant stiffly.

"You will, as you got Helena."

"I'll get him yet."

He consulted his watch.

"We'll be in in another quarter of an hour," he said. " 'Tis time we were all getting back to our respective compartments."

Magner entered and the other policemen rose. The sergeant fastened his collar and buckled his belt. Magner swayed, holding the door frame, a mawkish smile on his thin, handsome, dissipated face.

"Well, good night to you now, ma'am," said the sergeant, primly. "I'm as glad for all our sakes things ended up as they did."

"Good night, Helena," said Magner, bowing low and promptly tottering. "There'll be one happy man in Far-ranchreesht to-night."

"Come! Come, Joe!" protested the sergeant.

"One happy man," repeated Magner obstinately. " 'Tis his turn now."

"Come on back, man," said Delancey. "You're drunk."

"You wanted him," said Magner heavily. "Your people wouldn't let you have him, but you have him at last in spite of them all."

"Do you mean Cady Driscoll?" hissed the woman with sudden anger, leaning towards Magner, the shawl drawn tight about her head.

"Never mind who I mean. You have him."

"He's no more to me now than the salt sea!"

The policeman went out first, the women followed, Moll Mor laughing boisterously. The woman was left alone. Through the window she could see little cottages stepping down through wet and naked rocks to the water's edge. The flame of life had narrowed in her to a pin-point, and she could only wonder at the force that had caught her up, mastered her and thrown her aside.

"No more to me," she repeated dully to her own image in the window, "no more to me than the salt sea!"

15

Her Table Spread[1]

By ELIZABETH BOWEN

ALBAN had few opinions on the subject of marriage; his attitude to women was negative, but in particular he was not attracted to Miss Cuffe. Coming down early for dinner, red satin dress cut low, she attacked the silence with loud laughter before he had spoken. He recollected having heard that she was abnormal—at twenty-five, of statuesque development, still detained in childhood. The other two ladies, in beaded satins, made entrances of a surprising formality. It occurred to him, his presence must constitute an occasion: they certainly sparkled. Old Mr. Rossiter, uncle to Mrs. Treye, came last, more sourly. They sat for some time without the addition of lamp-light. Dinner was not announced; the ladies, by remaining on guard, seemed to deprecate any question of its appearance. No sound came from other parts of the castle.

Miss Cuffe was an heiress to whom the Castle belonged and whose guests they all were. But she carefully followed the movements of her aunt, Mrs. Treye; her ox-eyes moved from face to face in happy submission rather than expectancy. She was continually preoccupied with at-

[1] For comment on this story see pages 201 and 229. Reprinted from *Look at All Those Roses* by Elizabeth Bowen, by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Copyright 1941 by Elizabeth Bowen.

tempts at gravity, as though holding down her skirts in a high wind. Mrs. Treye and Miss Carbin combined to cover her excitement; still, their looks frequently stole from the company to the windows, of which there were too many. He received a strong impression someone outside was waiting to come in. At last, with a sigh, they got up; dinner had been announced.

The Castle was built on high ground, commanding the estuary; a steep hill, with trees, continued above it. On fine days the view was remarkable, of almost Italian brilliance, with that constant reflection up from the water that even now prolonged the too-long day. Now, in continuous evening rain, the winding wooded line of the further shore could be seen and, nearer the windows, a smothered island with the stump of a watch-tower. Where the Castle stood, a higher tower had answered the island's. Later a keep, then wings, had been added; now the fine peaceful residence had french windows opening on to the terrace. Invasions from the water would henceforth be social, perhaps amorous. On the slope down from the terrace, trees began again; almost, but not quite, concealing the destroyer. Alban, who knew nothing, had not yet looked down.

It was Mr. Rossiter who first spoke of the destroyer—Alban meanwhile glancing along the table; the preparations had been stupendous. The destroyer had come today. The ladies all turned to Alban: the beads on their bosoms sparkled. So this was what they had here, under their trees. Engulfed by their pleasure, from now on he disappeared personally. Mr. Rossiter, rising a note, continued. The estuary, it appeared, was deep, with a channel buoyed up it. By a term of the Treaty, English ships were permitted to anchor in these waters.

