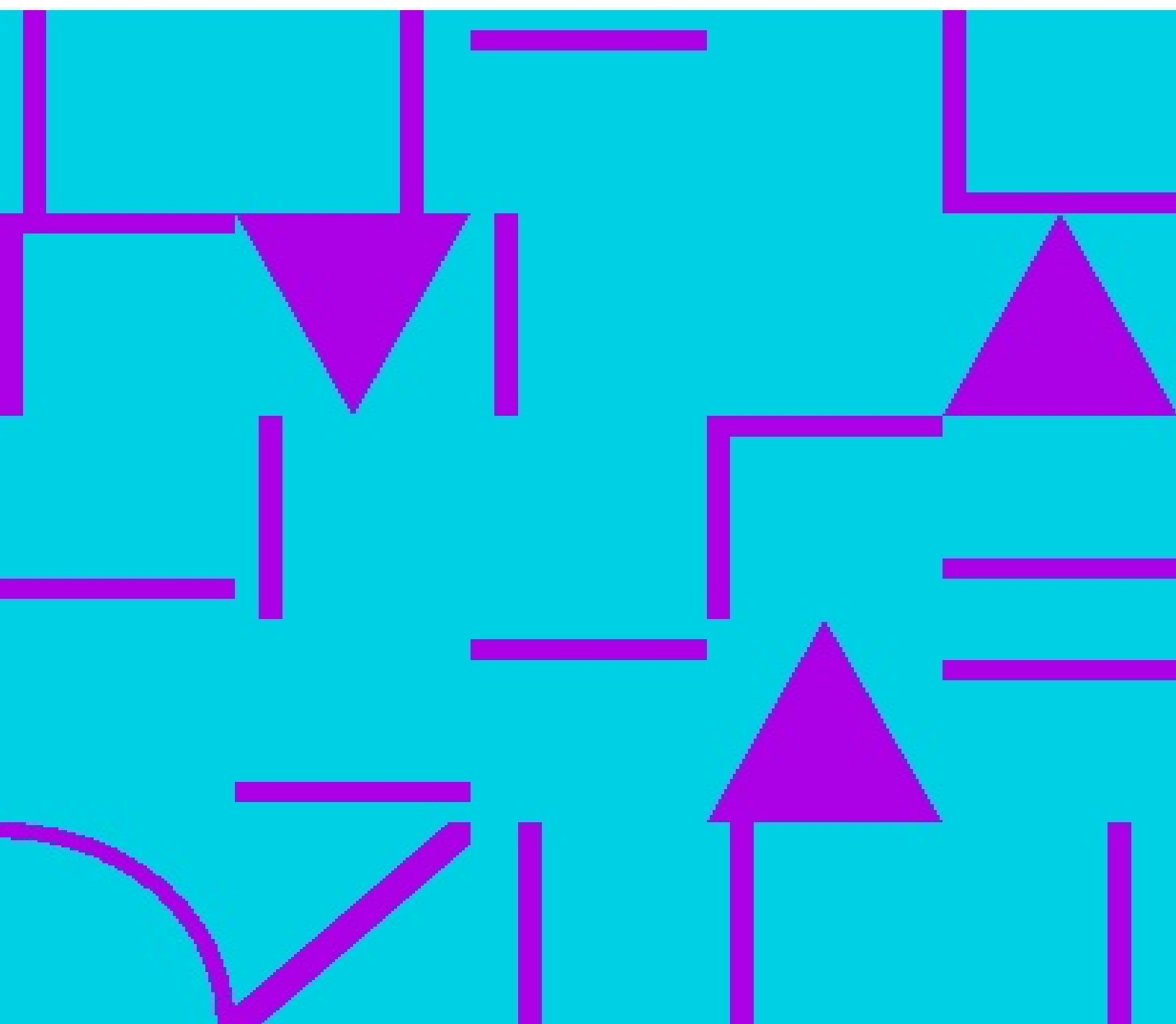


# The Lost Art of Reading

Gerald Stanley Lee



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# The Lost Art of Reading

By

# Gerald Stanley Lee

Author of "The Shadow Christ" (A Study of the Hebrew Poets)  
and "About an Old New England Church"  
"A Little History"

**G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS**

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To  
JENNETTE LEE



# Contents

## **BOOK I** PAGE

### **INTERFERENCES WITH THE READING HABIT 1**

#### **CIVILISATION 3**

- I. Dust 3
- II. Dust 5
- III. Dust to Dust 8
- IV. Ashes 12
- V. The Literary Rush 15
- VI. Parenthesis—To the Gentle Reader 24
- VII. More Parenthesis—But More to the Point 28
- VIII. More Literary Rush 34
- IX. The Bugbear of Being Well Informed—A Practical Suggestion 41
- X. The Dead Level of Intelligence 48
- XI. The Art of Reading as One Likes 58

#### **THE DISGRACE OF THE IMAGINATION 67**

- I. On Wondering Why One Was Born 67
- II. The Top of the Bureau Principle 74

#### **THE UNPOPULARITY OF THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR 82**

- I. The First Person a Necessary Evil 82
- II. The Art of Being Anonymous 89
- III. Egoism and Society 96
- IV.  $i + I = We$  99
- V. The Autobiography of Beauty 104

#### **THE HABIT OF NOT LETTING ONE'S SELF GO 109**

- I. The Country Boy in Literature 109

- II. The Subconscious Self 115
- III. The Organic Principle of Inspiration 120

## **THE HABIT OF ANALYSIS 125**

- I. If Shakespeare Came to Chicago 125
- II. Analysis Analysed 136

## **LITERARY DRILL IN COLLEGE 144**

- I. Seeds and Blossoms 144
- II. Private Road: Dangerous 150
- III. The Organs of Literature 159
- IV. Entrance Examinations in Joy 164
- V. Natural Selection in Theory 171
- VI. Natural Selection in Practice 175
- VII. The Emancipation of the Teacher 182
- VIII. The Test of Culture 186
- IX. Summary 188
- X. A Note 194

## **LIBRARIES. WANTED: AN OLD-FASHIONED LIBRARIAN 196**

- I. viz. 196
- II. cf. 199
- III. et al. 202
- IV. etc. 205
- V. O 212

## **BOOK II**

### **POSSIBILITIES 217**

- I. The Issue 219
- II. The First Selection 222
- III. Conveniences 223
- IV. The Charter of Possibility 230
- V. The Great Game 233
- VI. Outward Bound 239

## **BOOK III**

### **DETAILS. THE CONFESSIONS OF AN UNSCIENTIFIC MIND 247**

#### **I. UNSCIENTIFIC 249**

- I. On Being Intelligent in a Library 249

- II. How It Feels 253
- III. How a Specialist Can Be an Educated Man 254
- IV. On Reading Books Through their Backs 258
- V. On Keeping Each Other in Countenance 261
- VI. The Romance of Science 264
- VII. Monads 267
- VIII. Multiplication Tables 277

## **II. READING FOR PRINCIPLES 279**

- I. On Changing One's Conscience 279
- II. On the Intolerance of Experienced People 282
- III. On Having One's Experience Done Out 285
- IV. On Reading a Newspaper in Ten Minutes 289
- V. General Information 291
- VI. But—— 299

## **III. READING DOWN THROUGH 307**

- I. Inside 307
- II. On Being Lonely with a Book 308
- III. Keeping Other Minds Off 311
- IV. Reading Backwards 313

## **IV. READING FOR FACTS 319**

- I. Calling the Meeting to Order 319
- II. Symbolic Facts 323
- III. Duplicates: A Principle of Economy 325

## **V. READING FOR RESULTS 329**

- I. The Blank Paper Frame of Mind 329
- II. The Usefully Unfinished 334
- III. Athletics 340

## **VI. READING FOR FEELINGS 347**

- I. The Passion of Truth 347
- II. The Topical Point of View 352

## **VII. READING THE WORLD TOGETHER 359**

- I. Focusing 359
- II. The Human Unit 364
- III. The Higher Cannibalism 367
- IV. Spiritual Thrift 378
- V. The City, the Church, and the College 384

- VI. The Outsiders 389
- VII. Reading the World Together 397

## **BOOK IV**

### **WHAT TO DO NEXT 403**

- I. See Next Chapter 405
- II. Diagnosis 410
- III. Eclipse 412
- IV. Apocalypse 419
- V. Every Man His Own Genius 426
- VI. An Inclined Plane 430
- VII. Allons 435

## Book I

# Interferences with the Reading Habit



# The First Interference: Civilisation

I

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## Dust

“I SEE the ships,” said The Eavesdropper, as he stole round the world to me, “on a dozen sides of the world. I hear them fighting with the sea.”

“And what do you see on the ships?” I said.

“Figures of men and women—thousands of figures of men and women.”

“And what are they doing?”

“They are walking fiercely,” he said,—“some of them,—walking fiercely up and down the decks before the sea.”

“Why?” said I.

“Because they cannot stand still and look at it. Others are reading in chairs because they cannot sit still and look at it.”

“And there are some,” said The Eavesdropper, “with roofs of boards above their heads (to protect them from Wonder)—down in the hold—playing cards.”

There was silence.

. . . . .

“What are you seeing now?” I said.

“Trains,” he said—“a globe full of trains. They are on a dozen sides of it. They are clinging to the crusts of it—mountains—rivers—prairies—some in the light and some in the dark—creeping through space.”

“And what do you see in the trains?”

“Miles of faces.”

“And the faces?”

“They are pushing on the trains.”

. . . . .

“What are you seeing now?” I said.

“Cities,” he said—“streets of cities—miles of streets of cities.”

“And what do you see in the streets of cities?”

“Men, women, and smoke.”

“And what are the men and women doing?”

“Hurrying,” said he.

“Where?” said I.

“God knows.”

## II

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# Dust

The population of the civilised world to-day may be divided into two classes,—millionaires and those who would like to be millionaires. The rest are artists, poets, tramps, and babies—and do not count. Poets and artists do not count until after they are dead. Tramps are put in prison. Babies are expected to get over it. A few more summers, a few more winters—with short skirts or with down on their chins—they shall be seen burrowing with the rest of us.

One almost wonders sometimes, why it is that the sun keeps on year after year and day after day

turning the globe around and around, heating it and lighting it and keeping things growing on it, when after all, when all is said and done (crowded with wonder and with things to live with, as it is), it is a comparatively empty globe. No one seems to be using it very much, or paying very much attention to it, or getting very much out of it. There are never more than a very few men on it at a time, who can be said to be really living on it. They are engaged in getting a living and in hoping that they are going to live sometime. They are also going to read sometime.

When one thinks of the wasted sunrises and sunsets—the great free show of heaven—the door open every night—of the little groups of people straggling into it—of the swarms of people hurrying back and forth before it, jostling their getting-a-living lives up and down before it, not knowing it is there,—one wonders why it is there. Why does it not fall upon us, or its lights go suddenly out upon us? We stand in the days and the nights like stalls—suns flying over our heads, stars singing through space beneath our feet. But we do not see. Every man's head in a pocket,—boring for his living in a pocket—or being bored for his living in a pocket,—why should he see? True we are not without a philosophy for this—to look over the edge of our stalls with. “Getting a living is living,” we say. We whisper it to ourselves—in our pockets. Then we try to get it. When we get it, we try to believe it—and when we get it we do not believe anything. Let every man under the walled-in heaven, the iron heaven, speak for his own soul. No one else shall speak for him. We only know what we know—each of us in our own pockets. The great books tell us it has not always been an iron heaven or a walled-in heaven. But into the faces of the flocks of the children that come to us, year after year, we look, wondering. They shall not do anything but burrowing—most of them. Our very ideals are burrowings. So are our books. Religion burrows. It barely so much as looks at heaven. Why should a civilised man—a man who has a pocket in civilisation—a man who can burrow—look at heaven? It is the glimmering boundary line where burrowing leaves off. Time enough. In the meantime the shovel. Let the stars wheel. Do men look at stars with shovels?

The faults of our prevailing habits of reading are the faults of our lives. Any criticism of our habit of reading books to-day, which actually or even apparently confines itself to the point, is unsatisfactory. A criticism of the reading habit of a nation is a criticism of its civilisation. To sketch a scheme of defence for the modern human brain, from the kindergarten stage to Commencement day, is merely a way of bringing the subject of education up, and dropping it where it begins.

Even if the youth of the period, as a live, human, reading being (on the principles to be laid down in the following pages), is so fortunate as to succeed in escaping the dangers and temptations of the home—even if he contrives to run the gauntlet of the grammar school and the academy—even if, in the last, longest, and hardest pull of all, he succeeds in keeping a spontaneous habit with books in spite of a college course, the story is not over. Civilisation waits for him—all-enfolding, all-instructing civilisation, and he stands face to face—book in hand—with his last chance.

## Dust to Dust

Whatever else may be said of our present civilisation, one must needs go very far in it to see Abraham at his tent's door, waiting for angels. And yet, from the point of view of reading and from the point of view of the books that the world has always called worth reading, if ever there was a type of a gentleman and scholar in history, and a Christian, and a man of possibilities, founder and ruler of civilisations, it is this same man Abraham at his tent's door waiting for angels. Have we any like him now? Peradventure there shall be twenty? Peradventure there shall be ten? Where is the man who feels that he is free to-day to sit upon his steps and have a quiet think, unless there floats across the spirit of his dream the sweet and reassuring sound of some one making a tremendous din around the next corner—a band, or a new literary journal, or a historical novel, or a special correspondent, or a new club or church or something? Until he feels that the world is being conducted for him, that things are tolerably not at rest, where shall one find in civilisation, in this present moment, a man who is ready to stop and look about him—to take a spell at last at being a reasonable, contemplative, or even marriageable being?

The essential unmarriedness of the modern man and the unreadableness of his books are two facts that work very well together.

When Emerson asked Bronson Alcott “What have you done in the world, what have you written?” the answer of Alcott, “If Pythagoras came to Concord whom would he ask to see?” was a diagnosis of the whole nineteenth century. It was a very short sentence, but it was a sentence to found a college with, to build libraries out of, to make a whole modern world read, to fill the weary and heedless heart of it—for a thousand years.

We have plenty of provision made for books in civilisation, but if civilisation should ever have another man in the course of time who knows how to read a book, it would not know what to do with him. No provision is made for such a man. We have nothing but libraries—monstrous libraries to lose him in. The books take up nearly all the room in civilisation, and civilisation takes up the rest. The man is not allowed to peep in civilisation. He is too busy in being ordered around by it to know that he would like to. It does not occur to him that he ought to be allowed time in it to know who he is, before he dies. The typical civilised man is an exhausted, spiritually hysterical man because he has no idea of what it means, or can be made to mean to a man, to face calmly with his whole life a great book, a few minutes every day, to rest back on his ideals in it, to keep office hours with his own soul.

The practical value of a book is the inherent energy and quietness of the ideals in it—the immemorial way ideals have—have always had—of working themselves out in a man, of doing the work of the man and of doing their own work at the same time.

Inasmuch as ideals are what all real books are written with and read with, and inasmuch as ideals are the only known way a human being has of resting, in this present world, it would be hard to think of any book that would be more to the point in this modern civilisation than a book that shall tell men how to read to live,—how to touch their ideals swiftly every day. Any book that should do this for us would touch life at more points and flow out on men's minds in more directions than any other that could be conceived. It would contribute as the June day, or as the night for sleep, to all men's lives, to all of the problems of all of the world at once. It would be a night latch—to the ideal.

Whatever the remedy may be said to be, one thing is certainly true with regard to our reading habits in modern times. Men who are habitually shamefaced or absent-minded before the ideal—that is, before the actual nature of things—cannot expect to be real readers of books. They can only be what most men are nowadays, merely busy and effeminate, running-and-reading sort of men—rushing about propping up the universe. Men who cannot trust the ideal—the nature of things,—and who think they can do better, are naturally kept very busy, and as they take no time to rest back on their ideals they are naturally very tired. The result stares at us on every hand. Whether in religion, art, education, or public affairs, we do not stop to find our ideals for the problems that confront us. We do not even look at them. Our modern problems are all Jerichos to us—most of them paper ones. We arrange symposiums and processions around them and shout at them and march up and down before them. Modern prophecy is the blare of the trumpet. Modern thought is a crowd hurrying to and fro. Civilisation is the dust we scuffle in each other's eyes.

When the peace and strength of spirit with which the walls of temples are builded no longer dwell in them, the stones crumble. Temples are built of eon-gathered and eon-rested stones. Infinite nights and days are wrought in them, and leisure and splendour wait upon them, and visits of suns and stars, and when leisure and splendour are no more in human beings' lives, and visits of suns and stars are as though they were not, in our civilisation, the walls of it shall crumble upon us. If fulness and leisure and power of living are no more with us, nothing shall save us. Walls of encyclopædias—not even walls of Bibles shall save us, nor miles of Carnegie-library. Empty and hasty and cowardly living does not get itself protected from the laws of nature by tons of paper and ink. The only way out for civilisation is through the practical men in it—men who grapple daily with ideals, who keep office hours with their souls, who keep hold of life with books, who take enough time out of hurraing civilisation along—to live.

Civilisation has been long in building and its splendour still hangs over us, but Parthenons do not stand when Parthenons are no longer being lived in Greek men's souls. Only those who have Coliseums in them can keep Coliseums around them. The Ideal has its own way. It has it with the very stones. It was an Ideal, a vanished Ideal, that made a moonlight scene for tourists out of the Coliseum—out of the Dead Soul of Rome.

## Ashes

There seem to be but two fundamental characteristic sensibilities left alive in the typical, callously-civilised man. One of these sensibilities is the sense of motion and the other is the sense of mass. If he cannot be appealed to through one of these senses, it is of little use to appeal to him at all. In proportion as he is civilised, the civilised man can be depended on for two things. He can always be touched by a hurry of any kind, and he never fails to be moved by a crowd. If he can have hurry and crowd together, he is capable of almost anything. These two sensibilities, the sense of motion and the sense of mass, are all that is left of the original, lusty, tasting and seeing and feeling human being who took possession of the earth. And even in the case of comparatively rudimentary and somewhat stupid senses like these, the sense of motion, with the average civilised man, is so blunt that he needs to be rushed along at seventy miles an hour to have the feeling that he is moving, and his sense of mass is so degenerate that he needs to live with hundreds of thousands of people next door to know that he is not alone. He is seen in his most natural state,—this civilised being,—with most of his civilisation around him, in the seat of an elevated railway train, with a crowded newspaper before his eyes, and another crowded newspaper in his lap, and crowds of people reading crowded newspapers standing round him in the aisles; but he can never be said to be seen at his best, in a spectacle like this, until the spectacle moves, until it is felt rushing over the sky of the street, puffing through space; in which delectable pell-mell and carnival of hurry—hiss in front of it, shriek under it, and dust behind it—he finds, to all appearances at least, the meaning of this present world and the hope of the next. Hurry and crowd have kissed each other and his soul rests. “If Abraham sitting in his tent door waiting for angels had been visited by a spectacle like this and invited to live in it all his days, would he not have climbed into it cheerfully enough?” asks the modern man. Living in a tent would have been out of the question, and waiting for angels—waiting for anything, in fact—forever impossible.

Whatever else may be said of Abraham, his waiting for angels was the making of him, and the making of all that is good in what has followed since. The man who hangs on a strap—up in the morning and down at night, hurrying between the crowd he sleeps with and the crowd he works with, to the crowd that hurries no more,—even this man, such as he is, with all his civilisation roaring about him, would have been impossible if Abraham in the stately and quiet days had not waited at his tent door for angels to begin a civilisation with, or if he had been the kind of Abraham that expected that angels would come hurrying and scurrying after one in a spectacle like this. “What has a man,” says Blank in his *Angels of the Nineteenth Century*,—“What has a man who consents to be a knee-bumping, elbow-jamming, foothold-struggling strap-hanger—an abject commuter all his days (for no better reason than that he is not well

enough to keep still and that there is not enough of him to be alone)—to do with angels—or to do with anything, except to get done with it as fast as he can?” So say we all of us, hanging on straps to say it, swaying and swinging to oblivion. “Is there no power,” says Blank, “in heaven above or earth beneath that will *help us to stop?*”

If a civilisation is founded on two senses—the sense of motion and the sense of mass,—one need not go far to find the essential traits of its literature and its daily reading habit. There are two things that such a civilisation makes sure of in all its concerns—hurry and crowd. Hence the spectacle before us—the literary rush and mobs of books.

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## V

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### The Literary Rush

The present writer, being occasionally addicted (like the reader of this book) to a seemly desire to have the opinions of some one besides the author represented, has fallen into the way of having interviews held with himself from time to time, which are afterwards published at his own request. These interviews appear in the public prints as being between a Mysterious Person and The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts. The author can only earnestly hope that in thus generously providing for an opposing point of view, in taking, as it were, the words of the enemy upon his lips, he will lose the sympathy of the reader. The Mysterious Person is in colloquy with The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts. As The P. G. S. of M. lives relentlessly at his elbow—dogs every day of his life,—it is hoped that the reader will make allowance for a certain impatient familiarity in the tone of The Mysterious Person toward so considerable a personage as The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts—which we can only profoundly regret.

The Mysterious Person: “There is no escaping from it. Reading-madness is a thing we all are breathing in to-day whether we will or no, and it is not only in the air, but it is worse than in the air. It is underneath the foundations of the things in which we live and on which we stand. It has infected the very character of the natural world, and the movement of the planets, and the whirl of the globe beneath our feet. Without its little paling of books about it, there is hardly a thing that is left in this modern world a man can go to for its own sake. Except by stepping off the globe, perhaps, now and then—practically arranging a world of one’s own, and breaking with one’s kind,—the life that a man must live to-day can only be described as a kind of eternal parting with himself. There is getting to be no possible way for a man to preserve his five spiritual senses—even his five physical ones—and be a member, in good and regular standing, of civilisation at the same time.

“If civilisation and human nature are to continue to be allowed to exist together there is but one way out, apparently—an extra planet for all of us, one for a man to live on and the other for him to be civilised on.”

P. G. S. of M.: “But——”

“As long as we, who are the men and women of the world, are willing to continue our present fashion of giving up living in order to get a living, one planet will never be large enough for us. If we can only get our living in one place and have it to live with in another, the question is, To whom does this present planet belong—the people who spend their days in living into it and enjoying it, or the people who never take time to notice the planet, who do not seem to know that they are living on a planet at all?”

P. G. S. of M.: “But——”

“I may not be very well informed on very many things, but I am very sure of one of them,” said The Mysterious Person, “and that is, that this present planet—this one we are living on now—belongs by all that is fair and just to those who are really living on it, and that it should be saved and kept as a sacred and protected place—a place where men shall be able to belong to the taste and colour and meaning of things and to God and to themselves. If people want another planet—a planet to belong to Society on,—let them go out and get it.

“Look at our literature—current literature. It is a mere headlong, helpless literary rush from beginning to end. All that one can extract from it is getting to be a kind of general sound of going. We began gently enough. We began with the annual. We had Poor Richard’s Almanac. Then we had the quarterly. A monthly was reasonable enough in course of time; so we had monthlies. Then the semi-monthly came to ease our literary nerves; and now the weekly magazine stumbles, rapt and wistful, on the heels of men of genius. It makes contracts for prophecy. Unborn poems are sold in the open market. The latest thoughts that thinkers have, the trend of the thoughts they are going to have—the public makes demand for these. It gets them. Then it cries ‘More! More!’ Where is the writer who does not think with the printing-press hot upon his track, and the sound of the pulp-mill making paper for his poems, and the buzz of editors, instead of the music of the spheres? Think of the destruction to American forests, the bare and glaring hills that face us day and night, all for a literature like this—thousands of square miles of it, spread before our faces, morning after morning, week after week, through all this broad and glorious land! Seventy million souls—brothers of yours and mine—walking through prairies of pictures Sunday after Sunday, flickered at by head-lines, deceived by adjectives, each with his long day’s work, column after column, sentence after sentence, plodding—plodding—plodding down to —— . My geography may be wrong; the general direction is right.”

“But don’t you believe in newspapers?”

“Why, yes, in the abstract; *newspapers*. But we do not have any news nowadays. It is not news to know a thing before it’s happened, nor is it news to know what might happen, or why it might happen, or why it might not happen. To be told that it doesn’t make any difference whether it happens at all, would be

news, perhaps, to many people—such news as there is; but it is hardly worth while to pay three cents to be sure of that. An intelligent man can be sure of it for nothing. He has been sure of it every morning for years. It's the gist of most of the newspapers he reads. From the point of view of what can be called truly vital information, in any larger sense, the only news a daily paper has is the date at the top of the page. If a man once makes sure of that, if he feels from the bottom of his heart what really good news it is that one more day is come in a world as beautiful as this,—the rest of it——”

P. G. S. of M.: “But——”

“The rest of it, if it's true, is hardly worth knowing; and if it's worth knowing, it can be found better in books; and if it's not true—‘Every man his own liar’ is my motto. He might as well have the pleasure of it, and he knows how much to believe. The same lunging, garrulous, blindly busy habit is the law of all we do. Take our literary critical journals. If a critic can not tell what he sees at once, he must tell what he fails to see at once. The point is not his seeing or not seeing, nor anybody's seeing or not seeing. The point is the imperative ‘at once.’ Literature is getting to be the filling of orders—time-limited orders. Criticism is out of a car window. Book reviews are telegraphed across the sea (Tennyson's memoirs). The —— (Daily) —— (a spectacle for Homer!) begins a magazine to ‘review in three weeks every book of permanent value that is published’—one of the gravest and most significant blows at literature—one of the gravest and most significant signs of the condition of letters to-day—that could be conceived! Three weeks, man! As if a ‘book of permanent value’ had ever been recognised, as yet, in three years, or reviewed in thirty years (in any proper sense), or mastered in three hundred years—with all the hurrying of this hurrying world! We have no book-reviewers. Why should we? Criticism begins where a man's soul leaves off. It comes from brilliantly-defective minds,—so far as one can see,—from men of attractively imperfect sympathies. Nordau, working himself into a mighty wrath because mystery is left out of his soul, gathering adjectives about his loins, stalks this little fluttered modern world, puts his huge, fumbling, hippopotamus hoof upon the *Blessed Damozel*, goes crashing through the press. He is greeted with a shudder of delight. Even Matthew Arnold, a man who had a way of seeing things almost, sometimes, criticises Emerson for lack of unity, because the unity was on so large a scale that Arnold's imagination could not see it; and now the chirrup from afar, rising from the east and the west, ‘Why doesn't George Meredith?’ etc. People want him to put guide-posts in his books, apparently, or before his sentences: ‘TO ——’ or ‘TEN MILES TO THE NEAREST VERB’—the inevitable fate of any writer, man or woman, who dares to ask, in this present day, that his reader shall stop to think. If a man cannot read as he runs, he does not read a book at all. The result is, he ought to run; that is natural enough; and the faster he runs, in most books, the better.”

At this point The Mysterious Person reached out his long arm from his easy-chair to some papers that were lying near. I knew too well what it meant. He began to read. (He is always breaking over into manuscript when he talks.)

“We are forgetting to see. Looking is a lost art. With our poor, wistful, straining eyes, we hurry along

the days that slowly, out of the rest of heaven, move their stillness across this little world. The more we hurry, the more we read. Night and noon and morning the panorama passes before our eyes. By tables, on cars, and in the street we see them—readers, readers everywhere, drinking their blindness in. Life is a blur of printed paper. We see no more the things themselves. We see about them. We lose the power to see the things themselves. We see in sentences. The linotype looks for us. We know the world in columns. The sounds of the street are muffled to us. In papers up to our ears, we whirl along our endless tracks. The faces that pass are phantoms. In our little woodcut head-line dream we go ceaseless on, turning leaves,—days and weeks and months of leaves,—wherever we go—years of leaves. Boys who never have seen the sky above them, young men who have never seen it in a face, old men who have never looked out at sea across a crowd, nor guessed the horizons there—dead men, the flicker of life in their hands, not yet beneath the roofs of graves—all turning leaves.”

The Mysterious Person stopped. Nobody said anything. It is the better way, generally, with The Mysterious Person. We were beginning to feel as if he were through, when his eye fell on a copy of The ——, lying on the floor. It was open at an unlucky page.

“Look at that!” said he. He handed the paper to The P. G. S. of M., pointing with his finger, rather excitedly. The P. G. S. of M. looked at it—read it through. Then he put it down; The Mysterious Person went on.

“Do you not know what it means when you, a civilised, cultivated, converted human being, can stand face to face with a list—a list like that—a list headed ‘BOOKS OF THE WEEK’—when, unblinking and shameless, and without a cry of protest, you actually read it through, without seeing, or seeming to see, for a single moment that right there—right there in that list—the fact that there is such a list—your civilisation is on trial for its life—that any society or nation or century that is shallow enough to publish as many books as that has yet to face the most awful, the most unprecedented, the most headlong-coming crisis in the history of the human race?”

The Mysterious Person made a pause—the pause of settling things. [There are people who seem to think that the only really adequate way to settle a thing, in this world, is for them to ask a question about it.]

At all events The Mysterious Person having asked a question at this point, everybody might as well have the benefit of it.

In the meantime, it is to be hoped that in the next chapter The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts, or somebody—will get a word in.

# Parenthesis To the Gentle Reader

This was a footnote at first. It is placed at the top of the page in the hope that it will point at itself more and let the worst out at once. I want to say I—a little—in this book.

I do not propose to do it very often. Indeed I am not sure just now, that I shall be able to do it at all, but I would like to have the feeling as I go along that arrangements have been made for it, and that it is all understood, and that if I am fairly good about it—ring a little bell or something—and warn people, I am going to be allowed—right here in my own book at least—to say I when I want to.

I is the way I feel on the inside about this subject. Anybody can see it. And I want to be honest, in the first place, and in the second place (like a good many other people) I never have had what could be called a real good chance to say I in this world, and I feel that if I had—somehow, it would cure me.

I have tried other ways. I have tried calling myself he. I have stated my experiences in principles—called myself it, and in the first part of this book I have already fallen into the way—page after page—of borrowing other people, when all the time I knew perfectly well (and everybody) that I preferred myself. At all events this calling one's self names—now one and now another,—working one's way *incognito*, all the way through one's own book, is not making me as modest as I had hoped. There seems to be nothing for it—with some of us, but to work through to modesty the other way—backward—I it out.

There is one other reason. This Mysterious Person I have arranged with in these opening chapters, to say I for me, does not seem to me to be doing it very well. I think any one—any fairly observing person—would admit that I could do it better, and if it's going to be done at all, why should a mere spiritual machine—a kind of moral phonograph like this Mysterious Person—be put forward to take the ignominy of it? I have set my "I" up before me and duly cross-examined it. I have said to it, "Either you are good enough to say I in a book or you are not," and my "I" has replied to me, "If I am not, I want everybody to know why and if I am—am——." Well of course he is not, and we will all help him to know why. We will do as we would be done by. If there is ever going to be any possible comfort in this world for me, in not being what I ought to be, it is the thought that I am not the only one that knows it. At all events, this feeling that the worst is known, even if one takes, as I am doing now, a planet for a confessional, gives one a luxurious sense—a sense of combined safety and irresponsibility which would not be exchanged for a world. Every book should have I-places in it—breathing-holes—places where one's soul can come up to the surface and look out through the ice and say things. I do not wish to seem superior and I will admit that I am as respectable as anybody in most places, but I do think that if half the time I am devoting, and am going to devote, to appearing as modest as people expect in this world, could be devoted to really doing something in it, my little modesty—such as it is—would not be missed. At all events I am persuaded that anything—almost anything—would be better than this eternal keeping up appearances of all being a little less interested in ourselves than we are, which is what Literature and Society are for, mostly. We all do it, more or less. And yet if there were only a few scattered-along places, public soul-

open places to rest in, and be honest in—(in art-parlours and teas and things)—wouldn't we see people rushing to them? I would give the world sometimes to believe that it would pay to be as honest with some people as with a piece of paper or with a book.

I dare say I am all wrong in striking out and flourishing about in a chapter like this, and in threatening to have more like them, but there is one comfort I lay to my soul in doing it. If there is one thing rather than another a book is for (one's own book) it is, that it furnishes the one good, fair, safe place for a man to talk about himself in, because it is the only place that any one—absolutely any one,—at any moment, can shut him up.

This is not saying that I am going to do it. My courage will go from me (for saying I, I mean). Or I shall not be humble enough or something and it all will pass away. I am going to do it now, a little, but I cannot guarantee it. All of a sudden, no telling when or why, I shall feel that Mysterious Person with all his worldly trappings hanging around me again and before I know it, before you know it, Gentle Reader, I with all my I (or i) shall be swallowed up. Next time I appear, you shall see me, decorous, trim, and in the third person, my literary white tie on, snooping along through these sentences one after the other, crossing my I's out, wishing I had never been born.

Postscript. I cannot help recording at this point, for the benefit of reckless persons, how saying I in a book feels. It feels a good deal like a very small boy in a very high swing—a kind of flashing-of-everything through-nothing feeling, but it cannot be undone now, and so if you please, Gentle Reader, and if everybody will hold their breath, I am going to hold on tight and do it.

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## VII

### More Parenthesis—But More to the Point

I have gotten into a way lately, while I am just living along, of going out and taking a good square turn every now and then, in front of myself. It is not altogether an agreeable experience, but there seems to be a window in every man's nature on purpose for it—arranged and located on purpose for it, and I find on the whole that going out around one's window, once in so often, and standing awhile has advantages. The general idea is to stand perfectly still for a little time, in a kind of general, public, disinterested way, and then suddenly, when one is off one's guard and not looking, so to speak, take a peek backwards into one's self.

I am aware that it does not follow, because I have just come out and have been looking into my

window, that I have a right to hold up any person or persons who may be going by in this book, and ask them to look in too, but at the same time I cannot conceal—do not wish to conceal, even if I could—that there have been times, standing in front of my window and looking in, when what I have seen there has seemed to me to assume a national significance.

There are millions of other windows like it. It is one of the daily sorrows of my life that the people who own them do not seem to know it—most of them—except perhaps in a vague, hurried pained way. Sometimes I feel like calling out to them as I stand by my window—see them go hurrying by on The Great Street: “Say there, Stranger! Halloa, Stranger! Want to see yourself? Come right over here and look at me!”

Nobody believes it, of course. It’s a good deal like standing and waving one’s arms in the Midway—being an egotist,—but I must say, I have never got a man yet—got him in out of the rush, I mean, right up in front of my window—got him once stooped down and really looking in there, but he admitted there was something in it.

Thus does it come to pass—this gentle swelling. Let me be a warning to you, Gentle Reader, when you once get to philosophising yourself over (along the line of your faults) into the disputed territory of the First Person Singular. I am not asking you to try to believe my little philosophy of types. I am trying to, in my humble way, to be sure, but I would rather, on the whole, let it go. It is not so much my philosophy I rest my case on, as my sub-philosophy or religion—viz., I like it and believe in it—saying I. (Thank Heaven that, bad as it is, I have struck bottom at last!) The best I can do under the circumstances, I suppose, is to beg (in a perfectly blank way) forgiveness—forgiveness of any and every kind from everybody, if in this and the following chapters I fall sometimes to talking of people—people at large—under the general head of myself.

I was born to read. I spent all my early years, as I remember them, with books,—peering softly about in them. My whole being was hushed and trustful and expectant at the sight of a printed page. I lived in the presence of books, with all my thoughts lying open about me; a kind of still, radiant mood of welcome seemed to lie upon them. When I looked at a shelf of books I felt the whole world flocking to me.

I have been civilised now, I should say, twenty, or possibly twenty-five, years. At least every one supposes I am civilised, and my whole being has changed. I cannot so much as look upon a great many books in a library or any other heaped-up place, without feeling bleak and heartless. I never read if I can help it. My whole attitude toward current literature is grouty and snappish, a kind of perpetual interrupted “What are you ringing my door-bell now for?” attitude. I am a disagreeable character. I spend at least one half my time, I should judge, keeping things off, in defending my character. Then I spend the other half in wondering if, after all, it was worth it. What I see in my window has changed. When I used to go out around and look into it, in the old days, to see what I was like, I was a sunny, open valley—streams and

roads and everything running down into it, and opening out of it, and when I go out suddenly now, and turn around in front of myself and look in—I am a mountain pass. I sift my friends—up a trail. The few friends that come, come a little out of breath (God bless them!), and a book cannot so much as get to me except on a mule's back.

It is by no means an ideal arrangement—a mountain pass, but it is better than always sitting in one's study in civilisation, where every passer-by, pamphlet, boy in the street, thinks he might just as well come up and ring one's door-bell awhile. All modern books are book agents at heart, around getting subscriptions for themselves. If a man wants to be sociable or literary nowadays, he can only do it by being a more or less disagreeable character, and if he wishes to be a beautiful character, he must go off and do it by himself.

This is a mere choice in suicides.

The question that presses upon me is: Whose fault is it that a poor wistful, incomplete, human being, born into this huge dilemma of a world, can only keep on having a soul in it, by keeping it (that is, his soul) tossed back and forth—now in one place where souls are lost, and now in another? Is it your fault, or mine, Gentle Reader, that we are obliged to live in this undignified, obstreperous fashion in what is called civilisation? I cannot believe it. Nearly all the best people one knows can be seen sitting in civilisation on the edge of their chairs, or hurrying along with their souls in satchels.

There is but one conclusion. Civilisation is not what it is advertised to be. Every time I see a fresh missionary down at the steamer wharf, as I do sometimes, starting away for other lands, loaded up with our Institutions to the eyes, Church in one hand and Schoolhouse in the other, trim, happy, and smiling over them, at everybody, I feel like stepping up to him and saying, what seem to me, a few appropriate words. I seldom do it, but the other day when I happened to be down at the *Umbria* dock about sailing-time, I came across one (a foreign missionary, I mean) pleasant, thoughtless, and benevolent-looking, standing there all by himself by the steamer-rail, and I thought I would try speaking to him.

“Where are you going to be putting—those?” I said, pointing to a lot of funny little churches and funny little schoolhouses he was holding in both hands.

“From Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand,” he said.

I looked at them a minute. “You don't think, do you?” I said—“You don't really think you had better wait over a little—bring them back and let us—finish them for you, do you? one or two—samples?” I said.

He looked at me with what seemed to me at first, a kind of blurred, helpless look. I soon saw that he was pitying me and I promptly stepped down to the dining-saloon and tried to appreciate two or three tons of flowers.

I do not wish to say a word against missionaries. They are merely apt to be somewhat heedless, morally-hurried persons, rushing about the world turning people (as they think) right side up everywhere, without really noticing them much, but I do think that a great deliberate corporate body like The American

Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions ought to be more optimistic about the Church—wait and work for it a little more, expect a little more of it.

It seems to me that it ought to be far less pessimistic than it is, also, about what we can do in the way of schools and social life in civilisation and about civilisation's way of doing business. Is our little knack of Christianity (I find myself wondering) quite worthy of all this attention it is getting from The American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions? Why should it approve of civilisation with a rush? Does any one really suppose that it is really time to pat it on the back—yet?—to spend a million dollars a year—patting it on the back?

I merely throw out the question.

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## VIII

### More Literary Rush

We had been talking along, in our Club, as usual, for some time, on the general subject of the world—fixing the blame for things. We had come to the point where it was nearly all fixed (most of it on other people) when I thought I might as well put forward my little theory that nearly everything that was the matter, could be traced to the people who “belong to Society.”

Then The P. G. S. of M. (who is always shoving a dictionary around in front of him when he talks) spoke up and said:

“But who belongs to Society?”

“All persons who read what they are told to and who call where they can't help it. What this world needs just now,” I went on, looking The P. G. S. of M. as much in the eye as I could, “is emancipation. It needs a prophet—a man who can gather about him a few brave-hearted, intelligently ignorant men, who shall go about with their beautiful feet on the mountains, telling the good tidings of how many things there are we do not need to know. The prejudice against being ignorant is largely because people have not learned how to do it. The wrong people have taken hold of it.”

I cannot remember the exact words of what was said after this, but I said that it seemed to me that most people were afraid not to know everything. Not knowing too much is a natural gift, and unless a man can make his ignorance contagious—inspire people with the books he dares not read—of course the only thing he can do is to give up and read everything, and belong to Society. He certainly cannot belong to himself unless he protects himself with well-selected, carefully guarded, daring ignorance. Think of the books—the books that are dictated to us—the books that will not let a man go,—and behind every book a hundred intelligent men and women—one's friends, too—one's own kin——

P. G. S. of M.: “But the cultured man must——”

The cultured man is the man who can tell me what he does not know, with such grace that I feel ashamed of knowing it.

Now there’s M——, for example. Other people seem to read to talk, but I never see him across a drawing-room without an impulse of barbarism, and I always get him off into a corner as soon as I can, if only to rest myself—to feel that I have a right not to read everything. He always proves to me something that I can get along without. He is full of the most choice and picturesque bits of ignorance. He is creatively ignorant. He displaces a book every time I see him—which is a deal better in these days than writing one. A man should be measured by his book-displacement. He goes about with his thinking face, and a kind of nimbus over him, of never needing to read at all. He has nothing whatever to give but himself, but I had rather have one of his *questions* about a book I had read, than all the other opinions and subtle distinctions in the room—or the book itself.

P. G. S. of M. “But the cultured man must——”

**NOT.** It is the very essence of a cultured man that when he hears the word “must” it is on his own lips. It is the very essence of his culture that he says it to himself. His culture is his belonging to himself, and his belonging to himself is the first condition of his being worth giving to other people. One longs for Elia. People know too much, and there doesn’t seem to be a man living who can charm them from the error of their way. Knowledge takes the place of everything else, and all one can do in this present day as he reads the reviews and goes to his club, is to look forward with a tired heart to the prophecy of Scripture, “Knowledge shall pass away.”

Where do we see the old and sweet content of loving a thing for itself? Now, there are the flowers. The only way to delight in a flower at your feet in these days is to watch with it all alone, or keep still about it. The moment you speak of it, it becomes botany. It’s a rare man who will not tell you all he knows about it. Love isn’t worth anything without a classic name. It’s a wonder we have any flowers left. Half the charm of a flower to me is that it looks demure and talks perfume and keeps its name so gently to itself. The man who always enjoys views by picking out the places he knows, is a symbol of all our reading habits and of our national relation to books. One can glory in a great cliff down in the depths of his heart, but if you mention it, it is geology, and an argument. Even the birds sing zoölogically, and as for the sky, it has become a mere blue-and-gold science, and all the wonder seems to be confined to one’s not knowing the names of the planets. I was brought up wistfully on

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are.

But now it is become:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,

Teacher's told me what you are.

Even babies won't wonder very soon. That is to say, they won't wonder out loud. Nobody does.  
Another of my poems was:

Where did you come from, baby dear?

Out of the everywhere into here.

I thought of it the other day when I stepped into the library with the list of books I had to have an opinion about before Mrs. W——'s Thursday Afternoon, I felt like a literary infant.

Where did you come from, baby fair?

Out of the here into everywhere.

And the bookcases stared at me.

It is a serious question whether the average American youth is ever given a chance to thirst for knowledge. He thirsts for ignorance instead. From the very first he is hemmed in by knowledge. The kindergarten with its suave relentlessness, its perfunctory cheerfulness, closes in upon the life of every child with himself. The dear old-fashioned breathing spell he used to have after getting here—whither has it gone? The rough, strong, ruthless, unseemly, grown-up world crowds to the very edge of every beginning life. It has no patience with trailing clouds of glory. Flocks of infants every year—new-comers to this planet—who can but watch them sadly, huddled closer and closer to the little strip of wonder that is left near the land from which they came? No lingering away from us. No infinite holiday. Childhood walks a precipice crowded to the brink of birth. We tabulate its moods. We register its learning inch by inch. We draw its poor little premature soul out of its body breath by breath. Infants are well informed now. The suckling has nerves. A few days more he will be like all the rest of us. It will be:

Poem: "When I Was Weaned."

"My First Tooth: A Study."

The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts, with his dazed, kind look, looked up and said: "I fear, my dear fellow, there is no place for you in the world."

Thanks. One of the delights of going fishing or hunting is, that one learns how small "a place in the world" is—comes across so many accidentally preserved characters—preserved by not having a place in the world—persons that are interesting to be with—persons you can tell things.

The real object—it seems to me—in meeting another human being is complement—fitting into each other's ignorances. Sometimes it seems as if it were only where there is something to be caught or shot, or where there is plenty of room, that the highest and most sociable and useful forms of ignorance were allowed to mature.

One can still find such fascinating prejudices, such frank enthusiasms of ignorance, where there's

good fishing; and then, in the stray hamlets, there is the grave whimsicalness and the calm superior air of austerity to cultured people.

Ah, let me live in the Maine woods or wander by the brooks of Virginia, and rest my soul in the delights—in the pomposity—of ignorance—ignorance in its pride and glory and courage and lovableness! I never come back from a vacation without a dream of what I might have been, if I had only dared to know a little less; and even now I sometimes feel I have ignorance enough, if like Elia, for instance, I only knew how to use it, but I cannot as much as get over being ashamed of it. I am nearly gone. I have little left but the gift of being bored. That is something—but hardly a day passes without my slurring over a guilty place in conversation, without my hiding my ignorance under a bushel, where I can go later and take a look at it by myself. Then I know all about it next time and sink lower and lower. A man can do nothing alone. Of course, ignorance must be natural and not acquired in order to have the true ring and afford the most relief in the world; but every wide-awake village that has thoughtful people enough—people who are educated up to it—ought to organise an Ignoramus Club to defend the town from papers and books——.

It was at about this point that The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts took up the subject, and after modulating a little and then modulating a little more, he was soon listening to himself about a book we had not read, and I sat in my chair and wrote out this.

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## IX

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### The Bugbear of Being Well Informed—A Practical Suggestion

1. This Club shall be known as the Ignoramus Club of ——.
4. Every member shall be pledged not to read the latest book until people have stopped expecting it.
5. The Club shall have a Standing Committee that shall report at every meeting on New Things That People Do Not Need to Know.
6. It shall have a Public Library Committee, appointed every year, to look over the books in regular order and report on Old Things That People Do Not Need to Know. (Committee instructed to keep the library as small as possible.)
8. No member (vacations excepted) shall read any book that he would not read twice. In case he does, he shall be obliged to read it twice or pay a fine (three times the price of book, net).
11. The Club shall meet weekly.
12. Any person of suitable age shall be eligible for membership in the Club, who, after a written examination in his deficiencies, shall appear, in the opinion of the Examining Board, to have selected his ignorance thoughtfully, conscientiously, and for the protection of his mind.

13. All persons thus approved shall be voted upon at the next regular meeting of the Club—the vote to be taken by ballot (any candidate who has not read *When Knighthood Was in Flower*, or *Audrey*, or *David Harum*—by acclamation).

Perhaps I have quoted from the by-laws sufficiently to give an idea of the spirit and aim of the Club. I append the order of meeting:

1. Called to order.
2. Reports of Committees.
3. General Confession (what members have read during the week).
4. **FINES.**
5. Review: Books I Have Escaped.
6. Essay: Things Plato Did Not Need to Know.
7. Omniscience. Helpful Hints. Remedies.
8. The Description Evil; followed by an illustration.
9. *Not Travelling on the Nile: By One Who Has Been There.*
10. Our Village Street: Stereopticon.
11. What Not to Know about Birds.
12. Myself through an Opera-Glass.
13. Sonnet: Botany.
14. Essay: Proper Treatment of Paupers, Insane, and Instructive People.
15. The Fad for Facts.
16. How to Organise a Club against Clubs.
17. Paper: How to Humble Him Who Asks, “Have You Read——?”
18. Essay, by youngest member: Infinity. An Appreciation.
19. Review: The Heavens in a Nutshell.
20. Review. Wild Animals I Do Not Want to Know.
21. Exercise in Silence. (Ten Minutes. Entire Club.)
22. Essay (Ten Minutes): *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Summary.
23. Exercise in Wondering about Something. (Selected. Ten Minutes. Entire Club.)
24. Debate: Which Is More Deadly—the Pen or the Sword?
25. Things Said To-Night That We Must Forget.
26. ADJOURNMENT. (Each member required to walk home alone looking at the stars.)

I have sometimes thought I would like to go off to some great, wide, bare, splendid place—nothing

but Time and Room in it—and read awhile. I would want it built in the same general style and with the same general effect as the universe, but a universe in which everything lets one alone, in which everything just goes quietly on in its great still round, letting itself be looked at—no more said about it, nothing to be done about it. No exclamations required. No one standing around explaining things or showing how they appreciated them.

Then after I had looked about a little, seen that everything was safe and according to specifications, I think the first thing I would do would be to sit down and see if I could not read a great book—the way I used to read a great book, before I belonged to civilisation, read it until I felt my soul growing softly toward it, reaching up to the day and to the night with it.

I have always kept on hoping that I would be allowed, in spite of being somewhat mixed up with civilisation, to be a normal man sometime. It has always seemed to me that the normal man—the highly organised man in all ages, is the man who takes the universe primarily as a spectacle. This is his main use for it. The object of his life is to get a good look at it before he dies—to be the kind of man who can get a good look at it. How any one can go through a whole life—sixty or seventy years of it—with a splendour like this arching over him morning, noon, and night, flying beneath his feet, blooming out at him on every side, and not spend nearly all his time (after the bare necessities of life) in taking it in, listening and tasting and looking in it, is one of the seven wonders of the world. I never look out of my factory window in civilisation, see a sunset or shore of the universe,—am reminded again that there is a universe—but I wonder at myself and wonder at It. I try to put civilisation and the universe together. I cannot do it. It's as if we were afraid to be caught looking at it—most of us—spending the time to look at it, or as if we were ashamed before the universe itself—running furiously to and fro in it, lest it should look at us.

It is the first trait of a great book, it seems to me, that it makes all other books—little hurrying, petulant books—wait. A kind of immeasurable elemental hunger comes to a man out of it. Somehow I feel I have not had it out with a great book if I have not faced other great things with it. I want to face storms with it, hours of weariness and miles of walking with it. It seems to ask me to. It seems to bring with it something which makes me want to stop my mere reading-and-doing kind of life, my ink-and-paper imitation kind of life, and come out and be a companion with the silent shining, with the eternal going on of things. It seems to be written in every writing that is worth a man's while that it can not—that it shall not—be read by itself. It is written that a man shall work to read, that he must win some great delight to do his reading with. Many and many a winter day I have tramped with four lines down to the edge of the night, to overtake my soul—to read four lines with. I have faced a wind for hours—been bitterly cold with it—before the utmost joy of the book I had lost would come back to me. I find that when I am being normal (vacations mostly) I scarcely know what it is to give myself over to another mind for more than an hour or so at a time. If a chapter has anything in it, I want to do something with it, go out and believe it, live with it, exercise it awhile. I am not only bored with a book when it does not interest me. I am bored with it when it does. I want to interrupt it, take it outdoors, see what the hills and clouds think, try it on,

test it, see if it is good enough—see if it can come down upon me as rain or sunlight or other real things and blow upon me as the wind. It does not belong to me until it has found its way through all the weathers within and the weathers without, until it drifts with me through moods, events, sensations, and days and nights, faces and sunsets, and the light of stars,—until it is a part of life itself. I find there is no other or shorter or easier way for me to do with a great book than to greet it as it seems to ask to be greeted, as if it were a world that had come to me and sought me out—wanted me to live in it. Hundreds and hundreds of times, when I am being civilised, have I not tried to do otherwise? Have I not stopped my poor pale, hurried, busy soul (like a kind of spectre flying past me) before a great book and tried to get it to speak to it, and it would not? It requires a world—a great book does—as a kind of ticket of admission, and what have I to do, when I am being civilised, with a world—the one that’s running still and godlike over me? Do I not for days and weeks at a time go about in it, guilty, shut-in, and foolish under it, slinking about—its emptied miracles all around me, mean, joyless, anxious, unable to look the littlest flower in the face—unable——. “Ah, God!” my soul cries out within me. Are not all these things mine? Do they not belong with me and I with them? And I go racing about, making things up in their presence, plodding for shadows, cutting out paper dolls to live with. All the time this earnest, splendid, wasted heaven shining over me—doing nothing with it, expecting nothing of it—a little more warmth out of it perhaps, a little more light not to see in——. Who am I that the grasses should whisper to me, that the winds should blow upon me? Now and then there are days that come, when I see a flower—when I really see a flower—and my soul cries out to it.

Now and then there are days too, when I see a great book, a book that has the universe wrought in it. I find my soul feeling it vaguely, creeping toward it. I wonder if I dare to read it. I remember how I used to read it. I all but pray to it. I sit in my factory window and try sometimes. But it is all far away—at least as long as I stay in my window. It’s all about some one else—a kind of splendid wistful walking in a dream. It does not really belong to me to live in a great book—a book with the universe in it. Sometimes it almost seems to. But it barely, faintly belongs to me. It is as if the sky came to me, and stooped down over me, and then went softly away in my sleep.

