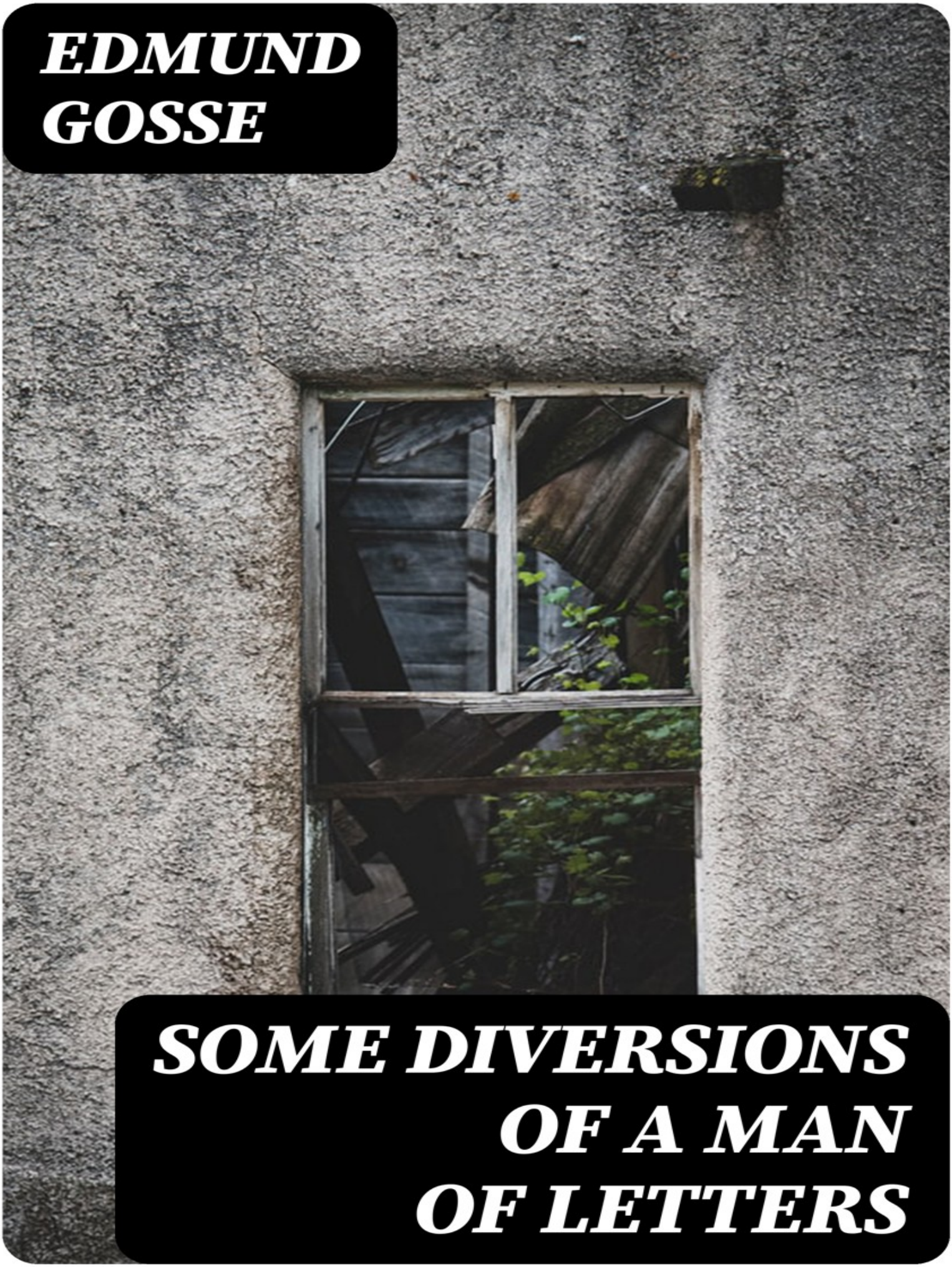
EDMUND GOSSE



SOME DIVERSIONS OF A MAN OF LETTERS

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Some Diversions of a Man of Letters

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PREFACE:

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ON FLUCTUATIONS OF TASTE

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When Voltaire sat down to write a book on Epic Poetry, he dedicated his first chapter to "Differences of Taste in Nations." A critic of to-day might well find it necessary, on the threshold of a general inquiry, to expatiate on "Differences of Taste in Generations." Changes of standard in the arts are always taking place, but it is only with advancing years, perhaps, that we begin to be embarrassed by the recurrence of them. In early youth we fight for the new forms of art, for the new æsthetic shibboleths, and in that happy ardour of battle we have no time or inclination to regret the demigods whom we dispossess. But the years glide on, and, behold! one morning, we wake up to find our own predilections treated with contempt, and the objects of our own idolatry consigned to the waste-paper basket. Then the matter becomes serious, and we must either go on struggling for a cause inevitably lost, or we must give up the whole matter in indifference. This week I read, over the signature of a very clever and very popular literary character of our day, the remark that Wordsworth's was "a genteel mind of the third rank." I put down the newspaper in which this airy dictum was printed, and, for the first time, I was glad that poor Mr. Matthew Arnold was no longer with us. But, of course, the evolutions of taste must go on, whether they hurt the living and the dead, or no.