"But they've been afraid of the rain!" chimed in Valeria Cuffe.

"Hush," said her aunt, "that's silly. Sailors would be accustomed to getting wet."

But, Miss Carbin reported, that spring there *had* already been one destroyer. Two of the officers had been seen dancing at the hotel at the head of the estuary.

"So," said Alban, "you are quite in the world." He adjusted his glasses in her direction.

Miss Carbin—blonde, not forty, and an attachment of Mrs. Treye's—shook her head despondently. "We were all away at Easter. Wasn't it curious they should have come then? The sailors walked in the demesne but never touched the daffodils."

"As though I should have cared!" exclaimed Valeria passionately.

"Morale too good," stated Mr. Rossiter.

"But next evening," continued Miss Carbin, "the officers did not go to the hotel. They climbed up here through the trees to the terrace—you see, they had no idea. Friends of ours were staying here at the Castle, and they apologised. Our friends invited them in to supper. . . ."

"Did they accept?"

The three ladies said in a breath: "Yes, they came."

Valeria added urgently, "So don't you *think*——?"

"So to-night we have a destroyer to greet you," Mrs. Treye said quickly to Alban. "It is quite an event; the country people are coming down from the mountains. These waters are very lonely; the steamers have given up since the bad times; there is hardly a pleasure-boat. The weather this year has driven visitors right away."

"You are beautifully remote."

"Yes," agreed Miss Carbin. "Do you know much about the Navy? Do you think, for instance, that this is likely to be the same destroyer?"

"Will they remember?" Valeria's bust was almost on

the table. But with a rustle Mrs. Treye pressed Valeria's toe. For the dining-room also looked out across the estuary, and the great girl had not once taken her eyes from the window. Perhaps it was unfortunate that Mr. Alban should have coincided with the destroyer. Perhaps it was unfortunate for Mr. Alban too.

For he saw now he was less than half the feast; unappeased, the party sat looking through him, all grouped at an end of the table—to the other, chairs had been pulled up. Dinner was being served very slowly. Candles—possibly to see from the water—were lit now; some wet peonies glistened. Outside, day still lingered hopefully. The bushes over the edge of the terrace were like heads—you could have sworn sometimes you saw them mounting, swaying in manly talk. Once, wound up in the rain, a bird whistled, seeming hardly a bird.

"Perhaps since then they have been to Greece, or Malta?"

"That would be the Mediterranean fleet," said Mr. Rossiter.

They were sorry to think of anything out in the rain to-night.

"The decks must be streaming," said Miss Carbin.

Then Valeria, exclaiming, "Please excuse me!" pushed her chair in and ran from the room.

"She is impulsive," explained Mrs. Treye.

"Have *you* been to Malta, Mr. Alban?"

In the drawing-room, empty of Valeria, the standard lamps had been lit. Through their ballet-skirt shades, rose and lemon, they gave out a deep, welcoming light. Alban, at the ladies' invitation, undraped the piano. He played, but they could see he was not pleased. It was obvious he had always been a civilian, and when he had taken his place on the piano-stool—which he twirled round three times, rather fussily—his dinner-jacket wrin-

kled across the shoulders. It was sad they should feel so indifferent, for he came from London. Mendelssohn was exasperating to them—they opened all four windows to let the music downhill. They preferred not to draw the curtains; the air, though damp, being pleasant to-night, they said.

The piano was damp, but Alban played almost all his heart out. He played out the indignation of years his mild manner concealed. He had failed to love; nobody did anything about this; partners at dinner gave him less than half their attention. He knew some spring had dried up at the root of the world. He was fixed in the dark rain, by an indifferent shore. He played badly, but they were unmusical. Old Mr. Rossiter, who was not what he seemed, went back to the dining-room to talk to the parlour-maid.

Valeria, glittering vastly, appeared in a window.

