

# **Limbo and other Essays**

Vernon Lee

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## Dedication

TO MY FRIEND, MABEL PRICE, IN MEMORY OF MANY RAMBLES AND HOPES OF MANY MORE AMONGST HILLS, BOOKS, AND UNREALITIES

*MAIANO NEAR FLORENCE FEBRUARY 1897*

## LIMBO

**Perocchè gente di molto valore  
Conobbi che in quel *Limbo* eran sospesi.**

### I

**IT** may seem curious to begin with Dante and pass on to the Children's Rabbits' House; but I require both to explain what it is I mean by Limbo; no such easy matter on trying. For this discourse is not about the Pious Pagans whom the poet found in honourable confinement at the Gate of Hell, nor of their neighbours the Unchristened Babies; but I am glad of Dante's authority for the existence of a place holding such creatures as have just missed a necessary rite, or come too soon for thorough salvation. And I am glad, moreover, that the poet has insisted on the importance "gente di molto valore" of the beings thus enclosed; because it is just with the superior quality of the things in what I mean by Limbo that we are peculiarly concerned.

And now for the other half of my preliminary illustration of the subject, to wit, the Children's Rabbits' House. The little gardens which the children played at cultivating have long since disappeared, taken insensibly back into that corner of the formal but slackly kept garden which looks towards the steep hill dotted with cows and sheep. But in that corner, behind the shapeless Portugal laurels and the patches of seeding grass, there still remains, beneath big trees, what the children used to call the "Rabbits' Villa." 'Tis merely a wooden toy house, with green moss-eaten roof, standing, like the lake dwellings of prehistoric times, on wooden posts, with the tall foxgloves, crimson and white, growing all round it. There is something ludicrous in this superannuated toy, this Noah's ark on stilts among the grass and bushes; but when you look into the thing, finding the empty plates and cups "for having tea with the rabbits," and when you look into it spiritually also, it grows oddly pathetic. We walked up and down between the high hornbeam hedges, the sunlight lying low on the armies of tall daisies and seeding grasses, and falling in narrow glints among the white boles and hanging boughs of the beeches, where the wooden benches stand unused in the deep grass, and the old swing hangs crazily crooked. Yes, the Rabbits' Villa and the surrounding overgrown beds are quite pathetic. Is it because they are, in a way, the graves of children long dead, as dead despite the grown-up folk who may come and say "It was I" as the rabbits and guinea-pigs with whom they once had tea? That is it; and that explains my meaning: the Rabbits' Villa is, to the eye of the initiate, one of many little branch establishments of Limbo surrounding us on all sides. Another poet, more versed in similar matters than Dante (one feels sure that Dante knew his own mind, and always had his own way, even when exiled), Rossetti, in a sonnet, has given us the terrible little speech, which would issue from the small Limbos of this kind: Look in my face: My name is *Might-have-been*.

II

Of all the things that Limbo might contain, there is one about which some persons, very notably Churchyard Gray, have led us into error. I do not believe there is much genius to be found in Limbo. The world, although it takes a lot of dunning, offers a fair price for this article, which it requires as much as water—power and coal, nay even as much as food and clothes (bread for its soul and raiment for its thought); so that what genius there is will surely be brought into market. But even were it wholly otherwise, genius, like murder, *would out*; for genius is one of the liveliest forces of nature: not to be quelled or quenched, adaptable, protean, expansive, nay explosive; of all things in the world the most able to take care of itself; which accounts for so much public expenditure to foster and encourage it: foster the sun's chemistry, the force of gravitation, encourage atomic affinity and natural selection, magnificent Mæcenas and judicious Parliamentary Board, they are sure to do you credit!

Hence, to my mind, there are *no mute in—glorious Miltons*, or none worth taking into account. Our sentimental surmises about them grow from the notion that human power is something like the wheels or cylinder of a watch, a neat numbered scrap of mechanism, stamped at a blow by a creative *fiat*, or hand—hammered by evolution, and fitting just exactly into one little plan, serving exactly one little purpose, indispensable for that particular machine, and otherwise fit for the dust—heap. Happily for us it is certainly not so. The very greatest men have always been the most versatile: Lionardo, Goethe, Napoleon; the next greatest can still be imagined under different circumstances as turning their energy to very different tasks; and I am tempted to think that the hobbies by which many of them have laid much store, while the world merely laughed at the statesman's trashy verses or the musician's third—rate sketches, may have been of the nature of rudimentary organs, which, given a different environment, might have developed, become the creature's chief *raison d'être*, leaving that which has actually chanced to be his talent to become atrophied, perhaps invisible.

Be this last as it may and I commend it to those who believe in genius as a form of monomania it is quite certain that genius has nothing in common with machinery. It is the most organic and alive of living organisms; the most adaptable therefore, and least easily killed; and for this reason, and despite Gray's *Elegy*, there is no chance of much of it in Limbo.

This is no excuse for the optimistic extermination of distinguished men. It is indeed most difficult to kill genius, but there are a hundred ways of killing its possessors; and with them as much of their work as they have left undone. What pictures might Giorgione not have painted but for the lady, the rival, or the plague, whichever it was that killed him! Mozart could assuredly have given us a half—dozen more *Don Giovannis* if he had had fewer lessons, fewer worries, better food; nay, by his miserable death the world has lost, methinks, more even than that a commanding influence which would have kept music, for a score of years, earnest and masterly but joyful: Rossini would not have run to seed, and Beethoven's ninth symphony might have been a genuine a "Hymn to Joy" if only Mozart, the Apollo of musicians, had, for a few years more, flooded men's souls with radiance. A similar thing is said of Rafael; but his followers were mediocre, and he himself lacked personality, so that many a better example might be brought.

These are not useless speculations; it is as well we realise that, although genius be immortal, poor men of genius are not. Quite an extraordinarily small amount of draughts and microbes, of starvation bodily and spiritual, of pin—pricks of various kinds, will do for them; we can all have a hand in their killing; the killing also of their peace, kindness and justice, sending these qualities to Limbo, which is full of such. And now, dear reader, I perceive that we have at last got Limbo well in sight and, in another minute, we may begin to discern some of its real contents.



The Paladin Astolfo, as Ariosto relates, was sent on a winged horse up to the moon; where, under the ciceroneship of John the Evangelist, he saw most of the things which had been lost on earth, among others the wits of many persons in bottles, his cousin Orlando's, which he had come on purpose to fetch, and, curiously enough, his own, which he had never missed.

The moon does well as storehouse for such brilliant, romantic things. The Limbo whose contents and branches I would speak of is far less glorious, a trifle humdrum; sometimes such as makes one smile, like that Villa of the Rabbits in the neglected garden. 'Twas for this reason, indeed, that I preferred to clear away at once the question of the Mute Inglorious Miltons, and of such solemn public loss as comes of the untimely death of illustrious men. Do you remember, by the way, reader, a certain hasty sketch by Cazin, which hangs in a corner of the Luxembourg? The bedroom of Gambetta after his death: the white bed neatly made, empty, with laurel garlands replacing him; the tricolor flag, half-furled, leaned against the chair, and on the table vague heaped-up papers; a thing quite modest and heroic, suitable to all similar occasions Mirabeau say, and Stevenson on his far-off island and with whose image we can fitly close our talk of genius wasted by early death.

I have alluded to *happiness* as filling up much space in Limbo; and I think that the amount of it lying in that kingdom of Might-have-been is probably out of all proportion with that which must do duty in this actual life. Browning's *Last Ride Together* one has to be perpetually referring to poets on this matter, for philosophers and moralists consider happiness in its *causal connection* or as a fine snare to virtue Browning's *Last Ride Together* expresses, indeed, a view of the subject commending itself to active and cheerful persons, which comes to many just after their salad days; to wit, what a mercy that we don't often get what we want most. The objects of our recent ardent longings reveal themselves, most luridly sometimes, as dangers, deadlocks, fetters, hopeless labyrinths, from which we have barely escaped. This is the house I wanted to buy, the employment I fretted to obtain, the lady I pined to marry, the friend with whom I projected to share lodgings. With such sudden chill recognitions comes belief in a special providence, some fine Greek-sounding goddess, thwarting one's dearest wishes from tender solicitude that we shouldn't get what we want. In such a crisis the nobler of us feel like the Riding Lover, and learn ideal philosophy and manly acquiescence; the meaner snigger ungenerously about those youthful escapes; and know not that they have gained safety at the price, very often, of the little good ideality, faith and dash there ever was about them: safe smug individuals, whose safety is mere loss to the cosmos. But later on, when our characters have settled, when repeated changes have taught us which is our unchangeable ego, we begin to let go that optimist creed, and to suspect (suspicion turning to certainty) that, as all things which *have* happened to us have not been always advantageous, so likewise things longed for in vain need not necessarily have been curses. As we grow less attached to theories, and more to our neighbours, we recognise every day that loss, refusal of the desired, has not by any means always braced or chastened the lives we look into; we admit that the Powers That Be showed considerable judgment in disregarding the teachings of asceticism, and inspiring mankind with inmate repugnance to having a bad time. And, to return to the question of Limbo, as we watch the best powers, the whole usefulness and sweetness starved out of certain lives for lack of the love, the liberty or the special activities they prayed for; as regards the question of Limbo, I repeat, we grow (or try to grow) a little more cautious about sending so much more happiness ours and other folk's to the place of Might-have-been.

Some of it certainly does seem beyond our control, a fatal matter of constitution. I am not speaking of the results of vice or stupidity; this talk of Limbo is exclusively addressed to the very nicest people.

A deal of the world's sound happiness is lost through Shyness. We have all of us seen instances. They often occur between members of the same family, the very similarity of nature, which might make mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters, into closest companions, merely doubling the dose of that terrible reserve, timidity, horror of human contact, paralysis of speech, which keeps the most loving hearts asunder. It is useless to console ourselves by saying that each has its own love of the other. And thus they walk, sometimes side by side, never looking in

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one another's eyes, never saying the word, till death steps in, death sometimes unable to loosen the tongue of the mourner. Such things are common among our reserved northern races, making us so much less happy and less helpful in everyday life than our Latin and Teuton neighbours; and, I imagine, are commonest among persons of the same blood. But the same will happen between lovers, or those who should have been such; doubt of one's own feeling, fear of the other's charity, apprehension of its all being a mistake, has silently prevented many a marriage. The two, then, could not have been much in love? Not *in love*, since neither ever allowed that to happen, more's the pity; but loving one another with the whole affinity of their natures, and, after all, *being in love* is but the crisis, or the beginning of that, if it's worth anything.

Thus shyness sends much happiness to Limbo. But actual shyness is not the worst. Some persons, sometimes of the very finest kind, endowed for loving-kindness, passion, highest devotion, nay requiring it as much as air or warmth, have received, from some baleful fairy, a sterilising gift of fear. Fear of what they could not tell; something which makes all community of soul a terror, and every friend a threat. Something terrible, in whose presence we must bow our heads and pray impunity therefrom for ourselves and ours.

But the bulk of happiness stacked up in Limbo appears, on careful looking, to be an agglomeration of other lost things; justice, charm, appreciation, and faith in one another, all recklessly packed off as so much lumber, sometimes to make room for fine new qualities instead! Justice, I am inclined to think, is usually sent to Limbo through the agency of others. A work in many folios might be written by condensing what famous men have had said against them in their days of struggle, and what they have answered about others in their days of prosperity.

The loss of *charm* is due to many more circumstances; the stress of life indeed seems calculated to send it to Limbo. Certain it is that few women, and fewer men, of forty, preserve a particle of it. I am not speaking of youth or beauty, though it does seem a pity that mature human beings should mostly be too fat or too thin, and lacking either sympathy or intellectual keenness. *Charm* must comprise all that, but much besides. It is the undefinable quality of nearly every child, and of all nice lads and girls; the quality which (though it *can* reach perfection in exceptional old people) usually vanishes, no one knows when exactly, into the Limbo marked by the Rabbits' Villa, with its plates and tea-cups, mouldering on its wooden posts in the unweeded garden.

More useful qualities replace all these: hardness, readiness to snatch opportunity, mistrust of all ideals, inflexible self-righteousness; useful, nay necessary; but, let us admit it, in a life which, judged by the amount of dignity and sweetness it contains, is perhaps scarce necessary itself, and certainly not useful. The case might be summed up, for our guidance, by saying that the loss of many of our finer qualities is due to the complacent, and sometimes dutiful, cultivation of our worse ones!

For, even in the list of virtues, there are finer and less fine, nay virtues one might almost call atrocious, and virtues with a taint of ignominy. I have said that we lose some of our finer qualities this way; what's worse is, that we often fail to appreciate the finest qualities of others.

## IV

And here, coming to the vague rubric *appreciation of others*, I feel we have got to a district of Limbo about which few of us should have the audacity to speak, and few, as a fact, have the courage honestly to think. *What do we make of our idea of others* in our constant attempt to justify ourselves? No Japanese bogie-monger ever produced the equal of certain wooden monster-puppets which we carve, paint, rig out and christen by the names of real folk alas, alas, dear names sometimes of friends! and stick up to gibber in our memory; while the real image, the creature we have really known, is carted off to Limbo! But this is too bad to speak of.



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Let us rather think gently of things, sad, but sad without ignominy, of friendships stillborn or untimely cut off, hurried by death into a place like that which holds the souls of the unchristened babies; often, like them, let us hope, removed to a sphere where such things grow finer and more fruitful, the sphere of the love of those we have not loved enough in life.

But that at best is but a place of ghosts; so let us never forget, dear friends, how close all round lies Limbo, the Kingdom of Might-have-been.

### IN PRAISE OF OLD HOUSES

### IN PRAISE OF OLD HOUSES

#### I

**MY** Yorkshire friend was saying that she hated being in an old house. *There seemed to be other* people in it besides the living....

These words, expressing the very reverse of what I feel, have set me musing on my foolish passion for the Past. The Past, but the real one; not the Past considered as a possible Present. For though I should like to have seen ancient Athens, or Carthage according to Salambô, and though I have pined to hear the singers of last century, I know that any other period than this of the world's history would be detestable to live in. For one thing one among other instances of brutish dulness our ancestors knew nothing of the emotion of the past, the rapture of old towns and houses.