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## X

### The Dead Level of Intelligence

Your hostess introduces you to a man in a drawing-room. “Mr. C—— belongs to a Browning Club, too,” she says.

What are you going to do about it? Are you going to talk about Browning?

Not if Browning is one of your alive places. You will reconnoitre first—James Whitcomb Riley or Ella Wheeler Wilcox. There is no telling where The Enemy will bring you up, if you do not. He may tell you something about Browning you never knew—something you have always wanted to know,—but you will be hurt that he knew it. He may be the original Grammarian of “The Grammarian’s Funeral” (whom Robert Browning took—and knew perfectly well that he took at the one poetic moment of his life), but his belonging to a Browning Club—The Enemy, that is—does not mean anything to you or to any one else nowadays—either about Browning or about himself.

There was a time once, when, if a man revealed in conversation, that he was familiar with poetic structure in John Keats, it meant something about the man—his temperament, his producing or delighting power. It means now, that he has taken a course in poetics in college, or teaches English in a high school, and is carrying deadly information about with him wherever he goes. It does not mean that he has a spark of the Keats spirit in him, or that he could have endured being in the same room with Keats, or Keats could have endured being in the same room with him, for fifteen minutes.

If there is one inconvenience rather than another in being born in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it is the almost constant compulsion one is under in it, of finding people out—making a distinction between the people who know a beautiful thing and are worth while, and the boors of culture—the people who know all about it. One sees on every hand to-day persons occupying positions of importance who have been taken through all the motions of education, from the bottom to the top, but who always belong to the intellectual lower classes whatever their positions may be, because they are not masters. They are clumsy and futile with knowledge. Their culture has not been made over into them—selves. They have acquired it largely under mob-influence (the dead level of intelligence), and all that they can do with it, not wanting it, is to be teachery with it—force it on other people who do not want it.

Whether in the origin, processes, or results of their learning, these people have all the attributes of a mob. Their influence and force in civilisation is a mob influence, and it operates in the old and classic fashion of mobs upon all who oppose it.

It constitutes at present the most important and securely intrenched intimidating force that modern society presents against the actual culture of the world, whether in the schools or out of them. Its voice is in every street, and its shout of derision may be heard in almost every walk of life against all who refuse to conform to it. There are but very few who refuse. Millions of human beings, young and old, in meek and willing rows are seen on every side, standing before It—THE DEAD LEVEL,—anxious to do anything to be graded up to it, or to be graded down to it—offering their heads to be taken off, their necks to be stretched, or their waists—willing to live footless all their days—anything—anything whatever, bless their hearts! to know that they are on the Level, the Dead Level, the precise and exact Dead Level of Intelligence.

The fact that this mob-power keeps its hold by using books instead of bricks is merely a matter of form. It occupies most of the strategic positions just now in the highways of learning, and it does all the

things that mobs do, and does them in the way that mobs do them. It has broken into the gardens, into the arts, the resting-places of nations, and with its factories to learn to love in, its treadmills to learn to sing in, it girdles its belt of drudgery around the world and carries bricks and mortar to the clouds. It shouts to every human being across the spaces—the outdoors of life: “Who goes there? Come thou with us. Dig thou with us. Root or die!”

Every vagrant joy-maker and world-builder the modern era boasts—genius, lover, singer, artist, has had to have his struggle with the hod-carriers of culture, and if a lover of books has not enough love in him to refuse to be coerced into joining the huge Intimidator, the aggregation of the Reading Labour Unions of the world, which rules the world, there is little hope for him. All true books draw quietly away from him. Their spirit is a spirit he cannot know.

It would be hard to find a more significant fact with regard to the ruling culture of modern life than the almost total displacement of temperament in it,—its blank, staring inexpressiveness. We have lived our lives so long under the domination of the “Cultured-man-must” theory of education—the industry of being well informed has gained such headway with us, that out of all of the crowds of the civilised we prefer to live with to-day, one must go very far to find a cultivated man who has not violated himself in his knowledge, who has not given up his last chance at distinction—his last chance to have his knowledge fit him closely and express him and belong to him.

The time was, when knowledge was made to fit people like their clothes. But now that we have come to the point where we pride ourselves on educating people in rows and civilising them in the bulk, “If a man has the privilege of being born by himself, of beginning his life by himself, it is as much as he can expect,” says the typical Board of Education. The result is, so far as his being educated is concerned, the average man looks back to his first birthday as his last chance of being treated—as God made him,—a special creation by himself. “The Almighty may deal with a man, when He makes him, as a special creation by himself. He may manage to do it afterward. *We* cannot,” says The Board, succinctly, drawing its salary; “It increases the tax rate.”

The problem is dealt with simply enough. There is just so much cloth to be had and just so many young and two-legged persons to be covered with it—and that is the end of it. The growing child walks down the years—turns every corner of life—with Vistas of Ready-Made Clothing hanging before him, closing behind him. Unless he shall fit himself to these clothes—he is given to understand—down the pitying, staring world he shall go, naked, all his days, like a dream in the night.

It is a general principle that a nation’s life can be said to be truly a civilised life, in proportion as it is expressive, and in proportion as all the persons in it, in the things they know and in the things they do, are engaged in expressing what they are.

A generation may be said to stand forth in history, to be a great and memorable generation in art and letters, in material and spiritual creation, in proportion as the knowledge of that generation was fitted to the people who wore it and the things they were doing in it, and the things they were born to do.

If it were not contradicted by almost every attribute of what is being called an age of special and general culture, it would seem to be the first axiom of all culture that knowledge can only be made to be true knowledge, by being made to fit people, and to express them as their clothes fit them and express them.

But we do not want knowledge in our civilisation to fit people as their clothes fit them. We do not even want their clothes to fit them. The people themselves do not want it. Our modern life is an elaborate and organised endeavour, on the part of almost every person in it, to escape from being fitted, either in knowledge or in anything else. The first symptom of civilisation—of the fact that a man is becoming civilised—is that he wishes to appear to belong where he does not. It is looked upon as the spirit of the age. He wishes to be learned, that no one may find out how little he knows. He wishes to be religious, that no one may see how wicked he is. He wishes to be respectable, that no one may know that he does not respect himself. The result mocks at us from every corner in life. Society is a struggle to get into the wrong clothes. Culture is a struggle to learn the things that belong to some one else. Black Mollie (who is the cook next door) presented her betrothed last week—a stable hand on the farm—with an eight-dollar manicure set. She did not mean to sum up the condition of culture in the United States in this simple and tender act. But she did.

Michael O’Hennessy, who lives under the hill, sums it up also. He has just bought a brougham in which he and Mrs. O’H. can be seen almost any pleasant Sunday driving in the Park. It is not to be denied that Michael O’Hennessy, sitting in his brougham, is a genuinely happy-looking object. But it is not the brougham itself that Michael enjoys. What he enjoys is the fact that he has bought the brougham, and that the brougham belongs to some one else. Mrs. John Brown-Smith, who presides at our tubs from week to week, and who comes to us in a brilliant silk waist (removed for business), has just bought a piano to play *Hold the Fort* on, with one finger, when the neighbours are passing by—a fact which is not without national significance, which sheds light upon schools and upon college catalogues and learning-shows, and upon educational conditions through the whole United States.

It would be a great pity if a man could not know the things that have always belonged before, to other men to know, and it is the essence of culture that he should, but his appearing to know things that belong to some one else—his desire to appear to know them—heaps up darkness. The more things there are a man knows without knowing the inside of them—the spirit of them—the more kinds of an ignoramus he is. It is not enough to say that the learned man (learned in this way) is merely ignorant. His ignorance is placed where it counts the most,—generally,—at the fountain heads of society, and he radiates ignorance.

There seem to be three objections to the Dead Level of Intelligence,—getting people at all hazards, alive or dead, to know certain things. First, the things that a person who learns in this way appears to know, are blighted by his appearing to know them. Second, he keeps other people who might know them from wanting to. Third, he poisons his own life, by appearing to know—by even desiring to appear to know—what is not in him to know. He takes away the last hope he can ever have of really knowing the

thing he appears to know, and, unless he is careful, the last hope he can ever have of really knowing anything. He destroys the thing a man does his knowing with. It is not the least pathetic phase of the great industry of being well informed, that thousands of men and women may be seen on every hand, giving up their lives that they may appear to live, and giving up knowledge that they may appear to know, taking pains for vacuums. Success in appearing to know is success in locking one's self outside of knowledge, and all that can be said of the most learned man that lives—if he is learned in this way—is that he knows more things that he does not know, about more things, than any man in the world. He runs the gamut of ignorance.

In the meantime, as long as the industry of being well informed is the main ideal of living in the world, as long as every man's life, chasing the shadow of some other man's life, goes hurrying by, grasping at ignorance, there is nothing we can do—most of us—as educators, but to rescue a youth now and then from the rush and wait for results, both good and evil, to work themselves out. Those of us who respect every man's life, and delight in it and in the dignity of the things that belong to it, would like to do many things. We should be particularly glad to join hands in the “practical” things that are being hurried into the hurry around us. But they do not seem to us practical. The only practical thing we know of that can be done with a man who does not respect himself, is to get him to. It is true, no doubt, that we cannot respect another man's life for him, but we are profoundly convinced that we cannot do anything more practical for such a man's life than respecting it until he respects it himself, and we are convinced also that until he does respect it himself, respecting it for him is the only thing that any one else can do—the beginning and end of all action for him and of all knowledge. Democracy to-day in education—as in everything else—is facing its supreme opportunity. Going about in the world respecting men until they respect themselves is almost the only practical way there is of serving them.

We find it necessary to believe that any man in this present day who shall be inspired to respect his life, who shall refuse to take to himself the things that do not belong to his life, who shall break with the appearance of things, who shall rejoice in the things that are really real to him—there shall be no withstanding him. The strength of the universe shall be in him. He shall be glorious with it. The man who lives down through the knowledge that he has, has all the secret of all knowledge that he does not have. The spirit that all truths are known with, becomes his spirit. The essential mastery over all real things and over all real men is his possession forever.

When this vital and delighted knowledge—knowledge that is based on facts—one's own self-respecting experience with facts, shall begin again to be the habit of the educated life, the days of the Dead Level of Intelligence shall be numbered. Men are going to be the embodiment of the truths they know—some-time—as they have been in the past. When the world is filled once more with men who know what they know, learning will cease to be a theory about a theory of life, and children will acquire truths as helplessly and inescapably as they acquire parents. Truths will be learned through the types of men the truths have made. A man was meant to learn truths by gazing up and down lives—out of his own

life.

When these principles are brought home to educators—when they are practised in some degree by the people, instead of merely, as they have always been before, by the leaders of the people, the world of knowledge shall be a new world. All knowledge shall be human, incarnate, expressive, artistic. Whole systems of knowledge shall come to us by seeing one another's faces on the street.

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## XI

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# The Art of Reading as One Likes

Most of us are apt to discover by the time we are too old to get over it, that we are born with a natural gift for being interested in ourselves. We realise in a general way, that our lives are not very important—that they are being lived on a comparatively obscure but comfortable little planet, on a side street in space—but no matter how much we study astronomy, nor how fully we are made to feel how many other worlds there are for people to live on, and how many other people have lived on this one, we are still interested in ourselves.

The fact that the universe is very large is neither here nor there to us, in a certain sense. It is a mere matter of size. A man has to live on it. If he had to live on all of it, it would be different. It naturally comes to pass that when a human being once discovers that he is born in a universe like this, his first business in it is to find out the relation of the nearest, most sympathetic part of it to himself.

After the usual first successful experiment a child makes in making connection with the universe, the next thing he learns is how much of the universe there is that is not good to eat. He does not quite understand it at first—the unswallowableness of things. He soon comes to the conclusion that, although it is worth while as a general principle, in dealing with a universe, to try to make the connection, as a rule, with one's mouth, it cannot be expected to succeed except part of the time. He looks for another connection. He learns that some things in this world are merely made to feel, and drop on the floor. He discovers each of his senses by trying to make some other sense work. If his mouth waters for the moon, and he tries to smack his lips on a lullaby, who shall smile at him, poor little fellow, making his sturdy lunges at this huge, impenetrable world? He is making his connection and getting his hold on his world of colour and sense and sound, with infinitely more truth and patience and precision and delight than nine out of ten of his elders are doing or have ever been able to do, in the world of books.

The books that were written to be breathed—gravely chewed upon by the literary infants of this modern day,—who can number them?—books that were made to live in—vast, open clearings in the thicket of life—chapters like tents to dwell in under the wide heaven, visited like railway stations by

excursion trains of readers,—books that were made to look down from—serene mountain heights criticised because factories are not founded on them—in every reading-room hundreds of people (who has not seen them?), looking up inspirations in encyclopædias, poring over poems for facts, looking in the clouds for seeds, digging in the ground for sunsets; and everywhere through all the world, the whole huddling, crowding mob of those who read, hastening on its endless paper-paved streets, from the pyramids of Egypt and the gates of Greece, to Pater Noster Row and the Old Corner Book Store—nearly all of them trying to make the wrong connections with the right things or the right connections with things they have no connection with, and only now and then a straggler lagging behind perhaps, at some left-over bookstall, who truly knows how to read, or some beautiful, over-grown child let loose in a library—making connections for himself, who knows the uttermost joy of a book.

In seeking for a fundamental principle to proceed upon in the reading of books, it seems only reasonable to assert that the printed universe is governed by the same laws as the real one. If a child is to have his senses about him—his five reading senses—he must learn them in exactly the way he learns his five living senses. The most significant fact about the way a child learns the five senses he has to live with is, that no one can teach them to him. We do not even try to. There are still—thanks to a most merciful Heaven—five things left in the poor, experimented-on, battered, modern child, that a board of education cannot get at. For the first few months of his life, at least, it is generally conceded, the modern infant has his education—that is, his making connection with things—entirely in his own hands. That he learns more these first few months of his life when his education is in his own hands, than he learns in all the later days when he is surrounded by those who hope they are teaching him something, it may not be fair to say; but while it cannot be said that he learns more perhaps, what he does learn, he learns better, and more scientifically, than he is ever allowed to learn with ordinary parents and ordinary teachers and text-books in the years that come afterward. With most of us, this first year or so, we are obliged to confess, was the chance of our lives. Some of us have lived long enough to suspect that if we have ever really learned anything at all we must have learned it then.

The whole problem of bringing to pass in others and of maintaining in ourselves a vital and beautiful relation to the world of books, turns entirely upon such success as we may have in calling back or keeping up in our attitude toward books, the attitude of the new-born child when he wakes in the sunshine of the earth, and little by little on the edge of the infinite, groping and slow, begins to make his connections with the universe. It cannot be over-emphasised that this new-born child makes these connections for himself, that the entire value of having these connections made is in the fact that he makes them for himself. As between the books in a library that ought to be read, and a new life standing in it, that ought to read them, the sacred thing is not the books the child ought to read. The sacred thing is the way the child feels about the books; and unless the new life, like the needle of a magnet trembling there under the whole wide heaven of them all, is allowed to turn and poise itself by laws of attraction and repulsion forever left out of our hands, the magnet is ruined. It is made a dead thing. It makes no difference how many similar books

may be placed within range of the dead thing afterward, nor how many good reasons there may be for the dead thing's being attracted to them, the poise of the magnet toward a book, which is the sole secret of any power that a book can have, is trained and disciplined out of it. The poise of the magnet, the magnet's poisoning itself, is inspiration, and inspiration is what a book is for.

If John Milton had had any idea when he wrote the little book called *Paradise Lost* that it was going to be used mostly during the nineteenth century to batter children's minds with, it is doubtful if he would ever have had the heart to write it. It does not damage a book very much to let it lie on a wooden shelf little longer than it ought to. But to come crashing down into the exquisite filaments of a human brain with it, to use it to keep a brain from continuing to be a brain—that is, an organ with all its reading senses acting and reacting warm and living in it, is a very serious matter. It always ends in the same way, this modern brutality with books. Even Bibles cannot stand it. Human nature stands it least of all. That books of all things in this world, made to open men's instincts with, should be so generally used to shut them up with, is one of the saddest signs we have of the caricature of culture that is having its way in our modern world. It is getting so that the only way the average dinned-at, educated modern boy, shut in with masterpieces, can really get to read is in some still overlooked moment when people are too tired of him to do him good. Then softly, perhaps guiltily, left all by himself with a book, he stumbles all of a sudden on his soul—steals out and loves something. It may not be the best, but listening to the singing of the crickets is more worth while than seeming to listen to the music of the spheres. It leads to the music of the spheres. All agencies, persons, institutions, or customs that interfere with this sensitive, self-discovering moment when a human spirit makes its connection in life with its ideal, that interfere with its being a genuine, instinctive, free and beautiful connection, living and growing daily of itself,—all influences that tend to make it a formal connection or a merely decorous or borrowed one, whether they act in the name of culture or religion or the state, are the profoundest, most subtle, and most unconquerable enemies of culture in the world.

It is not necessary to contend for the doctrine of reading as one likes—using the word “likes” in the sense of direction and temperament—in its larger and more permanent sense. It is but necessary to call attention to the fact that the universe of books is such a very large and various universe, a universe in which so much that one likes can be brought to bear at any given point, that reading as one likes is almost always safe in it. There is always more of what one likes than one can possibly read. It is impossible to like any one thing deeply without discovering a hundred other things to like with it. One is infallibly led out. If one touches the universe vitally at one point, all the rest of the universe flocks to it. It is the way a universe is made.

Almost anything can be accomplished with a child who has a habit of being eager with books, who respects them enough, and who respects himself enough, to leave books alone when he cannot be eager with them. Eagerness in reading counts as much as it does in living. A live reader who reads the wrong books is more promising than a dead one who reads the right ones. Being alive is the point. Anything can

be done with life. It is the Seed of Infinity.

While much might be said for the topical or purely scientific method in learning how to read, it certainly is not claiming too much for the human, artistic, or personal point of view in reading, that it comes first in the order of time in a developing life and first in the order of strategic importance. Topical or scientific reading cannot be fruitful; it cannot even be scientific, in the larger sense, except as, in its own time and in its own way, it selects itself in due time in a boy's life, buds out, and is allowed to branch out, from his own inner personal reading.

As the first and most important and most far-reaching of the arts of reading is the Art of Reading as One Likes, the principles, inspirations, and difficulties of reading as one likes are the first to be considered in the following chapters.

The fact that the art of reading as one likes is the most difficult, perhaps the most impossible, of all the arts in modern times, constitutes one of those serio-comic problems of civilisation—a problem which civilisation itself, with all its swagger of science, its literary braggadocio, its Library Cure, with all its Board Schools, Commissioners of Education and specialists, and bishops and newsboys, all hard at work upon it, is only beginning to realise.





## The Second Interference: The Disgrace of the Imagination

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### I

#### On Wondering Why One Was Born

**T**HE real trouble with most of the attempts that teachers and parents make, to teach children a vital relation to books, is that they do not believe in the books and that they do not believe in the children.

It is almost impossible to find a child who, in one direction or another, the first few years of his life, is not creative. It is almost impossible to find a parent or a teacher who does not discourage this creativeness. The discouragement begins in a small way, at first, in the average family, but as the more creative a child becomes the more inconvenient he is, as a general rule, every time a boy is caught being creative, something has to be done to him about it.

It is a part of the nature of creativeness that it involves being creative a large part of the time in the wrong direction. Half-proud and half-stupefied parents, failing to see that the mischief in a boy is the

entire basis of his education, the mainspring of his life, not being able to break the mainspring themselves, frequently hire teachers to help them. The teacher who can break a mainspring first and keep it from getting mended, is often the most esteemed in the community. Those who have broken the most, “secure results.” The spectacle of the mechanical, barren, conventional society so common in the present day to all who love their kind is a sign there is no withstanding. It is a spectacle we can only stand and watch—some of us,—the huge, dreary kinetoscope of it, grinding its cogs and wheels, and swinging its weary faces past our eyes. The most common sight in it and the one that hurts the hardest, is the boy who could be made into a man out of the parts of him that his parents and teachers are trying to throw away. The faults of the average child, as things are going just now, would be the making of him, if he could be placed in seeing hands. It may not be possible to educate a boy by using what has been left out of him, but it is more than possible to begin his education by using what ought to have been left out of him. So long as parents and teachers are either too dull or too busy to experiment with mischief, to be willing to pay for a child’s originality what originality costs, only the most hopeless children can be expected to amount to anything. If we fail to see that originality is worth paying for, that the risk involved in a child’s not being creative is infinitely more serious than the risk involved in his being creative in the wrong direction, there is little either for us or for our children to hope for, as the years go on, except to grow duller together. We do not like this growing duller together very well, perhaps, but we have the feeling at least that we have been educated, and when our children become at last as little interested in the workings of their minds, as parents and teachers are in theirs, we have the feeling that they also have been educated. We are not unwilling to admit, in a somewhat useless, kindly, generalising fashion, that vital and beautiful children delight in things, in proportion as they discover them, or are allowed to make them up, but we do not propose in the meantime to have our own children any more vital and beautiful than we can help. In four or five years they discover that a home is a place where the more one thinks of things, the more unhappy he is. In four or five years more they learn that a school is a place where children are expected not to use their brains while they are being cultivated. As long as he is at his mother’s breast the typical American child finds that he is admired for thinking of things. When he runs around the house he finds gradually that he is admired very much less for thinking of things. At school he is disciplined for it. In a library, if he has an uncommonly active mind, and takes the liberty of being as alive there, as he is outdoors, if he roams through the books, vaults over their fences, climbs up their mountains, and eats of their fruit, and dreams by their streams, or is caught camping out in their woods, he is made an example of. He is treated as a tramp and an idler, and if he cannot be held down with a dictionary he is looked upon as not worth educating. If his parents decide he shall be educated anyway, dead or alive, or in spite of his being alive, the more he is educated the more he wonders why he was born and the more his teachers from behind their dictionaries, and the other boys from underneath their dictionaries, wonder why he was born. While it may be a general principle that the longer a boy wonders why he was born in conditions like these, and the longer his teachers and parents wonder, the more there is of him, it may be observed that a general

principle is not of very much comfort to the boy while the process of wondering is going on. There seems to be no escape from the process, and if, while he is being educated, he is not allowed to use himself, he can hardly be blamed for spending a good deal of his time in wondering why he is not some one else. In a half-seeing, half-blinded fashion he struggles on. If he is obstinate enough, he manages to struggle through with his eyes shut. Sometimes he belongs to a higher kind, and opens his eyes and struggles.

With the average boy the struggle with the School and the Church is less vigorous than the struggle at home. It is more hopeless. A mother is a comparatively simple affair. One can either manage a mother or be managed. It is merely a matter of time. It is soon settled. There is something there. She is not boundless, intangible. The School and the Church are different. With the first fresh breaths of the world tingling in him, the youth stands before them. They are entirely new to him. They are huge, immeasurable, unaccountable. They loom over him—a part of the structure of the universe itself. A mother can meet one in a door. The problem is concentrated. The Church stretches beyond the sunrise. The School is part of the horizon of the earth, and what after all is his own life and who is he that he should take account of it? Out of space—out of time—out of history they come to him—the Church and the School. They are the assembling of all mankind around his soul. Each with its Cone of Ether, its desire to control the breath of his life, its determination to do his breathing for him, to push the Cone down over him, looms above him and above all in sight, before he speaks—before he is able to speak.

It is soon over. He lies passive and insensible at last,—as convenient as though he were dead, and the Church and the School operate upon him. They remove as many of his natural organs as they can, put in Presbyterian ones perhaps, or School-Board ones instead. Those that cannot be removed are numbed. When the time is fulfilled and the youth is cured of enough life at last to like living with the dead, and when it is thought he is enough like every one else to do, he is given his degree and sewed up.

After the sewing up his history is better imagined than described. Not being interesting to himself, he is not apt to be very interesting to any one else, and because of his lack of interest in himself he is called the average man.<sup>1</sup>

The main distinction of every greater or more extraordinary book is that it has been written by an extraordinary man—a natural or wild man, a man of genius, who has never been operated on. The main distinction of the man of talent is that he has somehow managed to escape a complete operation. It is a matter of common observation in reading biography that in proportion as men have had lasting power in the world there has been something irregular in their education. These irregularities, whether they happen to be due to overwhelming circumstance or to overwhelming temperament, seem to sum themselves up in one fundamental and comprehensive irregularity that penetrates them all—namely, every powerful mind, in proportion to its power, either in school or out of it or in spite of it, has educated itself. The ability that many men have used to avoid being educated is exactly the same ability they have used afterward to move the world with. In proportion as they have moved the world, they are found to have kept the lead in their education from their earliest years, to have had a habit of initiative as well as hospitality, to have

maintained a creative, selective, active attitude toward all persons and toward all books that have been brought within range of their lives.

## II

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### The Top of the Bureau Principle

THE experience of being robbed of a story we are about to read, by the good friend who cannot help telling how it comes out, is an occasional experience in the lives of older people, but it sums up the main sensation of life in the career of a child. The whole existence of a boy may be said to be a daily—almost hourly—struggle to escape from being told things.

It has been found that the best way to emphasise a fact in the mind of a bright boy is to discover some way of not saying anything about it. And this is not because human nature is obstinate, but because facts have been intended from the beginning of the world to speak for themselves, and to speak better than anyone can speak for them. When a fact speaks, God speaks. Considering the way that most persons who are talking about the truth see fit to rush in and interrupt Him, the wonder is not that children grow less and less interested in truth as they grow older, but that they are interested in truth at all—even lies about the truth.

The real trouble with most men and women as parents is, that they have had to begin life with parents of their own. When the child's first memory of God is a father or mother interrupting Him, he is apt to be under the impression, when he grows up, that God can only be introduced to his own children by never being allowed to get a word in. If we as much as see a Fact coming toward a child—most of us—we either run out where the child is, and bring him into the house and cry over him, or we rush to his side and look anxious and stand in front of the Fact, and talk to him about it.

And yet it is doubtful if there has ever been a boy as yet worth mentioning, who did not wish we would stand a little more one side—let him have it out with things. He is very weary—if he really amounts to anything—of having everything about him prepared for him. There has never been a live boy who would not throw a store-plaything away in two or three hours for a comparatively imperfect plaything he had made himself. He is equally indifferent to a store Fact, and a boy who does not see through a store-God, or a store-book, or a store-education sooner than ninety-nine parents out of a hundred and sooner than most synods, is not worth bringing up.

No just or comprehensive principle can be found to govern the reading of books that cannot be made

to apply, by one who really believes it (though in varying degrees), to the genius and to the dolt. It is a matter of history that a boy of fine creative powers can only be taught a true relation to books through an appeal to his own discoveries; but what is being especially contended for, and what most needs to be emphasised in current education, is the fact that the boy of ordinary creative powers can only be taught to read in the same way—by a slower, broader, and more patient appeal to his own discoveries. The boy of no creative powers whatever, if he is ever born, should not be taught to read at all. Creation is the essence of knowing, and teaching him to read merely teaches him more ways of not knowing. It gives him a wider range of places to be a nobody in—takes away his last opportunity for thinking of anything—that is, getting the meaning of anything for himself. If a man's heart does not beat for him, why substitute a hot-water bottle? The less a mind is able to do, the less it can afford to have anything done for it. It will be a great day for education when we all have learned that the genius and the dolt can only be educated—at different rates of speed—in exactly the same way. The trouble with our education now is, that many of us do not see that a boy who has been presented with an imitation brain is a deal worse off than a boy who, in spite of his teachers, has managed to save his real one, and has not used it yet.

It is dangerous to give a program for a principle to those who do not believe in the principle, and who do not believe in it instinctively, but if a program were to be given it would be something like this: It would assume that the best way to do with an uncreative mind is to put the owner of it where his mind will be obliged to create.

First. Decide what the owner of the mind most wants in the world.

Second. Put this thing, whatever it may be where the owner of the mind cannot get it unless he uses his mind. Take pains to put it where he can get it, if he does use his mind.

Third. Lure him on. It is education.

If this principle is properly applied to books, there is not a human being living on the earth who will not find himself capable of reading books—as far as he goes—with his whole mind and his whole body. He will read a printed page as eagerly as he lives, and he will read it in exactly the same way that he lives—with his imagination. A boy lives with his imagination every hour of His life—except in school. The moment he discovers, or is allowed to discover, that reading a book and living a day are very much alike, that they are both parts of the same act, and that they are both properly done in the same way, he will drink up knowledge as Job did scorning, like water.

But it is objected that many children are entirely imitative, and that the imagination cannot be appealed to with them and that they cut themselves off from creativeness at every point.

While it is inevitable in the nature of things that many children should be largely imitative, there is not a child that does not do some of his imitating in a creative way, give the hint to his teachers even in his imitations, of where his creativeness would come if it were allowed to. His very blunders in imitating, point to desires that would make him creative of themselves, if followed up. Some children have many desires in behalf of which they become creative. Others are creative only in behalf of a few. But there is

always a single desire in a child's nature through which his creativeness can be called out.

A boy learns to live, to command his body, through the desires which make him creative with it—hunger, and movement, and sleep—desires the very vegetables are stirred with, and the boy who does not find himself responding to them, who can help responding to them, does not exist. There may be times when a boy has no desire to fill himself with food, and when he has no desire to think, but if he is kept hungry he is soon found doing both—thinking things into his stomach. A stomach, in the average boy, will all but take the part of a brain itself, for the time being, to avoid being empty. If a human being is alive at all, there is always at least one desire he can be educated with, prodded into creativeness, until he learns the habit and the pleasure of it. The best qualification for a nurse for a child whose creativeness turns on his stomach, is a natural gift for keeping food on the tops of bureaus and shelves just out of reach. The best qualification for a teacher is infinite contrivance in high bureaus. The applying of the Top of the High Bureau to all knowledge and to all books is what true education is for.

It is generally considered a dangerous thing to do, to turn a child loose in a library. It might fairly be called a dangerous thing to do if it were not much more dangerous not to. The same forces that wrought themselves into the books when they were being made can be trusted to gather and play across them on the shelves. These forces are the self-propelling and self-healing forces of the creative mood. The creative mood protects the books, and it protects all who come near the books. It protects from the inside. It toughens and makes supple. Parents who cannot trust a boy to face the weather in a library should never let him outdoors.

Trusting a boy to the weather in a library may have its momentary embarrassments, but it is immeasurably the shortest and most natural way to bring him into a vital connection with books. The first condition of a vital connection with books is that he shall make the connection for himself. The relation will be vital in proportion as he makes it himself.

The fact that he will begin to use his five reading senses by trying to connect in the wrong way, or by connecting with the wrong books or parts of books, is a reason, not for action on the part of parents and teachers, but for inspired waiting. As a vital relation to books is the most immeasurable outfit for living and the most perfect protection against the dangers of life, a boy can have, the one point to be borne in mind is not the book but the boy—the instinct of curiosity in the boy.

A boy who has all his good discoveries in books made for him—spoiled for him, if he has any good material in him—will proceed to make bad ones. The vices would be nearly as safe from interference as the virtues, if they were faithfully cultivated in Sunday-schools or by average teachers in day-schools. Sin itself is uninteresting when one knows all about it. The interest of the average young man in many a more important sin to-day is only kept up by the fact that no one stands by with a book teaching him how to do it. Whatever the expression “original sin” may have meant in the first place, it means now that we are full of original sin because we are not given a chance to be original in anything else. A virtue may be defined as an act so good that a religiously trained youth cannot possibly learn anything more about it. A classic is

a pleasure hurried into a responsibility, a book read by every man before he has anything to read it with. A classical author is a man who, if he could look ahead—could see the generations standing in rows to read his book, toeing the line to love it—would not read it himself.

Any training in the use of books that does not base its whole method of rousing the instinct of curiosity, and keeping it aroused, is a wholesale slaughter, not only of the minds that might live in the books, but of the books themselves. To ignore the central curiosity of a child's life, his natural power of self-discovery in books, is to dispense with the force of gravity in books, instead of taking advantage of it.





# The Third Interference: The Unpopularity of the First Person Singular

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## I

### The First Person a Necessary Evil

**G**REAT emphasis is being laid at the present time upon the tools that readers ought to have to do their reading with. We seem to be living in a reference-book age. Whatever else may be claimed for our own special generation it stands out as having one inspiration that is quite its own—the inspiration of conveniences. That these conveniences have their place, that one ought to have the best of them there can be no doubt, but it is very important to bear in mind, particularly in the present public mood, that if one cannot have all of these conveniences, or even the best of them, the one absolutely necessary reference book in reading the masters of literature is one that every man has.

It is something of a commonplace—a rather modest volume with most of us, summed up on a tombstone generally, easily enough, but we are bound to believe after all is said and done that the great

masterpiece among reference books, for every man,—the one originally intended by the Creator for every man to use,—is the reference book of his own life. We believe that the one direct and necessary thing for a man to do, if he is going to be a good reader, is to make, this reference book—his own private edition of it—as large and complete as possible. Everything refers to it, whatever his reading is. Shakespeare and the *New York World*, Homer and *Harper's Bazar*, Victor Hugo and *The Forum*, *Babyhood* and the Bible all refer to it,—are all alike in making their references (when they are really looked up) to private editions. Other editions do not work. In proportion as they are powerful in modern life, all the books and papers that we have are engaged in the business of going about the world discovering people to themselves, unroofing first person singulars in it, getting people to use their own reference books on all life. Literature is a kind of vast international industry of comparing life. We read to look up references in our own souls. The immortality of Homer and the circulation of the *Ladies' Home Journal* both conform to this fact, and it is equally the secret of the last page of *Harper's Bazar* and of Hamlet and of the grave and monthly lunge of *The Forum* at passing events. The difference of appeal may be as wide as the east and the west, but the east and the west are in human nature and not in the nature of the appeal. The larger selves look themselves up in the greater writers and the smaller selves spell themselves out in the smaller ones. It is here we all behold as in some vast reflection or mirage of the reading world our own souls crowding and jostling, little and great, against the walls of their years, seeking to be let out, to look out, to look over, to look up—that they may find their possible selves.

When men are allowed to follow what might be called the forces of nature in the reading world they are seen to read:

1st. About themselves.

2nd. About people they know.

3rd. About people they want to know.

4th. God.

Next to their interest in persons is their interest in things:

1st. Things that they have themselves.

2nd. Things that people they know, have.

3rd. Things they want to have.

4th. Things they ought to want to have.

5th. Other things.

6th. The universe—things God has.

7th. God.

A scale like this may not be very complimentary to human nature. Some of us feel that it is appropriate and possibly a little religious to think that it is not. But the scale is here. It is mere psychological-matter-of-fact. It is the way things are made, and while it may not be quite complimentary to human nature, it seems to be more complimentary to God to believe, in spite of appearances, that this

scale from I to God is made right and should be used as it stands. It seems to have been in general use among our more considerable men in the world and among all our great men and among all who have made others great. They do not seem to have been ashamed of it. They have climbed up frankly on it—most of them, in full sight of all men—from I to God. They have claimed that everybody (including themselves) was identified with God, and they have made people believe it. It is the few in every generation who have dared to believe in this scale, and who have used it, who have been the leaders of the rest. The measure of a man's being seems to be the swiftness with which his nature runs from the bottom of this scale to the top, the swiftness with which he identifies himself, says "I" in all of it. The measure of his ability to read on any particular subject is the swiftness with which he runs the scale from the bottom to the top on that subject, makes the trip with his soul from his own little I to God. When he has mastered the subject, he makes the run almost without knowing it, sees it as it is, *i. e.*, identifies himself with God on it. The principle is one which reaches under all mastery in the world, from the art of prophecy even to the art of politeness. The man who makes the trip on any subject from the first person out through the second person to the farthest bounds of the third person,—that is, who identifies himself with all men's lives, is called the poet or seer, the master-lover of persons. The man who makes the trip most swiftly from his own things to other men's things and to God's things—the Universe—is called the scientist, the master-lover of things. The God is he who identifies his own personal life, with all lives and his own things with all men's things—who says "I" forever everywhere.

The reason that the Hebrew Bible has had more influence in history than all other literatures combined, is that there are fewer emasculated men in it. The one really fundamental and astonishing thing about the Bible is the way that people have of talking about themselves in it. No other nation that has ever existed on the earth would ever have thought of daring to publish a book like the Bible. So far as the plot is concerned, the fundamental literary conception, it is all the Bible comes to practically—two or three thousand years of it—a long row of people talking about themselves. The Hebrew nation has been the leading power in history because the Hebrew man, in spite of all his faults has always had the feeling that God sympathised with him, in being interested in himself. He has dared to feel identified with God. It is the same in all ages—not an age but one sees a Hebrew in it, out under his lonely heaven standing and crying "God and I." It is the one great spectacle of the Soul this little world has seen. Are not the mightiest faces that come to us flickering out of the dark, their faces? Who can look at the past who does not see—who does not always see—some mighty Hebrew in it singing and struggling with God? What is it—what else could it possibly be but the Hebrew soul, like a kind of pageantry down the years between us and God, that would ever have made us guess—men of the other nations—that a God belonged to us, or that a God could belong to us and be a God at all? Have not all the other races, each in their turn spawning in the sun and lost in the night, vanished because they could not say "I" before God? The nations that are left, the great nations of the modern world, are but the moral passengers of the Hebrews, hangers-on to the race that can say "I"—I to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  power,—the race that has dared to identify itself with God. The fact that

the Hebrew, instead of saying God and I, has turned it around sometimes and said I and God is neither here nor there in the end. It is because the Hebrew has kept to the main point, has felt related to God (the main point a God cares about), that he has been the most heroic and athletic figure in human history—comes nearer to the God-size. The rest of the nations sitting about and wondering in the dark, have called this thing in the Hebrew “religious genius.” If one were to try to sum up what religious genius is, in the Hebrew, or to account for the spiritual and material supremacy of the Hebrew in history, in a single fact, it would be the fact that Moses, their first great leader, when he wanted to say “It seems to me,” said “The Lord said unto Moses.”

The Hebrews may have written a book that teaches, of all others, self-renunciation, but the way they taught it was self-assertion. The Bible begins with a meek Moses who teaches by saying “The Lord said unto Moses,” and it comes to its climax in a lowly and radiant man who dies on a cross to say “I and the Father are one.” The man Jesus seems to have called himself God because he had a divine habit of identifying himself, because he had kept on identifying himself with others until the first person and the second person and the third person were as one to him. The distinction of the New Testament is that it is the one book the world has seen, which dispenses with pronouns. It is a book that sums up pronouns and numbers, singular and plural, first person, second and third person, and all, in the one great central pronoun of the universe. The very stars speak it—WE.

We is a developed I.

The first person may not be what it ought to be either as a philosophy or an experience, but it has been considered good enough to make Bibles out of, and it does seem as if a good word might occasionally be said for it in modern times, as if some one ought to be born before long, who will give it a certain standing, a certain moral respectability once more in human life and in the education of human life.

It would not seem to be an overstatement that the best possible book to give a child to read at any time is the one that makes the most cross references at that time to his undeveloped We.

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## II

# The Art of Being Anonymous

The main difficulty in getting a child to live in the whole of his nature, to run the scale from the bottom to the top, from “I” to God, is to persuade his parents and teachers, and the people who crowd around him to educate him, that he must begin at the bottom.

The Unpopularity of the First Person Singular in current education naturally follows from The

Disgrace of the Imagination in it. Our typical school is not satisfied with cutting off a boy's imagination about the outer world that lies around him. It amputates his imagination at its tap root. It stops a boy's imagination about himself, and the issues, connections, and possibilities of his own life.

Inasmuch as the education of a child—his relation to books—must be conducted either with reference to evading personality, or accumulating it, the issue is one that must be squarely drawn from the first. Beginning at the bottom is found by society at large to be such an inconvenient and painstaking process, that the children who are allowed to lay a foundation for personality—to say “I” in its disagreeable stages—seem to be confined, for the most part, to either one or the other of two classes—the Incurable or the Callous. The more thorough a child's nature is, the more real his processes are, the more incurable he is bound to be—secretly if he is sensitive, and offensively if he is callous. In either case the fact is the same. The child unconsciously acts on the principle that self-assertion is self-preservation. One of the first things that he discovers is that self-preservation is the last thing polite parents desire in a child. If he is to be preserved, they will preserve him themselves.

The conspiracy begins in the earliest days. The world rolls over him. The home and the church and the school and the printed book roll over him. The story is the same in all. Education—originally conceived as drawing a boy out—becomes a huge, elaborate, overwhelming scheme for squeezing him in—for keeping him squeezed in. He is mobbed on every side. At school the teachers crowd round him and say “I” for him. At home his parents say “I” for him. At church the preacher says “I” for him. And when he retreats into the privacy of his own soul and betakes himself to a book, the book is a classic and the book says “I” for him. When he says “I” himself after a few appropriate years, he says it in disguised quotation marks. If he cannot always avoid it—if in some unguarded moment he is particularly alive about something and the “I” comes out on it, society expects him to be ashamed of it, at least to avoid the appearance of not being ashamed of it. If he writes he is desired to say “we.” Sometimes he shades himself off into “the present writer.” Sometimes he capitulates in bare initials.

There are very few people who do not live in quotation marks most of their lives. They would die in them and go to heaven in them, if they could. Nine times out of ten it is some one else's heaven they want to go to. The number of people who would know what to do or how to act in this world or the next, without their quotation marks on, is getting more limited every year.

And yet one could not very well imagine a world more prostrate than this one is, before a man without quotation marks. It dotes on personality. It spends hundreds of years at a time in yearning for a great man. But it wants its great man finished. It is never willing to pay what he costs. It is particularly unwilling to pay what he costs as it goes along. The great man as a boy has had to pay for himself. The bare feat of keeping out of quotation marks has cost him generally more than he thought he was worth—and has had to be paid in advance.

There is a certain sense in which it is true that every boy, at least at the point where he is especially alive, is a kind of great man in miniature—has the same experience, that is, in growing. Many a boy who

has been regularly represented to himself as a monster, a curiosity of selfishness (and who has believed it), has had occasion to observe when he grew up that some of his selfishness was real selfishness and that some of it was life. The things he was selfish with, he finds as he grows older, are the things he has been making a man out of. As a boy, however, he does not get much inkling of this. He finds he is being brought up in a world where boys who so little know how to play with their things that they give them away, are pointed out to him as generous, and where boys who are so bored with their own minds that they prefer other people's, are considered modest. If he knew in the days when models are being pointed out to him, that the time would soon come in the world for boys like these when it would make little difference either to the boys themselves, or to any one else, whether they were generous or modest or not, it would make his education happier. In the meantime, in his disgrace, he does not guess what a good example to models he is. Very few other people guess it.

The general truth, that when a man has nothing to be generous with, and nothing to be modest about, even his virtues are superfluous, is realised by society at large in a pleasant helpless fashion in its bearing on the man, but its bearing on the next man, on education, on the problem of human development, is almost totally overlooked.

The youth who grasps at everything in sight to have his experience with it, who cares more for the thing than he does for the person it comes from, and more for his experience with the thing than he does for the thing, is by no means an inspiring spectacle while this process is going on, and he is naturally in perpetual disgrace, but in proportion as they are wise, our best educators are aware that in all probability this same youth will wield more spiritual power in the world, and do more good in it, than nine or ten pleasantly smoothed and adjustable persons. His boy-faults are his man-virtues wrongside out.

There are very few lives of powerful men in modern times that do not illustrate this. The men who do not believe it—who do not approve of illustrating it, have illustrated it the most—devoted their lives to it. It would be hard to find a man of any special importance in modern biography who has not been indebted to the sins of his youth. “It is the things I ought not to have done—see page 93, 179, 321,” says the average autobiography, “which have been the making of me.” “They were all good things for me to do (see page 526, 632, 720), but I did not think so when I did them. Neither did any one else.” “Studying Shakespeare and the theatre in the theological seminary, and taking walks instead of examinations in college,” says the biography of Beecher (between the lines), “meant definite moral degeneration to me. I did habitually what I could not justify at the time, either to myself or to others, and I have had to make up since for all the moral degeneration, item by item, but the things I got with the degeneration when I got it—habits of imagination, and expression, headway of personality—are the things that have given me all my inspirations for being moral since.” “What love of liberty I have,” Wendell Phillips seems to say, “I got from loving my own.” It is the boy who loves his liberty so much that he insists on having it to do wrong with, as well as right, who in the long run gets the most right done. The basis of character is moral experiment and almost all the men who have discovered different or beautiful or right habits of life for

men, have discovered them by doing wrong long enough. (The ice is thin at this point, Gentle Reader, for many of us, perhaps, but it has held up our betters.) The fact of the matter seems to be that a man's conscience in this world, especially if it is an educated one, or borrowed from his parents, can get as much in his way as anything else. There is no doubt that The Great Spirit prefers to lead a man by his conscience, but if it cannot be done, if a man's conscience has no conveniences for being led, He leads him against his conscience. The doctrine runs along the edge of a precipice (like all the best ones), but if there is one gift rather than another to be prayed for in this world it is the ability to recognise the crucial moment that sometimes comes in a human life—the moment when The Almighty Himself gets a man—against his conscience—to do right. It seems to be the way that some consciences are meant to grow, by trying wrong things on a little. Thousands of inferior people can be seen every day stumbling over their sins to heaven, while the rest of us are holding back with our virtues. It has been intimated from time to time in this world that all men are sinners. Inasmuch as things are arranged so that men can sin in doing right things, and sin in doing wrong ones both, they can hardly miss it. The real religion of every age seems to have looked a little askance at perfection, even at purity, has gone its way in a kind of fine straightforwardness, has spent itself in an inspired blundering, in progressive noble culminating moral experiment.

The basis for a great character seems to be the capacity for intense experience with the character one already has. So far as most of us can judge, experience, in proportion as it has been conclusive and economical, has had to be (literally or with one's imagination) in the first person. The world has never really wanted yet (in spite of appearances) its own way with a man. It wants the man. It is what he is that concerns it. All that it asks of him, and all that he has to give, is the surplus of himself. The trouble with our modern fashion of substituting the second person or the third person for the first, in a man's education, is that it takes his capacity for intense experience of himself, his chance for having a surplus of himself, entirely away.

### III

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## Egoism and Society

That the unpopularity of the first person singular is honestly acquired and heartily deserved, it would be useless to deny. Every one who has ever had a first person singular for a longer or shorter period in his life knows that it is a disagreeable thing and that every one else knows it, in nine cases out of ten, at least, and about nine tenths of the time during its development. The fundamental question does not concern itself with the first person singular being agreeable or disagreeable, but with what to do with it, it being the

necessary evil that it is.

It seems to be a reasonable position that what should be objected to in the interests of society, is not egoism, a man's being interested in himself, but the lack of egoism, a man's having a self that does not include others. The trouble would seem to be—not that people use their own private special monosyllable overmuch, but that there is not enough of it, that nine times out of ten, when they write "I" it should be written "i."

In the face of the political objection, the objection of the State to the first person singular, the egoist defends every man's reading for himself as follows. Any book that is allowed to come between a man and himself is doing him and all who know him a public injury. The most important and interesting fact about a man, to other people, is his attitude toward himself. It determines his attitude toward every one else. The most fundamental question of every State is: "What is each man's attitude in this State toward himself? What can it be?" A man's expectancy toward himself, so far as the State is concerned, is the moral centre of citizenship. It determines how much of what he expects he will expect of himself, and how much he will expect of others and how much of books. The man who expects too much of himself develops into the headlong and dangerous citizen who threatens society with his strength—goes elbowing about in it—insisting upon living other people's lives for them as well as his own. The man who expects too much of others threatens society with weariness. He is always expecting other people to do his living for him. The man who expects too much of books lives neither in himself nor in any one else. The career of the Paper Doll is open to him. History seems to be always taking turns with these three temperaments whether in art or religion or public affairs,—the over-manned, the under-manned, and the over-read—the Tyrant, the Tramp, and the Paper Doll. Between the man who keeps things in his own hands, and the man who does not care to, and the man who has no hands, the State has a hard time. Nothing could be more important to the existence of the State than that every man in it shall expect just enough of himself and just enough of others and just enough of the world of books. Living is adjusting these worlds to one another. The central fact about society is the way it helps a man with himself. The society which cuts a man off from himself cuts him still farther off from every one else. A man's reading in the first person—enough to have a first person—enough to be identified with himself, is one of the defences of society.

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#### IV

$$i + I = We$$

The most natural course for a human being, who is going to identify himself with other people, is to begin by practising on himself. If he has not succeeded in identifying himself with himself, he makes very

trying work of the rest of us. A man who has not learned to say “I” and mean something very real by it, has it not in his power, without dulness or impertinence, to say “you” to any living creature. If a man has not learned to say “you,” if he has not taken hold of himself, interpreted and adjusted himself to those who are face to face with him, the wider and more general privilege of saying “they,” of judging any part of mankind or any temperament in it, should be kept away from him. It is only as one has experienced a temperament, has in some mood of one’s life said “I” in that temperament, that one has the outfit for passing an opinion on it, or the outfit for living with it, or for being in the same world with it.

There are times, it must be confessed, when Christ’s command, that every man shall love his neighbour as himself, seems inconsiderate. There are some of us who cannot help feeling, when we see a man coming along toward us proposing to love us a little while the way he loves himself, that our permission might have been asked. If there is one inconvenience rather than another in our modern Christian society, it is the general unprotected sense one has in it, the number of people there are about in it (let loose by Sunday-school teachers and others) who are allowed to go around loving other people the way they love themselves. A codicil or at least an explanatory footnote to the Golden Rule, in the general interest of neighbours, would be widely appreciated. How shall a man dare to love his neighbour as himself, until he loves himself, has a self that he really loves, a self he can really love, and loves it? There is no more sad or constant spectacle that this modern world has to face than the spectacle of the man who has overlooked himself, bustling about in it, trying to give honour to other people,—the man who has never been able to help himself, hurrying anxious to and fro as if he could help some one else.

It is not too much to say “Charity begins at home.” Everything does. The one person who has the necessary training for being an altruist is the alert egoist who does not know he is an altruist. His service to society is a more intense and comprehensive selfishness. He would be cutting acquaintance with himself not to render it. When he says “I” he means “we,” and the second and third persons are grown dim to him.

An absolutely perfect virtue is the conveying of a man’s self, with a truth, to others. The virtues that do not convey anything are cheap and common enough. Favours can be had almost any day from anybody, if one is not too particular, and so can blank staring self-sacrifices. One feels like putting up a sign over the door of one’s life, with some people: “Let no man do me a favour except he do it as a self-indulgence.” Even kindness wears out, shows through, becomes impertinent, if it is not a part of selfishness. It may be that there are certain rudimentary virtues the outer form of which had better be maintained in the world, whether they can be maintained spiritually—that is, thoroughly and egotistically, or not. If my enemy who lives under the hill will continue to not-murder me, I desire him to continue whether he enjoys not-murdering me or not. But it is no credit to him. Except in some baldly negative fashion as this, however, it is literally true that a man’s virtues are of little account to others except as they are of account to him, and except he enjoys them as much as his vices. The first really important shock that comes to a young man’s religious sentiment in this world is the number of bored-looking people around,

doing right. An absolutely substantial and perfect love is transfigured selfishness. It is no mere playing with words to say this, nor is it substituting a comfortable and pleasant doctrine for a strenuous altruism. If it were as light and graceful an undertaking to have enough selfishness to go around, to live in the whole of a universe like this, as it is to slip out of even living in one's self in it, like a mere shadow or altruist, egoism were superficial enough. As it is, egoism being terribly or beautifully alive, so far as it goes, is now and always has been, and always must be the running gear of the spiritual world—egoism socialised. The first person is what the second and third persons are made out of. Altruism, as opposed to egoism, except in a temporary sense, is a contradiction in terms. Unless a man has a life to identify other lives, with a self which is the symbol through which he loves all other selves and all other experiences, he is selfish in the true sense.

With all our Galileos, Agassizes, and Shakespeares, the universe has not grown in its countless centuries. It has not been getting higher and wider over us since the human race began. It is not a larger universe. It is lived in by larger men, more all-absorbing, all-identifying, and selfish men. It is a universe in which a human being is duly born, given place with such a self as he happens to have, and he is expected to grow up to it. Barring a certain amount of wear and tear and a few minor rearrangements on the outside, it is the same universe that it was in the beginning, and is now and always will be quite the same universe, whether a man grows up to it or not. The larger universe is not one that comes with the telescope. It comes with the larger self, the self that by reaching farther and farther in, reaches farther and farther out. It is as if the sky were a splendour that grew by night out of his own heart, the tent of his love of God spreading its roof over the nature of things. The greater distance knowledge reaches, the more it has to be personal, because it has to be spiritual.

The one thing that it is necessary to do in any part of the world to make any branch of knowledge or deed of mercy, a living and eager thing, is to get men to see how direct its bearing is upon themselves. The man who does not feel concerned when the Armenians are massacred, thousands of miles away, because there is a sea between, is not a different man in kind from the man who does feel concerned. The difference is one of degree. It is a matter of area in living. The man who does feel concerned has a larger self. He sees further, feels the cry as the cry of his own children. He has learned the oneness and is touched with the closeness, of the great family of the world.