"Come *in!*" her aunt cried in indignation. She would die of a chill, childless, in fact unwedded; the Castle would have to be sold and where would they all be?

But—"Lights down there!" Valeria shouted above the music.

They had to run out for a moment, laughing and holding cushions over their bare shoulders. Alban left the piano: they looked boldly down from the terrace. Indeed, there they were: two lights like arc-lamps blurred by rain and drawn down deep in reflection into the steady water. There were, too, ever so many portholes, all lit up.

"Perhaps they are playing bridge," said Miss Carbin.

"Now I wonder if Uncle Robert ought to have called," said Mrs. Treye. "Perhaps we have seemed remiss—one calls on a regiment."

"Patrick could row him out to-morrow."

"He hates the water." She sighed. "Perhaps they will be gone."

"Let's go for a row now—let's go for a row with a lan-

tern," besought Valeria, jumping and pulling her aunt's elbow. They produced such indignation she disappeared again—wet satin skirts and all—into the bushes. The ladies could do no more: Alban suggested the rain might spot their dresses.

"They must lose a great deal, playing cards throughout an evening for high stakes," Miss Carbin said with concern as they all sat down again.

"Yet, if you come to think of it, somebody must win."

But the naval officers who so joyfully supped at Easter had been, Miss Carbin knew, a Mr. Graves and a Mr. Garrett: they *would* certainly lose. "At all events, it is better than dancing at the hotel; there would be nobody of their type."

"There is nobody there at all."

"I expect they are best where they are. . . . Mr. Alban, a Viennese waltz?"

He played while the ladies whispered, waving the waltz time a little distractedly. Mr. Rossiter, coming back, momentously stood: they turned in hope: even the waltz halted. But he brought no news. "You should call Valeria in. You can't tell who may be round the place. She's not fit to be out to-night."

"Perhaps she's not out."

"She is," said Mr. Rossiter crossly. "I just saw her racing past the window with a lantern."

Valeria's mind was made up: she was a princess. Not for nothing had she had the dining-room silver polished and all set out. She would pace around in red satin that swished behind, while Mr. Alban kept on playing a loud waltz. They would be dazed at all she had to offer—also her two new statues and the leopard skin from the auction.

When he and she were married (she inclined a little to Mr. Garrett) they would invite all the Navy up the estu-

ary and give them tea. Her estuary would be filled up, like a regatta, with loud excited battleships tooting to one another and flags flying. The terrace would be covered with grateful sailors, leaving room for the band. She would keep the peacocks her aunt did not allow. His friends would be surprised to notice that Mr. Garrett had meanwhile become an admiral, all gold. He would lead the other admirals into the castle and say, while they wiped their feet respectfully: "These are my wife's statues; she has given them to me. One is Mars, one is Mercury. We have a Venus, but she is not dressed. And wait till I show you our silver and gold plates . . ." The Navy would be unable to tear itself away.

She had been excited for some weeks at the idea of marrying Mr. Alban, but now the lovely appearance of the destroyer put him out of her mind. He would not have done; he was not handsome. But she could keep him to play the piano on quiet afternoons.

Her friends had told her Mr. Garrett was quite a Viking. She was so very familiar with his appearance that she felt sometimes they had already been married for years—though still, sometimes, he could not realise his good luck. She still had to remind him the island was hers too. . . . To-night, Aunt and darling Miss Carbin had so fallen in with her plans, putting on their satins and decorating the drawing-room, that the dinner became a betrothal feast. There was some little hitch about the arrival of Mr. Garrett—she had heard that gentlemen sometimes could not tie their ties. And now he was late and would be discouraged. So she must now go half-way down to the water and wave a lantern.

But she put her two hands over the lantern, then smothered it in her dress. She had a panic. Supposing she should prefer Mr. Graves?

She had heard Mr. Graves was stocky, but very merry;

when he came to supper at Easter he slid in the gallery. He would teach her to dance, and take her to Naples and Paris. . . . Oh, dear, oh, dear, then they must fight for her; that was all there was to it. . . . She let the lantern out of her skirts and waved. Her fine arm with bangles went up and down, up and down, with the staggering light; the trees one by one jumped up from the dark, like savages.