Is there, then, no such thing as a permanent element of poetic beauty? The curious fact is that leading critics in each successive generation are united in believing that there is, and that the reigning favourite conforms to it. The life of a reputation is like the life of a plant, and seems, in these days, to be like the life of an annual. We watch the seed, admiration for Wordsworth, planted about 1795, shoot obscurely from the ground, and gradually clothe itself with leaves till about 1840; then it bursts into blossom of rapturous praise, and about 1870 is hung with clusters of the fruit of "permanent" appreciation. In 1919, little more than a century from its first evolution in obscurity, it recedes again in the raggedness of obloquy, and cumbers the earth, as dim old "genteel" Wordsworth, whom we are assured that nobody reads. But why were "the best judges" scornful in 1800 and again in 1919 of what gave the noblest and the most inspiriting pleasure to "the best judges" in 1870? The execution of the verse has not altered, the conditions of imagination seem the same, why then is the estimate always changing? Is every form of poetic taste, is all trained enjoyment of poetry, merely a graduated illusion which goes up and down like a wave of the sea and carries "the best judges" with it? If not, who is right, and who is wrong, and what is the use of dogmatising? Let us unite to quit all vain ambition, and prefer the jangle of the music-halls, with its direct "æsthetic thrill."

So far as I know, the only philosopher who has dared to face this problem is Mr. Balfour, in the brilliant second chapter of his "Foundations of Belief." He has there asked, "Is there any fixed and permanent element in beauty?" The

result of his inquiry is disconcerting; after much discussion he decides that there is not. Mr. Balfour deals, in particular, with only two forms of art, Music and Dress, but he tacitly includes the others with them. It is certain that the result of his investigations is the singularly stultifying one that we are not permitted to expect "permanent relations" in or behind the feeling of poetic beauty, which may be indifferently awakened by Blake to-day and by Hayley to-morrow. If the critic says that the verse of Blake is beautiful and that of Hayley is not, he merely "expounds case-made law." The result seems to be that no canons of taste exist; that what are called "laws" of style are enacted only for those who make them, and for those whom the makers can bully into accepting their legislation, a new generation of lawbreakers being perfectly free to repeal the code. Southey yesterday and Keats to-day; why not Southey again to-morrow, or perhaps Tupper? Such is the cynical *cul-de-sac* into which the logic of a philosopher drives us.

We have had in France an example of *volte-face* in taste which I confess has left me gasping. I imagine that if Mr. Balfour was able to spare a moment from the consideration of fiscal reform, he must have spent it in triumphing over the fate of M. Sully-Prudhomme. In the month of September 1906 this poet closed, after a protracted agony, "that long disease, his life." He had compelled respect by his courage in the face of hopeless pain, and, one might suppose, some gratitude by the abundance of his benefactions. His career was more than blameless, it was singularly exemplary. Half-blind, half-paralysed, for a long time very poor, pious without fanaticism, patient, laborious, devoted to his

friends, he seems to have been one of those extraordinary beings whose fortitude in the face of affliction knows no abatement. It would be ridiculous to quote any of these virtues as a reason for admiring the poetry of Sully-Prudhomme. I mention them merely to show that there was nothing in his personal temperament to arouse hatred or in his personal conditions to excuse envy. Nothing to account for the, doubtless, entirely sincere detestation which his poetry seemed to awaken in all "the best minds" directly he was dead.

As every one knows, from about 1870 to 1890, Sully-Prudhomme was, without a rival, the favourite living poet of the French. Victor Hugo was there, of course, until 1885—and posthumously until much later—but he was a god, and the object of idolatry. All who loved human poetry, the poetry of sweetness and light, took Sully-Prudhomme to their heart of hearts. The *Stances et Poèmes* of 1865 had perhaps the warmest welcome that ever the work of a new poet had in France. Théophile Gautier instantly pounced upon *Le Vase Brisé* (since too-famous) and introduced it to a thousand school-girls. Sainte-Beuve, though grown old and languid, waked up to celebrate the psychology and the music of this new poetry, so delicate, fresh and transparent. An unknown beauty of extreme refinement seemed to have been created in it, a beauty made up of lucidity, pathos and sobriety. Readers who are now approaching seventy will not forget with what emotion they listened, for instance, to that dialogue between the long-dead father and the newly-buried son, which closes:—

"J' ai laissé ma sœur et ma mère
Et les beaux livres que j' ai lus;
Vous n'avez pas de bru, mon père,
On m'a blesse, je n'aime plus."

"De tes aïeux compte le nombre,
Va baiser leurs fronts inconnus,
Et viens faire ton lit dans l'ombre
A côté des derniers venus.