This emotion, at times this rapture, depends upon a number of mingled causes; its origin is complex and subtle, like that of all things exquisite; the flavour of certain dishes, the feel of sea or mountain air, in which chemical peculiarities and circumstances of temperature join with a hundred trifles, seaweed, herbs, tar, heather and so forth; and like, more particularly, music and poetry, whose essence is so difficult of ascertaining. And in this case, the causes that first occur to our mind merely suggest a number more. Of these there is a principal one, only just less important than that suggested by my Yorkshire friend, which might be summed up thus: *That the action of time makes man's works into natural objects.*

Now, with no disrespect to man, 'tis certain Nature can do more than he. Not that she is the more intelligent of the two; on the contrary, she often makes the grossest artistic blunders, and has, for instance, a woeful lack of design in England, and a perfect mania for obvious composition and deliberate picturesqueness in Italy and Argyllshire. But Nature is greater than man because she is bigger, and can do more things at a time. Man seems unable to attend to one point without neglecting some other; where he has a fine fancy in melody, his harmony is apt to be threadbare; if he succeeds with colour, he cannot manage line, and if light and shade, then neither; and it is a circumstance worthy of remark that whenever and wherever man has built beautiful temples, churches, and palaces, he has been impelled to bedizen them with primary colours, of which, in Venice and the Alhambra, time at last made something agreeable, and time also, in Greece, has judged best to obliterate every odious trace. Hence, in the works of man there is always a tendency to simplify, to suppress detail, to make things clear and explain patterns and points of view; to save trouble, thought, and material; to be symmetrical, which means, after all, to repeat the same thing twice over; he knows it is wrong to carve one frieze on the top of the other, and to paint in more than one layer of paint. Of all such restrictions Nature is superbly unconscious. She smears weather-stain on weather-stain and lichen on lichen, never stopping to match them. She jags off corners and

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edges, and of one meagre line makes fifty curves and facets. She weaves pattern over pattern, regardless of confusion, so that the mangiest hedgerow is richer, more subtle than all the carpets and papers ever designed by Mr. Morris. Her one notion is *More, always more*; whereas that of man, less likely to exceed, is a timid *Enough*. No wonder, for has she not the chemistry of soil and sun and moisture and wind and frost, all at her beck and call?

Be it as it may, Nature does more for us than man, in the way of pleasure and interest. And to say, therefore, that time turns the works of man into natural objects is, therefore, saying that time gives them infinitely more variety and charm. In making them natural objects also time gives to man's lifeless productions the chief quality of everything belonging to Nature life. Compare a freshly plastered wall with one that has been exposed to sun and rain, or a newly slated roof to one all covered with crumbling, grey, feathery stuff, like those of the Genoese villages, which look as if they had been thatched with olive-leaves from off their hills. 'Tis the comparison between life and death; or, rather, since death includes change, between something and nothing. Imagine a tree as regular as a column, or an apple as round as a door-knob!

## II

So much for the material improvements which time effects in our surroundings. We now come to the spiritual advantages of dealing with the past instead of the present.

These begin in our earliest boy- or girl-hood. What right-minded child of ten or twelve cares, beyond its tribute of apples, and jam, and cricket, and guinea-pigs, for so dull a thing as the present? Why, the present is like this schoolroom or playground, compared with Polar Seas, Rocky Mountains, or Pacific Islands; a place for the body, not for the soul. It all came back to me, a little while ago, when doing up for my young friend, L.V., sundry Roman coins long mislaid in a trunk, and which had formed my happiness at his age. Delightful things! smooth and bright green like certain cabbage-leaves, or of a sorry brown, rough with rust and verdigris; but all leaving alike a perceptible portion of themselves in the paper bag, a delectable smell of copper on one's hands. How often had I turned you round and round betwixt finger and thumb, trying to catch the slant of an inscription, or to get, in some special light, the film or effaced effigy the chin of Nero, or the undulating, benevolent nose of Marcus Aurelius? How often have my hands not anointed you with every conceivable mixture of oil, varnish, and gum, rubbing you gently with silk and wool, and kid gloves, in hopes that something ineffable might rise up on your surface! I quite sympathised with my young friend when, having waggled and chortled over each of them several times, he thought it necessary to overcome the natural manly horror for kissing, and shook my hand twice, thrice, and then once more, returning from the door... For had they not concentrated in their interesting verdigrised, brass-smelling smallness something, to me, of the glory and wonder of Rome? Cæcilia Metella, the Grotto of Egeria a vague vision, through some twenty years' fog, of a drive between budding hedges and dry reeds; a walk across short anemone-starred turf; but turning into distinct remembrance of the buying of two old pennies, one of Augustus, the other even more interesting, owing to entire obliteration of both reverse and obverse; a valuable coin, undoubtedly. And the Baths of Caracalla, which I can recollect with the thick brushwood, oak scrub, ivy and lentisk, and even baby ilexes, covering the masonry and overhanging the arches, and with rose hedges just cut away to dig out some huge porphyry pillar were not their charms all concentrated in dim, delicious hopes of finding, just where the green turf ended and the undulating expanse of purple, green and white tessellated pavement began, some other brazen penny? And then, in Switzerland, soon after, did I not suffer acutely, as I cleaned my coins, from the knowledge that in this barbarous Northern place, which the Romans had, perhaps, never come near, it was quite useless to keep one's eyes on the ruts of roads and the gravel of paths, and consequently almost useless to go out, or to exist; until one day I learnt that a certain old lawyer, in a certain field, had actually dug up Roman antiquities... I don't know whether I ever saw them with corporeal eyes, but certainly with those of the spirit; and I was lent a drawing of one of them, a gold armet, of which I insisted on having a

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copy made, and sticking it up in my room...

It does but little honour to our greatest living philosopher that he, whom children will bless for free permission to bruise, burn, and cut their bodies, and empty the sugar-bowl and jam-pot, should wish to deprive the coming generation of all historical knowledge, of so much joy therefore, and, let me add, of so much education. For do not tell me that it is not education, and of the best, to enable a child to feel the passion and poetry of life; to live, while it trudges along the dull familiar streets, in company with dull, familiar, and often stolidly incurious grown-up folk, in that terrible, magnificent past, in dungeons and palaces, loving and worshipping Joan of Arc, execrating Bloody Mary, dreaming strange impossible possibilities of what we would have said and done for Marie Antoinette said to her, *her* actually coming towards us, by some stroke of magic, in that advancing carriage! There is enough in afterlife, God knows, to teach us *not to be heroic*; 'tis just as well that, as children, we learn a lingering liking for the quality; 'tis as important, perhaps, as learning that our tissues consume carbon, if they do so. I can speak very fervently of the enormous value for happiness of such an historical habit of mind.

Such a habit transcends altogether, in its power of filling one's life, the merely artistic and literary habit. For, after all, painting, architecture, music, poetry, are things which touch us in a very intermittent way. I would compare this historic habit rather to the capacity of deriving pleasure from nature, not merely through the eye, but through all the senses; and largely, doubtless, through those obscure perceptions which make certain kinds of weather, air, &c., an actual tonic, nay food, for the body. To this alone would I place my *historical habit* in the second rank. For, as the sensitiveness to nature means supplementing our physical life by the life of the air and the sun, the clouds and waters, so does this historic habit mean supplementing our present life by a life in the past; a life larger, richer than our own, multiplying our emotions by those of the dead....

I am no longer speaking of our passions for Joan of Arc and Marie Antoinette, which disappear with our childhood; I am speaking of a peculiar sense, ineffable, indescribable, but which every one knows again who has once had it, and which to many of us has grown into a cherished habit the sense of being companioned by the past, of being in a place warmed for our living by the lives of others. To me, as I started with saying, the reverse of this is almost painful; and I know few things more odious than the chilly, draughty, emptiness of a place without a history. For this reason America, save what may remain of Hawthorne's New England and Irving's New York, never tempts my vagabond fancy. Nature can scarcely afford beauty wherewith to compensate for living in block-tin shanties or brand new palaces. How different if we find ourselves in some city, nay village, rendered habitable for our soul by the previous dwelling therein of others, of souls! Here the streets are never empty; and, surrounded by that faceless crowd of ghosts, one feels a right to walk about, being invited by them, instead of rushing along on one's errands among a throng of other wretched living creatures who are blocked by us and block us in their turn.

How convey this sense? I do not mean that if I walk through old Paris or through Rome my thoughts revolve on Louis XI. or Julius Cæsar. Nothing could be further from the fact. Indeed the charm of the thing is that one feels oneself accompanied not by this or that magnifico of the past (whom of course one would never have been introduced to), but by a crowd of nameless creatures; the daily life, common joy, suffering, heroism of the past. Nay, there is something more subtle than this: the whole place (how shall I explain it?) becomes a sort of living something. Thus, when I hurry (for one must needs hurry through Venetian narrowness) between the pink and lilac houses, with faded shutters and here and there a shred of tracery; now turning a sharp corner before the locksmith's or the chestnut-roaster's; now hearing my steps lonely between high walls broken by a Gothic doorway; now crossing some smooth-paved little square with its sculptured well and balconied palaces, I feel, I say, walking day after day through these streets, that I am in contact with a whole living, breathing thing, full of habits of life, of suppressed words; a sort of odd, mysterious, mythical, but very real creature; as if, in the dark, I stretched out my hand and met something (but without any fear), something absolutely indefinable in shape and kind, but warm, alive. This changes solitude in unknown places into the reverse of solitude and strangeness. I remember walking thus along the bastions under the bishop's palace at Laon, the great stone cows peering down from the belfry above, with a sense of inexpressible familiarity and peace. And, strange to say, this historic habit

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makes us familiar also with places where we have never been. How well, for instance, do I not know Dinant and Bouvines, rival cities on the Meuse (topography and detail equally fantastic); and how I sometimes long, as with homesickness, for a scramble among the stones and grass and chandelier-like asphodels of Agrigentum, Veii, Collatium! Why, to one minded like myself, a map, and even the names of stations in a time-table, are full of possible delight.

And sometimes it rises to rapture. This time, eight years ago, I was fretting my soul away, ill, exiled away from home, forbidden all work, in the south of Spain. At Grenada for three dreary weeks it rained without ceasing, till the hill of the Alhambra became filled with the babbling of streams, and the town was almost cut off by a sea of mud. Between the showers one rushed up into the damp gardens of the Generalife, or into the Alhambra, to be imprisoned for hours in its desolate halls, while the rain splashed down into the courts. My sitting-room had five doors, four of glass; and the snow lay thick on the mountains. My few books had been read long ago; there remained to spell through a Spanish tome on the rebellion of the Alpujarras, whose Moorish leader, having committed every crime, finally went to heaven for spitting on the Koran on his death-bed. Letters from home were perpetually lost, or took a week to come. It seemed as if the world had quite unlearned every single trick that had ever given me pleasure. Yet, in these dreary weeks, there was one happy morning.

It was the anniversary, worse luck to it, of the Conquest of Grenada from the Moors. We got seats in the chapel of the Catholic kings, and watched a gentleman in a high hat (which he kept on in church) and swallow tails, carry the banner of Castille and Aragon, in the presence of the archbishop and chapter, some mediæval pages, two trumpeters with pigtails, and an array of soldiers. A paltry ceremony enough. But before it began, and while mass was still going on, there came to me for a few brief moments that happiness unknown for so many, many months, that beloved historic emotion.

My eyes were wandering round the chapel, up the sheaves of the pilasters to the gilded spandrils, round the altars covered with gibbering sculpture, and down again among the crowd kneeling on the matted floor women in veils, men with scarlet cloak-lining over the shoulder, here and there the shaven head and pigtail of the bull-ring. In the middle of it all, on their marble beds, lay the effigies of Ferdinand and Isabella, with folded hands and rigid feet, four crimson banners of the Moors overhead. The crowd was pouring in from the cathedral, and be vies of priests, and scarlet choir-boys led by their fiddler. The organ, above the chants, was running through vague mazes. I felt it approaching and stealing over me, that curious emotion felt before in such different places: walking up and down, one day, in the church of Lamballe in Brittany; seated, another time, in the porch at Ely. And then it possessed me completely, raising me into a sort of beatitude. This kind of rapture is not easy to describe. No rare feeling is. But I would warn you from thinking that in such solemn moments there sweeps across the brain a paltry pageant, a Lord Mayor's Show of bygone things, like the cavalcades of future heroes who descend from frescoed or sculptured wall at the bidding of Ariosto's wizards and Spenser's fairies. This is some-thing infinitely more potent and subtle; and like all strong intellectual emotions, it is compounded of many and various elements, and has its origin far down in mysterious depths of our nature; and it arises overwhelmingly from many springs, filling us with the throb of vague passions welling from our most vital parts. There is in it no possession of any definite portion of bygone times; but a yearning expectancy, a sense of the near presence, as it were, of the past; or, rather, of a sudden capacity in ourselves of apprehending the past which looms all round.

For a few moments thus, in that chapel before the tombs of the Catholic kings; in the churches of Bruges and Innsbruck at the same time (for such emotion gives strange possibilities of simultaneous presence in various places); with the gold pomegranate flower of the badges, and the crimson tassels of the Moorish standards before my eyes; also the iron knights who watch round Maximilian's grave for a moment while the priests were chanting and the organs quavering, the life of to-day seemed to reel and vanish, and my mind to be swept along the dark and gleaming whirlpools of the past....



Catholic kings, Moorish banners, wrought-iron statues of paladins; these are great things, and not at all what I had intended to speak of when I set out to explain why old houses, which give my Yorkshire friend the creeps, seem to my feelings so far more peaceful and familiar.

Yes, it is just because the past is somehow more companionable, warmer, more full of flavour, than the present, that I love all old houses; but best of all such as are solitary in the country, isolated both from new surroundings, and from such alterations as contact with the world's hurry almost always brings. It certainly is no question of beauty. The houses along Chelsea embankment are more beautiful, and some of them a great deal more picturesque than that Worcestershire rectory, to which I always long to return: the long brick house on its terraced river-bank, the overlaid plum-trees on one side, and the funereally prosperous churchyard yews on the other; and with corridors and staircases hung with stained, frameless Bolognese nakedness, Judgments of Paris, Venuses, Carità Romanas, shipped over cheap by some bear-leading parson-tutor of the eighteenth century. Nor are they architectural, those brick and timber cottages all round, sinking (one might think) into the rich, damp soil. But they have a mellowness corresponding to that of the warm, wet, fruitful land, and due to the untroubled, warm brooding over by the past. And what is architecture to that? As to these Italian ones, which my soul loveth most, they have even less of what you would call beauty; at most such grace of projecting window-grating or buttressed side as the South gives its buildings; and such colour, or rather discolouring, as a comparatively small number of years will bring.

It kept revolving in my mind, this question of old houses and their charm, as I was sitting waiting for a tram one afternoon, in the church-porch of Pieve a Ripoli, a hamlet about two miles outside the south-east gate of Florence. That church porch is like the baldacchino over certain Roman high altars, or, more humbly, like a very large fourpost bedstead. On the one hand was a hillside of purple and brown scrub and dark cypresses fringed against the moist, moving grey sky; on the other, some old, bare, mulberry-trees, a hedge of russet sloe, closing in wintry fields; and, more particularly, next the porch, an insignificant house, with blistered green shutters at irregular intervals in the stained whitewash, a big green door, and a little coat-of-arms the three Strozzi halfmoons clapped on to the sharp corner. I sat there, among the tombstones of the porch, and wondered why I loved this house: and why it would remain, as I knew it must, a landmark in my memory. Yes, the charm must lie in the knowledge of the many creatures who have lived in this house, the many things that have been done and felt.