## The Autobiography of Beauty

But the brunt of the penalty of the unpopularity of the first person singular in modern society falls

upon the individual. The hard part of it, for a man who has not the daily habit of being a companion to himself, is his own personal private sense of emptiness—of missing things. All the universe gets itself addressed to some one else—a great showy heartless pantomime it rolls over him, beckoning with its nights and days and winds and faces—always beckoning, but to some one else. All that seems to be left to him in a universe is a kind of keeping up appearances in it—a looking as if he lived—a hurrying, dishonest trying to forget. He dare not sit down and think. He spends his strength in racing with himself to get away from himself, and those greatest days of all in human life—the days when men grow old, world-gentle, and still and deep before their God, are the days he dreads the most. He can only look forward to old age as the time when a man sits down with his lie at last, and day after day and night after night faces infinite and eternal loneliness in his own heart.

It is the man who cuts acquaintance with himself, who dares to be lonely with himself, who dares the supreme daring in this world. He and his loneliness are hermetically sealed up together in infinite Time, infinite Space,—not a great man of all that have been, not a star or flower, not even a great book that can get at him.

It is the nature of a great book that in proportion as it is beautiful it makes itself helpless before a human soul. Like music or poetry or painting it lays itself radiant and open before all that lies before it—to everything or to nothing, whatever it may be. It makes the direct appeal. Before the days and years of a man's life it stands. "Is not this so?" it says. It never says less than this. It does not know how to say more.

A bare and trivial book stops with what it says itself. A great book depends now and forever upon what it makes a man say back, and if he does not say anything, if he does not bring anything to it to say, nothing out of his own observation, passion, experience, to be called out by the passing words upon the page, the most living book, in its board and paper prison, is a dead and helpless thing before a Dead Soul. The helplessness of the Dead Soul lies upon it.

Perhaps there is no more important distinction between a great book and a little book than this—that the great book is always a listener before a human life, and the little book takes nothing for granted of a reader. It does not expect anything of him. The littler it is, the less it expects and the more it explains. Nothing that is really great and living explains. Living is enough. If greatness does not explain by being great, nothing smaller can explain it. God never explains. He merely appeals to every man's first person singular. Religion is not what He has told to men. It is what He has made men wonder about until they have been determined to find out. The stars have never been published with footnotes. The sun, with its huge, soft shining on people, kept on with the shining even when the people thought it was doing so trivial and undignified and provincial a thing as to spend its whole time going around them, and around their little earth, that they might have light on it perchance, and be kept warm. The moon has never gone out of its way to prove that it is not made of green cheese. And this present planet we are allowed the use of from year to year, which was so little observed for thousands of generations that all the people on it supposed it was flat, made no answer through the centuries. It kept on burying them one by one, and

waited—like a work of genius or a masterpiece.

In proportion as a thing is beautiful, whether of man or God, it has this heroic helplessness about it with the passing soul or generation of souls. If people are foolish, it can but appeal from one dear, pitiful fool to another until enough of us have died to make it time for a wise man again. History is a series of crises like this, in which once in so often men who say “I” have crossed the lives of mortals—have puzzled the world enough to be remembered in it, like Socrates, or been abused by it enough to make it love them forever, like Christ.

The greatest revelation of history is the patience of the beauty in it, and truth can always be known by the fact that it is the only thing in the wide world that can afford to wait. A true book does not go about advertising itself, huckstering for souls, arranging its greatness small enough. It waits. Sometimes for twenty years it waits for us, sometimes for forty, sometimes sixty, and then when the time is fulfilled and we come at length and lay before it the burden of the blind and blundering years we have tried to live, it does little with us, after all, but to bring these same years singing and crying and struggling back to us, that through their shadowy doors we may enter at last the confessional of the human heart, and cry out there, or stammer or whisper or sing there, the prophecy of our own lives. Dead words out of dead dictionaries the book brings to us. It is a great book because it is a listening book, because it makes the unspoken to speak and the dead to live in it. To the vanished pen and the yellowed paper of the man who writes to us, thy soul and mine, Gentle Reader, shall call back, “This is the truth.”

If a book has force in it, whatever its literary form may be, or however disguised, it is biography appealing to biography. If a book has great force in it, it is autobiography appealing to autobiography. The great book is always a confession—a moral adventure with its reader, an incredible confidence.





# The Fourth Interference: The Habit of Not Letting One's Self Go

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## I

### The Country Boy in Literature

“LET not any Parliament Member,” says Carlyle, “ask of the Present Editor ‘What is to be done?’ Editors are not here to say, ‘How.’”

“Which is both ungracious and tantalisingly elusive,” suggests a Professor of Literature, who has been recently criticising the Nineteenth Century.

This criticism, as a part of an estimate of Thomas Carlyle, is not only a criticism on itself and an autobiography besides, but it sums up, in a more or less characteristic fashion perhaps, what might be called the ultra-academic attitude in reading. The ultra-academic attitude may be defined as the attitude of sitting down and being told things, and of expecting all other persons to sit down and be told things, and of judging all authors, principles, men, and methods accordingly.

If the universe were what in most libraries and clubs to-day it is made to seem, a kind of infinite Institution of Learning, a Lecture Room on a larger scale, and if all the men in it, instead of doing and singing in it, had spent their days in delivering lectures to it, there would be every reason, in a universe arranged for lectures, why we should exact of those who give them, that they should make the truth plain to us—so plain that there would be nothing left for us to do, with truth, but to read it in the printed book, and then analyse the best analysis of it—and die.

It seems to be quite generally true of those who have been the great masters of literature, however, that in proportion as they have been great they have proved to be as ungracious and as tantalisingly elusive as the universe itself. They have refused, without exception, to bear down on the word “how.” They have almost never told men what to do, and have confined themselves to saying something that would make them do it, and make them find a way to do it. This something that they have said, like the something that they have lived, has come to them they know not how, and it has gone from them they know not how, sometimes not even when. It has been incommunicable, incalculable, infinite, the subconscious self of each of them, the voice beneath the voice, calling down the corridors of the world.

If a boy from the country were to stand in a city street before the window of a shop, gazing into it with open mouth, he would do more in five or six minutes to measure the power and calibre of the passing men and women than almost any device that could be arranged. Ninety-five out of a hundred of them, probably, would smile a superior smile at him and hurry on. Out of the remaining five, four would look again and pity him. One, perhaps, would honour and envy him.

The boy who, in a day like the present one, is still vital enough to forget how he looks in enjoying something, is not only a rare and refreshing spectacle, but he is master of the most important intellectual and moral superiority a boy can be master of, and if, in spite of teachers and surroundings, he can keep this superiority long enough, or until he comes to be a man, he shall be the kind of man whose very faults shall be remembered better and cherished more by a doting world than the virtues of the rest of us.

The most important fact—perhaps the only important fact—about James Boswell—the country boy of literature—is that, whatever may have been his limitations, he had the most important gift that life can give to a man—the gift of forgetting himself in it. In the Fleet Street of letters, smiling at him and jeering by him, who does not always see James Boswell, completely lost to the street, gaping at the soul of Samuel Johnson as if it were the show window of the world, as if to be allowed to look at a soul like this were almost to have a soul one’s self?

Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* is a classic because James Boswell had the classic power in him of unconsciousness. To book-labourers, college employees, analysis-hands of whatever kind, his book is a standing notice that the prerogative of being immortal is granted by men, even to a fool, if he has the grace not to know it. For that matter, even if the fool knows he is a fool, if he cares more about his subject than he cares about not letting any one else know it, he is never forgotten. The world cannot afford to leave such a fool out. Is it not a world in which there is not a man living of us who does not cherish in his heart

a little secret like this of his own? We are bound to admit that the main difference between James Boswell and the rest, consists in the fact that James Boswell found something in the world so much more worth living for, than not letting the common secret out, that he lived for it, and like all the other great naïves he will never get over living for it.

Even allowing that Boswell's consistent and unfailing motive in cultivating Samuel Johnson was vanity, this very vanity of Boswell's has more genius in it than Johnson's vocabulary, and the important and inspiring fact remains, that James Boswell, a flagrantly commonplace man in every single respect, by the law of letting himself go, has taken his stand forever in English literature, as the one commonplace man in it who has produced a work of genius. The main quality of a man of genius, his power of sacrificing everything to his main purpose, belonged to him. He was not only willing to seem the kind of fool he was, but he did not hesitate to seem several kinds that he was not, to fulfil his main purpose. That Samuel Johnson might be given the ponderous and gigantic and looming look that a Samuel Johnson ought to have, Boswell painted himself into his picture with more relentlessness than any other author that can be called to mind, except three or four similarly commonplace and similarly inspired and self-forgetful persons in the New Testament. There has never been any other biography in England with the single exception of Pepys, in which the author has so completely lost himself in his subject. If the author of Johnson's life had written his book with the inspiration of not being laughed at (which is the inspiration that nine out of ten who love to laugh are likely to write with), James Boswell would never have been heard of, and the burly figure of Samuel Johnson would be a blur behind a dictionary.

It may be set down as one of the necessary principles of the reading habit that no true and vital reading is possible except as the reader possesses and employs the gift of letting himself go. It is a gift that William Shakespeare and James Boswell and Elijah and Charles Lamb and a great many other happy but unimportant people have had in common. No man of genius—a man who puts his best and his most unconscious self into his utterance—can be read or listened to or interpreted for one moment without it. Except from those who bring to him the greeting of their own unconscious selves, he hides himself. He gives himself only to those with whom unconsciousness is a daily habit, with whom the joy of letting one's self go is one of the great resources of life. This joy is back of every great act and every deep appreciation in the world, and it is the charm and delight of the smaller ones. On its higher levels, it is called genius and inspiration. In religion it is called faith. It is the primal energy both of art and religion.

Probably only the man who has very little would be able to tell what faith is, as a basis of art or religion, but we have learned some things that it is not. We know that faith is not a dead-lift of the brain, a supreme effort either for God or for ourselves. It is the soul giving itself up, finding itself, feeling itself drawn to its own, into infinite space, face to face with strength. It is the supreme swinging-free of the spirit, the becoming a part of the running-gear of things. Faith is not an act of the imagination—to the man who knows it. It is infinite fact, the infinite crowding of facts, the drawing of the man-self upward and outward, where he is surrounded with the infinite man-self. Perhaps a man can make himself not believe.

He can not make himself believe. He can only believe by letting himself go, by trusting the force of gravity and the law of space around him. Faith is the universe flowing silently, implacably, through his soul. He has given himself up to it. In the tiniest, noisiest noon his spirit is flooded with the stars. He is let out to the boundaries of heaven and the night-sky bears him up in the heat of the day.

In the presence of a great work of art—a work of inspiration or faith, there is no such thing as appreciation, without letting one's self go.

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## II

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# The Subconscious Self

The criticism of Carlyle's remark, "Editors are not here to say 'How,'"—that it is "ungracious and tantalisingly elusive," is a fair illustration of the mood to which the habit of analysis leads its victims. The explainer cannot let himself go. The puttering love of explaining and the need of explaining dog his soul at every turn of thought or thought of having a thought. He not only puts a microscope to his eyes to know with, but his eyes have ingrown microscopes. The microscope has become a part of his eyes. He cannot see anything without putting it on a slide, and when his microscope will not focus it, and it cannot be reduced and explained, he explains that it is not there.

The man of genius, on the other hand, with whom truth is an experience instead of a specimen, has learned that the probabilities are that the more impossible it is to explain a truth the more truth there is in it. In so far as the truth is an experience to him, he is not looking for slides. He will not mount it as a specimen and he is not interested in seeing it explained or focussed. He lives with it in his own heart in so far as he possesses it, and he looks at it with a telescope for that greater part which he cannot possess. The microscope is perpetually mislaid. He has the experience itself and the one thing he wants to do with it is to convey it to others. He does this by giving himself up to it. The truth having become a part of him by his thus giving himself up, it becomes a part of his reader, by his reader's giving himself up.

Reading a work of genius is one man's unconsciousness greeting another man's. No author of the higher class can possibly be read without this mutual exchange of unconsciousness. He cannot be explained. He cannot explain himself. And he cannot be enjoyed, appreciated, or criticised by those who expect him to. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, that is, experienced things are discerned by experience. They are "ungracious and tantalisingly elusive."

When the man who has a little talent tells a truth he tells the truth so ill that he is obliged to tell how to do it. The artist, on the other hand, having given himself up to the truth, almost always tells it as if he were listening to it, as if he were being borne up by it, as by some great delight, even while he speaks to

us. It is the power of the artist's truth when he writes like this that it shall haunt his reader as it has haunted him. He lives with it and is haunted by it day after day whether he wants to be or not, and when a human being is obliged to live with a burning truth inside of him every day of his life, he will find a how for it, he will find some way of saying it, of getting it outside of him, of doing it, if only for the common and obvious reason that it burns the heart out of a man who does not. If the truth is really in a man—a truth to be done,—he finds out how to do it as a matter of self-preservation.

The average man no doubt will continue now as always to consider Carlyle's "Editors are not here to say 'How'" ungracious and tantalisingly elusive. He demands of every writer not only that he shall write the truth for every man but that he shall—practically—read it for him—that is, tell him how to read it—the best part of reading it. It is by this explaining the truth too much, by making it small enough for small people that so many lies have been made out of it. The gist of the matter seems to be that if the spirit of the truth does not inspire a man to some more eager way of finding out how to do a truth than asking some other man how to do it, it must be some other spirit. The way out for the explotterating or weak man does not consist in the scientist's or the commentator's how, or the artist's how, or in any other strain of helping the ground to hold one up. It consists in the power of letting one's self go.

To say nothing of appreciation of power, criticism of power is impossible, without letting one's self go. Criticism which is not the faithful remembering and reporting of an unconscious mood is not worthy of being called criticism at all. A critic cannot find even the faults of a book who does not let himself go in it, and there is not a man living who can expect to write a criticism of a book until he has given himself a chance to have an experience with it, to write his criticism with. The larger part of the professional criticism of the ages that are past has proved worthless to us, because the typical professional critic has generally been a man who professes not to let himself go and who is proud of it. If it were not for the occasional possibility of his being stunned by a book—made unconscious by it,—the professional critic of the lesser sort would never say anything of interest to us at all, and even if he did, being a maimed and defective conscious person, the evidence that he was stunned is likely to be of more significance than anything he may say about the book that stunned him, or about the way he felt when he was being stunned. Having had very little practice in being unconscious, the bare fact is all that he can remember about it. The unconsciousness of a person who has long lost the habit of unconsciousness is apt to be a kind of groping stupor or deadness at its best, and not, as with the artist, a state of being, a way of being incalculably alive, and of letting in infinite life. It is a small joy that is not unconscious. The man who knows he is reading when he has a book in his hands, does not know very much about books.

People who always know what time it is, who always know exactly where they are, and exactly how they look, have it not in their power to read a great book. The book that comes to the reader as a great book is always one that shares with him the infinite and the eternal in himself.

There is a time to know what time it is, and there is a time not to, and there are many places small enough to know where they are. The book that knows what time it is, in every sentence, will always be

read by the clock, but the great book, the book with infinite vistas in it, shall not be read by men with a rim of time around it. The place of it is unmeasured, and there is no sound that men can make which shall tick in that place.

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### III

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## The Organic Principle of Inspiration

Letting one's self go is but a half-principle, however, to do one's reading with. The other half consists in getting one's self together again. In proportion as we truly appreciate what we read, we find ourselves playing; at being Boswell to a book and being Johnson to it by turns. The vital reader lets himself go and collects himself as the work before him demands. There are some books, where it is necessary to let one's self go from beginning to end. There are others where a man may sit as he sits at a play, being himself between acts, or at proper intervals when the author lets down the curtain, and being translated the rest of the time.

Our richest moods are those in which, as we look back upon them, we seem to have been impressing, impressionable, creative, and receptive at the same time. The alternating currents of these moods are so swift that they seem simultaneous, and the immeasurable swiftness with which they pass from one to the other is the soul's instinctive method of kindling itself—the very act of inspiration. Sometimes the subconscious self has it all its own way with us except for a corner of dim, burning consciousness keeping guard. Sometimes the conscious has it all its own way with us and the subconscious self is crowded to the horizon's edge, like Northern Lights still playing in the distance; but the result is the same—the dim presence of one of these moods in the other, when one's power is least effective, and the gradual alternating of the currents of the moods as power grows more effective. In the higher states of power, the moods are seen alternating with increasing heat and swiftness until in the highest state of power of all, they are seen in their mutual glow and splendour, working as one mood, creating miracles.

The orator and the listener, the writer and the reader, in proportion as they become alive to one another, come into the same spirit—the spirit of mutual listening and utterance. At the very best, and in the most inspired mood, the reader reads as if he were a reader and writer both, and the writer writes as if he were a writer and reader both.

While it is necessary in the use and development of power, that all varieties and combinations of these moods should be familiar experiences with the artist and with the reader of the artist, it remains as the climax and ideal of all energy and beauty in the human soul that these moods shall be found alternating very swiftly—to all appearances together. The artist's command of this alternating current, the swiftness

with which he modulates these moods into one another, is the measure of his power. The violinist who plays best is the one who sings the most things together in his playing. He listens to his own bow, to the heart of his audience, and to the soul of the composer all at once. His instrument sings a singing that blends them together. The effect of their being together is called art. The effect of their being together is produced by the fact that they are together, that they are born and living and dying together in the man himself while the strings are singing to us. They are the spirit within the strings. His letting himself go to them, his gathering himself out of them, his power to receive and create at once, is the secret of the effect he produces. The power to be receptive and creative by turns is only obtained by constant and daily practice, and when the modulating of one of these moods into the other becomes a swift and unconscious habit of life, what is called “temperament” in an artist is attained at last and inspiration is a daily occurrence. It is as hard for such a man to keep from being inspired as it is for the rest of us to make ourselves inspired. He has to go out of his way to avoid inspiration.

In proportion as this principle is recognised and allowed free play in the habits that obtain amongst men who know books, their habits will be inspired habits. Books will be read and lived in the same breath, and books that have been lived will be written.

The most serious menace in the present epidemic of analysis in our colleges is not that it is teaching men to analyse masterpieces until they are dead to them, but that it is teaching men to analyse their own lives until they are dead to themselves. When the process of education is such that it narrows the area of unconscious thinking and feeling in a man’s life, it cuts him off from his kinship with the gods, from his habit of being unconscious enough of what he has to enter into the joy of what he has not.

The best that can be said of such an education is that it is a patient, painstaking, laborious training in locking one’s self up. It dooms a man to himself, the smallest part of himself, and walls him out of the universe. He comes to its doorways one by one. The shining of them falls at first on him, as it falls on all of us. He sees the shining of them and hastens to them. One by one they are shut in his face. His soul is damned—is sentenced to perpetual consciousness of itself. What is there that he can do next? Turning round and round inside himself, learning how little worth while it is, there is but one fate left open to such a man, a blind and desperate lunge into the roar of the life he cannot see, for facts—the usual L.H.D., Ph.D. fate. If he piles around him the huge hollow sounding outsides of things in the universe that have lived, bones of soul, matter of bodies, skeletons of lives that men have lived, who shall blame him? He wonders why they have lived, why any one lives; and if, when he has wondered long enough why any one lives, we choose to make him the teacher of the young, that the young also may wonder why any one lives, why should we call him to account? He cannot but teach what he has, what has been given him, and we have but ourselves to thank that, as every radiant June comes round, diplomas for ennui are being handed out—thousands of them—to specially favoured children through all this broad and glorious land.



## The Fifth Interference: The Habit of Analysis

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### I

#### If Shakespeare Came to Chicago

**I**T is one of the supreme literary excellences of the Bible that, until the other day almost, it had never occurred to any one that it is literature at all. It has been read by men and women, and children and priests and popes, and kings and slaves and the dying of all ages, and it has come to them not as a book, but as if it were something happening to them.

It has come to them as nights and mornings come, and sleep and death, as one of the great, simple, infinite experiences of human life. It has been the habit of the world to take the greatest works of art, like the greatest works of God, in this simple and straightforward fashion, as great experiences. If a masterpiece really is a masterpiece, and rains and shines its instincts on us as masterpieces should, we do not think whether it is literary or not, any more than we gaze on mountains and stop to think how sublimely

scientific, raptly geological, and logically chemical they are. These things are true about mountains, and have their place. But it is the nature of a mountain to insist upon its own place—to be an experience first and to be as scientific and geological and chemical as it pleases afterward. It is the nature of anything powerful to be an experience first and to appeal to experience. When we have time, or when the experience is over, a mountain or a masterpiece can be analysed—the worst part of it; but we cannot make a masterpiece by analysing it; and a mountain has never been appreciated by pounding it into trap, quartz, and conglomerate; and it still holds good, as a general principle, that making a man appreciate a mountain by pounding it takes nearly as long as making the mountain, and is not nearly so worth while.

Not many years ago, in one of our journals of the more literary sort, there appeared a few directions from Chicago University to the late John Keats on how to write an “Ode to a Nightingale.” These directions were from the Head of a Department, who, in a previous paper in the same journal, had rewritten the “Ode to a Grecian Urn.” The main point the Head of the Department made, with regard to the nightingale, was that it was not worth rewriting. ““The Ode to the Nightingale,”” says he, “offers me no such temptation. There is almost nothing in it that properly belongs to the subject treated. The faults of the Grecian Urn are such as the poet himself, under wise criticism” (see catalogue of Chicago University) “might easily have removed. The faults of the Nightingale are such that they cannot be removed. They inhere in the idea and structure.” The Head of the Department dwells at length upon “the hopeless fortune of the poem,” expressing his regret that it can never be retrieved. After duly analysing what he considers the poem’s leading thought, he regrets that a poet like John Keats should go so far, apropos of a nightingale, as to sigh in his immortal stanzas, “for something which, whatever it may be, is nothing short of a dead drunk.”

One hears the soul of Keats from out its eternal Italy—

“Is there no one near to help me  
... No fair dawn  
Of life from charitable voice? No sweet saying  
To set my dull and sadden’d spirit playing?”

The Head of the Department goes on, and the lines—

Still wouldst thou sing and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod—

are passed through analysis. “What the fitness is,” he says, “or what the poetic or other effectiveness of suggesting that the corpse of a person who has ceased upon the midnight still has ears, only to add that it has them in vain, I cannot pretend to understand”—one of a great many other things that the Head of the Department does not pretend to understand. It is probably with the same outfit of not pretending to

understand that—for the edification of the merely admiring mind—the “Ode to a Grecian Urn” was rewritten. To Keats’s lines—

Oh, Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou sayest,  
“Beauty is truth, truth beauty”—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know—

he makes various corrections, offering as a substitute-conclusion to the poet’s song the following outburst:

Preaching this wisdom with thy cheerful mien:  
Possessing beauty thou possessest all;  
Pause at that goal, nor farther push thy quest.

It would not be just to the present state of academic instruction in literature to illustrate it by such an extreme instance as this of the damage the educated mind—debauched with analysis—is capable of doing to the reading habit. It is probable that a large proportion of the teachers of literature in the United States, both out of their sense of John Keats and out of respect to themselves, would have publicly resented this astonishing exhibit of the extreme literary-academic mind in a prominent journal, had they not suspected that its editor, having discovered a literary-academic mind that could take itself as seriously as this, had deliberately brought it out as a spectacle. It could do no harm to Keats, certainly, or to any one else, and would afford an infinite deal of amusement—the journal argued—to let a mind like this clatter down a column to oblivion. So it did. It was taken by all concerned, teachers, critics, and observers alike, as one of the more interesting literary events of the season.

Unfortunately, however, entertainments of this kind have a very serious side to them. It is one thing to smile at an individual when one knows that standing where he does he stands by himself, and another to smile at an individual when one knows that he is not standing by himself, that he is a type, that there must be a great many others like him or he would not be standing where he does at all. When a human being is seen taking his stand over his own soul in public print, summing up its emptiness there, and gloating over it, we are in the presence of a disheartening fact. It can be covered up, however, and in what, on the whole, is such a fine, true-ringing, hearty old world as this, it need not be made much of; but when we

find that a mind like this has been placed at the head of a Department of Poetry in a great, representative American university, the last thing that should be done with it is to cover it up. The more people know where the analytical mind is to-day—where it is getting to be—and the more they think what its being there means, the better. The signs of the times, the destiny of education, and the fate of literature are all involved in a fact like this. The mere possibility of having the analysing-grinding mind engaged in teaching a spontaneous art in a great educational institution would be of great significance. The fact that it is actually there and that no particular comment is excited by its being there, is significant. It betrays not only what the general, national, academic attitude toward literature is, but that that attitude has become habitual, that it is taken for granted.

One would be inclined to suppose, looking at the matter abstractly, that all students and teachers of literature would take it for granted that the practice of making a dispassionate criticism of a passion would be a dangerous practice for any vital and spontaneous nature—certainly the last kind of practice that a student of the art of poetry (that is, the art of literature, in the essential sense) would wish to make himself master of. The first item in a critic's outfit for criticising a passion is having one. The fact that this is not regarded as an axiom in our current education in books is a very significant fact. It goes with another significant fact—the assumption, in most courses of literature as at present conducted, that a little man (that is, a man incapable of a great passion), who is not even able to read a book with a great passion in it, can somehow teach other people to read it.

It is not necessary to deny that analysis occasionally plays a valuable part in bringing a pupil to a true method and knowledge of literature, but unless the analysis is inspired nothing can be more dangerous to a pupil under his thirtieth year, even for the shortest period of time, or more likely to move him over to the farthest confines of the creative life, or more certain, if continued long enough, to set him forever outside all power or possibility of power, either in the art of literature or in any of the other arts.

The first objection to the analysis of one of Shakespeare's plays as ordinarily practised in courses of literature is that it is of doubtful value to nine hundred and ninety-nine pupils in a thousand—if they do it. The second is, that they cannot do it. The analysing of one of Shakespeare's plays requires more of a commonplace pupil than Shakespeare required of himself. The apology that is given for the analysing method is, that the process of analysing a work of Shakespeare's will show the pupil how Shakespeare did it, and that by seeing how Shakespeare did it he will see how to do it himself.

In the first place, analysis will not show how Shakespeare did it, and in the second place, if it does, it will show that he did not do it by analysis. In the third place,—to say nothing of not doing it by analysis,—if he had analysed it before he did it, he could not have analysed it afterward in the literal and modern sense. In the fourth place, even if Shakespeare were able to do his work by analysing it before he did it, it does not follow that undergraduate students can.

A man of genius, with all his onset of natural passion, his natural power of letting himself go, could doubtless do more analysing, both before and after his work, than any one else without being damaged by

it. What shall be said of the folly of trying to teach men of talent, and the mere pupils of men of talent, by analysis—by a method, that is, which, even if it succeeds in doing what it tries to do, can only, at the very best, reveal to the pupil the roots of his instincts before they have come up? And why is it that our courses of literature may be seen assuming to-day on every hand, almost without exception, that by teaching men to analyse their own inspirations—the inspirations they have—and teaching them to analyse the inspirations of other men—inspirations they can never have—we are somehow teaching them “English literature”?

It seems to have been overlooked while we are all analytically falling at Shakespeare’s feet, that Shakespeare did not become Shakespeare by analytically falling at any one’s feet—not even at his own—and that the most important difference between being a Shakespeare and being an analyser of Shakespeare is that with the man Shakespeare no submitting of himself to the analysis-gymnast would ever have been possible, and with the students of Shakespeare (as students go and if they are caught young enough) the habit of analysis is not only a possibility but a sleek, industrious, and complacent certainty.

After a little furtive looking backward perhaps, and a few tremblings and doubts, they shall all be seen, almost to a man, offering their souls to Moloch, as though the not having a soul and not missing it were the one final and consummate triumph that literary culture could bring. Flocks of them can be seen with the shining in their faces year after year, term after term, almost anywhere on the civilised globe, doing this very thing—doing it under the impression that they are learning something, and not until the shining in their faces is gone will they be under the impression that they have learned it (whatever it is) and that they are educated.

The fact that the analytic mind is establishing itself, in a greater or less degree, as the sentinel in college life of the entire creative literature of the world is a fact with many meanings in it. It means not only that there are a great many more minds like it in literature, but that a great many other minds—nearly all college-educated minds—are being made like it. It means that unless the danger is promptly faced and acted upon the next generation of American citizens can neither expect to be able to produce literature of its own nor to appreciate or enjoy literature that has been produced. It means that another eighteenth century is coming to the world; and, as the analysis is deeper than before and more deadly-clever with the deeper things than before, it is going to be the longest eighteenth century the world has ever seen—generations with machines for hands and feet, machines for minds, machines outside their minds to enjoy the machines inside their minds with. Every man with his information-machine to be cultured with, his religious machine to be good with, and his private Analysis Machine to be beautiful with, shall take his place in the world—shall add his soul to the Machine we make a world with. For every man that is born on the earth one more joy shall be crowded out of it—one more analysis of joy shall take its place, go round and round under the stars—dew, dawn, and darkness—until it stops. How a sunrise is made and why a cloud is artistic and how pines should be composed in a landscape, all men shall know. We shall criticise the technique of thunderstorms. “And what is a sunset after all?” The reflection of a large body

on rarefied air. Through analysed heaven and overanalysed fields it trails its joylessness around the earth.

Time was, when the setting of the sun was the playing of two worlds upon a human being's life on the edge of the little day, the blending of sense and spirit for him, earth and heaven, out in the still west. His whole being went forth to it. He watched with it and prayed and sang with it. In its presence his soul walked down to the stars. Out of the joy of his life, the finite sorrow and the struggle of his life, he gazed upon it. It was the portrait of his infinite self. Every setting sun that came to him was a compact with Eternal Joy. The Night itself—his figure faint before it in the flicker of the east—whispered to him: "Thou also—hills and heavens around thee, hills and heavens within thee—oh, Child of Time—Thou also art God!"

"Ah me! How I could love! My soul doth melt," cries Keats:

Ye deaf and senseless minutes of the day,  
And thou old forest, hold ye this for true,  
There is no lightning, no authentic dew  
But in the eye of love; there's not a sound,  
Melodious howsoever, can confound  
The heavens and the earth to such a death  
As doth the voice of love; there's not a breath  
Will mingle kindly with the meadow air,  
Till it has panted round, and stolen a share  
Of passion from the heart.

John Keats and William Shakespeare wrote masterpieces because they had passions, spiritual experiences, and the daily habit of inspiration. In so far as these masterpieces are being truthfully taught, they are taught by teachers who themselves know the passion of creation. They teach John Keats and William Shakespeare by rousing the same passions and experiences in the pupil that Keats and Shakespeare had, and by daily appealing to them.

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## II

# Analysis Analysed

There are a great many men in the world to-day, faithfully doing their stint in it (they are commonly known as men of talent), who would have been men of genius if they had dared. Education has made

cowards of us all, and the habit of examining the roots of one's instincts, before they come up, is an incurable habit.

The essential principle in a true work of art is always the poem or the song that is hidden in it. A work of art by a man of talent is generally ranked by the fact that it is the work of a man who analyses a song before he sings it. He puts down the words of the song first—writes it, that is—in prose. Then he lumbers it over into poetry. Then he looks around for some music for it. Then he practises at singing it, and then he sings it. The man of genius, on the other hand, whether he be a great one or a very little one, is known by the fact that he has a song sent to him. He sings it. He has a habit of humming it over afterwards. His humming it over afterwards is his analysis. It is the only possible inspired analysis.

The difference between these two types of men is so great that anything that the smaller of them has to say about the spirit or the processes of the other is of little value. When one of them tries to teach the work of the other, which is what almost always occurs,—the man of talent being the typical professor of works of genius,—the result is fatal. A singer who is so little capable of singing that he can give a prose analysis of his own song while it is coming to him and before he sings it, can hardly be expected to extemporise an inspired analysis of another man's song after reading it. If a man cannot apply inspired analysis to a little common passion in a song he has of his own, he is placed in a hopeless position when he tries to give an inspired analysis of a passion that only another man could have and that only a great man would forget himself long enough to have.

An inspired analysis may be defined as the kind of analysis that the real poet in his creatively critical mood is able to give to his work—a low-singing or humming analysis in which all the elements of the song are active and all the faculties and all the senses work on the subject at once. The proportions and relations of a living thing are all kept perfect in an inspired analysis, and the song is made perfect at last, not by being taken apart, but by being made to pass its delight more deeply and more slowly through the singer's utmost self to its fulfilment.

What is ordinarily taught as analysis is very different from this. It consists in the deliberate and triumphant separation of the faculties from one another and from the thing they have produced—the dull, bare, pitiless process of passing a living and beautiful thing before one vacant, staring faculty at a time. This faculty, being left in the stupor of being all by itself, sits in complacent judgment upon a work of art, the very essence of the life and beauty of which is its appealing to all of the faculties and senses at once, in their true proportion, glowing them together into a unit—namely, several things made into one thing, that is—several things occupying the same time and the same place, that is—synthesis. An inspired analysis is the rehearsal of a synthesis. An analysis is not inspired unless it comes as a flash of light and a burst of music and a breath of fragrance all in one. Such an analysis cannot be secured with painstaking and slowness, unless the painstaking and slowness are the rehearsal of a synthesis, and all the elements in it are laboured on and delighted in at once. It must be a low-singing or humming analysis.

The expert student or teacher of poetry who makes “a dispassionate criticism” of a passion, who

makes it his special boast that he is able to apply his intellect severely by itself to a great poem, boasts of the devastation of the highest power a human being can attain. The commonest man that lives, whatever his powers may be, if they are powers that act together, can look down on a man whose powers cannot, as a mutilated being. While it cannot be denied that a being who has been thus especially mutilated is often possessed of a certain literary ability, he belongs to the acrobats of literature rather than to literature itself. The contortionist who separates himself from his hands and feet for the delectation of audiences, the circus performer who makes a battering-ram of his head and who glories in being shot out of a cannon into space and amazement, goes through his motions with essentially the same pride in his strength, and sustains the same relation to the strength of the real man of the world.

Whatever a course of literary criticism may be, or its value may be, to the pupils who take it, it consists, more often than not, on the part of pupil and teacher both, in the dislocating of one faculty from all the others, and the bearing it down hard on a work of art, as if what it was made of, or how it was made, could only be seen by scratching it.

It is to be expected now and then, in the hurry of the outside world, that a newspaper critic will be found writing a cerebellum criticism of a work of the imagination; but the student of literature, in the comparative quiet and leisure of the college atmosphere, who works in the same separated spirit, who estimates a work by dislocating his faculties on it, is infinitely more blameworthy; and the college teacher who teaches a work of genius by causing it to file before one of his faculties at a time, when all of them would not be enough,—who does this in the presence of young persons and trains them to do it themselves,—is a public menace. The attempt to master a masterpiece, as it were, by reading it first with the sense of sight, and then with the sense of smell, and with all the senses in turn, keeping them carefully guarded from their habit of sensing things together, is not only a self-destructive but a hopeless attempt. A great mind, even if it would attempt to master anything in this way, would find it hopeless, and the attempt to learn a great work of art—a great whole—by applying the small parts of a small mind to it, one after the other, is more hopeless still. It can be put down as a general principle that a human being who is so little alive that he finds his main pleasure in life in taking himself apart, can find little of value for others in a masterpiece—a work of art which is so much alive that it cannot be taken apart, and which is eternal because its secret is eternally its own. If the time ever comes when it can be taken apart, it will be done only by a man who could have put it together, who is more alive than the masterpiece is alive. Until the masterpiece meets with a master who is more creative than its first master was, the less the motions of analysis are gone through with by those who are not masters, the better. A masterpiece cannot be analysed by the cold and negative process of being taken apart. It can only be analysed by being melted down. It can only be melted down by a man who has creative heat in him to melt it down and the daily habit of glowing with creative heat.

It is a matter of common observation that the fewer resources an artist has, the more things there are in nature and in the nature of life which he thinks are not beautiful. The making of an artist is his sense of

selection. If he is an artist of the smaller type, he selects beautiful subjects—subjects with ready-made beauty in them. If he is an artist of the larger type, he can hardly miss making almost any subject beautiful, because he has so many beautiful things to put it with. He sees every subject the way it is—that is, in relation to a great many other subjects—the way God saw it, when He made it, and the way it is.

The essential difference between a small mood and a large one is that in the small one we see each thing we look on, comparatively by itself, or with reference to one or two relations to persons and events. In our larger mood we see it less analytically. We see it as it is and as it lives and as a god would see it, playing its meaning through the whole created scheme into everything else.

The soul of beauty is synthesis. In the presence of a mountain the sound of a hammer is as rich as a symphony. It is like the little word of a great man, great in its great relations. When the spirit is waked and the man within the man is listening to it, the sound of a hoof on a lonely road in the great woods is the footstep of cities to him coming through the trees, and the low, chocking sound of a cartwheel in the still and radiant valley throngs his being like an opera. All sights and echoes and thoughts and feelings revel in it. It is music for the smoke, rapt and beautiful, rising from the chimneys at his feet. A sheet of water—making heaven out of nothing—is beautiful to the dullest man, because he cannot analyse it, could not—even if he would—contrive to see it by itself. Skies come crowding on it. There is enough poetry in the mere angle of a sinking sun to flood the prose of a continent with, because the gentle earthlong shadows that follow it lay their fingers upon all life and creep together innumerable separated things.

In the meadow where our birds are there is scarcely a tree in sight to tangle the singing in. It is a meadow with miles of sunlight in it. It seems like a kind of world-melody to walk in the height of noon there—infinite grass, infinite sky, gusts of bobolinks' voices—it's as if the air that drifted down made music of itself; and the song of all the singing everywhere—the song the soul hears—comes on the slow winds.

Half the delight of a bobolink is that he is more synthetic, more of a poet, than other birds,—has a duet in his throat. He bursts from the grass and sings in bursts—plays his own obligato while he goes. One can never see him in his eager flurry, between his low heaven and his low nest, without catching the lilt of inspiration. Like the true poet, he suits the action to the word in a weary world, and does his flying and singing together. The song that he throws around him, is the very spirit of his wings—of all wings. More beauty is always the putting of more things together. They were created to be together. The spirit of art is the spirit that finds this out. Even the bobolink is cosmic, if he sings with room enough; and when the heart wakes, the song of the cricket is infinite. We hear it across stars.



# The Sixth Interference: Literary Drill in College

## I

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### Seeds and Blossoms

**F**OUR men stood before God at the end of The First Week, watching Him whirl His little globe.<sup>2</sup> The first man said to Him, "Tell me how you did it." The second man said, "Let me have it." The third man said, "What is it for?" The fourth man said nothing, and fell down and worshipped. Having worshipped he rose to his feet and made a world himself.

These four men have been known in history as the Scientist, the Man of Affairs, the Philosopher, and the Artist. They stand for the four necessary points of view in reading books.

Most of the readers of the world are content to be partitioned off, and having been duly set down for life in one or the other of these four divisions of human nature they take sides from beginning to end with one or the other of these four men. It is the distinction of the scholar of the highest class in every period,

that he declines to do this. In so far as he finds each of the four men taking sides against each other, he takes sides against each of them in behalf of all. He insists on being able to absorb knowledge, to read and write in all four ways. If he is a man of genius as well as a scholar, he insists on being able to read and write, as a rule, in all four ways at once; if his genius is of the lesser kind, in two or three ways at once. The eternal books are those that stand this four-sided test. They are written from all of these points of view. They have absorbed into themselves the four moods of creation morning. It is thus that they bring the morning back to us.

The most important question in regard to books that our schools and institutions of learning are obliged to face at present is, "How shall we produce conditions that will enable the ordinary man to keep the proportions that belong to a man, to absorb knowledge, to do his reading and writing in all four ways at once?" In other words, How shall we enable him to be a natural man, a man of genius as far as he goes?

A masterpiece is a book that can only be read by a man who is a master in some degree of the things the book is master of. The man who has mastered things the most is the man who can make those things. The man who makes things is the artist. He has bowed down and worshipped and he has arisen and stood before God and created before Him, and the spirit of the Creator is in him. To take the artist's point of view, is to take the point of view that absorbs and sums up the others. The supremacy and comprehensiveness of this point of view is a matter of fact rather than argument. The artist is the man who makes the things that Science and Practical Affairs and Philosophy are merely about. The artist of the higher order is more scientific than the scientist, more practical than the man of affairs, and more philosophic than the philosopher, because he combines what these men do about things, and what these men say about things, into the things themselves, and makes the things live.

To combine these four moods at once in one's attitude toward an idea is to take the artist's—that is, the creative—point of view toward it. The only fundamental outfit a man can have for reading books in all four ways at once is his ability to take the point of view of the man who made the book in all four ways at once, and feel the way he felt when he made it.

The organs that appreciate literature are the organs that made it. True reading is latent writing. The more one feels like writing a book when he reads it the more alive his reading is and the more alive the book is.

The measure of culture is its originating and reproductive capacity, the amount of seed and blossom there is in it, the amount it can afford to throw away, and secure divine results. Unless the culture in books we are taking such national pains to acquire in the present generation can be said to have this pollen quality in it, unless it is contagious, can be summed up in its pollen and transmitted, unless it is nothing more or less than life itself made catching, unless, like all else that is allowed to have rights in nature, it has powers also, has an almost infinite power of self-multiplication, self-perpetuation, the more cultured we are the more emasculated we are. The vegetables of the earth and the flowers of the field—the very codfish of the sea become our superiors. What is more to the point, in the minds and interests of all living

human beings, their culture crowds ours out.

Nature may be somewhat coarse and simple-minded and naïve, but reproduction is her main point and she never misses it. Her prejudice against dead things is immutable. If a man objects to this prejudice against dead things, his only way of making himself count is to die. Nature uses such men over again, makes them into something more worth while, something terribly or beautifully alive,—and goes on her way.

If this principle—namely, that the reproductive power of culture is the measure of its value—were as fully introduced and recognised in the world of books as it is in the world of commerce and in the natural world, it would revolutionise from top to bottom, and from entrance examination to diploma, the entire course of study, policy, and spirit of most of our educational institutions. Allowing for exceptions in every faculty—memorable to all of us who have been college students,—it would require a new corps of teachers.

Entrance examinations for pupils and teachers alike would determine two points. First, what does this person know about things? Second, what is the condition of his organs—what can he do with them? If the privilege of being a pupil in the standard college were conditioned strictly upon the second of these questions—the condition of his organs—as well as upon the first, fifty out of a hundred pupils, as prepared at present, would fall short of admission. If the same test were applied for admission to the faculty, ninety out of a hundred teachers would fall short of admission. Having had analytic, self-destructive, learned habits for a longer time than their pupils, the condition of their organs is more hopeless.

The man who has the greatest joy in a symphony is:

First, the man who composes it.

Second, the conductor.

Third, the performers.

Fourth, those who might be composers of such music themselves.

Fifth, those in the audience who have been performers.

Sixth, those who are going to be.

Seventh, those who are composers of such music for other instruments.

Eighth, those who are composers of music in other arts—literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Ninth, those who are performers of music on other instruments.

Tenth, those who are performers of music in other arts.

Eleventh, those who are creators of music with their own lives.

Twelfth, those who perform and interpret in their own lives the music they hear in other lives.

Thirteenth, those who create anything whatever and who love perfection in it.

Fourteenth, “The Public.”

Fifteenth, the Professional Critic—almost inevitably at the fifteenth remove from the heart of things because he is the least creative, unless he is a man of genius, or has pluck and talent enough to work his way through the other fourteen moods and sum them up before he ventures to criticise.

The principles that have been employed in putting life into literature must be employed on drawing life out of it. These principles are the creative principles—principles of joy. All influences in education, family training, and a man's life that tend to overawe, crowd out, and make impossible his own private, personal, daily habit of creative joy are the enemies of books.

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## II

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### Private Road: Dangerous

The impotence of the study of literature as practised in the schools and colleges of the present day turns largely on the fact that the principle of creative joy—of knowing through creative joy—is overlooked. The field of vision is the book and not the world. In the average course in literature the field is not even the book. It is still farther from the creative point of view. It is the book about the book.

It is written generally in the laborious unreadable, well-read style—the book about the book. You are as one (when you are in the book about the book) thrust into the shadow of the endless aisles of Other Books—not that they are referred to baldly, or vulgarly, or in the text. It is worse than this (for this could be skipped). But you are surrounded helplessly. Invisible lexicons are on every page. Grammars and rhetorics, piled up in paragraphs and between the lines thrust at you everywhere. Hardly a chapter that does not convey its sense of struggling faithfulness, of infinite forlorn and empty plodding—and all for something a man might have known anyway. “I have toted a thousand books,” each chapter seems to say. “This one paragraph [page 1993—you feel it in the paragraph] has had to have forty-seven books carried to it.” Not once, except in loopholes in his reading which come now and then, does the face of the man's soul peep forth. One does not expect to meet any one in the book about the book—not one's self, not even the man who writes it, nor the man who writes the book that the book is about. One is confronted with a mob.

Two things are apt to be true of students who study the great masters in courses employing the book about the book. Even if the books about the book are what they ought to be, the pupils of such courses find that (1) studying the master, instead of the things he mastered, they lose all power over the things he mastered; (2) they lose, consequently, not only the power of creating masterpieces out of these things themselves, but the power of enjoying those that have been created by others, of having the daily experiences that make such joy possible. They are out of range of experience. They are barricaded against

life. Inasmuch as the creators of literature, without a single exception, have been more interested in life than in books, and have written books to help other people to be more interested in life than in books, this is the gravest possible defect. To be more interested in life than in books is the first essential for creating a book or for understanding one.

The typical course of study now offered in literature carries on its process of paralysis in various ways:

First. It undermines the imagination by giving it paper things instead of real ones to work on.

Second. By seeing that these things are selected instead of letting the imagination select its own things—the essence of having an imagination.

Third. By requiring of the student a rigorous and ceaselessly unimaginative habit. The paralysis of the learned is forced upon him. He finds little escape from the constant reading of books that have all the imagination left out of them.

Fourth. By forcing the imagination to work so hard in its capacity of pack-horse and memory that it has no power left to go anywhere of itself.

Fifth. By overawing individual initiative, undermining personality in the pupil, crowding great classics into him instead of attracting little ones out of him. Attracting little classics out of a man is a thing that great classics are always intended to do—the thing that they always succeed in doing when left to themselves.

Sixth. The teacher of literature so-called, having succeeded in destroying the personality of the pupil, puts himself in front of the personality of the author.

Seventh. A teacher who destroys personality in a pupil is the wrong personality to put in front of an author. If he were the right one, if he had the spirit of the author, his being in front, now and then at least, would be interpretation and inspiration. Not having the spirit of the author, he is intimidated by him, or has all he can do not to be. A classic cannot reveal itself to a groveller or to a critic. It is a book that was written standing up and it can only be studied and taught by those who stand up without knowing it. The decorous and beautiful despising of one's self that the study of the classics has come to be as conducted under unclassic teachers, is a fact that speaks for itself.

Eighth. Even if the personality of the teacher of literature is so fortunate as not to be the wrong one, there is not enough of it. There is hardly a course of literature that can be found in a college catalogue at the present time that does not base itself on the dictum that a great book can somehow—by some mysterious process—be taught by a small person. The axiom that necessarily undermines all such courses is obvious enough. A great book cannot be taught except by a teacher who is literally living in a great spirit, the spirit the great book lived in before it became a book,—a teacher who has the great book in him—not over him,—who, if he took time for it, might be capable of writing, in some sense at least, a great book himself. When the teacher is a teacher of this kind, teaches the spirit of what he teaches—that is, teaches the inside,—a classic can be taught.

Otherwise the best course in literature that can be devised is the one that gives the masterpieces the most opportunity to teach themselves. The object of a course in literature is best served in proportion as the course is arranged and all associated studies are arranged in such a way as to secure sensitive and contagious conditions for the pupil's mind in the presence of the great masters, such conditions as give the pupil time, freedom, space, and atmosphere—the things out of which a masterpiece is written and with which alone it can be taught, or can teach itself.

All that comes between a masterpiece and its thus teaching itself, spreads ruin both ways. The masterpiece is partitioned off from the pupil, guarded to be kept aloof from him—outside of him. The pupil is locked up from himself—his possible self.

Not too much stress could possibly be laid upon intimacy with the great books or on the constant habit of living on them. They are the movable Olympus. All who create camp out between the heavens and the earth on them and breathe and live and climb upon them. From their mighty sides they look down on human life. But classics can only be taught by classics. The creative paralysis of pupils who have drudged most deeply in classical training—English or otherwise—is a fact that no observer of college life can overlook. The guilt for this state of affairs must be laid at the door of the classics or at the door of the teachers. Either the classics are not worth teaching or they are not being taught properly.

In either case the best way out of the difficulty would seem to be for teachers to let the classics teach themselves, to furnish the students with the atmosphere, the conditions, the points of view in life, which will give the classics a chance to teach themselves.

This brings us to the important fact that teachers of literature do not wish to create the atmosphere, the conditions, and points of view that give the classics a chance to teach themselves. Creating the atmosphere for a classic in the life of a student is harder than creating a classic. The more obvious and practicable course is to teach the classic—teach it one's self, whether there is atmosphere or not.

It is admitted that this is not the ideal way to do with college students who suppose they are studying literature, but it is contended—college students and college electives being what they are—that there is nothing else to do. The situation sums itself up in the attitude of self-defence. “It may be (as no one needs to point out), that the teaching of literature, as at present conducted in college, is a somewhat faithful and dogged farce, but whatever may be the faults of modern college-teaching in literature, it is as good as our pupils deserve.” In other words, the teachers are not respecting their pupils. It may be said to be the constitution and by-laws of the literature class (as generally conducted) that the teachers cannot and must not respect their pupils. They cannot afford to. It costs more than most pupils are mentally worth, it is plausibly contended, to furnish students in college with the conditions of life and the conditions in their own minds that will give masterpieces a fair chance at them. *Ergo*, inasmuch as the average pupil cannot be taught a classic he must be choked with it.

The fact that the typical teacher of literature is more or less grudgingly engaged in doing his work and conducting his classes under the practical working theory that his pupils are not good enough for him,

suggests two important principles.

First. If his pupils are good enough for him, they are good enough to be taught the best there is in him, and they must be taught this best there is in him, as far as it goes, whether all of them are good enough for it or not. There is as much learning in watching others being educated as there is in appearing to be educated one's self.

Second. If his pupils are not good enough for him, the most literary thing he can do with them is to make them good enough. If he is not a sufficiently literary teacher to divine the central ganglion of interest in a pupil, and play upon it and gather delight about it and make it gather delight itself, the next most literary thing he can do is protect both the books and the pupil by keeping them faithfully apart until they are ready for one another.

If the teacher cannot recognise, arouse, and exercise such organs as his pupil has, and carry them out into themselves, and free them in self-activity, the pupil may be unfortunate in not having a better teacher, but he is fortunate in having no better organs to be blundered on.

The drawing out of a pupil's first faint but honest and lasting power of really reading a book, of knowing what it is to be sensitive to a book, does not produce a very literary-looking result, of course, and it is hard to give the result an impressive or learned look in a catalogue, and it is a difficult thing to do without considering each pupil as a special human being by himself,—worthy of some attention on that account,—but it is the one upright, worthy, and beautiful thing a teacher can do. Any easier course he may choose to adopt in an institution of learning (even when it is taken helplessly or thoughtlessly as it generally is) is insincere and spectacular, a despising not only of the pupil but of the college public and of one's self.

If it is true that the right study of literature consists in exercising and opening out the human mind instead of making it a place for cold storage, it is not necessary to call attention to the essential pretentiousness and shoddiness of the average college course in literature. At its best—that is, if the pupils do not do the work, the study of literature in college is a sorry spectacle enough—a kind of huge girls' school with a chaperone taking its park walk. At its worst—that is, when the pupils do do the work, it is a sight that would break a Homer's heart. If it were not for a few inspired and inconsistent teachers blessing particular schools and scholars here and there, doing a little guilty, furtive teaching, whether or no, discovering short-cuts, climbing fences, breaking through the fields, and walking on the grass, the whole modern scheme of elaborate, tireless, endless laboriousness would come to nothing, except the sight of larger piles of paper in the world, perhaps, and rows of dreary, dogged people with degrees lugging them back and forth in it,—one pile of paper to another pile of paper, and a general sense that something is being done.

In the meantime, human life around us, trudging along in its anger, sorrow, or bliss, wonders what this thing is that is being done, and has a vague and troubled respect for it; but it is to be noted that it buys and reads the books (and that it has always bought and read the books) of those who have not done it, and

who are not doing it,—those who, standing in the spectacle of the universe, have been sensitive to it, have had a mighty love in it, or a mighty hate, or a true experience, and who have laughed and cried with it through the hearts of their brothers to the ends of the earth.

