

Dry Things

Of yonder gap in the solid grey
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away,
But forth one wavelet, then another curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then over-
flowed the world."

There was a mist over the child's eyes. Ruskin is right, I said to myself, when he wonders, not at what men suffer, but at what they lose.

My companion was silent while we walked down the hill. As we turned towards her home she said suddenly: "I shall never dare say again that I dislike history, or that I cannot endure Thackeray, or that the old paintings in the galleries are hideous. I shall be discreetly silent about things I cannot appreciate; for I believe now that dry things are just things we do not know enough about to care for."

92



THE BROAD VIEW

XV

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light.
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward look, the land is bright.

WHAT does it mean, this something in Clough's lines which beyond rhythm and picture appeals to us? And to what does Carlyle refer when he talks fiercely of respectability with its thousand gigs? and Matthew Arnold when he asserts that the occupant of every gig is a Philistine? Is it not a warning to get out of the cramped narrowness of our daily lives? to open more than one outlook on life—else we shall catch but faint and tardy glimpses of the radiance that floods it?

When Honorius was told at Ravenna that Roma was lost he gave signs of the deepest distress, believ-

93



The Broad View

ing that a pet bird of his called Roma was meant; and was greatly consoled on discovering that it was merely the capital of the world! "*Rien!*" wrote Louis XIV because it chanced that day there was no hunt; and while he wrote Paris surged on to storm the Bastille. But emperors and kings are not alone in their narrownesses.

All of us know the woman who after a journey comes back to tell us the minutest details of the room in which she was quartered, the situation of the bureau, the number of shelves in the closet; what she thought about the paper on the wall and what her sister to whom she had spoken thought about it. If we ask concerning the music which we had longed to hear, she is reminded that returning from a certain concert she slipped and fell and her husband had to call a carriage and how it took them to the wrong hotel, and the ex-

94

The Broad View

act remarks they made to the driver; and then follows a list of remedies, the order of hot compresses and cold arnica until you feel that you could perform it all backwards and in the dark. If you ask about the university settlement in which her friends were engaged she is reminded of her own children and recounts the number of garments she has made for each and offers to send you their photographs and write their ages on the back. She tells you what carpets she is going to take up, and makes you guess how long they have been down, and floods your brain with her petty concerns until you are irritated and exhausted and her presence becomes intolerable.

We do not all err along this line. Our especial window may not face the domestic side. It may be that philanthropy magnifies the importance of some Borriboola Gha, to the exclusion of our own development or

95

The Broad View

the interests of those about us; it may be even books and self-improvement which narrow our vision to the strip of sky which we think monopolizes the sunshine of life.

Broad views do not depend upon environment. Go where you will, have what you crave, you can never be anything but what you are. The great question for each of us is, "What horizon shall I draw around my life?" Because we do not shine in society, shall we therefore avoid its softening and enlarging influences? Because we appreciate that we are neither skilled pianists nor artists, shall we therefore hesitate to study harmony and form? Because our acquaintances are uncultured, shall we therefore neglect the quickening atmosphere of books? Because our first youth has flown shall we therefore fall behind the times we are in?

96

SHUT-INS

XVI

THE young girl thought it was cruel. She turned her face to the wall and let her thin fingers rest supinely in the strong hand which covered them. "Dear," the man said gently, "your voice is the sweetest thing in the world to us now, but wouldn't this be a good day to drop the whine? It is a very easy habit when one is so weak, but the habit will be harder to break to-morrow." It was then that the girl turned to the wall. She had been brought up to obey, however, and obeying she became a pleasanter convalescent, and very soon recognized the wholesomeness of her father's lesson.

It is with keen recollection of the unwelcomeness of such suggestion that the whilom invalid begs to say

97

Shut-Ins

to her sister invalids, "Let us drop the attitude of the shut-in."

The response is prompt and widespread: "Gladly would we resign the conditions, put aside our sufferings and deformities and helplessness. Do you bring a remedy, or would you take away a consolation? What do you mean?"

The reply is certain to seem cruel. It must first emphasize that illness is an abnormal physical condition, accompanied almost always by an abnormal condition of mind. For one person whom invalidism ennobles there are fifty whom it degrades; the average sick person is more biased, more petulant, more selfish than the same person would be in health, and therefore just so much less capable of sound judgment and counsel. For such persons to band themselves together into organizations is to inoculate themselves with diseases of others, foster mor-

Shut-Ins

bid introspection and mock resignation and often drag the well into needless, vicarious misery.

