**Intentions by Oscar Wilde**

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Transcribed from the 1913 edition by David Price,
email ccx074@coventry.ac.uk

INTENTIONS

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THE DECAY OF LYING: AN OBSERVATION

A DIALOGUE. Persons: Cyril and Vivian. Scene: the Library of a
country house in Nottinghamshire.
CYRIL (coming in through the open window from the terrace). My dear Vivian, don't coop yourself up all day in the library. It is a perfectly lovely afternoon. The air is exquisite. There is a mist upon the woods, like the purple bloom upon a plum. Let us go and lie on the grass and smoke cigarettes and enjoy Nature.

VIVIAN. Enjoy Nature! I am glad to say that I have entirely lost that faculty. People tell us that Art makes us love Nature more than we loved her before; that it reveals her secrets to us; and that after a careful study of Corot and Constable we see things in her that had escaped our observation. My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her.

CYRIL. Well, you need not look at the landscape. You can lie on the grass and smoke and talk.
VIVIAN. But Nature is so uncomfortable. Grass is hard and lumpy and damp, and full of dreadful black insects. Why, even Morris’s poorest workman could make you a more comfortable seat than the whole of Nature can. Nature pales before the furniture of ‘the street which from Oxford has borrowed its name,’ as the poet you love so much once vilely phrased it. I don’t complain. If Nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture, and I prefer houses to the open air. In a house we all feel of the proper proportions. Everything is subordinated to us, fashioned for our use and our pleasure. Egotism itself, which is so necessary to a proper sense of human dignity, is entirely the result of indoor life. Out of doors one becomes abstract and impersonal. One’s individuality absolutely leaves one. And then Nature is so indifferent, so unappreciative. Whenever I am walking in the park here, I always feel that I am no more to her than the cattle that browse on the slope, or the burdock that blooms in the ditch. Nothing is more evident than that Nature hates Mind. Thinking is the most unhealthy thing in the world, and people die of it just as they die of any other disease. Fortunately, in England at any rate, thought is not catching. Our splendid physique as a people is entirely due to our national stupidity. I only hope we shall be able to keep this great historic bulwark of our happiness for many years to come; but I am afraid that we are beginning to be over-educated; at least everybody who is incapable of learning has taken to teaching--that is really what our enthusiasm for education has come to. In the meantime, you had better go back to your wearisome uncomfortable Nature, and leave me
to correct my proofs.

CYRIL. Writing an article! That is not very consistent after what you have just said.

VIVIAN. Who wants to be consistent? The dullard and the doctrinaire, the tedious people who carry out their principles to the bitter end of action, to the reductio ad absurdum of practice. Not I. Like Emerson, I write over the door of my library the word 'Whim.' Besides, my article is really a most salutary and valuable warning. If it is attended to, there may be a new Renaissance of Art.

CYRIL. What is the subject?

VIVIAN. I intend to call it 'The Decay of Lying: A Protest.'

CYRIL. Lying! I should have thought that our politicians kept up that habit.

VIVIAN. I assure you that they do not. They never rise beyond the level of misrepresentation, and actually condescend to prove, to discuss, to argue. How different from the temper of the true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind! After all, what
is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence. If a man is
sufficiently unimaginative to produce evidence in support of a lie,
he might just as well speak the truth at once. No, the politicians
won't do. Something may, perhaps, be urged on behalf of the Bar.
The mantle of the Sophist has fallen on its members. Their feigned
ardours and unreal rhetoric are delightful. They can make the
worse appear the better cause, as though they were fresh from
Leontine schools, and have been known to wrest from reluctant
juries triumphant verdicts of acquittal for their clients, even
when those clients, as often happens, were clearly and
unmistakeably innocent. But they are briefed by the prosaic, and
are not ashamed to appeal to precedent. In spite of their
endeavours, the truth will out. Newspapers, even, have
degenerated. They may now be absolutely relied upon. One feels it
as one wades through their columns. It is always the unreadable
that occurs. I am afraid that there is not much to be said in
favour of either the lawyer or the journalist. Besides, what I am
pleading for is Lying in art. Shall I read you what I have
written? It might do you a great deal of good.

CYRIL. Certainly, if you give me a cigarette. Thanks. By the
way, what magazine do you intend it for?

VIVIAN. For the Retrospective Review. I think I told you that the
elect had revived it.
CYRIL. Whom do you mean by 'the elect'?

VIVIAN. Oh, The Tired Hedonists, of course. It is a club to which I belong. We are supposed to wear faded roses in our button-holes when we meet, and to have a sort of cult for Domitian. I am afraid you are not eligible. You are too fond of simple pleasures.

CYRIL. I should be black-balled on the ground of animal spirits, I suppose?

VIVIAN. Probably. Besides, you are a little too old. We don't admit anybody who is of the usual age.

CYRIL. Well, I should fancy you are all a good deal bored with each other.

VIVIAN. We are. This is one of the objects of the club. Now, if you promise not to interrupt too often, I will read you my article.

CYRIL. You will find me all attention.

VIVIAN (reading in a very clear, musical voice). THE DECAY OF LYING: A PROTEST.--One of the chief causes that can be assigned for the curiously commonplace character of most of the literature
of our age is undoubtedly the decay of Lying as an art, a science, and a social pleasure. The ancient historians gave us delightful fiction in the form of fact; the modern novelist presents us with dull facts under the guise of fiction. The Blue-Book is rapidly becoming his ideal both for method and manner. He has his tedious document humain, his miserable little coin de la creation, into which he peers with his microscope. He is to be found at the Librairie Nationale, or at the British Museum, shamelessly reading up his subject. He has not even the courage of other people's ideas, but insists on going directly to life for everything, and ultimately, between encyclopaedias and personal experience, he comes to the ground, having drawn his types from the family circle or from the weekly washerwoman, and having acquired an amount of useful information from which never, even in his most meditative moments, can he thoroughly free himself.

'The lose that results to literature in general from this false ideal of our time can hardly be overestimated. People have a careless way of talking about a "born liar," just as they talk about a "born poet." But in both cases they are wrong. Lying and poetry are arts—arts, as Pinto saw, not unconnected with each other—and they require the most careful study, the most disinterested devotion. Indeed, they have their technique, just as the more material arts of painting and sculpture have, their subtle secrets of form and colour, their craft-mysteries, their deliberate artistic methods. As one knows the poet by his fine music, so one can recognise the liar by his rich rhythmic utterance, and in
neither case will the casual inspiration of the moment suffice.

Here, as elsewhere, practice must, precede perfection. But in
modern days while the fashion of writing poetry has become far too
common, and should, if possible, be discouraged, the fashion of
lying has almost fallen into disrepute. Many a young man starts in
life with a natural gift for exaggeration which, if nurtured in
congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by the imitation of the
best models, might grow into something really great and wonderful.
But, as a rule, he comes to nothing. He either falls into careless
habits of accuracy--'

CYRIL. My dear fellow!

VIVIAN. Please don't interrupt in the middle of a sentence. 'He
either falls into careless habits of accuracy, or takes to
frequenting the society of the aged and the well-informed. Both
things are equally fatal to his imagination, as indeed they would
be fatal to the imagination of anybody, and in a short time he
develops a morbid and unhealthy faculty of truth-telling, begins to
verify all statements made in his presence, has no hesitation in
contradicting people who are much younger than himself, and often
ends by writing novels which are so lifelike that no one can
possibly believe in their probability. This is no isolated
instance that we are giving. It is simply one example out of many;
and if something cannot be done to check, or at least to modify,
our monstrous worship of facts, Art will become sterile, and beauty
will pass away from the land.
'Even Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, that delightful master of
delicate and fanciful prose, is tainted with this modern vice, for
we know positively no other name for it. There is such a thing as
robbing a story of its reality by trying to make it too true, and
The Black Arrow is so inartistic as not to contain a single
anachronism to boast of, while the transformation of Dr. Jekyll
reads dangerously like an experiment out of the Lancet. As for Mr.
Rider Haggard, who really has, or had once, the makings of a
perfectly magnificent liar, he is now so afraid of being suspected
of genius that when he does tell us anything marvellous, he feels
bound to invent a personal reminiscence, and to put it into a
footnote as a kind of cowardly corroboration. Nor are our other
novelists much better. Mr. Henry James writes fiction as if it
were a painful duty, and wastes upon mean motives and imperceptible
“points of view” his neat literary style, his felicitous phrases,
his swift and caustic satire. Mr. Hall Caine, it is true, aims at
the grandiose, but then he writes at the top of his voice. He is
so loud that one cannot bear what he says. Mr. James Payn is an
advent in the art of concealing what is not worth finding. He hunts
down the obvious with the enthusiasm of a short-sighted detective.
As one turns over the pages, the suspense of the author becomes
almost unbearable. The horses of Mr. William Black's phaeton do
not soar towards the sun. They merely frighten the sky at evening
into violent chromolithographic effects. On seeing them approach,
the peasants take refuge in dialect. Mrs. Oliphant prattles
pleasantly about curates, lawn-tennis parties, domesticity, and
other wearisome things. Mr. Marion Crawford has immolated himself upon the altar of local colour. He is like the lady in the French comedy who keeps talking about "le beau ciel d'Italie." Besides, he has fallen into the bad habit of uttering moral platitudes. He is always telling us that to be good is to be good, and that to be bad is to be wicked. At times he is almost edifying. Robert Elsmere is of course a masterpiece--a masterpiece of the "genre ennuyeux," the one form of literature that the English people seems thoroughly to enjoy. A thoughtful young friend of ours once told us that it reminded him of the sort of conversation that goes on at a meat tea in the house of a serious Nonconformist family, and we can quite believe it. Indeed it is only in England that such a book could be produced. England is the home of lost ideas. As for that great and daily increasing school of novelists for whom the sun always rises in the East-End, the only thing that can be said about them is that they find life crude, and leave it raw.

In France, though nothing so deliberately tedious as Robert Elsmere has been produced, things are not much better. M. Guy de Maupassant, with his keen mordant irony and his hard vivid style, strips life of the few poor rags that still cover her, and shows us foul sore and festering wound. He writes lurid little tragedies in which everybody is ridiculous; bitter comedies at which one cannot laugh for very tears. M. Zola, true to the lofty principle that he lays down in one of his pronunciamientos on literature, "L'homme de genie n'a jamais d'esprit," is determined to show that, if he has not got genius, he can at least be dull. And how well he succeeds!
He is not without power. Indeed at times, as in Germinal, there is something almost epic in his work. But his work is entirely wrong from beginning to end, and wrong not on the ground of morals, but on the ground of art. From any ethical standpoint it is just what it should be. The author is perfectly truthful, and describes things exactly as they happen. What more can any moralist desire? We have no sympathy at all with the moral indignation of our time against M. Zola. It is simply the indignation of Tartuffe on being exposed. But from the standpoint of art, what can be said in favour of the author of L'Assommoir, Nana and Pot-Bouille? Nothing. Mr. Ruskin once described the characters in George Eliot's novels as being like the sweepings of a Pentonville omnibus, but M. Zola's characters are much worse. They have their dreary vices, and their drearier virtues. The record of their lives is absolutely without interest. Who cares what happens to them? In literature we require distinction, charm, beauty and imaginative power. We don't want to be harrowed and disgusted with an account of the doings of the lower orders. M. Daudet is better. He has wit, a light touch and an amusing style. But he has lately committed literary suicide. Nobody can possibly care for Delobelle with his "Il faut lutter pour l'art," or for Valmajour with his eternal refrain about the nightingale, or for the poet in Jack with his "mots cruels," now that we have learned from Vingt Ans de ma Vie littéraire that these characters were taken directly from life. To us they seem to have suddenly lost all their vitality, all the few qualities they ever possessed. The only real people are the people who never existed, and if a novelist is base enough to go to life for his personages he should at least pretend that they are
creations, and not boast of them as copies. The justification of a
caracter in a novel is not that other persons are what they are,
but that the author is what he is. Otherwise the novel is not a
work of art. As for M. Paul Bourget, the master of the roman
psychologique, he commits the error of imagining that the men and
women of modern life are capable of being infinitely analysed for
an innumerable series of chapters. In point of fact what is
interesting about people in good society--and M. Bourget rarely
moves out of the Faubourg St. Germain, except to come to London,--
is the mask that each one of them wears, not the reality that lies
behind the mask. It is a humiliating confession, but we are all of
us made out of the same stuff. In Falstaff there is something of
Hamlet, in Hamlet there is not a little of Falstaff. The fat
knight has his moods of melancholy, and the young prince his
moments of coarse humour. Where we differ from each other is
purely in accidentals: in dress, manner, tone of voice, religious
opinions, personal appearance, tricks of habit and the like. The
more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis
disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal
thing called human nature. Indeed, as any one who has ever worked
among the poor knows only too well, the brotherhood of man is no
mere poet's dream, it is a most depressing and humiliating reality;
and if a writer insists upon analysing the upper classes, he might
just as well write of match-girls and costermongers at once.'

However, my dear Cyril, I will not detain you any further just
here. I quite admit that modern novels have many good points. All
I insist on is that, as a class, they are quite unreadable.
Cyril. That is certainly a very grave qualification, but I must say that I think you are rather unfair in some of your strictures. I like The Deemster, and The Daughter of Heth, and Le Disciple, and Mr. Isaacs, and as for Robert Elsmere, I am quite devoted to it. Not that I can look upon it as a serious work. As a statement of the problems that confront the earnest Christian it is ridiculous and antiquated. It is simply Arnold's Literature and Dogma with the literature left out. It is as much behind the age as Paley's Evidences, or Colenso's method of Biblical exegesis. Nor could anything be less impressive than the unfortunate hero gravely heralding a dawn that rose long ago, and so completely missing its true significance that he proposes to carry on the business of the old firm under the new name. On the other hand, it contains several clever caricatures, and a heap of delightful quotations, and Green's philosophy very pleasantly sugars the somewhat bitter pill of the author's fiction. I also cannot help expressing my surprise that you have said nothing about the two novelists whom you are always reading, Balzac and George Meredith. Surely they are realists, both of them?

Vivian. Ah! Meredith! Who can define him? His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning. As a writer he has mastered everything except language: as a novelist he can do everything, except tell a story: as an artist he is everything except articulate. Somebody in Shakespeare--Touchstone, I think--talks about a man who is always breaking his shins over his own wit, and
it seems to me that this might serve as the basis for a criticism of Meredith's method. But whatever he is, he is not a realist. Or rather I would say that he is a child of realism who is not on speaking terms with his father. By deliberate choice he has made himself a romanticist. He has refused to bow the knee to Baal, and after all, even if the man's fine spirit did not revolt against the noisy assertions of realism, his style would be quite sufficient of itself to keep life at a respectful distance. By its means he has planted round his garden a hedge full of thorns, and red with wonderful roses. As for Balzac, he was a most remarkable combination of the artistic temperament with the scientific spirit. The latter he bequeathed to his disciples. The former was entirely his own. The difference between such a book as M. Zola's L'Assommoir and Balzac's Illusions Perdues is the difference between unimaginative realism and imaginative reality. 'All Balzac's characters;' said Baudelaire, 'are gifted with the same ardour of life that animated himself. All his fictions are as deeply coloured as dreams. Each mind is a weapon loaded to the muzzle with will. The very scullions have genius.' A steady course of Balzac reduces our living friends to shadows, and our acquaintances to the shadows of shades. His characters have a kind of fervent fiery-coloured existence. They dominate us, and defy scepticism. One of the greatest tragedies of my life is the death of Lucien de Rubempre. It is a grief from which I have never been able completely to rid myself. It haunts me in my moments of pleasure. I remember it when I laugh. But Balzac is no more a realist than Holbein was. He created life, he did not copy it. I admit, however, that he set far too high a value on modernity of
form, and that, consequently, there is no book of his that, as an artistic masterpiece, can rank with Salammbo or Esmond, or The Cloister and the Hearth, or the Vicomte de Bragelonne.

CYRIL. Do you object to modernity of form, then?

VIVIAN. Yes. It is a huge price to pay for a very poor result. Pure modernity of form is always somewhat vulgarising. It cannot help being so. The public imagine that, because they are interested in their immediate surroundings, Art should be interested in them also, and should take them as her subject-matter. But the mere fact that they are interested in these things makes them unsuitable subjects for Art. The only beautiful things, as somebody once said, are the things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art. To art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent. We should, at any rate, have no preferences, no prejudices, no partisan feeling of any kind. It is exactly because Hecuba is nothing to us that her sorrows are such an admirable motive for a tragedy. I do not know anything in the whole history of literature sadder than the artistic career of Charles Reade. He wrote one beautiful book, The Cloister and the Hearth, a book as much above Romola as Romola is above Daniel Deronda, and wasted the rest of his life in a foolish attempt to be modern, to draw public attention to the state of our convict
prisons, and the management of our private lunatic asylums.

Charles Dickens was depressing enough in all conscience when he tried to arouse our sympathy for the victims of the poor-law administration; but Charles Reade, an artist, a scholar, a man with a true sense of beauty, raging and roaring over the abuses of contemporary life like a common pamphleteer or a sensational journalist, is really a sight for the angels to weep over. Believe me, my dear Cyril, modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter are entirely and absolutely wrong. We have mistaken the common livery of the age for the vesture of the Muses, and spend our days in the sordid streets and hideous suburbs of our vile cities when we should be out on the hillside with Apollo. Certainly we are a degraded race, and have sold our birthright for a mess of facts.

CYRIL. There is something in what you say, and there is no doubt that whatever amusement we may find in reading a purely model novel, we have rarely any artistic pleasure in re-reading it. And this is perhaps the best rough test of what is literature and what is not. If one cannot enjoy reading a book over and over again, there is no use reading it at all. But what do you say about the return to Life and Nature? This is the panacea that is always being recommended to us.

VIVIAN. I will read you what I say on that subject. The passage comes later on in the article, but I may as well give it to you now:-
'The popular cry of our time is "Let us return to Life and Nature; they will recreate Art for us, and send the red blood coursing through her veins; they will shoe her feet with swiftness and make her hand strong." But, alas! we are mistaken in our amiable and well-meaning efforts. Nature is always behind the age. And as for Life, she is the solvent that breaks up Art, the enemy that lays waste her house.'

CYRIL. What do you mean by saying that Nature is always behind the age?

VIVIAN. Well, perhaps that is rather cryptic. What I mean is this. If we take Nature to mean natural simple instinct as opposed to self-conscious culture, the work produced under this influence is always old-fashioned, antiquated, and out of date. One touch of Nature may make the whole world kin, but two touches of Nature will destroy any work of Art. If, on the other hand, we regard Nature as the collection of phenomena external to man, people only discover in her what they bring to her. She has no suggestions of her own. Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there. He went moralising about the district, but his good work was produced when he returned, not to Nature but to poetry. Poetry gave him 'Laodamia,' and the fine sonnets, and the great Ode, such as it is. Nature gave him 'Martha Ray' and 'Peter Bell,' and the
address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade.

CYRIL. I think that view might be questioned. I am rather inclined to believe in 'the impulse from a vernal wood,' though of course the artistic value of such an impulse depends entirely on the kind of temperament that receives it, so that the return to Nature would come to mean simply the advance to a great personality. You would agree with that, I fancy. However, proceed with your article.

VIVIAN (reading). 'Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder, and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle. Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment. The third stage is when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness. That is the true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering. ‘Take the case of the English drama. At first in the hands of the monks Dramatic Art was abstract, decorative and mythological. Then she enlisted Life in her service, and using some of life's external forms, she created an entirely new race of beings, whose sorrows
were more terrible than any sorrow man has ever felt, whose joys were keener than lover's joys, who had the rage of the Titans and the calm of the gods, who had monstrous and marvellous sins, monstrous and marvellous virtues. To them she gave a language different from that of actual use, a language full of resonant music and sweet rhythm, made stately by solemn cadence, or made delicate by fanciful rhyme, jewelled with wonderful words, and enriched with lofty diction. She clothed her children in strange raiment and gave them masks, and at her bidding the antique world rose from its marble tomb. A new Caesar stalked through the streets of risen Rome, and with purple sail and flute-led oars another Cleopatra passed up the river to Antioch. Old myth and legend and dream took shape and substance. History was entirely re-written, and there was hardly one of the dramatists who did not recognise that the object of Art is not simple truth but complex beauty. In this they were perfectly right. Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis.

'But Life soon shattered the perfection of the form. Even in Shakespeare we can see the beginning of the end. It shows itself by the gradual breaking-up of the blank-verse in the later plays, by the predominance given to prose, and by the over-importance assigned to characterisation. The passages in Shakespeare--and they are many--where the language is uncouth, vulgar, exaggerated, fantastic, obscene even, are entirely due to Life calling for an echo of her own voice, and rejecting the intervention of beautiful
style, through which alone should life be suffered to find
expression. Shakespeare is not by any means a flawless artist. He
is too fond of going directly to life, and borrowing life's natural
utterance. He forgets that when Art surrenders her imaginative
medium she surrenders everything. Goethe says, somewhere -

In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister,

"It is in working within limits that the master reveals himself,"
and the limitation, the very condition of any art is style.
However, we need not linger any longer over Shakespeare's realism.
The Tempest is the most perfect of palinodes. All that we desired
to point out was, that the magnificent work of the Elizabethan and
Jacobean artists contained within itself the seeds of its own
dissolution, and that, if it drew some of its strength from using
life as rough material, it drew all its weakness from using life as
an artistic method. As the inevitable result of this substitution
of an imitative for a creative medium, this surrender of an
imaginative form, we have the modern English melodrama. The
characters in these plays talk on the stage exactly as they would
talk off it; they have neither aspirations nor aspirates; they are
taken directly from life and reproduce its vulgarity down to the
smallest detail; they present the gait, manner, costume and accent
of real people; they would pass unnoticed in a third-class railway
carriage. And yet how wearisome the plays are! They do not
succeed in producing even that impression of reality at which they
aim, and which is their only reason for existing. As a method,
realism is a complete failure.

'What is true about the drama and the novel is no less true about those arts that we call the decorative arts. The whole history of these arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit. Wherever the former has been paramount, as in Byzantium, Sicily and Spain, by actual contact, or in the rest of Europe by the influence of the Crusades, we have had beautiful and imaginative work in which the visible things of life are transmuted into artistic conventions, and the things that Life has not are invented and fashioned for her delight. But wherever we have returned to Life and Nature, our work has always become vulgar, common and uninteresting. Modern tapestry, with its aerial effects, its elaborate perspective, its broad expanses of waste sky, its faithful and laborious realism, has no beauty whatsoever. The pictorial glass of Germany is absolutely detestable. We are beginning to weave possible carpets in England, but only because we have returned to the method and spirit of the East. Our rugs and carpets of twenty years ago, with their solemn depressing truths, their inane worship of Nature, their sordid reproductions of visible objects, have become, even to the Philistine, a source of laughter. A cultured Mahomedan once remarked to us, "You Christians are so occupied in misinterpreting the fourth commandment that you have never thought of making an artistic application of the second." He was perfectly right, and
the whole truth of the matter is this: The proper school to learn
art in is not Life but Art.'

And now let me read you a passage which seems to me to settle the
question very completely.

'It was not always thus. We need not say anything about the poets,
for they, with the unfortunate exception of Mr. Wordsworth, have
been really faithful to their high mission, and are universally
recognised as being absolutely unreliable. But in the works of
Herodotus, who, in spite of the shallow and ungenerous attempts of
modern sciolists to verify his history, may justly be called the
"Father of Lies"; in the published speeches of Cicero and the
biographies of Suetonius; in Tacitus at his best; in Pliny's
Natural History; in Hanno's Periplus; in all the early chronicles;
in the Lives of the Saints; in Froissart and Sir Thomas Malory; in
the travels of Marco Polo; in Olaus Magnus, and Aldrovandus, and
Conrad Lycosthenes, with his magnificent Prodigiorum et Ostentorum
Chronicon; in the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini; in the
memoirs of Casanova; in Defoe's History of the Plague; in Boswell's
Life of Johnson; in Napoleon's despatches, and in the works of our
own Carlyle, whose French Revolution is one of the most fascinating
historical novels ever written, facts are either kept in their
proper subordinate position, or else entirely excluded on the
general ground of dulness. Now, everything is changed. Facts are
not merely finding a footing-place in history, but they are
usurping the domain of Fancy, and have invaded the kingdom of
Romance. Their chilling touch is over everything. They are vulgarising mankind. The crude commercialism of America, its materialising spirit, its indifference to the poetical side of things, and its lack of imagination and of high unattainable ideals, are entirely due to that country having adopted for its national hero a man who, according to his own confession, was incapable of telling a lie, and it is not too much to say that the story of George Washington and the cherry-tree has done more harm, and in a shorter space of time, than any other moral tale in the whole of literature.’

CYRIL. My dear boy!

VIVIAN. I assure you it is the case, and the amusing part of the whole thing is that the story of the cherry-tree is an absolute myth. However, you must not think that I am too despondent about the artistic future either of America or of our own country.

Listen to this:-

‘That some change will take place before this century has drawn to its close we have no doubt whatsoever. Bored by the tedious and improving conversation of those who have neither the wit to exaggerate nor the genius to romance, tired of the intelligent person whose reminiscences are always based upon memory, whose statements are invariably limited by probability, and who is at any time liable to be corroborated by the merest Philistine who happens
to be present, Society sooner or later must return to its lost
leader, the cultured and fascinating liar. Who he was who first,
without ever having gone out to the rude chase, told the wandering
cavemen at sunset how he had dragged the Megatherium from the
purple darkness of its jasper cave, or slain the Mammoth in single
combat and brought back its gilded tusks, we cannot tell, and not
one of our modern anthropologists, for all their much-boasted
science, has had the ordinary courage to tell us. Whatever was his
name or race, he certainly was the true founder of social
intercourse. For the aim of the liar is simply to charm, to
delight, to give pleasure. He is the very basis of civilised
society, and without him a dinner-party, even at the mansions of
the great, is as dull as a lecture at the Royal Society, or a
debate at the Incorporated Authors, or one of Mr. Burnand's
farcical comedies.

'Nor will he be welcomed by society alone. Art, breaking from the
prison-house of realism, will run to greet him, and will kiss his
false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone is in possession of
the great secret of all her manifestations, the secret that Truth
is entirely and absolutely a matter of style; while Life—poor,
probable, uninteresting human life—tired of repeating herself for
the benefit of Mr. Herbert Spencer, scientific historians, and the
compilers of statistics in general, will follow meekly after him,
and try to reproduce, in her own simple and untutored way, some of
the marvels of which he talks.
'No doubt there will always be critics who, like a certain writer in the Saturday Review, will gravely censure the teller of fairy tales for his defective knowledge of natural history, who will measure imaginative work by their own lack of any imaginative faculty, and will hold up their ink-stained hands in horror if some honest gentleman, who has never been farther than the yew-trees of his own garden, pens a fascinating book of travels like Sir John Mandeville, or, like great Raleigh, writes a whole history of the world, without knowing anything whatsoever about the past. To excuse themselves they will try and shelter under the shield of him who made Prospero the magician, and gave him Caliban and Ariel as his servants, who heard the Tritons blowing their horns round the coral reefs of the Enchanted Isle, and the fairies singing to each other in a wood near Athens, who led the phantom kings in dim procession across the misty Scottish heath, and hid Hecate in a cave with the weird sisters. They will call upon Shakespeare--they always do--and will quote that hackneyed passage forgetting that this unfortunate aphorism about Art holding the mirror up to Nature, is deliberately said by Hamlet in order to convince the bystanders of his absolute insanity in all art-matters.'

CYRIL. Ahem! Another cigarette, please.

VIVIAN. My dear fellow, whatever you may say, it is merely a dramatic utterance, and no more represents Shakespeare's real views upon art than the speeches of Iago represent his real views upon
morals. But let me get to the end of the passage:

'Aart finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself.
She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance.
She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no
forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and
unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a
scarlet thread. Hers are the "forms more real than living man,"
and hers the great archetypes of which things that have existence
are but unfinished copies. Nature has, in her eyes, no laws, no
uniformity. She can work miracles at her will, and when she calls
monsters from the deep they come. She can bid the almond-tree
blossom in winter, and send the snow upon the ripe cornfield. At
her word the frost lays its silver finger on the burning mouth of
June, and the winged lions creep out from the hollows of the Lydian
hills. The dryads peer from the thicket as she passes by, and the
brown fauns smile strangely at her when she comes near them. She
has hawk-faced gods that worship her, and the centaurs gallop at
her side.'

CYRIL. I like that. I can see it. Is that the end?

VIVIAN. No. There is one more passage, but it is purely
practical. It simply suggests some methods by which we could
revive this lost art of Lying.
CYRIL. Well, before you read it to me, I should like to ask you a question. What do you mean by saying that life, 'poor, probable, uninteresting human life,' will try to reproduce the marvels of art? I can quite understand your objection to art being treated as a mirror. You think it would reduce genius to the position of a cracked looking-glass. But you don't mean to say that you seriously believe that Life imitates Art, that Life in fact is the mirror, and Art the reality?

VIVIAN. Certainly I do. Paradox though it may seem--and paradoxes are always dangerous things--it is none the less true that Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life. We have all seen in our own day in England how a certain curious and fascinating type of beauty, invented and emphasised by two imaginative painters, has so influenced Life that whenever one goes to a private view or to an artistic salon one sees, here the mystic eyes of Rossetti's dream, the long ivory throat, the strange square-cut jaw, the loosened shadowy hair that he so ardently loved, there the sweet maidenhood of 'The Golden Stair,' the blossom-like mouth and weary loveliness of the 'Laus Amoris,' the passion-pale face of Andromeda, the thin hands and lithe beauty of the Vivian in 'Merlin's Dream.' And it has always been so. A great artist invents a type, and Life tries to copy it, to reproduce it in a popular form, like an enterprising publisher. Neither Holbein nor Vandyck found in England what they have given us. They brought their types with them, and Life with her keen imitative faculty set herself to supply the master with models. The Greeks, with their
quick artistic instinct, understood this, and set in the bride’s chamber the statue of Hermes or of Apollo, that she might bear children as lovely as the works of art that she looked at in her rapture or her pain. They knew that Life gains from art not merely spirituality, depth of thought and feeling, soul-turmoil or soul-peace, but that she can form herself on the very lines and colours of art, and can reproduce the dignity of Pheidias as well as the grace of Praxiteles. Hence came their objection to realism. They disliked it on purely social grounds. They felt that it inevitably makes people ugly, and they were perfectly right. We try to improve the conditions of the race by means of good air, free sunlight, wholesome water, and hideous bare buildings for the better housing of the lower orders. But these things merely produce health, they do not produce beauty. For this, Art is required, and the true disciples of the great artist are not his studio-imitators, but those who become like his works of art, be they plastic as in Greek days, or pictorial as in modern times; in a word, Life is Art’s best, Art’s only pupil.