Inconceivably, the destroyer took no notice.

Undisturbed by oars, the rain stood up from the water; not a light rose to peer, and the gramophone, though it remained very faint, did not cease or alter.

In mackintoshes, Mr. Rossiter and Alban meanwhile made their way to the boat-house, Alban did not know why. "If that goes on," said Mr. Rossiter, nodding towards Valeria's lantern, "they'll fire one of their guns at us."

"Oh, no. Why?" said Alban. He buttoned up, however, the collar of his mackintosh.

"Nervous as cats. It's high time that girl was married. She's a nice girl in many ways, too."

"Couldn't we get the lantern away from her?" They stepped on a paved causeway and heard the water nibble the rocks.

"She'd scream the place down. She's of age now, you see."

"But if——"

"Oh, she won't do that; I was having a bit of fun with you." Chuckling equably, Mrs. Treye's uncle unlocked and pulled open the boat-house door. A bat whistled out.

"Why are we here?"

"She might come for the boat; she's a fine oar," said Mr. Rossiter wisely. The place was familiar to him; he lit an oil-lamp and, sitting down on a trestle with a

staunch air of having done what he could, reached a bottle of whisky out of the boat. He motioned the bottle to Alban. "It's a wild night," he said. "Ah, well, we don't have these destroyers every day."

"That seems fortunate."

"Well, it is and it isn't." Restoring the bottle to the vertical, Mr. Rossiter continued: "It's a pity you don't want a wife. You'd be the better for a wife, d'you see, a young fellow like you. She's got a nice character; she's a girl you could shape. She's got a nice income." The bat returned from the rain and knocked round the lamp. Lowering the bottle frequently, Mr. Rossiter talked to Alban (whose attitude remained negative) of women in general and the parlour-maid in particular. . . .

"Bat!" Alban squealed irrepressibly, and with his hand to his ear—where he still felt it—fled from the boat-house. Mr. Rossiter's conversation continued. Alban's pumps squelched as he ran; he skidded along the causeway and baulked at the upward steps. His soul squelched equally: he had been warned; he had been warned. He had heard they were all mad; he had erred out of headiness and curiosity. A degree of terror was agreeable to his vanity: by express wish he had occupied haunted rooms. Now he had no other pumps in this country, no idea where to buy them, and a ducal visit ahead. Also, wandering as it were among the apples and amphoras of an art school, he had blundered into the life room: woman revolved gravely.

"Hell," he said to the steps, mounting, his mind blank to the outcome.

He was nerved for the jumping lantern, but half-way up to the Castle darkness was once more absolute. Her lantern had gone out; he could orientate himself—in spite of himself—by her sobbing. Absolute desperation. He

pulled up so short that, for balance, he had to cling to a creaking tree.

"Hi!" she croaked. Then: "You *are* there! I hear you!"

"Miss Cuffe——"

"How too bad you are! I never heard you rowing. I thought you were never coming——"

"Quietly, my dear girl."

"Come up quickly. I haven't even seen you. Come up to the windows——"

"Miss Cuffe——"

"Don't you remember the way?" As sure but not so noiseless as a cat in the dark, Valeria hurried to him.

"Mr. Garrett——" she panted. "I'm Miss Cuffe. Where have you been? I've destroyed my beautiful red dress and they've eaten up your dinner. But we're still waiting. Don't be afraid; you'll soon be there now. I'm Miss Cuffe; this is my Castle——"

"Listen, it's I, Mr. Alban——"

"Ssh, ssh, Mr. Alban: *Mr. Garrett has landed.*"

Her cry, his voice, some breath of the joyful intelligence, brought the others on to the terrace, blind with lamplight.

"Valeria?"

"Mr. Garrett has landed!"

Mrs. Treye said to Miss Carbin under her breath, "Mr. Garrett has come."