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### III

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## The Organs of Literature

The literary problem—the problem of possessing or appreciating or teaching a literary style—resolves itself at last into a pure problem of personality. A pupil is being trained in literature in proportion as his spiritual and physical powers are being brought out by the teacher and played upon until they permeate each other in all that he does and in all that he is—in all phases of his life. Unless what a pupil is glows to the finger tips of his words, he cannot write, and unless what he is makes the words of other men glow when he reads, he cannot read.

In proportion as it is great, literature is addressed to all of a man's body and to all of his soul. It matters nothing how much a man may know about books, unless the pages of them play upon his senses while he reads, he is not physically a cultivated man, a gentleman, or scholar with his body. Unless books play upon all his spiritual and mental sensibilities when he reads he cannot be considered a cultivated man, a gentleman, and a scholar in his soul. It is the essence of all great literature that it makes its direct appeal to sense-perceptions permeated with spiritual suggestion. There is no such thing possible as being a literary authority, a cultured or scholarly man, unless the permeating of the sense-perceptions with spiritual suggestion is a daily and unconscious habit of life. "Every man his own poet" is the underlying assumption of every genuine work of art, and a work of art cannot be taught to a pupil in any other way than by making this same pupil a poet, by getting him to discover himself. Continued and unfaltering disaster is all that can be expected of all methods of literary training that do not recognise this.

To teach a pupil all that can be known about a great poem is to take the poetry out of him, and to make the poem prose to him forever. A pupil cannot even be taught great prose except by making a poet of him, in his attitude toward it, and by so governing the conditions, excitements, duties, and habits of his course of study that he will discover he is a poet in spite of himself. The essence of Walter Pater's essays cannot be taught to a pupil except by making a new creature of him in the presence of the things the essays are about. Unless the conditions of a pupil's course are so governed, in college or otherwise, as to insure and develop the delicate and strong response of all his bodily senses, at the time of his life when nature decrees that his senses must be developed, that the spirit must be waked in them, or not at all, the study of Walter Pater will be in vain.

The physical organisation, the mere bodily state of the pupil, necessary to appreciate either the form or the substance of a bit of writing like *The Child in the House*, is the first thing a true teacher is concerned with. A college graduate whose nostrils have not been trained for years,—steeped in the great, still delights of the ground,—who has not learned the spirit and fragrance of the soil beneath his feet, is not a sufficiently cultivated person to pronounce judgment either upon Walter Pater's style or upon his definition of style.

To be educated in the great literatures of the world is to be trained in the drawing out in one's own body and mind of the physical and mental powers of those who write great literatures. Culture is the feeling of the induced current—the thrill of the lives of the dead—the charging the nerves of the body and powers of the spirit with the genius that has walked the earth before us. In the borrowed glories of the great for one swift and passing page we walk before heaven with them, breathe the long breath of the centuries with them, know the joy of the gods and live. The man of genius is the man who literally gives himself. He makes every man a man of genius for the time being. He exchanges souls with us and for one brief moment we are great, we are beautiful, we are immortal. We are visited with our possible selves. Literature is the transfiguring of the senses in which men are dwelling every day and of the thoughts of the mind in which they are living every day. It is the commingling of one's life in one vast network of sensibility, communion, and eternal comradeship with all the joy and sorrow, taste, odor, and sound, passion of men and love of women and worship of God, that ever has been on the earth, since the watching of the first night above the earth, or since the look of the first morning on it, when it was loved for the first time by a human life.

The artist is recognised as an artist in proportion as the senses of his body drift their glow and splendour over into the creations of his mind. He is an artist because his flesh is informed with the spirit, because in whatever he does he incarnates the spirit in the flesh.

The gentle, stroking delight in this universe that Dr. Holmes took all his days, his contagious gladness in it and approval of it, his impressionableness to its moods—its Oliver-Wendell ones,—who really denies in his soul that this capacity of Dr. Holmes to enjoy, this delicate, ceaseless tasting with sense and spirit of the essence of life, was the very substance of his culture? The books that he wrote and the things that he knew were merely the form of it. His power of expression was the blending of sense and spirit in him, and because his mind was trained into the texture of his body people delighted in his words in form and spirit both.

There is no training in the art of expression or study of those who know how to express, that shall not consist, not in a pupil's knowing wherein the power of a book lies, but in his experiencing the power himself, in his entering the life behind the book and the habit of life that made writing such a book and reading it possible. This habit is the habit of incarnation.

A true and classic book is always the history some human soul has had in its tent of flesh, camped out beneath the stars, groping for the thing they shine to us, trying to find a body for it. In the great wide plain

of wonder there they sing the wonder a little time to us, if we listen. Then they pass on to it. Literature is but the faint echo tangled in thousands of years, of this mighty, lonely singing of theirs, under the Dome of Life, in the presence of the things that books are about. The power to read a great book is the power to glory in these things, and to use that glory every day to do one's living and reading with. Knowing what is in the book may be called learning, but the test of culture always is that it will not be content with knowledge unless it is inward knowledge. Inward knowledge is the knowledge that comes to us from behind the book, from living for weeks with the author until his habits have become our habits, until God Himself, through days and nights and deeds and dreams, has blended our souls together.

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#### IV

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### Entrance Examinations in Joy

If entrance examinations in joy were required at our representative colleges very few of the pupils who are prepared for college in the ordinary way would be admitted. What is more serious than this, the honour-pupils in the colleges themselves at commencement time—those who have submitted most fully to the college requirements—would take a lower stand in a final examination in joy, whether of sense or spirit, than any others in the class. Their education has not consisted in the acquiring of a state of being, a condition of organs, a capacity of tasting life, of creating and sharing the joys and meanings in it. Their learning has largely consisted in the fact that they have learned at last to let their joys go. They have become the most satisfactory of scholars, not because of their power of knowing, but because of their willingness to be powerless in knowing. When they have been drilled to know without joy, have become the day-labourers of learning, they are given diplomas for cheerlessness, and are sent forth into the world as teachers of the young. Almost any morning, in almost any town or city beneath the sun, you can see them, Gentle Reader, with the children, spreading their tired minds and their tired bodies over all the fresh and buoyant knowledge of the earth. Knowledge that has not been throbbled in cannot be throbbled out. The graduates of the colleges for women (in The Association of Collegiate Alumnæ) have seriously discussed the question whether the college course in literature made them nearer or farther from creating literature themselves. The Editor of *Harper's Monthly* has recorded that "the spontaneity and freedom of subjective construction" in certain American authors was only made possible, probably, by their having escaped an early academic training. The *Century Magazine* has been so struck with the fact that hardly a single writer of original power before the public has been a regular college graduate that it has offered special prizes and inducements for any form of creative literature—poem, story, or essay—that a college graduate could write.

If a teacher of literature desires to remove his subject from the uncreative methods he finds in use around him, he can only do so successfully by persuading trustees and college presidents that literature is an art and that it can only be taught through the methods and spirit and conditions that belong to art. If he succeeds in persuading trustees and presidents, he will probably find that faculties are not persuaded, and that, in the typical Germanised institution of learning at least, any work he may choose to do in the spirit and method of joy will be looked upon by the larger part of his fellow teachers as superficial and pleasant. Those who do not feel that it is superficial and pleasant, who grant that working for a state of being is the most profound and worthy and strenuous work a teacher can do,—that it is what education is for,—will feel that it is impracticable. It is thus that it has come to pass in the average institution of learning, that if a teacher does not know what education is, he regards education as superficial, and if he does know what education is, he regards education as impossible.

It is not intended to be dogmatic, but it may be worth while to state from the pupil's point of view and from memory what kind of teacher a college student who is really interested in literature would like to have.

Given a teacher of literature who has *carte blanche* from the other teachers—the authorities around him—and from the trustees—the authorities over him,—what kind of a stand will he find it best to take, if he proposes to give his pupils an actual knowledge of literature?

In the first place, he will stand on the general principle that if a pupil is to have an actual knowledge of literature as literature, he must experience literature as an art.

In the second place, if he is to teach literature to his pupils as an art to be mastered, he will begin his teaching as a master. Instead of his pupils determining that they will elect him, he will elect them. If there is to be any candidating, he will see that the candidating is properly placed; that the privilege at least of the first-class music master, dancing master, and teacher of painting—the choosing of his own pupils—is accorded to him. Inasmuch as the power and value of his class must always depend upon him, he will not allow either the size or the character of his classes to be determined by a catalogue, or by the examinations of other persons, or by the advertising facilities of the college. If actual results are to be achieved in his pupils, it can only be by his governing the conditions of their work and by keeping these conditions at all times in his own hands.

In the third place, he will see that his class is so conducted that out of a hundred who desire to belong to it the best ten only will be able to.

In the fourth place, he will himself not only determine which are the best ten, but he will make this determination on the one basis possible for a teacher of art—the basis of mutual attraction among the pupils. He will take his stand on the spiritual principle that if classes are to be vital classes, it is not enough that the pupils should elect the teacher, but the teacher and pupils must elect each other. The basis of an art is the mutual attraction that exists between things that belong together. The basis for transmitting an art to other persons is the natural attraction that exists between persons that belong together. The more

mutual the attraction is,—complementary or otherwise,—the more condensed and powerful teaching can it be made the conductor of. If a hundred candidates offer themselves, fifty will be rejected because the attraction is not mutual enough to insure swift and permanent results. Out of fifty, forty will be rejected probably for the sake of ten with whom the mutual attraction is so great that great things cannot help being accomplished by it.

The thorough and contagious teacher of literature will hold his power—the power of conveying the current and mood of art to others—as a public trust. He owes it to the institution in which he is placed to refuse to surround himself with non-conductors; and inasmuch as his power—such as it is—is instinctive power, it will be placed where it instinctively counts the most. In proportion as he loves his art and loves his kind and desires to get them on speaking terms with each other, he will devote himself to selected pupils, to those with whom he will throw the least away. His service to others will be to give to these such real, inspired, and reproductive knowledge, that it shall pass on from them to others of its own inherent energy. From the narrower—that is, the less spiritual—point of view, it has seemed perhaps a selfish and aristocratic thing for a teacher to make distinctions in persons in the conduct of his work, but from the point of view of the progress of the world, it is heartless and sentimental to do otherwise; and without exception all of the most successful teachers in all of the arts have been successful quite as much through a kind of dictatorial insight in selecting the pupils they could teach, as in selecting the things they could teach them.

In the fifth place, having determined to choose his pupils himself, the selection will be determined by processes of his own choosing. These processes, whatever form or lack of form they may take, will serve to convey to the teacher the main knowledge he desires. They will be an examination in the capacity of joy in the pupil. Inasmuch as surplus joy in a pupil is the most promising thing he can have, the sole secret of any ability he may ever attain of learning literature, the basis of all discipline, it will be the first thing the teacher takes into account. While it is obvious that an examination in joy could not be conducted in any set fashion, every great joy in the world has its natural diviners and experts, and teachers of literature who know its joy have plenty of ways of divining this joy in others.

In the sixth place, pupils will be dropped and promoted by a teacher, in such a class as has been described, according to the spirit and force and creativeness of their daily work. Promotion will be by elimination—that is, the pupil will stay where he is and the class will be made smaller for him. The superior natural force of each pupil will have full sway in determining his share of the teacher's force. As this force belongs most to those who waste it least, if five tenths of the appreciation in a class belongs to one pupil, five tenths of the teacher belongs to him, and promotion is most truly effected, not by giving the best pupils a new teacher, but by giving them more of the old one. A teacher's work can only be successful in proportion as it is accurately individual and puts each pupil in the place he was made to fit.

In the seventh place, the select class will be selected by the teacher as a baseball captain selects his team: not as being the nine best men, but as being the nine men who most call each other out, and make the

best play together. If the teacher selects his class wisely, the principle of his selection sometimes—from the outside, at least—will seem no principle at all. The class must have its fool, for instance, and pupils must be selected for useful defects as well as for virtues. Belonging to such a class will not be allowed to have a stiff, definite, water-metre meaning in it, with regard to the capacity of a pupil. It will only be known that he is placed in the class for some quality, fault, or inspiration in him that can be brought to bear on the state of being in the class in such a way as to produce results, not only for himself but for all concerned.

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## V

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### Natural Selection in Theory

The conditions just stated as necessary for the vital teaching of literature narrow themselves down, for the most part, to the very simple and common principle of life and art, the principle of natural selection.

As an item in current philosophy the principle of natural selection meets with general acceptance. It is one of those pleasant and instructive doctrines which, when applied to existing institutions, is opposed at once as a sensational, visionary, and revolutionary doctrine.

There are two most powerful objections to the doctrine of natural selection in education. One of these is the scholastic objection and the other is the religious one.

The scholastic objection is that natural selection in education is impracticable. It cannot be made to operate mechanically, or for large numbers, and it interferes with nearly all of the educational machinery for hammering heads in rows, which we have at command at present. Even if the machinery could be stopped and natural selection could be given the place that belongs to it, all success in acting on it would call for hand-made teachers; and hand-made teachers are not being produced when we have nothing but machines to produce them with. The scholastic objection—that natural selection in education is impracticable under existing conditions—is obviously well taken. As it cannot be answered, it had best be taken, perhaps, as a recommendation.

The religious objection to natural selection in education is not that it is impracticable, but that it is wicked. It rests its case on the defence of the weak.

But the question at issue is not whether the weak shall be served and defended or whether they shall not. We all would serve and defend the weak. If a teacher feels that he can serve his inferior pupils best by making his superior pupils inferior too, it is probable that he had better do it, and that he will know how to do it, and that he will know how to do it better than any one else. There are many teachers,

however, who have the instinctive belief, and who act on it so far as they are allowed to, that to take the stand that the inferior pupil must be defended at the expense of the superior pupil is to take a sentimental stand. It is not a stand in favour of the inferior pupil, but against him.

The best way to respect an inferior pupil is to keep him in place. The more he is kept in place, the more his powers will be called upon. If he is in the place above him, he may see much that he would not see otherwise, much at which he will wonder, perhaps; but he deserves to be treated spiritually and thoroughly, to be kept where he will be creative, where his wondering will be to the point, both at once and eventually.

It is a law that holds as good in the life of a teacher of literature as it does in the lives of makers of literature. From the point of view of the world at large, the author who can do anything else has no right to write for the average man. There are plenty of people who cannot help writing for him. Let them do it. It is their right and the world's right that they should be the ones to do it. It is the place that belongs to them, and why should nearly every man we have of the more seeing kind to-day deliberately compete with men who cannot compete with him? The man who abandons the life that belongs to him,—the life that would not exist in the world if he did not live it and keep it existing in the world, and who does it to help his inferiors, does not help his inferiors. He becomes their rival. He crowds them out of their lives. There could not possibly be a more noble, or more exact and spiritual law of progress than this—that every man should take his place in human society and do his work in it with his nearest spiritual neighbours. These nearest spiritual neighbours are a part of the economy of the universe. They are now and always have been the natural conductors over the face of the earth of all actual power in it. It has been through the grouping of the nearest spiritual neighbours around the world that men have unfailingly found the heaven-appointed, world-remoulding teachers of every age.

It does not sound very much like Thomas Jefferson,—and it is to be admitted that there are certain lines in our first great national document which, read on the run at least, may seem to deny it,—but the living spirit of Thomas Jefferson does not teach that amputation is progress, nor does true Democracy admit either the patriotism or the religion of a man who feels that his legs must be cut off to run to the assistance of neighbours whose legs are cut off. An educational Democracy which expects a pupil to be less than himself for the benefit of other pupils is a mock Democracy, and it is the very essence of a Democracy of the truer kind that it expects every man in it to be more than himself. And if a man's religion is of the truer kind, it will not be heard telling him that he owes it to God and the Average Man to be less than himself.

# Natural Selection in Practice

It is not going to be possible very much longer to take it for granted that natural selection is a somewhat absent-minded and heathen habit that God has fallen into in the natural world, and uses in his dealings with men, but that it is not a good enough law for men to use in their dealings with one another.

The main thing that science has done in the last fifty years, in spite of conventional religion and so-called scholarship, has been to bring to pass in men a respect for the natural world. The next thing that is to be brought to pass—also in spite of conventional religion and so-called scholarship—is the self-respect of the natural man and of the instincts of human nature. The self-respect of the natural man, when once he gains it, is a thing that is bound to take care of itself, and take care of the man, and take care of everything that is important to the man.

Inasmuch as, in the long run at least, education, even in times of its not being human, interests humanity more than anything else, a most important consequence of the self-respect of the natural man is going to be an uprising, all over the world, of teachers who believe something. The most important consequence of having teachers who believe something will be a wholesale and uncompromising rearrangement of nearly all our systems and methods of education. Instead of being arranged to cow the teacher with routine, to keep teachers from being human beings, and to keep their pupils from finding it out if they are human beings, they will be arranged on the principle that the whole object of knowledge is the being of a human being, and the only way to know anything worth knowing in the world is to begin by knowing how to be a human being—and by liking it.

Not until our current education is based throughout on expecting great things of human nature instead of secretly despising it, can it truly be called education. Expectancy is the very essence of education. Actions not only speak louder than words, they make words as though they were not; and so long as our teachers confine themselves to saying beautiful and literary things about the instincts of the human heart, and do not trust their own instincts in their daily teaching, and the instincts of their pupils, and do not make this trust the foundation of all their work, the more they educate the more they destroy. The destruction is both ways, and whatever the subjects are they may choose to know, murder and suicide are the branches they teach.

The chief characteristic of the teacher of the future is going to be that he will dare to believe in himself, and that he will divine some one thing to believe in, in everybody else, and that, trusting the laws of human nature, he will go to work on this some one thing, and work out from it to everything. Inasmuch as the chief working principle of human nature is the principle of natural selection, the entire method of the teacher of the future will be based on his faith in natural selection. All such teaching as he attempts to do will be worked out from the temperamental, involuntary, primitive choices of his own being, both in persons and in subject. His power with his classes will be his power of divining the free and unconscious and primitive choices of individual pupils in persons and subjects.

Half of the battle is already won. The principle of natural selection between pupils and subjects is recognised in the elective system, but we have barely commenced to conceive as yet the principle of natural selection in its more important application—mutual attraction between teacher and pupil—natural selection in its deeper and more powerful and spiritual sense: the kind of natural selection that makes the teacher a worker in wonder, and education the handiwork of God.

In most of our great institutions we do not believe in even the theory of this deeper natural selection: and if we do believe in it, sitting in endowed chairs under the Umbrella of Endowed Ideas, how can we act on that belief? And if we do, who will come out and act with us? If it does not seem best for even the single teacher, doing his teaching unattached and quite by himself, to educate in the open,—to trust his own soul and the souls of his pupils to the nature of things, how much less shall the great institution, with its crowds of teachers and its rows of pupils and its Vested Funds be expected to lay itself open—lay its teachers and pupils and its Vested Funds open—to the nature of things? We are suspicious of the nature of things. God has concealed a lie in them. We do not believe. Therefore we cannot teach.

The conclusion is inevitable. As long as we believe in natural selection between pupil and subject, but do not believe in natural selection between pupil and teacher, no great results in education or in teaching a vital relation to books or to anything else will be possible. As long as natural selection between pupil and teacher is secretly regarded as an irreligious and selfish instinct, with which a teacher must have nothing to do, instead of a divine ordinance, a Heaven-appointed starting-point for doing everything, the average routine teacher in the conventional school and college will continue to be the kind of teacher he is, and will continue to belong to what seems to many, at least, the sentimental and superstitious and pessimistic profession he belongs to now. Why should a teacher allow himself to teach without inspiration in the one profession on the earth where, between the love of God and the love of the opening faces, inspiration—one would say—could hardly be missed? Certainly, if it was ever intended that artists should be in the world it was intended that teachers should be artists. And why should we be artisans? If we cannot be artists, if we are not allowed to make our work a self-expression, were it not better to get one's living by the labour of one's hands,—by digging in the wonder of the ground? A stone-crusher, as long as one works one's will with it, makes it say something, is nearer to nature than a college. "I would rather do manual labour with my hands than manual labour with my soul," the true artist is saying to-day, and a great many thousand teachers are saying it, and thousands more who would like to teach. The moment that teaching ceases to be a trade and becomes a profession again, these thousands are going to crowd into it. Until the artist-teachers have been attracted to teaching, things can only continue as they are. Young men and women who are capable of teaching will continue to do all that they can not to get into it; and young men and women who are capable of teaching, and who are still trying to teach, will continue to do all that they can to get out of it. When the schools of America have all been obliged, like the city of Brooklyn, to advertise to secure even poor teachers, we shall begin to see where we stand,—stop our machinery a while and look at it.

The only way out is the return to nature, and to faith in the freedom of nature. Not until the teacher of the young has dared to return to nature, has won the emancipation of his own instincts and the emancipation of the instincts of his pupils, can we expect anything better than we have now of either of them. Not until the modern teacher has come to the point where he deliberately works with his instincts, where he looks upon himself as an artist working in the subject that attracts him most, and in the material that is attracted to him most, can we expect to secure in our crowded conditions to-day enough teaching to go around. The one practical and economical way to make our limited supply of passion and thought cover the ground is to be spiritual and spontaneous and thorough with what we have. The one practical and economical way to do this is to leave things free, to let the natural forces in men's lives find the places that belong to them, develop the powers that belong to them, until power in every man's life shall be contagious of power. In the meantime, having brought out the true and vital energies of men as far as we go, if we are obliged to be specialists in knowledge we shall be specialists of the larger sort. The powers of each man, being actual and genuine powers, shall play into the powers of other men. Each man that essays to live shall create for us a splendour and beauty and strength he was made to create from the beginning of the world.

To those who sit in the seat of the scornful the somewhat lyrical idea of an examination in joy as a basis of admission to the typical college appeals as a fit subject of laughter. So it is. Having admitted the laugh, the question is,—all human life is questioning the college to-day,—which way shall the laugh point?

If the conditions of the typical college do not allow for the working of the laws of nature, so much the worse for the laws of nature, or so much the worse for the college. In the meantime, it is good to record that there are many signs—thanks to these same laws of nature—that a most powerful reaction is setting in, not only in the colleges themselves, but in all the forces of culture outside and around them. The examination in joy—the test of natural selection—is already employed by all celebrated music masters the world over in the choosing of pupils, and by all capable teachers of painting; and the time is not far off when, so far as courses in literature are concerned (if the teaching of literature is attempted in crowded institutions), the examination in joy will be the determining factor with all the best teachers, not only in the conduct of their classes, but in the very structure of them. Structure is the basis of conduct.

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## VII

# The Emancipation of the Teacher

The custom of mowing lawns in cities, of having every grass-blade in every door-yard like every

other grass-blade, is considered by many persons as an artificial custom—a violation of the law of nature. It is contended that the free-swinging, wind-blown grasses of the fields are more beautiful and that they give more various and infinite delight in colour and line and movement. If a piece of this same field, however, could be carefully cut out and moved and fitted to a city door-yard—bobolinks and daisies and shadows and all, precisely as they are—it would not be beautiful. Long grass conforms to a law of nature where nature has room, and short grass conforms to a law of nature where nature has not room.

When, for whatever reason, of whatever importance, men and women choose to be so close together, that it is not fitting they should have freedom, and when they choose to have so little room to live in that development is not fitting lest it should inconvenience others, the penalty follows. When grass-blades are crowded between walls and fences, the more they can be made to look alike the more pleasing they are, and when an acre of ground finds itself covered with a thousand people, or a teacher of culture finds himself mobbed with pupils, the law of nature is the same. Whenever crowding of any kind takes place, whether it be in grass, ideas, or human nature, the most pleasing as well as the most convenient and natural way of producing a beautiful effect is with the Lawn Mower. The dead level is the logic of crowded conditions. The city grades down its hills for the convenience of reducing its sewer problem. It makes its streets into blocks for the convenience of knowing where every home is, and how far it is, by a glance at a page, and, in order that the human beings in it (one set of innumerable nobodies hurrying to another set of innumerable nobodies) may never be made to turn out perchance for an elm on a sidewalk, it cuts down centuries of trees, and then, out of its modern improvements, its map of life, its woods in rows, its wheels on tracks, and its souls in pigeonholes—out of its huge Checker-board under the days and nights—it lifts its eyes to the smoke in heaven, at last, and thanks God it is civilised!

The substantial fact in the case would seem to be that every human being born into the world has a right to be treated as a special creation all by himself. Society can only be said to be truly civilised in proportion as it acts on this fact. It is because in the family each being is treated as one out of six or seven, and in the school as one out of six hundred, that the family (with approximately good parents) comes nearer to being a model school than anything we have.

If we deliberately prefer to live in crowds for the larger part of our lives, we must expect our lives to be cut and fitted accordingly. It is an æsthetic as well as a practical law that this should be so. The law of nature where there is room for a man to be a man is not the law of nature where there is not room for him to be a man. If there is no playground for his individual instincts except the street he must give them up. Inasmuch as natural selection in overcrowded conditions means selecting things by taking them away from others, it can be neither beautiful nor useful to practise it.

People who prefer to be educated in masses must conform to the law of mass, which is inertia, and to the law of the herd, which is the Dog. As long as our prevailing idea of the best elective is the one with the largest class, and the prevailing idea of culture is the degree from the most crowded college, all natural gifts, whether in teachers or pupils, are under a penalty. If we deliberately place ourselves where

everything is done by the gross, as a matter of course and in the nature of things the machine-made man, taught by the machine-made teacher, in a teaching-machine, will continue to be the typical scholar of the modern world; and the gentleman-scholar—the man who made himself, or who gave God a chance to make him—will continue to be what he is now in most of our large teaching communities—an exception.

Culture which has not the power to win the emancipation of its teachers does not produce emancipated and powerful pupils. The essence of culture is selection, and the essence of selection is natural selection, and teachers who have not been educated with natural selection cannot teach with it. Teachers who have given up being individuals in the main activity of their lives, who are not allowed to be individuals in their teaching, do not train pupils to be individuals. Their pupils, instead of being organic human beings, are manufactured ones. Literary drill in college consists in drilling every man to be himself—in giving him the freedom of himself. Probably it would be admitted by most of us who are college graduates that the teachers who loom up in our lives are those whom we remember as emancipated teachers—men who dared to be individuals in their daily work, and who, every time they touched us, helped us to be individuals.

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## VIII

# The Test of Culture

Looking at our great institutions of learning in a general way, one might be inclined to feel that literature cannot be taught in them, because the classes are too large. When one considers, however, the average class in literature, as it actually is, and the things that are being taught in it, it becomes obvious that the larger such a class can be made, and the less the pupil can be made to get out of it, the better.

The best test of a man's knowledge of the Spanish language would be to put him in a balloon and set him down in dark night in the middle of Spain and leave him there with his Spanish words. The best test of a man's knowledge of books is to see what he can do without them on a desert island in the sea. When the ship's library over the blue horizon dwindles at last in its cloud of smoke and he is left without a shred of printed paper by him, the supreme opportunity of education will come to him. He will learn how vital and beautiful, or boastful and empty, his education is. If it is true education, the first step he takes he will find a use for it. The first bird that floats from its tree-top shall be a message from London straight to his soul. If he has truly known them, the spirits of all his books will flock to him. If he has known Shakespeare, the ghost of the great master will rise from beneath its Stratford stone, and walk oceans to be with him. If he knows Homer, Homer is full of Odysseys trooping across the seas. Shall he sit him down on the rocks, lift his voice like a mere librarian, and, like a book-raised, paper-pampered, ink-

hungry babe cry to the surf for a Greek dictionary? The rhythm of the beach is Greece to him, and the singing of the great Greek voice is on the tops of waves around the world.

A man's culture is his knowledge become himself. It is in the seeing of his eyes and the hearing of his ears and the use of his hands. Is there not always the altar of the heavens and the earth? Laying down days and nights of joy before it and of beauty and wonder and peace, the scholar is always a scholar, *i. e.*, he is always at home. To be cultured is to be so splendidly wrought of body and soul as to get the most joy out of the least and the fewest things. Wherever he happens to be,—whatever he happens to be without,—his culture is his being master. He may be naked before the universe, and it may be a pitiless universe or a gracious one, but he is always master, knowing how to live in it, knowing how to hunger and die in it, or, like Stevenson, smiling out of his poor, worn body to it. He is the unconquerable man. Wherever he is in the world, he cannot be old in the presence of the pageant of Life. From behind the fading of his face lie watches it, child after child, spring after spring as it flies before him; he will not grow old while it still passes by. It carries delight across to him to the end. He watches and sings with it to the end, down to the edge of sleep.

A bird's shadow is enough to be happy with, if a man is educated, or the flicker of light on a leaf, and when really a song is being lived in a man, all nature plays its accompaniment. To possess one's own senses, to know how to conduct one's self, is to be the conductor of orchestras in the clouds and in the grass. The trained man is not dependent on having the thing itself. He borrows the boom of the sea to live with, anywhere, and the gladness of continents.

Literary training consists in the acquiring of a state of mind and body to feel the universe with; in becoming an athlete toward beauty, a giver of great lifts of joy to this poor, straining, stumbling world with its immemorial burden on its back, which, going round and round, for the most part with its eyes shut, between infinities, is the hope and sorrow of all of us for the very reason that its eyes are shut.

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## IX

# Summary

The proper conditions for literary drill in college would seem to sum themselves up in the general idea that literature is the spirit of life. It can therefore only be taught through the spirit.

*First.* It can only be taught through the spirit by being taught as an art, through its own nature and activity, reproductively—giving the spirit body. Both the subject-matter and the method in true literary drill can only be based on the study of human experience. The intense study of human experience in a college course may be fairly said to involve three things that must be daily made possible to the pupil in

college life. Everything that is given him to do, and everything that happens to him in college, should cultivate these three things in the pupil: (1) Personality—an intense first person singular, as a centre for having experience; (2) Imagination—the natural organ in the human soul for realising what an experience is and for combining and condensing it; (3) The habit of having time and room, for re-experiencing an experience at will in the imagination, until the experience becomes so powerful and vivid, so fully realises itself in the mind, that the owner of the mind is an artist with his mind. When he puts the experience of his mind down it becomes more real to other men on paper than their own experiences are to them in their own lives.

It is hardly necessary to point out that whatever our conventional courses in literature may be doing, whether in college or anywhere else, they are not bringing out this creative joy and habit of creative joy in the pupils. Those who are interested in literature-courses—such as we have—for the most part do not believe in trying to bring out the creative joy of each pupil. Those who might believe in trying to do it do not believe it can be done. They do not believe it can be done because they do not realise that in the case of each and every pupil—so far as he goes—it is the only thing worth doing. They fail to see from behind their commentaries and from out of their footnotes, the fact that the one object in studying literature is joy, that the one way of studying and knowing literature is joy, and that the one way to attain joy is to draw out creative joy.

*Second.* And if literature is to be taught as an art it must be taught as a way of life. As long as literature and life continue to be conceived and taught as being separate things, there can be no wide and beautiful hope for either of them. The organs of literature are precisely the same organs and they are trained on precisely the same principles as the organs of life.

Except an education in books can bring to pass the right condition of these organs, a state of being in the pupil, his knowledge of no matter how long a list of masterpieces is but a catalogue of the names of things for ever left out of his life. It is little wonder, when the drudgery has done its work and the sorry show is over, and the victim of the System is face to face with his empty soul at last, if in his earlier years at least he seems overfond to some of us of receiving medals, honours, and valedictories for what he might have been and of flourishing a Degree for what he has missed.

There was once a Master of Arts,  
Who was “nuts” upon cranberry tarts:  
    When he’d eaten his fill  
    He was awfully ill,  
But he was still a Master of Arts.

The power and habit of studying and enjoying human nature as it lives around us, is not only a more human and alive occupation, but it is a more literary one than becoming another editor of Æschylus or going down to posterity in footnotes as one of the most prominent bores that Shakespeare ever had. If a

teacher of literature enjoys being the editor of Æschylus, or if he is happier in appearing on a title-page with a poet than he could possibly be in being a poet, it is personally well enough, though it may be a disaster to the rest of us and to Æschylus. Men who can be said as a class to care more about literature than they do about life, who prefer the paper side of things to the real one, are at liberty as private persons to be editors and footnote hunters to the top of their bent; but why should they call it “The Study of Literature,” to teach their pupils to be footnote hunters and editors? and how can they possibly teach anything else? and do they teach anything else? And if good teachers can only teach what they have, what shall we expect of poor ones?

In the meantime the Manufacture of the Cultured Mind is going ruthlessly on, and thousands of young men and women who, left alone with the masters of literature, might be engaged in accumulating and multiplying inspiration, are engaged in analysing—dividing what inspiration they have; and, in the one natural, creative period of their lives, their time is entirely spent in learning how inspired work was done, or how it might have been done, or how it should have been done; in absorbing everything about it except its spirit—the power that did it—the power that makes being told how to do it uncalled for, the power that asks and answers its “Hows?” for itself. The serene powerlessness of it all, without courage or passion or conviction, without self-discovery in it, or self-forgetfulness or beauty in it, or for one moment the great contagion of the great, is one of the saddest sights in this modern day.

In the meantime the most practical thing that can be done with the matter of literary drill in college is to turn the eye of the public on it. Methods will change when ideals change, and ideals will change when the public clearly sees ideals, and when the public encourages colleges that see them. The time is not far off when it will be admitted by all concerned that the true study of masterpieces consists, and always must consist, in communing with the things that masterpieces are about, in the learning and applying of the principles of human nature, in a passion for real persons, and in a daily loving of the face of the universe.

This idea may not be considered very practical. It stands for a kind of education in which it is difficult to exhibit in rows actual results. We are not contending for an education that looks practical. We are contending merely for education that will be true and beautiful and natural. It will be practical the way the forces of nature are practical—whether any one notices it or not.

The following announcement can already be seen on the bulletin boards of universities around the world—if looked for twice).

THEY ARE COMING! O Shades of Learning, THE LOVERS OF JOY, IMPERIOUS WITH JOY, UNCONQUERABLE!  
Their Sails are Flocking the East.  
The High Seas are Theirs.

They shall command you, overwhelm you. Book-lubbers, paper-plodders, shall be as though they were not. The youth of the earth shall be renewed in the morning, the suns and the stars shall be unlocked, and the evening shall go forth with joy. The mountains shall be freed from the pick and the shovel and the book, and lift themselves to heaven. Flowers shall again outblossom botanies, and gymnasts of music

shall be laid low, and Birds Through An Opera Glass shall sing. Joy shall come to knowledge, and the strength of Joy upon it. THEY ARE COMING, O Ye Shades of Learning, a thousand thousand strong. Their sails flock the Sea. The smoke and the throb of their engines is the promise of the east. The days of thirteen-thousand-ton, three-horse-power education are numbered.

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## X

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### A Note

It is one of the danger signs of the times that the men who have most closely observed our modern life, in its social, industrial, artistic, educational, and religious aspects seem to be gradually coming to the point where they all but take it for granted in considering all social, industrial, and educational and political questions, that the conditions of modern times are such, and are going to be such that imagination and personality might as well be dropped as practical forces—forces that must be reckoned with in the movement of human life. Nearly all the old-time outlooks of the Soul, as they stand in history, have been taken for factory sites, bought up by syndicates, moral and otherwise, and are being used for chimneys. Nothing but smoke and steel and wooden Things come out of them. Poets and brokers are both telling us on every hand that imagination is impossible and personality incredible in modern life.

Imagination and personality are the spirit and the dust out of which all great nations and all great religions are made.

The attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to point out that they are not dead. The Altar smoulders.

In pointing out how imagination and personality can be wrought into one single branch of a man's education—his relation to books—principles may have been suggested which can be concretely applied by all of us, each in our own department, to the education of the whole man.



## The Seventh Interference: Libraries. Wanted: An Old-Fashioned Librarian

I

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viz.

I NEVER shall quite forget the time when the rumour was started in our town that old Mr. M——, our librarian—a gentle, furtive, silent man—a man who (with the single exception of a long white beard) was all screwed up and bent around with learning, who was always slipping invisibly in and out of his high shelves, and who looked as if his whole life had been nothing but a kind of long, perpetual salaam to books—had been caught dancing one day with his wife.

“Which only goes to show,” broke in The M. P., “what a man of fixed literary habits—mere book-habits—if he keeps on, is reduced to.”

But as I was about to remark, for a good many weeks afterward—after the rumour was started—one kept seeing people (I was one of them) as they came into the library, looking shyly at Mr. M——, as if

they were looking at him all over again. They looked at him as if they had really never quite noticed him before. He sat at his desk, quiet and busy, and bent over, with his fine-pointed pen and his labels, as usual, and his big leather-bound catalogue of the universe.

A few of us had had reason to suspect—at least we had had hopes—that the pedantry in Mr. M—— was somewhat superimposed, that he had possibilities, human and otherwise, but none of us, it must be confessed, had been able to surmise quite accurately just where they would break out. We were filled with a gentle spreading joy with the very thought of it, a sense of having acquired a secret possession in a librarian. The community at large, however, as it walked into its library, looked at its Acre of Books, and then looked at its librarian; felt cheated. It was shocked. The community had always been proud of its books, proud of its Book Worm. It had always paid a big salary to it. And the Worm had turned.

I have only been back to the old town twice since the day I left it, as a boy—about this time. The first time I went he was there. I came across him in his big, splendid new library, his face like some live, but wrinkled old parchment, twinkling and human though—looking out from its Dust Heap. “It seems to me,” I thought, as I stood in the doorway,—saw him edging around an alcove in The Syriac Department,—“that if one must have a great dreary heaped-up pile of books in a town—anyway—the spectacle of a man like this, flitting around in it, doting on them, is what one ought to have to go with it.” He always seemed to me a kind of responsive every-way-at-once little man, book-alive all through. One never missed it with him. He had the literary nerves of ten dead nations tingling in him.

The next time I was in town they said he had resigned. They said he lived in the little grey house around the corner from the great new glaring stone library. No one ever saw him except in one of his long, hesitating walks, or sometimes, perhaps, by the little study window, pouring himself over into a book there. It was there that I saw him myself that last morning—older and closer to the light turning leaves—the same still, swift eagerness about him.

I stepped into the library next door and saw the new librarian—an efficient person. He seemed to know what time it was while we stood and chatted together. That is the main impression one had of him—that he would always know what time it was. Put him anywhere. One felt it.

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## II

cf.

Our new librarian troubles me a good deal. I have not quite made out why. Perhaps it is because he has a kind of chipper air with the books. I am always coming across him in the shelves, but I do not seem to get used to him. Of course I pull myself together, bow and say things, make it a point to assume he is

literary, go through the form of not letting him know what I think as well as may be, but we do not get on.

And yet all the time down underneath I know perfectly well that there is no real reason why I should find fault with him. The only thing that seems to be the matter with him is that he keeps right on, every time I see him, making me try to.

I have had occasion to notice that, as a general rule, when I find myself finding fault with a man in this fashion—this vague, eager fashion—the gist of it is that I merely want him to be some one else. But in this case—well, he is some one else. He is almost anybody else. He might be a head salesman in a department store, or a hotel clerk, or a train dispatcher, or a broker, or a treasurer of something. There are thousands of things he might be—ought to be—except our librarian. He has an odd, displaced look behind the great desk. He looks as if he had gotten in by mistake and was trying to make the most of it. He has a business-like, worldly-minded, foreign air about him—a kind of off-hand, pert, familiar way with books. He does not know how to bend over—like a librarian—and when one comes on him in an alcove, the way one ought to come on a librarian, with a great folio on his knees, he is—well, there are those who think, that have seen it, that he is positively comic. I followed him around only the other day for fifteen or twenty minutes, from one alcove to another, and watched him taking down books. He does not even know how to take down a book. He takes all the books down alike—the same pleasant, dapper, capable manner, the same peek and clap for all of them. He always seems to have the same indefatigable unconsciousness about him, going up and down his long aisles, no more idea of what he is about or of what the books are about; everything about him seems disconnected with a library. I find I cannot get myself to notice him as a librarian or comrade, or book-mind. He does not seem to have noticed himself in this capacity—exactly. So far as I can get at his mind at all, he seems to have decided that his mind (any librarian's mind) is a kind of pneumatic-tube, or carrier system—apparently—for shoving immortals at people. Any higher or more thorough use for a mind, such as being a kind of spirit of the books for people, making a kind of spiritual connection with them down underneath, does not seem to have occurred to him.

Time was when librarians really had something to do with books. They looked it. One could almost tell a librarian on the street—tell him at sight, if he had been one long enough. One could feel a library in a man somehow. It struck in. Librarians were allowed to be persons. It was expected of them. They have not always been what so many of them are now—mere couplings, conveniences, connecting-rods, literary-beltings. They were identified—wrought in with books. They could not be unmixed. They ate books; and, like the little green caterpillars that eat green grass, the colour showed through. A sort of general brown, faded colour, a little undusted around the edges, was the proper colour for librarians.

It is true that people did not expect librarians to look quite human—at least on the outside, sometimes, and doubtless the whole matter was carried too far. But it does seem to me it is some comfort (if one has to have a librarian in a library) to have one that goes with the books—same colour, tone, feeling, spirit, and everything—the kind of librarian that slips in and out among books without being noticed there, one way or the other, like the overtone in a symphony.

et al.

But the trouble with our library is not merely the new librarian, who permeates, penetrates, and ramifies the whole library within and without, percolating efficiency into its farthest and loneliest alcoves. Our new librarian has a corps of assistants. And even if you manage, by slipping around a little, to get over to where a book is, alone, and get settled down with it, there is always some one who is, has been, or will be looking over your shoulder.

I dare say it's a defect of temperament—this having one's shoulder looked over in libraries. Other people do not seem to be troubled much, and I suppose I ought to admit, while I am about it, that having one's shoulder looked over in a library does not in the least depend upon any one's actually looking over it. That is merely a matter of form. It is a little hard to express it. What one feels—at least in our library—is that one is in a kind of side-looking place. One feels a kind of literary detective system going silently on in and out all around one, a polite, absent-minded-looking watchfulness.

Now I am not for one moment flattering myself that I can make my fault-finding with our librarian's assistants amount to much—fill out a blank with it.

No one can feel more strongly than I do my failure to put my finger on the letter of our librarian's faults. I cannot even tell the difference between the faults and the virtues of our librarian's assistants. Either by doing the right thing with the wrong spirit, or the wrong thing with the right spirit they do their faults and virtues all up together. Their indefatigable unobtrusiveness, their kindly, faithful service I both dread and appreciate. I have tried my utmost to notice and emphasise every day the pleasant things about them, but I always get tangled up. I have started out to think with approval, for instance, of the hush,—the hush that clothes them as a garment,—but it has all ended in my merely wondering where they got it and what they thought they were doing with it. One would think that a hush—a hush of almost any kind—could hardly help—but I have said enough. I do not want to seem censorious, but if ever there was a visible, unctuous, tangible, actual thick silence, a silence that can be proved, if ever there was a silence that stood up and flourished and swung its hat, that silence is in our library. The way our librarian's assistants go tiptoeing and reverberating around the room—well—it's one of those things that follow a man always, follow his inmost being all his life. It gets in with the books—after a few years or so. One can feel the tiptoeing going on in a book—one of our library books—when one gets home with it. It is the spirit of the place. Everything that comes out of it is followed and tiptoed around by our librarian's assistants' silence. They are followed about by it themselves. The thick little blonde one, with the high yellow hair, lives in our ward. One feels a kind of hush rimming her around, when one meets her on the street.

Now I do not wish to claim that librarians' assistants can possibly be blamed, in so many words,

either for this, or for any of the other things that seem to make them (in our library, at least) more prominent than the books. Everything in a library seems to depend upon something in it that cannot be put into words. It seems to be a kind of spirit. If the spirit is the wrong spirit, not all the librarians in the world, not even the books themselves can do anything about it.

Postscript. I do hope that no one will suppose from this chapter that I am finding fault or think I am finding fault with our assistant librarians. I am merely finding fault with them (may Heaven forgive them!) because I cannot. It doesn't seem to make very much difference—their doing certain things or not doing them. They either do them or they don't do them—whichever it is—with the same spirit. They are not really down in their hearts true to the books. One can hardly help feeling vaguely, persistently resentful over having them about presiding over the past. One never catches them—at least I never do—forgetting themselves. One never comes on one loving a book. They seem to be servants,—most of them,—book chambermaids. They do not care anything about a library as a library. They just seem to be going around remembering rules in it.

#### IV

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etc.

The P. G. S. of M. as good as said the other day, when I had been trying as well as I could to express something of this kind, that the real trouble with the modern library was not with the modern library, but with me. He thought I tried to carry too many likes and dislikes around with me, that I was too sensitive. He seemed to think that I should learn to be callous in places of public resort.

I said I had no very violent dislikes to deal with. The only thing I could think of that was the matter with me in a library was that I had a passion for books. I didn't like climbing over a barricade of catalogues to get to books. I hated to feel partitioned off from them, to stand and watch rows of people marking things between me and books. I thought that things had come to a pretty pass, if a man could not so much as touch elbows with a poet nowadays—with Plato, for instance—without carrying a redoubt of terrible beautiful young ladies. I said I thought a great many other people felt the way I did. I admitted there were other sides to it, but there were times, I said, when it almost seemed to me that this spontaneous uprising in our country—this movement of the Book Lovers, for instance—was simply a struggle on the part of the people to get away from Mr. Carnegie's libraries. They are hemming literature and human nature in, on every side, or they are going to unless Mr. Carnegie can buy up occasional old-

fashioned librarians—some other kind than are turned out in steel works—to put into them. Libraries are getting to be huge Separators. Books that have been put through libraries are separated from themselves. They are depersonalised—the human nature all taken off. And yet when one thinks of it, with nine people out of ten—the best people and the worst both—the sense of having a personal relation to a book, the sense of snuggling up with one's own little life to a book, is what books are for.

“To a man,” I said, “to whom books are people, and the liveliest kind of people, brothers of his own flesh, cronies of his life, the whole business of getting a book in a library is full of resentment and rebellion. He finds his rights, or what he thinks are his rights, being treated as privileges, his most sacred and confidential relations, his relations with the great, meddled with by strangers—pleasant enough strangers, but still strangers. Perhaps he wishes to see John Milton. He goes down town to a great unhomelike-looking building, and slides in at the door. He steps up to a wall, and asks permission to see John Milton. He waits in a kind of vague, unsatisfied fashion, but he feels that machinery is being set in motion. While it is being set in motion, he sits down before the wall on one of the seats or pews where a large audience of other comfortless and lonely-looking people are. He feels the great, heartless building gathering itself together, going after John Milton for him, while he sits and waits. One after the other he hears human beings' names being called out in space, and one by one poor scared-looking people who seem to be ashamed to go with their names—most of them—step up before the audience. He sees a book being swung out to them, watches them slink gratefully away, and finally his own name echoing about among the Immortals, startles its way down to him. Then he steps up to the wall again, and John Milton at last, as on some huge transcendental derrick belonging to the city of —, is swung into his arms. He feels of the outside gropingly—takes it home. If he can get John Milton to come to life again after all this, he communes with him. In two weeks he takes him back. Then the derrick again.”

The only kind of book that I ever feel close to, in the average library, is a book on war. Even if I go in, in a gentle, harmless, happy, singing sort of way, thinking I want a volume of pastoral poems, by the time I get it, I wish it were something that could be loaded, or that would go off. As for asking for a book and reading it in cold blood right in the middle of such a place, it will always be beyond me. I have never found a book I could do it with yet. However I struggle to follow the train of thought in it, it's a fuse. I find myself breaking out, when I see all these far-away-looking people coming up in rows to their faraway books. “A library,” I say to myself, “is a huge barbaric, mediæval institution, where behind stone and glass a man's dearest friends in the world, the familiars of his life, lie helpless in their cells. It is the Penitentiary of Immortals. There are certain visiting days when friends and relatives are allowed to come, but it only—” At this point a gong sounds and tells me to go home. “Are not books bone of a man's bone, and flesh of his flesh? Oughtn't they to be? Shall a man ask permission to see his wife? Why should I fill out a slip to a pretty girl, when I want to be in Greece with Homer, or go to hell with Dante? Why should I write on a piece of paper, ‘I promise to return—infinity—by six o'clock’? A library is a huge machine for keeping the letter with books and violating their spirit. The fact that the machinery is filled with a mirage

of pleasant faces does not help. Pleasant faces make machinery worse—if they are a part of it. They make one expect something better.”

The P. G. S. of M. wished me to understand at this point that I was not made right, that I was incapable, helpless in a library, that I did not seem to know what to do unless I could have a simple, natural, or country relation to books.

“It doesn’t follow,” he said, “because you are bashful in a library, cannot get your mind to work there, with other people around, that the other people oughtn’t to be around. There are a great many ways of using a library, and the more people there are crowded in with the books there, other things being equal, the better. It’s what a library is for,” he said, and a great deal more to the same effect.

I listened a while and told him that I supposed he was right. I supposed I had naturally a kind of wild mind. I allowed that the more a library in a general way took after a piece of woods, the more I enjoyed it. I did not attempt to deny that a library was made for the people, but I did think there ought to be places in libraries—all libraries—where wild ones, like me, could go. There ought to be in every library some uncultivated, uncatalogued, unlibrarianed tract where a man with a skittish or country mind will have a chance, where a man who likes to be alone with books—with books just as books—will be permitted to browse, unnoticed, bars all down, and frisk with his mind and roll himself, without turning over all of a sudden only to find a librarian’s assistant standing there wondering at him, looking down to the bottom of his soul.

I am not in the least denying that librarians are well enough,—that is, might be well enough,—but as things are going to-day, they all seem to contribute, somehow, toward making a library a conscious and stilted place. They hold one up to the surface of things, with books. They make impossible to a man those freedoms of the spirit—those best times of all in a library, when one feels free to find one’s mood, when one gets hold of one’s divining-rod, opens down into a book, discovers a new, unconscious, subterranean self there.

The P. G. S. of M. broke in at this point and said this was all subjective folderol on my part—that I had better drop it—a kind of habit I had gotten into lately, of splitting the hairs of my emotions—or something to that effect. He went on at some length and took the general ground before he was through, that absolutely everything in modern libraries depended on the librarians. Librarians—I should judge—in a modern library were what books were for. He said that the more intelligent people were nowadays the more they enjoyed librarians—knew how to use them—doted on them, etc., *ad infinitum*.

“The kind of people one sees at operas,” I interrupted, “listening with librettos, the kind of people who puff up mountains to see views and extract geography from them, the people one meets in the fields, nowadays, flower in one hand, botany in the other, the kind of people who have to have charts to enjoy stars with—these are the people who want librarians between them and their books. The more librarians they can get standing in a row between them and a masterpiece the more they feel they are appreciating it, the more card catalogues, gazetteers, dictionaries, derricks, and other machinery they can have pulling and

hauling above their heads in a library the more literary they feel in it. They feel culture—somehow—stirring around them. They are not exactly sure what culture is, but they feel that a great deal of it—whatever it is—is being poured over into them.”

But I must begin to bring these wanderings about libraries to a close. It can do no harm to remark, perhaps, that I am not maintaining—do not wish to maintain (I could not if I dared) that the modern librarian with all his faults is not useful at times. As a sort of pianola or æolian attachment for a library, as a mechanical contrivance for making a comparatively ignorant man draw perfectly enormous harmonies out of it (which he does not care anything about), a modern librarian helps. All that I am maintaining is, that I am not this comparatively ignorant man. I am another one. I am merely saying that the pianola way of dealing with ignorance, in my own case, up to the present at least, does not grow on me.

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## V

## O

I suppose that the Boston Public Library would say—if it said anything—that I had a mere Old Athenæum kind of a mind. I am obliged to confess that I dote on the Old Athenæum. It protects one’s optimism. One is made to feel there—let right down in the midst of civilisation, within a stone’s throw of the State House—that it is barely possible to keep civilisation off. One feels it rolling itself along, heaping itself up out on Tremont Street and the Common (the very trees cannot live in it), but one is out of reach. When one has to live in civilisation, as most of us do, nearly all of one’s time every day in the week, it means a great deal. I can hardly say how much it means to me, in the daily struggle with it, to be able to dodge behind the Athenæum, to be able to go in and sit down there, if only for a minute, to be behind glass, as it were, to hear great, hungry Tremont Street chewing men up, hundreds of trainloads at a time, into wood-pulp, smoothing them out into nobody or everybody; it makes one feel, while it is not as it ought to be, as if, after all, there might be some way out, as if some provision had been made in this world, or might be made, for letting human beings live on it.

The general sense of unsensitiveness in a modern library, of hurry and rush and efficiency, above all, the kind of moral smugness one feels there, the book-self-consciousness, the unprotected, public-street feeling one has—all these things are very grave and important obstacles which our great librarians, with their great systems—most of them—have yet to reckon with. A little more mustiness, gentlemen, please, silence, slowness, solitude with books, as if they were woods, unattainableness (and oh, will any one understand it?), a little inconvenience, a little old-fashioned, happy inconvenience; a chance to gloat and take pains and love things with difficulties, a chance to go around the corners of one’s knowledge, to

make modest discoveries all by one's self. It is no small thing to go about a library having books happen to one, to feel one's self sitting down with a book—one's own private Providence—turning the pages of events.