As it is with the visible arts, so it is with literature. The most obvious and the vulgarest form in which this is shown is in the case of the silly boys who, after reading the adventures of Jack Sheppard or Dick Turpin, pillage the stalls of unfortunate apple-women, break into sweet-shops at night, and alarm old gentlemen who are returning home from the city by leaping out on them in suburban lanes, with black masks and unloaded revolvers. This interesting phenomenon, which always occurs after the appearance of a new
edition of either of the books I have alluded to, is usually attributed to the influence of literature on the imagination. But this is a mistake. The imagination is essentially creative, and always seeks for a new form. The boy-burglar is simply the inevitable result of life's imitative instinct. He is Fact, occupied as Fact usually is, with trying to reproduce Fiction, and what we see in him is repeated on an extended scale throughout the whole of life. Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism that characterises modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy. The Nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in, is a purely literary product. He was invented by Tourgenieff, and completed by Dostoieffski. Robespierre came out of the pages of Rousseau as surely as the People's Palace rose out of the debris of a novel. Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose. The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac. Our Luciens de Rubempre, our Rastignacs, and De Marsays made their first appearance on the stage of the Comedie Humaine. We are merely carrying out, with footnotes and unnecessary additions, the whim or fancy or creative vision of a great novelist. I once asked a lady, who knew Thackeray intimately, whether he had had any model for Becky Sharp. She told me that Becky was an invention, but that the idea of the character had been partly suggested by a governess who lived in the neighbourhood of Kensington Square, and was the companion of a very selfish and rich old woman. I inquired what became of the governess, and she replied that, oddly enough, some years after the
appearance of Vanity Fair, she ran away with the nephew of the lady
with whom she was living, and for a short time made a great splash
in society, quite in Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's style, and entirely by
Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's methods. Ultimately she came to grief,
disappeared to the Continent, and used to be occasionally seen at
Monte Carlo and other gambling places. The noble gentleman from
whom the same great sentimentalist drew Colonel Newcome died, a few
months after The Newcomer had reached a fourth edition, with the
word 'Adsum' on his lips. Shortly after Mr. Stevenson published
his curious psychological story of transformation, a friend of
mine, called Mr. Hyde, was in the north of London, and being
anxious to get to a railway station, took what he thought would be
a short cut, lost his way, and found himself in a network of mean,
evil-looking streets. Feeling rather nervous he began to walk
extremely fast, when suddenly out of an archway ran a child right
between his legs. It fell on the pavement, he tripped over it, and
trampled upon it. Being of course very much frightened and a
little hurt, it began to scream, and in a few seconds the whole
street was full of rough people who came pouring out of the houses
like ants. They surrounded him, and asked him his name. He was
just about to give it when he suddenly remembered the opening
incident in Mr. Stevenson's story. He was so filled with horror at
having realised in his own person that terrible and well-written
scene, and at having done accidentally, though in fact, what the
Mr. Hyde of fiction had done with deliberate intent, that he ran
away as hard as he could go. He was, however, very closely
followed, and finally he took refuge in a surgery, the door of
which happened to be open, where he explained to a young assistant,
who happened to be there, exactly what had occurred. The humanitarian crowd were induced to go away on his giving them a small sum of money, and as soon as the coast was clear he left. As he passed out, the name on the brass door-plate of the surgery caught his eye. It was 'Jekyll.' At least it should have been.

Here the imitation, as far as it went, was of course accidental. In the following case the imitation was self-conscious. In the year 1879, just after I had left Oxford, I met at a reception at the house of one of the Foreign Ministers a woman of very curious exotic beauty. We became great friends, and were constantly together. And yet what interested me most in her was not her beauty, but her character, her entire vagueness of character. She seemed to have no personality at all, but simply the possibility of many types. Sometimes she would give herself up entirely to art, turn her drawing-room into a studio, and spend two or three days a week at picture galleries or museums. Then she would take to attending race-meetings, wear the most horsey clothes, and talk about nothing but betting. She abandoned religion for mesmerism, mesmerism for politics, and politics for the melodramatic excitements of philanthropy. In fact, she was a kind of Proteus, and as much a failure in all her transformations as was that wondrous sea-god when Odysseus laid hold of him. One day a serial began in one of the French magazines. At that time I used to read serial stories, and I well remember the shock of surprise I felt when I came to the description of the heroine. She was so like my friend that I brought her the magazine, and she recognised herself
in it immediately, and seemed fascinated by the resemblance. I should tell you, by the way, that the story was translated from some dead Russian writer, so that the author had not taken his type from my friend. Well, to put the matter briefly, some months afterwards I was in Venice, and finding the magazine in the reading-room of the hotel, I took it up casually to see what had become of the heroine. It was a most piteous tale, as the girl had ended by running away with a man absolutely inferior to her, not merely in social station, but in character and intellect also. I wrote to my friend that evening about my views on John Bellini, and the admirable ices at Florian's, and the artistic value of gondolas, but added a postscript to the effect that her double in the story had behaved in a very silly manner. I don't know why I added that, but I remember I had a sort of dread over me that she might do the same thing. Before my letter had reached her, she had run away with a man who deserted her in six months. I saw her in 1884 in Paris, where she was living with her mother, and I asked her whether the story had had anything to do with her action. She told me that she had felt an absolutely irresistible impulse to follow the heroine step by step in her strange and fatal progress, and that it was with a feeling of real terror that she had looked forward to the last few chapters of the story. When they appeared, it seemed to her that she was compelled to reproduce them in life, and she did so. It was a most clear example of this imitative instinct of which I was speaking, and an extremely tragic one.

However, I do not wish to dwell any further upon individual
instances. Personal experience is a most vicious and limited circle. All that I desire to point out is the general principle that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life, and I feel sure that if you think seriously about it you will find that it is true. Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realises in fact what has been dreamed in fiction. Scientifically speaking, the basis of life—the energy of life, as Aristotle would call it—is simply the desire for expression, and Art is always presenting various forms through which this expression can be attained. Life seizes on them and uses them, even if they be to her own hurt. Young men have committed suicide because Rolla did so, have died by their own hand because by his own hand Werther died. Think of what we owe to the imitation of Christ, of what we owe to the imitation of Caesar.

CYRIL. The theory is certainly a very curious one, but to make it complete you must show that Nature, no less than Life, is an imitation of Art. Are you prepared to prove that?

VIVIAN. My dear fellow, I am prepared to prove anything.

CYRIL. Nature follows the landscape painter, then, and takes her effects from him?

VIVIAN. Certainly. Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we
get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets,
blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous
shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the
lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint
forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge? The
extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London
during the last ten years is entirely due to a particular school of
Art. You smile. Consider the matter from a scientific or a
metaphysical point of view, and you will find that I am right. For
what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She
is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life.
Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it,
depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is
very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything
until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into
existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are
fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the
mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs
for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw
them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not
exist till Art had invented them. Now, it must be admitted, fogs
are carried to excess. They have become the mere mannerism of a
clique, and the exaggerated realism of their method gives dull
people bronchitis. Where the cultured catch an effect, the
uncultured catch cold. And so, let us be humane, and invite Art to
turn her wonderful eyes elsewhere. She has done so already,
indeed. That white quivering sunlight that one sees now in France,
with its strange blotches of mauve, and its restless violet
shadows, is her latest fancy, and, on the whole, Nature reproduces it quite admirably. Where she used to give us Corots and Daubignys, she gives us now exquisite Monets and entrancing Pissaros. Indeed there are moments, rare, it is true, but still to be observed from time to time, when Nature becomes absolutely modern. Of course she is not always to be relied upon. The fact is that she is in this unfortunate position. Art creates an incomparable and unique effect, and, having done so, passes on to other things. Nature, upon the other hand, forgetting that imitation can be made the sincerest form of insult, keeps on repeating this effect until we all become absolutely wearied of it. Nobody of any real culture, for instance, ever talks nowadays about the beauty of a sunset. Sunsets are quite old-fashioned. They belong to the time when Turner was the last note in art. To admire them is a distinct sign of provincialism of temperament. Upon the other hand they go on. Yesterday evening Mrs. Arundel insisted on my going to the window, and looking at the glorious sky, as she called it. Of course I had to look at it. She is one of those absurdly pretty Philistines to whom one can deny nothing. And what was it? It was simply a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and over-emphasised. Of course, I am quite ready to admit that Life very often commits the same error. She produces her false Renes and her sham Vautrins, just as Nature gives us, on one day a doubtful Cuyp, and on another a more than questionable Rousseau. Still, Nature irritates one more when she does things of that kind. It seems so stupid, so obvious, so unnecessary. A false Vautrin might be delightful. A doubtful Cuyp is unbearable. However, I don't want
to be too hard on Nature. I wish the Channel, especially at Hastings, did not look quite so often like a Henry Moore, grey pearl with yellow lights, but then, when Art is more varied, Nature will, no doubt, be more varied also. That she imitates Art, I don't think even her worst enemy would deny now. It is the one thing that keeps her in touch with civilised man. But have I proved my theory to your satisfaction?

CYRIL. You have proved it to my dissatisfaction, which is better. But even admitting this strange imitative instinct in Life and Nature, surely you would acknowledge that Art expresses the temper of its age, the spirit of its time, the moral and social conditions that surround it, and under whose influence it is produced.

VIVIAN. Certainly not! Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new aesthetics; and it is this, more than that vital connection between form and substance, on which Mr. Pater dwells, that makes music the type of all the arts. Of course, nations and individuals, with that healthy natural vanity which is the secret of existence, are always under the impression that it is of them that the Muses are talking, always trying to find in the calm dignity of imaginative art some mirror of their own turbid passions, always forgetting that the singer of life is not Apollo but Marsyas. Remote from reality, and with her eyes turned away from the shadows of the cave, Art reveals her own perfection, and the wondering crowd that watches the opening of the marvellous, many-petalled rose fancies that it is its own history
that is being told to it, its own spirit that is finding expression
in a new form. But it is not so. The highest art rejects the
burden of the human spirit, and gains more from a new medium or a
fresh material than she does from any enthusiasm for art, or from
any lofty passion, or from any great awakening of the human
consciousness. She develops purely on her own lines. She is not
symbolic of any age. It is the ages that are her symbols.

Even those who hold that Art is representative of time and place
and people cannot help admitting that the more imitative an art is,
the less it represents to us the spirit of its age. The evil faces
of the Roman emperors look out at us from the foul porphyry and
spotted jasper in which the realistic artists of the day delighted
to work, and we fancy that in those cruel lips and heavy sensual
jaws we can find the secret of the ruin of the Empire. But it was
not so. The vices of Tiberius could not destroy that supreme
civilisation, any more than the virtues of the Antonines could save
it. It fell for other, for less interesting reasons. The sibyls
and prophets of the Sistine may indeed serve to interpret for some
that new birth of the emancipated spirit that we call the
Renaissance; but what do the drunken boors and bawling peasants of
Dutch art tell us about the great soul of Holland? The more
abstract, the more ideal an art is, the more it reveals to us the
temper of its age. If we wish to understand a nation by means of
its art, let us look at its architecture or its music.

CYRIL. I quite agree with you there. The spirit of an age may be
best expressed in the abstract ideal arts, for the spirit itself is
abstract and ideal. Upon the other hand, for the visible aspect of
an age, for its look, as the phrase goes, we must of course go to
the arts of imitation.

VIVIAN. I don't think so. After all, what the imitative arts
really give us are merely the various styles of particular artists,
or of certain schools of artists. Surely you don't imagine that
the people of the Middle Ages bore any resemblance at all to the
figures on mediaeval stained glass, or in mediaeval stone and wood
carving, or on mediaeval metal-work, or tapestries, or illuminated
MSS. They were probably very ordinary-looking people, with nothing
grotesque, or remarkable, or fantastic in their appearance. The
Middle Ages, as we know them in art, are simply a definite form of
style, and there is no reason at all why an artist with this style
should not be produced in the nineteenth century. No great artist
ever sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to
be an artist. Take an example from our own day. I know that you
are fond of Japanese things. Now, do you really imagine that the
Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any
existence? If you do, you have never understood Japanese art at
all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious
creation of certain individual artists. If you set a picture by
Hokusai, or Hokkei, or any of the great native painters, beside a
real Japanese gentleman or lady, you will see that there is not the
slightest resemblance between them. The actual people who live in
Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to
say, they are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them. In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people.

One of our most charming painters went recently to the Land of the Chrysanthemum in the foolish hope of seeing the Japanese. All he saw, all he had the chance of painting, were a few lanterns and some fans. He was quite unable to discover the inhabitants, as his delightful exhibition at Messrs. Dowdeswell's Gallery showed only too well. He did not know that the Japanese people are, as I have said, simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art. And so, if you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio. On the contrary, you will stay at home and steep yourself in the work of certain Japanese artists, and then, when you have absorbed the spirit of their style, and caught their imaginative manner of vision, you will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see an absolutely Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere.

Or, to return again to the past, take as another instance the ancient Greeks. Do you think that Greek art ever tells us what the Greek people were like? Do you believe that the Athenian women were like the stately dignified figures of the Parthenon frieze, or like those marvellous goddesses who sat in the triangular pediments of the same building? If you judge from the art, they certainly were so. But read an authority, like Aristophanes, for instance. You will find that the Athenian ladies laced tightly, wore high-heeled shoes, dyed their hair yellow, painted and rouged their faces, and were exactly like any silly fashionable or fallen creature of our own day. The fact is that we look back on the ages
entirely through the medium of art, and art, very fortunately, has never once told us the truth.

CYRIL. But modern portraits by English painters, what of them? Surely they are like the people they pretend to represent?

VIVIAN. Quite so. They are so like them that a hundred years from now no one will believe in them. The only portraits in which one believes are portraits where there is very little of the sitter, and a very great deal of the artist. Holbein's drawings of the men and women of his time impress us with a sense of their absolute reality. But this is simply because Holbein compelled life to accept his conditions, to restrain itself within his limitations, to reproduce his type, and to appear as he wished it to appear. It is style that makes us believe in a thing--nothing but style. Most of our modern portrait painters are doomed to absolute oblivion. They never paint what they see. They paint what the public sees, and the public never sees anything.

CYRIL. Well, after that I think I should like to hear the end of your article.

VIVIAN. With pleasure. Whether it will do any good I really cannot say. Ours is certainly the dullest and most prosaic century possible. Why, even Sleep has played us false, and has closed up the gates of ivory, and opened the gates of horn. The dreams of
the great middle classes of this country, as recorded in Mr. Myers's two bulky volumes on the subject, and in the Transactions of the Psychical Society, are the most depressing things that I have ever read. There is not even a fine nightmare among them. They are commonplace, sordid and tedious. As for the Church, I cannot conceive anything better for the culture of a country than the presence in it of a body of men whose duty it is to believe in the supernatural, to perform daily miracles, and to keep alive that mythopoeic faculty which is so essential for the imagination. But in the English Church a man succeeds, not through his capacity for belief, but through his capacity for disbelief. Ours is the only Church where the sceptic stands at the altar, and where St. Thomas is regarded as the ideal apostle. Many a worthy clergyman, who passes his life in admirable works of kindly charity, lives and dies unnoticed and unknown; but it is sufficient for some shallow uneducated passman out of either University to get up in his pulpit and express his doubts about Noah's ark, or Balaam's ass, or Jonah and the whale, for half of London to flock to hear him, and to sit open-mouthed in rapt admiration at his superb intellect. The growth of common sense in the English Church is a thing very much to be regretted. It is really a degrading concession to a low form of realism. It is silly, too. It springs from an entire ignorance of psychology. Man can believe the impossible, but man can never believe the improbable. However, I must read the end of my article:-

'What we have to do, what at any rate it is our duty to do, is to
revive this old art of Lying. Much of course may be done, in the
way of educating the public, by amateurs in the domestic circle, at
literary lunches, and at afternoon teas. But this is merely the
light and graceful side of lying, such as was probably heard at
Cretan dinner-parties. There are many other forms. Lying for the
sake of gaining some immediate personal advantage, for instance--
lying with a moral purpose, as it is usually called--though of late
it has been rather looked down upon, was extremely popular with the
antique world. Athena laughs when Odysseus tells her "his words of
sly devising," as Mr. William Morris phrases it, and the glory of
mendacity illumines the pale brow of the stainless hero of
Euripidean tragedy, and sets among the noble women of the past the
young bride of one of Horace's most exquisite odes. Later on, what
at first had been merely a natural instinct was elevated into a
self-conscious science. Elaborate rules were laid down for the
guidance of mankind, and an important school of literature grew up
round the subject. Indeed, when one remembers the excellent
philosophical treatise of Sanchez on the whole question, one cannot
help regretting that no one has ever thought of publishing a cheap
and condensed edition of the works of that great casuist. A short
primer, "When to Lie and How," if brought out in an attractive and
not too expensive a form, would no doubt command a large sale, and
would prove of real practical service to many earnest and deep-
thinking people. Lying for the sake of the improvement of the
young, which is the basis of home education, still lingers amongst
us, and its advantages are so admirably set forth in the early
books of Plato's Republic that it is unnecessary to dwell upon them
here. It is a mode of lying for which all good mothers have
peculiar capabilities, but it is capable of still further
development, and has been sadly overlooked by the School Board.
Lying for the sake of a monthly salary is of course well known in
Fleet Street, and the profession of a political leader-writer is
not without its advantages. But it is said to be a somewhat dull
occupation, and it certainly does not lead to much beyond a kind of
ostentatious obscurity. The only form of lying that is absolutely
beyond reproach is lying for its own sake, and the highest
development of this is, as we have already pointed out, Lying in
Art. Just as those who do not love Plato more than Truth cannot
pass beyond the threshold of the Academe, so those who do not love
Beauty more than Truth never know the inmost shrine of Art. The
solid stolid British intellect lies in the desert sands like the
Sphinx in Flaubert's marvellous tale, and fantasy, La Chimere,
dances round it, and calls to it with her false, flute-toned voice.
It may not hear her now, but surely some day, when we are all bored
to death with the commonplace character of modern fiction, it will
hearken to her and try to borrow her wings.

'And when that day dawns, or sunset reddens, how joyous we shall
all be! Facts will be regarded as discreditable, Truth will be
found mourning over her fetters, and Romance, with her temper of
wonder, will return to the land. The very aspect of the world will
change to our startled eyes. Out of the sea will rise Behemoth and
Leviathan, and sail round the high-pooped galleys, as they do on
the delightful maps of those ages when books on geography were
actually readable. Dragons will wander about the waste places,
the phoenix will soar from her nest of fire into the air. We shall lay our hands upon the basilisk, and see the jewel in the toad's head. Champing his gilded oats, the Hippogriff will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Blue Bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be. But before this comes to pass we must cultivate the lost art of Lying.'

CYRIL. Then we must entirely cultivate it at once. But in order to avoid making any error I want you to tell me briefly the doctrines of the new aesthetics.

VIVIAN. Briefly, then, they are these. Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines. It is not necessarily realistic in an age of realism, nor spiritual in an age of faith. So far from being the creation of its time, it is usually in direct opposition to it, and the only history that it preserves for us is the history of its own progress. Sometimes it returns upon its footsteps, and revives some antique form, as happened in the archaistic movement of late Greek Art, and in the pre-Raphaelite movement of our own day. At other times it entirely anticipates its age, and produces in one century work that it takes another century to understand, to appreciate and to enjoy. In no case does it reproduce its age. To pass from the art of a time to the time itself is the great mistake that all historians commit.
The second doctrine is this. All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must be translated into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter. To us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us. It is, to have the pleasure of quoting myself, exactly because Hecuba is nothing to us that her sorrows are so suitable a motive for a tragedy. Besides, it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned. M. Zola sits down to give us a picture of the Second Empire. Who cares for the Second Empire now? It is out of date. Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of Life.

The third doctrine is that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy. It is a theory that has never been put forward before, but it is extremely fruitful, and throws an entirely new light upon the history of Art.
It follows, as a corollary from this, that external Nature also
imitates Art. The only effects that she can show us are effects
that we have already seen through poetry, or in paintings. This is
the secret of Nature's charm, as well as the explanation of
Nature's weakness.

The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue
things, is the proper aim of Art. But of this I think I have
spoken at sufficient length. And now let us go out on the terrace,
where 'droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,' while the
evening star 'washes the dusk with silver.' At twilight nature
becomes a wonderfully suggestive effect, and is not without
loveliness, though perhaps its chief use is to illustrate
quotations from the poets. Come! We have talked long enough.

PEN, PENCIL AND POISON--A STUDY IN GREEN

It has constantly been made a subject of reproach against artists
and men of letters that they are lacking in wholeness and
completeness of nature. As a rule this must necessarily be so.
That very concentration of vision and intensity of purpose which is
the characteristic of the artistic temperament is in itself a mode
of limitation. To those who are preoccupied with the beauty of
form nothing else seems of much importance. Yet there are many
exceptions to this rule. Rubens served as ambassador, and Goethe
as state councillor, and Milton as Latin secretary to Cromwell.
Sophocles held civic office in his own city; the humourists, essayists, and novelists of modern America seem to desire nothing better than to become the diplomatic representatives of their country; and Charles Lamb's friend, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, the subject of this brief memoir, though of an extremely artistic temperament, followed many masters other than art, being not merely a poet and a painter, an art-critic, an antiquarian, and a writer of prose, an amateur of beautiful things, and a dilettante of things delightful, but also a forger of no mean or ordinary capabilities, and as a subtle and secret poisoner almost without rival in this or any age.

This remarkable man, so powerful with 'pen, pencil and poison,' as a great poet of our own day has finely said of him, was born at Chiswick, in 1794. His father was the son of a distinguished solicitor of Gray's Inn and Hatton Garden. His mother was the daughter of the celebrated Dr. Griffiths, the editor and founder of the Monthly Review, the partner in another literary speculation of Thomas Davis, that famous bookseller of whom Johnson said that he was not a bookseller, but 'a gentleman who dealt in books,' the friend of Goldsmith and Wedgwood, and one of the most well-known men of his day. Mrs. Wainewright died, in giving him birth, at the early age of twenty-one, and an obituary notice in the Gentleman's Magazine tells us of her 'amiable disposition and numerous accomplishments,' and adds somewhat quaintly that 'she is supposed to have understood the writings of Mr. Locke as well as perhaps any person of either sex now living.' His father did not long survive
his young wife, and the little child seems to have been brought up
by his grandfather, and, on the death of the latter in 1803, by his
uncle George Edward Griffiths, whom he subsequently poisoned. His
boyhood was passed at Linden House, Turnham Green, one of those
many fine Georgian mansions that have unfortunately disappeared
before the inroads of the suburban builder, and to its lovely
gardens and well-timbered park he owed that simple and impassioned
love of nature which never left him all through his life, and which
made him so peculiarly susceptible to the spiritual influences of
Wordsworth's poetry. He went to school at Charles Burney's academy
at Hammersmith. Mr. Burney was the son of the historian of music,
and the near kinsman of the artistic lad who was destined to turn
out his most remarkable pupil. He seems to have been a man of a
good deal of culture, and in after years Mr. Wainewright often
spoke of him with much affection as a philosopher, an
archaeologist, and an admirable teacher who, while he valued the
intellectual side of education, did not forget the importance of
early moral training. It was under Mr. Burney that he first
developed his talent as an artist, and Mr. Hazlitt tells us that a
drawing-book which he used at school is still extant, and displays
great talent and natural feeling. Indeed, painting was the first
art that fascinated him. It was not till much later that he sought
to find expression by pen or poison.

Before this, however, he seems to have been carried away by boyish
dreams of the romance and chivalry of a soldier's life, and to have
become a young guardsman. But the reckless dissipated life of his
companions failed to satisfy the refined artistic temperament of one who was made for other things. In a short time he wearied of the service. 'Art,' he tells us, in words that still move many by their ardent sincerity and strange fervour, 'Art touched her renegade; by her pure and high influence the noisome mists were purged; my feelings, parched, hot, and tarnished, were renovated with cool, fresh bloom, simple, beautiful to the simple-hearted.' But Art was not the only cause of the change. 'The writings of Wordsworth,' he goes on to say, 'did much towards calming the confusing whirl necessarily incident to sudden mutations. I wept over them tears of happiness and gratitude.' He accordingly left the army, with its rough barrack-life and coarse mess-room tittle-tattle, and returned to Linden House, full of this new-born enthusiasm for culture. A severe illness, in which, to use his own words, he was 'broken like a vessel of clay,' prostrated him for a time. His delicately strung organisation, however indifferent it might have been to inflicting pain on others, was itself most keenly sensitive to pain. He shrank from suffering as a thing that mars and maims human life, and seems to have wandered through that terrible valley of melancholia from which so many great, perhaps greater, spirits have never emerged. But he was young--only twenty-five years of age--and he soon passed out of the 'dead black waters,' as he called them, into the larger air of humanistic culture. As he was recovering from the illness that had led him almost to the gates of death, he conceived the idea of taking up literature as an art. 'I said with John Woodvil,' he cries, 'it were a life of gods to dwell in such an element,' to see and hear and write brave things:-
‘These high and gusty relishes of life
Have no allayings of mortality.’

It is impossible not to feel that in this passage we have the utterance of a man who had a true passion for letters. ‘To see and hear and write brave things,’ this was his aim.

Scott, the editor of the London Magazine, struck by the young man’s genius, or under the influence of the strange fascination that he exercised on every one who knew him, invited him to write a series of articles on artistic subjects, and under a series of fanciful pseudonym he began to contribute to the literature of his day. Janus Weathercock, Egomet Bonmot, and Van Vinkvooms, were some of the grotesque masks under which he choose to hide his seriousness or to reveal his levity. A mask tells us more than a face. These disguises intensified his personality. In an incredibly short time he seems to have made his mark. Charles Lamb speaks of ‘kind, light-hearted Wainewright,’ whose prose is ‘capital.’ We hear of him entertaining Macready, John Forster, Maginn, Talfourd, Sir Wentworth Dilke, the poet John Clare, and others, at a petit-diner. Like Disraeli, he determined to startle the town as a dandy, and his beautiful rings, his antique cameo breast-pin, and his pale lemon-coloured kid gloves, were well known, and indeed were regarded by Hazlitt as being the signs of a new manner in literature: while his rich curly hair, fine eyes, and exquisite
white hands gave him the dangerous and delightful distinction of being different from others. There was something in him of Balzac's Lucien de Rubempre. At times he reminds us of Julien Sorel. De Quincey saw him once. It was at a dinner at Charles Lamb's. 'Amongst the company, all literary men, sat a murderer,' he tells us, and he goes on to describe how on that day he had been ill, and had hated the face of man and woman, and yet found himself looking with intellectual interest across the table at the young writer beneath whose affectations of manner there seemed to him to lie so much unaffected sensibility, and speculates on 'what sudden growth of another interest' would have changed his mood, had he known of what terrible sin the guest to whom Lamb paid so much attention was even then guilty.

His life-work falls naturally under the three heads suggested by Mr. Swinburne, and it may be partly admitted that, if we set aside his achievements in the sphere of poison, what he has actually left to us hardly justifies his reputation.

But then it is only the Philistine who seeks to estimate a personality by the vulgar test of production. This young dandy sought to be somebody, rather than to do something. He recognised that Life itself is in art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it. Nor is his work without interest. We hear of William Blake stopping in the Royal Academy before one of his pictures and pronouncing it to be 'very fine.' His essays are prefiguring of much that has since been realised.
He seems to have anticipated some of those accidents of modern culture that are regarded by many as true essentials. He writes about La Gioconda, and early French poets and the Italian Renaissance. He loves Greek gems, and Persian carpets, and Elizabethan translations of Cupid and Psyche, and the Hypnerotomachia, and book-binding and early editions, and wide-margined proofs. He is keenly sensitive to the value of beautiful surroundings, and never wearies of describing to us the rooms in which he lived, or would have liked to live. He had that curious love of green, which in individuals is always the sign of a subtle artistic temperament, and in nations is said to denote a laxity, if not a decadence of morals. Like Baudelaire he was extremely fond of cats, and with Gautier, he was fascinated by that 'sweet marble monster' of both sexes that we can still see at Florence and in the Louvre.

There is of course much in his descriptions, and his suggestions for decoration, that shows that he did not entirely free himself from the false taste of his time. But it is clear that he was one of the first to recognise what is, indeed, the very keynote of aesthetic eclecticism, I mean the true harmony of all really beautiful things irrespective of age or place, of school or manner. He saw that in decorating a room, which is to be, not a room for show, but a room to live in, we should never aim at any archaeological reconstruction of the past, nor burden ourselves with any fanciful necessity for historical accuracy. In this artistic perception he was perfectly right. All beautiful things
belong to the same age.

And so, in his own library, as he describes it, we find the
delicate fictile vase of the Greek, with its exquisitely painted
figures and the faint [Greek text which cannot be reproduced]
finely traced upon its side, and behind it hangs an engraving of
the 'Delphic Sibyl' of Michael Angelo, or of the 'Pastoral' of
Giorgione. Here is a bit of Florentine majolica, and here a rude
lamp from some old Roman tomb. On the table lies a book of Hours,
'cased in a cover of solid silver gilt, wrought with quaint devices
and studded with small brilliants and rubies,' and close by it
'squats a little ugly monster, a Lar, perhaps, dug up in the sunny
fields of corn-bearing Sicily.' Some dark antique bronzes contrast
with the pale gleam of two noble Christi Crucifixi, one carved in
ivory, the other moulded in wax.' He has his trays of Tassie's
gems, his tiny Louis-Quatorze bonbonniere with a miniature by
Petitot, his highly prized 'brown-biscuit teapots, filagree-
worked,' his citron morocco letter-case, and his 'pomona-green'
chair.

One can fancy him lying there in the midst of his books and casts
and engravings, a true virtuoso, a subtle connoisseur, turning over
his fine collection of Mare Antonios, and his Turner's 'Liber
Studiorum,' of which he was a warm admirer, or examining with a
magnifier some of his antique gems and cameos, 'the head of
Alexander on an onyx of two strata,' or 'that superb altissimo
relievo on cornelian, Jupiter AEgiochus.' He was always a great
amateur of engravings, and gives some very useful suggestions as to
the best means of forming a collection. Indeed, while fully
appreciating modern art, he never lost sight of the importance of
reproductions of the great masterpieces of the past, and all that
he says about the value of plaster casts is quite admirable.

As an art-critic he concerned himself primarily with the complex
impressions produced by a work of art, and certainly the first step
in aesthetic criticism is to realise one's own impressions. He
cared nothing for abstract discussions on the nature of the
Beautiful, and the historical method, which has since yielded such
rich fruit, did not belong to his day, but he never lost sight of
the great truth that Art's first appeal is neither to the intellect
nor to the emotions, but purely to the artistic temperament, and he
more than once points out that this temperament, this 'taste,' as
he calls it, being unconsciously guided and made perfect by
frequent contact with the best work, becomes in the end a form of
right judgment. Of course there are fashions in art just as there
are fashions in dress, and perhaps none of us can ever quite free
ourselves from the influence of custom and the influence of
novelty. He certainly could not, and he frankly acknowledges how
difficult it is to form any fair estimate of contemporary work.
But, on the whole, his taste was good and sound. He admired Turner
and Constable at a time when they were not so much thought of as
they are now, and saw that for the highest landscape art we require
more than 'mere industry and accurate transcription.' Of Crome's
'Heath Scene near Norwich' he remarks that it shows 'how much a
subtle observation of the elements, in their wild moods, does for a most uninteresting flat,' and of the popular type of landscape of his day he says that it is 'simply an enumeration of hill and dale, stumps of trees, shrubs, water, meadows, cottages and houses; little more than topography, a kind of pictorial map-work; in which rainbows, showers, mists, haloes, large beams shooting through rifted clouds, storms, starlight, all the most valued materials of the real painter, are not.' He had a thorough dislike of what is obvious or commonplace in art, and while he was charmed to entertain Wilkie at dinner, he cared as little for Sir David's pictures as he did for Mr. Crabbe's poems. With the imitative and realistic tendencies of his day he had no sympathy and he tells us frankly that his great admiration for Fuseli was largely due to the fact that the little Swiss did not consider it necessary that an artist should paint only what he sees. The qualities that he sought for in a picture were composition, beauty and dignity of line, richness of colour, and imaginative power. Upon the other hand, he was not a doctrinaire. 'I hold that no work of art can be tried otherwise than by laws deduced from itself: whether or not it be consistent with itself is the question.' This is one of his excellent aphorisms. And in criticising painters so different as Landseer and Martin, Stothard and Etty, he shows that, to use a phrase now classical, he is trying 'to see the object as in itself it really is.'