"Ne pleure pas, dors dans l'argile
En espérant le grand reveit."
"O père, qu'il est difficile
De ne plus penser au soleil!"

This body of verse, to which was presently added fresh collections—*Les Epreuves* (1886), *Les Vaines Tendresses* (1875), *Le Prisme* (1886),—was welcomed by the elder Sanhedrim, and still more vociferously and unanimously by the younger priesthood of criticism. It pleased the superfine amateurs of poetry, it was accepted with enthusiasm by the thousands who enjoy without analysing their enjoyment. In 1880, to have questioned that Sully-Prudhomme was a very noble poet would have been like challenging Tennyson in 1870, or Cowley in 1660. Jules Lemaître claimed that he was the greatest artist in symbols that France had ever produced. Brunetière, so seldom moved by modern literature, celebrated with ardour the author of *Les Vaines Tendresses* as having succeeded better than any other writer who had ever lived in translating into perfect language the dawn and the twilight of emotion. That Gaston

Paris and M. Anatole France competed in lofty praise of the lyrics of Sully-Prudhomme, is perhaps less remarkable than that Paul Verlaine, whom all the younger schools still look upon as their apostle and guide, declared, in reviewing *Les Ecuries d'Augias*, that the force of style of Sully-Prudhomme was excelled only by the beauty of his detail. It is needless to multiply examples of the unanimous praise given by the divers schools of criticism to Sully-Prudhomme up to about 1890. His was, perhaps, the least contested literary glory of France.

His death startlingly reminded us that this state of things had to be entirely reversed. It is true that the peculiar talent of Sully-Prudhomme, being almost exclusively lyrical, scarcely survived his youth, and that he cumbered his moon of sands with two huge and clumsy wrecks, *La Justice* (1878) and *Le Bonheur* (1898), round which the feet of the fairies could hardly be expected to trip. One must be an academician and hopelessly famous before one dares to inflict two elephantine didactic epics on one's admirers. Unfortunately, too, the poet undertook to teach the art of verse in his *Réflexions* (1892) and his *Testament Poétique* (1901), brochures which greatly irritated the young. It is probably wise for academicians, whether poets or the reverse, to sit beside their nectar, and not to hurl bolts down into the valley. But, behind these errors of judgment, there they remain—those early volumes, which seemed to us all so full of exquisite little masterpieces. Why is it that nobody, except a few elderly persons, any longer delights in them? The notices which Sully-Prudhomme's death awakened in the Paris Press were either stamped with the

mark of old contemporary affection, or else, when they were not abusive, were as frigid as the tomb itself. "Ses tendresses sucrées, sirupeuses, sont vaines en effet," said a critic of importance! Indeed, it would appear so; and where are the laurels of yester-year?

To those who were young when Sully-Prudhomme entered into his immortality it seems impossible to realise that the glory has already departed. Gaston Paris celebrated "the penetrating sincerity and the exquisite expression of feeling" which distinguished Sully-Prudhomme above all other poets. He was the bard of the inner life, sincere and dignified, full of melancholy reverie. A great critic compared *La Vote Lactic* and *Les Stalactites* with the far-off sound of bells heard down some lovely valley in a golden afternoon. Yet the images and the language were precise; Sully-Prudhomme was a mathematician, and if he was reproached with anything like a fault, it was that his style was slightly geometrical. It would be otiose to collect any more tributes to his genius, as it appeared to all Frenchmen, cultivated or semi-cultivated, about the year 1880. With an analysis of Sully-Prudhomme's poetry I am not here concerned, but with the question of why it is that such an authority as Rémy de Gourmont could, in 1907, without awakening any protest among persons under fifty say that it was a "sort of social crime" to impose such balderdash as the verse of Sully-Prudhomme on the public.

It is not needful to quote other living critics, who may think such prolongation of their severities ungraceful. But a single contrast will suffice. When, in 1881, Sully-Prudhomme was elected to the French Academy, expert opinion

throughout the Press was unanimous in admitting that this was an honour deservedly given to the best lyric poet of the age. In 1906, when a literary journal sent out this question, "Who is the poet you love best?" and was answered by more than two hundred writers of verse, the diversity of opinion was indeed excessive; such poets as Sainte-Beuve, as Brizeux, as Rodenbach, received votes, all the great masters received many. But Sully-Prudhomme, alone, received not one vote. A new generation had arisen, and one of its leaders, with cruel wit, transferred to the reputation of the author his own most famous line:—"N'y touchez pas, il est brisé."