The creatures who have lived here, the things which have been felt and done.... But those things felt and done, were they not mainly trivial, base; at best nowise uncommon, and such as must be going on in every new house all around? People worked and shirked their work, endured, fretted, suffered somewhat, and amused themselves a little; were loving, unkind, neglected and neglectful, and died, some too soon, some too late. That is human life, and as such doubtless important. But all that goes on to-day just the same; and there is no reason why that former life should have been more interesting than that these people, Argenta Cavallesi and Vincenzo Grazzini, buried at my feet, should have had bigger or better made souls and bodies than I or my friends. Indeed, in sundry ways, and owing to the narrowness of life and thought, the calmer acceptance of coarse or cruel things, I incline to think that they were less interesting, those men and women of the past, whose rustling dresses fill old houses with fantastic sounds. They had, some few of them, their great art, great aims, feelings, struggles; but the majority were of the earth, and intolerably earthy. 'Tis their clothes' ghosts that haunt us, not their own.

So why should the past be charming? Perhaps merely because of its being the one free place for our imagination. For, as to the future, it is either empty or filled only with the cast shadows of ourselves and our various machineries. The past is the unreal and the yet visible; it has the fascination of the distant hills, the valleys seen from above; the unreal, but the unreal whose unreality, unlike that of the unreal things with which we cram the present, can never be forced on us. *There is more behind; there may be anything.* This sense which makes us in

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love with all intricacies of things and feelings, roads which turn, views behind views, trees behind trees, makes the past so rich in possibilities..... An ordinary looking priest passes by, rings at the door of the presbytery, and enters. Those who lived there, in that old stained house with the Strozzi escutcheon, opposite the five bare mulberry-trees, were doubtless as like as may be to this man who lives there in the present. Quite true; and yet there creeps up the sense that *they* lived in the past.

For there is no end to the deceits of the past; we protest that we know it is cozening us, and it continues to cozen us just as much. Reading over Browning's *Galuppi* lately, it struck me that this dead world of vanity was no more charming or poetical than the one we live in, when it also was alive; and that those ladies, Mrs. X., Countess Y., and Lady Z., of whose *toilettes* at last night's ball that old gossip P had been giving us details throughout dinner, will in their turn, if any one care, be just as charming, as dainty, and elegiac as those other women who sat by while Galuppi "played toccatas stately at the clavichord." Their dresses, should they hang for a century or so, will emit a perfume as frail, and sad, and heady; their wardrobe filled with such dust as makes tears come into one's eyes, from no mechanical reason.

"Was a lady *such* a lady?" They will say that of ours also. And, in recognising this, we recognise how trumpery, flat, stale and unprofitable were those ladies of the past. It is not they who make the past charming, but the past that makes them. Time has wonderful cosmetics for its favoured ones; and if it brings white hairs and wrinkles to the realities, how much does it not heighten the bloom, brighten the eyes and hair of those who survive in our imagination!

And thus, somewhat irrelevantly, concludes my chapters in praise of old houses.

## THE LIE OF THE LAND

### NOTES ABOUT LANDSCAPES

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### NOTES ABOUT LANDSCAPES

**I WANT** to talk about the something which makes the real, individual landscape the landscape one actually sees with the eyes of the body and the eyes of the spirit *the landscape you cannot describe*.

That is the drawback of my subject that it just happens to elude all literary treatment, and yet it must be treated. There is not even a single word or phrase to label it, and I have had to call it, in sheer despair, *the lie of the land*: it is an unnamed mystery into which various things enter, and I feel as if I ought to explain myself by dumb show. It will serve at any rate as an object-lesson in the extreme one-sidedness of language and a protest against human silence about the things it likes best.

Of outdoor things words can of course tell us some important points: colour, for instance, and light, and somewhat of their gradations and relations. And an adjective, a metaphor may evoke an entire atmospheric effect, paint us a sunset or a star-lit night. But the far subtler and more individual relations of visible line defy expression: no poet

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or prose writer can give you the tilt of a roof, the undulation of a field, the bend of a road. Yet these are the things in landscape which constitute its individuality and which reach home to our feelings.

For colour and light are variable nay, more, they are relative. The same tract will be green in connection with one sort of sky, blue with another, and yellow with a third. We may be disappointed when the woods, which we had seen as vague, moss-like blue before the sun had overtopped the hills, become at midday a mere vast lettuce-bed. We should be much more than disappointed, we should doubt of our senses we found on going to our window that looked down upon outlines of hills, upon precipices, ledges, knolls, or flat expanses, different from those we had seen the previous day or the previous year. Thus the unvarying items of a landscape happen to be those for which precise words cannot be found. Briefly we praise colour, but we actually live in the indescribable thing which I must call the *lie of the land*. The lie of the land means walking or climbing, shelter or bleakness; it means the corner where we dread a boring neighbour, the bend round which we have watched some one depart, the stretch of road which seemed to lead us away out of captivity. Yes, *lie of the land* is what has mattered to us since we were children, to our fathers and remotest ancestors; ay, and its perception, the instinctive preference for one kind rather than another, is among the obscure things inherited with our blood, and making up the stuff of our souls. For how else explain the strange powers which different shapes of the earth's surface have over different individuals; the sudden pleasure, as of the sight of an old friend, the pang of pathos which we may all receive in a scene which is new, without memories, and so unlike everything familiar as to be almost without associations?

The *lie of the land* has therefore an importance in art, or if it have not, ought to have, quite independent of pleasantness of line or of anything merely visual. An immense charm consists in the fact that the mind can walk about in a landscape. The delight at the beauty which is seen is heightened the anticipation of further unseen beauty; the sense of exploring the unknown; and our present pleasure before a painted landscape is added the pleasure we have been storing up during years of intercourse, if I may use this word, with so many real ones.

## II

For there is such a thing as intercourse with fields and trees and skies, with the windings of road and water and hedge, in our every-day, ordinary life. And a terrible thing for us all if there were not; if our lives were not full of such various commerce, of pleasure, curiosity, and gratitude, of kindly introduction of friend by friend, quite apart from the commerce with other human beings. Indeed, one reason why the modern rectangular town (built at one go for the convenience of running omnibuses and suppressing riots) fills our soul with bitterness and dryness, is surely that this ill-conditioned convenient thing can give us only its own poor, paltry presence, introducing our eye and fancy neither to further details of itself, nor to other places and people, past or distant.

Words can just barely indicate the charm of this other place other time enriching of the present impression. Words cannot in the least, I think, render that other suggestion contained in *The Lie of the Land*, the suggestion of the possibility of a delightful walk. What walks have we not taken, leaving sacred personages and profane, not to speak of allegoric ones, far behind in the backgrounds of the old Tuscans, Umbrians, and Venetians! Up Benozzo's hillside woods of cypress and pine, smelling of myrrh and sweet-briar, over Perugino's green rising grounds, towards those slender, scant-leaved trees, straight-stemmed acacias and elms, by the water in the cool, blue evening valley. Best of all, have not Giorgione and Titian, Palma and Bonifazio, and the dear imitative people labelled Venetian school, led us between the hedges russet already with the ripening of the season and hour into those fields where the sheep are nibbling, under the twilight of the big brown trees, to where some pale blue alps closes in the slopes and the valleys?

III

It is a pity that the landscape painters of our day I mean those French or French taught whose methods are really new tend to neglect *The Lie of the Land*. Some of them, I fear deliberately avoid it as old-fashioned what they call obvious as interfering with their aim of interesting by the mere power of vision and skill in laying on the paint. Be this as it may, their innovations inevitably lead then away from all research of what we may call *topographical* charm, for what they have added to art is the perception of very changeable conditions of light and atmosphere, of extremely fleeting accidents of colour. One would indeed be glad to open one's window on the fairyland of iridescent misty capes, of vibrating skies and sparkling seas of Monsieur Claude Monet; still more to stand at the close of an autumn day watching the light fogs rise along the fields, mingling with delicate pinkish mist of the bare poplar row against the green of the first sprouts of corn. But I am not sure that the straight line of sea and shore would be interesting at any other moment of the day; and the poplar rows and cornfields would very likely be drearily dull until sunset. The moment, like Faust's second of perfect bliss, is such as should be made immortal, but the place one would rather not see again. Yet Monsieur Monet is the one of his school who shows most care for the scene he is painting. The others, even the great ones men like Pissarro and Sisley, who have shown us so many delightful things in the details of even the dull French foliage, even the dull midday sky the other *modern ones* make one long to pull up their umbrella and easel and carry them on not very far surely to some spot where the road made a bend, the embankment had a gap, the water a swirl; for we would not be so old-fashioned as to request that the country might have a few undulations.... Of course it was very dull of our ancestors particularly of Clive Newcome's day always to paint a panorama with whole ranges of hills, miles of river, and as many cities as possible; and even our pleasure in Turner's large landscapes is spoilt by their being the sort of thing people would drive for miles or climb for hours to enjoy, what our grandfathers in post-chaises called a *noble fine prospect*. All that had to be got rid of, like the contemporaneous literary descriptions: "A smiling valley proceeded from south-east to north-west; an amphitheatre cliffs bounding it on the right hand; while the left a magnificent waterfall leapt from a rock three hundred feet in height and expanded into a noble natural basin of granite some fifty yards in diameter," &c. &c. The British classics, thus busy with compass, measuring-rod and level, thus anxious to enable the reader to reconstruct their landscape on pasteboard, had no time of course to notice trifling matters: how, for instance,

"The woods are round us, heaped and dim;

From slab to slab how it slips and springs

The thread of water, single and slim,

Through the ravage some torrent brings." Nor could the panoramic painter of the earlier nineteenth century pay much attention to mere alternations of light while absorbed in his great "Distant View of Jerusalem and Madagascar;" indeed, he could afford to move off only when it began to rain very hard.

IV

The impressionist painters represent the reaction against this dignified and also more stolid school of landscape; they have seen, or are still seeing, all the things which other men did not see. And here I may remark that one of the most important items of this seeing is exactly the fact that in many cases we can *see* only very little. The impressionists have been scoffed at for painting rocks which might be chimney-stacks, and flowering hedges which might be foaming brooks; plains also which might be hills, and *vice versa*, and described as wretches, disrespectful to natural objects, which, we are told, reveal new beauties at every glance. But is it more respectful to natural objects to put a drawing-screen behind a willow-bush and copy its minutest detail of branch and trunk, than to paint that same willow, a mere mist of glorious orange, as we see it flame against the hillside confusion of



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mauve, and russet and pinkish sereness? I am glad to have brought in that word *confusion*: the modern school of landscape has done a great and pious thing in reinstating the complexity, the mystery, the confusion of Nature's effects; Nature, which differs from the paltry work of man just in this, that she does not thin out, make clear and symmetrical for the easier appreciation of foolish persons, but packs effect upon effect, in space even as in time, one close upon the other, leaf upon leaf, branch upon branch, tree upon tree, colour upon colour, a mystery of beauty wrapped in beauty, without the faintest concern whether it would not be better to say "this is really a river," or, "that is really a tree." "But," answer the critics with much superiority, "art should not be the mere copying of Nature; surely there is already enough of Nature herself; art should be the expression of man's delight in Nature's shows." Well, Nature shows a great many things which are not unchanging and not by any means unperplexing; she shows them at least to those who will see, see what is really there to be seen; and she will show them, thanks to our brave impressionists, to all men henceforth who have eyes and a heart. And here comes our debt to these great painters: what a number of effects, modest and exquisite, or bizarre and magnificent, they will have taught us to look out for; what beauty and poetry in humdrum scenery, what perfect loveliness even among sordidness and squalor: tints as of dove's breasts in city mud, enamel splendours in heaps of furnace refuse, mysterious magnificence, visions of Venice at night, of Eblis palace, of I know not what, in wet gaslit nights, in looming lit-up factories. Nay, leaving that alone, since 'tis better, perhaps, that we should not enjoy anything connected with grime and misery and ugliness how much have not these men added to the delight of our walks and rides; revealing to us, among other things, the supreme beauty of winter colouring, the harmony of purple, blue, slate, brown, pink, and russet, of tints and compounds of tints without a name, of bare hedgerows and leafless trees, sere grass and mist-veiled waters; compared with which spring is but raw, summer dull, and autumn positively ostentatious in her gala suit of tawny and yellow.

Perhaps, indeed, these modern painters have done more for us by the beauty they have taught us to see in Nature than by the beauty they have actually put before us in their pictures; if I except some winter landscapes of Monet's and the wonderful water colours of Mr. Brabazon, whose exquisite sense of form and knowledge of drawing have enabled him, in rapid sketches of rapidly passing effects, to indicate the structure of hills and valleys, the shape of clouds, in the mere wash of colour, even as Nature indicates them herself. With such exceptions as these, and the beautiful mysteries of Mr. Whistler, there is undoubtedly in recent landscape a preoccupation of technical methods and an indifference to choice of subject, above all, a degree of insistence on what is *actually seen* which leads one to suspect that the impressionists represent rather a necessary phase in the art, than a definite achievement, in the same manner as the Renaissance painters who gave themselves up to the study of perspective and anatomy. This terrible over-importance of the act of vision is doubtless the preparation for a new kind of landscape, which will employ these arduously acquired facts of colour and light, this restlessly renovated technique, in the service of a new kind of sentiment and imagination, differing from that of previous ages even as the sentiment and imagination of Browning differs from that of his great predecessors. But it is probably necessary that the world at large, as well as the artists, should be familiarised with the new facts, the new methods of impressionism, before such facts and methods can find their significance and achievement; even as in the Renaissance people had to recognise the realities of perspective and anatomy before they could enjoy an art which attained beauty through this means; it would have been no use showing Sixtine chapels to the contemporaries of Giotto. There is at present a certain lack of enjoyable quality, a lack of soul appealing to soul, in the new school of landscape. But where there is a faithful, reverent eye, a subtle hand, a soul cannot be far round the corner. And we may hope that, if we be as sincere and willing as themselves, our Pollaiolos and Mantegnas of the impressionist school, discoverers of new subtleties of colour and light, will be duly succeeded by modern Michelangelos and Titians, who will receive all the science ready for use, and bid it fetch and carry and build new wonderful things for the pleasure of their soul and of ours.

V

And mentioning Titian, brings to my memory a remark once made to me on one of those washed away, rubbly hills, cypresses and pines holding the earth together, which the old Tuscans drew so very often. The remark, namely, that some of the charm of the old masters' landscapes is due to the very reverse of what sometimes worries one in modern work, to the notion which these backgrounds give at first bits of valley, outlines of hills, distant views of towered villages, of having been done without trouble, almost from memory, till you discover that your Titian has modelled his blue valley into delicate blue ridges; and your Piero della Francesca indicated the precise structure of his pale, bony mountains. Add to this, to the old men's credit, that, as I said, they knew *the lie of the land*, they gave us landscapes in which our fancy, our memories, could walk.