However, as I pointed out before, he never feels quite at his ease in his criticisms of contemporary work. 'The present,' he says,
'is about as agreeable a confusion to me as Ariosto on the first perusal. . . . Modern things dazzle me. I must look at them through Time's telescope. Elia complains that to him the merit of a MS. poem is uncertain; "print," as he excellently says, "settles it." Fifty years' toning does the same thing to a picture.' He is happier when he is writing about Watteau and Lancret, about Rubens and Giorgione, about Rembrandt, Corregio, and Michael Angelo; happiest of all when he is writing about Greek things. What is Gothic touched him very little, but classical art and the art of the Renaissance were always dear to him. He saw what our English school could gain from a study of Greek models, and never wearies of pointing out to the young student the artistic possibilities that lie dormant in Hellenic marbles and Hellenic methods of work. In his judgments on the great Italian Masters, says De Quincey, 'there seemed a tone of sincerity and of native sensibility, as in one who spoke for himself, and was not merely a copier from books.' The highest praise that we can give to him is that he tried to revive style as a conscious tradition. But he saw that no amount of art lectures or art congresses, or 'plans for advancing the fine arts,' will ever produce this result. The people, he says very wisely, and in the true spirit of Toynbee Hall, must always have 'the best models constantly before their eyes.'

As is to be expected from one who was a painter, he is often extremely technical in his art criticisms. Of Tintoret's 'St. George delivering the Egyptian Princess from the Dragon,' he remarks:-
The robe of Sabra, warmly glazed with Prussian blue, is relieved from the pale greenish background by a vermilion scarf; and the full hues of both are beautifully echoed, as it were, in a lower key by the purple-lake coloured stuffs and bluish iron armour of the saint, besides an ample balance to the vivid azure drapery on the foreground in the indigo shades of the wild wood surrounding the castle.

And elsewhere he talks learnedly of 'a delicate Schiavone, various as a tulip-bed, with rich broken tints,' of 'a glowing portrait, remarkable for morbidezza, by the scarce Moroni,' and of another picture being 'pulpy in the carnations.'

But, as a rule, he deals with his impressions of the work as an artistic whole, and tries to translate those impressions into words, to give, as it were, the literary equivalent for the imaginative and mental effect. He was one of the first to develop what has been called the art-literature of the nineteenth century, that form of literature which has found in Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Browning, its two most perfect exponents. His description of Lancret's Repas Italien, in which 'a dark-haired girl, "amorous of mischief," lies on the daisy-powdered grass,' is in some respects very charming. Here is his account of 'The Crucifixion,' by Rembrandt. It is extremely characteristic of his style:-
Darkness--sooty, portentous darkness--shrouds the whole scene: only above the accursed wood, as if through a horrid rift in the murky ceiling, a rainy deluge--‘sleety-flaw, discoloured water’--streams down amain, spreading a grisly spectral light, even more horrible than that palpable night. Already the Earth pants thick and fast! the darkened Cross trembles! the winds are dropt--the air is stagnant--a muttering rumble growls underneath their feet, and some of that miserable crowd begin to fly down the hill. The horses snuff the coming terror, and become unmanageable through fear. The moment rapidly approaches when, nearly torn asunder by His own weight, fainting with loss of blood, which now runs in narrower rivulets from His slit veins, His temples and breast drowned in sweat, and His black tongue parched with the fiery death-fever, Jesus cries, ‘I thirst.’ The deadly vinegar is elevated to Him.

His head sinks, and the sacred corpse ‘swings senseless of the cross.’ A sheet of vermilion flame shoots sheer through the air and vanishes; the rocks of Carmel and Lebanon cleave asunder; the sea rolls on high from the sands its black weltering waves. Earth yawns, and the graves give up their dwellers. The dead and the living are mingled together in unnatural conjunction and hurry through the holy city. New prodigies await them there. The veil of the temple--the unpierceable veil--is rent asunder from top to bottom, and that dreaded recess containing the Hebrew mysteries--the fatal ark with the tables and seven-branched candelabrum--is disclosed by the light of unearthly flames to the God-deserted
Rembrandt never painted this sketch, and he was quite right. It would have lost nearly all its charms in losing that perplexing veil of indistinctness which affords such ample range wherein the doubting imagination may speculate. At present it is like a thing in another world. A dark gulf is betwixt us. It is not tangible by the body. We can only approach it in the spirit.

In this passage, written, the author tells us, 'in awe and reverence,' there is much that is terrible, and very much that is quite horrible, but it is not without a certain crude form of power, or, at any rate, a certain crude violence of words, a quality which this age should highly appreciate, as it is its chief defect. It is pleasanter, however, to pass to this description of Giulio Romano's 'Cephalus and Procris':-

We should read Moschus's lament for Bion, the sweet shepherd, before looking at this picture, or study the picture as a preparation for the lament. We have nearly the same images in both. For either victim the high groves and forest dells murmur; the flowers exhale sad perfume from their buds; the nightingale mourns on the craggy lands, and the swallow in the long-winding vales; 'the satyrs, too, and fauns dark-veiled groan,' and the fountain nymphs within the wood melt into tearful waters. The sheep and goats leave their pasture; and oreads, 'who love to scale
the most inaccessible tops of all uprightest rocks,' hurry down
from the song of their wind-courting pines; while the dryads bend
from the branches of the meeting trees, and the rivers moan for
white Procris, 'with many-sobbing streams,'

Filling the far-seen ocean with a voice.

The golden bees are silent on the thymy Hymettus; and the knelling
horn of Aurora's love no more shall scatter away the cold twilight
on the top of Hymettus. The foreground of our subject is a grassy
sunburnt bank, broken into swells and hollows like waves (a sort of
land-breakers), rendered more uneven by many foot-tripping roots
and stumps of trees stocked untimely by the axe, which are again
throwing out light-green shoots. This bank rises rather suddenly
on the right to a clustering grove, penetrable to no star, at the
entrance of which sits the stunned Thessalian king, holding between
his knees that ivory-bright body which was, but an instant agone,
parting the rough boughs with her smooth forehead, and treading
alike on thorns and flowers with jealousy-stung foot--now helpless,
heavy, void of all motion, save when the breeze lifts her thick
hair in mockery.

From between the closely-neighbourd boles astonished nymphs press
forward with loud cries -

And deerskin-vested satyrs, crowned with ivy twists, advance;
And put strange pity in their horned countenance.

Laelaps lies beneath, and shows by his panting the rapid pace of death. On the other side of the group, Virtuous Love with 'vans dejected' holds forth the arrow to an approaching troop of sylvan people, fauns, rams, goats, satyrs, and satyr-mothers, pressing their children tighter with their fearful hands, who hurry along from the left in a sunken path between the foreground and a rocky wall, on whose lowest ridge a brook-guardian pours from her urn her grief-telling waters. Above and more remote than the Ephidryad, another female, rending her locks, appears among the vine-festooned pillars of an unshorn grove. The centre of the picture is filled by shady meadows, sinking down to a river-mouth; beyond is 'the vast strength of the ocean stream,' from whose floor the extinguisher of stars, rosy Aurora, drives furiously up her brine-washed steeds to behold the death-pangs of her rival.

Were this description carefully re-written, it would be quite admirable. The conception of making a prose poem out of paint is excellent. Much of the best modern literature springs from the same aim. In a very ugly and sensible age, the arts borrow, not from life, but from each other.

His sympathies, too, were wonderfully varied. In everything connected with the stage, for instance, he was always extremely interested, and strongly upheld the necessity for archaeological
accuracy in costume and scene-painting. 'In art,' he says in one of his essays, 'whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well'; and he points out that once we allow the intrusion of anachronisms, it becomes difficult to say where the line is to be drawn. In literature, again, like Lord Beaconsfield on a famous occasion, he was 'on the side of the angels.' He was one of the first to admire Keats and Shelley--'the tremulously-sensitive and poetical Shelley,' as he calls him. His admiration for Wordsworth was sincere and profound. He thoroughly appreciated William Blake.

One of the best copies of the 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' that is now in existence was wrought specially for him. He loved Alain Chartier, and Ronsard, and the Elizabethan dramatists, and Chaucer and Chapman, and Petrarch. And to him all the arts were one. 'Our critics,' he remarks with much wisdom, 'seem hardly aware of the identity of the primal seeds of poetry and painting, nor that any true advancement in the serious study of one art co-generates a proportionate perfection in the other'; and he says elsewhere that if a man who does not admire Michael Angelo talks of his love for Milton, he is deceiving either himself or his listeners. To his fellow-contributors in the London Magazine he was always most generous, and praises Barry Cornwall, Allan Cunningham, Hazlitt, Elton, and Leigh Hunt without anything of the malice of a friend. Some of his sketches of Charles Lamb are admirable in their way, and, with the art of the true comedian, borrow their style from their subject:

What can I say of thee more than all know? that thou hadst the
gaiety of a boy with the knowledge of a man: as gentle a heart as
ever sent tears to the eyes.

How wittily would he mistake your meaning, and put in a conceit
most seasonably out of season. His talk without affectation was
compressed, like his beloved Elizabethans, even unto obscurity.
Like grains of fine gold, his sentences would beat out into whole
sheets. He had small mercy on spurious fame, and a caustic
observation on the FASHION FOR MEN OF GENIUS was a standing dish.
Sir Thomas Browne was a 'bosom cronie' of his; so was Burton, and
old Fuller. In his amorous vein he dallied with that peerless
Duchess of many-folio odour; and with the heyday comedies of
Beaumont and Fletcher he induced light dreams. He would deliver
critical touches on these, like one inspired, but it was good to
let him choose his own game; if another began even on the
acknowledged pets he was liable to interrupt, or rather append, in
a mode difficult to define whether as misapprehensive or
mischievous. One night at C-'s, the above dramatic partners were
the temporary subject of chat. Mr. X. commended the passion and
haughty style of a tragedy (I don't know which of them), but was
instantly taken up by Elia, who told him 'THAT was nothing; the
lyrics were the high things--the lyrics!'

One side of his literary career deserves especial notice. Modern
journalism may be said to owe almost as much to him as to any man
of the early part of this century. He was the pioneer of Asiatic
prose, and delighted in pictorial epithets and pompous
exaggerations. To have a style so gorgeous that it conceals the
subject is one of the highest achievements of an important and much
admired school of Fleet Street leader-writers, and this school
Janus Weathercock may be said to have invented. He also saw that
it was quite easy by continued reiteration to make the public
interested in his own personality, and in his purely journalistic
articles this extraordinary young man tells the world what he had
for dinner, where he gets his clothes, what wines he likes, and in
what state of health he is, just as if he were writing weekly notes
for some popular newspaper of our own time. This being the least
valuable side of his work, is the one that has had the most obvious
influence. A publicist, nowadays, is a man who bores the community
with the details of the illegalities of his private life.

Like most artificial people, he had a great love of nature. 'I
hold three things in high estimation,' he says somewhere: 'to sit
lazily on an eminence that commands a rich prospect; to be shadowed
by thick trees while the sun shines around me; and to enjoy
solitude with the consciousness of neighbourhood. The country
gives them all to me.' He writes about his wandering over fragrant
furze and heath repeating Collins's 'Ode to Evening,' just to catch
the fine quality of the moment; about smothering his face 'in a
watery bed of cowslips, wet with May dews'; and about the pleasure
of seeing the sweet-breathed kine 'pass slowly homeward through the
twilight,' and hearing 'the distant clank of the sheep-bell.' One
phrase of his, 'the polyanthus glowed in its cold bed of earth,
like a solitary picture of Giorgione on a dark oaken panel,' is
curiously characteristic of his temperament, and this passage is rather pretty in its way:-

The short tender grass was covered with marguerites—'such that men called DAISIES in our town'—thick as stars on a summer's night. The harsh caw of the busy rooks came pleasantly mellowed from a high dusky grove of elms at some distance off, and at intervals was heard the voice of a boy scaring away the birds from the newly-sown seeds. The blue depths were the colour of the darkest ultramarine; not a cloud streaked the calm aether; only round the horizon's edge streamed a light, warm film of misty vapour, against which the near village with its ancient stone church showed sharply out with blinding whiteness. I thought of Wordsworth's 'Lines written in March.'

However, we must not forget that the cultivated young man who penned these lines, and who was so susceptible to Wordsworthian influences, was also, as I said at the beginning of this memoir, one of the most subtle and secret poisoners of this or any age. How he first became fascinated by this strange sin he does not tell us, and the diary in which he carefully noted the results of his terrible experiments and the methods that he adopted, has unfortunately been lost to us. Even in later days, too, he was always reticent on the matter, and preferred to speak about 'The Excursion,' and the 'Poems founded on the Affections.' There is no doubt, however, that the poison that he used was strychnine. In one of the beautiful rings of which he was so proud, and which
served to show off the fine modelling of his delicate ivory hands, he used to carry crystals of the Indian nux vomica, a poison, one of his biographers tells us, 'nearly tasteless, difficult of discovery, and capable of almost infinite dilution.' His murders, says De Quincey, were more than were ever made known judicially. This is no doubt so, and some of them are worthy of mention. His first victim was his uncle, Mr. Thomas Griffiths. He poisoned him in 1829 to gain possession of Linden House, a place to which he had always been very much attached. In the August of the next year he poisoned Mrs. Abercrombie, his wife's mother, and in the following December he poisoned the lovely Helen Abercrombie, his sister-in-law. Why he murdered Mrs. Abercrombie is not ascertained. It may have been for a caprice, or to quicken some hideous sense of power that was in him, or because she suspected something, or for no reason. But the murder of Helen Abercrombie was carried out by himself and his wife for the sake of a sum of about 18,000 pounds, for which they had insured her life in various offices. The circumstances were as follows. On the 12th of December, he and his wife and child came up to London from Linden House, and took lodgings at No. 12 Conduit Street, Regent Street. With them were the two sisters, Helen and Madeleine Abercrombie. On the evening of the 14th they all went to the play, and at supper that night Helen sickened. The next day she was extremely ill, and Dr. Locock, of Hanover Square, was called in to attend her. She lived till Monday, the 20th, when, after the doctor's morning visit, Mr. and Mrs. Wainewright brought her some poisoned jelly, and then went out for a walk. When they returned Helen Abercrombie was dead. She was about twenty years of age, a tall graceful girl with fair
hair. A very charming red-chalk drawing of her by her brother-in-law is still in existence, and shows how much his style as an artist was influenced by Sir Thomas Lawrence, a painter for whose work he had always entertained a great admiration. De Quincey says that Mrs. Wainewright was not really privy to the murder. Let us hope that she was not. Sin should be solitary, and have no accomplices.

The insurance companies, suspecting the real facts of the case, declined to pay the policy on the technical ground of misrepresentation and want of interest, and, with curious courage, the poisoner entered an action in the Court of Chancery against the Imperial, it being agreed that one decision should govern all the cases. The trial, however, did not come on for five years, when, after one disagreement, a verdict was ultimately given in the companies’ favour. The judge on the occasion was Lord Abinger. Egomet Bonmot was represented by Mr. Erle and Sir William Follet, and the Attorney-General and Sir Frederick Pollock appeared for the other side. The plaintiff, unfortunately, was unable to be present at either of the trials. The refusal of the companies to give him the 18,000 pounds had placed him in a position of most painful pecuniary embarrassment. Indeed, a few months after the murder of Helen Abercrombie, he had been actually arrested for debt in the streets of London while he was serenading the pretty daughter of one of his friends. This difficulty was got over at the time, but shortly afterwards he thought it better to go abroad till he could come to some practical arrangement with his creditors. He
accordingly went to Boulogne on a visit to the father of the young lady in question, and while he was there induced him to insure his life with the Pelican Company for 3000 pounds. As soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through and the policy executed, he dropped some crystals of strychnine into his coffee as they sat together one evening after dinner. He himself did not gain any monetary advantage by doing this. His aim was simply to revenge himself on the first office that had refused to pay him the price of his sin. His friend died the next day in his presence, and he left Boulogne at once for a sketching tour through the most picturesque parts of Brittany, and was for some time the guest of an old French gentleman, who had a beautiful country house at St. Omer. From this he moved to Paris, where he remained for several years, living in luxury, some say, while others talk of his 'skulking with poison in his pocket, and being dreaded by all who knew him.' In 1837 he returned to England privately. Some strange mad fascination brought him back. He followed a woman whom he loved.

It was the month of June, and he was staying at one of the hotels in Covent Garden. His sitting-room was on the ground floor, and he prudently kept the blinds down for fear of being seen. Thirteen years before, when he was making his fine collection of majolica and Marc Antonios, he had forged the names of his trustees to a power of attorney, which enabled him to get possession of some of the money which he had inherited from his mother, and had brought into marriage settlement. He knew that this forgery had been
discovered, and that by returning to England he was imperilling his life. Yet he returned. Should one wonder? It was said that the woman was very beautiful. Besides, she did not love him.

It was by a mere accident that he was discovered. A noise in the street attracted his attention, and, in his artistic interest in modern life, he pushed aside the blind for a moment. Some one outside called out, 'That's Wainewright, the Bank-forger.' It was Forrester, the Bow Street runner.

On the 5th of July he was brought up at the Old Bailey. The following report of the proceedings appeared in the Times:-

Before Mr. Justice Vaughan and Mr. Baron Alderson, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, aged forty-two, a man of gentlemanly appearance, wearing mustachios, was indicted for forging and uttering a certain power of attorney for 2259 pounds, with intent to defraud the Governor and Company of the Bank of England.

There were five indictments against the prisoner, to all of which he pleaded not guilty, when he was arraigned before Mr. Serjeant Arabin in the course of the morning. On being brought before the judges, however, he begged to be allowed to withdraw the former plea, and then pleaded guilty to two of the indictments which were not of a capital nature.
The counsel for the Bank having explained that there were three other indictments, but that the Bank did not desire to shed blood, the plea of guilty on the two minor charges was recorded, and the prisoner at the close of the session sentenced by the Recorder to transportation for life.

He was taken back to Newgate, preparatory to his removal to the colonies. In a fanciful passage in one of his early essays he had fancied himself ‘lying in Horsemonger Gaol under sentence of death’ for having been unable to resist the temptation of stealing some Marc Antonios from the British Museum in order to complete his collection. The sentence now passed on him was to a man of his culture a form of death. He complained bitterly of it to his friends, and pointed out, with a good deal of reason, some people may fancy, that the money was practically his own, having come to him from his mother, and that the forgery, such as it was, had been committed thirteen years before, which, to use his own phrase, was at least a circonstance attenuante. The permanence of personality is a very subtle metaphysical problem, and certainly the English law solves the question in an extremely rough-and-ready manner. There is, however, something dramatic in the fact that this heavy punishment was inflicted on him for what, if we remember his fatal influence on the prose of modern journalism, was certainly not the worst of all his sins.

While he was in gaol, Dickens, Macready, and Hablot Browne came
across him by chance. They had been going over the prisons of
London, searching for artistic effects, and in Newgate they
suddenly caught sight of Wainewright. He met them with a defiant
stare, Forster tells us, but Macready was 'horrified to recognise a
man familiarly known to him in former years, and at whose table he
had dined.'

Others had more curiosity, and his cell was for some time a kind of
fashionable lounge. Many men of letters went down to visit their
old literary comrade. But he was no longer the kind light-hearted
Janus whom Charles Lamb admired. He seems to have grown quite
cynical.

To the agent of an insurance company who was visiting him one
afternoon, and thought he would improve the occasion by pointing
out that, after all, crime was a bad speculation, he replied:
'Sir, you City men enter on your speculations, and take the chances
of them. Some of your speculations succeed, some fail. Mine
happen to have failed, yours happen to have succeeded. That is the
only difference, sir, between my visitor and me. But, sir, I will
tell you one thing in which I have succeeded to the last. I have
been determined through life to hold the position of a gentleman.
I have always done so. I do so still. It is the custom of this
place that each of the inmates of a cell shall take his morning's
turn of sweeping it out. I occupy a cell with a bricklayer and a
sweep, but they never offer me the broom!' When a friend
reproached him with the murder of Helen Abercrombie he shrugged his
shoulders and said, 'Yes; it was a dreadful thing to do, but she had very thick ankles.'

From Newgate he was brought to the hulks at Portsmouth, and sent from there in the Susan to Van Diemen's Land along with three hundred other convicts. The voyage seems to have been most distasteful to him, and in a letter written to a friend he spoke bitterly about the ignominy of 'the companion of poets and artists' being compelled to associate with 'country bumpkins.' The phrase that he applies to his companions need not surprise us. Crime in England is rarely the result of sin. It is nearly always the result of starvation. There was probably no one on board in whom he would have found a sympathetic listener, or even a psychologically interesting nature.

His love of art, however, never deserted him. At Hobart Town he started a studio, and returned to sketching and portrait-painting, and his conversation and manners seem not to have lost their charm. Nor did he give up his habit of poisoning, and there are two cases on record in which he tried to make away with people who had offended him. But his hand seems to have lost its cunning. Both of his attempts were complete failures, and in 1844, being thoroughly dissatisfied with Tasmanian society, he presented a memorial to the governor of the settlement, Sir John Eardley Wilmot, praying for a ticket-of-leave. In it he speaks of himself as being 'tormented by ideas struggling for outward form and realisation, barred up from increase of knowledge, and deprived of
the exercise of profitable or even of decorous speech.’ His request, however, was refused, and the associate of Coleridge consoled himself by making those marvellous Paradis Artificiels whose secret is only known to the eaters of opium. In 1852 he died of apoplexy, his sole living companion being a cat, for which he had evinced at extraordinary affection.

His crimes seem to have had an important effect upon his art. They gave a strong personality to his style, a quality that his early work certainly lacked. In a note to the Life of Dickens, Forster mentions that in 1847 Lady Blessington received from her brother, Major Power, who held a military appointment at Hobart Town, an oil portrait of a young lady from his clever brush; and it is said that ‘he had contrived to put the expression of his own wickedness into the portrait of a nice, kind-hearted girl.’ M. Zola, in one of his novels, tells us of a young man who, having committed a murder, takes to art, and paints greenish impressionist portraits of perfectly respectable people, all of which bear a curious resemblance to his victim. The development of Mr. Wainewright's style seems to me far more subtle and suggestive. One can fancy an intense personality being created out of sin.

This strange and fascinating figure that for a few years dazzled literary London, and made so brilliant a debut in life and letters, is undoubtedly a most interesting study. Mr. W. Carew Hazlitt, his latest biographer, to whom I am indebted for many of the facts contained in this memoir, and whose little book is, indeed, quite
invaluable in its way, is of opinion that his love of art and
nature was a mere pretence and assumption, and others have denied
to him all literary power. This seems to me a shallow, or at least
a mistaken, view. The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing
against his prose. The domestic virtues are not the true basis of
art, though they may serve as an excellent advertisement for
second-rate artists. It is possible that De Quincey exaggerated
his critical powers, and I cannot help saying again that there is
much in his published works that is too familiar, too common, too
journalistic, in the bad sense of that bad word. Here and there he
is distinctly vulgar in expression, and he is always lacking in the
self-restraint of the true artist. But for some of his faults we
must blame the time in which he lived, and, after all, prose that
Charles Lamb thought 'capital' has no small historic interest.
That he had a sincere love of art and nature seems to me quite
certain. There is no essential incongruity between crime and
culture. We cannot re-write the whole of history for the purpose
of gratifying our moral sense of what should be.

Of course, he is far too close to our own time for us to be able to
form any purely artistic judgment about him. It is impossible not
to feel a strong prejudice against a man who might have poisoned
Lord Tennyson, or Mr. Gladstone, or the Master of Balliol. But had
the man worn a costume and spoken a language different from our
own, had he lived in imperial Rome, or at the time of the Italian
Renaissance, or in Spain in the seventeenth century, or in any land
or any century but this century and this land, we would be quite
able to arrive at a perfectly unprejudiced estimate of his position
and value. I know that there are many historians, or at least
writers on historical subjects, who still think it necessary to
apply moral judgments to history, and who distribute their praise
or blame with the solemn complacency of a successful schoolmaster.
This, however, is a foolish habit, and merely shows that the moral
instinct can be brought to such a pitch of perfection that it will
make its appearance wherever it is not required. Nobody with the
true historical sense ever dreams of blaming Nero, or scolding
Tiberius, or censuring Caesar Borgia. These personages have become
like the puppets of a play. They may fill us with terror, or
horror, or wonder, but they do not harm us. They are not in
immediate relation to us. We have nothing to fear from them. They
have passed into the sphere of art and science, and neither art nor
science knows anything of moral approval or disapproval. And so it
may be some day with Charles Lamb's friend. At present I feel that
he is just a little too modern to be treated in that fine spirit of
disinterested curiosity to which we owe so many charming studies of
the great criminals of the Italian Renaissance from the pens of Mr.
John Addington Symonds, Miss A. Mary F. Robinson, Miss Vernon Lee,
and other distinguished writers. However, Art has not forgotten
him. He is the hero of Dickens's Hunted Down, the Varney of
Bulwer's Lucretia; and it is gratifying to note that fiction has
paid some homage to one who was so powerful with 'pen, pencil and
poison.' To be suggestive for fiction is to be of more importance
than a fact.
THE CRITIC AS ARTIST: WITH SOME REMARKS UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING NOTHING


GILBERT (at the Piano). My dear Ernest, what are you laughing at?

ERNEST (looking up). At a capital story that I have just come across in this volume of Reminiscences that I have found on your table.

GILBERT. What is the book? Ah! I see. I have not read it yet. Is it good?

ERNEST. Well, while you have been playing, I have been turning over the pages with some amusement, though, as a rule, I dislike modern memoirs. They are generally written by people who have either entirely lost their memories, or have never done anything worth remembering; which, however, is, no doubt, the true explanation of their popularity, as the English public always feels perfectly at its ease when a mediocrity is talking to it.

GILBERT. Yes: the public is wonderfully tolerant. It forgives everything except genius. But I must confess that I like all
memoirs. I like them for their form, just as much as for their
matter. In literature mere egotism is delightful. It is what
fascinates us in the letters of personalities so different as
Cicero and Balzac, Flaubert and Berlioz, Byron and Madame de
Sevigne. Whenever we come across it, and, strangely enough, it is
rather rare, we cannot but welcome it, and do not easily forget it.
Humanity will always love Rousseau for having confessed his sins,
ot to a priest, but to the world, and the couchant nymphs that
Cellini wrought in bronze for the castle of King Francis, the green
and gold Perseus, even, that in the open Loggia at Florence shows
the moon the dead terror that once turned life to stone, have not
given it more pleasure than has that autobiography in which the
supreme scoundrel of the Renaissance relates the story of his
splendour and his shame. The opinions, the character, the
achievements of the man, matter very little. He may be a sceptic
like the gentle Sieur de Montaigne, or a saint like the bitter son
of Monica, but when he tells us his own secrets he can always charm
our ears to listening and our lips to silence. The mode of thought
that Cardinal Newman represented--if that can be called a mode of
thought which seeks to solve intellectual problems by a denial of
the supremacy of the intellect--may not, cannot, I think, survive.
But the world will never weary of watching that troubled soul in
its progress from darkness to darkness. The lonely church at
Littlemore, where 'the breath of the morning is damp, and
worshippers are few,' will always be dear to it, and whenever men
see the yellow snapdragon blossoming on the wall of Trinity they
will think of that gracious undergraduate who saw in the flower's
sure recurrence a prophecy that he would abide for ever with the
Benign Mother of his days—a prophecy that Faith, in her wisdom or her folly, suffered not to be fulfilled. Yes; autobiography is irresistible. Poor, silly, conceited Mr. Secretary Pepys has chattered his way into the circle of the Immortals, and, conscious that indiscretion is the better part of valour, bustles about among them in that 'shaggy purple gown with gold buttons and looped lace' which he is so fond of describing to us, perfectly at his ease, and prattling, to his own and our infinite pleasure, of the Indian blue petticoat that he bought for his wife, of the 'good hog's harslet,' and the 'pleasant French fricassee of veal' that he loved to eat, of his game of bowls with Will Joyce, and his 'gadding after beauties,' and his reciting of Hamlet on a Sunday, and his playing of the viol on week days, and other wicked or trivial things. Even in actual life egotism is not without its attractions. When people talk to us about others they are usually dull. When they talk to us about themselves they are nearly always interesting, and if one could shut them up, when they become wearisome, as easily as one can shut up a book of which one has grown wearied, they would be perfect absolutely.

ERNEST. There is much virtue in that If, as Touchstone would say. But do you seriously propose that every man should become his own Boswell? What would become of our industrious compilers of Lives and Recollections in that case?

GILBERT. What has become of them? They are the pest of the age, nothing more and nothing less. Every great man nowadays has his
disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography.

ERNEST. My dear fellow!

GILBERT. I am afraid it is true. Formerly we used to canonise our heroes. The modern method is to vulgarise them. Cheap editions of great books may be delightful, but cheap editions of great men are absolutely detestable.

ERNEST. May I ask, Gilbert, to whom you allude?

GILBERT. Oh! to all our second-rate litterateurs. We are overrun by a set of people who, when poet or painter passes away, arrive at the house along with the undertaker, and forget that their one duty is to behave as mutes. But we won't talk about them. They are the mere body-snatchers of literature. The dust is given to one, and the ashes to another, and the soul is out of their reach. And now, let me play Chopin to you, or Dvorak? Shall I play you a fantasy by Dvorak? He writes passionate, curiously-coloured things.

ERNEST. No; I don't want music just at present. It is far too indefinite. Besides, I took the Baroness Bernstein down to dinner last night, and, though absolutely charming in every other respect, she insisted on discussing music as if it were actually written in the German language. Now, whatever music sounds like I am glad to
say that it does not sound in the smallest degree like German.

There are forms of patriotism that are really quite degrading. No;
Gilbert, don't play any more. Turn round and talk to me. Talk to
me till the white-horned day comes into the room. There is
something in your voice that is wonderful.

GILBERT (rising from the piano). I am not in a mood for talking
to-night. I really am not. How horrid of you to smile! Where are
the cigarettes? Thanks. How exquisite these single daffodils are!
They seem to be made of amber and cool ivory. They are like Greek
things of the best period. What was the story in the confessions
of the remorseful Academician that made you laugh? Tell it to me.
After playing Chopin, I feel as if I had been weeping over sins
that I had never committed, and mourning over tragedies that were
not my own. Music always seems to me to produce that effect. It
creates for one a past of which one has been ignorant, and fills
one with a sense of sorrows that have been hidden from one's tears.
I can fancy a man who had led a perfectly commonplace life, hearing
by chance some curious piece of music, and suddenly discovering
that his soul, without his being conscious of it, had passed
through terrible experiences, and known fearful joys, or wild
romantic loves, or great renunciations. And so tell me this story,
Ernest. I want to be amused.

ERNEST. Oh! I don't know that it is of any importance. But I
thought it a really admirable illustration of the true value of
ordinary art-criticism. It seems that a lady once gravely asked
the remorseful Academician, as you call him, if his celebrated picture of 'A Spring-Day at Whiteley's,' or, 'Waiting for the Last Omnibus,' or some subject of that kind, was all painted by hand?

GILBERT. And was it?

ERNEST. You are quite incorrigible. But, seriously speaking, what is the use of art-criticism? Why cannot the artist be left alone, to create a new world if he wishes it, or, if not, to shadow forth the world which we already know, and of which, I fancy, we would each one of us be wearied if Art, with her fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection, did not, as it were, purify it for us, and give to it a momentary perfection. It seems to me that the imagination spreads, or should spread, a solitude around it, and works best in silence and in isolation. Why should the artist be troubled by the shrill clamour of criticism? Why should those who cannot create take upon themselves to estimate the value of creative work? What can they know about it? If a man's work is easy to understand, an explanation is unnecessary. . . .

GILBERT. And if his work is incomprehensible, an explanation is wicked.