It is necessary to recollect that we are not dealing with the phenomenon of the inability of very astute literary people to recognise at once a startling new sort of beauty. When Robert Browning lent the best poems of Keats to Mrs. Carlyle, she read them and returned them with the remark that "almost any young gentleman with a sweet tooth might be expected to write such things." Mrs. Carlyle was a very clever woman, but she was not quite "educated up to" Keats. The history of letters is full of these grotesque limitations of taste, in the presence of great art which has not yet been "classed." But we are here considering the much stranger and indeed extremely disconcerting case of a product which has been accepted, with acclamation, by the judges of one generation, and is contemptuously hooted out of court by the next. It is not, on this occasion, Sully-Prudhomme whom we are considering, but his critics. If Théophile Gautier was right in 1867, Rémy de Gourmont must have been wrong in 1907; yet they both were

honourable men in the world of criticism. Nor is it merely the dictum of a single man, which, however ingenious, may be paradoxical. It is worse than that; it is the fact that one whole generation seems to have agreed with Gautier, and that another whole generation is of the same mind as Rémy de Gourmont.

Then it is that Mr. Balfour, like Galuppi with his "cold music," comes in and tells us that this is precisely what we have to expect. All beauty consists in the possession of certain relations, which being withdrawn, beauty disappears from the object that seemed to possess it. There is no permanent element in poetic excellence. We are not to demand any settled opinion about poetry. So Mr. Balfour seems to creak it, and we want the heart to scold. But is it quite so certain that there is no fixed norm of beauty imaginable? Is it the fact that poetic pleasure cannot "be supposed to last any longer than the transient reaction between it" and the temporary prejudice of our senses? If this be true, then are critics of all men most miserable.

Yet, deeply dejected as it leaves me to know that very clever people despise the "genteel third-rate mind" of Wordsworth, I am not quite certain that I yield to Mr. Balfour's brilliant and paralysing logic. That eminent philosopher seems to say "you find the poets, whom you revered in your youth, treated with contempt in your old age. Well! It is very sad, and perhaps it would annoy me too, if I were not a philosopher. But it only shows how right I was to tell, you not to expect permanent relations behind the feeling of beauty, since all is illusion, and there is no such thing as a principle of taste, but only a variation of fashion."

Is it, however, quite so certain, after all, that there is no standard? It must be admitted that there seems to be no fixed rule of taste, not even a uniformity of practice or general tendency to agreement in particular cases. But the whole study of the fine arts would lead to despair if we allowed ourselves to accept this admission as implying that no conceivable principle of taste exists. We may not be able to produce it, like a yard-measure, and submit works of imagination to it, once and for all, in the eyes of a consternated public. But when we observe, as we must allow, that art is no better at one age than at another, but only different; that it is subject to modification, but certainly not to development; may we not safely accept this stationary quality as a proof that there does exist, out of sight, unattained and unattainable, a positive norm of poetic beauty? We cannot define it, but in each generation all excellence must be the result of a relation to it. It is the moon, heavily wrapt up in clouds, and impossible exactly to locate, yet revealed by the light it throws on distant portions of the sky. At all events, it appears to me that this is the only theory by which we can justify a continued interest in literature when it is attacked, now on one side, now on another, by the vicissitudes of fashion.

The essays which are here collected deal, for the most part, with figures in the history of English literature which have suffered from the changes of fortune and the instability of taste. In every case, there has been something which is calculated to attract the sympathy and interest of one who, like myself, has been closely concerned with two distinct but not unrelated branches of his subject, the

literary character and the literary craft. More than fifty years have passed—like a cloud, like a dream!—since I first saw my name printed below a passage of critical opinion. How many reputations, within that half-century, have not been exalted, how many have not been depressed! We have seen Tennyson advanced beyond Virgil and Victor Hugo beyond Homer. We have seen the latest freak of futurism preferred to *The Lotus Eaters*, and the first *Légende des Siècles* rejected as unreadable. In face of this whirlwind of doctrine the public ceases to know whether it is on its head or its feet—"its trembling tent all topsy-turvy wheels," as an Elizabethan has it. To me it seems that security can only be found in an incessant exploration of the by-ways of literary history and analysis of the vagaries of literary character. To pursue this analysis and this exploration without bewilderment and without prejudice is to sum up the pleasures of a life devoted to books.

August 1919.

THE SHEPHERD OF THE OCEAN[1]

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Three hundred years have gone by to-day since Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded, in presence of a vast throng of spectators, on the scaffold of Old Palace Yard in Westminster. General Gordon said that England is what her adventurers have made her, and there is not in all English history a more shining and violent specimen of the adventurous type than Raleigh. I am desired to deliver a brief panegyric on this celebrated freebooter, and I go

behind the modern definition of the word "panegyric" (as a pompous and ornamented piece of rhetoric) to its original significance, which was, as I take it, the reminder, to a great assembly of persons, of the reason why they have been brought together in the name of a man long dead. Therefore I shall endeavour, in the short space of time allotted to me, not so much to eulogise as to explain and to define what Sir Walter Raleigh was and represents.