One cannot help feeling that if a part of the money that is being spent carnegieing nowadays, that is, in arranging for a great many books and a great many people to pile up order among a great many books, could be spent in providing hundreds of thousands of small libraries, or small places in large ones, where men who would like to do it would feel safe to creep in sometimes and open their souls—nobody looking—it would be no more than fair.

Postscript. One has to be so much of one's time helpless before a librarian in this world, one has to put him on his honour as a gentleman so much, to expose such vast, incredible tracts of ignorance to him, that I know only too well that I, of all men, cannot afford, in these pages or anywhere else, to say anything that will permanently offend librarians. I do hope I have not. It is only through knowing so many good ones that I know enough to criticise the rest. If I am right, it is because I am their spokesman. If I am wrong, I am not a well-informed person, and I do not count anywhere in particular on anything. The best way, I suspect, for a librarian to deal with me is not to try to classify me. I ought to be put out of the way on this subject, tucked back into any general pigeon-hole of odds and ends of temperament. If I had not felt that I could be cheerfully sorted out at the end of this page, filed away by everybody,—almost anybody,—as not making very much difference, I would not have spoken so freely. There is not a librarian who has read as far as this, in this book, who, though he may have had moments of being troubled in it, will not be able to dispose of me with a kind of grateful, relieved certainty. However that may be, I can only beg you, Oh, librarians, and all ye kindly learned ones, to be generous with me, wherever you put me. I leave my poor, naked, shivering, miscellaneous soul in your hands.



## Book II

# Possibilities



### I

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## The Issue

I dreamed I lived in a day when men dared have visions. I lay in a great white Silence as one who waited for something.

And as I lay and waited, the Silence groped toward me and I felt it gathering nearer and nearer about me.

Then it folded me to Itself.

I made Time my bedside.

And it seemed to me, when I had rested my soul with years, and when I had found Space and had stretched myself upon it, I awoke.

I lay in a great white empty place, and the whole world like solemn music came to me.

And I looked, and behold in the shadow of the earth, which came and went, I saw Human Lives being tossed about. On the solemn rhythmic music, back and forth, I saw them lifted across Silence.

And I said to my Spirit, “What is it they are doing?”

“They are living,” the Spirit said.

So they floated before me while The Great Shadow came and went.

. . . . .

“O my Soul, hast thou forgotten thy days in the world, when thou didst watch the processional of it, when the faces—day-lighted, night-lighted, faces—trooped before thee, and thou didst look upon them and delight in them? What didst thou see in the world?”

“I saw Two Immeasurable Hands in it,” said my Soul, “over every man. I saw that the man did not see the Hands. I saw that they reached out of infinity for him down through the days and the nights. And whether he slept or prayed or wrought, I saw that they still reached out for him, and folded themselves about him.”

And I asked God what The Hands were.

“The man calls them Heredity and Environment,” God said.

And God laughed.

Words came from far for me and waited in tumult within me. But my mouth was filled with silence.

. . . . .

I know that I do not know the world, but out of my little corner of time and space I have watched in it,—watched men and truths struggling in it, and in the struggle it has seemed to me I have seen three kinds of men. I have seen the man who feels that he is being made, and the man who feels that he is making himself. But I have seen also another kind of man—the man who feels that the Universe is at work on him, but (within limits) under his own supervision.

I have made a compact in my soul with this man, for a new world. He is not willing to be a mere manufactured man—one more being turned out from The Factory of Circumstance—neither does he think very much of the man who makes himself—who could make himself. If he were to try such a thing—try to make a man himself, he would really rather try it, if the truth must be told, on some one else.

As near as he can define it, life seems to be (to the normal or inspired man) a kind of alternate grasping and being grasped. Sometimes he feels his destiny tossed between the Two Immeasurable Hands. Sometimes he feels that they have paused—that the Immeasurable Hands have been lent to him, that the toss of destiny is made his own.

He watches these two great forces playing under heaven, before his eyes, with his immortal life, every day. His soul takes these powers of heaven, as the mariner takes the winds of the sea. He tacks to destiny. He takes the same attitude toward the laws of heredity and environment that the Creator took when He made them. He takes it for granted that a God who made these laws as conveniences for Himself, in running a Universe, must have intended them for men as conveniences in living in it. In proportion as men have been like God they have treated these laws as He does—as conveniences. Thousands of men are doing it to-day. Men did it for thousands of years before they knew what the laws were, when they merely followed their instincts with them. In a man's answer to the question, How can I make a convenience of the law of heredity and environment?—education before being born and education after being born—will be found to lie always the secret glory or the secret shame of his life.

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## II

### The First Selection

If the souls of the unborn could go about reconnoitering the earth a little before they settled on it, selecting the parents they would have, the places where it pleased them to be born, nine out of ten of them (judging from the way they conduct themselves in the flesh) would spend nearly all their time in looking for the best house and street to be born in, the best things to be born to. Such a little matter as selecting the right parents would be left, probably, to the last moment, or they would expect it to be thrown in.

We are all of us more or less aware, especially as we advance in life, that overlooking the importance of parents is a mistake. There have been times in the lives of some of us when having parents at all seemed a mistake. We can remember hours when we were sure we had the wrong ones. After our first disappointment,—that is, when we have learned how unmanageable parents are,—we have our time—most of us—of making comparisons, of trying other people's parents on. This cannot be said to work very well, taken as a whole, and it is generally admitted that people who are most serious about it, who take unto themselves fathers- and mothers-in-law seldom do any better than at first. The conclusion of the whole matter would seem to be: Since a man cannot select his parents and his parents cannot select him, he must select himself. That is what books are for.

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## III

# Conveniences

It is the first importance of a true book that a man can select his neighbours with it,—can overcome space, riches, poverty, and time with it,—and the grave, and break bread with the dead. A book is a portable miracle. It makes a man's native place all over for him, for a dollar and a quarter; and many a man in this somewhat hard and despairing world has been furnished with a new heaven and a new earth for twenty-five cents. Out of a public library he has felt reached down to him the grasp of heroes. Hurrying home in the night, perhaps, with his tiny life hid under stars, but with a Book under his arm, he has felt a Greeting against his breast and held it tight. "Who art thou, my lad?" it said; "who art thou?" And the saying was not forgotten. If it is true that the spirits of the mighty dead are abroad in the night they are turning the leaves of books.

There are other inspiring things in the world, but there is nothing else that carries itself among the sons of men like the book. With such divine plenteousness—seeds of the worlds in it—it goes about flocking on the souls of men. There is something so broadcast, so universal about the way of a book with a man: boundless, subtle, ceaseless, irresistible, following him and loving him, renewing him, delighting in him and hoping for him—like a god. It is as the way of Nature herself with a man. One cannot always feel it, but somehow, when I am really living a real day, I feel as if some Great Book were around me—were always around me. I feel myself all-enfolded, penetrated, surrounded with it—the vast, gentle force of it—sky and earth of it. It is as if I saw it, sometimes, building new boundaries for me, out there—softly, gently, on the edges of the night—for me and for all human life.

Other inspiring things seem to be less steadfast for us. They cannot always free themselves and then come and free us. Music cannot be depended upon. It sings sometimes for and sometimes against us. Sometimes, also, music is still—absolutely still, all the way down from the stars to the grass. At best it is for some people and for others not, and is addicted to places. It is a part of the air—part of the climate in Germany, but there is but one country in the world made for listening in—where any one, every one listens, the way one breathes. The great pictures inspire, on the whole, but few people—most of them with tickets. Cathedrals cannot be unmoored, have never been seen by the majority of men at all, except in dreams and photographs. Most mountains (for all practical purposes) are private property. The sea (a look at the middle of it) is controlled by two or three syndicates. The sky—the last stronghold of freedom—is rented out for the most part, where most men live—in cities; and in New York and London the people who can afford it pay taxes for air, and grass is a dollar a blade. Being born is the only really free thing—and dying. Next to these in any just estimate of the comparatively free raw material that goes to the making of a human life comes the printed book.

A library, on the whole, is the purest and most perfect form of power that exists, because it is a lever on the nature of things. If a man is born with the wrong neighbours it brings the right ones flocking to him. It is the universe to order. It makes the world like a globe in a child's hands. He turns up the part where he

chooses to live—now one way and now another, that he may delight in it and live in it. If he is a poet it is the meaning of life to him that he can keep on turning it until he has delighted and tasted and lived in all of it.

The second importance of true books is that they are not satisfied with the first. They are not satisfied to be used to influence a man from the outside—as a kind of house-furnishing for his soul. A true book is never a mere contrivance for arranging the right bit of sky for a man to live his life under, or the right neighbours for him to live his life with. It goes deeper than this. A mere playing upon a man's environment does not seem to satisfy a true book. It plays upon the latent infinity in the man himself. The majority of men are not merely conceived in sin and born in lies, but they are the lies; and lies as well as truths flow in their veins. Lies hold their souls back thousands of years. When one considers the actual facts about most men, the law of environment seems a clumsy and superficial law enough. If all that a book can do is to appeal to the law of environment for a man, it does not do very much. The very trees and stones do better for him, and the little birds in their nests. No possible amount of environment crowded on their frail souls would ever make it possible for most men to catch up—to overtake enough truth before they die to make their seventy years worth while. The majority of men (one hardly dares to deny) can be seen, sooner or later, drifting down to death either bitterly or indifferently. The shadows of their lives haunt us a little, then they vanish away from us and from the sound of our voices. Oh, God, from behind Thy high heaven—from out of Thy infinite wealth of years, hast Thou but the one same pittance of threescore and ten for every man? Some of us are born with the handicap of a thousand years woven in the nerves of our bodies, the swiftness of our minds, and the delights of our limbs. Others of us are born with the thousand years binding us down to blindness and hobbling, holding us back to disease, but all with the same Imperious Timepiece held above us, to run the same race, to overtake the same truth—before the iron curtain and the dark. Some of us—a few men in every generation—have two or three hundred years given to us outright the day we are born. Then we are given seventy more. Others of us have two hundred years taken away from us the day we are born. Then we are given seventy years to make them up in, and it is called life.

If we are to shut ourselves up with one law, either the law of environment or the law of heredity, it is obvious that the best a logical man could do, would be to be ashamed of a universe like this and creep out of it as soon as he could. The great glory of a great book is, that it will not let itself be limited to the law of environment in dealing with a man. It deals directly with the man himself. It appeals to the law of heredity. It reaches down into the infinite depth of his life. If a man has started a life with parents he had better not have (for all practical purposes), it furnishes him with better ones. It picks and chooses in behalf of his life out of his very grandfathers, for him. It not only supplies him with a new set of neighbours as often as he wants them. It sees that he is born again every morning on the wide earth and that he has a new set of parents to be born to. It is a part of the infinite and irrepressible hopefulness of this mortal life that each man of us who dwells on the earth is the child of an infinite marriage. We are all equipped, even the poorest of us, from the day we begin, with an infinite number of fathers and an infinite

number of mothers—no telling, as we travel down the years, which shall happen to us next. If what we call heredity were a matter of a few months,—a narrow, pitiful, two-parent affair,—if the fate of a human being could be shut in with what one man and one woman, playing and working, eating and drinking, under heaven, for a score of years or more, would be likely to have to give him from out of their very selves, heredity would certainly be a whimsical, unjust, undignified law to come into a world by, to don an immortal soul with. A man who has had his life so recklessly begun for him could hardly be blamed for being reckless with it afterward. But it is not true that the principle of heredity in a human life can be confined to a single accident in it. We are all infinite, and our very accidents are infinite. In the very flesh and bones of our bodies we are infinite—brought from the furthest reaches of eternity and the utmost bounds of created life to be ourselves. If we were to do nothing else for threescore years, it is not in our human breath to recite our fathers' names upon our lips. Each of us is the child of an infinite mother, and from her breast, veiled in a thousand years, we draw life, glory, sorrow, sleep, and death. The ones we call fathers and mothers are but ambassadors to us—delegates from a million graves—appointed for our birth. Every boy is a summed-up multitude. The infinite crowd of his fathers beckons for him. As in some vast amphitheatre he lives his life, before the innumerable audience of the dead—each from its circle of centuries—calls to him, contends for him, draws him to himself.

Inasmuch as every man who is born in the world is born with an infinite outfit for living in it, it is the office of all books that are true and beautiful books—true to the spirit of a man—that they shall play upon the latent infinity in him; that they shall help him to select his largest self; that they shall help him to give, as the years go on, the right accent to the right fathers, in his life.

Books are more close to the latent infinity in a human being than anything else can be, because the habit of the infinite is their habit. As books are more independent of space and time than all other known forces in the lives of men, they seem to make all the men who love them independent also. If a man has not room for his life, he takes a book and makes room for it. When the habit of books becomes the habit of a man he unhands himself at will from space and time; he finds the universe is his universe. He finds ancestors and neighbours alike flocking to him—doing his bidding. God Himself says “Yes” to him and delights in him. He has entered into conspiracy with the nature of things. He does not feel that he is being made. He does not feel that he is making himself. The universe is at work on him—under his own supervision.

In reading to select one's parents and one's self, there seem to be two instincts involved. These instincts may vary more or less according to the book and the mood of the reader, but the object of all live reading—of every live experience with a book—is the satisfying of one or both of them. A man whose reading means something to him is either letting himself go in a book or letting himself come in it. He is either reading himself out or reading himself in. It is as if every human life were a kind of port on the edge of the universe, when it reads,—possible selves outward-bound and inward-bound trooping before It. Some of these selves are exports and some are imports.

If the principle of selection is conceived in a large enough spirit, and is set in operation soon enough, and is continued long enough, there is not a child that can be born on the earth who shall not be able to determine by the use of books, in the course of the years, what manner of man he shall be. He may not be able to determine how soon he shall be that man, or how much of that man shall be fulfilled in himself before he dies, and how much of him shall be left over to be fulfilled in his children, but the fact remains that to an extraordinary degree, through a live use of books, not only a man's education after he is born, but his education before he is born, is placed in his hands. It is the supreme office of books that they do this; that they place the laws of heredity and environment where a man with a determined spirit can do something besides cringing to them. Neither environment nor heredity—taken by itself—can give a man a determined spirit, but it is everything to know that, given a few books and the determined spirit both, a man can have any environment he wants for living his life, and his own assorted ancestors for living it. It is only by means of books that a man can keep from living a partitioned-off life in the world—can keep toned up to the divine sense of possibility in it. We hear great men every day, across space and time, halloaing to one another in books, and across all things, as we feel and read, is the call of our possible selves. Even the impossible has been achieved, books tell us, in history, again and again. It has been achieved by several men. This may not prove very much, but if it does not prove anything else, it proves that the possible, at least, is the privilege of the rest of us. It has its greeting for every man. The sense of the possible crowds around him, and not merely in his books nor merely in his life, but in the place where his life and books meet—in his soul. However or wherever a man may be placed, it is the great book that reminds him Who he is. It reminds him who his Neighbour is. It is his charter of possibility. Having seen, he acts on what he sees, and reads himself out and reads himself in accordingly.

## The Great Game

It would be hard to say which is the more important, reading for exports or imports, reading one's

self out or reading one's self in, but inasmuch as the importance of reading one's self out is more generally overlooked, it may be well to dwell upon it. Most of the reading theories of the best people to-day, judging from the prohibitions of certain books, overlook the importance altogether, in vital and normal persons—especially the young,—of reading one's self out. It is only as some people keep themselves read out, and read out regularly, that they can be kept from bringing evil on the rest of us. If Eve had had a novel, she would have sat down under the Tree and read about the fruit instead of eating it. If Adam had had a morning paper, he would hardly have listened to his wife's suggestion. If the Evil One had come up to Eve in the middle of *Les Misérables*, or one of Rossetti's sonnets, no one would ever have heard of him. The main misfortune of Adam and Eve was that they had no arts to come to the rescue of their religion. If Eve could have painted the apple, she would not have eaten it. She put it into her mouth because she could not think of anything else to do with it, and she had to do something. She had the artistic temperament (inherited from her mother Sleep, probably, or from being born in a dream), and the temptation of the artistic temperament is, that it gets itself expressed or breaks something. She had tried everything—flowers, birds, clouds, and her shadow in the stream, but she found they were all inexpressible. She could not express them. She could not even express herself. Taking walks in Paradise and talking with the one man the place afforded was not a complete and satisfying self-expression. Adam had his limitations—like all men. There were things that could not be said.

Standing as we do on the present height of history, with all the resources of sympathy in the modern world, its countless arts drawing the sexes together, going about understanding people, communing with them, and expressing them, making a community for every man, even in his solitude, it is not hard to see that the comparative failure of the first marriage was a matter of course. The real trouble was that Adam and Eve, standing in their brand-new world, could not express themselves to one another. As there was nothing else to express them, they were bored. It is to Eve's credit that she was more bored than Adam was, and that she resented it more; and while a Fall, under the circumstances, was as painful as it was inevitable, and a rather extreme measure on Eve's part, no one will deny that it afforded relief on the main point. It seems to be the universal instinct of all Eve's sons and daughters that have followed since, that an expressive world is better than a dull one. An expressive world is a world in which all the men and women are getting themselves expressed, either in their experiences or in their arts—that is, in other people's experiences.

The play, the picture, and the poem and the novel and the symphony have all been the outgrowth of Eve's infinity. She could not contain herself. She either had more experience than she could express, or she had more to express than she could possibly put into experience.

One of the worst things that we know about the Japanese is that they have no imperative mood in the language. To be able to say of a nation that it has been able to live for thousands of years without feeling the need of an imperative, is one of the most terrible and sweeping accusations that has ever been made against a people on the earth. Swearing may not be respectable, but it is a great deal more respectable

than never wanting to. Either a man is dead in this world, or he is out looking for words on it. There is a great place left over in him, and as long as that place is left over, it is one of the practical purposes of books to make it of some use to him. Whether the place is a good one or a bad one, something must be done with it, and books must do it.

If there were wordlessness for five hundred years, man would seek vast inarticulate words for himself. Cathedrals would rise from the ground undreamed as yet to say we worshipped. Music would be the daily necessity of the humblest life. Orchestras all around the world would be created,—would float language around the dumbness in it. Composers would become the greatest, the most practical men in all the nations. Viaducts would stretch their mountains of stone across the valleys to find a word that said we were strong. Out of the stones of the hills, the mists of rivers, out of electricity, even out of silence itself, we would force expression. From the time a baby first moves his limbs to when—an old man—he struggles for his last breath, the one imperious divine necessity of life is expression. Hence the artist now and for ever—the ruler of history—whoever makes it. And if he cannot make it, he makes the makers of it. The artist is the man who, failing to find neighbours for himself, makes his neighbours with his own hands. If a woman is childless, she paints Madonnas. It is the inspiration, the despair that rests over all life. If we cannot express ourselves in things that are made, we make things, and if we cannot express ourselves in the things we make, we turn to words, and if we cannot express ourselves in words, we turn to other men's words.

The man who is satisfied with one life does not exist. The suicide does not commit suicide because he is tired of life, but because he wants so many more lives that he cannot have. The native of the tropics buys a book to the North Pole. If we are poor, we grow rich on paper. We roll in carriages through the highway of letters. If we are rich, we revel in a printed poverty. We cry our hearts out over our starving paper-children and hold our shivering, aching magazine hands over dying coals in garrets we live in by subscription at three dollars a year. The Bible is the book that has influenced men most in the world because it has expressed them the most. The moment it ceases to be the most expressive book, it will cease to be the most practical and effective one in human life. There is more of us than we can live. The touch of the infinite through which our spirits wandered is still upon us. The world cries to the poet: "Give me a new word—a word—a word! I will have a word!" It cries to the great man out of all its narrow places: "Give me another life! I will have a new life!" and every hero the world has known is worn threadbare with worship, because his life says for other men what their lives have tried to say. Every masterful life calls across the world a cry of liberty to pent-up dreams, to the ache of faith in all of us, "Here thou art my brother—this is thy heart that I have lived." A hero is immortalised because his life is every man's larger self. So through the day-span of our years—a tale that is never told—we wander on, the infinite heart of each of us prisoned in blood and flesh and the cry of us everywhere, throughout all being, "Give me room!" It cries to the composer, "Make a high wide place for me!" and on the edge of the silence between life and words, to music we come at last because it is the supreme confidante of the

human heart, the confessional, the world-priest between the actual self and the larger self of all of us. With all the multiplying of arts and the piling up of books that have come to us, the most important experience that men have had in this world since they began on it, is that they are infinite, that they cannot be expressed on it. It is not infrequently said that men must get themselves expressed in living, but the fact remains that no one has ever heard of a man as yet who really did it, or who was small enough to do it. There was One who seemed to express Himself by living and by dying both, but if He had any more than succeeded in beginning to express Himself, no one would have believed that He was the Son of God,—even that He was the Son of Man. It was because He could not crowd all that He was into thirty-three short years and twelve disciples and one Garden of Gethsemane and one Cross that we know who He was.

Riveted down to its little place with iron circumstance, the actual self in every man depends upon the larger possible self for the something that makes the actual self worth while. It is hard to be held down by circumstance, but it would be harder to be contented there, to live without those intimations of our diviner birth that come to us in books—books that weave some of the glory we have missed in our actual lives, into the glory of our thoughts. Even if life be to the uttermost the doing of what are called practical things, it is only by the occasional use of his imagination in reading or otherwise, that the practical man can hope to be in physical or mental condition to do them. He needs a rest from his actual self. A man cannot even be practical without this imaginary or larger self. Unless he can work off his unexpressed remnant, his limbs are not free. Even down to the meanest of us, we are incurably larger than anything we can do.

Reading a book is a game a man plays with his own infinity.

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## VI

# Outward Bound

If there could only be arranged some mystical place over the edge of human existence, where we all could go and practise at living, have full-dress rehearsals of our parts, before we are hustled in front of the footlights in our very swaddling clothes, how many people are there who have reached what are fabulously called years of discretion, who would not believe in such a place, and who would not gladly go back to it and spend most of the rest of their lives there?

This is one of the things that the world of books is for. Most of us would hardly know what to do without it, the world of books, if only as a place to make mistakes and to feel foolish in. It seems to be the one great unobserved retreat, where all the sons of men may go, may be seen flocking day and night, to get the experiences they would not have, to be ready for those they cannot help having. It is the Rehearsal

Room of History. The gods watch it—this Place of Books—as we who live go silent, trooping back and forth in it—the ceaseless, heartless, awful, beautiful pantomime of life.

It seems to be the testimony of human nature, after a somewhat immemorial experience, that some things in us had better be expressed by being lived, and that other things had better be expressed—if possible—in some other way.

There are a great many men, even amongst the wisest and strongest of us, who benefit every year of their lives by what might be called the purgative function of literature,—men who, if they did not have a chance at the right moment to commit certain sins with their imaginary selves, would commit them with their real ones. Many a man of the larger and more comprehensive type, hungering for the heart of all experience, bound to have its spirit, if not itself, has run the whole gamut of his possible selves in books, until all the sins and all the songs of men have coursed through his being. He finds himself reading not only to fill his lungs with ozone and his heart with the strength of the gods, but to work off the humour in his blood, to express his underself, and get it out of the way. Women who never cry their tears out—it is said—are desperate, and men who never read their sins away are dangerous. People who are tired of doing wrong on paper do right. To be sick of one's sins in a book saves not only one's self but every one else a deal of trouble. A man has not learned how to read until he reads with his veins as well as his arteries.

It would be useless to try to make out that evil passions in literature accomplish any absolute good, but they accomplish a relative good which the world can by no means afford to overlook. The amount of crime that is suggested by reading can be more than offset by the extraordinary amount of crime waiting in the hearts of men, aimed at the world and glanced off on paper.

There are many indications that this purgative function of literature is the main thing it is for in our present modern life. Modern life is so constituted that the majority of people who live in it are expressing their real selves more truly in their reading than they are in their lives. When one stops to consider what these lives are—most of them—there can be but one conclusion about the reading of the people who have to live them, and that is that while sensational reading may be an evil, as compared with the evil that has made it necessary, it is an immeasurable blessing.

The most important literary and artistic fact of the nineteenth century is the subdivision of labour—that is, the subdividing of every man's life and telling him he must only be alive in a part of it. In proportion as an age takes sensations out of men's lives it is obliged to put them into their literature. Men are used to sensations on the earth as long as they stay on it and they are bound to have them in one way or another. An age which narrows the actual lives of men, which so adjusts the labour of the world that nearly every man in it not only works with a machine, spiritual or otherwise, but is a machine himself, and a small part of a machine, must not find fault with its art for being full of hysterics and excitement, or with its newspapers for being sensational. Instead of finding fault it has every reason to be grateful—to thank a most merciful Heaven that the men in the world are still alive enough in it to be capable of feeling

sensation in other men's lives, though they have ceased to be capable of having sensations in their own, or of feeling sensations if they had them. It was when the herds of her people were buried in routine and peace that Rome had bull-fights. New York, with its hordes of drudges, ledger-slaves, machinists, and clerks, has the *New York World*. It lasts longer than a bull-fight and it can be had every morning before a man starts off to be a machine and every evening when he gets back from being a machine—for one cent. On Sunday a whole Colosseum fronts him and he is glutted with gore from morning until night. To a man who is a penholder by the week, or a linotype machine, or a ratchet in a factory, a fight is infinite peace. Obedience to the command of Scripture, making the Sabbath a day of rest, is entirely relative. Some of us are rested by taking our under-interested lives to a Sunday paper, and others are rested by taking our over-interested lives to church. Men read dime novels in proportion as their lives are staid and mechanical. Men whose lives are their own dime novels are bored by printed ones. Men whose years are crowded with crises, culminations, and events, who run the most risks in business, are found with the steadiest papers in their hands. The train-boy knows that the people who buy the biggest headlines are all on salaries and that danger and blood and thunder are being read nowadays by effeminately safe men, because it is the only way they can be had.

But it is not only the things that are left out of men's lives but the things they have too much of, which find their remedy in books. They are the levers with which the morbid is controlled. *Similia similibus curantur* may be a dangerous principle to be applied by everybody, but thousands of men and women mulling away on their lives and worrying themselves with themselves, cutting a wide swath of misery wherever they go, have suddenly stopped in a book—have purged away jealousy and despair and passion and nervous prostration in it. A paper-person with melancholia is a better cure for gloom than a live clown can be—who merely goes about reminding people how sad they are.

A man is often heard to say that he has tragedy enough in his own life not to want to go to a play for more, but this much having been said and truly said, he almost always goes to the play—to see how true it is. The stage is his huge confidante. Pitying one's self is a luxury, but it takes a great while, and one can never do it enough. Being pitied by a five-thousand-dollar house, and with incidental music, all for a dollar and a half, is a sure and quick way to cheer up. Being pitied by Victor Hugo is a sure way also. Hardy can do people's pitying for them much better than they can do it, and it's soon over and done with. It is noticeable that while the impressive books, the books that are written to impress people, have a fair and nominal patronage, it is the expressive books, the books that let people out, which have the enormous sales. This seems to be true of the big-sale books whether the people expressed in them are worth expressing (to any one but themselves) or not. The principle of getting one's self expressed is so largely in evidence that not only the best but the worst of our books illustrate it. Our popular books are carbuncles mostly. They are the inevitable and irrepressible form of the instinct of health in us, struggling with disease. On the whole, it makes being an optimist in modern life a little less of a tight-rope-walk. If even the bad elements in current literature—which are discouraging enough—are making us better, what

shall be said of the good?



## Book III

# Details. The Confessions of an Unscientific Mind



## I—Unscientific

### I

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### On Being Intelligent in a Library

**I** HAVE a way every two or three days or so, of an afternoon, of going down to our library, sliding into the little gate by the shelves, and taking a long empty walk there. I have found that nothing quite takes the place of it for me,—wandering up and down the aisles of my ignorance, letting myself be loomed at, staring doggedly back. I always feel when I go out the great door as if I had won a victory. I have at least faced the facts. I swing off to my tramp on the hills where is the sense of space, as if I had faced the bully of the world, the whole assembled world, in his own den, and he had given me a license to live.

Of course it only lasts a little while. One soon feels a library nowadays pulling on him. One has to go back and do it all over again, but for the time being it affords infinite relief. It sets one in right relations to the universe, to the original plan of things. One suspects that if God had originally intended that men on this planet should be crowded off by books on it, it would not have been put off to the twentieth century.

I was saying something of this sort to The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts the other

day, and when I was through he said promptly: "The way a man feels in a library (if any one can get him to tell it) lets out more about a man than anything else in the world."

It did not seem best to make a reply to this. I didn't think it would do either of us any good.

Finally, in spite of myself, I spoke up and allowed that I felt as intelligent in a library as anybody.

He did not say anything.

When I asked him what he thought being intelligent in a library was, he took the general ground that it consisted in always knowing what one was about there, in knowing exactly what one wanted.

I replied that I did not think that that was a very intelligent state of mind to be in, in a library.

Then I waited while he told me (fifteen minutes) what an intelligent mind was anywhere (nearly everywhere, it seemed to me). But I did not wait in vain, and at last, when he had come around to it, and had asked me what I thought the feeling of intelligence consisted in, in libraries, I said it consisted in being pulled on by the books.

I said quite a little after this, and of course the general run of my argument was that I was rather intelligent myself. The P. G. S. of M. had little to say to this, and after he had said how intelligent he was awhile, the conversation was dropped.

The question that concerns me is, What shall a man do, how shall he act, when he finds himself in the hush of a great library,—opens the door upon it, stands and waits in the midst of it, with his poor outstretched soul all by himself before it,—and feels the books pulling on him? I always feel as if it were a sort of infinite crossroads. The last thing I want to know in a library is exactly what I want there. I am tired of knowing what I want. I am always knowing what I want. I can know what I want almost anywhere. If there is a place left on God's earth where a modern man can go and go regularly and not know what he wants awhile, in Heaven's name why not let him? I am as fond as the next man, I think, of knowing what I am about, but when I find myself ushered into a great library I do not know what I am about any sooner than I can help. I shall know soon enough—God forgive me! When it is given to a man to stand in the Assembly Room of Nations, to feel the ages, all the ages, gathering around him, flowing past his life; to listen to the immortal stir of Thought, to the doings of The Dead, why should a man interrupt—interrupt a whole world—to know what he is about? I stand at the junction of all Time and Space. I am the three tenses. I read the newspaper of the universe.

It fades away after a little, I know. I go to the card catalogue like a lamb to the slaughter, poke my head into Knowledge—somewhere—and am lost, but the light of it on the spirit does not fade away. It leaves a glow there. It plays on the pages afterward.

There is a certain fine excitement about taking a library in this fashion, a sense of spaciousness of joy in it, which one is almost always sure to miss in libraries—most libraries—by staying in them. The only way one can get any real good out of a modern library seems to be by going away in the nick of time.

If one stays there is no help for it. One is soon standing before the card catalogue, sorting one's wits out in it, filing them away, and the sense of boundlessness both in one's self and everybody else—the thing a library is for—is fenced off for ever.

At least it seems fenced off for ever. One sees the universe barred and patterned off with a kind of grating before it. It is a card-catalogue universe.

I can only speak for one, but I must say for myself, that as compared with this feeling one has in the door, this feeling of standing over a library—mere reading in it, sitting down and letting one's self be tucked into a single book in it—is a humiliating experience.

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## II

### How It Feels

I am not unaware that this will seem to some—this empty doting on infinity, this standing and staring at All-knowledge—a mere dizzying exercise, whirling one's head round and round in Nothing, for Nothing. And I am not unaware that it would be unbecoming in me or in any other man to feel superior to a card catalogue.

A card catalogue, of course, as a device for making a kind of tunnel for one's mind in a library—for working one's way through it—is useful and necessary to all of us. Certainly, if a man insists on having infinity in a convenient form—infinity in a box—it would be hard to find anything better to have it in than a card catalogue.

But there are times when one does not want infinity in a box. He loses the best part of it that way. He prefers it in its natural state. All that I am contending for is, that when these times come, the times when a man likes to feel infinite knowledge crowding round him,—feel it through the backs of unopened books, and likes to stand still and think about it, worship with the thought of it,—he ought to be allowed to. It is true that there is no sign up against it (against thinking in libraries). But there might as well be. It amounts to the same thing. No one is expected to. People are expected to keep up an appearance, at least, of doing something else there. I do not dare to hope that the next time I am caught standing and staring in a library, with a kind of blank, happy look, I shall not be considered by all my kind intellectually disreputable for it. I admit that it does not look intelligent—this standing by a door and taking in a sweep of books—this reading a whole library at once. I can imagine how it looks. It looks like listening to a kind of cloth and paper chorus—foolish enough; but if I go out of the door to the hills again, refreshed for them and lifted up to them, with the strength of the ages in my limbs, great voices all around me, flocking my solitary walk—who shall gainsay me?

## How a Specialist can Be an Educated Man

It is a sad thing to go into a library nowadays and watch the people there who are merely making tunnels through it. Some libraries are worse than others—seem to be made for tunnels. College libraries, perhaps, are the worst. One can almost—if one stands still enough in them—hear what is going on. It is getting to be practically impossible in a college library to slink off to a side shelf by one's self, take down some gentle-hearted book one does not need to read there and begin to listen in it, without hearing some worthy person quietly, persistently boring himself around the next corner. It is getting worse every year. The only way a readable library book can be read nowadays is to take it away from the rest of them. It must be taken where no other reading is going on. The busy scene of a crowd of people—mere specialists and others—gathered around roofing their minds in is no fitting place for a great book or a live book to be read—a book that uncovers the universe.

On the other hand, it were certainly a trying universe if it were uncovered all the time, if one had to be exposed to all of it and to all of it at once, always; and there is no denying that libraries were intended to roof men's minds in sometimes as well as to take the roofs of their minds off. What seems to be necessary is to find some middle course in reading between the scientist's habit of tunnelling under the dome of knowledge and the poet's habit of soaring around in it. There ought to be some principle of economy in knowledge which will allow a man, if he wants to, or knows enough, to be a poet and a scientist both. It is well enough for a mere poet to take a library as a spectacle—a kind of perpetual Lick Observatory to peek at the universe with, if he likes, and if a man is a mere scientist, there is no objection to his taking a library as a kind of vast tunnel system, or chart for burrowing. But the common educated man—the man who is in the business of being a human being, unless he knows some middle course in a library, knows how to use its Lick Observatory and its tunnel system both—does not get very much out of it. If there can be found some principle of economy in knowledge, common to artists and scientists alike, which will make it possible for a poet to know something, and which will make it possible for a scientist to know a very great deal without being—to most people—a little underwitted, it would very much simplify the problem of being educated in modern times, and there would be a general gratefulness.

Far be it from me to seem to wish to claim this general gratefulness for myself. I have no world-reforming feeling about the matter. I would be very grateful just here to be allowed to tuck in a little idea—no chart to go with it—on this general subject, which my mind keeps coming back to, as it runs around watching people.

There seem to be but two ways of knowing. One of them is by the spirit and the other is by the letter. The most reasonable principle of economy in knowledge would seem to be, that in all reading that

pertains to man's specialty—his business in knowledge—he should read by the letter, knowing the facts by observing them himself, and that in all other reading he should read through the spirit of imagination—the power of taking to one's self facts that have been observed by others. If a man wants to be a specialist he must do his knowing like a scientist; but if a scientist wants to be a man he must be a poet; he must learn how to read like a poet; he must educate in himself the power of absorbing immeasurable knowledge, the facts of which have been approved and observed by others.

The weak point in our modern education seems to be that it has broken altogether with the spirit or the imagination. Playing upon the spirit or the imagination of a man is the one method possible to employ in educating him in everything except his specialty. It is the one method possible to employ in making even a powerful specialist of him; in relating his specialty to other specialties; that is, in making either him or his specialty worth while.

Inasmuch as it has been decreed that every man in modern life must be a specialist, the fundamental problem that confronts modern education is, How can a specialist be an educated man? There would seem to be but one way a specialist can be an educated man. The only hope for a specialist lies in his being allowed to have a soul (or whatever he chooses to call it), a spirit or an imagination. If he has This, whatever it is, in one way or another, he will find his way to every book he needs. He will read all the books there are in his specialty. He will read all other books through their backs.

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#### IV

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## On Reading Books through Their Backs

As this is the only way the majority of books can be read by anybody, one wonders why so little has been said about it.

Reading books through their backs is easily the most important part of a man's outfit, if he wishes to be an educated man. It is not necessary to prove this statement. The books themselves prove it without even being opened. The mere outside of a library—almost any library—would seem to settle the point that if a man proposes to be in any larger or deeper sense a reader of books, the books must be read through their backs.

Even the man who is obliged to open books in order to read them sooner or later admits this. He finds the few books he opens in the literal or unseeing way do not make him see anything. They merely make him see that he ought to have opened the others—that he must open the others; that is, if he is to know anything. The next thing he sees is that he must open all the others to know anything. When he comes to know this he may be said to have reached what is called, by stretch of courtesy, a state of mind. It is the

scientific state of mind. Any man who has watched his mind a little knows what this means. It is the first incipient symptom in a mind that science is setting in.

The only possible cure for it is reading books through their backs. As this scientific state of mind is the main obstacle nowadays in the way of reading books through their backs, it is fitting, perhaps, at this point that I should dwell on it a little.

I do not claim to be a scientist, and I have never—even in my worst moments—hoped for a scientific mind. I am afraid I know as well as any one who has read as far as this, in this book, that I cannot prove anything. The book has at least proved that; but it does seem to me that there are certain things that very much need to be said about the scientific mind, in its general relation to knowledge. I would give the world to be somebody else for awhile and say them—right here in the middle of my book. But I know as well as any one, after all that has passed, that if I say anything about the scientific mind nobody will believe it. The best I can do is to say how I feel about the scientific mind. “And what has that to do with it?” exclaims the whole world and all its laboratories. What is really wanted in dealing with this matter seems to be some person—some grave, superficial person—who will take the scientific mind up scientifically, shake it and filter it, put it under the microscope, stare at it with a telescope, stick the X-ray through it, lay it on the operating table—show what is the matter with it—even to itself. Anything that is said about the scientific mind which is not said in a big, bow-wow, scientific, impersonal, out-of-the-universe sort of way will not go very far.

And yet, the things that need to be said about the scientific mind—the things that need to be done for it—need to be said and done so very much, that it seems as if almost any one might help. So I am going to keep on trying. Let no one suppose, however, that because I have turned around the corner into another chapter, I am setting myself up as a sudden and new authority on the scientific mind. I do not tell how it feels to be scientific. I merely tell how it looks as if it felt.

I have never known a great scientist, and I can only speak of the kind of scientist I have generally met—the kind every one meets nowadays, the average, bare scientist. He always looks to me as if he had a grudge against the universe—jealous of it or something. There are so many things in it he cannot know and that he has no use for unless he does. It always seems to me (perhaps it seems so to most of us in this world, who are running around and enjoying things and guessing on them) that the average scientist has a kind of dreary and disgruntled look, a look of feeling left out. Nearly all the universe goes to waste with a scientist. He fixes himself so that it has to. If a man cannot get the good of a thing until he knows it and knows all of it, he cannot expect to be happy in this universe. There are no conveniences for his being happy in it. It is the wrong size, to begin with. Exact knowledge at its best, or even at its worst, does not let a man into very many things in a universe like this one. A large part of it is left over with a scientist. It is the part that is left over which makes him unhappy. I am not claiming that a scientist, simply because he is a scientist, is any unhappier or needs to be any unhappier than other men are. He does not need to be. It all comes of a kind of brutal, sweeping, overriding prejudice he has against guessing on anything.

## On Keeping Each Other in Countenance

I do not suppose that my philosophising on this subject—a sort of slow, peristaltic action of my own mind—is of any particular value; that it really makes any one feel any better except myself.

But it has just occurred to me that I may have arisen, quite as well as not, without knowing it, to the dignity of the commonplace.

“The man who thinks he is playing a solo in any human experience,” says this morning’s paper, “only needs a little more experience to know that he is a member of a chorus.” I suspect myself of being a Typical Case. The scientific mind has taken possession of all the land. It has assumed the right of eminent domain in it, and there must be other human beings here and there, I am sure, standing aghast at learning in our modern day, even as I am, their whys and wherefores working within them, trying to wonder their way out in this matter.

All that is necessary, as I take it, is for one or the other of us to speak up in the world, barely peep in it, make himself known wherever he is, tell how he feels, and he will find he is not alone. Then we will get together. We will keep each other in countenance. We will play with our minds if we want to. We will take the liberty of knowing rows of things we don’t know all about, and we will be as happy as we like, and if we keep together we will manage to have a fairly educated look besides. I am very sure of this. But it is the sort of thing a man cannot do alone. If he tries to do it with any one else, any one that happens along, he is soon come up with. It cannot be done in that way. There is no one to whom to turn. Almost every mind one knows in this modern educated world is a suspicious, unhappy, abject, helpless, scientific mind.

It is almost impossible to find a typical educated mind, either in this country or in Europe or anywhere, that is not a rolled-over mind, jealous and crushed by knowledge day and night, and yet staring at its ignorance everywhere. The scientist is almost always a man who takes his mind seriously, and he takes the universe as seriously as he takes his mind. Instead of glorying in a universe and being a little proud of it for being such an immeasurable, unspeakable, unknowable success, his whole state of being is one of worry about it. The universe seems to irritate him somehow. Has he not spent years of hard labour in making his mind over, in drilling it into not-thinking, into not-inferring things, into not-knowing anything he does not know all of? And yet here he is and here is his whole life—does it not consist in being baffled by germs and bacilli, crowded over by atoms, trampled on by the stars? It is getting so that there is but one thing left that the modern, educated scientific mind feels that it knows and that is the impossibility of knowledge. Certainly if there is anything in this wide world that can possibly be in a more helpless, more pulp-like state than the scientific mind in the presence of something that cannot be known, something that

can only be used by being wondered at (which is all most of the universe is for), it has yet to be pointed out.

He may be better off than he looks, and I don't doubt he quite looks down on me as,

A mere poet,  
The Chanticleer of Things,  
Who lives to flap his wings—  
It's all he knows,—  
They're never furled;  
Who plants his feet  
On the ridge-pole of the world  
And crows.

Still, I like it very well. I don't know anything better that can be done with the world, and as I have said before I say again, my friend and brother, the scientist, is either very great or very small, or he is moderately, decently unhappy. At least this is the way it looks from the ridge-pole of the world.

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## VI

# The Romance of Science

Science is generally accredited with being very matter-of-fact. But there has always been one romance in science from the first,—its romantic attitude toward itself. It would be hard to find any greater romance in modern times. The romance of science is the assumption that man is a plain, pure-blooded, non-infering, mere-observing being and that in proportion as his brain is educated he must not use it. "Deductive reasoning has gone out with the nineteenth century," says The Strident Voice. This is the one single inference that the scientific method seems to have been able to make—the inference that no inference has a right to exist.

So far as I can see, if there are going to be inferences anyway, and one has to take one's choice in inferring, I would rather have a few inferences on hand that I can live with every day than to have this one huge, voracious inference (the scientist's) which swallows all the others up. For that matter, when the scientist has actually made it,—this one huge guess that he hasn't a right to guess,—what good does it do him? He never lives up to it, and all the time he has his poor, miserable theory hanging about him, dogging him day and night. Does he not keep on guessing in spite of himself? Does he not live plumped up against mystery every hour of his life, crowded on by ignorance, forced to guess if only to eat? Is he not

browbeaten into taking things for granted whichever way he turns? He becomes a doleful, sceptical, contradictory, anxious, disagreeable, disapproving person as a matter of course.

One would think, in the abstract, that a certain serenity would go with exact knowledge; and it would, if a man were willing to put up with a reasonable amount of exact knowledge, eke it out with his brains, some of it; but when he wants all the exact knowledge there is, and nothing else but exact knowledge, and is not willing to mix his brains with it, it is different. When a man puts his whole being into a vise of exact knowledge, he finds that he has about as perfect a convenience for being miserable as could possibly be devised. He soon becomes incapable of noticing things or of enjoying things in the world for themselves. With one or two exceptions, I have never known a scientist to whom his knowing a thing, or not knowing it, did not seem the only important thing about it. Of course when a man's mind gets into this dolefully cramped, exact condition, a universe like this is not what it ought to be for him. He lives too unprotected a life. His whole attitude toward the universe becomes one of wishing things would keep off of him in it—things he does not know. Are there not enough things he does not know even in his specialty? And as for this eternal being reminded of the others, this slovenly habit of “general information” that interesting people have—this guessing, inferring, and generalising—what is it all for? What does it all come to? If a man is after knowledge, let him have knowledge, knowledge that is knowledge, let him find a fact, anything for a fact, get God into a corner, hug one fact and live with it and die with it.

When a man once gets into this shut-in attitude it is of little use to put a word in, with him, for the daily habit of taking the roof off one's mind, letting the universe play upon it instead of trying to bore a hole in it somewhere. “What does it avail after all, after it is all over, after a long life, even if the hole is bored,” I say to him, “to stand by one's little hole and cry, ‘Behold, oh, human race, this Gimlet Hole which I have bored in infinite space! Let it be forever named for me.’” And in the meantime the poor fellow gets no joy out of living. He does not even get credit for his not-living, seventy years of it. He fences off his little place to know a little of nothing in, becomes a specialist, a foot note to infinite space, and is never noticed afterwards (and quite reasonably) by any one—not even by himself.

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## VII

# Monads

I am not saying that this is the way a scientist—a mere scientist, one who has the fixed habit of not reading books through their backs—really feels. It is the way he ought to feel. As often as not he feels quite comfortable. One sees one every little while (the mere scientist) dropping the entire universe with a

dull thud and looking happy after it.

But the best ones are different. Even those who are not quite the best are different. It is really a very rare scientist who joggles contentedly down without qualms, or without delays, to a hole in space. There is always a capability, an apparently left-over capability in him. What seems to happen is, that when the average human being makes up his mind to it, insists on being a scientist, the Lord keeps a remnant of happiness in him—a gnawing on the inside of him which will not let him rest.

This remnant of happiness in him, his soul, or inferring organ, or whatever it may be, makes him suspect that the scientific method as a complete method is a false, superficial, and dangerous method, threatening the very existence of all knowledge that is worth knowing on the earth. He begins to suspect that a mere scientist, a man who cannot even make his mind work both ways, backwards or forwards, as he likes (the simplest, most rudimentary motion of a mind), inductively or deductively, is bound to have something left out of all of his knowledge. He sees that the all-or-nothing assumption in knowledge, to say nothing of not applying to the arts, in which it is always sterile, does not even apply to the physical sciences—to the mist, dust, fire, and water out of which the earth and the scientist are made.

For men who are living their lives as we are living ours, in the shimmer of a globule in space, it is not enough that we should lift our faces to the sky and blunder and guess at a God there, because there is so much room between the stars, and murmur faintly, “Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.” By the infinite bones of our bodies, by the seeds of the million years that flow in our veins, *material* things are spiritually discerned. There is not science enough nor scientific method enough in the schools of all Christendom for a man to listen intelligently to his own breathing with, or to know his own thumb-nail. Is not his own heart thundering the infinite through him—beating the eternal against his sides—even while he speaks? And does he not know it while he speaks?

By the time a man’s a Junior or a Senior nowadays, if he feels the eternal beating against his sides he thinks it must be something else. He thinks he ought to. It is a mere inference. At all events he has little use for it unless he knows just how eternal it is. I am speaking too strongly? I suppose I am. I am thinking of my four special boys—boys I have been doing my living in, the last few years. I cannot help speaking a little strongly. Two of them—two as fine, flash-minded, deep-lit, wide-hearted fellows as one would like to see, are down at W——, being cured of inferring in a four years’ course at the W—— Scientific School. Another one, who always seemed to me to have real genius in him, who might have had a period in literature named after him, almost, if he’d stop studying literature, is taking a graduate course at M——, learning that it cannot be proved that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare. He has already become one of these spotlessly accurate persons one expects nowadays. (I hardly dare to hope he will even read this book of mine, with all his affection for me, after the first few pages or so, lest he should fall into a low or wondering state of mind.) My fourth boy, who was the most promising of all, whose mind reached out the farthest, who was always touching new possibilities, a fresh, warm-blooded, bright-eyed fellow, is down under a manhole studying God in the N—— Theological Seminary.

This may not be exactly a literal statement, nor a very scientific way to criticise the scientific method, but when one has had to sit and see four of the finest minds he ever knew snuffed out by it,—whatever else may be said for science, scientific language is not satisfying. What is going to happen to us next, in our little town, I hardly dare to know. I only know that three relentlessly inductive, dull, brittle, *blasé*, and springless youths from S—— University have just come down and taken possession of our High School. They seem to be throwing, as near as I can judge, a spell of the impossibility of knowledge over the boys we have left.

I admit that I am in an unreasonable state of mind.<sup>3</sup> I think a great many people are. At least I hope so. There is no excuse for not being a little unreasonable. Sometimes it almost seems, when one looks at the condition of most college boys' minds, as if our colleges were becoming the moral and spiritual and intellectual dead-centres of modern life.

I will not yield to any man in admiration for Science—holy and speechless Science; holier than any religion has ever been yet; what religions are made of and are going to be made of, nor am I dating my mind three hundred years back and trying to pick a quarrel with Lord Bacon. I am merely wondering whether, if science is to be taught at all, it had not better be taught, in each branch of it, by men who are teaching a subject they have conceived with their minds instead of a subject which has been merely unloaded on them, piled up on top of their minds, and which their minds do not know anything about.

No one seems to have stopped to notice what the spectacle of science as taught in college is getting to be—the spectacle of one set of minds which has been crunched by knowledge crunching another set. Have you never been to One, oh Gentle Reader, and watched It, watched It when It was working, one of these great Endowed Fact-machines, wound up by the dead, going round and round, thousands and thousands of youths in it being rolled out and chilled through and educated in it, having their souls smoothed out of them? Hundreds of human minds, small and sure and hard, working away on thousands of other human minds, making them small and sure and hard. Matter—infinite matter everywhere—taught by More Matter,—taught the way Matter would teach if it knew how—without generalising, without putting facts together to make truths out of them.

It would seem, looking at it theoretically, that Science, of all things in this world, the stuff that dreams are made of; the one boundless subject of the earth, face to face and breath to breath with the Creator every minute of its life, would be taught with a divine touch in it, with the appeal to the imagination and the soul, to the world-building instinct in a man, the thing in him that puts universes together, the thing in him that fills the whole dome of space and all the crevices of being with the whisper of God.

But it is not so. Science is great, and great scientists are great as a matter of course; but the sciences in the meantime are being taught in our colleges—in many of them, most of them—by men whose minds are mere registering machines. The facts are put in at one end (one click per fact) and come out facts at the other. The sciences are being taught more and more every year by moral and spiritual stutterers, men with

non-inferring minds, men who live in a perfect deadlock of knowledge, men who cannot generalise about a fly's wing, bashful, empty, limp, and hopeless and doddering before the commonplacest, sanest, and simplest generalisations of human life. In The Great Free Show, in our common human peep at it, who has not seen them, staggering to know what the very children, playing with dolls and rocking-horses, can take for granted? Minds which seem absolutely incapable of striking out, of taking a good, manly stride on anything, mincing in religion, effeminate in enthusiasm—please forgive me, Gentle Reader, I know I ought not to carry on in this fashion, but have I not spent years in my soul (sometimes it seems hundreds of years) in being humble—in being abject before this kind of mind? It is only a day almost since I have found it out, broken away from it, got hold of the sky to hoot at it with. I am free now. I am not going to be humble longer, before it. I have spent years dully wondering before this mind; wondering what was the matter with me that I could not love it, that I could not go where it loved to go, and come when it said “Come” to me. I have spent years in dust and ashes before it, struggling with myself, trying to make myself small enough to follow this kind of a mind around, and now the scales are fallen from my eyes. When I follow An Inductive Scientific Mind now, or try to follow it through its convolutions of matter-of-fact, its involutions of logic, its wriggling through axioms, I smile a new smile and my heart laughs within me. If I miss the point, I am not in a panic, and if, at the end of the seventeenth platitude that did not need to be proved, I find I do not know where I am, I thank God.

I know that I am partly unreasonable, and I know that in my chosen station on the ridge-pole of the world it is useless to criticise those who do not even believe, probably, that worlds have ridge-poles. It is a bit hard to get their attention—and I hope the reader will overlook it if one seems to speak rather loud—from ridge-poles. Oh, ye children of The Literal! ye most serene Highnesses, ye archangels of Accuracy, the Voices of life all challenge you—the world around! What are ye, after all, but pilers-up of matter, truth-stutterers, truth-spellers, sunk in protoplasm to the tops of your souls? What is it that you are going to do with us? How many generations of youths do you want? When will souls be allowed again? When will they be allowed in college?