ERNEST. I did not say that.
GILBERT. Ah! but you should have. Nowadays, we have so few mysteries left to us that we cannot afford to part with one of them. The members of the Browning Society, like the theologians of the Broad Church Party, or the authors of Mr. Walter Scott's Great Writers Series, seem to me to spend their time in trying to explain their divinity away. Where one had hoped that Browning was a mystic they have sought to show that he was simply inarticulate. Where one had fancied that he had something to conceal, they have proved that he had but little to reveal. But I speak merely of his incoherent work. Taken as a whole the man was great. He did not belong to the Olympians, and had all the incompleteness of the Titan. He did not survey, and it was but rarely that he could sing. His work is marred by struggle, violence and effort, and he passed not from emotion to form, but from thought to chaos. Still, he was great. He has been called a thinker, and was certainly a man who was always thinking, and always thinking aloud; but it was not thought that fascinated him, but rather the processes by which thought moves. It was the machine he loved, not what the machine makes. The method by which the fool arrives at his folly was as dear to him as the ultimate wisdom of the wise. So much, indeed, did the subtle mechanism of mind fascinate him that he despised language, or looked upon it as an incomplete instrument of expression. Rhyme, that exquisite echo which in the Muse's hollow hill creates and answers its own voice; rhyme, which in the hands of the real artist becomes not merely a material element of metrical beauty, but a spiritual element of thought and passion also, waking a new mood, it may be, or stirring a fresh train of ideas, or opening by mere sweetness and suggestion of sound some
golden door at which the Imagination itself had knocked in vain; rhyme, which can turn man's utterance to the speech of gods; rhyme, the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre, became in Robert Browning's hands a grotesque, misshapen thing, which at times made him masquerade in poetry as a low comedian, and ride Pegasus too often with his tongue in his cheek. There are moments when he wounds us by monstrous music. Nay, if he can only get his music by breaking the strings of his lute, he breaks them, and they snap in discord, and no Athenian tettix, making melody from tremulous wings, lights on the ivory horn to make the movement perfect, or the interval less harsh. Yet, he was great: and though he turned language into ignoble clay, he made from it men and women that live. He is the most Shakespearian creature since Shakespeare. If Shakespeare could sing with myriad lips, Browning could stammer through a thousand mouths. Even now, as I am speaking, and speaking not against him but for him, there glides through the room the pageant of his persons. There, creeps Fra Lippo Lippi with his cheeks still burning from some girl's hot kiss. There, stands dread Saul with the lordly male-sapphires gleaming in his turban. Mildred Tresham is there, and the Spanish monk, yellow with hatred, and Blougram, and Ben Ezra, and the Bishop of St. Praxed's. The spawn of Setebos gibbers in the corner, and Sebald, hearing Pippa pass by, looks on Ottima's haggard face, and loathes her and his own sin, and himself. Pale as the white satin of his doublet, the melancholy king watches with dreamy treacherous eyes too loyal Strafford pass forth to his doom, and Andrea shudders as he hears the cousins whistle in the garden, and bids his perfect wife go down. Yes, Browning was great. And as what will he be remembered?
As a poet? Ah, not as a poet! He will be remembered as a writer of fiction, as the most supreme writer of fiction, it may be, that we have ever had. His sense of dramatic situation was unrivalled, and, if he could not answer his own problems, he could at least put problems forth, and what more should an artist do? Considered from the point of view of a creator of character he ranks next to him who made Hamlet. Had he been articulate, he might have sat beside him. The only man who can touch the hem of his garment is George Meredith. Meredith is a prose Browning, and so is Browning. He used poetry as a medium for writing in prose.

ERNEST. There is something in what you say, but there is not everything in what you say. In many points you are unjust.

GILBERT. It is difficult not to be unjust to what one loves. But let us return to the particular point at issue. What was it that you said?

ERNEST. Simply this: that in the best days of art there were no art-critics.

GILBERT. I seem to have heard that observation before, Ernest. It has all the vitality of error and all the tediousness of an old friend.
ERNEST. It is true. Yes: there is no use your tossing your head
in that petulant manner. It is quite true. In the best days of
art there were no art-critics. The sculptor hewed from the marble
block the great white-limbed Hermes that slept within it. The
waxers and gilders of images gave tone and texture to the statue,
and the world, when it saw it, worshipped and was dumb. He poured
the glowing bronze into the mould of sand, and the river of red
metal cooled into noble curves and took the impress of the body of
a god. With enamel or polished jewels he gave sight to the
sightless eyes. The hyacinth-like curls grew crisp beneath his
graver. And when, in some dim frescoed fane, or pillared sunlit
portico, the child of Leto stood upon his pedestal, those who
passed by, [Greek text which cannot be reproduced], became
conscious of a new influence that had come across their lives, and
dreamily, or with a sense of strange and quickening joy, went to
their homes or daily labour, or wandered, it may be, through the
city gates to that nymph-haunted meadow where young Phaedrus bathed
his feet, and, lying there on the soft grass, beneath the tall
wind--whispering planes and flowering agnus castus, began to think
of the wonder of beauty, and grew silent with unaccustomed awe. In
those days the artist was free. From the river valley he took the
fine clay in his fingers, and with a little tool of wood or bone,
fashioned it into forms so exquisite that the people gave them to
the dead as their playthings, and we find them still in the dusty
tombs on the yellow hillside by Tanagra, with the faint gold and
the fading crimson still lingering about hair and lips and raiment.
On a wall of fresh plaster, stained with bright sandyx or mixed
with milk and saffron, he pictured one who trod with tired feet the
purple white-starred fields of asphodel, one 'in whose eyelids lay
the whole of the Trojan War,' Polyxena, the daughter of Priam; or
figured Odysseus, the wise and cunning, bound by tight cords to the
mast-step, that he might listen without hurt to the singing of the
Sirens, or wandering by the clear river of Acheron, where the
ghosts of fishes flitted over the pebbly bed; or showed the Persian
in trews and mitre flying before the Greek at Marathon, or the
galleys clashing their beaks of brass in the little Salaminian bay.
He drew with silver-point and charcoal upon parchment and prepared
cedar. Upon ivory and rose-coloured terracotta he painted with
wax, making the wax fluid with juice of olives, and with heated
irons making it firm. Panel and marble and linen canvas became
wonderful as his brush swept across them; and life seeing her own
image, was still, and dared not speak. All life, indeed, was his,
from the merchants seated in the market-place to the cloaked
shepherd lying on the hill; from the nymph hidden in the laurels
and the faun that pipes at noon, to the king whom, in long green-
curtained litter, slaves bore upon oil-bright shoulders, and fanned
with peacock fans. Men and women, with pleasure or sorrow in their
faces, passed before him. He watched them, and their secret became
his. Through form and colour he re-created a world.

All subtle arts belonged to him also. He held the gem against the
revolving disk, and the amethyst became the purple couch for
Adonis, and across the veined sardonyx sped Artemis with her
hounds. He beat out the gold into roses, and strung them together
for necklace or armlet. He beat out the gold into wreaths for the
conqueror's helmet, or into palmates for the Tyrian robe, or into masks for the royal dead. On the back of the silver mirror he graved Thetis borne by her Nereids, or love-sick Phaedra with her nurse, or Persephone, weary of memory, putting poppies in her hair. The potter sat in his shed, and, flower-like from the silent wheel, the vase rose up beneath his hands. He decorated the base and stem and ears with pattern of dainty olive-leaf, or foliated acanthus, or curved and crested wave. Then in black or red he painted lads wrestling, or in the race: knights in full armour, with strange heraldic shields and curious visors, leaning from shell-shaped chariot over rearing steeds: the gods seated at the feast or working their miracles: the heroes in their victory or in their pain. Sometimes he would etch in thin vermilion lines upon a ground of white the languid bridegroom and his bride, with Eros hovering round them--an Eros like one of Donatello's angels, a little laughing thing with gilded or with azure wings. On the curved side he would write the name of his friend. [Greek text which cannot be reproduced] or [Greek text which cannot be reproduced] tells us the story of his days. Again, on the rim of the wide flat cup he would draw the stag browsing, or the lion at rest, as his fancy willed it. From the tiny perfume-bottle laughed Aphrodite at her toilet, and, with bare-limbed Maenads in his train, Dionysus danced round the wine-jar on naked must-stained feet, while, satyr-like, the old Silenus sprawled upon the bloated skins, or shook that magic spear which was tipped with a fretted fir-cone, and wreathed with dark ivy. And no one came to trouble the artist at his work. No irresponsible chatter disturbed him. He was not worried by opinions. By the Ilyssus, says Arnold
somewhere, there was no Higginbotham. By the Ilyssus, my dear Gilbert, there were no silly art congresses bringing provincialism to the provinces and teaching the mediocrity how to mouth. By the Ilyssus there were no tedious magazines about art, in which the industrious prattle of what they do not understand. On the reed-grown banks of that little stream strutted no ridiculous journalism monopolising the seat of judgment when it should be apologising in the dock. The Greeks had no art-critics.

GILBERT. Ernest, you are quite delightful, but your views are terribly unsound. I am afraid that you have been listening to the conversation of some one older than yourself. That is always a dangerous thing to do, and if you allow it to degenerate into a habit you will find it absolutely fatal to any intellectual development. As for modern journalism, it is not my business to defend it. It justifies its own existence by the great Darwinian principle of the survival of the vulgarest. I have merely to do with literature.

ERNEST. But what is the difference between literature and journalism?

GILBERT. Oh! journalism is unreadable, and literature is not read. That is all. But with regard to your statement that the Greeks had no art-critics, I assure you that is quite absurd. It would be more just to say that the Greeks were a nation of art-critics.
ERNEST. Really?

GILBERT. Yes, a nation of art-critics. But I don't wish to destroy the delightfully unreal picture that you have drawn of the relation of the Hellenic artist to the intellectual spirit of his age. To give an accurate description of what has never occurred is not merely the proper occupation of the historian, but the inalienable privilege of any man of parts and culture. Still less do I desire to talk learnedly. Learned conversation is either the affectation of the ignorant or the profession of the mentally unemployed. And, as for what is called improving conversation, that is merely the foolish method by which the still more foolish philanthropist feebly tries to disarm the just rancour of the criminal classes. No: let me play to you some mad scarlet thing by Dvorak. The pallid figures on the tapestry are smiling at us, and the heavy eyelids of my bronze Narcissus are folded in sleep. Don't let us discuss anything solemnly. I am but too conscious of the fact that we are born in an age when only the dull are treated seriously, and I live in terror of not being misunderstood. Don't degrade me into the position of giving you useful information. Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught. Through the parted curtains of the window I see the moon like a clipped piece of silver. Like gilded bees the stars cluster round her. The sky is a hard hollow sapphire. Let us go out into the night. Thought is wonderful, but adventure is more wonderful
still. Who knows but we may meet Prince Florizel of Bohemia, and
hear the fair Cuban tell us that she is not what she seems?

ERNEST. You are horribly wilful. I insist on your discussing this
matter with me. You have said that the Greeks were a nation of
art-critics. What art-criticism have they left us?

GILBERT. My dear Ernest, even if not a single fragment of art-
criticism had come down to us from Hellenic or Hellenistic days, it
would be none the less true that the Greeks were a nation of art-
critics, and that they invented the criticism of art just as they
invented the criticism of everything else. For, after all, what is
our primary debt to the Greeks? Simply the critical spirit. And,
this spirit, which they exercised on questions of religion and
science, of ethics and metaphysics, of politics and education, they
exercised on questions of art also, and, indeed, of the two supreme
and highest arts, they have left us the most flawless system of
criticism that the world has ever seen.

ERNEST. But what are the two supreme and highest arts?

GILBERT. Life and Literature, life and the perfect expression of
life. The principles of the former, as laid down by the Greeks, we
may not realise in an age so marred by false ideals as our own.
The principles of the latter, as they laid them down, are, in many
cases, so subtle that we can hardly understand them. Recognising
that the most perfect art is that which most fully mirrors man in all his infinite variety, they elaborated the criticism of language, considered in the light of the mere material of that art, to a point to which we, with our accentual system of reasonable or emotional emphasis, can barely if at all attain; studying, for instance, the metrical movements of a prose as scientifically as a modern musician studies harmony and counterpoint, and, I need hardly say, with much keener aesthetic instinct. In this they were right, as they were right in all things. Since the introduction of printing, and the fatal development of the habit of reading amongst the middle and lower classes of this country, there has been a tendency in literature to appeal more and more to the eye, and less and less to the ear which is really the sense which, from the standpoint of pure art, it should seek to please, and by whose canons of pleasure it should abide always. Even the work of Mr. Pater, who is, on the whole, the most perfect master of English prose now creating amongst us, is often far more like a piece of mosaic than a passage in music, and seems, here and there, to lack the true rhythmic life of words and the fine freedom and richness of effect that such rhythmic life produces. We, in fact, have made writing a definite mode of composition, and have treated it as a form of elaborate design. The Greeks, upon the other hand, regarded writing simply as a method of chronicling. Their test was always the spoken word in its musical and metrical relations. The voice was the medium, and the ear the critic. I have sometimes thought that the story of Homer's blindness might be really an artistic myth, created in critical days, and serving to remind us, not merely that the great poet is always a seer, seeing less with
the eyes of the body than he does with the eyes of the soul, but
that he is a true singer also, building his song out of music,
repeating each line over and over again to himself till he has
captured the secret of its melody, chanting in darkness the words
that are winged with light. Certainly, whether this be so or not,
it was to his blindness, as an occasion, if not as a cause, that
England's great poet owed much of the majestic movement and
sonorous splendour of his later verse. When Milton could no longer
write he began to sing. Who would match the measures of Comus with
the measures of Samson Agonistes, or of Paradise Lost or Regained?
When Milton became blind he composed, as every one should compose,
with the voice purely, and so the pipe or reed of earlier days
became that mighty many-stopped organ whose rich reverberant music
has all the stateliness of Homeric verse, if it seeks not to have
its swiftness, and is the one imperishable inheritance of English
literature sweeping through all the ages, because above them, and
abiding with us ever, being immortal in its form. Yes: writing
has done much harm to writers. We must return to the voice. That
must be our test, and perhaps then we shall be able to appreciate
some of the subtleties of Greek art-criticism.

As it now is, we cannot do so. Sometimes, when I have written a
piece of prose that I have been modest enough to consider
absolutely free from fault, a dreadful thought comes over me that I
may have been guilty of the immoral effeminacy of using trochaic
and tribrachic movements, a crime for which a learned critic of the
Augustan age censures with most just severity the brilliant if
somewhat paradoxical Hegesias. I grow cold when I think of it, and wonder to myself if the admirable ethical effect of the prose of that charming writer, who once in a spirit of reckless generosity towards the uncultivated portion of our community proclaimed the monstrous doctrine that conduct is three-fourths of life, will not some day be entirely annihilated by the discovery that the paeons have been wrongly placed.

ERNEST. Ah! now you are flippant.

GILBERT. Who would not be flippant when he is gravely told that the Greeks had no art-critics? I can understand it being said that the constructive genius of the Greeks lost itself in criticism, but not that the race to whom we owe the critical spirit did not criticise. You will not ask me to give you a survey of Greek art criticism from Plato to Plotinus. The night is too lovely for that, and the moon, if she heard us, would put more ashes on her face than are there already. But think merely of one perfect little work of aesthetic criticism, Aristotle’s Treatise on Poetry. It is not perfect in form, for it is badly written, consisting perhaps of notes dotted down for an art lecture, or of isolated fragments destined for some larger book, but in temper and treatment it is perfect, absolutely. The ethical effect of art, its importance to culture, and its place in the formation of character, had been done once for all by Plato; but here we have art treated, not from the moral, but from the purely aesthetic point of view. Plato had, of course, dealt with many definitely
artistic subjects, such as the importance of unity in a work of
art, the necessity for tone and harmony, the aesthetic value of
appearances, the relation of the visible arts to the external
world, and the relation of fiction to fact. He first perhaps
stirred in the soul of man that desire that we have not yet
satisfied, the desire to know the connection between Beauty and
Truth, and the place of Beauty in the moral and intellectual order
of the Kosmos. The problems of idealism and realism, as he sets
them forth, may seem to many to be somewhat barren of result in the
metaphysical sphere of abstract being in which he places them, but
transfer them to the sphere of art, and you will find that they are
still vital and full of meaning. It may be that it is as a critic
of Beauty that Plato is destined to live, and that by altering the
name of the sphere of his speculation we shall find a new
philosophy. But Aristotle, like Goethe, deals with art primarily
in its concrete manifestations, taking Tragedy, for instance, and
investigating the material it uses, which is language, its subject-
matter, which is life, the method by which it works, which is
action, the conditions under which it reveals itself, which are
those of theatric presentation, its logical structure, which is
plot, and its final aesthetic appeal, which is to the sense of
beauty realised through the passions of pity and awe. That
purification and spiritualising of the nature which he calls [Greek
text which cannot be reproduced] is, as Goethe saw, essentially
aesthetic, and is not moral, as Lessing fancied. Concerning
himself primarily with the impression that the work of art
produces, Aristotle sets himself to analyse that impression, to
investigate its source, to see how it is engendered. As a
physiologist and psychologist, he knows that the health of a function resides in energy. To have a capacity for a passion and not to realise it, is to make oneself incomplete and limited. The mimic spectacle of life that Tragedy affords cleanses the bosom of much ‘perilous stuff,’ and by presenting high and worthy objects for the exercise of the emotions purifies and spiritualises the man; nay, not merely does it spiritualise him, but it initiates him also into noble feelings of which he might else have known nothing, the word [Greek text which cannot be reproduced] having, it has sometimes seemed to me, a definite allusion to the rite of initiation, if indeed that be not, as I am occasionally tempted to fancy, its true and only meaning here. This is of course a mere outline of the book. But you see what a perfect piece of aesthetic criticism it is. Who indeed but a Greek could have analysed art so well? After reading it, one does not wonder any longer that Alexandria devoted itself so largely to art-criticism, and that we find the artistic temperaments of the day investigating every question of style and manner, discussing the great Academic schools of painting, for instance, such as the school of Sicyon, that sought to preserve the dignified traditions of the antique mode, or the realistic and impressionist schools, that aimed at reproducing actual life, or the elements of ideality in portraiture, or the artistic value of the epic form in an age so modern as theirs, or the proper subject-matter for the artist. Indeed, I fear that the inartistic temperaments of the day busied themselves also in matters of literature and art, for the accusations of plagiarism were endless, and such accusations proceed either from the thin colourless lips of impotence, or from the grotesque mouths of those
who, possessing nothing of their own, fancy that they can gain a reputation for wealth by crying out that they have been robbed.

And I assure you, my dear Ernest, that the Greeks chattered about painters quite as much as people do nowadays, and had their private views, and shilling exhibitions, and Arts and Crafts guilds, and Pre-Raphaelite movements, and movements towards realism, and lectured about art, and wrote essays on art, and produced their art-historians, and their archaeologists, and all the rest of it.

Why, even the theatrical managers of travelling companies brought their dramatic critics with them when they went on tour, and paid them very handsome salaries for writing laudatory notices.

Whatever, in fact, is modern in our life we owe to the Greeks. Whatever is an anachronism is due to mediaevalism. It is the Greeks who have given us the whole system of art-criticism, and how fine their critical instinct was, may be seen from the fact that the material they criticised with most care was, as I have already said, language. For the material that painter or sculptor uses is meagre in comparison with that of words. Words have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, colour as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze, but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, are theirs indeed alone. If the Greeks had criticised nothing but language, they would still have been the great art-critics of the world. To know the principles of the highest art is to know the principles of all the arts.
But I see that the moon is hiding behind a sulphur-coloured cloud.
Out of a tawny mane of drift she gleams like a lion's eye. She is afraid that I will talk to you of Lucian and Longinus, of Quintilian and Dionysius, of Pliny and Fronto and Pausanias, of all those who in the antique world wrote or lectured upon art matters. She need not be afraid. I am tired of my expedition into the dim, dull abyss of facts. There is nothing left for me now but the divine [Greek text which cannot be reproduced] of another cigarette. Cigarettes have at least the charm of leaving one unsatisfied.

ERNEST. Try one of mine. They are rather good. I get them direct from Cairo. The only use of our attaches is that they supply their friends with excellent tobacco. And as the moon has hidden herself, let us talk a little longer. I am quite ready to admit that I was wrong in what I said about the Greeks. They were, as you have pointed out, a nation of art-critics. I acknowledge it, and I feel a little sorry for them. For the creative faculty is higher than the critical. There is really no comparison between them.

GILBERT. The antithesis between them is entirely arbitrary. Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all, worthy of the name. You spoke a little while ago of that fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection by which the artist realises life for us, and gives to it a momentary perfection. Well, that spirit of choice, that subtle tact of
omission, is really the critical faculty in one of its most
classical moods, and no one who does not possess this critical
faculty can create anything at all in art. Arnold’s definition of
literature as a criticism of life was not very felicitous in form,
but it showed how keenly he recognized the importance of the
critical element in all creative work.

ERNEST. I should have said that great artists work unconsciously,
that they were ‘wiser than they knew,’ as, I think, Emerson remarks
somewhere.

GILBERT. It is really not so, Ernest. All fine imaginative work
is self-conscious and deliberate. No poet sings because he must
sing. At least, no great poet does. A great poet sings because he
chooses to sing. It is now, and it has always been so. We are
sometimes apt to think that the voices that sounded at the dawn of
poetry were simpler, fresher, and more natural than ours, and that
the world which the early poets looked at, and through which they
walked, had a kind of poetical quality of its own, and almost
without changing could pass into song. The snow lies thick now
upon Olympus, and its steep scarped sides are bleak and barren, but
once, we fancy, the white feet of the Muses brushed the dew from
the anemones in the morning, and at evening came Apollo to sing to
the shepherds in the vale. But in this we are merely lending to
other ages what we desire, or think we desire, for our own. Our
historical sense is at fault. Every century that produces poetry
is, so far, an artificial century, and the work that seems to us to
be the most natural and simple product of its time is always the result of the most self-conscious effort. Believe me, Ernest, there is no fine art without self-consciousness, and self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one.

ERNEST. I see what you mean, and there is much in it. But surely you would admit that the great poems of the early world, the primitive, anonymous collective poems, were the result of the imagination of races, rather than of the imagination of individuals?

GILBERT. Not when they became poetry. Not when they received a beautiful form. For there is no art where there is no style, and no style where there is no unity, and unity is of the individual. No doubt Homer had old ballads and stories to deal with, as Shakespeare had chronicles and plays and novels from which to work, but they were merely his rough material. He took them, and shaped them into song. They become his, because he made them lovely. They were built out of music,

And so not built at all,
And therefore built for ever.

The longer one studies life and literature, the more strongly one feels that behind everything that is wonderful stands the individual, and that it is not the moment that makes the man, but
the man who creates the age. Indeed, I am inclined to think that each myth and legend that seems to us to spring out of the wonder, or terror, or fancy of tribe and nation, was in its origin the invention of one single mind. The curiously limited number of the myths seems to me to point to this conclusion. But we must not go off into questions of comparative mythology. We must keep to criticism. And what I want to point out is this. An age that has no criticism is either an age in which art is immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types, or an age that possesses no art at all. There have been critical ages that have not been creative, in the ordinary sense of the word, ages in which the spirit of man has sought to set in order the treasures of his treasure-house, to separate the gold from the silver, and the silver from the lead, to count over the jewels, and to give names to the pearls. But there has never been a creative age that has not been critical also. For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms. The tendency of creation is to repeat itself. It is to the critical instinct that we owe each new school that springs up, each new mould that art finds ready to its hand. There is really not a single form that art now uses that does not come to us from the critical spirit of Alexandria, where these forms were either stereotyped or invented or made perfect. I say Alexandria, not merely because it was there that the Greek spirit became most self-conscious, and indeed ultimately expired in scepticism and theology, but because it was to that city, and not to Athens, that Rome turned for her models, and it was through the survival, such as it was, of the Latin language that culture lived at all. When, at the Renaissance, Greek literature dawned upon Europe, the soil...
had been in some measure prepared for it. But, to get rid of the
details of history, which are always wearisome and usually
inaccurate, let us say generally, that the forms of art have been
due to the Greek critical spirit. To it we owe the epic, the
lyric, the entire drama in every one of its developments, including
burlesque, the idyll, the romantic novel, the novel of adventure,
the essay, the dialogue, the oration, the lecture, for which
perhaps we should not forgive them, and the epigram, in all the
wide meaning of that word. In fact, we owe it everything, except
the sonnet, to which, however, some curious parallels of thought-
movement may be traced in the Anthology, American journalism, to
which no parallel can be found anywhere, and the ballad in sham
Scotch dialect, which one of our most industrious writers has
recently proposed should be made the basis for a final and
unanimous effort on the part of our second-rate poets to make
themselves really romantic. Each new school, as it appears, cries
out against criticism, but it is to the critical faculty in man
that it owes its origin. The mere creative instinct does not
innovate, but reproduces.

ERNEST. You have been talking of criticism as an essential part of
the creative spirit, and I now fully accept your theory. But what
of criticism outside creation? I have a foolish habit of reading
periodicals, and it seems to me that most modern criticism is
perfectly valueless.

GILBERT. So is most modern creative work also. Mediocrity
weighing mediocrity in the balance, and incompetence applauding its
brother--that is the spectacle which the artistic activity of
England affords us from time to time. And yet, I feel I am a
little unfair in this matter. As a rule, the critics--I speak, of
course, of the higher class, of those in fact who write for the
sixpenny papers--are far more cultured than the people whose work
they are called upon to review. This is, indeed, only what one
would expect, for criticism demands infinitely more cultivation
than creation does.

ERNEST. Really?

GILBERT. Certainly. Anybody can write a three-volumed novel. It
merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature.
The difficulty that I should fancy the reviewer feels is the
difficulty of sustaining any standard. Where there is no style a
standard must be impossible. The poor reviewers are apparently
reduced to be the reporters of the police-court of literature, the
chroniclers of the doings of the habitual criminals of art. It is
sometimes said of them that they do not read all through the works
they are called upon to criticise. They do not. Or at least they
should not. If they did so, they would become confirmed
misanthropes, or if I may borrow a phrase from one of the pretty
Newnham graduates, confirmed womanthropes for the rest of their
lives. Nor is it necessary. To know the vintage and quality of a
wine one need not drink the whole cask. It must be perfectly easy
in half an hour to say whether a book is worth anything or worth
nothing. Ten minutes are really sufficient, if one has the instinct for form. Who wants to wade through a dull volume? One tastes it, and that is quite enough--more than enough, I should imagine. I am aware that there are many honest workers in painting as well as in literature who object to criticism entirely. They are quite right. Their work stands in no intellectual relation to their age. It brings us no new element of pleasure. It suggests no fresh departure of thought, or passion, or beauty. It should not be spoken of. It should be left to the oblivion that it deserves.

ERNEST. But, my dear fellow--excuse me for interrupting you--you seem to me to be allowing your passion for criticism to lead you a great deal too far. For, after all, even you must admit that it is much more difficult to do a thing than to talk about it.

GILBERT. More difficult to do a thing than to talk about it? Not at all. That is a gross popular error. It is very much more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it. In the sphere of actual life that is of course obvious. Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it. There is no mode of action, no form of emotion, that we do not share with the lower animals. It is only by language that we rise above them, or above each other--by language, which is the parent, and not the child, of thought. Action, indeed, is always easy, and when presented to us in its most aggravated, because most continuous form, which I take to be that of real industry, becomes simply the refuge of people who have
nothing whatsoever to do. No, Ernest, don't talk about action. It is a blind thing dependent on external influences, and moved by an impulse of whose nature it is unconscious. It is a thing incomplete in its essence, because limited by accident, and ignorant of its direction, being always at variance with its aim. Its basis is the lack of imagination. It is the last resource of those who know not how to dream.

ERNEST. Gilbert, you treat the world as if it were a crystal ball. You hold it in your hand, and reverse it to please a wilful fancy. You do nothing but re-write history.

GILBERT. The one duty we owe to history is to re-write it. That is not the least of the tasks in store for the critical spirit. When we have fully discovered the scientific laws that govern life, we shall realise that the one person who has more illusions than the dreamer is the man of action. He, indeed, knows neither the origin of his deeds nor their results. From the field in which he thought that he had sown thorns, we have gathered our vintage, and the fig-tree that he planted for our pleasure is as barren as the thistle, and more bitter. It is because Humanity has never known where it was going that it has been able to find its way.

ERNEST. You think, then, that in the sphere of action a conscious aim is a delusion?
GILBERT. It is worse than a delusion. If we lived long enough to
see the results of our actions it may be that those who call
themselves good would be sickened with a dull remorse, and those
whom the world calls evil stirred by a noble joy. Each little
thing that we do passes into the great machine of life which may
grind our virtues to powder and make them worthless, or transform
our sins into elements of a new civilisation, more marvellous and
more splendid than any that has gone before. But men are the
slaves of words. They rage against Materialism, as they call it,
forgetting that there has been no material improvement that has not
spiritualised the world, and that there have been few, if any,
spiritual awakenings that have not wasted the world's faculties in
barren hopes, and fruitless aspirations, and empty or trammelling
creeds. What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress.
Without it the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become
colourless. By its curiosity Sin increases the experience of the
race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism, it saves
us from monotony of type. In its rejection of the current notions
about morality, it is one with the higher ethics. And as for the
virtues! What are the virtues? Nature, M. Renan tells us, cares
little about chastity, and it may be that it is to the shame of the
Magdalen, and not to their own purity, that the Lucretias of modern
life owe their freedom from stain. Charity, as even those of whose
religion it makes a formal part have been compelled to acknowledge,
creates a multitude of evils. The mere existence of conscience,
that faculty of which people prate so much nowadays, and are so
ignorantly proud, is a sign of our imperfect development. It must
be merged in instinct before we become fine. Self-denial is simply
a method by which man arrests his progress, and self-sacrifice a
survival of the mutilation of the savage, part of that old worship
of pain which is so terrible a factor in the history of the world,
and which even now makes its victims day by day, and has its altars
in the land. Virtues! Who knows what the virtues are? Not you.
Not I. Not any one. It is well for our vanity that we slay the
criminal, for if we suffered him to live he might show us what we
had gained by his crime. It is well for his peace that the saint
goes to his martyrdom. He is spared the sight of the horror of his
harvest.

ERNEST. Gilbert, you sound too harsh a note. Let us go back to
the more gracious fields of literature. What was it you said?
That it was more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it?

GILBERT (after a pause). Yes: I believe I ventured upon that
simple truth. Surely you see now that I am right? When man acts
he is a puppet. When he describes he is a poet. The whole secret
lies in that. It was easy enough on the sandy plains by windy
Ilion to send the notched arrow from the painted bow, or to hurl
against the shield of hide and flamelike brass the long ash-handled
spear. It was easy for the adulterous queen to spread the Tyrian
carpets for her lord, and then, as he lay couched in the marble
bath, to throw over his head the purple net, and call to her
smooth-faced lover to stab through the meshes at the heart that
should have broken at Aulis. For Antigone even, with Death waiting
for her as her bridegroom, it was easy to pass through the tainted
air at noon, and climb the hill, and strew with kindly earth the
wretched naked corse that had no tomb. But what of those who wrote
about these things? What of those who gave them reality, and made
them live for ever? Are they not greater than the men and women
they sing of? 'Hector that sweet knight is dead,' and Lucian tells
us how in the dim under-world Menippus saw the bleaching skull of
Helen, and marvelled that it was for so grim a favour that all
those horned ships were launched, those beautiful mailed men laid
low, those towered cities brought to dust. Yet, every day the
swanlike daughter of Leda comes out on the battlements, and looks
down at the tide of war. The greybeards wonder at her loveliness,
and she stands by the side of the king. In his chamber of stained
ivory lies her leman. He is polishing his dainty armour, and
combing the scarlet plume. With squire and page, her husband
passes from tent to tent. She can see his bright hair, and hears,
or fancies that she hears, that clear cold voice. In the courtyard
below, the son of Priam is buckling on his brazen cuirass. The
white arms of Andromache are around his neck. He sets his helmet
on the ground, lest their babe should be frightened. Behind the
embroidered curtains of his pavilion sits Achilles, in perfumed
raiment, while in harness of gilt and silver the friend of his soul
arrays himself to go forth to the fight. From a curiously carven
chest that his mother Thetis had brought to his ship-side, the Lord
of the Myrmidons takes out that mystic chalice that the lip of man
had never touched, and cleanses it with brimstone, and with fresh
water cools it, and, having washed his hands, fills with black wine
its burnished hollow, and spills the thick grape-blood upon the
ground in honour of Him whom at Dodona barefooted prophets
worshipped, and prays to Him, and knows not that he prays in vain,
and that by the hands of two knights from Troy, Panthous' son,
Euphorbus, whose love-locks were looped with gold, and the Priamid,
the lion-hearted, Patroclus, the comrade of comrades, must meet his
doom. Phantoms, are they? Heroes of mist and mountain? Shadows
in a song? No: they are real. Action! What is action? It dies
at the moment of its energy. It is a base concession to fact. The
world is made by the singer for the dreamer.