Miss Carbin, half weeping with agitation, replied, "We must go in." But uncertain who was to speak next, or how to speak, they remained leaning over the darkness. Behind, through the windows, lamps spread great skirts of light, and Mars and Mercury, unable to contain themselves, stooped from their pedastals. The dumb keyboard shone like a ballroom floor.

Alban, looking up, saw their arms and shoulders under

the bright rain. Close by, Valeria's fingers creaked on her warm wet satin. She laughed like a princess, magnificently justified. Their unseen faces were all three lovely, and, in the silence after the laughter, such a strong tenderness reached him that, standing there in full manhood, he was for a moment not exiled. For the moment, without moving or speaking, he stood, in the dark, in a flame, as though all three said: "My darling . . ."

Perhaps it was best for them all that early, when next day first lightened the rain, the destroyer steamed out—below the extinguished Castle where Valeria lay with her arms wide, past the boat-house where Mr. Rossiter lay insensible and the bat hung masked in its wings—down the estuary into the open sea.

16

The Light of the World[1]

By ERNEST HEMINGWAY

WHEN he saw us come in the door the bartender looked up and then reached over and put the glass covers on the two free-lunch bowls.

"Give me a beer," I said. He drew it, cut the top off with the spatula and then held the glass in his hand. I put the nickel on the wood and he slid the beer toward me.

"What's yours?" he said to Tom.

"Beer."

He drew that beer and cut it off and when he saw the money he pushed the beer across to Tom.

"What's the matter?" Tom asked.

The bartender didn't answer him. He just looked over our heads and said, "What's yours?" to a man who'd come in.

"Rye," the man said. The bartender put out the bottle and glass and a glass of water.

Tom reached over and took the glass off the free-lunch bowl. It was a bowl of pickled pigs' feet and there was a wooden thing that worked like a scissors, with two wooden forks at the end to pick them up with.

"No," said the bartender and put the glass cover back on

[1] For comment on this story see page 215. Reprinted from *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* by Ernest Hemingway; copyright 1938 by Ernest Hemingway; used by permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

the bowl. Tom held the wooden scissors fork in his hand. "Put it back," said the bartender.

"You know where," said Tom.

The bartender reached a hand forward under the bar, watching us both. I put fifty cents on the wood and he straightened up.

"What was yours?" he said.

"Beer," I said, and before he drew the beer he uncovered both the bowls.

"Your goddam pigs' feet stink," Tom said, and spit what he had in his mouth on the floor. The bartender didn't say anything. The man who had drunk the rye paid and went out without looking back.

"You stink yourself," the bartender said. "All you punks stink."

"He says we're punks," Tommy said to me.

"Listen," I said. "Let's get out."

"You punks clear the hell out of here," the bartender said.

"I said we were going out," I said. "It wasn't your idea."

"We'll be back," Tommy said.

"No you won't," the bartender told him.

"Tell me how wrong he is," Tom turned to me.

"Come on," I said.

Outside it was good and dark.

"What the hell kind of place is this?" Tommy said.

"I don't know," I said. "Let's go down to the station."

We'd come in that town at one end and we were going out the other. It smelled of hides and tan bark and the big piles of sawdust. It was getting dark as we came in, and now that it was dark it was cold and the puddles of water in the road were freezing at the edges.

Down at the station there were five whores waiting for the train to come in, and six white men and four Indians. It was crowded and hot from the stove and full of stale

smoke. As we came in nobody was talking and the ticket window was down.

"Shut the door, can't you!" somebody said.

I looked to see who said it. It was one of the white men. He wore stagged trousers and lumbermen's rubbers and a mackinaw shirt like the others, but he had no cap and his face was white and his hands were white and thin.

"Aren't you going to shut it?"

"Sure," I said, and shut it.

"Thank you," he said. One of the other men snickered.

"Ever interfere with a cook?" he said to me.

"No."

"You can interfere with this one," he looked at the cook. "He likes it."

The cook looked away from him holding his lips tight together.