I fear many faces are turning indignantly to the wall, but permit me to relate another incident from life. Two sisters, differing widely in age and temperament were suddenly deprived of a competency and went to live in humble quarters. The elder kept the house and a few boarders, toiling early and late without leisure for mental or physical recuperation. The younger, strong and rosy, found an easy situation in an office. One evening when the housekeeper was manifestly too ill to wash the dishes, the younger excused herself from all assistance, saying that it was the day to send her "shut-in" letter and her conscience would not allow her to neglect its preparation. Taking her Bible from a stand, she went off to the peace of her own room. Whether she caught the expression of my face,

Shut-Ins

or whether she acted from a love of proselyting, I do not know, but on my departure she handed me a little leaflet. It proved to be one of the many published communications from an invalid. The writer began with a minute description of herself, her environments and her sufferings. She thanked God that He had given her a cheerful spirit and asserted that she tried to smile no matter what her pain, and that she seldom spoke of her agony. She moralized a little, assured her readers that she loved them all, and closed with a request for certain reading matter.

It was to answer this maudlin letter from a stranger that my young philanthropist allowed her sister to toil on unaided ; and I cannot believe it an unjust sample of many kindred cases. Far be it from me to make light of suffering or the divine gift of consolation. Rather because I have known such exquisite examples of

100

Shut-Ins

both am I urged on to iconoclasm. The invalid who "serves" is she who is self-unconscious instead of self-sacrificing, which last always contains an element of egotism. She discourses neither of her ailments nor her patience. She offers rather than demands sympathy. She never taxes a busy friend with failing regard for herself. She seeks contact with whatever is brave and bright and wholesome and progressive. She cultivates the company of the well. She never signs herself a "shut-in"—why should she? The motto does not read one way for the strong and another for the weak. For both it is

"Look out and not in, and
Lend a hand."

101

SHAMS

XVII

"HANDS off!" was the sign over a case of magnificently bound books in the British building at the Columbian Exposition. Several young women stopped for a moment to read the titles, and one, in spite of the printed injunction, put out her hand to draw forth a volume. To the surprise of all, a block of wood fell into her fingers. "Shame on you, England," she exclaimed aloud; "there was no necessity for your bookcases here, and to think that you have them filled with painted shams. Shakespeare and Bacon and Thackeray would despise such empty compliments."

As the girls went out in couples, one pressed the arm of another with a light laugh. "Bravo for Marie and her avowed hatred of shams! Was

102

Shams

sincerity her strong point at college?"

"We used to envy her her very name," returned her companion, "until her mother came and called her Maria; we were led to believe her the youngest girl in the class until she inadvertently mentioned some memories of the Centennial; she laughed at our plain note-paper until we discovered that she had hers engraved at a stationer's with a left-over crest; and her sealskin jacket turned out to be a plush. Shame on you, Marie," and the roguish girl copied the air of the earlier speaker, "there was no necessity for anything nicer than a plush jacket, and to think you set us all agog with envy! She travelled through the South last year with my sister and me," the taller girl continued, "and we spent several weeks in a quiet, inexpensive place near St. Augustine. We drove to the magnificent Ponce de Leon one day for luncheon, and after-

103

Shams

wards, she and my sister went to the parlour to write letters. Unfortunately they each addressed the same person ; and while Ruth called attention to the fact that she was making the most of her aristocratic opportunities, and explained our journey in detail, Marie, on the hotel stationery, vaunted the glories of 'this charming spot where we are spending the month.' "

More famous persons than foolish Marie have succumbed to the fleeting honours of hypocrisy. Macaulay wrote a letter to his constituents dated Windsor Castle. He happened to be there a half-hour, and took that opportunity to write the letter, or rather to date it, for he carried it with him ready written. It has been thrown up to him ever since. A famous Italian character possessed a number of wigs of different lengths, which he wore in rotation in order to sustain the impression that his hair was