ERNEST. While you talk it seems to me to be so.

GILBERT. It is so in truth. On the mouldering citadel of Troy
lies the lizard like a thing of green bronze. The owl has built
her nest in the palace of Priam. Over the empty plain wander
shepherd and goatherd with their flocks, and where, on the wine-
surfaced, oily sea, [Greek text which cannot be reproduced], as
Homer calls it, copper-prowed and streaked with vermilion, the
great galleys of the Danaoi came in their gleaming crescent, the
lonely tunny-fisher sits in his little boat and watches the bobbing
corks of his net. Yet, every morning the doors of the city are
thrown open, and on foot, or in horse-drawn chariot, the warriors
go forth to battle, and mock their enemies from behind their iron
masks. All day long the fight rages, and when night comes the
torches gleam by the tents, and the cresset burns in the hall.
Those who live in marble or on painted panel, know of life but a
single exquisite instant, eternal indeed in its beauty, but limited
to one note of passion or one mood of calm. Those whom the poet makes live have their myriad emotions of joy and terror, of courage and despair, of pleasure and of suffering. The seasons come and go in glad or saddening pageant, and with winged or leaden feet the years pass by before them. They have their youth and their manhood, they are children, and they grow old. It is always dawn for St. Helena, as Veronese saw her at the window. Through the still morning air the angels bring her the symbol of God's pain.

The cool breezes of the morning lift the gilt threads from her brow. On that little hill by the city of Florence, where the lovers of Giorgione are lying, it is always the solstice of noon, of noon made so languorous by summer suns that hardly can the slim naked girl dip into the marble tank the round bubble of clear glass, and the long fingers of the lute-player rest idly upon the chords. It is twilight always for the dancing nymphs whom Corot set free among the silver poplars of France. In eternal twilight they move, those frail diaphanous figures, whose tremulous white feet seem not to touch the dew-drenched grass they tread on. But those who walk in epos, drama, or romance, see through the labouring months the young moons wax and wane, and watch the night from evening unto morning star, and from sunrise unto sunsetting can note the shifting day with all its gold and shadow. For them, as for us, the flowers bloom and wither, and the Earth, that Green-tressed Goddess as Coleridge calls her, alters her raiment for their pleasure. The statue is concentrated to one moment of perfection. The image stained upon the canvas possesses no spiritual element of growth or change. If they know nothing of death, it is because they know little of life, for the secrets of
life and death belong to those, and those only, whom the sequence of time affects, and who possess not merely the present but the future, and can rise or fall from a past of glory or of shame.

Movement, that problem of the visible arts, can be truly realised by Literature alone. It is Literature that shows us the body in its swiftness and the soul in its unrest.

ERNEST. Yes; I see now what you mean. But, surely, the higher you place the creative artist, the lower must the critic rank.

GILBERT. Why so?

ERNEST. Because the best that he can give us will be but an echo of rich music, a dim shadow of clear-outlined form. It may, indeed, be that life is chaos, as you tell me that it is; that its martyrdoms are mean and its heroisms ignoble; and that it is the function of Literature to create, from the rough material of actual existence, a new world that will be more marvellous, more enduring, and more true than the world that common eyes look upon, and through which common natures seek to realise their perfection. But surely, if this new world has been made by the spirit and touch of a great artist, it will be a thing so complete and perfect that there will be nothing left for the critic to do. I quite understand now, and indeed admit most readily, that it is far more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it. But it seems to me that this sound and sensible maxim, which is really extremely
soothing to one's feelings, and should be adopted as its motto by every Academy of Literature all over the world, applies only to the relations that exist between Art and Life, and not to any relations that there may be between Art and Criticism.

GILBERT. But, surely, Criticism is itself an art. And just as artistic creation implies the working of the critical faculty, and, indeed, without it cannot be said to exist at all, so Criticism is really creative in the highest sense of the word. Criticism is, in fact, both creative and independent.

ERNEST. Independent?

GILBERT. Yes; independent. Criticism is no more to be judged by any low standard of imitation or resemblance than is the work of poet or sculptor. The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. He does not even require for the perfection of his art the finest materials. Anything will serve his purpose. And just as out of the sordid and sentimental amours of the silly wife of a small country doctor in the squalid village of Yonville-l'Abbaye, near Rouen, Gustave Flaubert was able to create a classic, and make a masterpiece of style, so, from subjects of little or of no importance, such as the pictures in this year's Royal Academy, or in any year's Royal Academy for that matter, Mr. Lewis Morris's
poems, M. Ohnet's novels, or the plays of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, the true critic can, if it be his pleasure so to direct or waste his faculty of contemplation, produce work that will be flawless in beauty and instinct with intellectual subtlety. Why not? Dulness is always an irresistible temptation for brilliancy, and stupidity is the permanent Bestia Trionfans that calls wisdom from its cave. To an artist so creative as the critic, what does subject-matter signify? No more and no less than it does to the novelist and the painter. Like them, he can find his motives everywhere. Treatment is the test. There is nothing that has not in it suggestion or challenge.

ERNEST. But is Criticism really a creative art?

GILBERT. Why should it not be? It works with materials, and puts them into a form that is at once new and delightful. What more can one say of poetry? Indeed, I would call criticism a creation within a creation. For just as the great artists, from Homer and AEschylus, down to Shakespeare and Keats, did not go directly to life for their subject-matter, but sought for it in myth, and legend, and ancient tale, so the critic deals with materials that others have, as it were, purified for him, and to which imaginative form and colour have been already added. Nay, more, I would say that the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it,
in itself, and to itself, an end. Certainly, it is never
trammelled by any shackles of verisimilitude. No ignoble
considerations of probability, that cowardly concession to the
tedious repetitions of domestic or public life, affect it ever.
One may appeal from fiction unto fact. But from the soul there is
no appeal.

ERNEST. From the soul?

GILBERT. Yes, from the soul. That is what the highest criticism
really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating
than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself. It is more
delightful than philosophy, as its subject is concrete and not
abstract, real and not vague. It is the only civilised form of
autobiography, as it deals not with the events, but with the
thoughts of one's life; not with life's physical accidents of deed
or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative
passions of the mind. I am always amused by the silly vanity of
those writers and artists of our day who seem to imagine that the
primary function of the critic is to chatter about their second-
rate work. The best that one can say of most modern creative art
is that it is just a little less vulgar than reality, and so the
critic, with his fine sense of distinction and sure instinct of
delicate refinement, will prefer to look into the silver mirror or
through the woven veil, and will turn his eyes away from the chaos
and clamour of actual existence, though the mirror be tarnished and
the veil be torn. His sole aim is to chronicle his own
impressions. It is for him that pictures are painted, books
written, and marble hewn into form.

ERNEST. I seem to have heard another theory of Criticism.

GILBERT. Yes: it has been said by one whose gracious memory we
all revere, and the music of whose pipe once lured Proserpina from
her Sicilian fields, and made those white feet stir, and not in
vain, the Cumnor cowslips, that the proper aim of Criticism is to
see the object as in itself it really is. But this is a very
serious error, and takes no cognisance of Criticism's most perfect
form, which is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to
reveal its own secret and not the secret of another. For the
highest Criticism deals with art not as expressive but as
impressive purely.

ERNEST. But is that really so?

GILBERT. Of course it is. Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin's views on
Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and
majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery-coloured in its noble
elocution, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music, so sure and
certain, at its best, in subtle choice of word and epithet, is at
least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that
bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's Gallery;
greater indeed, one is apt to think at times, not merely because
its equal beauty is more enduring, but on account of the fuller
variety of its appeal, soul speaking to soul in those long-cadenced
lines, not through form and colour alone, though through these,
indeed, completely and without loss, but with intellectual and
emotional utterance, with lofty passion and with loftier thought,
with imaginative insight, and with poetic aim; greater, I always
think, even as Literature is the greater art. Who, again, cares
whether Mr. Pater has put into the portrait of Monna Lisa something
that Lionardo never dreamed of? The painter may have been merely
the slave of an archaic smile, as some have fancied, but whenever I
pass into the cool galleries of the Palace of the Louvre, and stand
before that strange figure 'set in its marble chair in that cirque
of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea,' I murmur to
myself, 'She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the
vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of
the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their
fallen day about her: and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern
merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as
St. Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as
the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with
which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the
eyelids and the hands.' And I say to my friend, 'The presence that
thus so strangely rose beside the waters is expressive of what in
the ways of a thousand years man had come to desire'; and he
answers me, 'Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world
are come," and the eyelids are a little weary.'
And so the picture becomes more wonderful to us than it really is, and reveals to us a secret of which, in truth, it knows nothing, and the music of the mystical prose is as sweet in our ears as was that flute-player's music that lent to the lips of La Gioconda those subtle and poisonous curves. Do you ask me what Lionardo would have said had any one told him of this picture that "all the thoughts and experience of the world had etched and moulded therein that which they had of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the reverie of the Middle Age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias?" He would probably have answered that he had contemplated none of these things, but had concerned himself simply with certain arrangements of lines and masses, and with new and curious colour-harmonies of blue and green. And it is for this very reason that the criticism which I have quoted is criticism of the highest kind. It treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation. It does not confine itself--let us at least suppose so for the moment--to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final. And in this it is right, for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it, as it was in his soul who wrought it. Nay, it is rather the beholder who lends to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings, and makes it marvellous for us, and sets it in some new relation to the age, so that it becomes a vital portion of our lives, and a symbol of what we pray for, or perhaps of what, having prayed for, we fear that we may receive. The longer I study, Ernest, the more clearly I see that the beauty of the visible arts
is, as the beauty of music, impressive primarily, and that it may be marred, and indeed often is so, by any excess of intellectual intention on the part of the artist. For when the work is finished it has, as it were, an independent life of its own, and may deliver a message far other than that which was put into its lips to say. Sometimes, when I listen to the overture to Tannhauser, I seem indeed to see that comely knight treading delicately on the flower-strewn grass, and to hear the voice of Venus calling to him from the caverned hill. But at other times it speaks to me of a thousand different things, of myself, it may be, and my own life, or of the lives of others whom one has loved and grown weary of loving, or of the passions that man has known, or of the passions that man has not known, and so has sought for. To-night it may fill one with that "Amour de l'Impossible," that falls like a madness on many who think they live securely and out of reach of harm, so that they sicken suddenly with the poison of unlimited desire, and, in the infinite pursuit of what they may not obtain, grow faint and swoon or stumble. To-morrow, like the music of which Aristotle and Plato tell us, the noble Dorian music of the Greek, it may perform the office of a physician, and give us an anodyne against pain, and heal the spirit that is wounded, and 'bring the soul into harmony with all right things.' And what is true about music is true about all the arts. Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods. Beauty is the symbol of symbols. Beauty reveals everything, because it expresses nothing. When it shows us itself, it shows us the whole fiery-coloured world.
ERNEST. But is such work as you have talked about really criticism?

GILBERT. It is the highest Criticism, for it criticises not merely the individual work of art, but Beauty itself, and fills with wonder a form which the artist may have left void, or not understood, or understood incompletely.

ERNEST. The highest Criticism, then, is more creative than creation, and the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not; that is your theory, I believe?

GILBERT. Yes, that is my theory. To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticises. The one characteristic of a beautiful form is that one can put into it whatever one wishes, and see in it whatever one chooses to see; and the Beauty, that gives to creation its universal and aesthetic element, makes the critic a creator in his turn, and whispers of a thousand different things which were not present in the mind of him who carved the statue or painted the panel or graved the gem.

It is sometimes said by those who understand neither the nature of the highest Criticism nor the charm of the highest Art, that the pictures that the critic loves most to write about are those that
belong to the anecdotalogue of painting, and that deal with scenes
taken out of literature or history. But this is not so. Indeed,
pictures of this kind are far too intelligible. As a class, they
rank with illustrations, and, even considered from this point of
view are failures, as they do not stir the imagination, but set
definite bounds to it. For the domain of the painter is, as I
suggested before, widely different from that of the poet. To the
latter belongs life in its full and absolute entirety; not merely
the beauty that men look at, but the beauty that men listen to
also; not merely the momentary grace of form or the transient
gladness of colour, but the whole sphere of feeling, the perfect
cycle of thought. The painter is so far limited that it is only
through the mask of the body that he can show us the mystery of the
soul; only through conventional images that he can handle ideas;
only through its physical equivalents that he can deal with
psychology. And how inadequately does he do it then, asking us to
accept the torn turban of the Moor for the noble rage of Othello,
or a dotard in a storm for the wild madness of Lear! Yet it seems
as if nothing could stop him. Most of our elderly English painters
spend their wicked and wasted lives in poaching upon the domain of
the poets, marring their motives by clumsy treatment, and striving
to render, by visible form or colour, the marvel of what is
invisible, the splendour of what is not seen. Their pictures are,
as a natural consequence, insufferably tedious. They have degraded
the invisible arts into the obvious arts, and the one thing not
worth looking at is the obvious. I do not say that poet and
painter may not treat of the same subject. They have always done
so and will always do so. But while the poet can be pictorial or
not, as he chooses, the painter must be pictorial always. For a painter is limited, not to what he sees in nature, but to what upon canvas may be seen.

And so, my dear Ernest, pictures of this kind will not really fascinate the critic. He will turn from them to such works as make him brood and dream and fancy, to works that possess the subtle quality of suggestion, and seem to tell one that even from them there is an escape into a wider world. It is sometimes said that the tragedy of an artist's life is that he cannot realise his ideal. But the true tragedy that dogs the steps of most artists is that they realise their ideal too absolutely. For, when the ideal is realised, it is robbed of its wonder and its mystery, and becomes simply a new starting-point for an ideal that is other than itself. This is the reason why music is the perfect type of art. Music can never reveal its ultimate secret. This, also, is the explanation of the value of limitations in art. The sculptor gladly surrenders imitative colour, and the painter the actual dimensions of form, because by such renunciations they are able to avoid too definite a presentation of the Real, which would be mere imitation, and too definite a realisation of the Ideal, which would be too purely intellectual. It is through its very incompleteness that art becomes complete in beauty, and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone, which, while accepting both reason and recognition as stages of apprehension, subordinates them both to a pure synthetic impression of the work of art as a whole, and,
taking whatever alien emotional elements the work may possess, uses
their very complexity as a means by which a richer unity may be
added to the ultimate impression itself. You see, then, how it is
that the aesthetic critic rejects these obvious modes of art that
have but one message to deliver, and having delivered it become
dumb and sterile, and seeks rather for such modes as suggest
reverie and mood, and by their imaginative beauty make all
interpretations true, and no interpretation final. Some
resemblance, no doubt, the creative work of the critic will have to
the work that has stirred him to creation, but it will be such
resemblance as exists, not between Nature and the mirror that the
painter of landscape or figure may be supposed to hold up to her,
but between Nature and the work of the decorative artist. Just as
on the flowerless carpets of Persia, tulip and rose blossom indeed
and are lovely to look on, though they are not reproduced in
visible shape or line; just as the pearl and purple of the sea-
shell is echoed in the church of St. Mark at Venice; just as the
vaulted ceiling of the wondrous chapel at Ravenna is made gorgeous
by the gold and green and sapphire of the peacock's tail, though
the birds of Juno fly not across it; so the critic reproduces the
work that he criticises in a mode that is never imitative, and part
of whose charm may really consist in the rejection of resemblance,
and shows us in this way not merely the meaning but also the
mystery of Beauty, and, by transforming each art into literature,
solves once for all the problem of Art's unity.

But I see it is time for supper. After we have discussed some
Chambertin and a few ortolans, we will pass on to the question of
the critic considered in the light of the interpreter.

ERNEST. Ah! you admit, then, that the critic may occasionally be
allowed to see the object as in itself it really is.

GILBERT. I am not quite sure. Perhaps I may admit it after
supper. There is a subtle influence in supper.

THE CRITIC AS ARTIST--WITH SOME REMARKS UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF
DISCUSSING EVERYTHING


ERNEST. The ortolans were delightful, and the Chambertin perfect,
and now let us return to the point at issue.

GILBERT. Ah! don't let us do that. Conversation should touch
everything, but should concentrate itself on nothing. Let us talk
about Moral Indignation, its Cause and Cure, a subject on which I
think of writing: or about The Survival of Thersites, as shown by
the English comic papers; or about any topic that may turn up.

ERNEST. No; I want to discuss the critic and criticism. You have
told me that the highest criticism deals with art, not as
expressive, but as impressive purely, and is consequently both
creative and independent, is in fact an art by itself, occupying
the same relation to creative work that creative work does to the
visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion
and of thought. Well, now, tell me, will not the critic be
sometimes a real interpreter?

GILBERT. Yes; the critic will be an interpreter, if he chooses.
He can pass from his synthetic impression of the work of art as a
whole, to an analysis or exposition of the work itself, and in this
lower sphere, as I hold it to be, there are many delightful things
to be said and done. Yet his object will not always be to explain
the work of art. He may seek rather to deepen its mystery, to
raise round it, and round its maker, that mist of wonder which is
dear to both gods and worshippers alike. Ordinary people are
'terribly at ease in Zion.' They propose to walk arm in arm with
the poets, and have a glib ignorant way of saying, 'Why should we
read what is written about Shakespeare and Milton? We can read the
plays and the poems. That is enough.' But an appreciation of
Milton is, as the late Rector of Lincoln remarked once, the reward
of consummate scholarship. And he who desires to understand
Shakespeare truly must understand the relations in which
Shakespeare stood to the Renaissance and the Reformation, to the
age of Elizabeth and the age of James; he must be familiar with the
history of the struggle for supremacy between the old classical
forms and the new spirit of romance, between the school of Sidney,
and Daniel, and Johnson, and the school of Marlowe and Marlowe's
greater son; he must know the materials that were at Shakespeare's
disposal, and the method in which he used them, and the conditions
of theatric presentation in the sixteenth and seventeenth century,
their limitations and their opportunities for freedom, and the
literary criticism of Shakespeare's day, its aims and modes and
canons; he must study the English language in its progress, and
blank or rhymed verse in its various developments; he must study
the Greek drama, and the connection between the art of the creator
of the Agamemnon and the art of the creator of Macbeth; in a word,
he must be able to bind Elizabethan London to the Athens of
Pericles, and to learn Shakespeare's true position in the history
of European drama and the drama of the world. The critic will
certainly be an interpreter, but he will not treat Art as a
riddling Sphinx, whose shallow secret may be guessed and revealed
by one whose feet are wounded and who knows not his name. Rather,
he will look upon Art as a goddess whose mystery it is his province
to intensify, and whose majesty his privilege to make more
marvellous in the eyes of men.

And here, Ernest, this strange thing happens. The critic will
indeed be an interpreter, but he will not be an interpreter in the
sense of one who simply repeats in another form a message that has
been put into his lips to say. For, just as it is only by contact
with the art of foreign nations that the art of a country gains
that individual and separate life that we call nationality, so, by
curious inversion, it is only by intensifying his own personality
that the critic can interpret the personality and work of others, and the more strongly this personality enters into the interpretation the more real the interpretation becomes, the more satisfying, the more convincing, and the more true.

ERNEST. I would have said that personality would have been a disturbing element.

GILBERT. No; it is an element of revelation. If you wish to understand others you must intensify your own individualism.

ERNEST. What, then, is the result?

GILBERT. I will tell you, and perhaps I can tell you best by definite example. It seems to me that, while the literary critic stands of course first, as having the wider range, and larger vision, and nobler material, each of the arts has a critic, as it were, assigned to it. The actor is a critic of the drama. He shows the poet's work under new conditions, and by a method special to himself. He takes the written word, and action, gesture and voice become the media of revelation. The singer or the player on lute and viol is the critic of music. The etcher of a picture robs the painting of its fair colours, but shows us by the use of a new material its true colour-quality, its tones and values, and the relations of its masses, and so is, in his way, a critic of it, for the critic is he who exhibits to us a work of art in a form
different from that of the work itself, and the employment of a new material is a critical as well as a creative element. Sculpture, too, has its critic, who may be either the carver of a gem, as he was in Greek days, or some painter like Mantegna, who sought to reproduce on canvas the beauty of plastic line and the symphonic dignity of processional bas-relief. And in the case of all these creative critics of art it is evident that personality is an absolute essential for any real interpretation. When Rubinstein plays to us the Sonata Appassionata of Beethoven, he gives us not merely Beethoven, but also himself, and so gives us Beethoven absolutely--Beethoven re-interpreted through a rich artistic nature, and made vivid and wonderful to us by a new and intense personality. When a great actor plays Shakespeare we have the same experience. His own individuality becomes a vital part of the interpretation. People sometimes say that actors give us their own Hamlets, and not Shakespeare's; and this fallacy--for it is a fallacy--is, I regret to say, repeated by that charming and graceful writer who has lately deserted the turmoil of literature for the peace of the House of Commons, I mean the author of Obiter Dicta. In point of fact, there is no such thing as Shakespeare's Hamlet. If Hamlet has something of the definiteness of a work of art, he has also all the obscurity that belongs to life. There are as many Hamlets as there are melancholies.

ERNEST. As many Hamlets as there are melancholies?

GILBERT. Yes: and as art springs from personality, so it is only
to personality that it can be revealed, and from the meeting of the
two comes right interpretative criticism.

ERNEST. The critic, then, considered as the interpreter, will give
no less than he receives, and lend as much as he borrows?

GILBERT. He will be always showing us the work of art in some new
relation to our age. He will always be reminding us that great
works of art are living things--are, in fact, the only things that
live. So much, indeed, will he feel this, that I am certain that,
as civilisation progresses and we become more highly organised, the
elect spirits of each age, the critical and cultured spirits, will
grow less and less interested in actual life, and WILL SEEK TO GAIN
THEIR IMPRESSIONS ALMOST ENTIRELY FROM WHAT ART HAS TOUCHED. For
life is terribly deficient in form. Its catastrophes happen in the
wrong way and to the wrong people. There is a grotesque horror
about its comedies, and its tragedies seem to culminate in farce.
One is always wounded when one approaches it. Things last either
too long, or not long enough.

ERNEST. Poor life! Poor human life! Are you not even touched by
the tears that the Roman poet tells us are part of its essence.

GILBERT. Too quickly touched by them, I fear. For when one looks
back upon the life that was so vivid in its emotional intensity,
and filled with such fervent moments of ecstasy or of joy, it all
seems to be a dream and an illusion. What are the unreal things, but the passions that once burned one like fire? What are the incredible things, but the things that one has faithfully believed? What are the improbable things? The things that one has done oneself. No, Ernest; life cheats us with shadows, like a puppet-master. We ask it for pleasure. It gives it to us, with bitterness and disappointment in its train. We come across some noble grief that we think will lend the purple dignity of tragedy to our days, but it passes away from us, and things less noble take its place, and on some grey windy dawn, or odorous eve of silence and of silver, we find ourselves looking with callous wonder, or dull heart of stone, at the tress of gold-flecked hair that we had once so wildly worshipped and so madly kissed.

ERNEST. Life then is a failure?

GILBERT. From the artistic point of view, certainly. And the chief thing that makes life a failure from this artistic point of view is the thing that lends to life its sordid security, the fact that one can never repeat exactly the same emotion. How different it is in the world of Art! On a shelf of the bookcase behind you stands the Divine Comedy, and I know that, if I open it at a certain place, I shall be filled with a fierce hatred of some one who has never wronged me, or stirred by a great love for some one whom I shall never see. There is no mood or passion that Art cannot give us, and those of us who have discovered her secret can settle beforehand what our experiences are going to be. We can
choose our day and select our hour. We can say to ourselves, 'To-
morrow, at dawn, we shall walk with grave Virgil through the valley
of the shadow of death,' and lo! the dawn finds us in the obscure
wood, and the Mantuan stands by our side. We pass through the gate
of the legend fatal to hope, and with pity or with joy behold the
horror of another world. The hypocrites go by, with their painted
faces and their cowls of gilded lead. Out of the ceaseless winds
that drive them, the carnal look at us, and we watch the heretic
 rending his flesh, and the glutton lashed by the rain. We break
the withered branches from the tree in the grove of the Harpies,
and each dull-hued poisonous twig bleeds with red blood before us,
and cries aloud with bitter cries. Out of a horn of fire Odysseus
speaks to us, and when from his sepulchre of flame the great
Ghibelline rises, the pride that triumphs over the torture of that
bed becomes ours for a moment. Through the dim purple air fly
those who have stained the world with the beauty of their sin, and
in the pit of loathsome disease, dropsy-stricken and swollen of
body into the semblance of a monstrous lute, lies Adamo di Brescia,
the coiner of false coin. He bids us listen to his misery; we
stop, and with dry and gaping lips he tells us how he dreams day
and night of the brooks of clear water that in cool dewy channels
gush down the green Casentine hills. Sinon, the false Greek of
Troy, mocks at him. He smites him in the face, and they wrangle.
We are fascinated by their shame, and loiter, till Virgil chides us
and leads us away to that city turreted by giants where great
Nimrod blows his horn. Terrible things are in store for us, and we
go to meet them in Dante's raiment and with Dante's heart. We
traverse the marshes of the Styx, and Argenti swims to the boat
through the slimy waves. He calls to us, and we reject him. When we hear the voice of his agony we are glad, and Virgil praises us for the bitterness of our scorn. We tread upon the cold crystal of Cocytus, in which traitors stick like straws in glass. Our foot strikes against the head of Bocca. He will not tell us his name, and we tear the hair in handfuls from the screaming skull. Alberigo prays us to break the ice upon his face that he may weep a little. We pledge our word to him, and when he has uttered his dolorous tale we deny the word that we have spoken, and pass from him; such cruelty being courtesy indeed, for who more base than he who has mercy for the condemned of God? In the jaws of Lucifer we see the man who sold Christ, and in the jaws of Lucifer the men who slew Caesar. We tremble, and come forth to re-behold the stars.

In the land of Purgation the air is freer, and the holy mountain rises into the pure light of day. There is peace for us, and for those who for a season abide in it there is some peace also, though, pale from the poison of the Maremma, Madonna Pia passes before us, and Ismene, with the sorrow of earth still lingering about her, is there. Soul after soul makes us share in some repentance or some joy. He whom the mourning of his widow taught to drink the sweet wormwood of pain, tells us of Nella praying in her lonely bed, and we learn from the mouth of Buonconte how a single tear may save a dying sinner from the fiend. Sordello, that noble and disdainful Lombard, eyes us from afar like a couchant lion. When he learns that Virgil is one of Mantua's citizens, he falls upon his neck, and when he learns that he is the singer of
Rome he falls before his feet. In that valley whose grass and
flowers are fairer than cleft emerald and Indian wood, and brighter
than scarlet and silver, they are singing who in the world were
kings; but the lips of Rudolph of Hapsburg do not move to the music
of the others, and Philip of France beats his breast and Henry of
England sits alone. On and on we go, climbing the marvellous
stair, and the stars become larger than their wont, and the song of
the kings grows faint, and at length we reach the seven trees of
gold and the garden of the Earthly Paradise. In a griffin-drawn
chariot appears one whose brows are bound with olive, who is veiled
in white, and mantled in green, and robed in a vesture that is
coloured like live fire. The ancient flame wakes within us. Our
blood quickens through terrible pulses. We recognise her. It is
Beatrice, the woman we have worshipped. The ice congealed about
our heart melts. Wild tears of anguish break from us, and we bow
our forehead to the ground, for we know that we have sinned. When
we have done penance, and are purified, and have drunk of the
fountain of Lethe and bathed in the fountain of Eunoe, the mistress
of our soul raises us to the Paradise of Heaven. Out of that
eternal pearl, the moon, the face of Piccarda Donati leans to us.
Her beauty troubles us for a moment, and when, like a thing that
falls through water, she passes away, we gaze after her with
wistful eyes. The sweet planet of Venus is full of lovers.
Cunizza, the sister of Ezzelin, the lady of Sordello's heart, is
there, and Folco, the passionate singer of Provence, who in sorrow
for Azalais forsook the world, and the Canaanitish harlot whose
soul was the first that Christ redeemed. Joachim of Flora stands
in the sun, and, in the sun, Aquinas recounts the story of St.
Francis and Bonaventure the story of St. Dominic. Through the burning rubies of Mars, Cacciaguida approaches. He tells us of the arrow that is shot from the bow of exile, and how salt tastes the bread of another, and how steep are the stairs in the house of a stranger. In Saturn the soul sings not, and even she who guides us dare not smile. On a ladder of gold the flames rise and fall. At last, we see the pageant of the Mystical Rose. Beatrice fixes her eyes upon the face of God to turn them not again. The beatific vision is granted to us; we know the Love that moves the sun and all the stars.

Yes, we can put the earth back six hundred courses and make ourselves one with the great Florentine, kneel at the same altar with him, and share his rapture and his scorn. And if we grow tired of an antique time, and desire to realise our own age in all its weariness and sin, are there not books that can make us live more in one single hour than life can make us live in a score of shameful years? Close to your hand lies a little volume, bound in some Nile-green skin that has been powdered with gilded nenuphars and smoothed with hard ivory. It is the book that Gautier loved, it is Baudelaire’s masterpiece. Open it at that sad madrigal that begins

Que m’importe que tu sois sage?
Sois belle! et sois triste!
and you will find yourself worshipping sorrow as you have never
worshipped joy. Pass on to the poem on the man who tortures
himself, let its subtle music steal into your brain and colour your
thoughts, and you will become for a moment what he was who wrote
it; nay, not for a moment only, but for many barren moonlit nights
and sunless sterile days will a despair that is not your own make
its dwelling within you, and the misery of another gnaw your heart
away. Read the whole book, suffer it to tell even one of its
secrets to your soul, and your soul will grow eager to know more,
and will feed upon poisonous honey, and seek to repent of strange
crimes of which it is guiltless, and to make atonement for terrible
pleasures that it has never known. And then, when you are tired of
these flowers of evil, turn to the flowers that grow in the garden
of Perdita, and in their dew-drenched chalices cool your fevered
brow, and let their loveliness heal and restore your soul; or wake
from his forgotten tomb the sweet Syrian, Meleager, and bid the
lover of Heliodore make you music, for he too has flowers in his
song, red pomegranate blossoms, and irises that smell of myrrh,
ringed daffodils and dark blue hyacinths, and marjoram and crinkled
ox-eyes. Dear to him was the perfume of the bean-field at evening,
and dear to him the odorous eared-spikenard that grew on the Syrian
hills, and the fresh green thyme, the wine-cup's charm. The feet
of his love as she walked in the garden were like lilies set upon
lilies. Softer than sleep-laden poppy petals were her lips, softer
than violets and as scented. The flame-like crocus sprang from the
grass to look at her. For her the slim narcissus stored the cool
rain; and for her the anemones forgot the Sicilian winds that wooed
them. And neither crocus, nor anemone, nor narcissus was as fair
as she was.