Well, well, I say to my soul, what does it all come to? Why all this ado about it one way or the other? Is it not a great, fresh, eager, boundless world? Does it not roll up out of Darkness with new children on it, night after night? What does it matter, I say to my soul—a generation or so—from the ridge-pole of the world? The great Sun comes round again. It travels over the tops of seas and mountains. Microbes in their dewdrops, seeds in their winds, stars in their courses, worms in their apples, answer it, and the hordes of the ants in their ant-hills run before it. And what does it matter after all, under the great Dome, a few hordes of factmongers more or less, glimmering and wonderless, crawlers on the bottom of the sea of time, lovers of the ooze of knowledge, feeling with slow, myopic mouths at Infinite Truth?

But when I see my four faces—the faces of my four special boys, when I hear the college bells ringing to them, it matters a great deal. My soul will not wait. What is the ridge-pole of the world? The distance of a ridge-pole does not count. The extent of a universe does not seem to make very much

difference. The next ten generations do not help very much on this one. I go forth in my soul. I take hold of the first scientist I meet—my whole mind pummelling him. “What is it?” I say, “what is it you are doing with us and with the lives of our children? What is it you are doing with yourself? Truth is not a Thing. Did you think it? Truth is not even a Heap of Things. It is a Light. How dare you mock at inferring? How dare you to think to escape the infinite? You cannot escape the infinite even by making yourself small enough. It is written that thou shalt be infinitely small if thou art not infinitely large. Not to infer is to contradict the very nature of facts. Not to infer is not to live. It is to cease to be a fact one’s self. What is education if one does not infer? Vacuums rolling around in vacuums. Atoms cross-examining atoms. And you say you will not guess? Do you need to be cudgelled with a whole universe to begin to learn to guess? What is all your science—your boasted science, after all, but more raw material to make more guesses with? Is not the whole Future Tense an inference? Is not History—that which has actually happened—a mystery? You yourself are a mere probability, and God is a generalisation. What does it profit a man to discover The Inductive Method and to lose his own soul? What is The Inductive Method? Do you think that all these scientists who have locked their souls up and a large part of their bodies, in The Inductive Method, if they had waited to be born by The Inductive Method, would ever have heard of it? Being born is one inference and dying is another. Man leaves a wake of infinity after him wherever he goes, and of course it’s where he doesn’t go. It’s all infinity—one way or the other.”

And it came to pass in my dream as I lay on my bed in the night, I thought I saw Man my brother blinking under the dome of space, infinite monad that he is: I saw him with a glass in one hand and a Slide of Infinity in the other, and, in my dream, out of His high heaven God leaned down to me and said to me, “What is THAT?”

And as I looked I laughed and prayed in my heart, I scarce knew which, and “Oh, Most Excellent Deity! Who would think it!” I cried. “I do not know, but I think—*I think*—it is a man, thinking he is studying a GERM—one tiny particle of inimitable Immensity ogling another!”

And a very pretty sight it is, too, oh Brother Monads—if we do not take it seriously.

And what we really need next, oh comrades, scientists—each under our separate stones—is the Laugh Out of Heaven which shall come down and save us—laugh the roofs of our stones off. Then we shall stretch our souls with inferences. We shall lie in the great sun and warm ourselves.

It would seem to be the main trouble with the scientific mind of the second rank that it overlooks the nature of knowledge in the thirst for exact knowledge. In an infinite world the better part of the knowledge a man needs to have does not need to be exact.

These things being as they are, it would seem that the art of reading books through their backs is an equally necessary art to a great scientist and to a great poet. If it is necessary to great scientists and to great poets it is all the more necessary to small ones, and to the rest of us. It is the only way, indeed, in which an immortal human being of any kind can get what he deserves to have to live his life with—a whole cross-section of the universe. A gentleman and a scholar will take nothing less.

If a man is to get his cross-section of the universe, his natural share in it, he can only get it by living in the qualities of things instead of the quantities; by avoiding duplicate facts, duplicate persons, and principles; by using the multiplication table in knowledge (inference) instead of adding everything up, by taking all things in this world (except his specialty) through their spirits and essences, and, in general, by reading books through their backs.

The problem of cultivating these powers in a man, when reduced to its simplest terms, is reduced to the problem of cultivating his imagination or organ of not needing to be told things.

However much a man may know about wise reading and about the principles of economy in knowledge, in an infinite world the measure of his knowledge is bound to be determined, in the long run, by the capacity of his organ of not needing to be told things—of reading books through their backs.



## II—On Reading for Principles

### I

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#### On Changing One's Conscience

**W**E were sitting by my fireplace—several of our club. I had just been reading out loud a little thing of my own. I have forgotten the title. It was something about Books that Other People ought to Read, I think. I stopped rather suddenly, rather more suddenly than anybody had hoped. At least nobody had thought what he ought to say about it. And I saw that the company, after a sort of general, vague air of having exclaimed properly, was settling back into the usual helpless silence one expects—after the appearance of an idea at clubs.

“Why doesn’t somebody say something?” I said.

P. G. S. of M.: “We are thinking.”

“Oh,” I said. I tried to feel grateful. But everybody kept waiting.

I was a good deal embarrassed and was getting reckless and was about to make the very serious mistake, in a club, of seeing if I could not rescue one idea by going out after it with another, when The

Mysterious Person (who is the only man in our club whose mind ever really comes over and plays in my yard) in the goodness of his heart spoke up. “I have not heard anything in a long time,” he began (the club looked at him rather anxiously), “which has done—which has made me feel—less ashamed of myself than this paper. I——”

It seemed to me that this was not exactly a fortunate remark. I said I didn’t doubt I could do a lot of good that way, probably, if I wanted to—going around the country making people less ashamed of themselves.

“But I don’t mean that I feel really ashamed of myself about books I have not read,” said The Mysterious Person. “What I mean is, that I have a kind of slinking feeling that I ought to—a feeling of being ashamed for not being ashamed.”

I told The M. P. that I thought New England was full of people; just like him—people with a lot of left-over consciences.

The P. G. S. of M. wanted to know what I meant by that.

I said I thought there were thousands of people—one sees them everywhere in Massachusetts—fairly intelligent people, people who are capable of changing their minds about things, but who can’t change their consciences. Their consciences seem to keep hanging on to them, in the same set way—somehow—with or without their minds. “Some people’s consciences don’t seem to notice much, so far as I can see, whether they have minds connected with them or not.” “Don’t you know what it is,” I appealed to the P. G. S. of M., “to get everything all fixed up with your mind and your reason and your soul; that certain things that look wrong are all right,—the very things of all others that you ought to do and keep on doing,—and then have your conscience keep right on the same as it always did—tatting them up against you?”

The P. G. S. of M. said something about not spending very much time thinking about his conscience.

I said I didn’t believe in it, but I thought that if a man had one, it was apt to trouble him a little off and on—especially if the one he had was one of these left-over ones. “If you had one of these consciences—I mean the kind of conscience that pretends to belong to you, and acts as if it belonged to some one else,” I said “one of these dead-frog-leg, reflex-action consciences, working and twitching away on you day and night, the way I have, you’d *have* to think about it sometimes. You’d get so ashamed of it. You’d feel trifled with so. You’d——”

The P. G. S. of M. said something about not being very much surprised—over my case. He said that people who changed their minds as often as I did couldn’t reasonably expect consciences spry enough.

His general theory seemed to be that I had a conscience once and wore it out.

“It’s getting to be so with everybody nowadays,” he said. “Nobody is settled. Everything is blown about. We do not respect tradition either in ourselves or in the life about us. No one listens to the Voice of Experience.”

“There she blows!” I said. I knew it was coming sooner or later. I added that one of the great inconveniences of life, it seemed to me, was the Intolerance of Experienced People.

## On the Intolerance of Experienced People

It is generally assumed by persons who have taken the pains to put themselves in this very disagreeable class, that people in general—all other people—are as inexperienced—as they look. If a man speaks on a subject at all in their presence, they assume he speaks autobiographically. These people are getting thicker every year. One can't go anywhere without finding them standing around with a kind of “How-do-you-know?” and “Did-it-happen-to-you?” air every time a man says something he knows by—well—by seeing it—perfectly plain seeing it. One doesn't need to stand up to one's neck in experience, in a perfect muck of experience, in order to know things, in order to know they are there. People who are experienced within an inch of their lives, submerged in experience, until all you can see of them is a tired look, are always calling out to the man who sees a thing as he is going by—sees it, I mean, with his mind; sees it without having to put his feet in it—they are always calling out to him to come back and be with them, and know life, as they call it, and duck under to Experience. Now, to say nothing of living with such persons, it is almost impossible to talk with them. It isn't safe even to philosophise when they are around. If a man ventures the assertion in their presence that what a woman loves in a lover is complete subjugation they argue that either he is a fool and is asserting what he has not experienced, or he is still more of one and has experienced it. The idea that a man may have several principles around him that he has not used yet does not occur to them. The average amateur mother, when she belongs to this type, becomes a perfect bigot toward a maiden aunt who advances, perhaps, some harmless little Froebel idea. She swears by the shibboleth of experience, and every new baby she has makes her more disagreeable to people who have not had babies. The only way to get acquainted with her is to have a baby. She assumes that a motherless woman has a motherless mind. The idea that a rich and bountiful womanhood, which is saving its motherhood up, which is free from the absorption and the haste, keenly observant and sympathetic, may come to a kind of motherly insight, distinctly the result of not being experienced, does not occur to her. The art of getting the result—the spirit of experience, without paying all the cost of the experience itself—needs a good word spoken for it nowadays. Some one has yet to point out the value and power of what might be called The Maiden-Aunt Attitude toward Life. The world has had thousands of experienced young mothers for thousands of years—experienced out of their wits—piled up with experiences they don't know anything about; but, in the meantime, the most important contribution to the bringing-up of children in the world that has ever been known—the kindergarten—was thought of in the first place by a man who was never a mother, and has been developed entirely in the years that have followed since by maiden aunts.

The spiritual power and manifoldness and largeness which is the most informing quality of a really

cultivated man comes from a certain refinement in him, a gift of knowing by tasting. He seems to have touched the spirits of a thousand experiences we know he never has had, and they seem to have left the souls of sorrows and joys in him. He lives in a kind of beautiful magnetic fellowship with all real life in the world. This is only possible by a sort of unconscious economy in the man's nature, a gift of not having to experience things.

Avoiding experience is one of the great creative arts of life. We shall have enough before we die. It is forced upon us. We cannot even select it, most of it. But, in so far as we can select it,—in one's reading, for instance,—it behooves a man to avoid experience. He at least wants to avoid experience enough to have time to stop and think about the experience he has; to be sure he is getting as much out of his experience as it is worth.

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### III

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## On Having One's Experience Done Out

“But how can one avoid an experience?”

By heading it off with a principle. Principles are a lot of other people's experiences, in a convenient form a man can carry around with him, to keep off his own experiences with.

No other rule for economising knowledge can quite take the place, it seems to me, of reading for principles. It economises for a man both ways at once. It not only makes it possible for a man to have the whole human race working out his life for him, instead of having to do it all himself, but it makes it possible for him to read anything he likes, to get something out of almost anything he does not like, which he is obliged to read. If a man has a habit of reading for principles, for the law behind everything, he cannot miss it. He cannot help learning things, even from people who don't know them.

The other evening when The P. G. S. of M. came into my study, he saw the morning paper lying unopened on the settle by the fireplace.

“Haven't you read this yet?” he said.

“No, not to-day.”

“Where are you, anyway? Why not?”

I said I hadn't felt up to it yet, didn't feel profound enough—something to that effect.

The P. G. S. of M. thinks a newspaper should be read in ten minutes. He looked over at me with a sort of slow, pitying, Boston-Public-Library expression he has sometimes.

I behaved as well as I could—took no notice for a minute.

“The fact is, I have changed,” I said, “about papers and some things. I have times of thinking I'm

improved considerably,” I added recklessly.

Still the same pained Boston-Public-Library expression—only turned on a little harder.

“Seems to me,” I said, “when a man can’t feel superior to other people in this world, he might at least be allowed the privilege of feeling superior to himself once in a while—spells of it.”

He intimated that the trouble with me was that I wanted both. I admitted that I had cravings for both. I said I thought I’d be a little easier to get along with, if they were more satisfied.

He intimated that I was easier to get along with than I ought to be, or than I seemed to think I was. He did not put it in so many words. The P. G. S. of M. never says anything that can be got hold of and answered. Finally I determined to answer him whether he had said anything or not.

“Well,” I said, “I may feel superior to other people sometimes. I may even feel superior to myself, but I haven’t got to the point where I feel superior to a newspaper—to a whole world at once. I don’t try to read it in ten minutes. I don’t try to make a whole day of a whole world, a foot-note to my oatmeal mush! I don’t treat the whole human race, trooping past my breakfast, as a parenthesis in my own mind. I don’t try to read a great, serious, boundless thing like a daily newspaper, unfolded out of starlight, gleaner of a thousand sunsets around a world, and talk at the same time. I don’t say, ‘There’s nothing in it,’ interrupt a planet to chew my food, throw a planet on the floor and look for my hat.... Nations lunging through space to say good-morning to me, continents flashed around my thoughts, seas for the boundaries of my day’s delight ... the great God shining over all! And may He preserve me from ever reading a newspaper in ten minutes!”

I have spent as much time as any one, I think, in my day, first and last, in feeling superior to newspapers. I can remember when I used to enjoy it very much—the feeling, I mean. I have spent whole half-days at it, going up and down columns, thinking they were not good enough for me.

Now when I take up a morning paper, half-dread, half-delight, I take it up softly. My whole being trembles in the balance before it. The whole procession of my soul, shabby, loveless, provincial, tawdry, is passed in review before it. It is the grandstand of the world. The vast and awful Roll-Call of the things I ought to be—the things I ought to love—in the great world voice sweeps over me. It reaches its way through all my thoughts, through the minutes of my days. “Where is thy soul? Oh, where is thy soul?” the morning paper, up and down its columns, calls to me. There are days that I ache with the echo of it. There are days when I dare not read it until the night. Then the voice that is in it grows gentle with the darkness, it may be, and is stilled with sleep.

I am not saying it does not take a very intelligent man to read a newspaper in ten minutes—squeeze a planet at breakfast and drop it. I think it does. But I am inclined to think that the intelligent man who reads a newspaper in ten minutes is exactly the same kind of intelligent man who could spend a week reading it if he wanted to, and not waste a minute. And he might want to. He simply reads a newspaper as he likes. He is not confined to one way. He does not read it in ten minutes because he has a mere ten-minute mind, but because he merely has the ten minutes. Rapid reading and slow reading are both based, with such a man, on appreciation of the paper—and not upon a narrow, literary, Boston-Public-Library feeling of being superior to it.

The value of reading-matter, like other matter, depends on what a man does with it. All that one needs in order not to waste time in general reading is a large, complete set of principles to stow things away in. Nothing really needs to be wasted. If one knows where everything belongs in one's mind—or tries to,—if one takes the trouble to put it there, reading a newspaper is one of the most colossal, tremendous, and boundless acts that can be performed by any one in the whole course of a human life.

If there's any place where a man needs to have all his wits about him, to put things into,—if there's any place where the next three inches can demand as much of a man as a newspaper, where is it? The moment he opens it he lays his soul open and exposes himself to all sides of the world in a second,—to several thousand years of a world at once.

A book is a comparatively safe, unintelligent place for a mind to be in. There are at least four walls to it—a few scantlings over one, protecting one from all space. A man has at least some remotest idea of where he is, of what may drop on him, in a book. It may tax his capacity of stowing things away. But he always has notice—almost always. It sees that he has time and room. It has more conveniences for fixing things. The author is always there besides, a kind of valet to anybody, to help people along pleasantly, to anticipate their wants. It's what an author is for. One expects it.

But a man finds it is different in a morning paper, rolled out of dreams and sleep into it,—empty, helpless before a day, all the telegraph machines of the world thumping all the night, clicked into one's thoughts before one thinks—no man really has room in him to read a morning paper. No man's soul is athletic or swift enough.... Nations in a sentence. ... Thousands of years in a minute, philosophies, religions, legislatures, paleozoics, church socials, side by side; stars and gossip, fools, heroes, comets—infinity on parade, and over the precipice of the next paragraph, head-long—who knows what!

Reading a morning paper is one of the supreme acts of presence of mind in a human life.

“But what is going to become of us?” some one says, “if a man has to go through ‘the supreme act of presence of mind in a whole human life,’ every morning—and every morning before he goes to business? It takes as much presence of mind as most men have, mornings, barely to get up.”

Well, of course, I admit, if a man’s going to read a newspaper to toe the line of all his convictions; if he insists on taking the newspaper as a kind of this-morning’s junction of all knowledge, he will have to expect to be a rather anxious person. One could hardly get one paper really read through in this way in one’s whole life. If a man is always going to read the news of the globe in such a serious, sensitive, suggestive, improving, Atlas-like fashion, it would be better he had never learned to read at all. At all events, if it’s a plain question between a man’s devouring his paper or letting his paper devour him, of course the only way to do is to begin the day by reading something else, or by reading it in ten minutes and forgetting it in ten more. One would certainly rather be headlong—a mere heedless, superficial globe-trotter with one’s mind, than not to have any mind—to be wiped out at one’s breakfast table, to be soaked up into infinity every morning, to be drawn off, evaporated into all knowledge, to begin one’s day scattered around the edges of all the world. One would do almost anything to avoid this. And it is what always happens if one reads for principles pell-mell.

All that I am claiming for reading for principles is, that if one reads for principles, one really cannot miss it in reading. There is always something there, and a man who treats a newspaper as if it were not good enough for him falls short of himself.

The same is true of desultory reading so-called, of the habit of general information, and of the habit of going about noticing things—noticing things over one’s shoulder.

I am inclined to think that desultory reading is as good if not better for a man than any other reading he can do, if he organises it—has habitual principles and swift channels of thought to pour it into. I do not think it is at all unlikely from such peeps as we common mortals get into the minds of men of genius, that their desultory reading (in the fine strenuous sense) has been the making of them. The intensely suggestive habit of thought, the prehensile power in a mind, the power of grasping wide-apart facts and impressions, of putting them into prompt handfuls, where anything can be done with them that one likes, could not possibly be cultivated to better advantage than by the practice of masterful and regular desultory reading.

Certainly the one compelling trait in a work of genius, whether in music, painting, or literature, the trait of untraceableness, the semi-miraculous look, the feeling things give us sometimes, in a great work of art, of being at once impossible together, and inevitable together,—has its most natural background in what would seem at first probably, to most minds, incidental or accidental habits of observation.

One always knows a work of art of the second rank by the fact that one can place one’s hand on big blocks of material in it almost everywhere, material which has been taken bodily and moved over from certain places. And one always knows a work of art of the first rank by the fact that it is absolutely defiant and elusive. There is a sense of infinity—a gathered-from-everywhere sense in it—of things which belong and have always belonged side by side and exactly where they are put, but which no one had put there.

It would be hard to think of any intellectual or spiritual habit more likely to give a man a bi-sexual or at least a cross-fertilising mind, than the habit of masterful, wilful, elemental, desultory reading. The amount of desultory reading a mind can do, and do triumphantly, may be said to be perhaps the supreme test of the actual energy of the mind, of the vital heat in it, of its melting-down power, its power of melting everything through, and blending everything in, to the great central essence of life.

No more adequate plan, or, as the architects call it, no better elevation for a man could possibly be found than a daily newspaper of the higher type. For scope, points of view, topics, directions of interest, catholicity, many-sidedness, world-wideness, for all the raw material a large and powerful man must needs be made out of, nothing could possibly excel a daily newspaper. Plenty of smaller artists have been made in the world and will be made again in it—hothouse or parlour artists—men whose work has very little floor-space in it, one- or two-story men, and there is no denying that they have their place, but there never has been yet, and there never will be, I venture to say, a noble or colossal artist or artist of the first rank who shall not have as many stories in him as a daily newspaper. The immortal is the universal in a man looming up. If the modern critic who is looking about in this world of ours for the great artist would look where the small ones are afraid to go, he would stand a fair chance of finding what he is looking for. If one were to look about for a general plan, a rough draft or sketch of the mind of an Immortal, he will find that mind spread out before him in the interests and passions, the giant sorrows and delights of his morning paper.

I am not coming out in this chapter to defend morning papers. One might as well pop up in one's place on this globe, wherever one is on it, and say a good word for sunrises. What immediately interests me in this connection is the point that if a man reads for principles in this world he will have time and take time to be interested in a great many things in it. The point seems to be that there is nothing too great or too small for a human brain to carry away with it, if it will have a place to put it. All one has to do, to get the good of a man, a newspaper, a book, or any other action, a paragraph, or even the blowing of a wind, is to lift it over to its principle, see it and delight in it as a part of the whole, of the eternal, and of the running gear of things. Reading for principles may make a man seem very slow at first—several years slower than other people—but as every principle he reads with makes it possible to avoid at least one experience, and, at the smallest calculation, a hundred books, he soon catches up. It would be hard to find a better device for reading books through their backs, for travelling with one's mind, than the habit of reading for principles. A principle is a sort of universal car-coupling. One can be joined to any train of thought in all Christendom with it, and rolled in luxury around the world in the private car of one's own mind.

But it is not so much as a luxury as a convenience that reading for principles appeals to a vigorous mind. It is the short-cut to knowledge. The man who is once started in reading for principles is not long in distancing the rest of us, because all the reading that he does goes into growth,—is saved up in a few handy, prompt generalisations. His whole being becomes alert and supple. He has the under-hold in

dealing with nature, grips hold the law of the thing and rules it. He is capable of far reaches where others go step by step. In every age of the world of thought he goes about giant-like, lifting worlds with a laugh, doing with the very playing of his mind work which crowds of other minds toiling on their crowds of facts could not accomplish. He is only able to do this by being a master of principles. He has made himself a man who can handle a principle, a sum-total of a thousand facts as easily as other men, men with bare scientific minds, can handle one of the facts. He thinks like a god—not a very difficult thing to do. Any man can do it after thirty or forty years, if he gives himself the chance, if he reads for principles, keeps his imagination—the way Emerson did, for instance—sound and alive all through. He does not need to deny that the bare scientific method, the hugging of the outside of a thing, the being deliberately superficial and literal—the needing to know all of the facts, is a useful and necessary method at times; but outside of his specialty he takes the ground that the scientific method is not the normal method through which a man acquires his knowledge, but a secondary and useful method for verifying the knowledge he has. He acquires knowledge through the constant exercise of his mind with principles. He is full of subtle experiences he never had. He appears to other minds, perhaps, to go to the truth with a flash, but he probably does not. He does not have to go to the truth. He has the truth on the premises right where he can get at it, in its most convenient, most compact and spiritual form. To write or think or act he has but to strike down through the impressions, the experiences,—the saved-up experiences,—of his life, and draw up their principles.

A great deal has been said from time to time among the good of late about the passing of the sermon as a practical working force. A great deal has been said among the literary about the passing of the essay. Much has been said also about the passing of poetry and the passing of religion in our modern life. It would not be hard to prove that what has been called, under the pressure of the moment, the passing of religion and poetry, and of the sermon and the essay, could fairly be traced to the temporary failure of education, the disappearance in the modern mind of the power of reading for principles. The very farm-hands of New England were readers for principles once—men who looked back of things—philosophers. Philosophers grew like the grass on a thousand hills. Everybody was a philosopher a generation ago. The temporary obscuration of religion and poetry and the sermon and the essay at the present time is largely due to the fact that generalisation has been trained out of our typical modern minds. We are mobbed with facts. We are observers of the letter of things rather than of the principles and spirits of things. The letter has been heaped upon us. Poetry and religion and the essay and the sermon are all alike, in that they are addressed to what can be taken for granted in men—to sum-totals of experience—the power of seeing sum-totals. They are addressed to generalising minds. The essayist of the highest rank induces conviction by playing upon the power of generalisation, by arousing the associations and experiences that have formed the principles of his reader's mind. He makes his appeal to the philosophic imagination.

It is true that a man may not be infallible in depending upon his imagination or principle-gathering organ for acquiring knowledge, and in the nature of things it is subject to correction and verification, but

as a positive, practical, economical working organ in a world as large as this, an imagination answers the purpose as well as anything. To a finite man who finds himself in an infinite world it is the one possible practicable outfit for living in it.

Reading for principles is its most natural gymnasium.

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## VI

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### But——

I had finished writing these chapters on the philosophic mind, and was just reading them over, thinking how true they were, and how valuable they were for me, and how I must act on them, when I heard a soft “Pooh!” from somewhere way down in the depths of my being. When I had stopped and thought, I saw it was my Soul trying to get my attention. “I do not want you always reading for principles,” said my Soul stoutly, “reading for a philosophic mind. I do not want a philosophic mind on the premises.”

“Very well,” I said.

“You do not want one yourself,” my Soul said, “you would be bored to death with one—with a mind that’s always reading for principles!”

“I’m not so sure,” I said.

“You always are with other people’s.”

“Well, there’s Meakins,” I admitted.

“You wouldn’t want a Meakins kind of a mind, would you?” (Meakins is always reading for principles.)

I refused to answer at once. I knew I didn’t want Meakins’s, but I wanted to know why. Then I fell to thinking. Hence this chapter.

Meakins has changed, I said to myself. The trouble with him isn’t that he reads for principles, but he is getting so he cannot read for anything else. What a man really wants, it seems to me, is the use of a philosophic mind. He wants one where he can get at it, where he can have all the benefit of it without having to live with it. It’s quite another matter when a man gives his mind up, his own everyday mind—the one he lives with—lets it be coldly, deliberately philosophised through and through. It’s a kind of disease.

When Meakins visits me now, the morning after he is gone I take a piece of paper and sum his visit up in a row of propositions. When he came before five years ago—his visit was summed up in a great desire in me, a lift, a vow to the universe. He had the same ideas, but they all glowed out into a man. They came to me as a man and for a man—a free, emancipated, emancipating, world-loving, world-making man

—a man out in the open, making all the world his comrade. His appeal was personal.

Visiting with him now is like sitting down with a stick or pointer over you and being compelled to study a map. He doesn't care anything about me except as one more piece of paper to stamp his map on. And he doesn't care anything about the world he has the map of, except that it is the world that goes with his map. When a man gets into the habit of always reading for principles back of things—back of real, live, particular things—he becomes inhuman. He forgets the things. Meakins bores people, because he is becoming inhuman. He treats human beings over and over again unconsciously, when he meets them, as mere generalisations on legs. His mind seems a great sea of abstractions—just a few real things floating palely around in it for illustrations. When I try to rebuke him for being a mere philosopher or man without hands, he is “setting his universe in order,” he says—making his surveys. He may be living in his philosophic mind now, breaking out his intellectual roads but he is going to travel on them later, he explains.

In the meantime I notice one thing about the philosophic mind. It not only does not do things. It cannot even be talked with. It is not interested in things in particular. There is something garrulously, pedagogically unreal about it,—at least there is about Meakins's. You cannot so much as mention a real or particular thing to Meakins but he brings out a row of fifteen or twenty principles that go with it, which his mind has peeked around and found behind it. By the time he has floated out about fifteen of them—of these principles back of a thing—you begin to wonder if the thing was there for the principles to be back of. You hope it wasn't.

As fond as I am of him, I cannot get at him nowadays in a conversation. He is always just around back of something. He is a ghost. I come home praying Heaven, every time I see him, not to let me evaporate. He talks about the future of humanity by the week, but I find he doesn't notice humanity in particular. You cannot interest him in talking to him about himself, or even in letting him do his own talking about himself. He is a mere detail to himself. You are another detail. What you are and what he is are both mere footnotes to a philosophy. All history is a footnote to it—or at best a marginal illustration. There is no such thing as communing with Meakins unless you use (as I do) a torpedo or battering-ram as a starter. If you let him have his way he sits in his chair and in his deep, beautiful voice addresses a row of remarks to The Future in General—the only thing big enough or worth while to talk to. He sits perfectly motionless (except the whites of his eyes) and talks deeply and tenderly and instructively to the Next Few Hundred Years—to posterity, to babes not yet in their mothers' wombs, while his dearest friends sit by.

If ever there was a man who could take a whole roomful of warm, vital people, sitting right next to him, pulsing and glowing in their joys and their sins, and with one single heroic motion of an imperious hand drop them softly and lovingly over into Fatuity and Oblivion in five minutes and leave them out of the world before their own eyes, it is Theophilus Meakins. I try sometimes—but I cannot really do it.

He does not really commune with things or with persons at all. He gets what he wants out of them. You feel him putting people, when he meets them, through his philosophy. He makes them over while they

wait, into extracts. A man may keep on afterward living and growing, throbbing and being, but he does not exist to Meakins except in his bottle. A man cannot help feeling with Meakins afterward the way milk feels probably, if it could only express it, when it's been put through one of these separators, had the cream taken off of it. Half the world is skim-milk to him. But what does it matter to Meakins? He has them in his philosophy. He does the same way with things as with people. He puts in all nature as a parenthesis, and a rather condescending, explanatory one at that, a symbol, a kind of beckoning, an index-finger to God. He never notices a tree for itself. A great elm would have to call out to him, fairly shout at him, right under its arms: "Oh, Theophilus Meakins, author of *The Habit of Eternity*, author of *The Evolution of the Ego* look at ME, I also am alive, even as thou art. Canst thou not stop one moment and be glad with *me*? Have I not a thousand leaves glistening and glorying in the great sun? Have I not a million roots feeling for the stored-up light in the ground, reaching up God to me out of the dark? Have I not"—"It is one of the principles of the flux of society," breaks in Theophilus Meakins, "as illustrated in all the processes of the natural world—the sap of this tree," said he, "for instance," brushing the elm-tree off into space, "that the future of mankind depends and always must depend upon——"

"The flux of society be ——," said I in holy wrath. I stopped him suddenly, the elm-tree still holding its great arms above us. "Do you suppose that God," I said, "is in any such small business as to make an elm-tree like this—like THIS (look at it, man!), and put it on the earth, have it waving around on it, just to illustrate one of your sermons? Now, my dear fellow, I'm not going to have you lounging around in your mind with an elm-tree like this any longer. I want you to come right over to it," said I, taking hold of him, "and sit down on one of its roots, and lean up against its trunk and learn something, live with it a minute—get blessed by it. The flux of society can wait," I said.

Meakins is always tractable enough, when shouted at, or pounded on a little. We sat down under the tree for quite a while, perfectly still. I can't say what it did for Meakins. But it helped me—just barely leaning against the trunk of it helped me, under the circumstances, a great deal.

No one will believe it, I suppose, but we hadn't gotten any more than fifteen feet away from the shadow of that tree when "The principles of the flux of society," said he, "demand——"

"Now, my dear fellow," I said, "there are a lot more elm-trees we really ought to take in, on this walk. We——"

"I SAY!" said Meakins, his great voice roaring on my little polite, opposing sentence like surf over a pebble, "that the principles——"

Then I grew wroth. I always do when Meakins treats what I say just as a pebble to get more roar out of, on the great bleak shore of his thoughts. "No one says anything!" I cried; "if any one says anything—if you say another word, my dear fellow, on this walk, I will sing *Old Hundred* as loud as I can all the way home."

He promised to be good—after a half-mile or so. I caught him looking at me, harking back to an old, wonderfully sweet, gentle, human, understanding smile he has—or used to have before he was a

philosopher.

Then he quietly mentioned a real thing and we talked about real things for four miles.

I remember we sat under the stars that night after the world was folded up, and asleep, and I think we really felt the stars as we sat there—not as a roof for theories of the world, but we felt them as stars—shared the night with them, lit our hearts at them. Then we silently, happily, at last, both of us, like awkward, wondering boys, went to bed.





### III—Reading Down Through

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#### I

#### Inside

**I**T is always the same way. I no sooner get a good, pleasant, interesting, working idea, like this “Reading for Principles,” arranged and moved over, and set up in my mind, than some insinuating, persistent, concrete human being comes along, works his way in to illustrate it, and spoils it. Here is Meakins, for instance. I have been thinking on the other side of my thought every time I have thought of him. I have no more sympathy than any one with a man who spends all his time going round and round in his reading and everything else, swallowing a world up in principles. “Why should a good, live, sensible man,” I feel like saying, “go about in a world like this stowing his truths into principles, where, half the time, he cannot get at them himself, and no one else would want to?” Going about swallowing one’s experience up in principles is very well so far as it goes. But it is far better to go about swallowing up one’s principles into one’s self.

A man who has lived and read into himself for many years does not need to read very many books.

He has the gist of nine out of ten new books that are published. He knows, or as good as knows, what is in them, by taking a long, slow look at his own heart. So does everybody else.

## II

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### On Being Lonely with a Book

The P. G. S. of M. said that as far as he could make out, judging from the way I talked, my main ambition in the world seemed to be to write a book that would throw all publishers and libraries out of employment. “And what will your book amount to, when you get it done?” he said. “If it’s convincing—the way it ought to be—it will merely convince people they oughtn’t to have read it.”

“And that’s been done before,” I said. “Almost any book could do it.” I ventured to add that I thought people grew intelligent enough in one of my books—even in the first two or three chapters, not to read the rest of it. I said all I hoped to accomplish was to get people to treat other men’s books in the same way that they treated mine—treat everything that way—take things for granted, get the spirit of a thing, then go out and gloat on it, do something with it, live with it—anything but this going on page after page using the spirit of a thing all up, reading with it.

“Reading down through in a book seems a great deal more important to me than merely reading the book through.”

I expected that The P. G. S. of M. would ask me what I meant by reading down through, but he didn’t. He was still at large, worrying about the world. “I have no patience with it—your idea,” he broke out. “It’s all in the air. It’s impractical enough, anyway, just as an idea, and it’s all the more impractical when it’s carried out. So far as I can see, at the rate you’re carrying on,” said The P. G. S. of M., “what with improving the world and all with your book, there isn’t going to be anything but You and your Book left.”

“Might be worse,” I said. “What one wants in a book after the first three or four chapters, or in a world either, it seems to me, is not its facts merely, nor its principles, but one’s self—one’s real relation of one’s real self, I mean, to some real fact. If worst came to worst and I had to be left all alone, I’d rather be alone with myself, I think, than with anybody. It’s a deal better than being lonely the way we all are nowadays—with such a lot of other people crowding round, that one has to be lonely with, and books and newspapers and things besides. One has to be lonely so much in civilisation, there are so many things and persons that insist on one’s coming over and being lonely with them, that being lonely in a perfectly plain way, all by one’s self—the very thought of it seems to me, comparatively speaking, a relief. It’s not what it ought to be, but it’s something.”

I feel the same way about being lonely with a book. I find that the only way to keep from being lonely

in a book—that is, to keep from being crowded on to the outside of it, after the first three or four chapters—is to read the first three or four chapters all over again—read them down through. I have to get hold of my principles in them, and then I have to work over my personal relation to them. When I make sure of that, when I make sure of my personal relation to the author, and to his ideas, and there is a fairly acquainted feeling with both of us, then I can go on reading for all I am worth—or all he is worth anyway, whichever breaks down first—and no more said about it. Everything means something to everybody when one reads down through. The only way an author and reader can keep from wasting each other's time, it seems to me, at least from having spells of wasting it, is to begin by reading down through.

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### III

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## Keeping Other Minds Off

What I really mean by reading down through in a book, I suppose, is reading down through in it to myself. I dare say this does not seem worthy. It is quite possible, too, that there is no real defence for it—I mean for my being so much interested in myself in the middle of other people's books. My theory about it is that the most important thing in this world for a man's life is his being original in it. Being original consists, I take it, not in being different, but in being honest—really having something in one's own inner experience which one has anyway, and which one knows one has, and which one has all for one's own, whether any one else has ever had it or not. Being original consists in making over everything one sees and reads, into one's self.

Making over what one reads into one's self may be said to be the only way to have a really safe place for knowledge. If a man takes his knowledge and works it all over into what he is, sense and spirit, it may cost more at first, but it is more economical in the long run, because none of it can possibly be lost. And it can all be used on the place.

I do not know how it is with others nowadays, but I find that this feeling of originality in an experience, in my own case, is exceedingly hard to keep. It has to be struggled for.

Of course, one has a theory in a general way that one does not want an original mind if he has to get it by keeping other people's minds off, and yet there is a certain sense in which if he does not do it at certain times—have regular periods of keeping other people's minds off, he would lose for life the power of ever finding his own under them. Most men one knows nowadays, if they were to spend all the rest of their lives peeling other men's minds off, would not get down to their own before they died. It seems to be supposed that what a mind is for—at least in civilisation—is to have other men's minds on top of it.

It is the same way in books—at least I find it so myself when I get to reading in a book, reading so

fast I cannot stop in it. Nearly all books, especially the good ones, have a way of overtaking a man—riding his originality down. It seems to be assumed that if a man ever did get down to his own mind by accident, whether in a book or anywhere else, he would not know what to do with it.

And this is not an unreasonable assumption. Even the man who gets down to his mind regularly hardly knows what to do with it part of the time. But it makes having a mind interesting. There's a kind of pleasant, lusty feeling in it—a feeling of reality and honesty that makes having a mind—even merely one's own mind—seem almost respectable.

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## IV

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### Reading Backwards

Sir Joshua Reynolds gives the precedence to the Outside, to authority instead of originality, in the early stages of education, because when he went to Italy he met the greatest experience of his life. He found that much of his originality was wrong.

If Sir Joshua Reynolds had gone to Italy earlier he would never have been heard of except as a copyist, lecturer, or colour-commentator. The real value of Sir Joshua Reynolds's "Discourses on Art" is the man in spite of the lecturer. What the man stands for is,—Be original. Get headway of personal experience, some power of self-teaching. Then when you have something to work on, organs that act and react on what is presented to them, confront your Italy—whatever it may be—and the Past, and give yourself over to it. The result is paradox and power, a receptive, creative man, an obeying and commanding, but self-centred and self-poised man, world-open, subject to the whole world and yet who has a whole world subject to him, either by turns or at will.

What Sir Joshua conveys to his pupils is not his art, but his mere humility about his art—*i. e.*, his most belated experience, his finishing touch, as an artist.

The result is that having accidentally received an ideal education, having begun his education properly, with self-command, he completed his career with a kind of Reynoldsocracy—a complacent, teachery, levelling-down command of others. While Sir Joshua Reynolds was an artist, he became one because he did not follow his own advice. The fact that he would have followed it if he had had a chance shows what his art shows, namely, that he did not intend to be any more original than he could help. It is interesting, however, that having acquired the blemish of originality in early youth, he never could get rid of enough of it before he died, not to be tolerated among the immortals.

His career is in many ways the most striking possible illustration of what can be brought to pass when a human being without genius is by accident brought up with the same principles and order of

education and training that men of genius have—education by one's self; education by others, under the direction of one's self. Sir Joshua Reynolds would have been incapable of education by others under direction of himself, if he had not been kept ignorant and creative and English, long enough to get a good start with himself before he went down to Italy to run a race with Five Hundred Years. In his naive, almost desperate shame over the plight of being almost a genius, he overlooks this, but his fame is based upon it. He devoted his old age to trying to train young men into artists by teaching them to despise their youth in their youth, because, when he was an old man, he despised his.

What seems to be necessary is to strike a balance, in one's reading.

It's all well enough; indeed, there's nothing better than having one's originality ridden down. One wants it ridden down half the time. The trouble comes in making provision for catching up, for getting one's breath after it. I have found, for instance, that it has become absolutely necessary so far as I am concerned, if I am to keep my little mind's start in the world, to begin the day by not reading the newspaper in the morning. Unless I can get headway—some thought or act or cry or joy of my own—something that is definitely in my own direction first, there seems to be no hope for me all day long. Most people, I know, would not agree to this. They like to take a swig of all-space, a glance at everybody while the world goes round, before they settle down to their own little motor on it. They like to feel that the world is all right before they go ahead. So would I, but I have tried it again—and again. The world is too much for me in the morning. My own little motor comes to a complete stop. I simply want to watch the Big One going round and round. I cannot seem to stop somehow—begin puttering once more with my Little One. If I begin at all, I have to begin at once. In my heart I feel the Big One over me all the while, circling over me, blessing me. But I keep from noticing. I know no other way, and drive on. The world is getting to be—has to be—to me a purely afternoon or evening affair. I have a world of my own for morning use. I hold to it, one way or the other, with a cheerful smile or like grim death, until the clock says twelve and the sun turns the corner, and the book drops. It does not seem to make very much difference what kind of a world I am in, or what is going on in it, so that it is all my own, and the only way I know to do, is to say or read or write or use the things first in it which make it my own the most. The one thing I want in the morning is to let my soul light its own light, appropriate some one thing, glow it through with itself. When I have satisfied the hunger for making a bit of the great world over into my world, I am ready for the world as a world—streets and newspapers of it,—silent and looking, in it, until sleep falls.

It is because men lie down under it, allow themselves to be rolled over by it, that the modern newspaper, against its will, has become the great distracting machine of modern times. As I live and look about me, everywhere I find a great running to and fro of editors across the still earth. Every editor has his herd, is a kind of bell-wether, has a great paper herd flocking at his heels. "Is not the world here?" I say, "and am I not here to look at it? Can I really see a world better by joining a Cook's Excursion on it, sweeping round the earth in a column, seeing everything in a column, looking over the shoulder of a crowd?" Sometimes it seems as if the whole modern, reading, book-and-paper outfit were simply a huge,

crunching Mass-Machine—a machine for arranging every man’s mind from the outside.

Originality may be said to depend upon a balance of two things, the power of being interested in other people’s minds and the power of being more interested in one’s own. In its last analysis, it is the power a man’s mind has of minding its own business, which, even in another man’s book, makes the book real and absorbing to him. It is the least compliment one can pay a book. The only honest way to commune with a real man either in a book or out of it is to do one’s own share of talking. Both the book and the man say better things when talked back to. In reading a great book one finds it allows for this. In reading a poor one the only way to make it worth while, to find anything in it, is to put it there. The most self-respecting course when one finds one’s self in the middle of a poor book is to turn right around in it, and write it one’s self. As has been said by Hoffentotter (in the fourteenth chapter of his great masterpiece): “If you find that you cannot go on, gentle reader, in the reading of this book, pray read it backwards.”

The original man, the man who insists on keeping the power in a mind of minding its own business, is much more humble than he looks. All he feels is, that his mind has been made more convenient to him than to anybody else and that if anyone is going to use it, he must. It is not a matter of assuming that one’s own mind is superior. A very poor mind, on the premises, put right in with one’s own body, carefully fitted to it, to one’s very nerves and senses, is worth all the other minds in the world. It may be conceit to believe this, and it may be self-preservation. But, in any case, keeping up an interest in one’s own mind is excusable. Even the humblest man must admit that the first, the most economical, the most humble, the most necessary thing for a man to do in reading in this world (if he can do it) is to keep up an interest in his own mind.



## IV—Reading for Facts

### I

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#### Calling the Meeting to Order

**R**EADING for persons makes a man a poet or artist, makes him dramatic with his mind—puts the world-stage into him.

Reading for principles makes a man a philosopher. Reading for facts makes a man——

“It doesn’t make a man,” spoke up the Mysterious Person.

“Oh, yes,” I said, “if he reads a few of them—if he takes time to do something with them—he can make a man out of them, if he wants to, as well as anything else.”

The great trouble with scientific people and others who are always reading for facts is that they forget what facts are for. They use their minds as museums. They are like Ole Bill Spear. They take you up into their garret and point to a bushel-basketful of something and then to another bushel-basket half-full of some more. Then they say in deep tones and with solemn faces: “This is the largest collection of burnt matches in the world.”

It's what reading for facts brings a man to, generally—fact for fact's sake. He lunges along for facts wherever he goes. He cannot stop. All an outsider can do in such cases, with nine out of ten scientific or collecting minds, is to watch them sadly in a dull, trance-like, helpless inertia of facts, sliding on to Ignorance.

What seems to be most wanted in reading for facts in a world as large as this is some reasonable principle of economy. The great problem of reading for facts—travelling with one's mind—is the baggage problem. To have every fact that one needs and to throw away every fact that one can get along without, is the secret of having a comfortable and practicable, live, happy mind in modern knowledge—a mind that gets somewhere—that gets the hearts of things.

The best way to arrange this seems to be to have a sentinel in one's mind in reading.

Every man finds in his intellectual life, sooner or later, that there are certain orders and kinds of facts that have a way of coming to him of their own accord and without being asked. He is half amused sometimes and half annoyed by them. He has no particular use for them. He dotes on them some, perhaps, pets them a little—tells them to go away, but they keep coming back. Apropos of nothing, in the way of everything, they keep hanging about while he attends to the regular business of his brain, and say: "Why don't you do something with Me?"

What I would like to be permitted to do in this chapter is to say a good word for these involuntary, helpless, wistful facts that keep tagging a man's mind around. I know that I am exposing myself in standing up for them to the accusation that I have a mere irrelevant, sideways, intellectually unbusinesslike sort of a mind. I can see my championship even now being gently but firmly set one side. "It's all of a piece—this pleasant, yielding way with ideas," people say. "It goes with the slovenly, lazy, useless, polite state of mind always, and the general ball-bearing view of life."

It seems to me that if a man has a few involuntary, instinctive facts about him, facts that fasten themselves on to his thoughts whether he wants them there or not, facts that keep on working for him of their own accord, down under the floor of his mind, passing things up, running invisible errands for him, making short-cuts for him—it seems to me that if a man has a few facts like this in him, facts that serve him like the great involuntary servants of Nature, whether they are noticed or not, he ought to find it worth his while to do something in return, conduct his life with reference to them. They ought to have the main chance at him. It seems reasonable also that his reading should be conducted with reference to them.

It is no mere literary prejudice, and it seems to be a truth for the scientist as well as for the poet, that the great involuntary facts in a man's life, the facts he does not select, the facts that select him, the facts that say to him, "Come thou and live with us, make a human life out of us that men may know us," are the facts of all others which ought to have their way sooner or later in the great struggling mass-meeting of his mind. I have read equally in vain the lives of the great scientists and the lives of the great artists and makers, if they are not all alike in this, that certain great facts have been yielded to, have been made the presiding officers, the organisers of their minds. In so far as they have been great, no facts have been

suppressed and all facts have been represented; but I doubt if there has ever been a life of a powerful mind yet in which a few great facts and a great man were not seen mutually attracted to each other, day and night,—getting themselves made over into each other, mutually mastering the world.

Certainly, if there is one token rather than another of the great scientist or poet in distinction from the small scientist or poet, it is the courage with which he yields himself, makes his whole being sensitive and free before his instinctive facts, gives himself fearless up to them, allows them to be the organisers of his mind.

It seems to be the only possible way in reading for facts that the mind of a man can come to anything; namely, by always having a chairman (and a few alternates appointed for life) to call the meeting to order.

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## II

### Symbolic Facts

If the meeting is to accomplish anything before it adjourns *sine die*, everything depends upon the gavel in it, upon there being some power in it that makes some facts sit down and others stand up, but which sees that all facts are represented.

In general, the more facts a particular fact can be said to be a delegate for, the more a particular fact can be said to represent other facts, the more of the floor it should have. The power of reading for facts depends upon a man's power to recognise symbolic or sum-total or senatorial facts and keep all other facts, the general mob or common run of facts, from interrupting. The amount of knowledge a man is going to be able to master in the world depends upon the number of facts he knows how to avoid.

This is where our common scientific training—the manufacturing of small scientists in the bulk—breaks down. The first thing that is done with a young man nowadays, if he is to be made into a scientist, is to take away any last vestige of power his mind may have of avoiding facts. Everyone has seen it, and yet we know perfectly well when we stop to think about it that when in the course of his being educated a man's ability to avoid facts is taken away from him, it soon ceases to make very much difference whether he is educated or not. He becomes a mere memory let loose in the universe—goes about remembering everything, hit or miss. I never see one of these memory-machines going about mowing things down remembering them, but that it gives me a kind of sad, sudden feeling of being intelligent. I cannot quite describe the feeling. I am part sorry and part glad and part ashamed of being glad. It depends upon what one thinks of, one's own narrow escape or the other man, or the way of the world. All one can do is to thank God, silently, in some safe place in one's thoughts, that after all there is a great deal of the human race—always is—in every generation who by mere circumstance cannot be educated—bowled over by

their memories. Even at the worst only a few hundred persons can be made over into *reductio-ad-absurdum* Stanley Halls (that is, study science under pupils of the pupils of Stanley Hall) and the chances are even now, as bad as things are and are getting to be, that for several hundred years yet, Man, the Big Brother of creation, will insist on preserving his special distinction in it, the thing that has lifted him above the other animals—his inimitable faculty for forgetting things.

### III

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## Duplicates: A Principle of Economy

I do not suppose that anybody would submit to my being admitted—I was black-balled before I was born—to the brotherhood of scientists. And yet it seems to me that there is a certain sense in which I am as scientific as anyone. It seems to me, for instance, that it is a fairly scientific thing to do—a fairly matter-of-fact thing—to consider the actual nature of facts and to act on it. When one considers the actual nature of facts, the first thing one notices is that there are too many of them. The second thing one notices about facts is that they are not so many as they look. They are mostly duplicates. The small scientist never thinks of this because he never looks at more than one class of facts, never allows himself to fall into any general, interesting, fact-comparing habit. The small poet never thinks of it because he never looks at facts at all. It is thus that it has come to pass that the most ordinary human being, just living along, the man who has the habit of general information, is the intellectual superior of the mere scientists about him or the mere poets. He is superior to the mere poet because he is interested in knowing facts, and he is superior to the minor scientist because he does not want to know all of them, or at least if he does, he never has time to try to, and so keeps on knowing something.

When one considers the actual nature of facts, it is obvious that the only possible model for a scientist of the first class or a poet of the first class in this world, is the average man. The only way to be an extraordinary man, master of more of the universe than any one else, is to keep out of the two great pits God has made in it, in which The Educated are thrown away—the science-pit and the poet-pit. The area and power and value of a man's knowledge depend upon his having such a boundless interest in facts that he will avoid all facts he knows already and go on to new ones. The rapidity of a man's education depends upon his power to scent a duplicate fact afar off and to keep from stopping and puttering with it. Is not one fact out of a thousand about a truth as good as the other nine hundred and ninety-nine to enjoy it with? If there were not any more truths or if there were not so many more things to enjoy in this world than one had time for, it would be different. It would be superficial, I admit, not to climb down into a well and collect some more of the same facts about it, or not to crawl under a stone somewhere and know what

we know already—a little harder. But as it is—well, it does seem to me that when a man has collected one good, representative fact about a thing, or at most two, it is about time to move on and enjoy some of the others. There is not a man living dull enough, it seems to me, to make it worth while to do any other way. There is not a man living who can afford, in a world made as this one is, to know any more facts than he can help. Are not facts plenty enough in the world? Are they not scattered everywhere? And there are not men enough to go around. Let us take our one fact apiece and be off, and be men with it. There is always one fact about everything which is the spirit of all the rest, the fact a man was intended to know and to go on his way rejoicing with. It may be superficial withal and merely spiritual, but if there is anything worth while in this world to me, it is not to miss any part of being a man in it that any other man has had. I do not want to know what every man knows, but I do want to get the best of what he knows and live every day with it. Oh, to take all knowledge for one's province, to have rights with all facts, to be naive and unashamed before the universe, to go forth fearlessly to know God in it, to make the round of creation before one dies, to share all that has been shared, to be all that is, to go about in space saying halloa to one's soul in it, in the stars and in the flowers and in children's faces, is not this to have lived,—that there should be nothing left out in a man's life that all the world has had?





## V—Reading for Results

### I

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#### The Blank Paper Frame of Mind

**T**HE P. G. S. of M. read a paper in our club the other day which he called “Reading for Results.” It was followed by a somewhat warm discussion, in the course of which so many things were said that were not so that the entire club (before any one knew it) had waked up and learned something.

The P. G. S. of M. took the general ground that most of the men one knows nowadays had never learned to read. They read wastefully. Our common schools and colleges, he thought, ought to teach a young man to read with a purpose. “When an educated young man takes up a book,” he said, “he should feel that he has some business in it, and attend to it.”

I said I thought young men nowadays read with purposes too much. Purposes were all they had to read with. “When a man feels that he needs a purpose in front of him, to go through a book with, when he goes about in a book looking over the edge of a purpose at everything, the chances are that he is missing nine tenths of what the book has to give.”

The P. G. S. of M. thought that one tenth was enough. He didn't read a book to get nine tenths of an author. He read it to get the one tenth he wanted—to find out which it was.

I asked him which tenth of Shakespeare he wanted. He said that sometimes he wanted one tenth and sometimes another.

“That is just it,” I said. “Everybody does. It is at the bottom and has been at the bottom of the whole Shakespeare nuisance for three hundred years. Every literary man we have or have had seems to feel obliged somehow to read Shakespeare in tenths. Generally he thinks he ought to publish his tenth—make a streak across Shakespeare with his soul—before he feels literary or satisfied or feels that he has a place in the world. One hardly knows a man who calls himself really literary, who reads Shakespeare nowadays except with a purpose, with some little side-show of his own mind. It is true that there are still some people—not very many perhaps—but we all know some people who can be said to understand Shakespeare, who never get so low in their minds as to have to read him with a purpose; but they are not prominent.