How large a share such fancy and such memories have in the life of art, people can scarcely realise. Nay, such is the habit of thinking of the picture, statue, or poem, as a complete and vital thing apart from the mind which perceives it, that the expression *life of art* is sure to be interpreted as life of various schools of art: thus, the life of art developed from the type of Phidias to that of Praxiteles, and so forth. But in the broader, truer sense, the life of all art goes on in the mind and heart, not merely of those who make the work, but of those who see and read it. Nay, is not *the* work, the real one, a certain particular state of feeling, a pattern woven of new perceptions and impressions and of old memories and feelings, which the picture, the statue or poem, awakens, different in each different individual? 'Tis a thought perhaps annoying to those who have slaved seven years over a particular outline of muscles, a particular colour of grass, or the cadence of a particular sentence. What! all this to be refused finality, to be disintegrated by the feelings and fancies of the man who looks at the picture, or reads the book, heaven knows how carelessly besides? Well, if not disintegrated, would you prefer it to be unassimilated? Do you wish your picture, statue or poem to remain whole as you made it? Place it permanently in front of a mirror; consign it to the memory of a parrot; or, if you are musician, sing your song, expression and all, down a phonograph. You cannot get from the poor human soul, that living microcosm of changing impressions, the thorough, wholesale appreciation which you want.

VI

This same power of sentiment and fancy, that is to say, of association, enables us to carry about, like a verse or a tune, whole mountain ranges, valleys, rivers and lakes, things in appearance the least easy to remove from their place. As some persons are never unattended by a melody; so others, and among them your humble servant, have always for their thoughts and feelings, an additional background besides the one which happens to be visible behind their head and shoulders. By this means I am usually in two places at a time, sometimes in several very distant ones within a few seconds.

It is extraordinary how much of my soul seems to cling to certain peculiarities of what I have called *lie of the land*, undulations, bends of rivers, straightenings and snakings of road; how much of one's past life, sensations, hopes, wishes, words, has got entangled in the little familiar sprigs, grasses and moss. The order of time and space is sometimes utterly subverted; thus, last autumn, in a corner of Argyllshire, I seemed suddenly cut off from everything in the British Isles, and reunited to the life I used to lead hundreds of miles away, years ago in the high Apennines, merely because of the minute starry moss under foot and the bubble of brooks in my ears.

Nay, the power of outdoor things, their mysterious affinities, can change the values even of what has been and what has not been, can make one live for a moment in places which have never existed save in the fancy. Have I not found myself suddenly taken back to certain woods which I loved in my childhood simply because I had halted before a great isolated fir with hanging branches, a single fir shading a circle of soft-green turf, and

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watched the rabbits sitting, like round grey stones suddenly flashing into white tails and movement? Woods where? I have not the faintest notion. Perhaps only woods I imagined my father must be shooting in when I was a baby, woods which I made up out of Christmas trees, moss and dead rabbits, woods I had heard of in fairy tales...

Such are some of the relations of landscape and sentiments, a correct notion of which is necessary before it is possible to consider the best manner of *representing landscape with words*; a subject to which none of my readers, I think, nor myself, have at present the smallest desire to pass on.

### TUSCAN MIDSUMMER MAGIC

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#### I

"**THEN**," I said, "you decline to tell me about the Three Kings, when their procession wound round and round these hillocks: all the little wooden horses with golden bridles and velvet holsters, out of the toy boxes; and the camelopard, and the monkeys and the lynx, and the little doll pages blowing toy trumpets. And still, I know it happened here, because I recognise the place from the pictures: the hillocks all washed away into breasts like those of Diana of the Ephesians, and the rows of cypresses and spruce pines also out of the toy box. I know it happened in this very place, because Benozzo Gozzoli painted it all at the time; and you were already about the place, I presume?"

I knew that by her dress, but I did not like to allude to its being old-fashioned. It was the sort of thing, muslin all embroidered with little nosegays of myrtle and yellow broom, and tied into odd bunches at the elbow and waist, which they wore in the days of Botticelli's *Spring*; and on her head she had a garland of eglantine and palm-shaped hellebore leaves which was quite unmistakable.

The nymph Terzollina (for of course she was the tutelary divinity of the narrow valley behind the great Medicean Villa) merely shook her head and shifted one of her bare feet, on which she was seated under a cypress tree, and went on threading the yellow broom flowers.

"At all events, you might tell me some thing about the Magnificent Lorenzo," I went on, impatient at her obstinacy. "You know quite well that he used to come and court you here, and make verses most likely."

The exasperating goddess raised her thin brown face, with the sharp squirrel's teeth and the glittering goat's eyes. Very pretty I thought her, though undoubtedly a little *passée*, like all the symbolical ladies of her set. She plucked at a clump of dry peppermint, perfuming the hot air as she crushed it, and then looked up, with a sly, shy little peasant-girl's look, which was absurd in a lady so mature and so elaborately adorned. Then, in a crooning voice, she began to recite some stanzas in *ottava rima*, as follows:

"The house where the good old Knight Gualando hid away the little Princess, was itself hidden in this hidden valley. It was small and quite white, with great iron bars to the windows. In front was a long piece of greensward, starred with white clover, and behind and in front, to where the pines and cypresses began, ran strips of corn-field. It was remote from all the pomps of life; and when the cuckoo had become silent and the nightingales had cracked their voices, the only sound was the coo of the wood-pigeons, the babble of the stream, and the twitter of the young larks.

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"The old Knight Gualando had hidden his bright armour in an oaken chest; and went to the distant town every day dressed in the blue smock of a peasant, and driving a donkey before him. Thence he returned with delicacies for the little Princess and with news of the wicked usurper; nor did any one suspect who he was, or dream of his hiding-place.

"During his absence the little Princess whose name was Fiordispina, used to string beads through the hot hours when the sun smote through the trees, and the green corn ridges began to take a faint gilding in their silveriness, as the Princess remembered it in a picture in the Castle Chapel, where the sun was represented by a big embossed ball of gold, projecting from the picture, which she was allowed to stroke on holidays.

"In the evening, when the sky turned pearl white, and a breeze rustled through the pines and cypresses which made a little black fringe on the hill-top and a little patch of feathery velvet pile on the slopes, the little Princess would come forth, and ramble about in her peasant's frock, her fair face stained browner by the sun than by any walnut juice. She would climb the hill, and sniff the scent of the sun-warmed resin, and the sweetness of the yellow broom. It spread all over the hill, and the King, her father, had not possessed so many ells of cloth of gold.

"But one evening she wandered further than usual, and saw on a bank, at the edge of a cornfield, five big white lilies blowing. She went back home and fetched the golden scissors from her work-bag, and cut off one of the lilies. On the next day she came again and cut another until she had cut them all.

"But it happened that an old witch was staying in that neighbourhood, gathering herbs among the hills. She had taken note of the five lilies, because she disliked them on account of their being white; and she remarked that one of them had been cut off; then another, then another. She hated people who like lilies. When she found the fifth lily gone, she wondered greatly, and climbed on the ridge, and looked at their stalks where they were cut. She was a wise woman, who knew many things. So she laid her finger upon the cut stalk, and said, 'This has not been cut with iron shears'; and she laid her lip against the cut stalk, and felt that it had been cut with gold shears, for gold cuts like nothing else.

"'Oho!' said the old witch 'where there are gold scissors, there must be gold work-bags; and where there are gold work-bags, there must be little Princesses.'"

"Well, and then?" I asked.

"Oh then, nothing at all," answered Nymph Terzollina beloved by the Magnificent Lorenzo, who had seen the procession of the Three Kings. "Good evening to you."

And where her white muslin dress, brodered with nosegays of broom and myrtle had been spread on the dry grass and crushed mint, there was only, beneath the cypresses, a bush of white-starred myrtle a tuft of belated yellow broom.

## II

One must have leisure to converse with goddesses; and certainly, during a summer in Tuscany, when folk are scattered in their country houses, and are disinclined to move out of hammock or off shaded bench, there are not many other persons to talk with.

On the other hand, during those weeks of cloudless summer, natural objects vie with each other in giving one

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amateur representations. Things look their most unexpected, masquerade as other things, get queer unintelligible allegoric meanings, leaving you to guess what it all means, a constant dumb-crambo of trees, flowers, animals, houses, and moonlight.

The moon, particularly, is continually *en scène*, as if to take the place of the fireflies, which last only so long as the corn is in the ear, gradually getting extinguished and trailing about, humble helpless moths with a pale phosphorescence in their tail, in the grass and in the curtains. The moon takes their place; the moon which, in an Italian summer, seems to be full for three weeks out of the four.

One evening the performance was given by the moon and the corn-sheaves, assisted by minor actors such as crickets, downy owls, and vine-garlands. The oats, which had been of such exquisite delicacy of green, had just been reaped in the field beyond our garden and were now stacked up. Suspecting one of the usual performances, I went after dinner to the upper garden-gate, and looked through the bars. There it was, the familiar, elemental witchery. The moon was nearly full, blurring the stars, steeping the sky and earth in pale blue mist, which seemed somehow to be the visible falling dew. It left a certain greenness to the broad grass path, a vague yellow to the unsickled wheat; and threw upon the sheaves of oats the shallows of festooned vine garlands. Those sheaves, or stooks who can describe their metamorphose? Palest yellow on the pale stubbly ground, they were frosted by the moonbeams in their crisp fringe of ears, and in the shining straws projecting here and there. Straws, ears? You would never have guessed that they were made of anything so mundane. They sat there, propped against the trees, between the pools of light and the shadows, while the crickets trilled their cool, shrill song; sat solemnly with an air of expectation, calling to me, frightening me. And one in particular, with a great additional bunch on his head, cut by a shadow, was oddly unaccountable and terrible. After a minute I had to slink away, back into the garden, like an intruder.

### III

There are performances also in broad daylight, and then human beings are admitted as supernumeraries. Such was a certain cattle fair, up the valley of the Mugnone.

The beasts were being sold on a piece of rough, freshly reaped ground, lying between the high road and the river bed, empty of waters, but full among its shingle of myrrh-scented yellow herbage. The oxen were mostly of the white Tuscan breeds (those of Romagna are smaller but more spirited, and of a delicate grey) only their thighs slightly browned; the scarlet cloth neck-fringes set off, like a garland of geranium, against the perfect milkiness of backs and necks. They looked, indeed, these gigantic creatures, as if moulded out of whipped cream or cream cheese; suggesting no strength, and even no resistance to the touch, with their smooth surface here and there packed into minute wrinkles, exactly like the little *stracchini* cheeses. This impalpable whiteness of the beasts suited their perfect tameness, passiveness, letting themselves be led about with great noiseless strides over the stubbly ridges and up the steep banks; and hustled together, flank against flank, horns interlaced with horns, without even a sound or movement of astonishment or disobedience. Never a low or a moo; never a glance round of their big, long-lashed, blue-brown eyes. Their big jaws move like millstones, their long tufted tails switch monotonously like pendulums.

Around them circle peasants, measuring them with the eye, prodding them with the finger, pulling them by the horns. And every now and then one of the red-faced men, butchers mainly, who act as go-betweens, dramatically throws his arms round the neck of some recalcitrant dealer or buyer, leads him aside, whispering with a gesture like Judas's kiss; or he clasps together the red hands and arms of contracting parties, silencing their objections, forcing them to do business. The contrast is curious between these hot, excited yelling, jostling human beings,

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above whose screaming *Dio Canes!* and *Dio Ladros!* the cry of the iced-water seller recurs monotonously, and the silent, impassive bullocks, white, unreal, inaudible; so still and huge, indeed, that, seen from above, they look like an encampment, their white flanks like so much spread canvas in the sunshine. And from a little distance, against the hillside beyond the river, the already bought yokes of bullocks look, tethered in a grove of cypresses, like some old mediæval allegory an allegory, as usual, nobody knows of what.

### IV

Another performance was that of the woods of Lecceto, and the hermitage of the same name. You will find them on the map of the district of Siena; but I doubt very much whether you will find them on the surface of the real globe, for I suspect them to be a piece of midsummer magic and nothing more. They had been for years to me among the number (we all have such) of things familiar but inaccessible; or rather things whose inaccessibility due to no conceivable cause is an essential quality of their existence. Every now and then from one of the hills you get a glimpse of the square red tower, massive and battlemented, rising among the grey of its ilexes, beckoning one across a ridge or two and a valley; then disappearing again, engulfed in the oak woods, green in summer, copper-coloured in winter: to reappear, but on the side you least expected it, plume of ilexes, battlements of tower, as you twisted along the high-lying vineyards and the clusters of umbrella pines fringing the hill-tops; and then, another minute and they were gone.

We determined to attain them, to be mocked no longer by Lecceto; and went forth on one endless July afternoon. After much twisting from hillside to hillside and valley to valley, we at last got into a country which was strange enough to secrete even Lecceto. In a narrow valley we were met by a scent, warm, delicious, familiar, which seemed to lead us (as perfumes we cannot identify will usually do) to ideas very hazy, but clear enough to be utterly inappropriate: English cottage-gardens, linen presses of old houses, old-fashioned sitting-rooms full of pots of *potpourri*; and then, behold, in front of us a hill covered every inch of it with flowering lavender, growing as heather does on the hills outside fairyland. And behind this lilac, sun-baked, scented hill, open the woods of ilexes. The trees were mostly young and with their summer uppergarment of green, fresh leaves over the crackling old ones; trees packed close like a hedge, their every gap filled with other verdure, arbutus and hornbeam, fern and heather; the close-set greenery crammed, as it were, with freshness and solitude.

These must be the woods of Lecceto, and in their depths the red battlemented tower of the Hermitage. For I had forgotten to say that for a thousand years that tower had been the abode of a succession of holy personages, so holy and so like each other as to have almost grown into one, an immortal hermit whom Popes and Emperors would come to consult and be blessed by. Deeper and deeper therefore we made our way into the green coolness and dampness, the ineffable deliciousness of young leaf and uncurling fern; till it seemed as if the plantation were getting impenetrable, and we began to think that, as usual, Lecceto had mocked us, and would probably appear, if we retraced our steps, in the diametrically opposite direction. When suddenly, over the tree-tops, rose the square battlemented tower of red brick. Then, at a turn of the rough narrow lane, there was the whole place, the tower, a church and steeple, and some half fortified buildings, in a wide clearing planted with olive trees. We tied our pony to an ilex and went to explore the Hermitage. But the building was enclosed round by walls and hedges, and the only entrance was by a stout gate armed with a knocker, behind which was apparently an outer yard and a high wall pierced only by a twisted iron balcony. So we knocked.

But that knocker was made only for Popes and Emperors walking about with their tiaras and crowns and sceptres, like the genuine Popes and Emperors of Italian folk-tales and of Pinturicchio's frescoes; for no knocking of ours, accompanied by loud yells, could elicit an answer. It seemed simple enough to get in some other way; there must be peasants about at work, even supposing the holy hermit to have ceased to exist. But climbing wall and hurdles

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and squeezing between the close tight ilexes, brought us only to more walls, above which, as above the oakwoods from a distance, rose the inaccessible battlemented tower. And a small shepherdess, in a flapping Leghorn hat, herding black and white baby pigs in a neighbouring stubble-field under the olives, was no more able than we to break the spell of the Hermitage. And all round, for miles apparently, undulated the dense grey plumage of the ilex woods.