"He puts lemon juice on his hands," the man said. "He wouldn't get them in dishwater for anything. Look how white they are."

One of the whores laughed out loud. She was the biggest whore I ever saw in my life and the biggest woman. And she had on one of those silk dresses that change colours. There were two other whores that were nearly as big but the big one must have weighed three hundred and fifty pounds. You couldn't believe she was real when you looked at her. All three had those changeable silk dresses. They sat side by side on the bench. They were huge. The other two were just ordinary looking whores, peroxide blondes.

"Look at his hands," the man said and nodded his head at the cook. The whore laughed again and shook all over.

The cook turned and said to her quickly, "You big disgusting mountain of flesh."

She just kept on laughing and shaking.

"Oh, my Christ," she said. She had a nice voice. "Oh, my sweet Christ."

The two other whores, the big ones, acted very quiet and placid as though they didn't have much sense, but they were big, nearly as big as the biggest one. They'd have both gone well over two hundred and fifty pounds. The other two were dignified.

Of the men, besides the cook and the one who talked, there were two other lumberjacks, one that listened, interested but bashful, and the other that seemed getting ready to say something, and two Swedes. Two Indians were sitting down at the end of the bench and one standing up against the wall.

The man who was getting ready to say something spoke to me very low, "Must be like getting on top of a hay mow."

I laughed and said it to Tommy.

"I swear to Christ I've never been anywhere like this," he said. "Look at the three of them." Then the cook spoke up.

"How old are you boys?"

"I'm ninety-six and he's sixty-nine," Tommy said.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" the big whore shook with laughing. She had a really pretty voice. The other whores didn't smile.

"Oh, can't you be decent?" the cook said. "I asked just to be friendly."

"We're seventeen and nineteen," I said.

"What's the matter with you?" Tommy turned to me.

"That's all right."

"You can call me Alice," the big whore said and then she began to shake again.

"Is that your name?" Tommy asked.

"Sure," she said. "Alice. Isn't it?" she turned to the man who sat by the cook.

"Alice. That's right."

"That's the sort of name you'd have," the cook said.

"It's my real name," Alice said.

"What's the other girls' names?" Tom asked.

"Hazel and Ethel," Alice said. Hazel and Ethel smiled. They weren't very bright.

"What's your name?" I said to one of the blondes.

"Frances," she said.

"Frances what?"

"Frances Wilson. What's it to you?"

"What's yours?" I asked the other one.

"Oh, don't be fresh," she said.

"He just wants us all to be friends," the man who talked said. "Don't you want to be friends?"

"No," the peroxide one said. "Not with you."

"She's just a spitfire," the man said. "A regular little spitfire."

The one blonde looked at the other and shook her head.

"Goddamned mossbacks," she said.

Alice commenced to laugh again and to shake all over.

"There's nothing funny," the cook said. "You all laugh but there's nothing funny. You two young lads; where are you bound for?"

"Where are you going yourself?" Tom asked him.

"I want to go to Cadillac," the cook said. "Have you ever been there? My sister lives there."

"He's a sister himself," the man in the stagged trousers said.

"Can't you stop that sort of thing?" the cook asked. "Can't we speak decently?"

"Cadillac is where Steve Ketchel came from and where Ad Wolgast is from," the shy man said.

"Steve Ketchel," one of the blondes said in a high voice as though the name had pulled a trigger on her. "His own father shot and killed him. Yes, by Christ, his own father. There aren't any more men like Steve Ketchel."

"Wasn't his name Stanley Ketchel?" asked the cook.

"Oh, shut up," said the blonde. "What do you know about Steve? Stanley. He was no Stanley. Steve Ketchel was the finest and most beautiful man that ever lived. I never saw a man as clean and as white and as beautiful as Steve Ketchel. There never was a man like that. He moved just like a tiger and he was the finest, free-est spender that ever lived."

"Did you know him?" one of the men asked.

"Did I know him? Did I know him? Did I love him? You ask me that? I knew him like you know nobody in the world and I loved him like you love God. He was the great-est, finest, whitest, most beautiful man that ever lived, Steve Ketchel, and his own father shot him down like a dog."