“And yet there is hardly any man who would deny that at best his reading with a purpose is almost always his more anæmic, official, unresourceful, reading. It is like putting a small tool to a book and whittling on it, instead of putting one's whole self to it. One might as well try to read most of Shakespeare's plays with a screw-driver or with a wrench as with a purpose. There is no purpose large enough, that one is likely to find, to connect with them. Shakespeare himself could not have found one when he wrote them in any small or ordinary sense. The one possible purpose in producing a work of art—in any age—is to praise the universe with it, love something with it, talk back to life with it, and the man who attempts to read what Shakespeare writes with any smaller or less general, less overflowing purpose than Shakespeare had in writing it should be advised to do his reading with some smaller, more carefully fitted author,—one nearer to his size. Of course if one wants to be a mere authority on Shakespeare or a mere author there is no denying that one can do it, and do it very well, by reading him with some purpose—some purpose that is too small to have ever been thought of before; but if one wants to understand him, get the wild native flavour and power of him, he must be read in a larger, more vital and open and resourceful spirit—as a kind of spiritual adventure. Half the joy of a great man, like any other great event, is that one can well afford—at least for once—to let one's purposes go.

“To feel one's self lifted out, carried along, if only for a little time, into some vast stream of consciousness, to feel great spaces around one's human life, to float out into the universe, to bathe in it, to taste it with every pore of one's body and all one's soul—this is the one supreme thing that the reading of a man like William Shakespeare is for. To interrupt the stream with dams, to make it turn wheels,—intellectual wheels (mostly pin-wheels and theories) or any wheels whatever,—is to cut one's self off from the last chance of knowing the real Shakespeare at all. A man knows Shakespeare in proportion as he gives himself, in proportion as he lets Shakespeare make a Shakespeare of him, a little while. As long as he is reading in the Shakespeare universe his one business in it is to live in it. He may do no mighty

work there,—pile up a commentary or throw on a footnote,—but he will be a mighty work himself if he let William Shakespeare work on him some. Before he knows it the universe that Shakespeare lived in becomes his universe. He feels the might of that universe being gathered over to him, descending upon him being breathed into him day and night—to belong to him always.

“The power and effect of a book which is a real work of art seems always to consist in the way it has of giving the nature of things a chance at a man, of keeping things open to the sun and air of thought. To those who cannot help being interested, it is a sad sight to stand by with the typical modern man—especially a student—and watch him go blundering about in a great book, cooping it up with purposes.”

The P. G. S. of M. remarked somewhere at about this point that it seemed to him that it made a great difference who an author or reader was. He suggested that my theory of reading with a not-purpose worked rather better with Shakespeare than with the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or the Hon. Carroll D. Wright, Commissioner of Statistics, or Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

I admitted that in reading dictionaries, statistics, or mere poets or mere scientists it was necessary to have a purpose to fall back upon to justify one’s self. And there was no denying that reading for results was a necessary and natural thing. The trouble seemed to be, that very few people could be depended on to pick out the right results. Most people cannot be depended upon to pick out even the right directions in reading a great book. It has to be left to the author. It could be categorically proved that the best results in this world, either in books or in life, had never been attained by men who always insisted on doing their own steering. The special purpose of a great book is that a man can stop steering in it, that one can give one’s self up to the undertow, to the cross-current in it. One feels one’s self swept out into the great struggling human stream that flows under life. One comes to truths and delights at last that no man, though he had a thousand lives, could steer to. Most of us are not clear-headed or far-sighted enough to pick out purposes or results in reading. We are always forgetting how great we are. We do not pick out results—and could not if we tried—that are big enough.

## II

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### The Usefully Unfinished

The P. G. S. of M. remarked that he thought there was such a thing as having purposes in reading that were too big. It seemed to him that a man who spent nearly all his strength when he was reading a book, in trying to use it to swallow a universe with, must find it monotonous. He said he had tried reading a great book without any purpose whatever except its tangents or suggestions, and he claimed that when he read a great book in that way—the average great book—the monotone of innumerable possibility wore on him.

He wanted to feel that a book was coming to something, and if he couldn't feel in reading it that the book was coming to something he wanted to feel at least that he was. He did not say it in so many words, but he admitted he did not care very much in reading for what I had spoken of as a "stream of consciousness." He wanted a nozzle on it.

I asked him at this point how he felt in reading certain classics. I brought out quite a nice little list of them, but I couldn't track him down to a single feeling he had thought of—had had to think of, all by himself, on a classic. I found he had all the proper feelings about them and a lot of well-regulated qualifications besides. He was on his guard. Finally I asked him if he had read (I am not going to get into trouble by naming it) a certain contemporary novel under discussion.

He said he had read it. "Great deal of power in it," he said. "But it doesn't come to anything. I do not see any possible artistic sense," he said, "in ending a novel like that. It doesn't bring one anywhere."

"Neither does one of Keats's poems," I said, "or Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. The odour of a rose doesn't come to anything—bring one anywhere. It would be hard to tell what one really gets out of the taste of roast beef. The sound of the surf on the Atlantic doesn't come to anything, but hundreds of people travel a long way and live in one-windowed rooms and rock in somebody else's bedroom rocker, to hear it, year after year. Millions of dollars are spent in Europe to look at pictures, but if a man can tell what it is he gets out of a picture in so many words there is something very wrong with the picture."

The P. G. S. of M. gave an impatient wave of his hand. (To be strictly accurate, he gave it in the middle of the last paragraph, just before we came to the Atlantic. The rest is Congressional Record.) And after he had given the impatient wave of his hand he looked hurt. I accordingly drew him out. He was still brooding on that novel. He didn't approve of the heroine.

"What was the matter?" I said; "dying in the last chapter?" (It is one of those novels in which the heroine takes the liberty of dying, in a mere paragraph, at the end, and in what always has seemed and always will, to some people, a rather unsatisfactory and unfinished manner.)

"The moral and spiritual issues of a book ought to be—well, things are all mixed up. She dies indefinitely."

"Most women do," I said. I asked him how many funerals of women—wives and mothers—he had been to in the course of his life where he could sit down and really think that they had died to the point—the way they do in novels. I didn't see why people should be required by critics and other authorities, to die to the point in a book more than anywhere else. It is this shallow, reckless way that readers have of wanting to have everything pleasant and appropriate when people die in novels which makes writing a novel nowadays as much as a man's reputation is worth.

The P. G. S. of M. explained that it wasn't exactly the way she died but it was the way everything was left—left to the imagination.

I said I was sorry for any human being who had lived in a world like this who didn't leave a good deal to the imagination when he died. The dullest, most uninteresting man that any one can ever know

becomes interesting in his death. One walks softly down the years of his life, peering through them. One cannot help loving him a little—stealthily. One goes out a little way with him on his long journey—feels bound in with him at last—actually bound in with him (it is like a promise) for ever. The more one knows about people's lives in this world, the more indefinitely, the more irrelevantly,—sometimes almost comically, or as a kind of an aside, or a bit of repartee,—they end them. Suddenly, sometimes while we laugh or look, they turn upon us, fling their souls upon the invisible, and are gone. It is like a last wistful haunting pleasantry—death is—from some of us, a kind of bravado in it—as one would say, “Oh, well, dying is really after all—having been allowed one look at a world like this—a small matter.”

It is true that most people in most novels, never having been born, do not really need to die—that is, if they are logical,—and they might as well die to the point or as the reader likes as in any other way, but if there is one sign rather than another that a novel belongs to the first class, it is that the novelist claims all the privileges of the stage of the world in it. He refuses to write a little parlour of a book and he sees that his people die the way they live, leaving as much left over to the imagination as they know how.

That there are many reasons for the habit of reading for results, as it is called, goes without saying. It also goes without saying—that is, no one is saying very much about it—that the habit of reading for results, such as it is, has taken such a grim hold on the modern American mind that the greatest result of all in reading, the result in a book that cannot be spoken in it, or even out of it, is being unanimously missed.

The fact seems to need to be emphasised that the novel which gives itself to one to be breathed and lived, the novel which leaves a man with something that he must finish himself, with something he must do and be, is the one which “gets a man somewhere” most of all. It is the one which ends the most definitely and practically.

When a novel, instead of being hewn out, finished, and decorated by the author,—added as one more monument or tomb of itself in a man's memory,—becomes a growing, living daily thing to him, the wondering, unfinished events of it, and the unfinished people of it, flocking out to him, interpreting for him the still unfinished events and all the dear unfinished people that jostle in his own life,—it is a great novel.

It seems to need to be recalled that the one possible object of a human being's life in a novel (as out of it) is to be loved. This is definite enough. It is the novel in which the heroine looks finished that does not come to anything. I always feel a little grieved and frustrated—as if human nature had been blasphemed a little in my presence—if a novel finishes its people or thinks it can. It is a small novel which finishes love—and lays it away; which makes me love say one brave woman or mother in a book, and close her away for ever. The greater novel makes me love one woman in a book in such a way that I go about through all the world seeking for her—knowing and loving a thousand women through her. I feel the secret of their faces—through her—flickering by me on the street. This intangible result, this eternal flash of a life upon life is all that reading is for. It is practical because it is eternal and cannot be wasted and because it is for ever to the point.

Life is greater than art and art is great only in so far as it proves that life is greater than art, interprets and intensifies life and the power to taste life—makes us live wider and deeper and farther in our seventy years.

### III

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## Athletics

“The world is full,” Ellery Charming used to say, “of fools who get a-going and never stop. Set them off on another tack, and they are half-cured.” There are grave reasons to believe that, if an archangel were to come to this earth and select a profession on it, instead of taking up some splendid, serious, dignified calling he would devote himself to a comparatively small and humble-looking career—that of jogging people’s minds. This might not seem at first sight to be a sufficiently large thing for an archangel to do, but if it were to be done at all (those who have tried it think) it would take an archangel to do it.

The only possible practical or businesslike substitute one can think of in modern life for an archangel would have to be an Institution of some kind. Some huge, pleasant Mutual Association for Jogging People’s Minds might do a little something perhaps, but it would not be very thorough. The people who need it most, half or three-quarters of them, the treadmill-conscientious, dear, ratty, people of this world, would not be touched by it. What is really wanted, if anything is really to be done in the way of jogging, is a new day in the week.

I have always thought that there ought to be a day, one day in the week, to do wrong in—not very wrong, but wrong enough to answer the purpose—a perfectly irresponsible, delectable, inconsequent day—a sabbath of whims. There ought to be a sort of sabbath for things that never get done because they are too good or not good enough. Letters that ought to be postponed until others are written, letters to friends that never dun, books that don’t bear on anything, books that no one has asked one to read, calls on unexpected people, bills that might just as well wait, tinkering around the house on the wrong things, the right ones, perfectly helpless, standing by. Sitting with one’s feet a little too high (if possible on one’s working desk), being a little foolish and liking it—making poor puns, enjoying one’s bad grammar—a day, in short, in which, whatever a man is, he rests from himself and play marbles with his soul.

Most people nowadays—at least the intellectual, so-called, and the learned above all others—are so far gone under the reading-for-results theory that they have become mere work-worshippers in books, worshippers of work which would not need to be performed at all—most of it—by men with healthy natural or fully exercised spiritual organs. One very seldom catches a man in the act nowadays of doing any old-fashioned or important reading. The old idea of reading for athletics instead of scientifics has

almost no provision made for it in the modern intellectual man's life. He does not seem to know what it is to take his rest like a gentleman. He lunges between all-science and all-vaudeville, and plays in his way, it is true, but he never plays with his mind. He never takes playing with a mind seriously, as one of the great standard joys and powers and equipments of human life. He does not seem to love his mind enough to play with it. Above all, he does not see that playing with a mind (on great subjects, at least) is the only possible way to make it work. He entirely overlooks the fact, in his little round of reading for results, that the main thing a book is in a man's hands for is the man—that it is there to lift him over into a state of being, a power of action. A man who really reads a book and reads it well, reads it for moral muscle, spiritual skill, for far-sightedness, for catholicity—above all for a kind of limberness and suppleness, a swift sure strength through his whole being. He faces the world with a new face when he has truly read a true book, and as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, he rejoices as a strong man to run a race.

As between reading to heighten one's senses, one's suggestibility, power of knowing and combining facts, the *multum-in-parvo* method in reading, and the *parvum-in-multo* method, a dogged, accumulating, impotent, callous reading for results, it is not hard to say which, in the equipment of the modern scientist, is being overlooked.

It is doubtless true, the common saying of the man of genius in every age, that "everything is grist to his mill," but it would not be if he could not grind it fine enough. And he is only able to grind it fine enough because he makes his reading bring him power as well as grist. Having provided for energy, stored-up energy for grinding, he guards and preserves that energy as the most important and culminating thing in his intellectual life. He insists on making provision for it. He makes ready solitude for it, blankness, reverie, sleep, silence. He cultivates the general habit not only of rejecting things, but of keeping out of their way when necessary, so as not to have to reject them, and he knows the passion in all times and all places for grinding grist finer instead of gathering more grist. These are going to be the traits of all the mighty reading, the reading that achieves, in the twentieth century. The saying of the man of genius that everything is grist to his mill merely means that he reads a book athletically, with a magnificent play of power across it, with an heroic imagination or power of putting together. He turns everything that comes to him over into its place and force and meaning in everything else. He reads slowly and organically where others read with their eyes. He knows what it is to tingle with a book, to blush and turn pale with it, to read his feet cold. He reads all over, with his nerves and senses, with his mind and heart. He reads through the whole tract of his digestive and assimilative nature. To borrow the Hebrew figure, he reads with his bowels. Instead of reading to maintain a theory, or a row of facts, he reads to sustain a certain state of being. The man who has the knack, as some people seem to think it, of making everything he reads and sees beautiful or vigorous and practical, does not need to try to do it. He does it because he has a habit of putting himself in a certain state of being and cannot help doing it. He does not need to spend a great deal of time in reading for results. He produces his own results. The less athletic reader, the smaller poet or scientist, confines himself to reading for results, for ready-made beauty and ready-made

facts, because he is not in condition to do anything else. The greater poet or scientist is an energy, a transfigurer, a transmuter of everything into beauty and truth. Everything having passed through the heat and light of his own being is fused and seen where it belongs, where God placed it when He made it, in some relation to everything else.

I fear that I may have come, in bearing down on this point, to another of the of-course places in this book. It is not just to assume that because people are not living with a truth that they need to be told it. It is of little use, when a man has used his truth all up boring people with it, to try to get them (what is left of the truth and the people) to do anything about it. But if I may be allowed one page more I would like to say in the present epidemic of educating for results, just what a practical education may be said to be.

The indications are that the more a man spends, makes himself able to spend, a large part of his time, as Whitman did, in standing still and looking around and loving things, the more practical he is. Even if a man's life were to serve as a mere guide-board to the universe, it would supply to all who know him the main thing the universe seems to be without. But a man who, like Walt Whitman, is more than a guide-board to the universe, who deliberately takes time to live in the whole of it, who becomes a part of the universe to all who live always, who makes the universe human to us—companionable,—such a man may not be able to fix a latch on a kitchen door, but I can only say for one that if there is a man who can lift a universe bodily, and set it down in my front yard where I can feel it helping me do my work all day and guarding my sleep at night, that man is practical. Who can say he does not “come to anything”? To have heard it rumoured that such a man has lived, can live, is a result—the most practical result of all to most of the workers of the world. A bare fact about such a man is a gospel. Why work for nothing (that is, with no result) in a universe where you can play for nothing—and by playing earn everything?

Such a man is not only practical, serving those who know him by merely being, but he serves all men always. They will not let him go. He becomes a part of the structure of the world. The generations keep flocking to him the way they flock to the great sane silent ministries of the sky and of the earth. Their being drawn to them is their being drawn to him. The strength of clouds is in him, and the spirit of falling water, and he knoweth the way of the wind. When a man can be said by the way he lives his life to have made himself the companion of his unborn brothers and of God; when he can be said to have made himself, not a mere scientist, but a younger brother, a real companion of air, water, fire, mist, and of the great gentle ground beneath his feet—he has secured a result.





## VI—Reading for Feelings

### I

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#### The Passion of Truth

**R**EADING resolves itself sooner or later into two elements in the reader's mind:

1. Tables of facts. (a) Rows of raw fact; (b) Principles, spiritual or sum-total facts.
2. Feelings about the facts.

But the Man with the Scientific Method, who lives just around the corner from me, tells me that reading for feelings is quite out of the question for a scientific mind. It is foreign to the nature of knowledge to want knowledge for the feelings that go with it. Feelings get in the way.

I find it impossible not to admit that there is a certain force in this, but I notice that when the average small scientist, the man around the corner, for instance, says to me what he is always saying, "Science requires the elimination of feelings,"—says it to me in his usual chilled-through, ophidian, infallible way,—I never believe it, or at least I believe it very softly and do not let him know it. But when a large scientist, a man like Charles Darwin, makes a statement like this, I believe it as hard, I notice, as if I had

made it all up myself. The statement that science requires the elimination of the feelings is true or not true, it seems to me, according to the size of the feelings. Considering what most men's feelings are, a man like Darwin feels that they had better be eliminated. If a man's feelings are small feelings, they are in the way in science, as a matter of course. If he has large noble ones, feelings that match the things that God has made, feelings that are free and daring, beautiful enough to belong with things that a God has made, he will have no trouble with them. It is the feelings in a great scientist which have always fired him into being a man of genius in his science, instead of a mere tool, or scoop, or human dredge of truth. All the great scientists show this firing-process down underneath, in their work. The idea that it is necessary for a scientific man to give up his human ideal, that it is necessary for him to be officially brutal, in his relation to nature, to become a professional nobody in order to get at truth, to make himself over into matter in order to understand matter, has not had a single great scientific achievement or conception to its credit. All great insight or genius in science is a passion of itself, a passion of worshipping real things. Science is a passion not only in its origin, but in its motive power and in its end. The real truth seems to be that the scientist of the greater sort is great, not by having no emotions, but by having disinterested emotions, by being large enough to have emotions on both sides and all sides, all held in subjection to the final emotion of truth. Having a disinterested, fair attitude in truth is not a matter of having no passions, but of having passions enough to go around. The temporary idea that a scientist cannot be scientific and emotional at once is based upon the experience of men who have never had emotions enough. Men whose emotions are slow and weak, who have one-sided or wavering emotions, find them inconvenient as a matter of course. The men who, like Charles Darwin or some larger Browning, have the passion of disinterestedness are those who are fitted to lead the human race, who are going to lead it along the paths of space and the footsteps of the worlds into the Great Presence.

The greatest astronomer or chemist is the man who glows with the joy of wrestling with God, of putting strength to strength.

To the geologist who goes groping about in stones, his whole life is a kind of mind-reading of the ground, a passion for getting underneath, for communing flesh to flesh with a planet. What he feels when he breaks a bit of rock is the whole round earth—the wonder of it—the great cinder floating through space. He would all but risk his life or sell his soul for a bit of lava. He is studying the phrenology of a star. All the other stars watch him. The feeling of being in a kind of eternal, invisible, infinite enterprise, of carrying out a world, of tracking a God, takes possession of him. He may not admit there is a God, in so many words, but his geology admits it. He devotes his whole life to appreciating a God, and the God takes the deed for the word, appreciates his appreciation, whether he does or not. If he says that he does not believe in a God, he merely means that he does not believe in Calvin's God, or in the present dapper, familiar little God or the hero of the sermon last Sunday. All he means by not believing in a God is that his God has not been represented yet. In the meantime he and his geology go sternly, implacably on for thousands of years, while churches come and go. So does his God. His geology is his own ineradicable

worship. His religion, his passion for the all, for communing through the part with the Whole, is merely called by the name of geology. In so far as a man's geology is real to him, if he is after anything but a degree in it, or a thesis or a salary, his geology is an infinite passion taking possession of him, soul and body, carrying him along with it, sweeping him out with it into the great workroom, the flame and the glow of the world-shop of God.

It would not seem necessary to say it if it were not so stoutly denied, but living as we do, most of us, with a great flock of little scientists around us, pecking on the infinite most of them, each with his own little private strut, or blasphemy, bragging of a world without a God, it does seem as if it were going to be the great strategic event of the twentieth century, for all men, to get the sciences and the humanities together once more, if only in our own thoughts, to make ourselves believe as we must believe, after all, that it is humanity in a scientist, and not a kind of professional inhumanity in him, which makes him a scientist in the great sense—a seer of matter. The great scientist is a man who communes with matter, not around his human spirit, but through it.

The small scientist, violating nature inside himself to understand it outside himself, misses the point.

At all events if a man who has locked himself out of his own soul goes around the world and cannot find God's in it, he does not prove anything. The man who finds a God proves quite as much. And he has his God besides.

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## II

### Topical Point of View

If it is true that reading resolves itself sooner or later into two elements in the reader's mind, tables of facts and feelings about the facts, that is, rows of raw fact, and spiritualised or related facts, several things follow. The most important of them is one's definition of education. The man who can get the greatest amount of feeling out of the smallest number and the greatest variety of facts is the greatest and most educated man—comes nearest to living an infinite life. The purpose of education in books would seem to be to make every man as near to this great or semi-infinite man as he can be made.

If men were capable of becoming infinite by sitting in a library long enough, the education-problem would soon take care of itself. There is no front or side door to the infinite. It is all doors. And if the mere taking time enough would do it, one could read one's way into the infinite as easily as if it were anything else. One can hardly miss it. One could begin anywhere. There would be nothing to do but to proceed at once to read all the facts and have all the feelings about the facts and enjoy them forever. The main difficulty one comes to, in being infinite, is that there is not time, but inasmuch as great men or semi-

infinite men have all had to contend with this same difficulty quite as much as the rest of us, it would seem that in getting as many of the infinite facts, and having as many infinite feelings about the facts, as they do, great men must employ some principle of economy or selection, that common, that is, artificial men, are apt to overlook.

There seem to be two main principles of economy open to great men and to all of us, in the acquiring of knowledge. One of these, as has been suggested, may be called the scientist's principle of economy, and the other the poet's or artist's. The main difference between the scientific and the artistic method of selection seems to be that the scientist does his selecting all at once and when he selects his career, and the artist makes selecting the entire business of every moment of his life. The scientist of the average sort begins by partitioning the universe off into topics. Having selected his topic and walled himself in with it, he develops it by walling the rest of the universe out. The poet (who is almost always a specialist also, a special kind of poet), having selected his specialty, develops it by letting all the universe in. He spends his time in making his life a cross section of the universe. The spirit of the whole of it, something of everything in it, is represented in everything he does. Whatever his specialty may be in poetry, painting, or literature, he produces an eternal result by massing the infinite and eternal into the result. He succeeds by bringing the universe to a point, by accumulating out of all things—himself. It is the tendency of the scientist to produce results by dividing the universe and by subdividing himself. Unless he is a very great scientist he accepts it as the logic of his method that he should do this. His individual results are small results and he makes himself professedly small to get them.

All questions with regard to the reading habit narrow themselves down at last: "Is the Book to be divided for the Man, or is the Man to be divided for the Book? Shall a man so read as to lose his soul in a subject, or shall he so read that the subject Loses itself in him—becomes a part of him?" The main fact about our present education is that it is the man who is getting lost. And not only is every man getting lost to himself, but all men are eagerly engaged in getting lost to each other. The dead level of intelligence, being a dead level in a literal sense, is a spiritless level—a mere grading down and grading up of appearances. In all that pertains to real knowledge of the things that people appear to know, greater heights and depths of difference in human lives are revealed to-day than in almost any age of the world. What with our steam-engines (machines for our hands and feet) and our sciences (machines for our souls) we have arrived at such an extraordinary division of labour, both of body and mind, that people of the same classes are farther apart than they used to be in different classes. Lawyers, for instance, are as different from one another as they used to be from ministers and doctors. Every new skill we come to and every new subdivision of skill marks the world off into pigeon-holes of existence, into huge, hopeless, separate divisions of humanity. We live in different elements, monsters of the sea wondering at the air, air-monsters peering curiously down into the sea, sailors on surfaces, trollers over other people's worlds. We commune with each other with lines and hooks. Some of us on the rim of the earth spend all our days quarrelling over bits of the crust of it. Some of us burrow and live in the ground, and are as workers in

mines. The sound of our voices to one another is as though they were not. They are as the sound of picks groping in rocks.

The reason that we are not able to produce or even to read a great literature is that a great book can never be written, in spirit at least, except to a whole human race. The final question with regard to every book that comes to a publisher to-day is what mine shall it be written in, which public shall it burrow for? A book that belongs to a whole human race, which cannot be classified or damned into smallness, would only be left by itself on the top of the ground in the sunlight. The next great book that comes will have to take a long trip, a kind of drummer's route around life, from mind to mind, and now in one place and now another be let down through shafts to us. There is no whole human race. A book with even forty-man power in it goes begging for readers. The reader with more than one-, two-, or three-man power of reading scarcely exists. We shall know our great book when it comes by the fact that crowds of kinds of men will flock to the paragraphs in it, each kind to its own kind of paragraph. It will hardly be said to reach us, the book with forty-man power in it, until it has been broken up into fortieths of itself. When it has been written over again—broken off into forty books by forty men, none of them on speaking terms with each other—it shall be recognised in some dim way that it must have been a great book.

It is the first law of culture, in the highest sense, that it always begins and ends with the fact that a man is a man. Teaching the fact to a man that he can be a greater man is the shortest and most practical way of teaching him other facts. It is only by being a greater man, by raising his state of being to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  power, that he can be made to see the other facts. The main attribute of the education of the future, in so far as it obtains to-day, is that it strikes both ways. It strikes in and makes a man mean something, and having made the man—the main fact—mean something, it strikes out through the man and makes all other facts mean something. It makes new facts, and old facts as good as new. It makes new worlds. All attempts to make a whole world without a single whole man anywhere to begin one out of are vain attempts. We are going to have great men again some time, but the science that attempts to build a civilisation in this twentieth century by subdividing such men as we already have mocks at itself. The devil is not a specialist and never will be. He is merely getting everybody else to be, as fast as he can.

It is safe to say in this present hour of subdivided men and sub-selected careers that any young man who shall deliberately set out at the beginning of his life to be interested, at any expense and at all hazards, in everything, in twenty or thirty years will have the field entirely to himself. It is true that he will have to run, what every more vital man has had to run, the supreme risk, the risk of being either a fool or a seer, a fool if he scatters himself into everything, a seer if he masses everything into himself. But when he succeeds at last he will find that for all practical purposes, as things are going to-day, he will have a monopoly of the universe, of the greatest force there is in it, the combining and melting and fusing force that brings all men and all ideas together, making the race one—a force which is the chief characteristic of every great period and of every great character that history has known.

It is obvious that whatever may be its dangers, the topical or scientific point of view in knowledge is

one that the human race is not going to get along without, if it is to be master of the House it lives in. It is also obvious that the human or artistic, the man-point of view in knowledge is one that it is not going to get along without, if the House is to continue to have Men in it.

The question remains, the topical point of view and the artistic point of view both being necessary, how shall a man contrive in the present crowding of the world to read with both? Is there any principle in reading that fuses them both? And if there is, what is it?





## VII—Reading the World Together

### I

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#### Focusing

**T**HERE are only a few square inches—of cells and things, no one quite knows what—on a human face, but a man can see more of the world in those few inches, and understand more of the meaning of the world in them, put the world together better there, than in any other few inches that God has made. Even one or two faces do it, for a man, for most of us, when we have seen them through and through. Not a face anywhere—no one has ever seen one that was not a mirror of a whole world, a poor and twisted one perhaps, but a great one. The man that goes with it may not know it, may not have much to do with it. While he is waiting to die, God writes on him; but however it is, every man's face (I cannot help feeling it when I really look at it) is helplessly great. It is one man's portrait of the universe as he has found it—his portrait of a Whole. I have caught myself looking at crowds of faces as if they were rows of worlds. Is not everything I can know or guess or cry or sing written on faces? An audience is a kind of universe by itself. I could pray to one—when once the soul is hushed before it. If there were any necessity to select one

place rather than another, any particular place to address a God in, I think I would choose an audience. Praying for it instead of to it is a mere matter of form. I cannot find a face in it that does not lead to a God, that does not gather a God in for me out of all space, that is not one of His assembling places. Many and many a time when heads were being bowed have I caught a face in a congregation and prayed to it and with it. Every man's face is a kind of prayer he carries around with him. One can hardly help joining in it. It is sacrament to look at his face, if only to take sides in it, join with the God-self in it and help against the others. Whoever or Whatever He is, up there across all heaven, He is a God to me because He can be infinitely small or infinitely great as He likes. I will not have a God that can be shut up into any horizon or shut out of any face. When I have stood before audiences, have really realised faces, felt the still and awful thronging of them through my soul, it has seemed to me as if some great miracle were happening. It's as if—but who shall say it?—Have you never stood, Gentle Reader, alone at night on the frail rim of the earth—spread your heart out wide upon the dark, and let it lie there,—let it be flocked on by stars? It is like that when Something is lifted and one sees faces. Faces are worlds to me. However hard I try, I cannot get a man, somehow, any smaller than a world. He is a world to himself, and God helping me, when I deal with him, he shall be a world to me. The dignity of a world rests upon him. His face is a sum-total of the universe. It is made by the passing of the infinite through his body. It is the mark of all things that are, upon his flesh.

What I like to believe is, that if there is an organic principle of unity like this in a little human life, if there is some way of summing up a universe in a man's face, there must be some way of summing it up, of putting it together in his education. It is this summing a universe up for one's self, and putting it together for one's self, and for one's own use, which makes an education in a universe worth while.

In other words, with a symbol as convenient, as near to him as his own face, a man need not go far in seeking for a principle of unity in focusing education. A man's face makes it seem not unreasonable to claim that the principle of unity in all education is the man, that the single human soul is created to be its own dome of all knowledge. A man's education may be said to be properly laid out in proportion as it is laid out the way he lays out his countenance. The method or process by which a man's countenance is laid out is a kind of daily organic process of world-swallowing. What a man undertakes in living is the making over of all phenomena, outer sights and sounds into his own inner ones, the passing of all outside knowledge through himself. In proportion as he is being educated he is making all things that are, into his own flesh and spirit.

When one looks at it in this way it is not too much to say that every man is a world. He makes the tiny platform of his soul in infinite space, a stage for worlds to come to, to play their parts on. His soul is a little All-show, a kind of dainty pantomime of the universe.

It seemed that I stood and watched a world awake, the great night still upbearing me above the flood

of the day. I watched it strangely, as a changed being, the godlikeness and the might of sleep, the spell of the All upon me. I became as one who saw the earth as it is, in a high noon of its real self. Hung in its mist of worlds, wrapped in its own breath, I saw it—a queer little ball of cooled-off fire, it seemed, still and swift plunging through space. And when I looked close in my heart, I saw cunning little men on it, nations and things running around on it. And when I looked still nearer, looked at the lighted side of it, I saw that each little man was not what I thought—a dot or fleck on the universe. And I saw that he was a reflection, a serious, wondrous miniature of all the rest. It all seemed strange to me at first—to a man who lives, as I do, in a rather weary, laborious, painstaking age—that this should be so. As I looked at the little man I wondered if it really could be so. Then, as I looked, the great light flowed all around the little man, and the little man reflected the great light.

But he did not seem to know it.

I felt like calling out to him—to one of them—telling him out loud to himself, wrapped away as he was, in his haste and dumbness, not knowing, and in the funny little noise of cities in the great still light. And so while the godlikeness and the might of sleep was upon me, I watched him, longed for him, wanted him for myself. I thought of my great cold, stretched-out wisdom. How empty and bare it was, this staring at stars one by one, this taking notes on creation, this slow painful tour of space, when after all right down there in this little man, I said “Is not all I can know, or hope to know stowed away and written up?” And when I thought of this—the blur of sleep still upon me—I could hardly help reaching down for him, half-patronising him, half-worshipping him, taking him up to myself, where I could keep him by me, keep him to consult, watch for the sun, face for the infinite.—“Dear little fellow!” I said, “my own queer little fellow! my own little Kosmos, pocket-size!”

I thought how convenient it would be if I could take one in my hand, do my seeing through it, focus my universe with it. And when the strange mood left me and I came to, I remembered or thought I remembered that I was one of Those myself. “Why not be your own little Kosmos-glass?” I said.

I have been trying it now for some time. It is hard to regulate the focus of course, and it is not always what it ought to be. It has to be allowed for some. I do not claim much for it. But it’s better, such as it is, than a sheer bit of Nothing, I think, to look at a universe with.

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## II

# The Human Unit

It matters little that the worlds that are made in this way are very different in detail or emphasis, that some of them are much smaller and more twisted than others. The great point, so far as education is

concerned, is for all teachers to realise that every man is a whole world, that it is possible and natural for every man to be a whole world. His very body is, and there must be some way for him to have a whole world in his mind. A being who finds a way of living a world into his face can find a way of reading a world together. If a man is going to have unity, read his world together, possess all-in-oneness in knowledge, he will have to have it the way he has it in his face.

It is superficial to assume, as scientists are apt to do, that in a world where there are infinite things to know, a man's knowledge must have unity or can have unity, in and of itself. The moment that all the different knowledges of a man are passed over or allowed to be passed over into his personal qualities, into the muscles and traits and organs and natural expressions of the man, they have unity and force and order and meaning as a matter of course. Infinite opposites of knowledge, recluses and separates of knowledge are gathered and can be seen gathered every day in almost any man, in the glance of his eye, in the turn of his lip, or in the blow of his fist.

It is not the method of science as science, and it is not in any sense put forward as the proper method for a man to use in his mere specialty, but it does seem to be true that if a man wants to know things which he does not intend to know all of, the best and most scientific way for him to know such things is to reach out to them and know them through their human or personal relations. I can only speak for myself, but I have found for one that the easiest and most thorough, practical way for me to get the benefit of things I do not know, is to know a man who does. If he is an educated man, a man who really knows, who has made what he knows over into himself, I find if I know him that I get it all—the gist of it. The spirit of his knowledge, its attitude toward life, is all in the man, and if I really know the man, absorb his nature, drink deep at his soul, I know what he knows—it seems to me—and what I know besides. It is true that I cannot express it precisely. He would have to give the lecture or diagram of it, but I know it—know what it comes to in life, his life and my life. I can be seen going around living with it afterwards, any day. His knowledge is summed up in him, his whole world is read together in him, belongs to him, and he belongs to me. To know a man is to know what he knows in its best form—the things that have made the man possible.

A great portrait painter, it has always seemed to me, is a kind of god in his way—knows everything his sitters know. He knows what every man's knowledge has done with the man—the best part of it—and makes it speak. I have never yet found myself looking at great walls of faces (one painter's faces), found myself walking up and down in Sargent's soul, without thinking what a great inhabited, trooped-through man he was—all knowledges flocking to him, showing their faces to him, from the ends of the earth, emptying their secrets silently out to his brush. If a man like Sargent has for one of his sitters a great astronomer, an astronomer who is really great, who knows and absorbs stars, Sargent absorbs the man, and as a last result the stars in the man, and the man in Sargent, and the man's stars in Sargent, all look out of the canvas.

It is the spirit that sums up and unifies knowledge. It is a fact to be reckoned with, in education, that

knowledge can be summed up, and that the best summing up of it is a human face.

### III

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## The Higher Cannibalism

It is not unnatural to claim, therefore, that the most immediate and important short-cut in knowledge that the comprehensive or educated man can take comes to him through his human and personal relations. There is no better way of getting at the spirits of facts, of tracing out valuable and practical laws or generalisations, than the habit of trying things on to people in one's mind.

I have always thought that if I ever got discouraged and had to be an editor, I would do this more practically. As it is, I merely do it with books. I find no more satisfactory way of reading most books—the way one has to—through their backs, than reading the few books that one does read, through persons and for persons and with persons. It is a great waste of time to read a book alone. One needs room for rows of one's friends in a book. One book read through the eyes of ten people has more reading matter in it than ten books read in a common, lazy, lonesome fashion. One likes to do it, not only because one finds one's self enjoying a book ten times over, getting ten people's worth out of it, but because it makes a kind of sitting-room of one's mind, puts a fire-place in it, and one watches the ten people enjoying one another.

It may be for better and it may be for worse, but I have come to the point where, if I really care about a book, the last thing I want to do with it is to sit down in a chair and read it by myself. If I were ever to get so low in my mind as to try to give advice to a real live author (any author but a dead one), it would be, "Let there be room for all of us, O Author, in your book. If I am to read a live, happy, human book, give me a bench."

I have noticed that getting at truth on most subjects is a dramatic process rather than an argumentative one. One gets at truth either in a book or in a conversation not so much by logic as by having different people speak. If what is wanted is a really comprehensive view of a subject, two or three rather different men placed in a row and talking about it, saying what they think about it in a perfectly plain way, without argument, will do more for it than two or three hundred syllogisms. A man seems to be the natural or wild form of the syllogism, which this world has tacitly agreed to adopt. Even when he is a very poor one he works better with most people than the other kind. If a man takes a few other men (very different ones), uses them as glasses to see a truth through, it will make him as wise in a few minutes, with that truth, as a whole human race.

Knowledge which comes to a man with any particular sweep or scope is, in the very nature of things, dramatic.

[I fear, Gentle Reader, I am nearing a conviction. I feel a certain constraint coming over me. I always do, when I am nearing a conviction. I never can be sure how my soul will take it upon itself to act when I am making the attempt I am making now, to state what is to me an intensely personal belief, in a general, convincing, or impersonal way. The embarrassing part of a conviction is that it is so. And when a man attempts to state a thing as it is, to speak for God or everybody,—well, it would not be respectable not to be embarrassed a little—speaking for God. I know perfectly well, sitting here at my desk, this minute, with this conviction up in my pen, that it is merely a little thing of my own, that I ought to go on from this point cool and straight with it. But it is a conviction, and if you find me, Gentle Reader, in the very next page, swivelling off and speaking for God, I can only beg that both He and you will forgive me. I solemnly assure you herewith, that, however it may look, I am merely speaking for myself. I have thought of having a rubber stamp for this book, a stamp with IT SEEMS TO ME on it. A good many of these pages need going over with it afterwards. I do not suppose there is a man living—either I or any other dogmatist—who would not enjoy more speaking for himself (if anybody would notice it) than speaking for God. I have a hope that if I can only hold myself to it on this subject I shall do much better in speaking for myself, and may speak accidentally for God besides. I leave it for others to say, but it is hard not to point a little—in a few places.]

But here is the conviction. As I was going to say, knowledge which comes to a man with any particular sweep or scope is in the very nature of things dramatic. If the minds of two men expressing opinions in the dark could be flashed on a canvas, if there could be such a thing as a composite photograph of an opinion—a biograph of it,—it would prove to be, with nine men out of ten, a dissolving view of faces. The unspoken sides of thought are all dramatic. The palest generalisation a man can express, if it could be first stretched out into its origins, and then in its origins could be crowded up and focused, would be found to be a long unconscious procession of human beings—a murmur of countless voices. All our knowledge is conceived at first, taken up and organised in actual men, flashed through the delights of souls and the music of voices upon our brains. If it is true even in the business of the street that the greatest efficiency is reached by dealers who mix with the knowledge of their subject a keen appreciation and mastery of men, it is still more true of the business of the mind that the greatest, most natural and comprehensive results are reached through the dramatic or human insights.

All our knowledge is dead drama. Wisdom is always some old play faded out, blurred into abstractions. A principle is a wonderful disguised biograph. The power of Carlyle's *French Revolution* is that it is a great spiritual play, a series of pictures and faces.

It was the French Revolution all happening over again to Carlyle, and it was another French Revolution to every one of his readers. It was dynamic, an induced current from Paris via Craigenputtock, because it was dramatic—great abstractions, playing magnificently over great concretes. Every man in Carlyle's history is a philosophy, and every abstraction in it a man's face, a beckoning to us. He always seems to me a kind of colossus of a man stalking across the dark, way out in The Past, using men as

search-lights. He could not help doing his thinking in persons, and everything he touches is terribly and beautifully alive. It was because he saw things in persons, that is, in great, rapid, organised sum-totals of experience and feeling, that he was able to make so much of so little as a historian, and what is quite as important (at least in history), so little of so much.

The true criticism of Carlyle as a historian is not a criticism of his method, that he went about in events and eras doing his seeing and thinking with persons, but that there were certain sorts of persons that Carlyle, with his mere lighted-up-brute imagination, could never see with. They were opaque to him. Every time he lifted one of them up to see ten years with, or a bevy of events or whatever it might be, he merely made blots or sputters with them, on his page. But it was his method that made it a great page, wider and deeper and more splendid than any of the others, and the blots were always obvious blots, did no harm there—no historical harm—almost any one could see them, and if they could not, were there not always plenty of little chilled-through historians, pattering around after him, tracking them out? But the great point of Carlyle's method was that he kept his perspective with it. Never flattened out like other historians, by tables of statistics, unbewildered by the blur of nobodies, he was able to have a live, glorious giant's way of writing, a godlike method of handling great handfuls of events in one hand, of unrolling great stretches of history with a look, of seeing things and making things seen, in huge, broad, focussed, vivid human wholes. It was a historical method of treating great masses, which Thomas Carlyle and Shakespeare and Homer and the Old Testament all have in common.

The fact that it fails in the letter and with hordes of literal persons, that it has great gaps of temperament left over in it, is of lesser weight. The letter passes by (thank Heaven!) in the great girths of time and space. In all lasting or real history, only the spirit has a right to live. Temperaments in histories even at the worst are easily allowed for, filled out with temperaments of other historians—that is, they ought to be and are going to be if we ever have real historians any more, historians great enough and alive enough to have temperaments, and with temperaments great enough to write history the way God does—that can be read.

History can only be truly written by men who have concepts of history, and “Every concept,” says Hegel, “must be universal, concrete, and particular, or else it cannot be a concept.” That is, it must be dramatic.

And what is true of a great natural man or man of genius like Carlyle is equally true of all other natural persons whether men of genius or not. A stenographic report of all the thoughts of almost any man's brain for a day would prove to almost any scientist how spiritually organised, personally conducted a human being's brain is bound to be, almost in spite of itself—even when it has been educated, artificially numbed and philosophised. A man may not know the look of the inside of his mind well enough to formulate or recognise it, but nearly every man's thinking is done, as a matter of course, either in people, or to people, or for people, or out of people. It is the way he grows, the way the world is woven through his being, the way of having life more abundantly.

It is not at all an exaggeration to say that if Shakespeare had not created his characters they would have created him. One need not wonder so very much that Shakespeare grew so masterfully in his later plays and as the years went on. Such a troop of people as flocked through Shakespeare's soul would have made a Shakespeare (allowing more time for it) out of almost anybody.

The essential wonder of Shakespeare, the greatness which has made men try to make a dozen specialists out of him, is not so very wonderful when one considers that he was a dramatist. A dramatist cannot help growing great. At least he has the outfit for it if he wants to. One hardly wants to be caught giving a world recipe,—a prescription for being a great man; but it does look sometimes as if the habit of reading for persons, of being a sort of spiritual cannibal, or man-eater, of going about through all the world absorbing personalities the way other men absorb facts, would gradually store up personality in a man, and make him great—almost inconveniently great, at times, and in spite of himself. The probabilities seem to be that it was because Shakespeare instinctively picked out persons in the general scheme of knowledge more than facts; it was because persons seemed to him, on the whole in every age, to be the main facts the age was for, summed the most facts up; it was because they made him see the most facts, helped him to feel and act on facts, made facts experiences to him, that William Shakespeare became so supreme and masterful with facts and men both.

To learn how to be *pro tem.* all kinds of men, about all things, to enjoy their joys in the things, is the greatest and the liveliest way of learning the things.

To learn to be a Committee of the Temperaments all by one's self (which is what Shakespeare did) is at once the method and the end of education—outside of one's specialty.

There could be no better method of doing this (no method open to everybody) than the method,—outside of one's specialty,—of reading for persons and with persons. It makes all one's life a series of spiritual revelations. It is like having regular habits of being born again, of having new experiences at will. It mobilises all love and passion and delight in the world and sends it flowing past one's door.

In this day of immeasurable exercises, why does not some one put in a word for the good old-fashioned exercise of being born again? It is an exercise which few men seem to believe in, not even once in a lifetime, but it is easily the best all-around drill for living, and even for reading, that can be arranged. And it is not a very difficult exercise if one knows how, does it regularly enough. It is not at all necessary to go off to another world to believe in reincarnations, if one practises on them every day. Women have always seemed to be more generally in the way of being born again than men, but they have less scope and sometimes there is a certain feverish smallness about it, and when men once get started (like Robert Browning in distinction from Mrs. Browning) they make the method of being born again seem a great triumphant one. They seem to have a larger repertoire to be born to, and they go through it more rapidly and justly. At the same time it is true that nearly all women are more or less familiar with the exercise of being born again—living *pro tem.* and at will—in others, and only a few men do it—merely the greatest ones, statesmen, diplomats, editors, poets, great financiers, and other prophets—all men who live by

seeing more than others have time for. They are found to do their seeing rather easily on the whole. They do it by the perfectly normal exercise of being born into other men, looking out of their eyes a minute, whenever they like. All great power in its first stage is essentially dramatic, a man-judging, man-illuminating power, the power of guessing what other people are going to think and do.

When the world points out to the young man, as it is very fond of doing, that he must learn from experience, what it really means is, that he must learn from his dramatic drill in human life, his contact with real persons, his slow, compulsory scrupulous going the rounds of his heart, putting himself in the place of real persons.

Probably every man who lives, in proportion as he covets power or knowledge, would like to be (at will at least) a kind of focused everybody. It is true that in his earlier stages, and in his lesser moods afterward, he would probably seem to most people a somewhat teetering person, diffused, chaotic, or contradictory. It could hardly be helped—with the raw materials of a great man all scattered around in him, great unaccounted-for insights, idle-looking powers all as yet unfused. But a man in the long run (and longer the better) is always worth while, no matter how he looks in the making, and it certainly does seem reasonable, however bad it may look, that this is the way he is made, that in proportion as he does his knowing spiritually and powerfully, he will have to do it dramatically. It sometimes seems as if knowing, in the best sense, were a kind of rotary-person process, a being everybody in a row, a state of living symposium. The interpenetrating, blending-in, digesting period comes in due course, the time of settling down into himself, and behold the man is made, a unified, concentrated, individual, universal man—a focused everybody.

This is not quite being a god perhaps, but it is as near to it, on the whole, as a man can conveniently get.

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## IV

# Spiritual Thrift

But perhaps one of the most interesting things about doing up one's knowing in persons is that it is not only the most alive, but the most economical knowledge that can be obtained. On the whole, eleven or twelve people do very well to know the world with, if one can get a complete set, if they are different enough, and one knows them down through. The rest of the people that one sees about, from the point of view of stretching one's comprehension, one's essential sympathy or knowledge, do not count very much. They are duplicates—to be respected and to be loved, of course, but to be kept in the cellar of actual consciousness. There is no other way to do. Everybody was not intended to be used by everybody. It is

because we think that they were, mostly, that we have come to our present, modern, heartlessly-cordial fashion of knowing people—knowing people by parlourfuls—whole parlourfuls at a time. “Is thy servant a whale?” said my not unsociable soul to me. “Is one to be fed with one’s kind as if they were animalculæ, as if they had to be taken in the bulk if one were really to get something?” It is heartless and shallow enough. Who is not weary of it? No one knows anybody nowadays. He merely knows everybody. He falls before The Reception Room. A reception room is a place where we set people up in rows like pickets on a fence to know them. Then like the small boy with a stick, one tap per picket, we run along knowing people. No one comes in touch with any one. It is getting so that there is hardly any possible way left in our modern life for knowing people except by marrying them. One cannot even be sure of that, when one thinks how married people are being driven about by books and by other people. Society is a crowd of crowds mutually destroying each other and literature is a crowd of books all shutting each other up, and the law seems to be either selection or annihilation, whether in reading or living. The only way to love everybody in this world seems to be to pick out a few in it, delegates of everybody, and use these few to read with, and to love and understand the world with, and to keep close to it, all one’s days.

The higher form one’s facts are put in in this world the fewer one needs. To know twelve extremely different souls utterly, to be able to borrow them at will, turn them on all knowledge, bring them to bear at a moment’s notice on anything one likes, is to be an educated, masterful man in the most literal possible sense. Except in mere matters of physical fact, things which are small enough to be put in encyclopedias and looked up there, a man with twelve deeply loved or deeply pitied souls woven into the texture of his being can flash down into almost any knowledge that he needs, or go out around almost any ignorance that is in his way, through all the earth. The shortest way for an immortal soul to read a book is to know and absorb enough other immortal souls, and get them to help. Any system of education which like our present prevailing one is so vulgar, so unpsychological, as to overlook the soul as the organ and method of knowledge, which fails to see that the knowledge of human souls is itself the method of acquiring all other knowledge and of combining and utilising it, makes narrow and trivial and impotent scholars as a matter of course.

Knowledge of human nature and of one’s self is the nervous system of knowledge, the flash and culmination, the final thoroughness of all the knowledge that is worth knowing and of all ways of knowing it.

It is all a theory, I suppose. I cannot prove anything with it. I dare say it is true that neither I nor any one else can get, by reading in this way, what I like to think I am getting, slowly, a cross-section of the universe. But it is something to get as time goes on a cross-section of all the human life that is being lived in it. It is something to take each knowledge that comes, strike all the keys of one’s friends on it—clear the keyboard of space on it. When one really does this, nothing can happen to one which does not or cannot happen to one in the way one likes. Events and topics in this world are determined to a large degree by circumstances—dandelions, stars, politics, bob-whites, acids, Kant, and domestic science—but

personalities, a man's means of seeing things, are determined only by the limits of his imagination. One's knowledge of pictures, or of Kant, of bob-whites or acids, cannot be applied to every conceivable occasion, but nothing can happen in all the world that one cannot see or feel or delight in, or suffer in, through Charles Lamb's soul if one has really acquired it. One can be a Charles Lamb almost anywhere toward almost anything that happens along, or a Robert Burns or a Socrates or a Heine, or an Amiel or a Dickens or Hugo or any one, or one can hush one's soul one eternal moment and be the Son of God. To know a few men, to turn them into one's books, to turn them into one another, into one's self, to study history with their hearts, to know all men that live with them, to put them all together and guess at God with them—it seems to me that knowledge that is as convenient and penetrating, as easily turned on and off, as much like a light as this, is well worth having. It would be like taking away a whole world, if it were taken away from me—the little row of people I do my reading with. And some of them are supposed to be dead—hundreds of years.

But the dramatic principle in education strikes both ways. While it is true that one does not need a very large outfit of people to do one's knowing with, if one has the habit of thinking in persons, it is still more true that one does not need a large outfit of books.

As I sit in my library facing the fire I fancy I hear, sometimes, my books eating each other up. One by one through the years they have disappeared from me—only portraits or titles are left. The more beautiful book absorbs the less and the greater folds itself around the small. I seldom take down a book that was an enthusiasm once without discovering that the heart of it has fled away, has stealthily moved over, while I dreamed, to some other book. Lowell and Whittier are footnotes scattered about in several volumes, now. J. G. Holland (Sainte-Beuve of my youth!) is digested by Matthew Arnold and Matthew Arnold by Walter Pater and Walter Pater by Walt Whitman. Montaigne and Plato have moved over into Emerson, and Emerson has been distilled slowly into—forty years. Holmes has dissolved into Charles Lamb and Thomas Browne. A big volume of Rossetti (whom I oddly knew first) is lost in a little volume of Keats, and as I sit and wait Ruskin and Carlyle are going fast into a battered copy on my desk—of the Old Testament. Once let the dramatic principle get well started in a man's knowledge and it seems to keep on sending him up new currents the way his heart does, whether he notices it or not. If a man will leave his books and his people to themselves, if he will let them do with him and with one another what they want to do, they all work while he sleeps. If the spirit of knowledge, the dramatic principle in it, is left free, knowledge all but comes to a man of itself, cannot help coming, like the dew on the grass. With enough reading for persons one need not buy very many books. One allows for unconscious cerebration in books. Books not only have a way of being read through their backs, but of reading one another.

## The City, the Church, and the College

The greatest event of the nineteenth century was that somewhere in it, at some immense and hidden moment in it, human knowledge passed silently over from the emphasis of Persons to the emphasis of Things.