I suggest, therefore, before we touch upon any of the details of his career and character, that the central feature of Raleigh, as he appears to us after three hundred years, is his unflinching determination to see the name of England written across the forehead of the world. Others before him had been patriots of the purest order, but Raleigh was the first man who laid it down, as a formula, that "England shall by the favour of God resist, repel and confound all whatsoever attempts against her sacred kingdom." He had no political sense nor skill in statecraft. For that we go to the Burghleys or the Cecils, crafty men of experience and judgment. But he understood that England had enemies and that those enemies must be humbled and confounded. He understood that the road of England's greatness, which was more to him than all other good things, lay across the sea. The time was ripe for the assertion of English liberty, of English ascendancy, too; and the opportunity of the moment lay in "those happy hands which the Holy Ghost hath guided," the fortunate adventurers. Of these Raleigh was the most eminent as he was also, in a sense, the most unfortunate.

A heavy shadow lay all over the Western world, the shadow of a fierce bird of prey hovering over its victim. Ever since Ferdinand expelled the Moors out of Granada, Spain had been nursing insensate dreams of universal empire. She was endeavouring to destroy the infant system of European civilisation by every means of brutality and intrigue which the activity of her arrogance could devise. The Kings of Spain, in their ruthless ambition, encouraged their people in a dream of Spanish world-dominion. Their bulletins had long "filled the earth with their vainglorious vaunts, making great appearance of victories"; they had spread their propaganda "in sundry languages in print," distributing braggart pamphlets in which they boasted, for the benefit of neutrals, of their successes against England, France, and Italy. They had "abused and tormented" the wretched inhabitants of the Low Countries, and they held that the force of arms which they brandished would weigh against justice, humanity, and freedom in the servitude which they meant to inflict upon Europe. It was to be *Spanien über alles*.

But there was one particular nation against which the malignity of the great enemy blazed most fiercely. The King of Spain blasphemously regarded himself as the instrument of God, and there was one country which more than the rest frustrated his pious designs. This was England, and for that reason England was more bitterly hated than any other enemy. The Spaniards did "more greedily thirst after English blood than after the lives of any other people of Europe." The avowed purpose of Castile was to destroy that maritime supremacy of England on which the very existence of the English State depends. The significance of Sir Walter Raleigh

consists in the clairvoyance with which he perceived and the energy with which he combated this monstrous assumption. Other noble Englishmen of his time, and before his time, had been clear-sighted and had struck hard against the evil tyranny of Spanish dynastic militarism, but no other man before or since was so luminously identified with resistance. He struts upon the stage of battle with the limelight full upon him. The classic writing of the crisis is contained in the *Last Fight of the Revenge at Sea* of 1591, where the splendid defiance and warning of the Preface are like trumpets blown to the four quarters of the globe. Raleigh stands out as the man who above all others laboured, as he said, "against the ambitious and bloody pretences of the Spaniards, who, seeking to devour all nations, shall be themselves devoured."

There is a blessing upon the meek of the earth, but I do not present Raleigh to you as a humble-minded man. In that wonderful Elizabethan age there were blossoming, side by side, the meekness of Hooker, the subtlety of Bacon, the platonic dream of Spenser, the imperturbable wisdom of Shakespeare. Raleigh had no part in any of these, and to complain of that would be to grumble because a hollyhock is neither a violet nor a rose. He had his enemies during his life and his detractors ever since, and we may go so far as to admit that he deserves them. He was a typical man of that heroic age in that he possessed, even to excess, all its tropic irregularity of ethics. He lived in a perpetual alternation of thunderstorm and blazing sunshine. He admitted himself that his "reason," by which he meant his judgment, "was exceeding weak," and his tactlessness

constantly precluded a due appreciation of his courage and nobility. For long years his violent and haughty temper made him the most unpopular man in England, except in Devonshire, where everybody doted on him. He was "a man of desperate fortunes," and he did not shrink from violent methods. In studying his life we are amused, we are almost scandalised, at his snake-like quality. He moves with serpentine undulations, and the beautiful hard head is lifted from ambush to strike the unsuspecting enemy at sight. With his protestations, his volubility, his torrent of excuses, his evasive pertinacity, Sir Walter Raleigh is the very opposite of the "strong silent" type of soldier which the nineteenth century invented for exclusive British consumption.

In judging his character we must take into consideration not only the times in which he lived, but the leaders of English policy with whom he came into collision. He was not thirty years of age, and still at the height of his vivacity, when he was taken into the close favour of Queen Elizabeth. There can be no question that he found in the temper of the monarch something to which his own nature intimately responded. The Queen was an adventurer at heart, as he was, and she was an Englishman of Englishmen. We are accustomed to laugh at the extravagance of the homage which Raleigh paid to a woman old enough to be his mother, at the bravado which made him fling his new plush cloak across a puddle for the Queen to tread over gently, as Fuller tells us, "rewarding him afterwards with many suits for his so free and seasonable tender of so fair a footcloth," or at the story of the rhymes the couple cut on the glass with

their diamond rings. In all this, no doubt, there was the fashion of the time, and on Raleigh's part there was ambition and the desire to push his fortunes without scruple. But there was, you may be sure, more than that; there was the instinctive sympathy between the two who hated with the most unflagging and the most burning hate the wicked aggression of Spain. We may be sure that Elizabeth never for a day forgot that Pope Alexander VI. had generously bestowed the Western world on the Crown of Spain. Raleigh spoke a language which might be extravagant and which might be exasperating, which might, in fact, lead to outrageous quarrels between his Cynthia and himself, but which, at least, that Cynthia understood.