The low sun was turning the stubble orange, where the pigs were feeding; and the distant hills of the Maremma were growing very blue behind the olive trees. So, lest night should overtake us, we turned our pony's head towards the city, and traversed the oakwoods and skirted the lavender hill, rather disbelieving in the reality of the place we had just been at, save when we saw its tower mock us, emerging again; an inaccessible, improbable place. The air was scented by the warm lavender of the hillsides; and by the pines forming a Japanese pattern, black upon the golden lacquer of the sky. Soon the moon rose, big and yellow, lighting very gradually the road in whose gloom you could vaguely see the yokes of white cattle returning from work. By the time we reached the city hill everything was steeped in a pale yellowish light, with queer yellowish shadows; and the tall tanneries glared out with their buttressed balconied top, exaggerated and alarming. Scrambling up the moonlit steep of Fonte Branda, and passing under a black arch, we found ourselves in the heart of the gaslit and crowded city, much as if we had been shot out of a cannon into another planet, and feeling that the Hermitage of Lecceto was absolutely apocryphal.

## V

The reason of this midsummer magic whose existence no legitimate descendant of Goths and Vandals and other early lovers of Italy can possibly deny the reason is altogether beyond my philosophy. The only word which expresses the phenomenon, is the German word, untranslatable, *Bescheerung*, a universal giving of gifts, lighting of candles, gilding of apples, manifestation of marvels, realisation of the desirable and improbable to wit, a Christmas Tree. And Italy, which knows no Christmas trees, makes its *Bescheerung* in midsummer gets rid of its tourist vulgarities, hides away the characteristics of its trivial nineteenth century, decks itself with magnolia blossoms and water-melons, with awnings and street booths, with mandolins and guitars; spangles itself with church festivals and local pageants and instead of wax-tapers and Chinese lanterns lights up the biggest golden sun by day, the biggest silver moon by night, all for the benefit of a few childish descendants of Goths and Vandals.

Nonsense apart, I am inclined to think that the specific charm of Italy exists only during the hot months; the charm which gives one a little stab now and then and makes one say "This is Italy."

I felt that little stab, to which my heart had long become unused, at the beginning of this very summer in Tuscany, to which belong the above instances of Italian Midsummer Magic I was spending the day at a small, but very ancient, Benedictine Monastery (it was a century old when St. Peter Igneus, according to the chronicle, went through his celebrated Ordeal by Fire), now turned into a farm, and hidden, battlemented walls and great gate towers, among the cornfields near the Arno. It came to me as the revival of an impression long forgotten, that overpowering sense that "This was Italy," it recurred and recurred in those same three words, as I sat under the rose-hedge opposite the water-wheel shed, garlanded with drying pea-straw; and as I rambled through the chill vaults, redolent of old wine-vats, into the sudden sunshine and broad shadows of the cloistered yards.

That smell was mysteriously connected with it; the smell of wine-vats mingled, I fancy (though I could not say why), with the sweet faint smell of decaying plaster and wood-work. One night, as we were driving through Bologna to wile away the hours between two trains, in the blue moon-mist and deep shadows of the black

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porticoed city, that same smell came to my nostrils as in a dream, and with it a whiff of bygone years, the years when first I had had this impression of Italian Magic. Oddly enough, Rome, where I spent much of my childhood and which was the object of my childish and tragic adoration, was always something apart, never Italy for my feelings. The Apennines of Lucca and Pistoia, with their sudden revelation of Italian fields and lanes, of flowers on wall and along roadside, of bells ringing in the summer sky, of peasants working in the fields and with the loom and distaff, meant Italy.

But how much more Italy and hence longed for how much! was Lucca, the town in the plain, with cathedral and palaces. Nay, any of the mountain hamlets where there was nothing modern, and where against the scarred brick masonry and blackened stonework the cypresses rose black and tapering, the trellises crawled bright green up hill! One never feels, once out of childhood, such joy as on the rare occasions when I was taken to such places. A certain farmhouse, with cypresses at the terrace corner and a great oleander over the wall, was also Italy before it became my home for several years. Most of all, however, Italy was represented by certain towns: Bologna, Padua and Vicenza, and Siena, which I saw mainly in the summer.

It is curious how one's associations change: nowadays Italy means mainly certain familiar effects of light and cloud, certain exquisite-nesses of sunset amber against ultramarine hills, of winter mists among misty olives, of folds and folds of pale blue mountains; it is a country which belongs to no time, which will always exist, superior to picturesqueness and romance. But that is but a vague, half-indifferent habit of enjoyment. And every now and then, when the Midsummer Magic is rife, there comes to me that very different, old, childish meaning of the word; as on that day among the roses of those Benedictine cloisters, the cool shadow of the fig-trees in the yards, with the whiff of that queer smell, heavy with romance, of wine-saturated oak and crumbling plaster; and I know with a little stab of joy that this is Italy.

### ON MODERN TRAVELLING

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#### I

**THERE** is one charming impression peculiar to railway travelling, that of the twilight hour in the train; but the charm is greater on a short journey, when one is not tired and has not the sense of being uprooted, than on a long one. The movement of the train seems, after sunset, particularly in the South where nightfall is rapid, to take a quality of mystery. It glides through a landscape of which the smaller details are effaced, as are likewise effaced the details of the railway itself. And that rapid gliding brings home to one the instability of the hour, of the changing light, the obliterating form. It makes one feel that everything is, as it were, a mere vision: bends of poplared river with sunset redness in their grey swirls; big towered houses of other days; the spectral white fruit trees in the dark fields; the pine tops round, separate, yet intangible, against the sky of unearthly blue; the darkness not descending, as foolish people say it does, from the skies to the earth, but rising slowly from the earth where it has gathered fold upon fold, an emanation thereof, into the sky still pale and luminous, turning its colour to white, its whiteness to gray, till the stars, mere little white specks before, kindle one by one.

Dante, who had travelled so much, and so much against his will, described this hour as turning backwards the longing of the traveller, and making the heart grow soft of them who had that day said farewell to their friends. It is an hour of bitterness, the crueller for mingled sweetness, to the exile; and in those days when distances were difficult to overcome, every traveller must in a sense have been somewhat of an exile. But to us, who have not



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necessarily left our friends, who may be returning to them; to us accustomed to coming and going, to us hurried along in dreary swiftness, it is the hour also when the earth seems full of peace and goodwill; and our pensiveness is only just sad enough to be sweet, not sad enough to be bitter. For every hamlet we pass seems somehow the place where we ought to tarry for all our days; every room or kitchen, a red square of light in the dimness with dark figures moving before the window, seems full of people who might be friends; and the hills we have never beheld before, the bends of rivers, the screen of trees, seem familiar as if we had lived among them in distant days which we think of with longing.

## II

This is the best that can be said, I think, for modern modes of travel. But then, although I have been jolted about a good deal from country to country, and slept in the train on my nurse's knees, and watched all my possessions, from my cardboard donkey and my wax dolls to my manuscripts and proof-sheets, overhauled on custom-house counters but then despite all this, I have never made a great journey. I have never been to the United States, nor to Egypt, nor to Russia; and it may well be that I shall see the Eleusinian gods, Persephone and whoever else imparts knowledge in ghostland, without ever having set foot in Greece. My remarks are therefore meant for the less fortunate freight of railways and steamers; though do I really envy those who see the wonderful places of the earth before they have dreamed of them, the dreamland of other men revealed to them for the first time in the solid reality of Cook and Gaze?

I would not for the world be misunderstood; I have not the faintest prejudice against Gaze or Cook. I fervently desire that these gentlemen may ever quicken trains and cheapen hotels; I am ready to be jostled in Alpine valleys and Venetian canals by any number of vociferous tourists, for the sake of the one, schoolmistress, or clerk, or artisan, or curate, who may by this means have reached at last the land east of the sun and west of the moon, the St. Brandan's Isle of his or her longings. What I object to are the well-mannered, well-dressed, often well-informed persons who, having turned Scotland into a sort of Hurlingham, are apparently making Egypt, the Holy Land, Japan, into *succursales* and *dépendances* (I like the good Swiss names evoking couriers and waiters) of their own particularly dull portion of London and Paris and New York.

Less externally presentable certainly, but how much more really venerable is the mysterious class of dwellers in obscure pensions: curious beings who migrate without perceiving any change of landscape and people, but only change of fare, from the cheap boarding-house in Dresden to the cheap boarding-house in Florence, Prague, Seville, Rouen, or Bruges. It is a class whom one of nature's ingenious provisions, intended doubtless to maintain a balance of inhabited and uninhabited, directs unconsciously, automatically to the great cities of the past rather than to those of the present; so that they sit in what were once palaces, castles, princely pleasure-houses, discussing over the stony pears and apples the pleasures and drawbacks, the prices and fares, the dark staircase against the Sunday ices, of other boarding-houses in other parts of Europe. A quaint race it is, neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and renewed by natural selection among the poor in purse and poor in spirit; but among whom the sentimental traveller, did he still exist, might pick up many droll and melancholy and perhaps chivalrous stories.

My main contention then is merely that, before visiting countries and towns in the body, we ought to have visited them in the spirit; otherwise I fear we might as well sit still at home. I do not mean that we should read about them; some persons I know affect to extract a kind of pleasure from it; but to me it seems dull work. One wants to visit unknown lands in company, not with other men's descriptions, but with one's own wishes and fancies. And very curious such wishes and fancies are, or rather the countries and cities they conjure up, having no existence on any part of the earth's surface, but a very vivid one in one's own mind. Surely most of us, arriving in any

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interesting place, are already furnished with a tolerable picture or plan thereof; the cathedral on a slant or a rising ground, the streets running uphill or somewhat in a circle, the river here or there, the lie of the land, colour of the houses, nay, the whole complexion of the town, so and so. The reality, so far as my own experience goes, never once tallies with the fancy; but the town of our building is so compact and clear that it often remains in our memory alongside of the town of stone and brick, only gradually dissolving, and then leaving sometimes airy splendours of itself hanging to the solid structures of its prosaic rival.

Another curious thing to note is how certain real scenes will sometimes get associated in our minds with places we have never beheld, to such a point that the charm of the known is actually enhanced by that of the unknown. I remember a little dell in the High Alps, which, with its huge larches and mountain pines, its tufts of bee-haunted heather and thyme among the mossy boulders, its overlooking peak and glimpses of far down lakes, became dear to me much less for its own sake than because it always brought to my mind the word Thrace, and with it a vague fleeting image of satyrs and moenads, a bar of the music of Orpheus. And less explicable than this, a certain rolling tableland, not more remote than the high road to Rome, used at one time to impress me with a mysterious consciousness of the plains of Central Asia; a ruined byre, a heap of white-washed stones, among the thistles and stubbles of a Fife hillside, had for me once a fascination due to the sense that it must be like Algeria.

Has any painter ever fixed on canvas such visions, distinct and haunting, of lands he had never seen, Claude or Turner, or the Flemish people who painted the little towered and domed celestial Jerusalem? I know not. The nearest thing of the kind was a wonderful erection of brown paper and (apparently) ingeniously arranged shavings, built up in rock-like fashion, covered with little green toy-box trees, and dotted here and there with bits of mirror glass and cardboard houses, which one puzzled me considerably in the parlour of a cottage. "Do tell me what that is?" at last rose to my lips. "That," answered my hostess very slowly, "that is a work of my late 'usband; a representation of the Halps as close as 'e could imagine them, for 'e never was abroad." I often think of that man "who never was abroad," and of his representation of the Alps; of the hours of poetic vision, of actual creation perhaps from sheer strength of longing, which resulted in that quaint work of art.

As close as he could imagine them! He had read, then, about the Alps, read perhaps in Byron or some Radcliffian novel on a stall; and he had wondered till the vision had come ready for pasteboard and toy-trees and glue and broken mirror to embody it! And meanwhile I, who am obliged to cross those very Alps twice every year, I try to do so at night, to rumble and rattle up and down their gorges in a sleeping-car! There seems something wrong in this; something wrong in the world's adjustments, not really in me, for I swear it is respect for the Alps which makes me thus avoid their sight.

### III

And here is the moment for stating my plea against our modern, rapid, hurried travelling: there is to decent minds a certain element of humiliation therein, as I suspect there is in every *royal road*. There is something almost super-humanly selfish in this rushing across countries without giving them a thought, indeed with no thoughts in us save of our convenience, inconvenience, food, sleep, weariness. The whole of Central Europe is thus reduced, for our feelings, to an arrangement of buffets and custom-houses, its acres checked off on our sensorium as so many jolts. For it is not often that respectable people spend a couple of days, or even three, so utterly engrossed in themselves, so without intellectual relation or responsibility to their surroundings, living in a moral stratum not above ordinary life, but below it. Perhaps it is this suspending of connection with all interests which makes such travelling restful to very busy persons, and agreeable to very foolish ones. But to decent, active, leisured folk it is, I maintain, humiliating; humiliating to become so much by comparison in one's own consciousness; and I suspect that the vague sense of self-disgust attendant on days thus spent is a sample of the self-disgust we feel very

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slightly (and ought to feel very strongly) whenever our wretched little self is allowed to occupy the whole stage of our perceptions.

There is in M. Zola's *Bête Humaine* a curious picture of a train, one train after another, full of eager modern life, being whirled from Paris to Havre through the empty fields, before cottages and old-world houses miles remote from any town. But in reality is not the train the empty thing, and are not those solitary houses and pastures that which is filled with life? The Roman express thus rushes to Naples, Egypt, India, the far East, the great Austral islands, cutting in two the cypress avenue of a country house of the Val d'Arno, Neptune with his conch, a huge figure of the seventeenth century, looking on from an artificial grotto. What to him is this miserable little swish past of to-day?

There is only one circumstance when this vacuity, this suspension of all real life, is in its place; when one is hurrying to some dreadful goal, a death-bed or perhaps a fresh-made grave. The soul is precipitated forward to one object, one moment, and cannot exist meanwhile; *ruit not hora*, but *anima*; emptiness suits passion and suffering, for they empty out the world.

## IV

Be this as it may, it will be a great pity if we lose a certain sense of wonder at distance overcome, a certain emotion of change of place. This emotion paid for no doubt by much impatience and weariness where the plains were wide, the mountains high, or the roads persistently straight must have been one of the great charms of the old mode of travelling. You savoured the fact of each change in the lie of the land, of each variation in climate and province, the difference between the chestnut and the beech zones, for instance, in the south, of the fir and the larch in the Alps; the various types of window, roof, chimney, or well, nay, the different fold of the cap or kerchief of the market women. One inn, one square, one town-hall or church, introduced you gradually to its neighbours. We feel this in the talk of old people, those who can remember buying their team at Calais, of elderly ones who chartered their *vetturino* at Marseilles or Nice; in certain scraps in the novels even of Thackeray, giving the sense of this gradual occupation of the continent by relays. One of Mr. Ruskin's drawings at Oxford evokes it strongly in me. On what railway journey would he have come across that little town of Rheinfelden (where is Rheinfelden?), would he have wandered round those quaint towered walls, over that bridge, along that grassy walk?

I can remember, in my childhood, the Alps before they had railways; the enormous remoteness of Italy, the sense of its lying down there, far, far away in its southern sea; the immense length of the straight road from Bellinzona to the lake, the endlessness of the winding valleys. Now, as I said in relation to that effigy of the Alps by the man who had never been abroad, I get into my bunk at Milan, and waking up, see, in the early morning crispness, the glass green Reuss tear past, and the petticoated turrets of Lucerne.