"Were you out on the coast with him?"

"No. I knew him before that. He was the only man I ever loved."

Every one was respectful to the peroxide blonde, who said all this in a high stagey way, but Alice was beginning to shake again. I felt it sitting by her.

"You should have married him," the cook said.

"I wouldn't hurt his career," the peroxide blonde said. "I wouldn't be a drawback to him. A wife wasn't what he needed. Oh, my God, what a man he was."

"That was a fine way to look at it," the cook said. "Didn't Jack Johnson knock him out though?"

"It was a trick," Peroxide said. "That big dinge took him by surprise. He'd just knocked Jack Johnson down, the big black bastard. That nigger beat him by a fluke."

The ticket window went up and the three Indians went over to it.

"Steve knocked him down," Peroxide said. "He turned to smile at me."

"I thought you said you weren't on the coast," someone said.

"I went out just for that fight. Steve turned to smile at me and that black son of a bitch from hell jumped up and hit him by surprise. Steve could lick a hundred like that black bastard."

"He was a great fighter," the lumberjack said.

"I hope to God he was," Peroxide said. "I hope to God they don't have fighters like that now. He was like a god, he was. So white and clean and beautiful and smooth and fast and like a tiger or like lightning."

"I saw him in the moving pictures of the fight," Tom said. We were all very moved. Alice was shaking all over and I looked and saw she was crying. The Indians had gone outside on the platform.

"He was more than any husband could ever be," Peroxide said. "We were married in the eyes of God, and I belong to him right now and always will and all of me is his. I don't care about my body. They can take my body. My soul belongs to Steve Ketchel. By God, he was a man."

Everybody felt terribly. It was sad and embarrassing. Then Alice, who was still shaking, spoke, "You're a dirty liar," she said in that low voice. "You never layed Steve Ketchel in your life and you know it."

"How can you say that?" Peroxide said proudly.

"I say it because it's true," Alice said. "I'm the only one here that ever knew Steve Ketchel and I come from Mancelona and I knew him there and it's true and you know it's true and God can strike me dead if it isn't true."

"He can strike me too," Peroxide said.

"This is true, true, true, and you know it. Not just made up and I know exactly what he said to me."

"What did he say?" Peroxide asked, complacently.

Alice was crying so she could hardly speak from shaking so. "He said, 'You're a lovely piece, Alice.' That's exactly what he said."

"It's a lie," Peroxide said.

"It's true," Alice said. "That's truly what he said."

"It's a lie," Peroxide said proudly.

"No, it's true, true, true, to Jesus and Mary true."

"Steve couldn't have said that. It wasn't the way he talked," Peroxide said happily.

"It's true," said Alice in her nice voice. "And it doesn't make any difference to me whether you believe it or not." She wasn't crying any more and she was calm.

"It would be impossible for Steve to have said that," Peroxide declared.

"He said it," Alice said and smiled. "And I remember when he said it and I *was* a lovely piece then exactly as he said, and right now I'm a better piece than you, you dried up old hot-water bottle."

"You can't insult me," said Peroxide. "You big mountain of pus. I have my memories."

"No," Alice said in that sweet lovely voice, "you haven't got any real memories except having your tubes out and when you started C. and M. Everything else you just read in the papers. I'm clean and you know it, and men like me, even though I'm big, and you know it, and I never lie and you know it."

"Leave me with my memories," Peroxide said. "With my true, wonderful memories."

Alice looked at her and then at us and her face lost that hurt look and she smiled and she had about the prettiest face I ever saw. She had a pretty face and a nice smooth skin and a lovely voice and she was nice all right and really friendly. But my God she was big. She was as big as three women. Tom saw me looking at her and he said, "Come on. Let's go."

"Good-bye," said Alice. She certainly had a nice voice.

"Good-bye," I said.

"Which way are you boys going?" asked the cook.

"The other way from you," Tom told him.

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