But in 1602, when Raleigh was fifty years of age and had his splendours behind him, there came another Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. James I. was the type of the cautious man who only looks to the present, who hopes by staving off a crisis till Tuesday that something fresh will "turn up" by Wednesday. He was disposed, from the very first, to distrust and to waylay the plans of Raleigh. We are told, and can well believe it, that he was "diffident" of Sir Walter's designs. He was uncomfortable in the presence of that breezy "man of desperate fortunes." A very excellent example of the opposition of the two types is offered by the discussion about the golden city of Manoa. Raleigh believed, and after all disappointments continued to be sure, that in the heart of the swamps of the Orinoco there existed a citadel of magnificent wealth, an emporium of diamonds and gold, from which Spain was secretly drawing the riches with which she proposed to overwhelm civilisation. He

struggled for nearly a quarter of a century to win this marvellous city for England. James I. chopped in with his cold logic, and declined to believe that any golden mine existed in Guiana "anywhere in nature," as he craftily said. When Raleigh returned after his last miserable failure in May 1617, the monarch spared no sneer and no reproof to the pirate of the seas. Of course, the King was right; there was no mine of diamonds, no golden city. But the immense treasures that haunted Raleigh's dreams were more real than reality; they existed in the future; he looked far ahead, and our sympathies to-day, and our gratitude also, are all for the noble and valorous knight who sailed out into the West searching for an unknown El Dorado.

It is not so easy to defend the character of our hero against those who, like Hume, have objected to his methods in the prosecution of his designs. To Hume, as to many others before and since, Raleigh seemed "extremely defective either in solid understanding, or morals, or both." The excellent historians of the eighteenth century could not make up their minds whether he was a hero or an impostor. Did he believe in the Guiana mine, or was he, through all those strenuous years, hoodwinking the world? Had he any purpose, save to plunder the Spaniard? Perhaps his own family doubted his sanity, for his son Walter, when he charged the Spanish settlement at San Thomé, pointed to the house of the little colony and shouted to his men: "Come on, this is the true mine, and none but fools would look for any other!" Accusations of bad faith, of factious behaviour, of disloyal intrigue, were brought up against Sir Walter over and over again during the "day of his

tempestuous life, drawn on into an evening" of ignominy and blood. These charges were the "inmost and soul-piercing wounds" of which he spoke, still "aching," still "uncured."

There is no need to recount to you the incidents of his life, but I may remind you that after the failure of the latest expedition to South America the Privy Council, under pressure from the Spanish Ambassador, gave orders to Sir Lewis Stukeley to bring the body of Sir Walter Raleigh speedily to London. This was the culmination of his fall, since, three days after Raleigh landed at Plymouth, the King had assured Spain that "not all those who have given security for Raleigh can save him from the gallows." His examination followed, and the publication of the *Apology for the Voyage to Guiana*. The trial dragged on, while James I., in a manner almost inconceivable, allowed himself to be hurried and bullied by the insolent tyrant Philip II. If the English King did not make haste to execute Raleigh the Spaniards would fetch him away and hang him in Madrid. In these conditions, and clutching at life as a man clutches at roots and branches when he is sliding down a precipice, the conduct of Raleigh has given cause to his critics to blaspheme. He wriggled like an eel, he pretended to be sick, he pretended to be mad, in order to protract his examination. He prevaricated about his mine, about the French alliance, about the Spanish treaties, about his stores and instruments. Did he believe, or did he not believe, in the Empire of the Inca, in the Amazons or Republic of Women, in the gold lying hidden in the hard white spar of El Dorado? We do not know, and his own latest efforts at explanation

only cloud our counsel. He was perhaps really a little mad at last, his feverish brain half-crazed by the movement on land and sea of the triumphant wealth of Spain.

Let us never overlook that the master-passion of his whole career was hatred of this tyrannous prosperity of England's most formidable rival. He acted impulsively, and even unjustly; there was much in his methods that a cool judgment must condemn; but he was fighting, with his back to the wall, in order that the British race should not be crowded out of existence by "the proud Iberian." He saw that if Spain were permitted to extend her military and commercial supremacy unchecked, there would be an end to civilisation. Democracy was a thing as yet undeveloped, but the seeds of it were lying in the warm soil of English liberty, and Raleigh perceived, more vehemently than any other living man, that the complete victory of Spain would involve the shipwreck of England's hopes of future prosperity. Nor was he exclusively interested in England, though all his best hopes were ours. When he had been a lad at Oxford he had broken away from his studies in 1569 to help the Protestant princes as a gentleman volunteer in France, and he took part in the famous battle of Jarnac. He is supposed to have fought in France for six years. From early youth his mind was "bent on military glory," and always in opposition to Spain. His escape from the bloody Vespers of Saint Bartholomew had given him a deep distrust of the policy of Rome. The Spaniard had "abused and tormented" the wretched inhabitants of Flanders. Sir Walter Raleigh dreamed that by the combination in arms of England, France, and the Low Countries, the Spaniards

"might not only be persuaded to live in peace, but all their swelling and overflowing streams might be brought back into their natural channels and old banks."