It is a strange thing, this transference of emotion. We sicken with the same maladies as the poets, and the singer lends us his pain. Dead lips have their message for us, and hearts that have fallen to dust can communicate their joy. We run to kiss the bleeding mouth of Fantine, and we follow Manon Lescaut over the whole world. Ours is the love-madness of the Tyrian, and the terror of Orestes is ours also. There is no passion that we cannot feel, no pleasure that we may not gratify, and we can choose the time of our initiation and the time of our freedom also. Life! Life! Don't let us go to life for our fulfilment or our experience. It is a thing narrowed by circumstances, incoherent in its utterance, and without that fine correspondence of form and spirit which is the only thing that can satisfy the artistic and critical temperament. It makes us pay too high a price for its wares, and we purchase the meanest of its secrets at a cost that is monstrous and infinite.

ERNEST. Must we go, then, to Art for everything?

GILBERT. For everything. Because Art does not hurt us. The tears that we shed at a play are a type of the exquisite sterile emotions that it is the function of Art to awaken. We weep, but we are not wounded. We grieve, but our grief is not bitter. In the actual life of man, sorrow, as Spinoza says somewhere, is a passage to a
lesser perfection. But the sorrow with which Art fills us both
purifies and initiates, if I may quote once more from the great art
critic of the Greeks. It is through Art, and through Art only,
that we can realise our perfection; through Art, and through Art
only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual
existence. This results not merely from the fact that nothing that
one can imagine is worth doing, and that one can imagine
everything, but from the subtle law that emotional forces, like the
forces of the physical sphere, are limited in extent and energy.
One can feel so much, and no more. And how can it matter with what
pleasure life tries to tempt one, or with what pain it seeks to
maim and mar one's soul, if in the spectacle of the lives of those
who have never existed one has found the true secret of joy, and
wept away one's tears over their deaths who, like Cordelia and the
daughter of Brabantio, can never die?

ERNEST. Stop a moment. It seems to me that in everything that you
have said there is something radically immoral.

GILBERT. All art is immoral.

ERNEST. All art?

GILBERT. Yes. For emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of
art, and emotion for the sake of action is the aim of life, and of
that practical organisation of life that we call society. Society,
which is the beginning and basis of morals, exists simply for the concentration of human energy, and in order to ensure its own continuance and healthy stability it demands, and no doubt rightly demands, of each of its citizens that he should contribute some form of productive labour to the common weal, and toil and travail that the day’s work may be done. Society often forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer. The beautiful sterile emotions that art excites in us are hateful in its eyes, and so completely are people dominated by the tyranny of this dreadful social ideal that they are always coming shamelessly up to one at Private Views and other places that are open to the general public, and saying in a loud stentorian voice, ‘What are you doing?’ whereas ‘What are you thinking?’ is the only question that any single civilised being should ever be allowed to whisper to another. They mean well, no doubt, these honest beaming folk. Perhaps that is the reason why they are so excessively tedious. But some one should teach them that while, in the opinion of society, Contemplation is the gravest sin of which any citizen can be guilty, in the opinion of the highest culture it is the proper occupation of man.

ERNEST. Contemplation?

GILBERT. Contemplation. I said to you some time ago that it was far more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it. Let me say to you now that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual. To Plato,
with his passion for wisdom, this was the noblest form of energy.
To Aristotle, with his passion for knowledge, this was the noblest form of energy also. It was to this that the passion for holiness led the saint and the mystic of mediaeval days.

ERNEST. We exist, then, to do nothing?

GILBERT. It is to do nothing that the elect exist. Action is limited and relative. Unlimited and absolute is the vision of him who sits at ease and watches, who walks in loneliness and dreams. But we who are born at the close of this wonderful age are at once too cultured and too critical, too intellectually subtle and too curious of exquisite pleasures, to accept any speculations about life in exchange for life itself. To us the citta divina is colourless, and the fruitio Dei without meaning. Metaphysics do not satisfy our temperaments, and religious ecstasy is out of date. The world through which the Academic philosopher becomes ‘the spectator of all time and of all existence’ is not really an ideal world, but simply a world of abstract ideas. When we enter it, we starve amidst the chill mathematics of thought. The courts of the city of God are not open to us now. Its gates are guarded by Ignorance, and to pass them we have to surrender all that in our nature is most divine. It is enough that our fathers believed. They have exhausted the faith-faculty of the species. Their legacy to us is the scepticism of which they were afraid. Had they put it into words, it might not live within us as thought. No, Ernest, no. We cannot go back to the saint. There is far more to be
learned from the sinner. We cannot go back to the philosopher, and
the mystic leads us astray. Who, as Mr. Pater suggests somewhere,
would exchange the curve of a single rose-leaf for that formless
intangible Being which Plato rates so high? What to us is the
Illumination of Philo, the Abyss of Eckhart, the Vision of Bohme,
the monstrous Heaven itself that was revealed to Swedenborg's
blinded eyes? Such things are less than the yellow trumpet of one
daffodil of the field, far less than the meanest of the visible
arts, for, just as Nature is matter struggling into mind, so Art is
mind expressing itself under the conditions of matter, and thus,
even in the lowliest of her manifestations, she speaks to both
sense and soul alike. To the aesthetic temperament the vague is
always repellent. The Greeks were a nation of artists, because
they were spared the sense of the infinite. Like Aristotle, like
Goethe after he had read Kant, we desire the concrete, and nothing
but the concrete can satisfy us.

ERNEST. What then do you propose?

GILBERT. It seems to me that with the development of the critical
spirit we shall be able to realise, not merely our own lives, but
the collective life of the race, and so to make ourselves
absolutely modern, in the true meaning of the word modernity. For
he to whom the present is the only thing that is present, knows
nothing of the age in which he lives. To realise the nineteenth
century, one must realise every century that has preceded it and
that has contributed to its making. To know anything about oneself
one must know all about others. There must be no mood with which
one cannot sympathise, no dead mode of life that one cannot make
alive. Is this impossible? I think not. By revealing to us the
absolute mechanism of all action, and so freeing us from the self-
imposed and trammelling burden of moral responsibility, the
scientific principle of Heredity has become, as it were, the
warrant for the contemplative life. It has shown us that we are
never less free than when we try to act. It has hemmed us round
with the nets of the hunter, and written upon the wall the prophecy
of our doom. We may not watch it, for it is within us. We may not
see it, save in a mirror that mirrors the soul. It is Nemesis
without her mask. It is the last of the Fates, and the most
terrible. It is the only one of the Gods whose real name we know.

And yet, while in the sphere of practical and external life it has
robbed energy of its freedom and activity of its choice, in the
subjective sphere, where the soul is at work, it comes to us, this
terrible shadow, with many gifts in its hands, gifts of strange
temperaments and subtle susceptibilities, gifts of wild ardours and
chill moods of indifference, complex multiform gifts of thoughts
that are at variance with each other, and passions that war against
themselves. And so, it is not our own life that we live, but the
lives of the dead, and the soul that dwells within us is no single
spiritual entity, making us personal and individual, created for
our service, and entering into us for our joy. It is something
that has dwelt in fearful places, and in ancient sepulchres has
made its abode. It is sick with many maladies, and has memories of
curious sins. It is wiser than we are, and its wisdom is bitter.

It fills us with impossible desires, and makes us follow what we
know we cannot gain. One thing, however, Ernest, it can do for us.

It can lead us away from surroundings whose beauty is dimmed to us
by the mist of familiarity, or whose ignoble ugliness and sordid
claims are marring the perfection of our development. It can help
us to leave the age in which we were born, and to pass into other
ages, and find ourselves not exiled from their air. It can teach
us how to escape from our experience, and to realise the
experiences of those who are greater than we are. The pain of
Leopardi crying out against life becomes our pain. Theocritus
blows on his pipe, and we laugh with the lips of nymph and
shepherd. In the wolfskin of Pierre Vidal we flee before the
hounds, and in the armour of Lancelot we ride from the bower of the
Queen. We have whispered the secret of our love beneath the cowl
of Abelard, and in the stained raiment of Villon have put our shame
into song. We can see the dawn through Shelley's eyes, and when we
wander with Endymion the Moon grows amorous of our youth. Ours is
the anguish of Atys, and ours the weak rage and noble sorrows of
the Dane. Do you think that it is the imagination that enables us
to live these countless lives? Yes: it is the imagination; and
the imagination is the result of heredity. It is simply
concentrated race-experience.

ERNEST. But where in this is the function of the critical spirit?

GILBERT. The culture that this transmission of racial experiences
makes possible can be made perfect by the critical spirit alone,
and indeed may be said to be one with it. For who is the true
critic but he who bears within himself the dreams, and ideas, and
feelings of myriad generations, and to whom no form of thought is
alien, no emotional impulse obscure? And who the true man of
culture, if not he who by fine scholarship and fastidious rejection
has made instinct self-conscious and intelligent, and can separate
the work that has distinction from the work that has it not, and so
by contact and comparison makes himself master of the secrets of
style and school, and understands their meanings, and listens to
their voices, and develops that spirit of disinterested curiosity
which is the real root, as it is the real flower, of the
intellectual life, and thus attains to intellectual clarity, and,
having learned 'the best that is known and thought in the world,'
lives--it is not fanciful to say so--with those who are the
Immortals.

Yes, Ernest: the contemplative life, the life that has for its aim
not DOING but BEING, and not BEING merely, but BECOMING--that is
what the critical spirit can give us. The gods live thus: either
brooding over their own perfection, as Aristotle tells us, or, as
Epicurus fancied, watching with the calm eyes of the spectator the
tragicomedy of the world that they have made. We, too, might live
like them, and set ourselves to witness with appropriate emotions
the varied scenes that man and nature afford. We might make
ourselves spiritual by detaching ourselves from action, and become
perfect by the rejection of energy. It has often seemed to me that
Browning felt something of this. Shakespeare hurls Hamlet into active life, and makes him realise his mission by effort. Browning might have given us a Hamlet who would have realised his mission by thought. Incident and event were to him unreal or unmeaning. He made the soul the protagonist of life's tragedy, and looked on action as the one undramatic element of a play. To us, at any rate, the [Greek text which cannot be reproduced] is the true ideal. From the high tower of Thought we can look out at the world. Calm, and self-centred, and complete, the aesthetic critic contemplates life, and no arrow drawn at a venture can pierce between the joints of his harness. He at least is safe. He has discovered how to live.

Is such a mode of life immoral? Yes: all the arts are immoral, except those baser forms of sensual or didactic art that seek to excite to action of evil or of good. For action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics. The aim of art is simply to create a mood. Is such a mode of life unpractical? Ah! it is not so easy to be unpractical as the ignorant Philistine imagines. It were well for England if it were so. There is no country in the world so much in need of unpractical people as this country of ours. With us, Thought is degraded by its constant association with practice. Who that moves in the stress and turmoil of actual existence, noisy politician, or brawling social reformer, or poor narrow-minded priest blinded by the sufferings of that unimportant section of the community among whom he has cast his lot, can seriously claim to be able to form a disinterested intellectual
judgment about any one thing? Each of the professions means a prejudice. The necessity for a career forces every one to take sides. We live in the age of the overworked, and the under-educated; the age in which people are so industrious that they become absolutely stupid. And, harsh though it may sound, I cannot help saying that such people deserve their doom. The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try to make oneself useful.

ERNEST. A charming doctrine, Gilbert.

GILBERT. I am not sure about that, but it has at least the minor merit of being true. That the desire to do good to others produces a plentiful crop of prigs is the least of the evils of which it is the cause. The prig is a very interesting psychological study, and though of all poses a moral pose is the most offensive, still to have a pose at all is something. It is a formal recognition of the importance of treating life from a definite and reasoned standpoint. That Humanitarian Sympathy wars against Nature, by securing the survival of the failure, may make the man of science loathe its facile virtues. The political economist may cry out against it for putting the improvident on the same level as the provident, and so robbing life of the strongest, because most sordid, incentive to industry. But, in the eyes of the thinker, the real harm that emotional sympathy does is that it limits knowledge, and so prevents us from solving any single social problem. We are trying at present to stave off the coming crisis, the coming revolution as my friends the Fabianists call it, by
means of doles and alms. Well, when the revolution or crisis
arrives, we shall be powerless, because we shall know nothing. And
so, Ernest, let us not be deceived. England will never be
civilised till she has added Utopia to her dominions. There is
more than one of her colonies that she might with advantage
surrender for so fair a land. What we want are unpractical people
who see beyond the moment, and think beyond the day. Those who try
to lead the people can only do so by following the mob. It is
through the voice of one crying in the wilderness that the ways of
the gods must be prepared.

But perhaps you think that in beholding for the mere joy of
beholding, and contemplating for the sake of contemplation, there
is something that is egotistic. If you think so, do not say so.
It takes a thoroughly selfish age, like our own, to deify self-
sacrifice. It takes a thoroughly grasping age, such as that in
which we live, to set above the fine intellectual virtues, those
shallow and emotional virtues that are an immediate practical
benefit to itself. They miss their aim, too, these philanthropists
and sentimentalists of our day, who are always chattering to one
about one's duty to one's neighbour. For the development of the
race depends on the development of the individual, and where self-
culture has ceased to be the ideal, the intellectual standard is
instantly lowered, and, often, ultimately lost. If you meet at
dinner a man who has spent his life in educating himself--a rare
type in our time, I admit, but still one occasionally to be met
with--you rise from table richer, and conscious that a high ideal
has for a moment touched and sanctified your days. But oh! my dear
Ernest, to sit next to a man who has spent his life in trying to
educate others! What a dreadful experience that is! How appalling
is that ignorance which is the inevitable result of the fatal habit
of imparting opinions! How limited in range the creature's mind
proves to be! How it wearies us, and must weary himself, with its
endless repetitions and sickly reiteration! How lacking it is in
any element of intellectual growth! In what a vicious circle it
always moves!

ERNEST. You speak with strange feeling, Gilbert. Have you had
this dreadful experience, as you call it, lately?

GILBERT. Few of us escape it. People say that the schoolmaster is
abroad. I wish to goodness he were. But the type of which, after
all, he is only one, and certainly the least important, of the
representatives, seems to me to be really dominating our lives; and
just as the philanthropist is the nuisance of the ethical sphere,
so the nuisance of the intellectual sphere is the man who is so
occupied in trying to educate others, that he has never had any
time to educate himself. No, Ernest, self-culture is the true
ideal of man. Goethe saw it, and the immediate debt that we owe to
Goethe is greater than the debt we owe to any man since Greek days.
The Greeks saw it, and have left us, as their legacy to modern
thought, the conception of the contemplative life as well as the
critical method by which alone can that life be truly realised. It
was the one thing that made the Renaissance great, and gave us
Humanism. It is the one thing that could make our own age great also; for the real weakness of England lies, not in incomplete armaments or unfortified coasts, not in the poverty that creeps through sunless lanes, or the drunkenness that brawls in loathsome courts, but simply in the fact that her ideals are emotional and not intellectual.

I do not deny that the intellectual ideal is difficult of attainment, still less that it is, and perhaps will be for years to come, unpopular with the crowd. It is so easy for people to have sympathy with suffering. It is so difficult for them to have sympathy with thought. Indeed, so little do ordinary people understand what thought really is, that they seem to imagine that, when they have said that a theory is dangerous, they have pronounced its condemnation, whereas it is only such theories that have any true intellectual value. An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.

ERNEST. Gilbert, you bewilder me. You have told me that all art is, in its essence, immoral. Are you going to tell me now that all thought is, in its essence, dangerous?

GILBERT. Yes, in the practical sphere it is so. The security of society lies in custom and unconscious instinct, and the basis of the stability of society, as a healthy organism, is the complete absence of any intelligence amongst its members. The great
majority of people being fully aware of this, rank themselves
naturally on the side of that splendid system that elevates them to
the dignity of machines, and rage so wildly against the intrusion
of the intellectual faculty into any question that concerns life,
that one is tempted to define man as a rational animal who always
loses his temper when he is called upon to act in accordance with
the dictates of reason. But let us turn from the practical sphere,
and say no more about the wicked philanthropists, who, indeed, may
well be left to the mercy of the almond-eyed sage of the Yellow
River Chuang Tsu the wise, who has proved that such well-meaning
and offensive busybodies have destroyed the simple and spontaneous
virtue that there is in man. They are a wearisome topic, and I am
anxious to get back to the sphere in which criticism is free.

ERNEST. The sphere of the intellect?

GILBERT. Yes. You remember that I spoke of the critic as being in
his own way as creative as the artist, whose work, indeed, may be
merely of value in so far as it gives to the critic a suggestion
for some new mood of thought and feeling which he can realise with
equal, or perhaps greater, distinction of form, and, through the
use of a fresh medium of expression, make differently beautiful and
more perfect. Well, you seemed to be a little sceptical about the
theory. But perhaps I wronged you?

ERNEST. I am not really sceptical about it, but I must admit that
I feel very strongly that such work as you describe the critic producing—and creative such work must undoubtedly be admitted to be—is, of necessity, purely subjective, whereas the greatest work is objective always, objective and impersonal.

GILBERT. The difference between objective and subjective work is one of external form merely. It is accidental, not essential. All artistic creation is absolutely subjective. The very landscape that Corot looked at was, as he said himself, but a mood of his own mind; and those great figures of Greek or English drama that seem to us to possess an actual existence of their own, apart from the poets who shaped and fashioned them, are, in their ultimate analysis, simply the poets themselves, not as they thought they were, but as they thought they were not; and by such thinking came in strange manner, though but for a moment, really so to be. For out of ourselves we can never pass, nor can there be in creation what in the creator was not. Nay, I would say that the more objective a creation appears to be, the more subjective it really is. Shakespeare might have met Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the white streets of London, or seen the serving-men of rival houses bite their thumbs at each other in the open square; but Hamlet came out of his soul, and Romeo out of his passion. They were elements of his nature to which he gave visible form, impulses that stirred so strongly within him that he had, as it were perforce, to suffer them to realise their energy, not on the lower plane of actual life, where they would have been trammelled and constrained and so made imperfect, but on that imaginative plane of art where Love can
indeed find in Death its rich fulfilment, where one can stab the
eavesdropper behind the arras, and wrestle in a new-made grave, and
make a guilty king drink his own hurt, and see one's father's
spirit, beneath the glimpses of the moon, stalking in complete
steel from misty wall to wall. Action being limited would have
left Shakespeare unsatisfied and unexpressed; and, just as it is
because he did nothing that he has been able to achieve everything,
so it is because he never speaks to us of himself in his plays that
his plays reveal him to us absolutely, and show us his true nature
and temperament far more completely than do those strange and
exquisite sonnets, even, in which he bares to crystal eyes the
secret closet of his heart. Yes, the objective form is the most
subjective in matter. Man is least himself when he talks in his
own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

ERNEST. The critic, then, being limited to the subjective form,
will necessarily be less able fully to express himself than the
artist, who has always at his disposal the forms that are
impersonal and objective.

GILBERT. Not necessarily, and certainly not at all if he
recognises that each mode of criticism is, in its highest
development, simply a mood, and that we are never more true to
ourselves than when we are inconsistent. The aesthetic critic,
constant only to the principle of beauty in all things, will ever
be looking for fresh impressions, winning from the various schools
the secret of their charm, bowing, it may be, before foreign
altars, or smiling, if it be his fancy, at strange new gods. What other people call one’s past has, no doubt, everything to do with them, but has absolutely nothing to do with oneself. The man who regards his past is a man who deserves to have no future to look forward to. When one has found expression for a mood, one has done with it. You laugh; but believe me it is so. Yesterday it was Realism that charmed one. One gained from it that nouveau frisson which it was its aim to produce. One analysed it, explained it, and wearied of it. At sunset came the Luministe in painting, and the Symboliste in poetry, and the spirit of mediaevalism, that spirit which belongs not to time but to temperament, woke suddenly in wounded Russia, and stirred us for a moment by the terrible fascination of pain. To-day the cry is for Romance, and already the leaves are tremulous in the valley, and on the purple hill-tops walks Beauty with slim gilded feet. The old modes of creation linger, of course. The artists reproduce either themselves or each other, with wearisome iteration. But Criticism is always moving on, and the critic is always developing.

Nor, again, is the critic really limited to the subjective form of expression. The method of the drama is his, as well as the method of the epos. He may use dialogue, as he did who set Milton talking to Marvel on the nature of comedy and tragedy, and made Sidney and Lord Brooke discourse on letters beneath the Penshurst oaks; or adopt narration, as Mr. Pater is fond of doing, each of whose Imaginary Portraits--is not that the title of the book?--presents to us, under the fanciful guise of fiction, some fine and exquisite
piece of criticism, one on the painter Watteau, another on the
philosophy of Spinoza, a third on the Pagan elements of the early
Renaissance, and the last, and in some respects the most
suggestive, on the source of that Aufklärung, that enlightening
which dawned on Germany in the last century, and to which our own
culture owes so great a debt. Dialogue, certainly, that wonderful
literary form which, from Plato to Lucian, and from Lucian to
Giordano Bruno, and from Bruno to that grand old Pagan in whom
Carlyle took such delight, the creative critics of the world have
always employed, can never lose for the thinker its attraction as a
mode of expression. By its means he can both reveal and conceal
himself, and give form to every fancy, and reality to every mood.
By its means he can exhibit the object from each point of view, and
show it to us in the round, as a sculptor shows us things, gaining
in this manner all the richness and reality of effect that comes
from those side issues that are suddenly suggested by the central
idea in its progress, and really illumine the idea more completely,
or from those felicitous after-thoughts that give a fuller
completeness to the central scheme, and yet convey something of the
delicate charm of chance.

ERNEST. By its means, too, he can invent an imaginary antagonist,
and convert him when he chooses by some absurdly sophistical
argument.

GILBERT. Ah! it is so easy to convert others. It is so difficult
to convert oneself. To arrive at what one really believes, one
must speak through lips different from one's own. To know the
truth one must imagine myriads of falsehoods. For what is Truth?
In matters of religion, it is simply the opinion that has survived.
In matters of science, it is the ultimate sensation. In matters of
art, it is one's last mood. And you see now, Ernest, that the
critic has at his disposal as many objective forms of expression as
the artist has. Ruskin put his criticism into imaginative prose,
and is superb in his changes and contradictions; and Browning put
his into blank verse and made painter and poet yield us their
secret; and M. Renan uses dialogue, and Mr. Pater fiction, and
Rossetti translated into sonnet-music the colour of Giorgione and
the design of Ingres, and his own design and colour also, feeling,
with the instinct of one who had many modes of utterance; that the
ultimate art is literature, and the finest and fullest medium that
of words.

ERNEST. Well, now that you have settled that the critic has at his
disposal all objective forms, I wish you would tell me what are the
qualities that should characterise the true critic.

GILBERT. What would you say they were?

ERNEST. Well, I should say that a critic should above all things
be fair.

GILBERT. Ah! not fair. A critic cannot be fair in the ordinary
sense of the word. It is only about things that do not interest
one that one can give a really unbiased opinion, which is no doubt
the reason why an unbiased opinion is always absolutely valueless.
The man who sees both sides of a question, is a man who sees
absolutely nothing at all. Art is a passion, and, in matters of
art, Thought is inevitably coloured by emotion, and so is fluid
rather than fixed, and, depending upon fine moods and exquisite
moments, cannot be narrowed into the rigidity of a scientific
formula or a theological dogma. It is to the soul that Art speaks,
and the soul may be made the prisoner of the mind as well as of the
body. One should, of course, have no prejudices; but, as a great
Frenchman remarked a hundred years ago, it is one’s business in
such matters to have preferences, and when one has preferences one
ceases to be fair. It is only an auctioneer who can equally and
impartially admire all schools of Art. No; fairness is not one of
the qualities of the true critic. It is not even a condition of
criticism. Each form of Art with which we come in contact
dominates us for the moment to the exclusion of every other form.
We must surrender ourselves absolutely to the work in question,
whatever it may be, if we wish to gain its secret. For the time,
we must think of nothing else, can think of nothing else, indeed.

ERNEST. The true critic will be rational, at any rate, will he
not?

GILBERT. Rational? There are two ways of disliking art, Ernest.
One is to dislike it. The other, to like it rationally. For Art,
as Plato saw, and not without regret, creates in listener and spectator a form of divine madness. It does not spring from inspiration, but it makes others inspired. Reason is not the faculty to which it appeals. If one loves Art at all, one must love it beyond all other things in the world, and against such love, the reason, if one listened to it, would cry out. There is nothing sane about the worship of beauty. It is too splendid to be sane. Those of whose lives it forms the dominant note will always seem to the world to be pure visionaries.

ERNEST. Well, at least, the critic will be sincere.

GILBERT. A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal. The true critic will, indeed, always be sincere in his devotion to the principle of beauty, but he will seek for beauty in every age and in each school, and will never suffer himself to be limited to any settled custom of thought or stereotyped mode of looking at things. He will realise himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways, and will ever be curious of new sensations and fresh points of view. Through constant change, and through constant change alone, he will find his true unity. He will not consent to be the slave of his own opinions. For what is mind but motion in the intellectual sphere? The essence of thought, as the essence of life, is growth. You must not be frightened by word, Ernest. What people call insincerity is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities.
ERNEST. I am afraid I have not been fortunate in my suggestions.

GILBERT. Of the three qualifications you mentioned, two, sincerity and fairness, were, if not actually moral, at least on the borderland of morals, and the first condition of criticism is that the critic should be able to recognise that the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate. When they are confused, Chaos has come again. They are too often confused in England now, and though our modern Puritans cannot destroy a beautiful thing, yet, by means of their extraordinary prurience, they can almost taint beauty for a moment. It is chiefly, I regret to say, through journalism that such people find expression. I regret it because there is much to be said in favour of modern journalism. By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, it keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community. By carefully chronicling the current events of contemporary life, it shows us of what very little importance such events really are. By invariably discussing the unnecessary it makes us understand what things are requisite for culture, and what are not. But it should not allow poor Tartuffe to write articles upon modern art. When it does this it stultifies itself. And yet Tartuffe's articles and Chadband's notes do this good, at least. They serve to show how extremely limited is the area over which ethics, and ethical considerations, can claim to exercise influence. Science is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon eternal truths. Art is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon...
things beautiful and immortal and ever-changing. To morals belong
the lower and less intellectual spheres. However, let these
mouthing Puritans pass; they have their comic side. Who can help
laughing when an ordinary journalist seriously proposes to limit
the subject-matter at the disposal of the artist? Some limitation
might well, and will soon, I hope, be placed upon some of our
newspapers and newspaper writers. For they give us the bald,
sordid, disgusting facts of life. They chronicle, with degrading
avidity, the sins of the second-rate, and with the
conscientiousness of the illiterate give us accurate and prosaic
details of the doings of people of absolutely no interest
whatsoever. But the artist, who accepts the facts of life, and yet
transforms them into shapes of beauty, and makes them vehicles of
pity or of awe, and shows their colour-element, and their wonder,
and their true ethical import also, and builds out of them a world
more real than reality itself, and of loftier and more noble
import--who shall set limits to him? Not the apostles of that new
Journalism which is but the old vulgarity 'writ large.' Not the
apostles of that new Puritanism, which is but the whine of the
hypocrite, and is both writ and spoken badly. The mere suggestion
is ridiculous. Let us leave these wicked people, and proceed to
the discussion of the artistic qualifications necessary for the
ture critic.

ERNEST. And what are they? Tell me yourself.

GILBERT. Temperament is the primary requisite for the critic--a
temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty, and to the various impressions that beauty gives us. Under what conditions, and by what means, this temperament is engendered in race or individual, we will not discuss at present. It is sufficient to note that it exists, and that there is in us a beauty-sense, separate from the other senses and above them, separate from the reason and of nobler import, separate from the soul and of equal value—a sense that leads some to create, and others, the finer spirits as I think, to contemplate merely. But to be purified and made perfect, this sense requires some form of exquisite environment. Without this it starves, or is dulled. You remember that lovely passage in which Plato describes how a young Greek should be educated, and with what insistence he dwells upon the importance of surroundings, telling us how the lad is to be brought up in the midst of fair sights and sounds, so that the beauty of material things may prepare his soul for the reception of the beauty that is spiritual. Insensibly, and without knowing the reason why, he is to develop that real love of beauty which, as Plato is never weary of reminding us, is the true aim of education. By slow degrees there is to be engendered in him such a temperament as will lead him naturally and simply to choose the good in preference to the bad, and, rejecting what is vulgar and discordant, to follow by fine instinctive taste all that possesses grace and charm and loveliness. Ultimately, in its due course, this taste is to become critical and self-conscious, but at first it is to exist purely as a cultivated instinct, and 'he who has received this true culture of the inner man will with clear and certain vision perceive the omissions and faults in art or nature, and with a taste that cannot err, while he praises, and finds his
pleasure in what is good, and receives it into his soul, and so
becomes good and noble, he will rightly blame and hate the bad, now
in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason
why': and so, when, later on, the critical and self-conscious
spirit develops in him, he 'will recognise and salute it as a
friend with whom his education has made him long familiar.' I need
hardly say, Ernest, how far we in England have fallen short of this
ideal, and I can imagine the smile that would illuminate the glossy
face of the Philistine if one ventured to suggest to him that the
true aim of education was the love of beauty, and that the methods
by which education should work were the development of temperament,
the cultivation of taste, and the creation of the critical spirit.

Yet, even for us, there is left some loveliness of environment, and
the dulness of tutors and professors matters very little when one
can loiter in the grey cloisters at Magdalen, and listen to some
flute-like voice singing in Waynflete's chapel, or lie in the
green meadow, among the strange snake-spotted fritillaries, and
watch the sunburnt noon smite to a finer gold the tower's gilded
vanes, or wander up the Christ Church staircase beneath the vaulted
ceiling's shadowy fans, or pass through the sculptured gateway of
Laud's building in the College of St. John. Nor is it merely at
Oxford, or Cambridge, that the sense of beauty can be formed and
trained and perfected. All over England there is a Renaissance of
the decorative Arts. Ugliness has had its day. Even in the houses
of the rich there is taste, and the houses of those who are not
rich have been made gracious and comely and sweet to live in.
Caliban, poor noisy Caliban, thinks that when he has ceased to make
mows at a thing, the thing ceases to exist. But if he mocks no
longer, it is because he has been met with mockery, swifter and
keener than his own, and for a moment has been bitterly schooled
into that silence which should seal for ever his uncouth distorted
lips. What has been done up to now, has been chiefly in the
clearing of the way. It is always more difficult to destroy than
it is to create, and when what one has to destroy is vulgarity and
stupidity, the task of destruction needs not merely courage but
also contempt. Yet it seems to me to have been, in a measure,
done. We have got rid of what was bad. We have now to make what
is beautiful. And though the mission of the aesthetic movement is
to lure people to contemplate, not to lead them to create, yet, as
the creative instinct is strong in the Celt, and it is the Celt who
leads in art, there is no reason why in future years this strange
Renaissance should not become almost as mighty in its way as was
that new birth of Art that woke many centuries ago in the cities of
Italy.

Certainly, for the cultivation of temperament, we must turn to the
decorative arts: to the arts that touch us, not to the arts that
teach us. Modern pictures are, no doubt, delightful to look at.
At least, some of them are. But they are quite impossible to live
with; they are too clever, too assertive, too intellectual. Their
meaning is too obvious, and their method too clearly defined. One
exhausts what they have to say in a very short time, and then they
become as tedious as one's relations. I am very fond of the work
of many of the Impressionist painters of Paris and London.

Subtlety and distinction have not yet left the school. Some of
their arrangements and harmonies serve to remind one of the
unapproachable beauty of Gautier's immortal Symphonie en Blanc
Majeur, that flawless masterpiece of colour and music which may
have suggested the type as well as the titles of many of their best
pictures. For a class that welcomes the incompetent with
sympathetic eagerness, and that confuses the bizarre with the
beautiful, and vulgarity with truth, they are extremely
accomplished. They can do etchings that have the brilliancy of
epigrams, pastels that are as fascinating as paradoxes, and as for
their portraits, whatever the commonplace may say against them, no
one can deny that they possess that unique and wonderful charm
which belongs to works of pure fiction. But even the
Impressionists, earnest and industrious as they are, will not do.