I have walked up and down Broadway when the whole street was like a prayer to me—miles of it—a long dull cry to its little strip of heaven. I have been on the Elevated—the huge shuttle of the great city—hour by hour, had my soul woven into New York on it, back and forth, up and down, until it was hardly a soul at all, a mere ganglion, a quivering, pressed-in nerve of second-story windows, skies of clotheslines, pale faces, mist and rumble and dust. “Perhaps I have a soul,” I say. “Perhaps I have not. Has any one a soul?” When I look at the men I say to myself, “Now I will look at the women,” and when I look at the women I say, “Now I will look at the men.” Then I look at shoes. Men are cheap in New York. Every little man I see stewing along the street, when I look into his face in my long, slow country way, as if a hill belonged with him or a scrap of sky or something, or as if he really counted, looks at me as one would say, “I? I am a millionth of New York—and you?”

I am not even that. The city gathers itself together in a great roar about me, puts its hands to its mouth and bellows in my country ears, “Men are cheap enough, dear boy, didn’t you know that? See those dots on Brooklyn Bridge?”

I go on with my walk. I stop and look up at the great blocks. “Who are you?” the great blocks say. I take another step. I am one more shuffle on the street. “Men are cheap. Look at *us*—” a thousand show windows say. Are there not square miles of human countenance drifting up Broadway any day? “And where are they going?” I asked my soul. “To oblivion?”—“They are going from Things,” said my soul, “to Things”; and *sotto voce*, “From one set of Things they know they do not want, to another set of Things they do not know they do not want.”

One need not wonder very long that nearly every man one knows in New York is at best a mere cheered-up and plucky pessimist. Of course one has to go down and see one’s favourite New Yorker, one needs to and wants to, and one needs to get wrought in with him too, but when one gets home, who is there who does not have to get free from his favourite New Yorker, shake himself off from him, save his soul a little longer? “Men are cheap,” it keeps saying over and over to one,—a New York soul does. It keeps coming back—whispering through all the aisles of thought. New York spreads itself like a vast concrete philosophy over every man’s spirit. It reeks with cheapness, human cheapness. How could it be otherwise with a New York man? I never come home from New York, wander through the city with my heart, afterward, look down upon it, see Broadway with this little man on it, fretting up and down between his

twenty-story blocks, in his little trough of din under the wide heaven, loomed at by iron and glass, browbeaten by stone, smothered by smoke, but that he all but seems to me, this little Broadway man, to be slipping off the planet, to barely belong to the planet. I feel like clutching at him, helping him to hold on, pitying him. Then I remember how it really is (if there is any pitying to be done),—this crowded-over, crowded-off, matter-cringing, callous-looking man, pities me.

When I was coming home from New York the last time, had reached a safe distance behind my engine, out in the fields, I found myself listening all over again to the roar (saved up in me) of the great city. I tried to make it out, tried to analyse what it was that the voice of the great city said to me. “The voice of the city is the Voice of Things,” my soul said to me. “And the Man?” I said, “where does the Man come in? Are not the Things for the Man?” Then the roar of the great city rose up about me, like a flood, swallowed my senses in itself, numbed and overbore me, swooned my soul in itself, and said: “No, THE THINGS ARE NOT FOR THE MAN. THE MAN IS FOR THE THINGS.”

This is what the great city said. And while I still listened, the roar broke over me once more with its NO! NO! NO! its million voices in it, its million souls in it. All doubts and fears and hates and cries, all deadnesses flowed around me, took possession of me.

Then I remembered the iron and wood faces of the men, great processions of them, I had seen there, the strange, protected-looking, boxed-in faces of the women, faces in crates, I had seen, and I understood. “New York,” I said, “is a huge war, a great battle numbered off in streets and houses, every man against every man, every man a shut-in, self-defended man. It is a huge lamp-lighted, sun-lighted, ceaseless struggle, day unto day.”

“But New York is not the world. Try the whole world,” said my soul to me. “Perhaps you can do better. Are there not churches, men-making, men-gathering places, oases for strength and rest in it?”

Then I went to all the churches in the land at once, of a still Sabbath morning, steeples in the fields and hills, and steeples in cities. The sound of splendid organs praying for the poor emptied people, the long, still, innumerable sound of countless collections being taken, the drone and seesaw of sermons, countless sermons! (Ah, these poor helpless Sundays!) Paper-philosophy and axioms. Chimes of bells to call the people to paper-philosophy and axioms! “Canst thou not,” said I to my soul, “guide me to a Man, to a door that leads to a Man—a world-lover or prophet?” Then I fled (I always do after a course of churches) to the hills from whence cometh strength. David tried to believe this. I do sometimes, but hills are great, still, coldly companionable, rather heartless fellows. I know in my heart that all the hills on earth, with all their halos on them, their cities of leaves, and circles of life, would not take the place to me, in mystery, closeness, illimitableness, and wonder—of one man.

And when I turn from the world of affairs and churches, to the world of scholarship, I cannot say that I find relief. Even scholarship, scholarship itself, is under a stone most of it, prone and pale and like all the rest, under The Emphasis of Things. Scholarship is getting to be a mere huge New York, infinite rows and streets of things, taught by rows of men who have made themselves over into things, to another row of

men who are trying to make themselves over into things. I visit one after the other of our great colleges, with their forlorn, lonesome little chapels, cosy-corners for God and for the humanities, their vast Thing-libraries, men like dots in them, their great long, reached-out laboratories, stables for truth, and I am obliged to confess in spirit that even the colleges, in all ages the strongholds of the human past, and the human future, the citadels of manhood, are getting to be great man-blind centres, shambles of souls, places for turning every man out from himself, every man away from other men, making a Thing of him—or at best a Columbus for a new kind of fly, or valet to a worm, or tag or label on Matter.

When one considers that it is a literal, scientific, demonstrable fact that there is not a single evil that can be named in modern life, social, religious, political, or industrial, which is not based on the narrowness and blindness of classes of men toward one another, it is very hard to sit by and watch the modern college almost everywhere, with its silent, deadly Thing-emphasis upon it, educating every man it can reach, into not knowing other men, into not knowing even himself.

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## VI

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### The Outsiders

One cannot but look with deep pleasure at first, and with much relief, upon these healthy objective modern men of ours. The only way out, for spiritual hardihood, after the world-sick Middle Ages, was a Columbus, a vast splendid train of Things after him, of men who emphasised Things,—who could emphasise Things. It is a great spectacle and a memorable one—the one we are in to-day, the spectacle of the wonder that men are doing with Things, but when one begins to see that it is all being turned around, that it is really a spectacle of what Things are doing with men, one wakes with a start. One wonders if there could be such a thing as having all the personalities of a whole generation lost. One looks suspiciously and wistfully at the children one sees in the schools. One wonders if they are going to be allowed, like their fathers and mothers, to have personalities to lose. I have all but caught myself kidnapping children as I have watched them flocking in the street. I have wanted to scurry them off to the country, a few of them, almost anywhere—for a few years. I have thought I would try to find a college to hide them in, some back-county, protected college, a college which still has the emphasis of Persons as well as the emphasis of Things upon it. Then I would wait and see what would come of it. I would at least have a little bevy of great men perhaps, saved out for a generation, enough to keep the world supplied with samples—to keep up the bare idea of the great man, a kind of isthmus to the future.

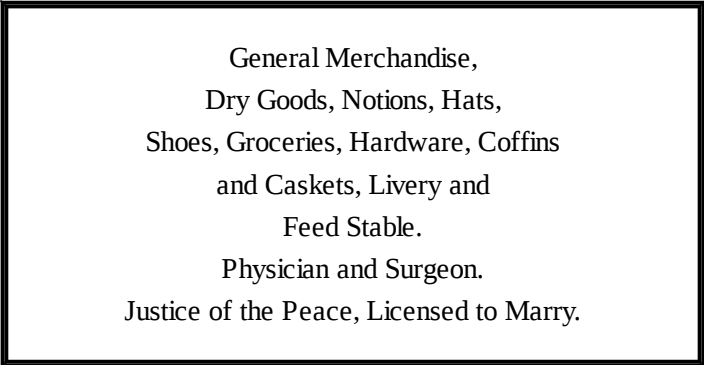
The test of civilisation is what it produces—its man, if only because he produces all else. If we have all made up our minds to allow the specialist to set the pace for us, either to be specialists ourselves or

vulgarly to compete with specialists, for the right of living, or getting a living, there is going to be a crash sometime. Then a sense of emptiness after the crash which will call us to our senses. The specialist's view of the world logically narrows itself down to a race of nonentities for nothings. And even if a thing is a thing, it is a nothing to a nonentity. And if it is the one business of the specialist to obtain results, and we are all browbeaten into being specialists, but one result is going to be possible. It is obvious that the man who is willing to sacrifice the most is going to have the most success in the race, crowd out and humiliate or annihilate the others. If this is to be the world, it is only men who are ready to die for nothing in order to create nothing who will be able to secure enough of nothing to rule it. One wonders how long ruling such a world will be worth while, a world which has accepted as the order of the day success by suicide, the spending of manhood on things which only by being men we can enjoy—the method of forging boilers and getting deaf to buy violins, of having elevated railways for dead men, wireless telegraphs for clods, gigantic printing-presses for men who have forgotten how to read. “Let us all, by all means, make all things for the world.” So we set ourselves to our task cheerfully, the task of attaining results for people at large by killing people in particular off. We are getting to be already, even in the arts, men with one sense. We have classes even in colour. Schools of painters are founded by men because they have one seventh of a sense of sight. Schools of musicians divide themselves off into fractions of the sense of sound, and on every hand men with a hundred and forty-three million cells in their brains, become noted (nobodies) because they only use a hundred and forty-three. “What is the use of attaining results,” one asks, “of making such a perfectly finished world, when there is not a man in it who would pay any attention to it as a world?” If the planet were really being improved by us, if the stars shone better by our committing suicide to know their names, it might be worth while for us all to die, perhaps, to make racks of ourselves, frames for souls (one whole generation of us), in one single, heroic, concerted attempt to perfect a universe like this, the use and mastery of it. But what would it all come to? Would we not still be left in the way on it, we and our children, lumbering it up, soiling and disgracing it, making a machine of it? There would be no one to appreciate it. Our children would inherit the curse from us, would be more like us than we are. If any one is to appreciate this world, we must appreciate it and pass the old secret on.

No one seems to believe in appreciating—appreciating more than one thing, at least. The practical disappearance in any vital form of the lecture-lyceum, the sermon, the essay, and the poem, the annihilation of the imagination or organ of comprehension, the disappearance of personality, the abolition of the editorial, the temporary decline of religion, of genius, of the artistic temperament, can all be summed up and symbolised in a single trait of modern life, its separated men, interested in separate things. We are getting to be lovers of contentedly separate things, little things in their little places all by themselves. The modern reader is a skimmer, a starrer at pictures, like a child, while he reads, never thinking a whole thought, a lover of peeks and paragraphs, as a matter of course. Except in his money-making, or perhaps in the upper levels of science, the typical modern man is all paragraphs, not only in

the way he reads, but in the way he lives and thinks. Outside of his specialty he is not interested in anything more than one paragraph's worth. He is as helpless as a bit of protoplasm before the sight of a great many very different things being honestly put together. Putting things together tires him. He has no imagination, because he has the daily habit of contentedly seeing a great many things which he never puts together. He is neither artistic nor original nor far-sighted nor powerful, because he has a paragraph way of thinking, a scrap-bag of a soul, because he cannot concentrate separate things, cannot put things together. He has no personality because he cannot put himself together.

It is significant that in the days when personalities were common and when very powerful, interesting personalities could be looked up, several to the mile, on almost any road in the land, it was not uncommon to see a business letter-head like this:



General Merchandise,  
Dry Goods, Notions, Hats,  
Shoes, Groceries, Hardware, Coffins  
and Caskets, Livery and  
Feed Stable.  
Physician and Surgeon.  
Justice of the Peace, Licensed to Marry.

If, as it looks just at present, the nation is going to believe in arbitration as the general modern method of adjustment, that is, in the all-siding up of a subject, the next thing it will be obliged to believe in will be some kind of an institution of learning which will produce arbitrators, men who have two or three perfectly good, human sides to their minds, who have been allowed to keep minds with three dimensions. The probabilities are that if the mind of Socrates, or any other great man, could have an X-ray put on it, and could be thrown on a canvas, it would come out as a hexagon, or an almost-circle, with lines very like spokes on the inside bringing all things to a centre.

It is not necessary to deny, in the present emphasis of Things, that we are making and inspiring all Things except ourselves in a way that would make the Things glad. The trouble is that Things are getting too glad. They are turning around and making us. Nearly every man in college is being made over, mind and body, into a sort of machine. When the college has finished him, and put him on the market, and one wonders what he is for, one learns he is to do some very little part, of some very little thing, and nothing else. The local paper announces with pride that in the new factory we have for the manufacture of shoes it takes one hundred and sixty-three machines to make one shoe—one man to each machine. I ask myself, “If it takes one hundred and sixty-three machines to make one shoe, how many machines does it take to make one man?”

The Infinite Face of The Street goes by me night and day. To and fro, its innumerable eyes, always the sound of footsteps in my ears, out of all these—jostling our shoulders, hidden from our souls, there

waits an All-man, a great man, I know, as always great men wait, whose soul shall be the signal to the latent hero in us all, who, standing forth from the machines of learning and the machines of worship, that spread their noise and network through all the living of our lives, shall start again the old sublime adventure of keeping a Man upon the earth. He shall rouse the glowing crusaders, the darers of every land, who through the proud and dreary temples of the wise shall go, with the cry from Nazareth on their lips, “Woe unto you ye men of learning, ye have taken away the key of knowledge, ye have entered not in yourselves and them that were entering in, ye have hindered,” and the mighty message of the one great scholar of his day who knew a God: “Whether there be prophecies they shall fail, whether there be tongues they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal,...”

I do not forget of Him, whose “I, IF I BE LIFTED UP” is the hail of this modern world, that there were men of letters in those far-off days, when once He walked with us, who, sounding their brass and tinkling their cymbals, asked the essentially ignorant question of all outsiders of knowledge in every age—“How knoweth this man letters, never having learned?”

As I lay on my bed in the night  
They came  
Pale with sleep—  
The faces of all the living  
As though they were dead;  
“What is Power?” they cried,  
Souls that were lost from their masters while they slept—  
Trooping through my dream,  
“What is Power?”  
Now these nineteen hundred years since the Boy  
In the temple with The Doctors  
Still the wind of faces flying  
Through the spaces of my dream,  
“WHAT IS POWER?” they cried.

It is not necessary to decry science, but it should be cried on the housetops of education, the world around in this twentieth century, that science is in a rut of dealing solely with things and that the pronoun of science is It. While it is obvious that neuter knowledge should have its place in any real scheme of life, it is also obvious that most of us, making locomotives, playing with mist, fire and water and lightning, and the great game with matter, should be allowed to have sex enough to be men and women a large part of the time, the privilege of being persons, perchance gods, surmounting this matter we know so much about, rather than becoming like it.

The next great move of education—the one which is to be expected—is that the educated man of the twentieth century is going to be educated by selecting out of all the bare knowledges the warm and human elements in them. He is going to work these over into a relation to himself and when he has worked them over into relation to himself, he is going to work them over through himself into every one else and read the world together.

It is because the general habit of reading for persons, acquiring one's knowledge naturally and vitally and in its relation to life, has been temporarily swept one side in modern education that we are obliged to face the divorced condition of the educated world to-day. There seem to be, for the most part, but two kinds of men living in it, living on opposite sides of the same truths glaring at each other. On the one hand the anæmically spiritual, broad, big, pallid men, and on the other the funny, infinitesimal, provincial, matter cornered, matter-of-fact ones.

However useless it may seem to be there is but one way out. Some man is going to come to us, must come to us, who will have it in him to challenge these forces, do battle with them, fight with fog on one hand and desert on the other. There never will be one world in education until we have one man who can emphasise persons and things together, and do it every day, side by side, in his own mind. When there is one man who is an all-man, an epitome of a world, there shall be more all-men. He cannot help attracting them, drawing them out, creating them. With enough men who have a whole world in their hearts, we shall soon have a whole world.

Whether it is true or not that the universe is most swiftly known, most naturally enjoyed as related to one Creator or Person, as the self-expression of one Being who loved all these things enough to gather them together, it is generally admitted that the natural man seems to have been created to enjoy a universe as related to himself. His most natural and powerful way of enjoying it is to enjoy it in its relation to persons. A Person may not have created it, but it seems for the time being at least, and so far as persons are concerned, to have been created for persons. To know the persons and the things together, and particularly the things in relation to the persons, is the swiftest and simplest way of knowing the things. Persons are the nervous system of all knowledge. So far as man is concerned all truth is a sub-topic under his own soul, and the universe is the tool of his own life. Reading for different topics in it gives him a superficial knowledge of the men who write about them. Reading to know the men gives him a superficial knowledge, in the technical sense, of the things they write about. Let him stand up and take his choice like

a man between being superficial in the letter and superficial in the spirit. Outside of his specialty, however, being superficial in the letter will lead him to the most knowledge. Man is the greatest topic. All other knowledge is a sub-topic under a Man, and the stars themselves are as footnotes to the thoughts of his heart.

“Things are not only related to other things,” the soul of the man says, “they are related to me.” This relation of things to me is a mutual affair, partly theirs and partly mine, and I am going to do my knowing, act on my own knowledge, as if I were of some importance in it. Shall I reckon with alkalis and acids and not reckon with myself? I say, “O great Nature, O infinite Things, by the charter of my soul (and whether I have a soul or not), I am not only going to know things, but things shall know *me*. I stamp myself upon them. I shall receive from them and love them and belong to them, but they shall be my things because they are things, and they shall be to me, what I make them.” “The sun is thy plaything,” my soul says to me, “O, mighty Child, the stars thy companions. Stand up! Come out in the day! laugh the great winds to thy side. The sea, if thou wilt have it so, is thy frog-pond and thou shalt play with the lightnings in thy breast.”

“Aye, aye,” I cry, “I know it! The youth of the world seizes my whole being. I hurrah like a child through all knowledge. I have taken all heaven for my nursery. The world is my rocking-horse. Things are not only for things, and my body in the end for things, but now I *live*, I *live*, and things are for me!” “Aye, aye, and they shall be to thee,” said my soul, “what thou biddest them.”

And now I go forth quietly. “Do you not see, O mountains, that you must reckon with me? I am the younger brother of the stars. I have faced nations in my heart. Great bullying, hulking, half-dead centuries I have faced. I have made them speak to me, and have dared against them. If there is history, I also am history. If there are facts, I also am a fact. If there are laws, it is one of the laws that I am one of the laws.”

All knowledge, I have said in my heart, instead of being a kind of vast overseer-and-slave system for a man to lock himself up in, and throw away his key in, becomes free, fluent, daring, and glorious the moment it is conceived through persons and for persons and with persons. Knowledge is not knowledge until it is conceived in relation to persons; that is, in relation to all the facts. Persons are facts also and on the whole the main facts, the facts which for seventy years, at least, or until the planet is too cooled off, all other facts are for. The world belongs to persons, is related to persons, and all the knowledge thereof, and by heaven, and by my soul’s delight, all the persons the knowledge is related to shall belong to me, and the knowledge that is related to them shall belong to me, the whole human round of it. The spirit and rhythm and song of their knowledge, the thing in it that is real to them, that sings out their lives to them, shall sing to me.

## Book IV

# What to Do Next

“I am he who tauntingly compels men, women, nations,  
Crying, ‘Leap from your seats and contend for your lives!’”



IT is good to rise early in the morning, when the world is still respectable and nobody has used it yet, and sit and look at it, try to realise it. One sees things very differently. It is a kind of yawn of all being. One feels one's soul lying out, all relaxed, on it, and resting on real things. It stretches itself on the bare bones of the earth and knows. On a hundred silent hills it lies and suns itself.

And as I lay in the morning, soul and body reaching out to the real things and resting on them, I thought I heard One Part of me, down underneath, half in the light and half in the dark, laughing softly at the Other. "What is this book of yours?" it said coldly, "with its proffered scheme of education, its millenniums and things? What do you think this theory, this heaven-spanning theory of reading of yours, really is, which you have held up objectively, almost authoritatively, to be looked at as truth? Do you think it is anything after all but a kind of pallid, unreal, water-colour exhibition, a row of blurs of faintly coloured portraits of yourself, spread on space? Do you not see how unfair it is—this spinning out of one's own little dark, tired inside, a theory for a wide heaven and earth, this straddling with one temperament a star?"

Then I made myself sit down and compose what I feared would be a strictly honest title-page for this book. Instead of:

## THE LOST ART OF READING

A STUDY  
OF  
EDUCATION  
BY  
ETC.

I wrote it:

## HOW TO BE MORE LIKE ME

A SHY  
AT  
EDUCATION  
BY  
ETC.

And when I had looked boldly (almost scientifically) at this title-page, let it mock me a little, had laughed and sighed over it, as I ought, there came a great hush from I know not where. I remembered it was the title, after all, for better or worse, in some sort or another, of every book I had craved and delighted in, in the whole world. Then suddenly I found myself before this book, praying to it, and before every struggling desiring-book of every man, of other men, where it has prayed before, and I dared to look

my title in the face. I have not denied—I do not need to deny—that what I have uncovered here is merely my own soul’s glimmer—my interpretation—at this mighty, passing show of a world, and it comes to you, Oh Gentle Reader, not as I am, but as I would like to be. Out of chaos it struggles to you, and defeat—can you not see it?—and if but the benediction of what I, or you, or any man would like to be will come and rest on it, it is enough. Take it first and last, it is written in every man’s soul, be his theory whatsoever it may of this great wondering world—wave after wave of it, shuddering and glorying over him—it is written after all that he does not know that anything is, can be, or has been in this world until he possesses it, or misses possessing it himself—feels it slipping from him. It is in what a man is, has, or might have, that he must track out his promise for a world. His life is his prayer for the ages as long as he lives, and what he is, and what he is trying to be, sings and prays for him, says masses for his soul under the stars, and in the presence of all peoples, when he is dead. By this truth, I and my book with you, Gentle Reader, must stand or fall. Even now as I bend over the click of my typewriter, the years rise dim and flow over me out of the east, ... generations of brothers, out of the mist of heaven and out of the dust of the earth, trooping across the world, and wondering at it, come and go, and out of all these there shall not be one, no not one, Gentle Reader, but shall be touched and loved by you, by me. In light out of shadow or in the shadow out of the light, our souls fleck them, fleck them with the invisible, blessing them and cursing them. We shall be the voices of the night and day to them, shall live a shadow of life with them, and be the sounds in their ears; did any man think that what we are, and what we are trying to be, is ours, is private, is for ourselves? Boundlessly, helplessly scattered on the world, upon the faces of our fellows, our souls mock to us or sing to us forever.

So if I have opened my windows to you, say not it is because I have dared. It is because I have not dared. I have said I will protect my soul with the street. I will have my vow written on my forehead. I will throw open my window to the passer-by. Fling it in! I beg you, oh world, whatever it is, be it prayer or hope or jest. It is mine. I have vowed to live with it, to live out of it—so long as I feel your footsteps under my casement, and know that your watch is upon my days, and that you hold me to myself. I have taken for my challenge or for my comrade, I know not which, a whole world.

And what shall a man give in exchange for a whole world?

And my soul said “He shall not save nor keep back himself.”

Who is the Fool—that I should be always taking all this trouble for him,—tiptoeing up and down the world with my little cover over my secret for him? To defy a Fool, I have said, speak your whole truth. Then God locks him out. To hide a secret, have enough of it. Hide it outdoors. Why should a man take anything less than a world to hide in? If a soul is really a soul, why should it not fall back for its reserve on its own infinity? God does. Even daisies do it. It is too big a world to be always bothering about one’s secret in it. “Who has time for it?” I have said. “Give it out. Move right on living. Get another.” The only way for a man in this twentieth century to hide his soul is by letting it reach out of sight. Not by locks, nor by stiflings, nor by mean little economizings of the heart does a man earn a world for a comrade. Let the

laughers laugh. On the great still street in space where souls are,—who cares?

## II

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### Diagnosis

Compelled as I am, as most of us are, to witness the unhappy spectacle, in every city of the land, of a great mass of unfortunate and mutilated persons whirled round and round in rows, in huge reading-machines, being crunched and educated, it is very hard not to rush thoughtlessly in to the rescue sometimes, even if one has nothing better than such a pitiful, helpless thing as good advice.

I am afraid it does not look very wise to do it. Civilisation is such a vast, hypnotising, polarising spectacle, has the stage so fully to itself, everybody's eyes glued on it, it is hard to get up and say what one thinks in it. One cannot find anything equally objective to say it with. One feels as if calling attention to one's self, to the little, private, shabby theatre of one's own mind. It is as if in a great theatre (on a back seat in it) one were to get up and stand in his chair and get the audience to turn round, and say, "Ladies and gentlemen. That is not the stage, with the foot-lights over there. This is the stage, here where I am. Now watch me twirl my thumbs."

But the great spectacle of the universal reading-machine is too much for me. Before I know it I try to get the audience to turn around.

The spectacle of even a single lad, in his more impressionable and possible years, reading a book whether he has anything to do with it or not, in spite of the author and in spite of himself, when one considers how many books he might read which really belong to him, is enough to make a mere reformer or outlaw or parent-interferer of any man who is compelled to witness it.

But it seems that the only way to interfere with one of these great reading-machines is to stop the machine. One would say theoretically that it would not take very much to stop it—a mere broken thread of thought would do it, if the machine had any provision for thoughts. As it is, one can only stand outside, watch it through the window, and do what all outsiders are obliged to do, shout into the din a little good advice. If this good advice were to be summed up in a principle or prepared for a text-book it would be something like this:

The whole theory of our prevailing education is a kind of unanimous, colossal, "I can't," "You can't"; chorus, "We all of us together can't." The working principle of public-school education, all the way from its biggest superintendents or overseers down to its littlest tow-heads in the primary rooms, is a huge, overbearing, overwhelming system of not expecting anything of anybody. Everything is arranged throughout with reference to not-expecting, and the more perfectly a system works without expecting, or

needing to expect, the more successful it is represented to be. The public does not expect anything of the politicians. The politicians do not expect anything of the superintendents. The superintendents do not expect anything of the teachers, and the teachers do not expect anything of the pupils, and the pupils do not expect anything of themselves. That is to say, the whole educational world is upside down,—so perfectly and regularly and faultlessly upside down that it is almost hopeful. All one needs to do is to turn it accurately and carefully over at every point and it will work wonderfully.

To turn it upside down, have teachers that believe something.

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### III

## Eclipse

When it was decreed in the course of the nineteenth century that the educational world should pass over from the emphasis of persons to the emphasis of things, it was decreed that a generation that could not emphasise persons in its knowledge could not know persons. A generation which knows things and does not know persons naturally believes in things more than it believes in persons.

Even an educator who is as forward-looking and open to human nature as President Charles F. Thwing, with all his emphasis of knowing persons and believing in persons as a basis for educational work, seems to some of us to give an essentially unbelieving and pessimistic classification of human nature for the use of teachers.

“Early education,” says President Thwing, “occupies itself with description (geometry, space, arithmetic, time, science, the world of nature). Later education with comparison and relations.” If one asks, “Why not both together? Why learn facts at one time and their relations at another? Is it not the most vital possible way to learn facts to learn them in their relations?”—the answer that would be generally made reveals that most teachers are pessimists, that they have very small faith in what can be expected of the youngest pupils. The theory is that interpretative minds must not be expected of them. Some of us find it very hard to believe as little as this, in any child. Most children have such an incorrigible tendency for putting things together that they even put them together wrong rather than not put them together at all. Under existing educational conditions a child is more of a philosopher at six than he is at twenty-six.

The third stage of education for which Dr. Thwing partitions off the human mind is the “stage in which a pupil becomes capable of original research, a discoverer of facts and relations” himself. In theory this means that when a man is thirty years old and all possible habits of originality have been trained out of him, he should be allowed to be original. In practice it means removing a man’s brain for thirty years and then telling him he can think. There never has been a live boy in a school as yet that would

allow himself to be educated in this way if he could help it. All the daily habits of his mind resent it. It is a pessimistic, postponing way of educating him. It does not believe in him enough. It may be true of men in the bulk, men by the five thousand, that their intellectual processes happen along in this conveniently scientific fashion, at least as regards emphasis, but when it is applied to any individual mind, at any particular time, in actual education, it is found that it is not true, that it is pessimistic. God is not so monotonous and the universe is not graded as accurately as a public school, and things are much more delightfully mixed up. If a great university were to give itself whole-heartedly and pointedly to one single individual student, it would find it both convenient and pleasant and natural and necessary to let him follow these three stages all at once, in one stage with one set of things, and in another stage with another.

Everyone admits that the first thing a genius does with such a convenient, three-part system, or chart for a soul, is to knock it endwise. He does it because he can. Others would if they could. He insists from his earliest days on doing all three parts, everything, one set of things after the other—description, comparison, creation, and original research sometimes all at once. He learns even words all ways at once. All of these processes are applied to each thing that a genius learns in his life, not the three parts of his life. One might as well say to a child, “Now, dear little lad, your life is going to be made up of eating, sleeping, and living. You must get your eating all done up now, these first ten years, and then you can get your sleeping done up, and then you can take a spell at living—or putting things together.”

The first axiom of true pedagogics is that nothing can be taught except the outside or letter of a thing. The second axiom is that there is nothing gained in teaching a pupil the outside of a thing if he has not the inside—the spirit or relations of it. Teachers do not dare to believe this. They think it is true only of men of genius. They admit that men of genius can be educated through the inside or by calling out the spirit, by drawing out their powers of originality from the first, but they argue that with common pupils this process should not be allowed. They are not worthy of it. That is to say, the more ordinary men are and the more they need brains, the less they shall be allowed to have them.

Inasmuch, then, as the inside cannot be taught and there is no object in teaching the outside, the question remains how to get the right inside at work producing the right outside. This is a purely spiritual question and brings us to the third axiom. Every human being born into the world is entitled to a special study and a special answer all to himself. If, as President Thwing very truly says, “The higher education as well as the lower is to be organised about the unit of the individual student,” what follows? The organisation must be such as to make it possible for every teacher to study and serve each individual student as a special being by himself. In other words, if this last statement of Dr. Thwing’s is to be acted on, it makes havoc with his first. It requires a somewhat new and practically revolutionary organisation in education. It will be an organisation which takes for its basic principle something like this:

*Viz.:* The very essence of an average pupil is that he needs to be studied more, not less, than any one else in order to find his master-key, the master-passion to open his soul with. The essence of a genius is that almost any one of a dozen passions can be made the motive power of his learning. His soul is opening

somewhere all the time.

The less individuality a student has, the more he is like other students, the more he should be kept away from other students until what little individuality he has has been brought out. It is not only equally true of the ordinary man as well as of the man of genius that he must educate himself, but it is more true. Other people's knowledge can be poured into and poured over a genius innocently enough. It rolls off him like water on a duck's back. Even if it gets in, he organically protects himself. The genius of the ordinary man needs special protection made for it. As our educational institutions are arranged at present, the more commonplace our students are the more we herd them together to make them more commonplace. That is, we do not believe in them enough. We believe that they are commonplace through and through, and that nothing can be done about it. We admit, after a little intellectual struggle, that a genius (who is bound to be an individual anyway) should be treated as one, but a common boy, whose individuality can only be brought out by his being very vigorously and constantly reminded of it, and exercised in it, is dropped altogether as an individual, is put into a herd of other common boys, and his last remaining chance of being anybody is irrevocably cut off. We do not believe in him as an individual. He is a fraction of a roomful. He is a 67th or 734th of something. Some one has said that the problem of education is getting to be, How can we give, in our huge learning-machines, our exceptional students more of a chance? I state a greater problem: How can we give our common students a chance to be exceptional ones?

The problem can only be solved by teachers who believe something, who believe that there is some common ground, some spiritual law of junction, between the man of genius, the natural or free man, and the cramped, *i. e.*, artificial, ordinary one. It would be hard to name any more important proposition for current education to act on than this, that the natural man in this world is the man of genius. The Church has had to learn that religion does not consist in being unnatural. The schools are next to learn that the man of genius is not unnatural. He is what nature intended every man to be, at the point where his genius lies. The way out in education, the only believing, virile, man's way out, would seem to be to begin with the man of genius as a principle and work out the application of the principle to more ordinary men—men of slowed-down genius. We are going to use the same methods—faster or slower—for both. A child's greater genius lies in his having a more lively sense of relation with more things than other children. Teachers are going to believe that if the right thing can be done about it, this sense of a live relation to knowledge can be uncovered in every human soul, that there is a certain sense in which every man is his own genius. "By education," said Helvetius, "you can make bears dance, but never create a man of genius." The first thing for a teacher who believes this to do, is not to teach.

# Apocalypse

There is a spirit in this book, struggling down underneath it, which neither I nor any other man shall ever express. It needs a nation to express it, a nation fearless to know itself, a great, joyous, trustful, expectant nation. The centuries break away. I almost see it now, lifting itself in its plains and hills and fields and cities, in its smoke and cloud-land, as on some huge altar, to supreme destiny, a nation freed before heaven by the mighty, daily, childlike joy of its own life. I see it as a nation full of personalities, full of self-contained, normally self-centred, self-delighted, self-poised men—men of genius, men who balance off with a world, men who are capable of being at will magnificently self-conscious or unconscious, self-possessed and self-forgetful—balanced men, comrades and equals of a world, neither its slaves nor its masters.

I have said I will not have a faith that I have to get to with a trap-door. I have said that inspiration is for everybody. I have had inspiration myself and I will not clang down a door above my soul and believe that God has given to me or to any one else what only a few can have. I do not want anything, I will not have anything that any one cannot have. If there is one thing rather than another that inspiration is for, it is that when I have it I know that any man can have it. It is necessary to my selfishness that he shall have it. If a great wonder of a world like this is given to a man, and he is told to live on it and it is not furnished with men to live with, with men that go with it, what is it all for? If one could have one's choice in being damned there would be no way that would be quite so quick and effective as having inspirations that were so little inspired as to make one suppose they were merely for one's self or for a few others. The only way to save one's soul or to keep a corner for God in it is to believe that He is a kind of God who has put inspiration in every man. All that has to be done with it, is to get him to stop smothering it.

Inspiration, instead of being an act of going to work in a minute, living a few hundred years at once, an act of making up and creating a new and wonderful soul for one's self, consists in the act of lifting off the lid from the one one has. The mere fact that the man exists who has had both experiences, not having inspiration and having it, gives a basis for knowledge of what inspiration is. A man who has never had anything except inspiration cannot tell us what it is, and a man who has never had it cannot tell us what it is; but a man who has had both of these experiences (which is the case with most of us) constitutes a cross-section of the subject, a symbol of hope for every one. All who have had not-inspirations and inspirations both know that the origin and control and habit of inspiration, are all of such a character as to suggest that it is the common property of all men. All that is necessary is to have true educators or promoters, men who furnish the conditions in which the common property can be got at.

The only difference between men of genius—men of genius who know it—and other men—men of genius who don't know it—is that the men of genius who know it have discovered themselves, have such a headlong habit of self-joy in them, have tasted their self-joys so deeply, that they are bound to get at them whether the conditions are favourable or not. The great fact about the ordinary man's genius, which

the educational world has next to reckon with, is that there are not so many places to uncover it. The ordinary man at first, or until he gets the appetite started, is more particular about the conditions.

It is because a man of genius is more thorough with the genius he has, more spiritual and wilful with it than other men, that he grows great. A man's genius is always at bottom religious, at the point where it is genius, a worshipping toward something, a worshipping toward something until he gets it, a supreme covetousness for God, for being a God. It is a faith in him, a sense of identity and sharing with what seems to be above and outside, a sense of his own latent infinity. I have said that all that real teaching is for, is to say to a man, in countless ways, a countless "You can." And I have said that all real learning is for is to say "I can." When we have enough great "I can's," there will be a great society or nation, a glorious "We can" rising to heaven. This is the ideal that hovers over all real teaching and makes it deathless,—fertile for ever.

If the world could be stopped short for ten years in its dull, sullen round of not believing in itself, if it could be allowed to have, all of it, all over, even for three days, the great solemn joy of letting itself go, it would not be caught falling back very soon, I think, into its stupor of cowardice. It would not be the same world for three hundred years. All that it is going to require to get all people to feel that they are inspired is some one who is strong enough to lift a few people off of themselves—get the idea started. Every man is so busy nowadays keeping himself, as he thinks, properly smothered, that he has not the slightest idea of what is really inside him, or of what the thing that is really inside him would do with him, if he would give it a chance. Any man who has had the experience of not having inspiration and the experience of having it both knows that it is the sense of striking down through, of having the lid of one's smaller consciousness lifted off. In the long run his inspiration can be had or not as he wills. He knows that it is the supreme reasonableness in him, the primeval, underlying naturalness in him, rising to its rights. What he feels when he is inspired is that the larger laws, the laws above the other laws, have taken hold of him. He knows that the one law of inspiration is that a man shall have the freedom of himself. Most problems and worries are based on defective, uninvoked functions. Some organ, vision, taste, or feeling or instinct is not allowed its vent, its chance to qualify. Something needs lifting away. The common experience of sleeping things off, or walking or working them off, is the daily symbol of inspiration. More often than not a worry or trouble is moved entirely out of one's path by the simplest possible device, an intelligent or instinctive change of conditions.

The fundamental heresy of modern education is that it does not believe this—does not believe in making deliberate arrangements for the originality of the average man. It does not see that the extraordinary man is simply the ordinary man keyed-up, writ large or moving more rapidly. What the average man is now, the great men were once. When we begin to understand that a man of genius is not supernatural, that he is simply more natural than the rest of us, that all the things that are true for him are true for us, except that they are true more slowly, the educational world will be a new world. The very essence of the creative power of a man of genius over other men, is that he believes in them more than

they do. He writes, paints, or sings as if all other men were men of genius, and he keeps on doing it until they are. All modern human nature is annexed genius. The whole world is a great gallery of things, that men of genius have seen, until they make other men see them too, and prove that other men can see them. What one man sees with travail or by being born again, whole generations see at last without trying, and when they are born the first time. The great cosmic process is going on in the human spirit. Ages flow down from the stars upon it. No one man shall guess, now or ever, what a man is, what a man shall be. But it is to be noticed that when the world gets its greatest man—the One who guesses most, generations are born and die to know Him, all with awe and gentleness in their hearts. One after the other as they wheel up to the Great Sun to live,—they call Him the Son of God because He thought everybody was.

The main difference between a great man and a little one is a matter of time. If the little man could keep his organs going, could keep on experiencing, acting, and reacting on things for four thousand years, he would have no difficulty in being as great as some men are in their threescore and ten. All genius is inherited time and space. The imagination, which is the psychological substitute for time and space, is a fundamental element in all great power, because, being able to reach results without pacing off the processes, it makes it possible for a man to crowd more experience in, and be great in a shorter time.

The idea of educating the little man in the same way as the great man, from the inside, or by drawing out his originality, meets with many objections. It is objected that inasmuch as no little men could be made into great men in the time allotted, there would be no object in trying to do it, and no result to show for it in the world, except row after row of spoiled little men, drearily waiting to die. The answer to this is the simple assertion that if a quart-cup is full it is the utmost a quart-cup can expect. A hogshead can do no more. So far as the man himself is concerned, if he has five sound, real senses in him, all of them acting and reacting on real things, if he is alive, i. e., sincere through and through, he is educated. True education must always consist, not in how much a man has, but in the way he feels about what he has. The kingdom of heaven is on the inside of his five senses.

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## V

# Every Man his Own Genius

I do not mean by the man of genius in this connection the great man of genius, who takes hold of his ancestors to live, rakes centuries into his life, burns up the phosphorus of ten generations in fifty years, and with giant masterpieces takes leave of the world at last, bringing his family to a full stop in a blaze of glory, and a spindling child or so. I am merely contending for the principle that the extraordinary or inspired man is the normal man (at the point where he is inspired) and that the ordinary or uninspired boy

can be made like him, must be educated like him, led out through his self-delight to truth, that, if anything, the ordinary or uninspired boy needs to be educated like a genius more than a genius does.

I know of a country house which reminds me of the kind of mind I would like to have. In the first place, it is a house that grew. It could not possibly have been thought of all at once. In the second place, it grew itself. Half inspiration and half common-sense, with its mistakes and its delights all in it, gloriously, frankly, it blundered into being, seven generations tumbled on its floors, filled it with laughter and love and tears. One felt that every life that had come to it had written itself on its walls, that the old house had broken out in a new place for it, full of new little joys everywhere, and jogs and bays and afterthoughts and forethoughts, old roofs and young ones chumming together, and old chimneys (three to start with and four new ones that came when they got ready). Everything about it touched the heart and said something. I have never managed to see it yet, whether in sunlight, cloud-light, or starlight, or the light of its own lamps, but that it stood and spoke. It is a house that has genius. The genius of the earth and the sky around it are all in it, of motherhood, of old age, and of little children. It grew out of a spirit, a loving, eager, putting-together, a making of relations between things that were apart,—the portrait of a family. It is a very beautiful, eloquent house, and hundreds of nights on the white road have I passed it by, in my lonely walk, and stopped and listened to it, standing there in its lights, like a kind of low singing in the trees, and when I have come home, later, on the white road, and the lights were all put out, I still feel it speaking there, faint against heaven, with all its sleep, its young and old sleep, its memories and hopes of birth and death, lifting itself in the night, a prayer of generations.

Many people do not care for it very much. They would wonder that I should like a mind like it. It is a wandering-around kind of a house, has thirty outside doors. If one doesn't like it, it is easy to get out (which is just what I like in a mind). Stairways almost anywhere, only one or two places in the whole building where there is not a piazza, and every inch of piazza has steps down to the grass and there are no walks. A great central fireplace, big as a room, little groups of rooms that keep coming on one like surprises, and little groups of houses around outside that have sprung up out of the ground themselves. A flower garden that thought of itself and looks as if it took care of itself (but doesn't). Everything exuberant and hospitable and free on every side and full of play,—a high stillness and seriousness over all.

I cannot quite say what it is, but most country houses look to me as if they had forgotten they were really outdoors, in a great, wide, free, happy place, where winds and suns run things, where not even God says nay, and everything lives by its inner law, in the presence of the others, exults in its own joy and plays with God. Most country homes forget this. They look like little isles of glare and showing off, and human joylessness, dotting the earth. People's minds in the houses are like the houses: they reek with propriety. That is, they are all abnormal, foreign to the spirit, to the passion of self-delight, of life, of genius. Most of them are fairly hostile to genius or look at it with a lorgnette.

I like to think that if the principles and habits of freedom that result in genius were to be gauged and adjusted toward bringing out the genius of ordinary men, they would result in the following:

Recipe to make a great man (or a live small one): Let him be made like a great work of art. In general, follow the rule in Genesis i.

1. Chaos.

2. Enough Chaos; that is, enough kinds of Chaos. Pouring all the several parts of Chaos upon the other parts of Chaos.

3. Watch to see what emerges and what it is in the Chaos that most belongs to all the rest, what is the Unifying Principle.

4. Fertilise the Chaos. Let it be impregnated with desire, will, purpose, personality.

5. When the Unifying Principle is discovered, refrain from trying to force everything to attach itself to it. Let things attach themselves in their way as they are sure to do in due time and grow upon it. Let the mind be trusted. Let it not be always ordered around, thrust into, or meddled with. The making of a man, like the making of a work of art, consists in giving the nature of things a chance, keeping them open to the sun and air and the springs of thought. The first person who ever said to man, “You press the button and I will do the rest,” was God.

The emphasis of art in our modern education, of the knack or science or how of things, is to be followed next by the emphasis of the art that conceals art, genius, the norm and climax of human ability. Any finishing-school girl can out-sonnet Keats. The study of appearances, the passion for the outside has run its course. The next thing in education is going to be honesty, fearless naturalness, upheaval, the freedom of self, self-expectancy, all-expectancy, and the passion for possessing real things. The personalities, persons with genius, persons with free-working, uncramped minds, are all there, ready and waiting, both in teachers and pupils, all growing *sub rosa*, and the main thing that is left to do is to lift the great roof of machinery off and let them come up. The days are already upon us when education shall be taken out of the hands of anæmic, abstracted men—men who go into everything theory-end first. There is already a new atmosphere in the educated world. The thing that shall be taught shall be the love of swinging out, of swinging up to the light and the air. Let every man live, the world says next, a little less with his outside, with his mere brain or logic-stitching machine. Let him swear by his instincts more, and live with his medulla oblongata.

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## VI

### An Inclined Plane

“This is a very pleasant and profitable ideal you have printed in this book, but teachers and pupils and institutions being what they are, it is not practical and nothing can be done about it,” it is objected.

1. There is nothing so practical as an ideal, for if through his personality and imagination a man can be made to see an ideal, the ideal does itself; that is, it takes hold of him and inspires him to do it and to find means for doing it. This is what has been aimed at in this book.

2. The first and most practical thing to do with an ideal is to believe it.

3. The next most practical thing is to act as if one believed it. This makes other people believe it. To act as if one believed an ideal is to be literal with it, to assume that it can be made real, that something—some next thing—can be done with it.

4. It is only people who believe an ideal who can make it practical. Educators who think that an ideal is true and who do not think it is practical do not think it is true, do not really know it. The process of knowing an ideal, of realising it with the mind, is the process of knowing that it can be made real. This is what makes it an ideal, that it is capable of becoming real, and if a man does not realise an ideal, cannot make it real in his mind, it is not accurate for him to say that it is not practical. It is accurate for him to say that it is not practical to him. The ideal presented in this book is not presented as practical except to teachers who believe it.

5. Every man has been given in this world, if he is allowed to get at them, two powers to make a man out of. These powers are Vision and Action. (1) Seeing, and (2) Being or Doing what one sees. What a man sees with, is quite generally called his imagination. What he does with what he sees, is called his character or personality. If it is true, as has been maintained in the whole trend of this book, that the most important means of education are imagination and personality, the power of seeing things and the power of living as if one saw them, imagination and personality must be accepted as the forces to teach with, and the things that must be taught. The persons who have imagination and personality in modern life must do the teaching.

6. Parents and others who believe in imagination and personality as the supreme energies of human knowledge and the means of education, and who have children they wish taught in this way, are going to make connections with such teachers and call on them to do it.

7. Inasmuch as the best way to make an ideal that rests on persons practical is to find the persons, the next thing for persons who believe in an ideal to do is to find each other out. All persons, particularly teachers and parents, in their various communities and in the nation, who believe that the ideal is practical in education should be social with their ideal, group themselves together, make themselves known and felt.

8. Some of us are going to act through the schools we have. We are going to make room in our present over-managed, morbidly organised institutions, with ordered-around teachers, for teachers who cannot be ordered around, who are accustomed to use their imaginations and personalities to teach with, instead of superintendents. We are going to have superintendents who will desire such teachers. The reason that our over-organised and over-superintended schools and colleges cannot get the teachers they

want, to carry out their ideals, is a natural one enough. The moment ideal teachers are secured it is found that they have ideals of their own and that they will not teach without them. When vital and free teachers are attracted to the schools and allowed fair conditions there, they will soon crowd others out. The moment we arrange to give good teachers a chance good teachers will be had.

9. Others will find it best to act in another way. Instead of reforming schools from the inside, they are going to attack the problem from the outside, start new schools which shall stand for live principles and outlive the others. As good teachers can arrange better conditions for themselves to teach in their own schools, wherever practicable this would seem to be the better way. They are going to organise colleges of their own. They are going to organise unorganised colleges (for such they would be called at first), assemblings of inspired teachers, men grouping men about them each after his kind.

Every one can begin somewhere. Teachers who are outside can begin outside and teachers who are within can begin within. Certainly if every teacher who believes something will believe deeply, will free himself, let himself out with his belief, act on it, the day is not long hence when the great host of ordered-around teachers with their ordered-around pupils will be a memory. Copying and appearing to know will cease. Self-delight and genius will again be the habit of the minds of men and the days of our present poor, pale, fuddling, unbelieving, Simon-says-thumbs-up education will be numbered.

Sometimes it seems as if this globe, this huge cyclorama of nations whirling in sunlight through stars, were a mere empty, mumbled repetition, a going round and round of the same stupendous stupidities and the same heroisms in human life. One is always feeling as if everything, arts, architecture, cables, colleges, nations, had all almost literally happened before, in the ages dark to us, gone the same round of beginning, struggling, and ending. Then the globe was wiped clean and began again.

One of the great advantages in emphasising individuals,—the main idea of this book,—in picking out particular men as forces, centres of energy in society, as the basis for one's programme for human nature, is the sense it gives that things really can begin again—begin anywhere—where a man is. One single human being, deeply believed in, glows up a world, casts a kind of speculative value, a divine wager over all the rest. I confess that most men I have seen seem to me phantasmagorically walking the earth, their lives haunting them, hanging intangibly about them—indeinitely postponed. But one does not need, in order to have a true joyous working-theory of life, to believe verbatim, every moment, in the mass of men—as men. One needs to believe in them very much—as possible men—larvæ of great men, and if, in the meantime, one can have (what is quite practicable) one sample to a square mile of what the mass of men in that mile might be, or are going to be, one comes to a considerable degree of enthusiasm, a working and sharing enthusiasm for all the rest.

## Allons

I thought when I began to make my little visit in civilisation—this book—that perhaps I ought to have a motto to visit a civilisation with. So the motto I selected (a good one for all reformers, viewers of institutions and things) was, “Do not shoot the organist. He is doing the best he can.” I fear I have not lived up to it. I am an optimist. I cannot believe he is doing the best he can. Before I know it, I get to hoping and scolding. I do not even believe he is enjoying it. Most of the people in civilisation are not enjoying it. They are like people one sees on tally-hos. They are not really enjoying what they are doing. They enjoy thinking that other people think they are enjoying it.

The great characteristic enthusiasm of modern society, of civilisation, the fad of showing off, of exhibiting a life instead of living it, very largely comes, it is not too much to say, from the lack of normal egoism, of self-joy in civilised human beings. It has come over us like a kind of moral anæmia. People cannot get interested enough in anything to be interested in it by themselves. Hence no great art—merely the art which is a trick or knack of appearance. We lack great art because we do not believe in great living.

The emphasis which would seem to be most to the point in civilisation is that people must enjoy something, something of their very own, even if it is only their sins, if they can do no better, and they are their own. It would be a beginning. They could work out from that. They would get the idea. Some one has said that people repent of their sins because they didn't enjoy them as much as they expected to. Well, then, let them enjoy their repentance. The great point is, in this world, that men must get hold of reality somewhere, somehow, get the feel, the bare feel of living before they try dying. Most of us seem to think we ought to do them both up together. It is to be admitted that people might not do really better things for their own joy, than for other people's, but they would do them better. It is not the object of this book to reform people. Reformers are sinners enjoying their own sins, who try to keep other people from enjoying theirs. The object of this book is to inspire people to enjoy anything, to find a principle that underlies right and wrong both. Let people enjoy their sins, we say, if they really know how to enjoy. The more they get the idea of enjoying anything, the more vitally and sincerely they will run their course—turn around and enjoy something truer and more lasting. What we all feel, what every man feels is, that he has a personal need of daring and happy people around him, people that are selfish enough to be alive and worth while, people that have the habit and conviction of joy, whose joys whether they are wrong or right are real joys to them, not shadows or shows of joys, joys that melt away when no one is looking.

The main difficulty in the present juncture of the world in writing on the Lost Art of Reading is that all the other arts are lost, the great self-delights. As they have all been lost together, it has been necessary

to go after them together, to seek some way of securing conditions for the artist, the enjoyer and prophet of human life, in our modern time. At the bottom of all great art, it is necessary to believe, there has been great, believing, free, beautiful living. This is not saying that inconsistency, contradiction, and insincerity have not played their part, but it is the benediction, the great Amen of the world, to say this,—that if there has been great constructive work there has been great radiant, unconquerable, constructive living behind it. There is but one way to recover the lost art of reading. It is to recover the lost art of living. The day we begin to take the liberty of living our own lives there will be artists and seers everywhere. We will all be artists and seers, and great arts, great books, and great readers of books will flock to us.

Well, here we are, Gentle Reader. We are rounding the corner of the last paragraph. Time stretches out before us. On the great highroad we stand together in the dawn—I with my little book in hand, you, perhaps, with yours. The white road reaches away before us, behind us. There are cross-roads. There are parallels, too. Sometimes when there falls a clearness on the air, they are nearer than I thought. I hear crowds trudging on them in the dark, singing faintly. I hear them cheering in the dark.

But this is my way, right here. See the hill there? That is my next one. The sun in a minute. You are going my way, comrade?... You are not going my way? So be it. God be with you. The top o' the morning to you. I pass on.



## Footnotes

1. A Typical Case: “The brain was cut away neatly and dressed. A healthy yearling calf was tied down, her skull cut away, and a lobe of brain removed and fitted into the cavity in L’s head. The wound was dressed and trephined, and the results awaited. The calf’s head was fixed up with half a brain in it. Both the man and the calf have progressed satisfactorily, and the man is nearly as well as before the operation.”—Daily Paper. [Return](#)
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