Raleigh stood out, as he put it himself, against "the continuance of this boundless ambition in mortal men." The rulers in Madrid, transported by their own arrogance, had determined to impose their religion, their culture, their form of government, on the world. It was a question whether the vastly superior moral and intellectual energy of England and France would not be crushed beneath the heel of Spain. Raleigh was ready to sacrifice everything, to imperil his own soul, to prevent that. He says you might as well "root out the Christian religion altogether" as join "the rest of all Europe to Spain." In his zeal to prevent "the continuance of this boundless ambition in mortal men," he lent himself to acts which we must not attempt to condone. There is no use in trying to explain away the facts of his cruel and even savage fanaticism in Ireland when he was governor of Munster. He was always apt to be abruptly brutal to a man who crossed his path. But even his Irish career offers aspects on which we may dwell with pure pleasure. Nothing could be more romantic than those adventures, like the feats of a paladin of the Faerie Queen, which he encountered in the great wood of Lismore; while the story of how he carried off Lord and Lady Roche from their breakfast-table in their own castle of Ballyinharsh, and how he rode with them up ravines and round precipices in that mad flight from their retainers, is as rousing as any scene ever imagined by Dumas *père*.

Raleigh called himself the Shepherd of the Ocean, and the name fits him well, even though his flock were less like sheep than like a leash of hunting leopards. His theory was that with a pack of small and active pinnaces he could successfully hunt the lumbering Spanish galleons without their being able to hit back. He was, in contradistinction to many preceding English admirals, a cautious fighter at sea, and he says, in a striking passage of the *History of the World*, written towards the end of his career, "to clap ships together without any consideration belongs rather to a madman than to a man of war." He must have taken the keenest interest in the gigantic failure of the Felicissima Armada in 1588, but, tantalisingly enough, we have no record of his part in it. On the other hand, the two finest of his prose pamphlets, the *Relation of the Action in Cadiz Harbour* and the incomparable *Report on the Fight in the Revenge*, supply us with ample materials for forming an idea of his value as a naval strategist. Raleigh's earliest biographer, Oldys the antiquary, speaks of him as "raising a grove of laurels out of the sea," and it is certainly upon that element that he reaches his highest effect of prominence. It was at sea that he could give fullest scope to his hatred of the tyrannous prosperity of Spain. He had to be at once a gamekeeper and a poacher; he had to protect the legitimate interests of English shipping against privateers and pirates, while he was persuaded to be, or felt himself called upon to become, no little of a pirate himself. He was a passionate advocate of the freedom of the seas, and those who look upon Raleigh as a mere hot-brained enthusiast should read his little book called *Observations on Trade and Commerce*,

written in the Tower, and see what sensible views he had about the causes of the depression of trade. These sage opinions did not check him, or his fleets of hunting-pinnaces, from lying in wait for the heavy wallowing plate-ships, laden with Indian carpets and rubies and sandalwood and ebony, which came swinging up to the equator from Ceylon or Malabar. The "freedom of the seas" was for Raleigh's ship, the *Roebuck*; it was by no means for the *Madre de Dios*. We find these moral inconsistencies in the mind of the best of adventurers.

A sketch of Raleigh's character would be imperfect indeed if it contained no word concerning his genius as a coloniser. One of his main determinations, early in life, was "to discover and conquer unknown lands, and take possession of them in the Queen's name." We celebrate in Sir Walter Raleigh one of the most intelligent and imaginative of the founders of our colonial empire. The English merchantmen before his time had been satisfied with the determination to grasp the wealth of the New World as it came home to Spain; it had not occurred to them to compete with the great rival at the fountain-head of riches. Even men like Drake and Frobisher had been content with a policy of forbidding Spain, as the poet Wither said, "to check our ships from sailing where they please." South America was already mainly in Spanish hands, but North America was still open to invasion. It was Raleigh's half-brother, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who first thought of planting an English settlement in what is now the United States, in 1578. But Gilbert had "no luck at sea," as Queen Elizabeth observed, and it was Raleigh who, in 1584, took up the scheme of

colonisation. He did not drop it until the death of Elizabeth, when, under the east wind of the new *régime*, the blossom of his colonial enterprises flagged.