I like them. Their white keynote, with its variations in lilac,
was an era in colour. Though the moment does not make the man, the
moment certainly makes the Impressionist, and for the moment in
art, and the 'moment's monument,' as Rossetti phrased it, what may
not be said? They are suggestive also. If they have not opened
the eyes of the blind, they have at least given great encouragement
to the short-sighted, and while their leaders may have all the
inexperience of old age, their young men are far too wise to be
ever sensible. Yet they will insist on treating painting as if it
were a mode of autobiography invented for the use of the
illiterate, and are always prating to us on their coarse gritty
canvases of their unnecessary selves and their unnecessary
opinions, and spoiling by a vulgar over-emphasis that fine contempt
of nature which is the best and only modest thing about them. One
tires, at the end, of the work of individuals whose individuality
is always noisy, and generally uninteresting. There is far more to
be said in favour of that newer school at Paris, the Archaicistes,
as they call themselves, who, refusing to leave the artist entirely
at the mercy of the weather, do not find the ideal of art in mere
atmospheric effect, but seek rather for the imaginative beauty of
design and the loveliness of fair colour, and rejecting the tedious
realism of those who merely paint what they see, try to see
something worth seeing, and to see it not merely with actual and
physical vision, but with that nobler vision of the soul which is
as far wider in spiritual scope as it is far more splendid in
artistic purpose. They, at any rate, work under those decorative
conditions that each art requires for its perfection, and have
sufficient aesthetic instinct to regret those sordid and stupid
limitations of absolute modernity of form which have proved the
ruin of so many of the Impressionists. Still, the art that is
frankly decorative is the art to live with. It is, of all our
visible arts, the one art that creates in us both mood and
temperament. Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with
definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways.
The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and
masses becomes mirrored in the mind. The repetitions of pattern
give us rest. The marvels of design stir the imagination. In the
mere loveliness of the materials employed there are latent elements
of culture. Nor is this all. By its deliberate rejection of
Nature as the ideal of beauty, as well as of the imitative method
of the ordinary painter, decorative art not merely prepares the
soul for the reception of true imaginative work, but develops in it
that sense of form which is the basis of creative no less than of
critical achievement. For the real artist is he who proceeds, not
from feeling to form, but from form to thought and passion. He
does not first conceive an idea, and then say to himself, 'I will
put my idea into a complex metre of fourteen lines;' but, realising
the beauty of the sonnet-scheme, he conceives certain modes of
music and methods of rhyme, and the mere form suggests what is to
fill it and make it intellectually and emotionally complete. From
time to time the world cries out against some charming artistic
poet, because, to use its hackneyed and silly phrase, he has
'nothing to say.' But if he had something to say, he would
probably say it, and the result would be tedious. It is just
because he has no new message, that he can do beautiful work. He
gains his inspiration from form, and from form purely, as an artist
should. A real passion would ruin him. Whatever actually occurs
is spoiled for art. All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling.
To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be
inartistic.

ERNEST. I wonder do you really believe what you say?

GILBERT. Why should you wonder? It is not merely in art that the
body is the soul. In every sphere of life Form is the beginning of
things. The rhythmic harmonious gestures of dancing convey, Plato
tells us, both rhythm and harmony into the mind. Forms are the
food of faith, cried Newman in one of those great moments of
sincerity that make us admire and know the man. He was right, though he may not have known how terribly right he was. The Creeds are believed, not because they are rational, but because they are repeated. Yes: Form is everything. It is the secret of life.

Find expression for a sorrow, and it will become dear to you. Find expression for a joy, and you intensify its ecstasy. Do you wish to love? Use Love's Litany, and the words will create the yearning from which the world fancies that they spring. Have you a grief that corrodes your heart? Steep yourself in the Language of grief, learn its utterance from Prince Hamlet and Queen Constance, and you will find that mere expression is a mode of consolation, and that Form, which is the birth of passion, is also the death of pain.

And so, to return to the sphere of Art, it is Form that creates not merely the critical temperament, but also the aesthetic instinct, that unerring instinct that reveals to one all things under their conditions of beauty. Start with the worship of form, and there is no secret in art that will not be revealed to you, and remember that in criticism, as in creation, temperament is everything, and that it is, not by the time of their production, but by the temperaments to which they appeal, that the schools of art should be historically grouped.

ERNEST. Your theory of education is delightful. But what influence will your critic, brought up in these exquisite surroundings, possess? Do you really think that any artist is ever affected by criticism?
GILBERT. The influence of the critic will be the mere fact of his own existence. He will represent the flawless type. In him the culture of the century will see itself realised. You must not ask of him to have any aim other than the perfecting of himself. The demand of the intellect, as has been well said, is simply to feel itself alive. The critic may, indeed, desire to exercise influence; but, if so, he will concern himself not with the individual, but with the age, which he will seek to wake into consciousness, and to make responsive, creating in it new desires and appetites, and lending it his larger vision and his nobler moods. The actual art of to-day will occupy him less than the art of to-morrow, far less than the art of yesterday, and as for this or that person at present toiling away, what do the industrious matter? They do their best, no doubt, and consequently we get the worst from them. It is always with the best intentions that the worst work is done. And besides, my dear Ernest, when a man reaches the age of forty, or becomes a Royal Academician, or is elected a member of the Athenaeum Club, or is recognised as a popular novelist, whose books are in great demand at suburban railway stations, one may have the amusement of exposing him, but one cannot have the pleasure of reforming him. And this is, I dare say, very fortunate for him; for I have no doubt that reformation is a much more painful process than punishment, is indeed punishment in its most aggravated and moral form—a fact which accounts for our entire failure as a community to reclaim that interesting phenomenon who is called the confirmed criminal.
ERNEST. But may it not be that the poet is the best judge of poetry, and the painter of painting? Each art must appeal primarily to the artist who works in it. His judgment will surely be the most valuable?

GILBERT. The appeal of all art is simply to the artistic temperament. Art does not address herself to the specialist. Her claim is that she is universal, and that in all her manifestations she is one. Indeed, so far from its being true that the artist is the best judge of art, a really great artist can never judge of other people's work at all, and can hardly, in fact, judge of his own. That very concentration of vision that makes a man an artist, limits by its sheer intensity his faculty of fine appreciation. The energy of creation hurries him blindly on to his own goal. The wheels of his chariot raise the dust as a cloud around him. The gods are hidden from each other. They can recognise their worshippers. That is all.

ERNEST. You say that a great artist cannot recognise the beauty of work different from his own.

GILBERT. It is impossible for him to do so. Wordsworth saw in Endymion merely a pretty piece of Paganism, and Shelley, with his dislike of actuality, was deaf to Wordsworth's message, being repelled by its form, and Byron, that great passionate human incomplete creature, could appreciate neither the poet of the cloud
nor the poet of the lake, and the wonder of Keats was hidden from him. The realism of Euripides was hateful to Sophokles. Those droppings of warm tears had no music for him. Milton, with his sense of the grand style, could not understand the method of Shakespeare, any more than could Sir Joshua the method of Gainsborough. Bad artists always admire each other's work. They call it being large-minded and free from prejudice. But a truly great artist cannot conceive of life being shown, or beauty fashioned, under any conditions other than those that he has selected. Creation employs all its critical faculty within its own sphere. It may not use it in the sphere that belongs to others. It is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it.

ERNEST. Do you really mean that?

GILBERT. Yes, for creation limits, while contemplation widens, the vision.

ERNEST. But what about technique? Surely each art has its separate technique?

GILBERT. Certainly: each art has its grammar and its materials. There is no mystery about either, and the incompetent can always be correct. But, while the laws upon which Art rests may be fixed and certain, to find their true realisation they must be touched by the
imagination into such beauty that they will seem an exception, each one of them. Technique is really personality. That is the reason why the artist cannot teach it, why the pupil cannot learn it, and why the aesthetic critic can understand it. To the great poet, there is only one method of music--his own. To the great painter, there is only one manner of painting--that which he himself employs. The aesthetic critic, and the aesthetic critic alone, can appreciate all forms and modes. It is to him that Art makes her appeal.

ERNEST. Well, I think I have put all my questions to you. And now I must admit -

GILBERT. Ah! don't say that you agree with me. When people agree with me I always feel that I must be wrong.

ERNEST. In that case I certainly won't tell you whether I agree with you or not. But I will put another question. You have explained to me that criticism is a creative art. What future has it?

GILBERT. It is to criticism that the future belongs. The subject-matter at the disposal of creation becomes every day more limited in extent and variety. Providence and Mr. Walter Besant have exhausted the obvious. If creation is to last at all, it can only do so on the condition of becoming far more critical than it is at
present. The old roads and dusty highways have been traversed too often. Their charm has been worn away by plodding feet, and they have lost that element of novelty or surprise which is so essential for romance. He who would stir us now by fiction must either give us an entirely new background, or reveal to us the soul of man in its innermost workings. The first is for the moment being done for us by Mr. Rudyard Kipling. As one turns over the pages of his Plain Tales from the Hills, one feels as if one were seated under a palm-tree reading life by superb flashes of vulgarity. The bright colours of the bazaars dazzle one's eyes. The jaded, second-rate Anglo-Indians are in exquisite incongruity with their surroundings. The mere lack of style in the story-teller gives an odd journalistic realism to what he tells us. From the point of view of literature Mr. Kipling is a genius who drops his aspirates. From the point of view of life, he is a reporter who knows vulgarity better than any one has ever known it. Dickens knew its clothes and its comedy. Mr. Kipling knows its essence and its seriousness. He is our first authority on the second-rate, and has seen marvellous things through keyholes, and his backgrounds are real works of art. As for the second condition, we have had Browning, and Meredith is with us. But there is still much to be done in the sphere of introspection. People sometimes say that fiction is getting too morbid. As far as psychology is concerned, it has never been morbid enough. We have merely touched the surface of the soul, that is all. In one single ivory cell of the brain there are stored away things more marvellous and more terrible than even they have dreamed of, who, like the author of Le Rouge et le Noir, have sought to track the soul into its most
secret places, and to make life confess its dearest sins. Still, there is a limit even to the number of untried backgrounds, and it is possible that a further development of the habit of introspection may prove fatal to that creative faculty to which it seeks to supply fresh material. I myself am inclined to think that creation is doomed. It springs from too primitive, too natural an impulse. However this may be, it is certain that the subject-matter at the disposal of creation is always diminishing, while the subject-matter of criticism increases daily. There are always new attitudes for the mind, and new points of view. The duty of imposing form upon chaos does not grow less as the world advances. There was never a time when Criticism was more needed than it is now. It is only by its means that Humanity can become conscious of the point at which it has arrived.

Hours ago, Ernest, you asked me the use of Criticism. You might just as well have asked me the use of thought. It is Criticism, as Arnold points out, that creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age. It is Criticism, as I hope to point out myself some day, that makes the mind a fine instrument. We, in our educational system, have burdened the memory with a load of unconnected facts, and laboriously striven to impart our laboriously-acquired knowledge. We teach people how to remember, we never teach them how to grow. It has never occurred to us to try and develop in the mind a more subtle quality of apprehension and discernment. The Greeks did this, and when we come in contact with the Greek critical intellect, we cannot but be conscious that, while our subject-
matter is in every respect larger and more varied than theirs, theirs is the only method by which this subject-matter can be interpreted. England has done one thing; it has invented and established Public Opinion, which is an attempt to organise the ignorance of the community, and to elevate it to the dignity of physical force. But Wisdom has always been hidden from it. Considered as an instrument of thought, the English mind is coarse and undeveloped. The only thing that can purify it is the growth of the critical instinct.

It is Criticism, again, that, by concentration, makes culture possible. It takes the cumbersome mass of creative work, and distills it into a finer essence. Who that desires to retain any sense of form could struggle through the monstrous multitudinous books that the world has produced, books in which thought stammers or ignorance brawls? The thread that is to guide us across the wearisome labyrinth is in the hands of Criticism. Nay more, where there is no record, and history is either lost, or was never written, Criticism can re-create the past for us from the very smallest fragment of language or art, just as surely as the man of science can from some tiny bone, or the mere impress of a foot upon a rock, re-create for us the winged dragon or Titan lizard that once made the earth shake beneath its tread, can call Behemoth out of his cave, and make Leviathan swim once more across the startled sea. Prehistoric history belongs to the philological and archaeological critic. It is to him that the origins of things are revealed. The self-conscious deposits of an age are nearly always
misleading. Through philological criticism alone we know more of
the centuries of which no actual record has been preserved, than we
do of the centuries that have left us their scrolls. It can do for
us what can be done neither by physics nor metaphysics. It can
give us the exact science of mind in the process of becoming. It
can do for us what History cannot do. It can tell us what man
thought before he learned how to write. You have asked me about
the influence of Criticism. I think I have answered that question
already; but there is this also to be said. It is Criticism that
makes us cosmopolitan. The Manchester school tried to make men
realise the brotherhood of humanity, by pointing out the commercial
advantages of peace. It sought to degrade the wonderful world into
a common market-place for the buyer and the seller. It addressed
itself to the lowest instincts, and it failed. War followed upon
war, and the tradesman's creed did not prevent France and Germany
from clashing together in blood-stained battle. There are others
of our own day who seek to appeal to mere emotional sympathies, or
to the shallow dogmas of some vague system of abstract ethics.
They have their Peace Societies, so dear to the sentimentalists,
and their proposals for unarmed International Arbitration, so
popular among those who have never read history. But mere
emotional sympathy will not do. It is too variable, and too
closely connected with the passions; and a board of arbitrators
who, for the general welfare of the race, are to be deprived of the
power of putting their decisions into execution, will not be of
much avail. There is only one thing worse than Injustice, and that
is Justice without her sword in her hand. When Right is not Might,
it is Evil.
No: the emotions will not make us cosmopolitan, any more than the greed for gain could do so. It is only by the cultivation of the habit of intellectual criticism that we shall be able to rise superior to race-prejudices. Goethe--you will not misunderstand what I say--was a German of the Germans. He loved his country--no man more so. Its people were dear to him; and he led them. Yet, when the iron hoof of Napoleon trampled upon vineyard and cornfield, his lips were silent. 'How can one write songs of hatred without hating?' he said to Eckermann, 'and how could I, to whom culture and barbarism are alone of importance, hate a nation which is among the most cultivated of the earth and to which I owe so great a part of my own cultivation?' This note, sounded in the modern world by Goethe first, will become, I think, the starting point for the cosmopolitanism of the future. Criticism will annihilate race-prejudices, by insisting upon the unity of the human mind in the variety of its forms. If we are tempted to make war upon another nation, we shall remember that we are seeking to destroy an element of our own culture, and possibly its most important element. As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular. The change will of course be slow, and people will not be conscious of it. They will not say 'We will not war against France because her prose is perfect,' but because the prose of France is perfect, they will not hate the land. Intellectual criticism will bind Europe together in bonds far closer than those that can be forged by shopman or sentimentalist.
It will give us the peace that springs from understanding.

Nor is this all. It is Criticism that, recognising no position as final, and refusing to bind itself by the shallow shibboleths of any sect or school, creates that serene philosophic temper which loves truth for its own sake, and loves it not the less because it knows it to be unattainable. How little we have of this temper in England, and how much we need it! The English mind is always in a rage. The intellect of the race is wasted in the sordid and stupid quarrels of second-rate politicians or third-rate theologians. It was reserved for a man of science to show us the supreme example of that 'sweet reasonableness' of which Arnold spoke so wisely, and, alas! to so little effect. The author of the Origin of Species had, at any rate, the philosophic temper. If one contemplates the ordinary pulpits and platforms of England, one can but feel the contempt of Julian, or the indifference of Montaigne. We are dominated by the fanatic, whose worst vice is his sincerity. Anything approaching to the free play of the mind is practically unknown amongst us. People cry out against the sinner, yet it is not the sinful, but the stupid, who are our shame. There is no sin except stupidity.

ERNEST. Ah! what an antinomian you are!

GILBERT. The artistic critic, like the mystic, is an antinomian always. To be good, according to the vulgar standard of goodness,
is obviously quite easy. It merely requires a certain amount of sordid terror, a certain lack of imaginative thought, and a certain low passion for middle-class respectability. Aesthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a more spiritual sphere. To discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive. Even a colour-sense is more important, in the development of the individual, than a sense of right and wrong. Aesthetics, in fact, are to Ethics in the sphere of conscious civilisation, what, in the sphere of the external world, sexual is to natural selection. Ethics, like natural selection, make existence possible. Aesthetics, like sexual selection, make life lovely and wonderful, fill it with new forms, and give it progress, and variety and change. And when we reach the true culture that is our aim, we attain to that perfection of which the saints have dreamed, the perfection of those to whom sin is impossible, not because they make the renunciations of the ascetic, but because they can do everything they wish without hurt to the soul, and can wish for nothing that can do the soul harm, the soul being an entity so divine that it is able to transform into elements of a richer experience, or a finer susceptibility, or a newer mode of thought, acts or passions that with the common would be commonplace, or with the uneducated ignoble, or with the shameful vile. Is this dangerous? Yes; it is dangerous--all ideas, as I told you, are so. But the night wearies, and the light flickers in the lamp. One more thing I cannot help saying to you. You have spoken against Criticism as being a sterile thing. The nineteenth century is a turning point in history, simply on account of the work of two men, Darwin and Renan, the one the critic of the Book of Nature, the
other the critic of the books of God. Not to recognise this is to
miss the meaning of one of the most important eras in the progress
of the world. Creation is always behind the age. It is Criticism
that leads us. The Critical Spirit and the World-Spirit are one.

ERNEST. And he who is in possession of this spirit, or whom this
spirit possesses, will, I suppose, do nothing?

GILBERT. Like the Persephone of whom Landor tells us, the sweet
pensive Persephone around whose white feet the asphodel and
amaranth are blooming, he will sit contented 'in that deep,
motionless quiet which mortals pity, and which the gods enjoy.' He
will look out upon the world and know its secret. By contact with
divine things he will become divine. His will be the perfect life,
and his only.

ERNEST. You have told me many strange things to-night, Gilbert.
You have told me that it is more difficult to talk about a thing
than to do it, and that to do nothing at all is the most difficult
thing in the world; you have told me that all Art is immoral, and
all thought dangerous; that criticism is more creative than
creation, and that the highest criticism is that which reveals in
the work of Art what the artist had not put there; that it is
exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge
of it; and that the true critic is unfair, insincere, and not
rational. My friend, you are a dreamer.
GILBERT. Yes: I am a dreamer. For a dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.

ERNEST. His punishment?

GILBERT. And his reward. But, see, it is dawn already. Draw back the curtains and open the windows wide. How cool the morning air is! Piccadilly lies at our feet like a long riband of silver. A faint purple mist hangs over the Park, and the shadows of the white houses are purple. It is too late to sleep. Let us go down to Covent Garden and look at the roses. Come! I am tired of thought.

THE TRUTH OF MASKS--A NOTE ON ILLUSION

In many of the somewhat violent attacks that have recently been made on that splendour of mounting which now characterises our Shakespearian revivals in England, it seems to have been tacitly assumed by the critics that Shakespeare himself was more or less indifferent to the costumes of his actors, and that, could he see Mrs. Langtry's production of Antony and Cleopatra, he would probably say that the play, and the play only, is the thing, and that everything else is leather and prunella. While, as regards any historical accuracy in dress, Lord Lytton, in an article in the
Nineteenth Century, has laid it down as a dogma of art that
archaeology is entirely out of place in the presentation of any of
Shakespeare's plays, and the attempt to introduce it one of the
stupidest pedantries of an age of prigs.

Lord Lytton's position I shall examine later on; but, as regards
the theory that Shakespeare did not busy himself much about the
costume-wardrobe of his theatre, anybody who cares to study
Shakespeare's method will see that there is absolutely no dramatist
of the French, English, or Athenian stage who relies so much for
his illusionist effects on the dress of his actors as Shakespeare
does himself.

Knowing how the artistic temperament is always fascinated by beauty
of costume, he constantly introduces into his plays masques and
dances, purely for the sake of the pleasure which they give the
eye; and we have still his stage-directions for the three great
processions in Henry the Eighth, directions which are characterised
by the most extraordinary elaborateness of detail down to the
collars of S.S. and the pearls in Anne Boleyn's hair. Indeed it
would be quite easy for a modern manager to reproduce these
pageants absolutely as Shakespeare had them designed; and so
accurate were they that one of the court officials of the time,
writing an account of the last performance of the play at the Globe
Theatre to a friend, actually complains of their realistic
character, notably of the production on the stage of the Knights of
the Garter in the robes and insignia of the order as being
calculated to bring ridicule on the real ceremonies; much in the same spirit in which the French Government, some time ago, prohibited that delightful actor, M. Christian, from appearing in uniform, on the plea that it was prejudicial to the glory of the army that a colonel should be caricatured. And elsewhere the gorgeousness of apparel which distinguished the English stage under Shakespeare's influence was attacked by the contemporary critics, not as a rule, however, on the grounds of the democratic tendencies of realism, but usually on those moral grounds which are always the last refuge of people who have no sense of beauty.

The point, however, which I wish to emphasise is, not that Shakespeare appreciated the value of lovely costumes in adding picturesqueness to poetry, but that he saw how important costume is as a means of producing certain dramatic effects. Many of his plays, such as Measure for Measure, Twelfth Night, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, All's Well that Ends Well, Cymbeline, and others, depend for their illusion on the character of the various dresses worn by the hero or the heroine; the delightful scene in Henry the Sixth, on the modern miracles of healing by faith, loses all its point unless Gloster is in black and scarlet; and the denoument of the Merry Wives of Windsor hinges on the colour of Anne Page's gown. As for the uses Shakespeare makes of disguises the instances are almost numberless. Posthumus hides his passion under a peasant's garb, and Edgar his pride beneath an idiot's rags; Portia wears the apparel of a lawyer, and Rosalind is attired in 'all points as a man'; the cloak-bag of Pisanio changes Imogen
to the Youth Fidele; Jessica flees from her father's house in boy's
dress, and Julia ties up her yellow hair in fantastic love-knots,
and dons hose and doublet; Henry the Eighth woos his lady as a
shepherd, and Romeo his as a pilgrim; Prince Hal and Poins appear
first as footpads in buckram suits, and then in white aprons and
leather jerkins as the waiters in a tavern: and as for Falstaff,
does he not come on as a highwayman, as an old woman, as Herne the
Hunter, and as the clothes going to the laundry?

Nor are the examples of the employment of costume as a mode of
intensifying dramatic situation less numerous. After slaughter of
Duncan, Macbeth appears in his night-gown as if aroused from sleep;
Timon ends in rags the play he had begun in splendour; Richard
flatters the London citizens in a suit of mean and shabby armour,
and, as soon as he has stepped in blood to the throne, marches
through the streets in crown and George and Garter; the climax of
The Tempest is reached when Prospero, throwing off his enchanter's
robes, sends Ariel for his hat and rapier, and reveals himself as
the great Italian Duke; the very Ghost in Hamlet changes his
mystical apparel to produce different effects; and as for Juliet, a
modern playwright would probably have laid her out in her shroud,
and made the scene a scene of horror merely, but Shakespeare arrays
her in rich and gorgeous raiment, whose loveliness makes the vault
'a feasting presence full of light,' turns the tomb into a bridal
chamber, and gives the cue and motive for Romeo's speech of the
triumph of Beauty over Death.
Even small details of dress, such as the colour of a major-domo’s stockings, the pattern on a wife’s handkerchief, the sleeve of a young soldier, and a fashionable woman’s bonnets, become in Shakespeare’s hands points of actual dramatic importance, and by some of them the action of the play in question is conditioned absolutely. Many other dramatists have availed themselves of costume as a method of expressing directly to the audience the character of a person on his entrance, though hardly so brilliantly as Shakespeare has done in the case of the dandy Parolles, whose dress, by the way, only an archaeologist can understand; the fun of a master and servant exchanging coats in presence of the audience, of shipwrecked sailors squabbling over the division of a lot of fine clothes, and of a tinker dressed up like a duke while he is in his cups, may be regarded as part of that great career which costume has always played in comedy from the time of Aristophanes down to Mr. Gilbert; but nobody from the mere details of apparel and adornment has ever drawn such irony of contrast, such immediate and tragic effect, such pity and such pathos, as Shakespeare himself. Armed cap-a-pie, the dead King stalks on the battlements of Elsinore because all is not right with Denmark; Shylock’s Jewish gaberdine is part of the stigma under which that wounded and embittered nature writhes; Arthur begging for his life can think of no better plea than the handkerchief he had given Hubert -

Have you the heart? when your head did but ache,

I knit my handkerchief about your brows,

(The best I had, a princess wrought it me)
And I did never ask it you again;

and Orlando's blood-stained napkin strikes the first sombre note in
that exquisite woodland idyll, and shows us the depth of feeling
that underlies Rosalind's fanciful wit and wilful jesting.

Last night 'twas on my arm; I kissed it;
I hope it be not gone to tell my lord
That I kiss aught but he,

says Imogen, jesting on the loss of the bracelet which was already
on its way to Rome to rob her of her husband's faith; the little
Prince passing to the Tower plays with the dagger in his uncle's
girdle; Duncan sends a ring to Lady Macbeth on the night of his own
murder, and the ring of Portia turns the tragedy of the merchant
into a wife's comedy. The great rebel York dies with a paper crown
on his head; Hamlet's black suit is a kind of colour-motive in the
piece, like the mourning of the Chimene in the Cid; and the climax
of Antony's speech is the production of Caesar's cloak:-

I remember
The first time ever Caesar put it on.
'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,
The day he overcame the Nervii:-
Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through:
See what a rent the envious Casca made:
Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed. . . .

Kind souls, what, weep you when you but behold

Our Caesar's vesture wounded?

The flowers which Ophelia carries with her in her madness are as pathetic as the violets that blossom on a grave; the effect of Lear's wandering on the heath is intensified beyond words by his fantastic attire; and when Cloten, stung by the taunt of that simile which his sister draws from her husband's raiment, arrays himself in that husband's very garb to work upon her the deed of shame, we feel that there is nothing in the whole of modern French realism, nothing even in Therese Raquin, that masterpiece of horror, which for terrible and tragic significance can compare with this strange scene in Cymbeline.

In the actual dialogue also some of the most vivid passages are those suggested by costume. Rosalind's

Dost thou think, though I am caparisoned like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition?

Constance's

Grief fills the place of my absent child,

Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
and the quick sharp cry of Elizabeth -

Ah! cut my lace asunder! -

are only a few of the many examples one might quote. One of the finest effects I have ever seen on the stage was Salvini, in the last act of Lear, tearing the plume from Kent's cap and applying it to Cordelia's lips when he came to the line,

This feather stirs; she lives!

Mr. Booth, whose Lear had many noble qualities of passion, plucked, I remember, some fur from his archaeologically-incorrect ermine for the same business; but Salvini's was the finer effect of the two, as well as the truer. And those who saw Mr. Irving in the last act of Richard the Third have not, I am sure, forgotten how much the agony and terror of his dream was intensified, by contrast, through the calm and quiet that preceded it, and the delivery of such lines as

What, is my beaver easier than it was? And all my armour laid into my tent? Look that my staves be sound and not too heavy -
lines which had a double meaning for the audience, remembering the
last words which Richard's mother called after him as he was
marching to Bosworth:-

Therefore take with thee my most grievous curse,
Which in the day of battle tire thee more
Than all the complete armour that thou wear'st.

As regards the resources which Shakespeare had at his disposal, it
is to be remarked that, while he more than once complains of the
smallness of the stage on which he has to produce big historical
plays, and of the want of scenery which obliges him to cut out many
effective open-air incidents, he always writes as a dramatist who
had at his disposal a most elaborate theatrical wardrobe, and who
could rely on the actors taking pains about their make-up. Even
now it is difficult to produce such a play as the Comedy of Errors;
and to the picturesque accident of Miss Ellen Terry's brother
resembling herself we owe the opportunity of seeing Twelfth Night
adequately performed. Indeed, to put any play of Shakespeare's on
the stage, absolutely as he himself wished it to be done, requires
the services of a good property-man, a clever wig-maker, a
costumier with a sense of colour and a knowledge of textures, a
master of the methods of making-up, a fencing-master, a dancing-
master, and an artist to direct personally the whole production.
For he is most careful to tell us the dress and appearance of each
character. 'Racine abhorre la realite,' says Auguste Vacquerie
somewhere; 'il ne daigne pas s'occuper de son costume. Si l'on s'en rapportait aux indications du poète, Agamemnon serait vetu d'un sceptre et Achille d'une epee.' But with Shakespeare it is very different. He gives us directions about the costumes of Perdita, Florizel, Autolycus, the Witches in Macbeth, and the apothecary in Romeo and Juliet, several elaborate descriptions of his fat knight, and a detailed account of the extraordinary garb in which Petruchio is to be married. Rosalind, he tells us, is tall, and is to carry a spear and a little dagger; Celia is smaller, and is to paint her face brown so as to look sunburnt. The children who play at fairies in Windsor Forest are to be dressed in white and green—a compliment, by the way, to Queen Elizabeth, whose favourite colours they were—and in white, with green garlands and gilded vizors, the angels are to come to Katherine in Kimbolton. Bottom is in homespun, Lysander is distinguished from Oberon by his wearing an Athenian dress, and Launce has holes in his boots. The Duchess of Gloucester stands in a white sheet with her husband in mourning beside her. The motley of the Fool, the scarlet of the Cardinal, and the French lilies brodered on the English coats, are all made occasion for jest or taunt in the dialogue. We know the patterns on the Dauphin's armour and the Pucelle's sword, the crest on Warwick's helmet and the colour of Bardolph's nose. Portia has golden hair, Phoebe is black-haired, Orlando has chestnut curls, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek's hair hangs like flax on a distaff, and won't curl at all. Some of the characters are stout, some lean, some straight, some hunchbacked, some fair, some dark, and some are to blacken their faces. Lear has a white beard, Hamlet's father a grizzled, and Benedick is to shave his in the course of the play.
Indeed, on the subject of stage beards Shakespeare is quite elaborate; tells us of the many different colours in use, and gives a hint to actors always to see that their own are properly tied on. There is a dance of reapers in rye-straw hats, and of rustics in hairy coats like satyrs; a masque of Amazons, a masque of Russians, and a classical masque; several immortal scenes over a weaver in an ass's head, a riot over the colour of a coat which it takes the Lord Mayor of London to quell, and a scene between an infuriated husband and his wife's milliner about the slashing of a sleeve.

As for the metaphors Shakespeare draws from dress, and the aphorisms he makes on it, his hits at the costume of his age, particularly at the ridiculous size of the ladies' bonnets, and the many descriptions of the mundus muliebris, from the long of Autolycus in the Winter's Tale down to the account of the Duchess of Milan's gown in Much Ado About Nothing, they are far too numerous to quote; though it may be worth while to remind people that the whole of the Philosophy of Clothes is to be found in Lear's scene with Edgar--a passage which has the advantage of brevity and style over the grotesque wisdom and somewhat mouthing metaphysics of Sartor Resartus. But I think that from what I have already said it is quite clear that Shakespeare was very much interested in costume. I do not mean in that shallow sense by which it has been concluded from his knowledge of deeds and daffodils that he was the Blackstone and Paxton of the Elizabethan age; but that he saw that costume could be made at once impressive of a certain effect on the audience and expressive of certain types
of character, and is one of the essential factors of the means which a true illusionist has at his disposal. Indeed to him the deformed figure of Richard was of as much value as Juliet's loveliness; he sets the serge of the radical beside the silks of the lord, and sees the stage effects to be got from each: he has as much delight in Caliban as he has in Ariel, in rags as he has in cloth of gold, and recognises the artistic beauty of ugliness.