Once also (and I hope not once and never again) I made an immense journey through Italy in a pony cart. We seemed to traverse all countries and climates; lush, stifling valleys with ripening maize and grapes; oak-woods where rows of cypress showed roads long gone, and crosses told of murders; desolate heaths high on hill-tops, and stony gorges full of myrtle; green irrigated meadows with plashing water-wheels, and grey olive groves; so that in the evening we felt homesick for that distant, distant morning: yet we had only covered as much ground as from London to Dover! And how immensely far off from Florence did we not feel when, four hours after leaving its walls, we arrived in utter darkness at the friendly mountain farm, and sat down to supper in the big bare room, where high-backed chairs and the plates above the immense chimney-piece loomed and glimmered in the half-light; feeling, as if in a dream, the cool night air still in our throats, the jingle of cart-bells and chirp of

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wayside crickets still in our ears! Where was Florence then? As a fact it was just sixteen miles off.

To travel in this way one should, however, as old John Evelyn advises, "diet with the natives." Our ancestors (for one takes for granted, of course, that one's ancestors were *milords*) were always plentifully furnished, I observe, with letters of introduction. They were necessary when persons of distinction carried their bedding on mules and rode in coaches escorted by blunderbuses, like John Evelyn himself.

It is this dieting with the natives which brings one fully in contact with a country's reality. At the tables of one's friends, while being strolled through the gardens or driven across country, one learns all about the life, thoughts, feelings of the people; the very gossip of the neighbourhood becomes instructive, and you touch the past through traditions of the family. Here the French put up the maypole in 1796; there the beautiful abbess met her lover; that old bowed man was the one who struck the Austrian colonel at Milan before 1859. 'Tis the mode of travelling that constituted the delight and matured the genius of Stendhal, king of cosmopolitans and grand master of the psychologic novel. To my kind friends, wherever I have any, but most perhaps in Northern Italy, is due among other kinds of gratitude, gratitude for having travelled in this way.

## V

But there is another way of travelling, more suitable methinks to the poet. For what does the poet want with details of reality when he possesses its universal essence, or with local manners and historic tradition, seeing that his work is for all times and all men?

Mr. Browning, I was told last year by his dear friends at Asolo, first came upon the kingdom of Kate the Queen by accident, perhaps not having heard its name or not remembering it, in the course of a long walking tour from Venice to the Alps. It was the first time he was in Italy, nay, abroad, and he had come from London to Venice by sea. That village of palaces on the hill-top, with the Lombard plain at its feet and the great Alps at its back; with its legends of the Queen of Cyprus was, therefore, one of the first impressions of mainland Italy which the poet could have received. And one can understand *Pippa Passes* resulting therefrom, better than from his years of familiarity with Florence. Pippa, Sebald, Ottima, Jules, his bride, the Bishop, the Spy, nay, even Queen Kate and her Page, are all born of that sort of misinterpretation of places, times, and stories which is so fruitful in poetry, because it means the begetting of things in the image of the poet's own soul, rather than the fashioning them to match something outside it.

Even without being a poet you may profit in an especial manner by travelling in a country where you know no one, provided you have in you that scrap of poetic fibre without which poets and poetry are caviare to you. There is no doubt that wandering about in the haunts of the past undisturbed by the knowledge of the present is marvellously favourable to the historic, the poetical emotion. The American fresh from the States thinks of Johnson and Dickens in Fleet Street; at Oxford or Cambridge he has raptures (are any raptures like these?) into which, like notes in a chord and overtones in a note, there enters the deliciousness, the poignancy of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Turner.

The Oxford or Cambridge man, on the other hand, will have similar raptures in some boarding-house at Venice or Florence; raptures rapturous in proportion almost to his ignorance of the language and the people. Do not let us smile, dear friends, who have lived in Rome till you are Romans, dear friends, who are Romans yourselves, at the foreigner with his Baedeker, turning his back to the Colosseum in his anxiety to reach it, and ashamed as well as unable to ask his way. That Goth or Vandal, very likely, is in the act of possessing Rome, of making its wonder and glory his own, consubstantial to his soul; Rome is his for the moment. Is it ours? Alas!

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Nature, Fate, I know not whether the mother or the daughter, they are so like each other, looks with benignity upon these poor ignorant, solitary tourists, and gives them what she denies to those who have more leisure and opportunity. I cannot explain by any other reason a fact which is beyond all possibility of doubt, and patent to the meanest observer; namely, that it is always during our first sojourn in a place, during its earlier part, and more particularly when we are living prosaically at inns and boarding-houses, that something happens a procession, a serenade, a street-fight, a fair, or a pilgrimage which shows the place in a particularly characteristic light, and which never occurs again. The very elements are desired to perform for the benefit of the stranger. I remember a thunderstorm, the second night I was ever at Venice, lighting up St. George's, the Salute, the whole lagoon as I have never seen it since.

I can testify, also, to having seen the Alhambra under snow, a sparkling whiteness lying soft on the myrtle hedges, and the reflection of arches and domes waving, with the drip of melted snow from the roofs, in the long-stagnant tanks. If I lived in Grenada, or went back there, should I ever see this wonder again? It was so ordered merely because I had just come, and was lodging at an inn.

Yes, Fate is friendly to those who travel rarely, who go abroad to see abroad, not to be warm or cold, or to meet the people they may meet anywhere else. Honour the tourist; he walks in a halo of romance. The cosmopolitan abroad desists from flannel shirts because he is always at home; and he knows to a nicety hours and places which demand a high hat. But does that compensate?

## VI

There is yet another mystery connected with travelling, but 'tis too subtle almost for words. All I can ask is, do you know what it is to meet, say, in some college room, or on the staircase of an English country house, or even close behind the front door in Bloomsbury, the photograph of some Florentine relief or French cathedral, the black, gaunt Piranesi print of some Roman ruin; and to feel suddenly Florence, Rouen, Reims, or Rome, the whole of their presence distilled, as it were, into one essence of emotion?

What does it mean? That in this solid world only delusion is worth having? Nay; but that nothing can come into the presence of that capricious despot, our fancy, which has not dwelt six months and six in the purlieus of its palace, steeped, like the candidates for Ahasuerus's favour, in sweet odours and myrrh.

## OLD ITALIAN GARDENS

### I

**THERE** are also modern gardens in Italy, and in such I have spent many pleasant hours. But that has been part of my life of reality, which concerns only my friends and myself. The gardens I would speak about are those in which I have lived the life of the fancy, and into which I may lead the idle thoughts of my readers.

It is pleasant to have flowers growing in a garden. I make this remark because there have been very fine gardens without any flowers at all; in fact, when the art of gardening reached its height, it took to despising its original material, as, at one time, people came to sing so well that it was considered vulgar to have any voice. There is a

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magnificent garden near Pescia, in Tuscany, built in terraces against a hillside, with wonderful water-works, which give you shower baths when you expect them least; and in this garden, surrounded by the trimmest box hedges, there bloom only imperishable blossoms of variegated pebbles and chalk. That I have seen with my own eyes. A similar garden, near Genoa, consisting of marble mosaics and coloured bits of glass, with a peach tree on a wall, and an old harpsichord on the doorstep to serve instead of bell or knocker, I am told of by a friend, who pretends to have spent her youth in it. But I suspect her to be of supernatural origin, and this garden to exist only in the world of Ariosto's enchantresses, whence she originally hails. To return to my first remark, it is pleasant, therefore, to have flowers in a garden, though not necessary. We moderns have flowers, and no gardens. I must protest against such a state of things. Still worse is it to suppose that you can get a garden by running up a wall or planting a fence round a field, a wood or any portion of what is vaguely called Nature. Gardens have nothing to do with Nature, or not much. Save the garden of Eden, which was perhaps no more a garden than certain London streets so called, gardens are always primarily the work of man. I say primarily, for these outdoor habitations, where man weaves himself carpets of grass and gravel, cuts himself walls out of ilex or hornbeam, and fits on as roof so much of blue day or of starspecked, moonsilvered night, are never perfect until Time has furnished it all with his weather stains and mosses, and Fancy, having given notice to the original occupants, has handed it into the charge of gentle little owls and furgloved bats, and of other tenants, human in shape, but as shy and solitary as they.

That is a thing of our days, or little short of them. I should be curious to know something of early Italian gardens, long ago; long before the magnificence of Roman Cæsars had reappeared, with their rapacity and pride, in the cardinals and princes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I imagine those beginnings to have been humble; the garden of the early middle ages to have been a thing more for utility than pleasure, and not at all for ostentation. For the garden of the castle is necessarily small; and the plot of ground between the inner and outer rows of walls, where corn and hay might be grown for the horses, is not likely to be given up exclusively to her ladyship's lilies and gillyflowers; salads and roots must grow there, and onions and leeks, for it is not always convenient to get vegetables from the villages below, particularly when there are enemies or disbanded pillaging mercenaries about; hence, also, there will be fewer roses than vines, pears, or apples, spaliere against the castle wall. On the other hand the burgher of the towns begins by being a very small artisan or shopkeeper, and even when he lends money to kings of England and Emperors, and is part owner of Constantinople, he keeps his house with businesslike frugality. Whatever they lavished on churches, frescoes, libraries, and pageants, the citizens, even of the fifteenth century, whose wives and daughters still mended the linen and waited at table, are not likely to have seen in their villa more than a kind of rural place of business, whence to check factors and peasants, where to store wine and oil; and from whose garden, barely enclosed from the fields, to obtain the fruit and flowers for their table. I think that mediæval poetry and tales have led me to this notion. There is little mention in them of a garden as such: the Provençal lovers meet in orchards "en un vergier sor folha d'albespi" where the May bushes grow among the almond trees. Boccaccio and the Italians more usually employ the word *orto*, which has lost its Latin signification, and is a place, as we learn from the context, planted with fruit trees and with pot-herbs, the sage which brought misfortune on poor Simona, and the sweet basil which Lisabetta watered, as it grew out of Lorenzo's head, "only with rosewater, or that of orange flowers, or with her own tears." A friend of mine has painted a picture of another of Boccaccio's ladies, Madonna Dianora, visiting the garden, which (to the confusion of her virtuous stratagem) the enamoured Ansaldo has made to bloom in January by magic arts; a little picture full of the quaint lovely details of Dello's wedding chests, the charm of the roses and lilies, the plashing fountains and birds singing against a background of wintry trees and snow-shrouded fields, the dainty youths and damsels treading their way among the flowers, looking like tulips and ranunculus themselves in their fur and brocade. But although in this story Boccaccio employs the word *giardino* instead of *orto*, I think we must imagine that magic flower garden rather as a corner they still exist on every hillside of orchard connected with the fields of wheat and olives below by the long tunnels of vine trellis, and dying away into them with the great tufts of lavender and rosemary and fennel on the grassy bank under the cherry trees. This piece of terraced ground along which the water spurted from the dolphin's mouth or the siren's breasts runs through walled channels, refreshing impartially violets and salads, lilies and tall flowering onions, under the branches of the peach tree and the pomegranate, to where, in the shade of the great pink oleander tufts, it pours out below into the big tank, for the

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maids to rinse their linen in the evening, and the peasants to fill their cans to water the bedded out tomatoes, and the potted clove-pinks in the shadow of the house.

The Blessed Virgin's garden is like that, where, as she prays in the cool of the evening, the gracious Gabriel flutters on to one knee (hushing the sound of his wings lest he startle her) through the pale green sky, the deep blue-green valley; and you may still see in the Tuscan fields clumps of cypresses clipped wheel shape, which might mark the very spot.

The transition from this orchard-garden, this *orto*, of the old Italian novelists and painters to the architectural garden of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is indicated in some of the descriptions and illustrations of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a sort of handbook of antiquities in the shape of a novel, written by Fra Francesco Colonna, and printed at Venice about 1480. Here we find trees and hedges treated as brick and stone work; walls, niches, colonnades, cut out of ilex and laurel; statues, vases, peacocks, clipped in box and yew; moreover antiquities, busts, inscriptions, broken altars and triumphal arches, temples to the graces and Venus, stuck about the place very much as we find them in the Roman Villas of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But I doubt whether the *Hypnerotomachia* can be taken as evidence of the gardens of Colonna's own days. I think his descriptions are rather of what his archæological lore made him long for, and what came in time, when antiques were more plentiful than in the early Renaissance, and the monuments of the ancients could be incorporated freely into the gardens. For the classic Italian garden is essentially Roman in origin; it could have arisen only on the top of ancient walls and baths, its shape suggested by the ruins below, its ornaments dug up in the planting of the trees; and until the time of Julius II. and Leo X., Rome was still a mediæval city, feudal and turbulent, in whose outskirts, for ever overrun by baronial squabbles, no sane man would have built himself a garden; and in whose ancient monuments castles were more to be expected than belvederes and orangeries. Indeed, by the side of quaint arches and temples, and labyrinths which look like designs for a box of toys, we find among the illustrations of Polifilo various charming woodcuts showing bits of vine trellis, of tank and of fountain, on the small scale, and in the domestic, quite unclassic style of the Italian burgher's garden. I do not mean to say that the gardens of Lorenzo dei Medici, of Catherine Cornaro near Asolo, of the Gonzagas near Mantua, of the Estensi at Scandiano and Sassuolo, were kitchen gardens like those of Isabella's basil pot. They had waterworks already, and aviaries full of costly birds, and enclosures where camels and giraffes were kept at vast expense, and parks with deer and fishponds; they were the gardens of the castle, of the farm, magnified and made magnificent, spread over a large extent of ground. But they were not, any more than are the gardens of Boiardo's and Ariosto's enchantresses (copied by Spencer) the typical Italian gardens of later days.

And here, having spoken of that rare and learned *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (which, by the way, any one who wishes to be instructed, sickened, and bored for many days together, may now read in Monsieur Claudius Popelin's French translation), it is well I should state that for the rest of this dissertation I have availed myself of neither the *British Museum*, nor the *National Library of Paris*, nor the *Library of South Kensington* (the italics seem necessary to show my appreciation of those haunts of learning), but merely of the light of my own poor intellect. For I do not think I care to read about gardens among foolscap and inkstains and printed forms; in fact I doubt whether I care to read about them at all, save in Boccaccio and Ariosto, Spencer and Tasso; though I hope that my readers will be more literary characters than myself.

## II

The climate of Italy (moving on in my discourse) renders it difficult and almost impossible to have flowers growing in the ground all through the summer. After the magnificent efflorescence of May and June the soil cakes into the consistence of terra cotta, and the sun, which has expanded and withered the roses and lilies with such

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marvellous rapidity, toasts everything like so much corn or maize. Very few herbaceous flowers the faithful, friendly, cheerful zinnias, for instance can continue blooming, and the oleander, become more brilliantly rose-colour with every additional week's drought, triumph over empty beds. Flowers in Italy are a crop like corn, hemp, or beans; you must be satisfied with fallow soil when they are over. I say these things, learned by some bitter experience of flowerless summers, to explain why Italian flower-gardening mainly takes refuge in pots from the great ornamented lemon-jars down to the pots of carnations, double geraniums, tuberoses, and jasmines on every wall, on every ledge or window-sill; so much so, in fact, that even the famous sweet basil and with it young Lorenzo's head, had to be planted in a pot. Now this poverty of flower-beds and richness of pots made it easy and natural for the Italian garden to become, like the Moorish one, a place of mere greenery and water, a palace whose fountains plashed in sunny yards walled in with myrtle and bay, in mysterious chambers roofed over with ilex and box.