The motion for the ceremony of to-day originated with the authorities of an important American city, which proudly bears the name of our adventurer. The earliest settlement in what are now the United States was made at Roanoke, in Virginia, on a day which must always be prominent in the annals of civilisation, August 17th, 1585. But this colony lasted only ten months, and it was not until nearly two years later that the fourth expedition which Raleigh sent out succeeded in maintaining a perilous foothold in the new country. This was the little trembling taper to which his own name was given, the twinkling spark which is now the flourishing city of Raleigh in North Carolina. We may well marvel at the pertinacity with which Sir Walter persisted, in the face of innumerable difficulties, in sending out one colonising fleet after another, although, contrary to common legend, he himself never set foot in North America. It was fortunate that at this period of his career he was wealthy, for the attempts to plant settlements in the vast region which he named Virginia cost him more than £40,000. We note at all turns of his fortune his extraordinary tenacity of purpose, which he illustrated, as though by a motto, in the verses he addressed to a comrade towards the end of his imprisonment in the Tower:—

> "Change not! to change thy fortune 'tis too
> late;
> Who with a manly faith resolves to die

May promise to himself a lasting State,
Though not so great, yet free from infamy."

So we may think of him in his prime, as he stood on the Hoe of Plymouth twenty years before, a gallant figure of a man, bedizened with precious stones, velvets, and embroidered damasks, shouting his commands to his captains in a strong Devonshire accent. We think of him resolutely gazing westward always, with the light of the sea in his eyes.

We come to the final scene which we are here to-day to commemorate. Little honour to the rulers of England in 1618 redounds from it, and yet we may feel that it completed and even redeemed from decay the character of Raleigh. This tragedy, which was almost a murder, was needed to round off the accomplishment of so strange and frantic a career of romantic violence, and to stamp it with meaning. If Raleigh had been thrown from his horse or had died of the ague in his bed, we should have been depressed by the squalid circumstances, we should have been less conscious than we are now of his unbroken magnanimity. His failures and his excesses had made him unpopular throughout England, and he was both proud and peevish in his recognition of the fact. He declared that he was "nothing indebted" to the world, and again that, "the common people are evil judges of honest things." But the thirteen years of his imprisonment caused a reaction. People forgot how troublesome he had been and only recollected his magnificence. They remembered nothing but that he had spent his whole energy and fortune in resisting the brutality and avarice of the Spaniard.

Then came the disgraceful scene of his cross-examination at Westminster, and the condemnation by his venal judges at the order of a paltry king. It became known, or shrewdly guessed, that Spain had sent to James I. a hectoring alternative that Raleigh must be executed in London or sent alive for a like purpose to Madrid. The trial was a cowardly and ignominious submission of the English Government to the insolence of England's hereditary enemy. Raleigh seemed for the moment to have failed completely, yet it was really like the act of Samson, who slew more men at his death than in all his life. Samuel Pepys, who had some fine intuitions at a time when the national *moral* was very low, spoke of Raleigh as being "given over, as a sacrifice," to our enemies. This has been, in truth, the secret of his unfailing romantic popularity, and it is the reason of the emotion which has called us together here three hundred years after his death upon the scaffold.

THE SONGS OF SHAKESPEARE

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Among the "co-supremes and stars of love" which form the constellated glory of our greatest poet there is one small splendour which we are apt to overlook in our general survey. But, if we isolate it from other considerations, it is surely no small thing that Shakespeare created and introduced into our literature the Dramatic Song. If with statistical finger we turn the pages of all his plays, we shall discover, not perhaps without surprise, that these contain not fewer than fifty strains of lyrical measure. Some of the

fifty, to be sure, are mere star-dust, but others include some of the very jewels of our tongue. They range in form from the sophisticated quatorzains of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (where, however, comes "Who is Silvia?") to the reckless snatches of melody in *Hamlet*. But all have a character which is Shakespearean, and this regardless of the question so often raised, and so incapable of reply, as to whether some of the wilder ones are Shakespeare's composition or no. Whoever originally may have written such scraps as "They bore him bare-faced on the bier" and "Come o'er the bourne, Bessy, to me," the spirit of Shakespeare now pervades and possesses them.

Our poet was a prodigious innovator in this as in so many other matters. Of course, the idea and practice of musical interludes in plays was not quite novel. In Shakespeare's early youth that remarkable artist in language, John Lyly, had presented songs in several of his plays, and these were notable for what his contemporary, Henry Upchear, called "their labouring beauty." We may notice that Lyly's songs were not printed till long after Shakespeare's death, but doubtless he had listened to them. Peele and Greene had brilliant lyrical gifts, but they did not exercise them in their dramas, nor did Lodge, whose novel of Rosalynde (1590) contains the only two precedent songs which we could willingly add to Shakespeare's juvenile repertory. But while I think it would be rash to deny that the lyrics of Lodge and Lyly had their direct influence on the style of Shakespeare, neither of those admirable precursors conceived the possibility of making the Song an integral part of the development of the drama. This was Shakespeare's