The difficulty Ducis felt about translating Othello in consequence of the importance given to such a vulgar thing as a handkerchief, and his attempt to soften its grossness by making the Moor reiterate 'Le bandeau! le bandeau!' may be taken as an example of the difference between la tragedie philosophique and the drama of real life; and the introduction for the first time of the word mouchoir at the Theatre Francais was an era in that romantic-realistic movement of which Hugo is the father and M. Zola the enfant terrible, just as the classicism of the earlier part of the century was emphasised by Talma's refusal to play Greek heroes any longer in a powdered periwig--one of the many instances, by the way, of that desire for archaeological accuracy in dress which has distinguished the great actors of our age.

In criticising the importance given to money in La Comedie Humaine, Theophile Gautier says that Balzac may claim to have invented a new hero in fiction, le heros metallique. Of Shakespeare it may be said he was the first to see the dramatic value of doublets, and that a climax may depend on a crinoline.
The burning of the Globe Theatre—an event due, by the way, to the results of the passion for illusion that distinguished Shakespeare's stage-management—has unfortunately robbed us of many important documents; but in the inventory, still in existence, of the costume-wardrobe of a London theatre in Shakespeare's time, there are mentioned particular costumes for cardinals, shepherds, kings, clowns, friars, and fools; green coats for Robin Hood's men, and a green gown for Maid Marian; a white and gold doublet for Henry the Fifth, and a robe for Longshanks; besides surplices, copes, damask gowns, gowns of cloth of gold and of cloth of silver, taffeta gowns, calico gowns, velvet coats, satin coats, frieze coats, jerkins of yellow leather and of black leather, red suits, grey suits, French Pierrot suits, a robe 'for to goo invisibell,' which seems inexpensive at 3 pounds, 10s., and four incomparable farthingales—all of which show a desire to give every character an appropriate dress. There are also entries of Spanish, Moorish and Danish costumes, of helmets, lances, painted shields, imperial crowns, and papal tiaras, as well as of costumes for Turkish Janissaries, Roman Senators, and all the gods and goddesses of Olympus, which evidence a good deal of archaeological research on the part of the manager of the theatre. It is true that there is a mention of a bodice for Eve, but probably the donnee of the play was after the Fall.

Indeed, anybody who cares to examine the age of Shakespeare will see that archaeology was one of its special characteristics. After
that revival of the classical forms of architecture which was one of the notes of the Renaissance, and the printing at Venice and elsewhere of the masterpieces of Greek and Latin literature, had come naturally an interest in the ornamentation and costume of the antique world. Nor was it for the learning that they could acquire, but rather for the loveliness that they might create, that the artists studied these things. The curious objects that were being constantly brought to light by excavations were not left to moulder in a museum, for the contemplation of a callous curator, and the ennui of a policeman bored by the absence of crime. They were used as motives for the production of a new art, which was to be not beautiful merely, but also strange.

Infessura tells us that in 1485 some workmen digging on the Appian Way came across an old Roman sarcophagus inscribed with the name ‘Julia, daughter of Claudius.’ On opening the coffer they found within its marble womb the body of a beautiful girl of about fifteen years of age, preserved by the embalmer’s skill from corruption and the decay of time. Her eyes were half open, her hair rippled round her in crisp curling gold, and from her lips and cheek the bloom of maidenhood had not yet departed. Borne back to the Capitol, she became at once the centre of a new cult, and from all parts of the city crowded pilgrims to worship at the wonderful shrine, till the Pope, fearing lest those who had found the secret of beauty in a Pagan tomb might forget what secrets Judaea’s rough and rock-hewn sepulchre contained, had the body conveyed away by night, and in secret buried. Legend though it may be, yet the
story is none the less valuable as showing us the attitude of the
Renaissance towards the antique world. Archaeology to them was not
a mere science for the antiquarian; it was a means by which they
could touch the dry dust of antiquity into the very breath and
beauty of life, and fill with the new wine of romanticism forms
that else had been old and outworn. From the pulpit of Niccola
Pisano down to Mantegna's 'Triumph of Caesar,' and the service
Cellini designed for King Francis, the influence of this spirit can
be traced; nor was it confined merely to the immobile arts--the
arts of arrested movement--but its influence was to be seen also in
the great Graeco-Roman masques which were the constant amusement of
the gay courts of the time, and in the public pomps and processions
with which the citizens of big commercial towns were wont to greet
the princes that chanced to visit them; pageants, by the way, which
were considered so important that large prints were made of them
and published--a fact which is a proof of the general interest at
the time in matters of such kind.

And this use of archaeology in shows, so far from being a bit of
priggish pedantry, is in every way legitimate and beautiful. For
the stage is not merely the meeting-place of all the arts, but is
also the return of art to life. Sometimes in an archaeological
novel the use of strange and obsolete terms seems to hide the
reality beneath the learning, and I dare say that many of the
readers of Notre Dame de Paris have been much puzzled over the
meaning of such expressions as la casaque a mochoires, les
voulgiers, le gallimard tache d'encre, les craaquiners, and the
like; but with the stage how different it is! The ancient world
wakes from its sleep, and history moves as a pageant before our
eyes, without obliging us to have recourse to a dictionary or an
encyclopaedia for the perfection of our enjoyment. Indeed, there
is not the slightest necessity that the public should know the
authorities for the mounting of any piece. From such materials,
for instance, as the disk of Theodosius, materials with which the
majority of people are probably not very familiar, Mr. E. W.
Godwin, one of the most artistic spirits of this century in
England, created the marvellous loveliness of the first act of
Claudian, and showed us the life of Byzantium in the fourth
century, not by a dreary lecture and a set of grimy casts, not by a
novel which requires a glossary to explain it, but by the visible
presentation before us of all the glory of that great town. And
while the costumes were true to the smallest points of colour and
design, yet the details were not assigned that abnormal importance
which they must necessarily be given in a piecemeal lecture, but
were subordinated to the rules of lofty composition and the unity
of artistic effect. Mr. Symonds, speaking of that great picture of
Mantegna's, now in Hampton Court, says that the artist has
converted an antiquarian motive into a theme for melodies of line.
The same could have been said with equal justice of Mr. Godwin's
scene. Only the foolish called it pedantry, only those who would
neither look nor listen spoke of the passion of the play being
killed by its paint. It was in reality a scene not merely perfect
in its picturesqueness, but absolutely dramatic also, getting rid
of any necessity for tedious descriptions, and showing us, by the
colour and character of Claudian's dress, and the dress of his
attendants, the whole nature and life of the man, from what school of philosophy he affected, down to what horses he backed on the turf.

And indeed archaeology is only really delightful when transfused into some form of art. I have no desire to underrate the services of laborious scholars, but I feel that the use Keats made of Lempriere's Dictionary is of far more value to us than Professor Max Muller's treatment of the same mythology as a disease of language. Better Endymion than any theory, however sound, or, as in the present instance, unsound, of an epidemic among adjectives! And who does not feel that the chief glory of Piranesi's book on Vases is that it gave Keats the suggestion for his 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'? Art, and art only, can make archaeology beautiful; and the theatric art can use it most directly and most vividly, for it can combine in one exquisite presentation the illusion of actual life with the wonder of the unreal world. But the sixteenth century was not merely the age of Vitruvius; it was the age of Vecellio also. Every nation seems suddenly to have become interested in the dress of its neighbours. Europe began to investigate its own clothes, and the amount of books published on national costumes is quite extraordinary. At the beginning of the century the Nuremberg Chronicle, with its two thousand illustrations, reached its fifth edition, and before the century was over seventeen editions were published of Munster's Cosmography. Besides these two books there were also the works of Michael Colyns, of Hans Weigel, of Amman, and of Vecellio himself,
all of them well illustrated, some of the drawings in Vecellio

being probably from the hand of Titian.

Nor was it merely from books and treatises that they acquired their
knowledge. The development of the habit of foreign travel, the
increased commercial intercourse between countries, and the
frequency of diplomatic missions, gave every nation many
opportunities of studying the various forms of contemporary dress.

After the departure from England, for instance, of the ambassadors
from the Czar, the Sultan and the Prince of Morocco, Henry the
Eighth and his friends gave several masques in the strange attire
of their visitors. Later on London saw, perhaps too often, the
sombre splendour of the Spanish Court, and to Elizabeth came envoys
from all lands, whose dress, Shakespeare tells us, had an important
influence on English costume.

And the interest was not confined merely to classical dress, or the
dress of foreign nations; there was also a good deal of research,
amongst theatrical people especially, into the ancient costume of
England itself: and when Shakespeare, in the prologue to one of
his plays, expresses his regret at being unable to produce helmets
of the period, he is speaking as an Elizabethan manager and not
merely as an Elizabethan poet. At Cambridge, for instance, during
his day, a play of Richard The Third was performed, in which the
actors were attired in real dresses of the time, procured from the
great collection of historical costume in the Tower, which was
always open to the inspection of managers, and sometimes placed at
their disposal. And I cannot help thinking that this performance
must have been far more artistic, as regards costume, than
Garrick's mounting of Shakespeare's own play on the subject, in
which he himself appeared in a nondescript fancy dress, and
everybody else in the costume of the time of George the Third,
Richmond especially being much admired in the uniform of a young
guardsman.

For what is the use to the stage of that archaeology which has so
strangely terrified the critics, but that it, and it alone, can
give us the architecture and apparel suitable to the time in which
the action of the play passes? It enables us to see a Greek
dressed like a Greek, and an Italian like an Italian; to enjoy the
arcades of Venice and the balconies of Verona; and, if the play
deals with any of the great eras in our country's history, to
contemplate the age in its proper attire, and the king in his habit
as he lived. And I wonder, by the way, what Lord Lytton would have
said some time ago, at the Princess's Theatre, had the curtain
risen on his father's Brutus reclining in a Queen Anne chair,
attired in a flowing wig and a flowered dressing-gown, a costume
which in the last century was considered peculiarly appropriate to
an antique Roman! For in those halcyon days of the drama no
archaeology troubled the stage, or distressed the critics, and our
inartistic grandfathers sat peaceably in a stifling atmosphere of
anachronisms, and beheld with the calm complacency of the age of
prose an Iachimo in powder and patches, a Lear in lace ruffles, and
a Lady Macbeth in a large crinoline. I can understand archaeology
being attacked on the ground of its excessive realism, but to
attack it as pedantic seems to be very much beside the mark.
However, to attack it for any reason is foolish; one might just as
well speak disrespectfully of the equator. For archaeology, being
a science, is neither good nor bad, but a fact simply. Its value
depends entirely on how it is used, and only an artist can use it.
We look to the archaeologist for the materials, to the artist for
the method.

In designing the scenery and costumes for any of Shakespeare's
plays, the first thing the artist has to settle is the best date
for the drama. This should be determined by the general spirit of
the play, more than by any actual historical references which may
occur in it. Most Hamlets I have seen were placed far too early.
Hamlet is essentially a scholar of the Revival of Learning; and if
the allusion to the recent invasion of England by the Danes puts it
back to the ninth century, the use of foils brings it down much
later. Once, however, that the date has been fixed, then the
archaeologist is to supply us with the facts which the artist is to
convert into effects.

It has been said that the anachronisms in the plays themselves show
us that Shakespeare was indifferent to historical accuracy, and a
great deal of capital has been made out of Hector's indiscreet
quotation from Aristotle. Upon the other hand, the anachronisms
are really few in number, and not very important, and, had
Shakespeare's attention been drawn to them by a brother artist, he
would probably have corrected them. For, though they can hardly be
called blemishes, they are certainly not the great beauties of his
work; or, at least, if they are, their anachronistic charm cannot
be emphasised unless the play is accurately mounted according to
its proper date. In looking at Shakespeare's plays as a whole,
however, what is really remarkable is their extraordinary fidelity
as regards his personages and his plots. Many of his dramatis
personae are people who had actually existed, and some of them
might have been seen in real life by a portion of his audience.
Indeed the most violent attack that was made on Shakespeare in his
time was for his supposed caricature of Lord Cobham. As for his
plots, Shakespeare constantly draws them either from authentic
history, or from the old ballads and traditions which served as
history to the Elizabethan public, and which even now no scientific
historian would dismiss as absolutely untrue. And not merely did
he select fact instead of fancy as the basis of much of his
imaginative work, but he always gives to each play the general
character, the social atmosphere in a word, of the age in question.
Stupidity he recognises as being one of the permanent
characteristics of all European civilisations; so he sees no
difference between a London mob of his own day and a Roman mob of
pagan days, between a silly watchman in Messina and a silly Justice
of the Peace in Windsor. But when he deals with higher characters,
with those exceptions of each age which are so fine that they
become its types, he gives them absolutely the stamp and seal of
their time. Virgilia is one of those Roman wives on whose tomb was
written 'Domi mansit, lanam fecit,' as surely as Juliet is the
romantic girl of the Renaissance. He is even true to the
characteristics of race. Hamlet has all the imagination and
irresolution of the Northern nations, and the Princess Katharine is
as entirely French as the heroine of Divorcons. Harry the Fifth is
a pure Englishman, and Othello a true Moor.

Again when Shakespeare treats of the history of England from the
fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, it is wonderful how careful
he is to have his facts perfectly right—indeed he follows
Holinshed with curious fidelity. The incessant wars between France
and England are described with extraordinary accuracy down to the
names of the besieged towns, the ports of landing and embarkation,
the sites and dates of the battles, the titles of the commanders on
each side, and the lists of the killed and wounded. And as regards
the Civil Wars of the Roses we have many elaborate genealogies of
the seven sons of Edward the Third; the claims of the rival Houses
of York and Lancaster to the throne are discussed at length; and if
the English aristocracy will not read Shakespeare as a poet, they
should certainly read him as a sort of early Peerage. There is
hardly a single title in the Upper House, with the exception of
course of the uninteresting titles assumed by the law lords, which
does not appear in Shakespeare along with many details of family
history, creditable and discreditable. Indeed if it be really
necessary that the School Board children should know all about the
Wars of the Roses, they could learn their lessons just as well out
of Shakespeare as out of shilling primers, and learn them, I need
not say, far more pleasurably. Even in Shakespeare's own day this
use of his plays was recognised. 'The historical plays teach
history to those who cannot read it in the chronicles,' says Heywood in a tract about the stage, and yet I am sure that sixteenth-century chronicles were much more delightful reading than nineteenth-century primers are.

Of course the aesthetic value of Shakespeare's plays does not, in the slightest degree, depend on their facts, but on their Truth, and Truth is independent of facts always, inventing or selecting them at pleasure. But still Shakespeare's use of facts is a most interesting part of his method of work, and shows us his attitude towards the stage, and his relations to the great art of illusion. Indeed he would have been very much surprised at any one classing his plays with 'fairy tales,' as Lord Lytton does; for one of his aims was to create for England a national historical drama, which should deal with incidents with which the public was well acquainted, and with heroes that lived in the memory of a people. Patriotism, I need hardly say, is not a necessary quality of art; but it means, for the artist, the substitution of a universal for an individual feeling, and for the public the presentation of a work of art in a most attractive and popular form. It is worth noticing that Shakespeare's first and last successes were both historical plays.

It may be asked, what has this to do with Shakespeare's attitude towards costume? I answer that a dramatist who laid such stress on historical accuracy of fact would have welcomed historical accuracy of costume as a most important adjunct to his illusionist method.
And I have no hesitation in saying that he did so. The reference
to helmets of the period in the prologue to Henry the Fifth may be
considered fanciful, though Shakespeare must have often seen

The very casque
That did affright the air at Agincourt,

where it still hangs in the dusky gloom of Westminster Abbey, along
with the saddle of that 'imp of fame,' and the dinted shield with
its torn blue velvet lining and its tarnished lilies of gold; but
the use of military tabards in Henry the Sixth is a bit of pure
archaeology, as they were not worn in the sixteenth century; and
the King's own tabard, I may mention, was still suspended over his
tomb in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, in Shakespeare's day. For,
up to the time of the unfortunate triumph of the Philistines in
1645, the chapels and cathedrals of England were the great national
museums of archaeology, and in them were kept the armour and attire
of the heroes of English history. A good deal was of course
preserved in the Tower, and even in Elizabeth's day tourists were
brought there to see such curious relics of the past as Charles
Brandon's huge lance, which is still, I believe, the admiration of
our country visitors; but the cathedrals and churches were, as a
rule, selected as the most suitable shrines for the reception of
the historic antiquities. Canterbury can still show us the helm of
the Black Prince, Westminster the robes of our kings, and in old
St. Paul's the very banner that had waved on Bosworth field was
hung up by Richmond himself.
In fact, everywhere that Shakespeare turned in London, he saw the apparel and appurtenances of past ages, and it is impossible to doubt that he made use of his opportunities. The employment of lance and shield, for instance, in actual warfare, which is so frequent in his plays, is drawn from archaeology, and not from the military accoutrements of his day; and his general use of armour in battle was not a characteristic of his age, a time when it was rapidly disappearing before firearms. Again, the crest on Warwick's helmet, of which such a point is made in Henry the Sixth, is absolutely correct in a fifteenth-century play when crests were generally worn, but would not have been so in a play of Shakespeare's own time, when feathers and plumes had taken their place—a fashion which, as he tells us in Henry the Eighth, was borrowed from France. For the historical plays, then, we may be sure that archaeology was employed, and as for the others I feel certain that it was the case also. The appearance of Jupiter on his eagle, thunderbolt in hand, of Juno with her peacocks, and of Iris with her many-coloured bow; the Amazon masque and the masque of the Five Worthies, may all be regarded as archaeological; and the vision which Posthumus sees in prison of Sicilius Leonatus—'an old man, attired like a warrior, leading an ancient matron'—is clearly so. Of the 'Athenian dress' by which Lysander is distinguished from Oberon I have already spoken; but one of the most marked instances is in the case of the dress of Coriolanus, for which Shakespeare goes directly to Plutarch. That historian, in his Life of the great Roman, tells us of the oak-wreath with
which Caius Marcius was crowned, and of the curious kind of dress
in which, according to ancient fashion, he had to canvass his
electors; and on both of these points he enters into long
disquisitions, investigating the origin and meaning of the old
customs. Shakespeare, in the spirit of the true artist, accepts
the facts of the antiquarian and converts them into dramatic and
picturesque effects: indeed the gown of humility, the 'woolvish
gown,' as Shakespeare calls it, is the central note of the play.
There are other cases I might quote, but this one is quite
sufficient for my purpose; and it is evident from it at any rate
that, in mounting a play in the accurate costume of the time,
according to the best authorities, we are carrying out
Shakespeare's own wishes and method.

Even if it were not so, there is no more reason that we should
continue any imperfections which may be supposed to have
classified Shakespeare's stage mounting than that we should have
Juliet played by a young man, or give up the advantage of
changeable scenery. A great work of dramatic art should not merely
be made expressive of modern passion by means of the actor, but
should be presented to us in the form most suitable to the modern
spirit. Racine produced his Roman plays in Louis Quatorze dress on
a stage crowded with spectators; but we require different
conditions for the enjoyment of his art. Perfect accuracy of
detail, for the sake of perfect illusion, is necessary for us.
What we have to see is that the details are not allowed to usurp
the principal place. They must be subordinate always to the
general motive of the play. But subordination in art does not mean
disregard of truth; it means conversion of fact into effect, and
assigning to each detail its proper relative value

'Les petits details d'histoire et de vie domestique (says Hugo)
doivent etre scrupuleusement etudies et reproduits par le poete,
mais uniquement comme des moyens d'accroitre la realite de
l'ensemble, et de faire penetrer jusque dans les coins les plus
obscur de l'oeuvre cette vie generale et puissante au milieu de
laquelle les personnages sont plus vrais, et les catastrophes, par
consequeut, plus poignantes. Tout doit etre subordonnee a ce but.
L'Homme sur le premier plan, le reste au fond.'

This passage is interesting as coming from the first great French
dramatist who employed archaeology on the stage, and whose plays,
though absolutely correct in detail, are known to all for their
passion, not for their pedantry--for their life, not for their
learning. It is true that he has made certain concessions in the
case of the employment of curious or strange expressions. Ruy Blas
talks of M, de Priego as 'sujet du roi' instead of 'noble du roi,'
and Angelo Malipieri speaks of 'la croix rouge' instead of 'la
croix de gueules.' But they are concessions made to the public, or
rather to a section of it. 'J'en offre ici toute mes excuses aux
spectateurs intelligents,' he says in a note to one of the plays;
'esperons qu'un jour un seigneur venitien pourra dire tout
bonnement sans peril son blason sur le theatre. C'est un progres
qui viendra.' And, though the description of the crest is not
couched in accurate language, still the crest itself was accurately right. It may, of course, be said that the public do not notice these things; upon the other hand, it should be remembered that Art has no other aim but her own perfection, and proceeds simply by her own laws, and that the play which Hamlet describes as being caviare to the general is a play he highly praises. Besides, in England, at any rate, the public have undergone a transformation; there is far more appreciation of beauty now than there was a few years ago; and though they may not be familiar with the authorities and archaeological data for what is shown to them, still they enjoy whatever loveliness they look at. And this is the important thing. Better to take pleasure in a rose than to put its root under a microscope. Archaeological accuracy is merely a condition of illusionist stage effect; it is not its quality. And Lord Lytton’s proposal that the dresses should merely be beautiful without being accurate is founded on a misapprehension of the nature of costume, and of its value on the stage. This value is twofold, picturesque and dramatic; the former depends on the colour of the dress, the latter on its design and character. But so interwoven are the two that, whenever in our own day historical accuracy has been disregarded, and the various dresses in a play taken from different ages, the result has been that the stage has been turned into that chaos of costume, that caricature of the centuries, the Fancy Dress Ball, to the entire ruin of all dramatic and picturesque effect. For the dresses of one age do not artistically harmonise with the dresses of another: and, as far as dramatic value goes, to confuse the costumes is to confuse the play. Costume is a growth, an evolution, and a most important, perhaps the most important, sign
Puritan dislike of colour, adornment and grace in apparel was part of the great revolt of the middle classes against Beauty in the seventeenth century. A historian who disregarded it would give us a most inaccurate picture of the time, and a dramatist who did not avail himself of it would miss a most vital element in producing an illusionist effect. The effeminacy of dress that characterised the reign of Richard the Second was a constant theme of contemporary authors. Shakespeare, writing two hundred years after, makes the king's fondness for gay apparel and foreign fashions a point in the play, from John of Gaunt's reproaches down to Richard's own speech in the third act on his deposition from the throne. And that Shakespeare examined Richard's tomb in Westminster Abbey seems to me certain from York's speech:

See, see, King Richard doth himself appear
As doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the east,
When he perceives the envious clouds are bent
To dim his glory.

For we can still discern on the King's robe his favourite badge--the sun issuing from a cloud. In fact, in every age the social conditions are so exemplified in costume, that to produce a sixteenth-century play in fourteenth-century attire, or vice versa, would make the performance seem unreal because untrue. And, valuable as beauty of effect on the stage is, the highest beauty is
not merely comparable with absolute accuracy of detail, but really
dependent on it. To invent, an entirely new costume is almost
impossible except in burlesque or extravaganza, and as for
combining the dress of different centuries into one, the experiment
would be dangerous, and Shakespeare's opinion of the artistic value
of such a medley may be gathered from his incessant satire of the
Elizabethan dandies for imagining that they were well dressed
because they got their doublets in Italy, their hats in Germany,
and their hose in France. And it should be noted that the most
lovely scenes that have been produced on our stage have been those
that have been characterised by perfect accuracy, such as Mr. and
Mrs. Bancroft's eighteenth-century revivals at the Haymarket, Mr.
Irying's superb production of Much Ado About Nothing, and Mr,
Barrett's Claudian. Besides, and this is perhaps the most complete
answer to Lord Lytton's theory, it must be remembered that neither
in costume nor in dialogue is beauty the dramatist's primary aim at
all. The true dramatist aims first at what is characteristic, and
no more desires that all his personages should be beautifully
attired than he desires that they should all have beautiful natures
or speak beautiful English. The true dramatist, in fact, shows us
life under the conditions of art, not art in the form of life. The
Greek dress was the loveliest dress the world has ever seen, and
the English dress of the last century one of the most monstrous;
yet we cannot costume a play by Sheridan as we would costume a play
by Sophokles. For, as Polonius says in his excellent lecture, a
lecture to which I am glad to have the opportunity of expressing my
obligations, one of the first qualities of apparel is its
expressiveness. And the affected style of dress in the last
century was the natural characteristic of a society of affected manners and affected conversation—a characteristic which the realistic dramatist will highly value down to the smallest detail of accuracy, and the materials for which he can get only from archaeology.

But it is not enough that a dress should be accurate; it must be also appropriate to the stature and appearance of the actor, and to his supposed condition, as well as to his necessary action in the play. In Mr. Hare's production of As You Like It at the St. James's Theatre, for instance, the whole point of Orlando's complaint that he is brought up like a peasant, and not like a gentleman, was spoiled by the gorgeousness of his dress, and the splendid apparel worn by the banished Duke and his friends was quite out of place. Mr. Lewis Wingfield's explanation that the sumptuary laws of the period necessitated their doing so, is, I am afraid, hardly sufficient. Outlaws, lurking in a forest and living by the chase, are not very likely to care much about ordinances of dress. They were probably attired like Robin Hood's men, to whom, indeed, they are compared in the course of the play. And that their dress was not that of wealthy noblemen may be seen by Orlando's words when he breaks in upon them. He mistakes them for robbers, and is amazed to find that they answer him in courteous and gentle terms. Lady Archibald Campbell's production, under Mr. E. W. Godwin's direction, of the same play in Coombe Wood was, as regards mounting, far more artistic. At least it seemed so to me. The Duke and his companions were dressed in serge tunics, leathern
jerkins, high boots and gauntlets, and wore bycocket hats and hoods. And as they were playing in a real forest, they found, I am sure, their dresses extremely convenient. To every character in the play was given a perfectly appropriate attire, and the brown and green of their costumes harmonised exquisitely with the ferns through which they wandered, the trees beneath which they lay, and the lovely English landscape that surrounded the Pastoral Players. The perfect naturalness of the scene was due to the absolute accuracy and appropriateness of everything that was worn. Nor could archaeology have been put to a severer test, or come out of it more triumphantly. The whole production showed once for all that, unless a dress is archaeologically correct, and artistically appropriate, it always looks unreal, unnatural, and theatrical in the sense of artificial.

Nor, again, is it enough that there should be accurate and appropriate costumes of beautiful colours; there must be also beauty of colour on the stage as a whole, and as long as the background is painted by one artist, and the foreground figures independently designed by another, there is the danger of a want of harmony in the scene as a picture. For each scene the colour-scheme should be settled as absolutely as for the decoration of a room, and the textures which it is proposed to use should be mixed and re-mixed in every possible combination, and what is discordant removed. Then, as regards the particular kinds of colours, the stage is often too glaring, partly through the excessive use of hot, violent reds, and partly through the costumes looking too new.
Shabbiness, which in modern life is merely the tendency of the lower orders towards tone, is not without its artistic value, and modern colours are often much improved by being a little faded. Blue also is too frequently used: it is not merely a dangerous colour to wear by gaslight, but it is really difficult in England to get a thoroughly good blue. The fine Chinese blue, which we all so much admire, takes two years to dye, and the English public will not wait so long for a colour. Peacock blue, of course, has been employed on the stage, notably at the Lyceum, with great advantage; but all attempts at a good light blue, or good dark blue, which I have seen have been failures. The value of black is hardly appreciated; it was used effectively by Mr. Irving in Hamlet as the central note of a composition, but as a tone-giving neutral its importance is not recognised. And this is curious, considering the general colour of the dress of a century in which, as Baudelaire says, 'Nous celebrons tous quelque enterrement.' The archaeologist of the future will probably point to this age as the time when the beauty of black was understood; but I hardly think that, as regards stage-mounting or house decoration, it really is. Its decorative value is, of course, the same as that of white or gold; it can separate and harmonise colours. In modern plays the black frock-coat of the hero becomes important in itself, and should be given a suitable background. But it rarely is. Indeed the only good background for a play in modern dress which I have ever seen was the dark grey and cream-white scene of the first act of the Princesse Georges in Mrs. Langtry's production. As a rule, the hero is smothered in bric-a-brac and palm-trees, lost in the gilded abyss of Louis Quatorze furniture, or reduced to a mere midge in
the midst of marqueterie; whereas the background should always be kept as a background, and colour subordinated to effect. This, of course, can only be done when there is one single mind directing the whole production. The facts of art are diverse, but the essence of artistic effect is unity. Monarchy, Anarchy, and Republicanism may contend for the government of nations; but a theatre should be in the power of a cultured despot. There may be division of labour, but there must be no division of mind. Whoever understands the costume of an age understands of necessity its architecture and its surroundings also, and it is easy to see from the chairs of a century whether it was a century of crinolines or not. In fact, in art there is no specialism, and a really artistic production should bear the impress of one master, and one master only, who not merely should design and arrange everything, but should have complete control over the way in which each dress is to be worn.

Mademoiselle Mars, in the first production of Hernani, absolutely refused to call her lover 'Mon Lion!' unless she was allowed to wear a little fashionable toque then much in vogue on the Boulevards; and many young ladies on our own stage insist to the present day on wearing stiff starched petticoats under Greek dresses, to the entire ruin of all delicacy of line and fold; but these wicked things should not be allowed. And there should be far more dress rehearsals than there are now. Actors such as Mr. Forbes-Robertson, Mr. Conway, Mr. George Alexander, and others, not to mention older artists, can move with ease and elegance in the
attire of any century; but there are not a few who seem dreadfully
embarrassed about their hands if they have no side pockets, and who
always wear their dresses as if they were costumes. Costumes, of
course, they are to the designer; but dresses they should be to
those that wear them. And it is time that a stop should be put to
the idea, very prevalent on the stage, that the Greeks and Romans
always went about bareheaded in the open air—a mistake the
Elizabethan managers did not fall into, for they gave hoods as well
as gowns to their Roman senators.

More dress rehearsals would also be of value in explaining to the
actors that there is a form of gesture and movement that is not
merely appropriate to each style of dress, but really conditioned
by it. The extravagant use of the arms in the eighteenth century,
for instance, was the necessary result of the large hoop, and the
solemn dignity of Burleigh owed as much to his ruff as to his
reason. Besides until an actor is at home in his dress, he is not
at home in his part.

Of the value of beautiful costume in creating an artistic
temperament in the audience, and producing that joy in beauty for
beauty’s sake without which the great masterpieces of art can never
be understood, I will not here speak; though it is worth while to
notice how Shakespeare appreciated that side of the question in the
production of his tragedies, acting them always by artificial
light, and in a theatre hung with black; but what I have tried to
point out is that archaeology is not a pedantic method, but a
method of artistic illusion, and that costume is a means of
displaying character without description, and of producing dramatic
situations and dramatic effects. And I think it is a pity that so
many critics should have set themselves to attack one of the most
important movements on the modern stage before that movement has at
all reached its proper perfection. That it will do so, however, I
feel as certain as that we shall require from our dramatic critics
in the future higher qualification than that they can remember
Macready or have seen Benjamin Webster; we shall require of them,
indeed, that they cultivate a sense of beauty. Pour etre plus
difficile, la tache n'en est que plus glorieuse. And if they will
not encourage, at least they must not oppose, a movement of which
Shakespeare of all dramatists would have most approved, for it has
the illusion of truth for its method, and the illusion of beauty
for its result. Not that I agree with everything that I have said
in this essay. There is much with which I entirely disagree. The
essay simply represents an artistic standpoint, and in aesthetic
criticism attitude is everything. For in art there is no such
thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose
contradictory is also true. And just as it is only in art-
criticism, and through it, that we can apprehend the Platonic
theory of ideas, so it is only in art-criticism, and through it,
that we can realise Hegel's system of contraries. The truths of
metaphysics are the truths of masks.