And this it became. Moderately at first; a few hedges of box and cypress exhaling its resinous breath in the sunshine leading up to the long, flat Tuscan house, with its tower or pillared loggia under the roof to take the air and dry linen; a few quaintly cut trees set here and there, along with the twisted mulberry tree where the family drank its wine and ate its fruit of an evening; a little grove of ilexes to the back, in whose shade you could sleep while the cicadas buzzed at noon; some cypresses gathered together into a screen, just to separate the garden from the olive yard above; gradually perhaps a balustrade set at the end of the bowling-green, that you might see, even from a distance, the shimmery blue valley below, the pale-blue distant hills; and if you had it, some antique statue, not good enough for the courtyard of the town house, set on the balustrade or against the tree; also, where water was plentiful, a little grotto scooped out under that semicircular screen of cypresses. A very modest place, but differing essentially from the orchard and kitchen garden of the mediæval burgher; and out of which came something immense and unique the classic Roman villa.

For your new garden, your real Italian garden, brings in a new element that of perspective, architecture, decoration; the trees used as building material, the lie of the land as theatre arrangements, the water as the most docile and multiform stage property. Now think what would happen when such gardens begin to be made in Rome. The Popes and Popes' nephews can enclose vast tracts of land, expropriated by some fine sweeping fiscal injustice, or by the great expropriator, fever, in the outskirts of the town; and there place their casino, at first a mere summer-house, whither to roll of spring evenings in stately coaches and breathe the air with a few friends; then gradually a huge house, with its suits of guests' chambers, stables, chapel, orangery, collection of statues and pictures, its subsidiary smaller houses, belvederes, circuses, and what not! And around the house His Eminence or His Serene Excellency may lay out his garden. Now go where you may in the outskirts of Rome you are sure to find ruins great aqueduct arches, temples half-standing, gigantic terrace-works belonging to some baths or palace hidden beneath the earth and vegetation. Here you have naturally an element of architectural ground-plan and decoration which is easily followed: the terraces of quincunxes, the symmetrical groves, the long flights of steps, the triumphal arches, the big ponds, come, as it were, of themselves, obeying the order of what is below. And from underground, everywhere, issues a legion of statues, headless, armless, in all stages of mutilation, who are charitably mended, and take their place, mute sentinels, white and earth-stained, at every intersecting box hedge, under every ilex grove, beneath the cypresses of each sweeping hillside avenue, wherever a tree can make a niche or a bough a canopy. Also vases, sarcophagi, baths, little altars, columns, reliefs by the score and hundred, to be stuck about everywhere, let into every wall, clapped on the top of every gable, every fountain, stacked up in every empty space.

Among these inhabitants of the gardens of Cæsar, Lucullus, or Sallust, who, after a thousand years' sleep, pierce through the earth into new gardens, of crimson cardinals and purple princes, each fattened on his predecessors' spoils Mediei, Farnesi, Peretti, Aldobrandini, Ludovisi, Rospigliosi, Borghese, Pamphili among this humble people of stone I would say a word of garden Hermes and their vicissitudes. There they stand, squeezing from out their triangular sheath the stout pectorals veined with rust, scarred with corrosions, under the ilexes, whose drip, drip, through all the rainy days and nights of those ancient times and these modern ones has gradually eaten away an eye here, a cheek there, making up for the loss by gilding the hair with lichens, and matting the beard with



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green ooze; while patched chin, and restored nose, give them an odd look of fierce German duellists. Have they been busts of Cæsars, hastily ordered on the accession of some Tiberius or Nero, hastily sent to alter into Caligula or Galba, or chucked into the Tiber on to the top of the monster Emperor's body after that had been properly hauled through the streets? Or are they philosophers, at your choice, Plato or Aristotle or Zeno or Epicurus, once presiding over the rolls of poetry and science in some noble's or some rhetor's library? Or is it possible that this featureless block, smiling foolishly with its orbless eye-sockets and worn-out mouth, may have had, once upon a time, a nose from Phidias's hand, a pair of Cupid lips carved by Praxiteles?

### III

A book of seventeenth-century prints "The Gardens of Rome, with their plans raised and seen in perspective, drawn and engraved by Giov: Battista Falda, at the printing-house of Gio: Giacomo de' Rossi, at the sign of Paris, near the church of Peace in Rome" brings home to one, with the names of the architects who laid them out, that these Roman villas are really a kind of architecture cut out of living instead of dead timber. To this new kind of architecture belongs a new kind of sculpture. The antiques do well in their niches of box and laurel under their canopy of hanging ilex boughs; they are, in their weather-stained, mutilated condition, another sort of natural material fit for the artist's use; but the old sculpture being thus in a way assimilated through the operation of earth, wind, and rain, into tree-trunks and mossy boulders, a new sculpture arises undertaking to make of marble something which will continue the impression of the trees and waters, wave its jagged outlines like the branches, twist its supple limbs like the fountains. It is high time that some one should stop the laughing and sniffing at this great sculpture of Bernini and his Italian and French followers, the last spontaneous outcome of the art of the Renaissance, of the decorative sculpture which worked in union with place and light and surroundings. Mistaken as indoor decoration, as free statuary in the sense of the antique, this sculpture has after all given us the only works which are thoroughly right in the open air, among the waving trees, the mad vegetation which sprouts under the moist, warm Roman sky, from every inch of masonry and travertine. They are comic of course looked at in all the details, those angels who smirk and gesticulate with the emblems of the passion, those popes and saints who stick out colossal toes and print on the sky gigantic hands, on the parapets of bridges and the gables of churches; but imagine them replaced by fine classic sculpture stiff mannikins struggling with the overwhelming height, the crushing hugeness of all things Roman; little tin soldiers lost in the sky instead of those gallant theatrical creatures swaggering among the clouds, pieces of wind-torn cloud, petrified for the occasion, themselves! Think of Bernini's Apollo and Daphne, a group unfortunately kept in a palace room, with whose right angles its every outline swears, but which, if placed in a garden, would be the very summing up of all garden and park impressions in the waving, circling lines; yet not without a niminy piminy restraint of the draperies, the limbs, the hair turning to clustered leaves, the body turning to smooth bark, of the flying nymph and the pursuing god.

The great creation of this Bernini school, which shows it as the sculpture born of gardens, is the fountain. No one till the seventeenth century had guessed what might be the relations of stone and water, each equally obedient to the artist's hand. The mediæval Italian fountain is a tank, a huge wash-tub fed from lions' mouths, as if by taps, and ornamented, more or less, with architectural and sculptured devices. In the Renaissance we get complicated works of art Neptunes with tridents throne above sirens squeezing their breasts, and cupids riding on dolphins, like the beautiful fountain of Bologna; or boys poised on one foot, holding up tortoises, like Rafael's Tartarughe of Piazza Mattei; more elaborate devices still, like the one of the villa at Bagnaia, near Viterbo. But these fountains do equally well when dry, equally well translated into bronze or silver: they are wonderful salt-cellar or fruit-dishes; everything is delightful except the water, which spurts in meagre threads as from a garden-hose. They are the fitting ornament of Florence, where there is pure drinking water only on Sundays and holidays, of Bologna, where there is never any at all.

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The seventeenth century made a very different thing of its fountains something as cool, as watery, as the jets which gurgle and splash in Moorish gardens and halls, and full of form and fancy withal, the water never alone, but accompanied by its watery suggestion of power and will and whim. They are so absolutely right, these Roman fountains of the Bernini school, that we are apt to take them as a matter of course, as if the horses had reared between the spurts from below and the gushes and trickles above; as if the Triton had been draped with the overflowing of his horn; as if the Moor with his turban, the Asiatic with his veiled fall, the solemn Egyptian river god, had basked and started back with the lion and the seahorse among the small cataracts breaking into foam in the pond, the sheets of water dropping, prefiguring icicles, lazily over the rocks, all stained black by the north winds and yellow by the lichen, all always, always, in those Roman gardens and squares, from the beginning of time, natural objects, perfect and not more to be wondered at than the water-encircled rocks of the mountains and seashores. Such art as this cannot be done justice to with the pen; diagrams would be necessary, showing how in every case the lines of the sculpture harmonise subtly, or clash to be more subtly harmonised, with the movement, the immensely varied, absolutely spontaneous movement of the water; the sculptor, become infinitely modest, willing to sacrifice his own work, to make it uninteresting in itself, as a result of the hours and days he must have spent watching the magnificent manners and exquisite tricks of natural waterfalls nay, the mere bursting alongside of breakwaters, the jutting up between stones, of every trout-stream and milldam. It is not till we perceive its absence (in the fountains, for instance, of modern Paris) that we appreciate this Roman art of water sculpture. Meanwhile we accept the fountains as we accept the whole magnificent harmony of nature and art nature tutored by art, art fostered by nature of the Roman villas, undulating, with their fringe of pines and oaks, over the hillocks and dells of the Campagna, or stacked up proudly, vineyards and woods all round, on the steep sides of Alban and Sabine hills.

## IV

This book of engravings of the villas of the Serene Princes Aldobrandini, Pamphili, Borghese, and so forth, brings home to us another fact, to wit, that the original owners and layers out thereof must have had but little enjoyment of them. There they go in their big coaches, among the immense bows and curtsies of the ladies and gentlemen and dapper ecclesiastics whom they meet; princes in feathers and laces, and cardinals in silk and ermine. But the delightful gardens on which they are being complimented are meanwhile mere dreadful little plantations, like a nurseryman's squares of cabbages, you would think, rather than groves of ilexes and cypresses, for, alas, the greatest princes, the most magnificent cardinals, cannot bribe time, or hustle him to hurry up.

And thus the gardens were planted and grew. For whom? Certainly not for the men of those days, who would doubtless have been merely shocked could they have seen or foreseen.... For their ghosts perhaps? Scarcely. A friend of mine, in whose information on such matters I have implicit belief, assures me that it is not the *whole* ghosts of the ladies and cavaliers of long ago who haunt the gardens; not the ghost of their everyday, humdrum likeness to ourselves, but the ghost of certain moments of their existence, certain rustlings, and shimmerings of their personality, their waywardness, momentary transcendent graces and graciousnesses, unaccountable wistfulness and sorrow, certain looks of the face and certain tones of the voice (perhaps none of the steadiest), things that seemed to die away into nothing on earth, but which have permeated their old haunts, clung to the statues with the ivy, risen and fallen with the plash of the fountains, and which now exhale in the breath of the honeysuckle and murmur in the voice of the birds, in the rustle of the leaves and the high, invading grasses. There are some verses of Verlaine's, which come to me always, on the melancholy minuet tune to which Monsieur Fauré has set them, as I walk in those Italian gardens, Roman and Florentine, walk in the spirit as well as in the flesh:

Votre âme est un paysage choisi  
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques  
Jouant du luth et quasi

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Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.  
Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur  
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,  
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur;  
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,  
Au calme clair de lune triste et beau  
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres  
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,  
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

## V

And this leads me to wonder what these gardens must be when the key has turned in their rusty gates, and the doorkeeper gone to sleep under the gun hanging from its nail. What must such places be, Mondragone, for instance, near Frascati, and the deserted Villa Pucci near Signa, during the great May nights, when my own small scrap of garden, not beyond kitchen sounds and servants' lamps, is made wonderful and magical by the scents which rise up, by the song of the nightingales, the dances of the fireflies, copying in the darkness below the figures which are footed by the nimble stars overhead. Into such rites as these, which the poetry of the past practises with the poetry of summer nights, one durst not penetrate, save after leaving one's vulgar flesh, one's habits, one's realities outside the gate.

And since I have mentioned gates, I must not forget one other sort of old Italian garden, perhaps the most poetical and pathetic the garden that has ceased to exist. You meet it along every Italian highroad or country lane; a piece of field, tender green with the short wheat in winter, brown and orange with the dried maize husks and seeding sorghum in summer, the wide grass path still telling of coaches that once rolled in; a big stone bench, with sweeping shell-like back under the rosemary bushes; and, facing the road, between solemnly grouped cypresses or stately marshalled poplars, a gate of charming hammered iron standing open between its scroll-work masonry amid empty vases, under its covered escutcheon. The gate that leads to nowhere.

## ABOUT LEISURE

## ABOUT LEISURE

"Sancte Hieronyme, ora pro nobis!" *Litany of the Saints.*

## I

**HUNG** in my room, in such a manner as to catch my eye on waking, is an excellent photograph of Bellini's *St. Jerome in his Study*. I am aware that it is not at all by Bellini, but by an inferior painter called Catena, and I am, therefore, careful not to like it very much. It occupies that conspicuous place not as a work of art but as an *aid to devotion*. For I have instituted in my mind, and quite apart from the orthodox cultus, a special devotion to St. Jerome as the Patron of Leisure.

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And here let me forestall the cavillings of those who may object that Hieronymus, whom we call Jerome (born in Dalmatia and died at Bethlehem about 1500 years ago), was on the contrary a busy, even an overworked Father of the Church; that he wrote three stout volumes of polemical treatises, besides many others (including the dispute "concerning seraphs"), translated the greater part of the Bible into Latin, edited many obscure texts, and, on the top of it all, kept up an active correspondence with seven or eight great ladies, a circumstance alone sufficient to prove that he could not have had much time to spare. I know. But all that either has nothing to do with it or serves to explain why St. Jerome was afterwards rewarded by the gift of Leisure, and is, therefore, to be invoked by all those who aspire at enjoying the same. For the painters of all schools, faithful to the higher truth, have agreed in telling us that: first, St. Jerome had a most delightful study, looking out on the finest scenery; secondly, that that he was never writing, but always reading or looking over the edge of his book at the charming tables and chairs and curiosities, or at the sea and mountains through the window; and thirdly, *that he was never interrupted by anybody*. I underline this item, because on it, above all the others, is founded my certainty that St. Jerome is the only person who ever enjoyed perfect leisure, and, therefore, the natural patron and advocate of all the other persons to whom even imperfect leisure is refused. In what manner this miracle was compassed is exactly what I propose to discuss in this essay. An excellent *Roman Catholic* friend of mine, to whom I propounded the question, did indeed solve it by reminding me that Heaven had made St. Jerome a present of a lion who slept on his door mat, after which, she thought, his leisure could take care of itself. But although this answer seems decisive, it really only begs the question; and we are obliged to inquire further into the *real nature of St. Jerome's lion*. This formula has a fine theological ring, calling to mind Hieronymus's own treatise, *Of the nature of Seraphs*, and I am pleased to have found anything so suitable to the arrangements of a Father of the Church. Nevertheless, I propose to investigate into the subject of Leisure with a method rather human and earthly than in any way transcendental.

## II

We must evidently begin by a little work of defining; and this will be easiest done by considering first what Leisure is not. In the first place, it is one of those things about which we erroneously suppose that other people have plenty of it, and we ourselves have little or none, owing to our thoroughly realising only that which lies nearest to our eye to wit, *ourselves*. How often do we not go into another person's room and say, "Ah! *this* is a place where one can feel peaceful!" How often do we not long to share the peacefulness of some old house, say in a deserted suburb, with its red fruit wall and its cedar half hiding the windows, or of some convent portico, with glimpses of spalliered orange trees. Meanwhile, in that swept and garnished spacious room, in that house or convent, is no peacefulness to share; barely, perhaps, enough to make life's two ends meet. For we do not see what fills up, chokes and frets the life of others, whereas we are uncomfortably aware of the smallest encumbrance in our own; in these matters we feel quickly enough the mote in our own eye, and do not perceive the beam in our neighbour's.

And leisure, like its sister, peace, is among those things which are internally felt rather than seen from the outside. (Having written this part of my definition, it strikes me that I have very nearly given away St. Jerome and St. Jerome's lion, since any one may say, that probably that famous leisure of his was just one of the delusions in question. But this is not the case. St. Jerome really had leisure, at least when he was painted; I know it to be a fact; and, for the purposes of literature, I require it to be one. So I close this parenthesis with the understanding that so much is absolutely settled.)

Leisure requires the evidence of our own feelings, because it is not so much a quality of time as a peculiar state of mind. We speak of *leisure time*, but what we really mean thereby is *time in which we can feel at leisure*. What being at leisure means is more easily felt than defined. It has nothing to do with being idle, or having time on

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one's hands, although it does involve a certain sense of free space about one, as we shall see anon. There is time and to spare in a lawyer's waiting-room, but there is no leisure, neither do we enjoy this blessing when we have to wait two or three hours at a railway junction. On both these occasions (for persons who can profit thereby to read the papers, to learn a verb, or to refresh memories of foreign travel, are distinctly abnormal) we do not feel in possession of ourselves. There is something fuming and raging inside us, something which seems to be kicking at our inner bulwarks as we kicked the cushions of a tardy four-wheeler in our childhood. St. Jerome, patron of leisure, never behaved like that, and his lion was always engrossed in pleasant contemplation of the cardinal's hat on the peg. I have said that when we are bored we feel as if possessed by something not quite ourselves (much as we feel possessed by a stone in a shoe, or a cold in the head); and this brings me to a main characteristic of leisure: it implies that we feel free to do what we like, and that we have plenty of space to do it in. This is a very important remark of mine, and if it seem trite, that is merely because it is so wonderfully true. Besides, it is fraught with unexpected consequences.

### III

The worst enemy of leisure is boredom: it is one of the most active pests existing, fruitful of vanity and vexation of spirit. I do not speak merely of the wear and tear of so-called social amusements, though that is bad enough. We kill time, and kill our better powers also, as much in the work undertaken to keep off *ennui* as in the play. Count Tolstoi, with his terrible eye for shams, showed it all up in a famous answer to M. Dumas  *fils*. Many, many of us, work, he says, in order to escape from ourselves. Now, we should not want to escape from ourselves; we ought to carry ourselves, the more unconsciously the better, along ever widening circles of interest and activity; we should bring ourselves into ever closer contact with everything that is outside us; we should be perpetually giving ourselves from sheer loving instinct; but how can we give ourselves if we have run away from it, or buried it at home, or chained it up in a treadmill? Good work is born of the love of the Power-to-do for the Job-to-be-done; nor can any sort of chemical arrangements, like those by which Faust's pupil made *Homunculus* in his retort, produce genuinely living and in its turn fruitful, work. The fear of boredom, the fear of the moral going to bits which boredom involves, encumbers the world with rubbish, and exhibitions of pictures, publishers' announcements, lecture syllabuses, schemes of charitable societies, are pattern books of such litter. The world, for many people, and unfortunately, for the finer and nobler (those most afraid of *ennui*) is like a painter's garret, where some half-daubed canvas, eleven feet by five, hides the *Joconda* on the wall, the *Venus* in the corner, and blocks the charming tree-tops, gables, and distant meadows through the window.

Art, literature, and philanthropy are notoriously expressions no longer of men's and women's thoughts and feelings, but of their dread of finding themselves without thoughts to think or feelings to feel. So-called practical persons know this, and despise such employments as frivolous and effeminate. But are they not also, to a great extent, frightened of themselves and running away from boredom? See your well-to-do weighty man of forty-five or fifty, merchant, or soldier, or civil servant; the same who thanks God *he* is no idler. Does he really require more money? Is he more really useful as a colonel than as a major, in a wig or cocked hat than out of it? Is he not shuffling money from one heap into another, making rules and regulations for others to unmake, preparing for future restless idlers the only useful work which restless idleness can do, the carting away of their predecessor's litter?

Nor is this all the mischief. Work undertaken to kill time, at best to safeguard one's dignity, is clearly not the work which one was born to, since that would have required no such incentives. Now, trying to do work one is not fit for, implies the more or less unfitting oneself to do, or even to be, the something for which one had facilities. It means competing with those who are utterly different, competing in things which want a totally different kind of organism; it means, therefore, offering one's arms and legs, and feelings and thoughts to those blind, brutal forces

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of adaptation which, having to fit a human character into a given place, lengthen and shorten it, mangling it unconcernedly in the process.

Say one was naturally adventurous, a creature for open air and quick, original resolves. Is he the better for a deliberative, sedentary business, or it for him? There are people whose thought poises on distant points, swirls and pounces, and gets the prey which can't be got by stalking along the bushes; there are those who, like divers, require to move head downwards, feet in the air, an absurd position for going up hill. There are people who must not feel aesthetically, in order (so Dr. Bain assures us) that they may be thorough-paced, scientific thinkers; others who cannot get half a page or fifty dates by heart because they assimilate and alter everything they take in.

And think of the persons born to contemplation or sympathy who, in the effort to be prompt and practical, in the struggle for a fortune or a visiting-list lose, atrophy (alas, after so much cruel bruising!) their inborn exquisite powers.

The world wants useful inhabitants. True. But the clouds building bridges over the sea, the storms modelling the peaks and flanks of the mountains, are a part of the world; and they want creatures to sit and look at them and learn their life's secrets, and carry them away, conveyed perhaps merely in altered tone of voice, or brightened colour of eye, to revive the spiritual and physical hewers of wood and drawers of water. For the poor sons and daughters of men require for sustenance, as well as food and fuel, and intellect and morals, the special mysterious commodity called *charm*....

## IV

And here let me open a parenthesis of lamentation over the ruthless manner in which our century and nation destroys this precious thing, even in its root and seed. *Charm* is, where it exists, an intrinsic and ultimate quality; it makes our actions, persons, life, significant and desirable, apart from anything they may lead to, or any use to which they can be put. Now we are allowing ourselves to get into a state where nothing is valued, otherwise than as a means; where to-day is interesting only because it leads up to to-morrow; and the flower is valued only on account of the fruit, and the fruit, in its turn, on account of the seed.

It began, perhaps, with the loss of that sacramental view of life and life's details which belonged to Judaism and the classic religions, and of which even Catholicism has retained a share; making eating, drinking, sleeping, cleaning house and person, let alone marriage, birth, and death, into something grave and meaningful, not merely animal and accidental; and mapping out the years into days, each with its symbolic or commemorative meaning and emotion. All this went long ago, and inevitably. But we are losing nowadays something analogous and more important: the cultivation and sanctification not merely of acts and occasions but of the individual character.

Life has been allowed to arrange itself, if such can be called arrangement, into an unstable, jostling heap of interests, ours and other folks', serious and vacuous, trusted to settle themselves according to the line of least resistance (that is, of most breakage!) and the survival of the toughest, without our sympathy directing the choice. As the days of the year have become confused, hurried, and largely filled with worthless toil and unworthy trouble, so in a measure, alas, our souls! We rarely envy people for being delightful; we are always ashamed of mentioning that any of our friends are virtuous; we state what they have done, or do, or are attempting; we state their chances of success. Yet success may depend, and often does, on greater hurrying and jostling, not on finer material and workmanship, in our hurrying times. The quick methods, the rapid worker, the cheap object quickly replaced by a cheaper these we honour; we want the last new thing, and have no time to get to love our properties, bodily and spiritual. 'Tis bad economy, we think, to weave such damask, linen, and brocade as our

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fathers have left us; and perhaps this reason accounts for our love of *bric-à-brac*; we wish to buy associations ready made, like that wealthy man of taste who sought to buy a half-dozen old statues, properly battered and lichened by the centuries, to put in his brand new garden. With this is connected I mean this indifference to what folk *are* as distinguished from what they *do* this self-assertion and aggressiveness of many worthy persons, men more than women, and gifted, alas, more than giftless; the special powers proportionately accompanied by special odiousness. Such persons cultivate themselves, indeed, but as fruit and vegetables for the market, and, with good luck and trouble, possibly *primeurs*: concentrate every means, chemical manure and sunshine, and quick! each still hard pear or greenish cauliflower into the packing-case, the shavings and sawdust, for export! It is with such well-endowed persons that originates the terrible mania (caught by their neighbours) of tangible work, something which can be put alongside of others' tangible work, if possible with some visible social number attached to it. So long as this be placed on the stall where it courts inspection, what matter how empty and exhausted the soul which has grown it? For nobody looks at souls except those who use them for this market-gardening.

Dropping metaphor; it is woeful to see so many fine qualities sacrificed to *getting on*, independent of actual necessity; getting on, no matter why, on to the road *to no matter what*. And on that road, what bitterness and fury if another passes in front! Take up books of science, of history and criticism, let alone newspapers; half the space is taken up in explaining (or forestalling explanations), that the sage, hero, poet, artist said, did, or made the particular thing before some other sage, hero, poet, artist; and that what the other did, or said, or made, was either a bungle, or a plagiarism, or worst of all was something *obvious*. Hence, like the bare-back riders at the Siena races, illustrious persons, and would-be illustrious, may be watched using their energies, not merely in pressing forward, but in hitting competitors out of the way with inflated bladders filled with the wind of conceit, not merely the breath of the lungs. People who might have been modest and gentle, grow, merely from self-defence, arrogant and aggressive; they become waspish, contradictory, unfair, who were born to be wise and just, and well-mannered. And to return to the question of *Charm*, they lose, soil, maim in this scuffle, much of this most valuable possession; their intimate, essential quality, their natural manner of being towards nature and neighbours and ideas; their individual shape, perfume, savour, and, in the sense of herbals, their individual *virtue*. And when, sometimes, one comes across some of it remaining, it is with the saddened feeling of finding a delicate plant trampled by cattle or half eaten up by goats.

Alas, alas, for charm! People are busy painting pictures, writing poems, and making music all the world over, and busy making money for the buying or hiring thereof. But as to that charm of character which is worth all the music and poetry and pictures put together, how the good common-sense generations do waste it.

## V

Now I suspect that *Charm* is closely related to *Leisure*. Charm is a living harmony in the individual soul. It is organised internally, the expression of mere inborn needs, the offspring of free choice; and as it is the great giver of pleasure to others, sprung probably from pleasure within ourselves; making life seem easier, more flexible, even as life feels in so far easier and more flexible to those who have it. Now even the best work means struggle, if not with the world and oneself, at least with difficulties inanimate and animate, pressure and resistance which make the individual soul stronger, but also harder and less flowerlike, and often a trifle warped by inevitable routine. Hence Charm is not the nursling of our hours of work, but the delicate and capricious foster child of Leisure. For, as observed, Leisure suspends the pull and push, the rough-and-ready reciprocity of man and circumstance. 'Tis in leisure that the soul is free to grow by its own laws, grow inwardly organised and harmonious; its fine individual hierarchism to form feelings and thoughts, each taking rank and motion under a conscious headship. 'Tis, I would show, in leisure, while talking with the persons who are dear, while musing on the themes that are dearer even than they, that voices learn their harmonious modes, intonation, accent,

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pronunciation of single words, all somehow falling into characteristic pattern; and the features of the face learn to move with that centred meaning which oftentimes makes homeliness itself more radiant than beauty. Nay more, may it not be in Leisure, during life's pauses, that we learn to live, what for and how?

### VI

*Life's Pauses.* We think of Leisure in those terms, comparing it with the scramble, at best the bustle, of work. But this might be a delusion, like that of the moving shore and the motionless boat. St. Jerome, our dear patron of Leisure, is looking dreamily over the top of his desk, listening to the larks outside the wide window, watching the white sailing clouds. Is he less alive than if his eyes were glued to the page, his thoughts focused on one topic, his pen going scratch–scratch, his soul oblivious of itself? He might be writing fine words, thinking fine thoughts; but would he have had fine thoughts to think, fine words to write, if he had always been busy thinking and writing, and had kept company not with the larks and the clouds and the dear lion on the mat, but only with the scratching pen?

For, when all is said and done, 'tis during work we spend, during leisure we amass those qualities which we barter for ever with other folk, and the act of barter is *life*. Anyhow, metaphysics apart, and to return to St. Jerome. This much is clear, that if Leisure were not a very good thing, this dear old saint would never have been made its heavenly patron.

But your discourse, declares the stern reader or he of sicklier conscience, might be a masked apology for idleness; and pray how many people would work in this world if every one insisted on having Leisure? The question, moralising friend, contains its own answer: if every one insisted on a share of Leisure, every one also would do a share of work. For as things stand, 'tis the superfluity of one man which makes the poverty of the other. And who knows? The realisation that Leisure is a good thing, a thing which every one must have, may, before very long, set many an idle man digging his garden and grooming his horses, many an idle woman cooking her dinner and rubbing her furniture. Not merely because one half of the world (the larger) will have recognised that work from morning to night is not in any sense living; but also because the other half may have learned (perhaps through grumbling experience) that doing nothing all day long, incidentally consuming or spoiling the work of others, is not *living* either. The recognition of the necessity of Leisure, believe me, will imply the recognition of the necessity of work, as its moral I might say its *hygienic*, as much as its economic, co–relative.

For Leisure (and the ignorance of this truth is at the bottom of much *ennui*) Leisure implies a superabundance not only of time but of the energy needed to spend time pleasantly. And it takes the finest activity to be truly at Leisure. Since Being at Leisure is but a name for being active from an inner impulse instead of a necessity; moving like a dancer or skater for the sake of one's inner rhythm instead of moving, like a ploughman or an errand–boy, for the sake of the wages you get for it. Indeed, for this reason, the type of all Leisure is *art*.

But this is an intricate question, and time, alas! presses. We must break off this leisurely talk, and betake ourselves each to his business let us hope not to his treadmill! And, as we do so, the more to enjoy our work if luckily useful, the less to detest it if, alas! as so often in our days, useless; let us invoke the good old greybeard, painted enjoying himself between his lion and his quail in the wide–windowed study; and, wishing for leisure, invoke its patron. Give us spare time, Holy Jerome, and joyful energy to use it. Sancte Hieronymus, ora pro nobis!