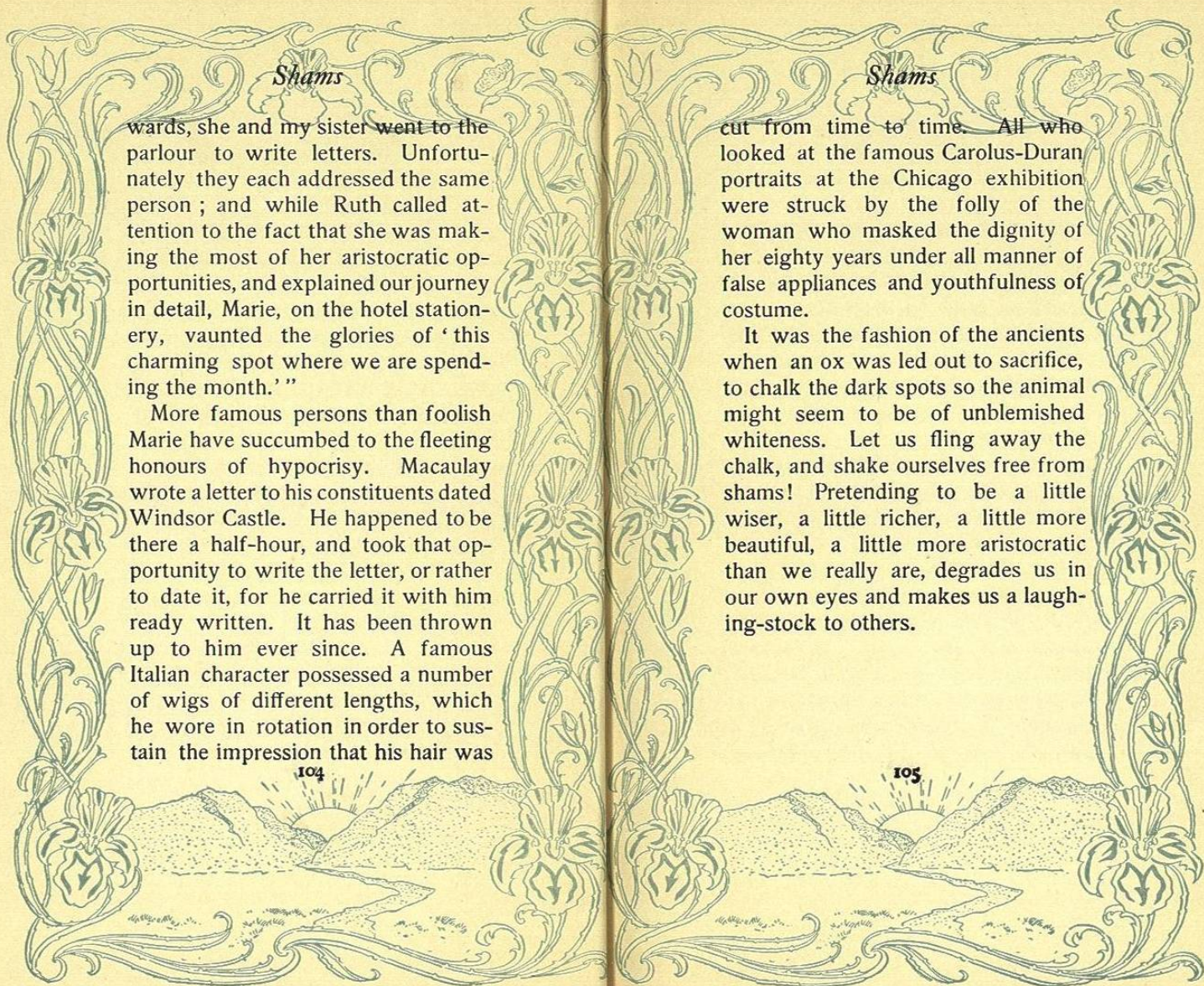
104

Shams

cut from time to time. All who looked at the famous Carolus-Duran portraits at the Chicago exhibition were struck by the folly of the woman who masked the dignity of her eighty years under all manner of false appliances and youthfulness of costume.

It was the fashion of the ancients when an ox was led out to sacrifice, to chalk the dark spots so the animal might seem to be of unblemished whiteness. Let us fling away the chalk, and shake ourselves free from shams! Pretending to be a little wiser, a little richer, a little more beautiful, a little more aristocratic than we really are, degrades us in our own eyes and makes us a laughing-stock to others.

105



FLATTERY

XVIII

AN American lady one day going into a Chinese kitchen was mystified to see the cook rubbing molasses over the mouth of a hideous paper image nailed to the wall.

Upon inquiry she learned that the image was a kitchen idol, the duty of which was to watch and report to some higher god whatever was said and done in the kitchen, and that its mouth was anointed in this fashion so that it could relate only sweet things.

"I have a lurking sympathy for the idol," the lady declared. "I can understand its helpless misery. Many and many a time have people heaped compliments and gifts and repulsive sweetnesses upon me in order to seal my lips or pervert my judgment. I am not sure but the crude molasses

106

Flattery

of the heathen Chinese is better than concocted 'taffy' of more civilized acquaintances."

"It is much easier to flatter than to praise," says Richter, and his distinction is wise, for while praise implies merit in the receiver and honesty in the giver flattery is based on no foundation and is spread without discrimination.

Schoolgirls, with their ardent affections and gushing confidences, need to learn the ill effects upon both themselves and their friends of indiscriminate praise. Because you love your laughing little seat-mate is that any reason why you should tell her that she is the prettiest girl in school? You thereby deaden your own judgment and plant in her a seed of vanity. Why not, if you must praise her to her face, tell her rather what is strictly true, that she is the best-natured girl you know and that you feel happier whenever she is in the

107

Flattery

room. That will strengthen your own integrity of mind and encourage her to let nothing mar the disposition which gives you so much pleasure.

Such sincerity of praise is inspired by the very best that is in us, and is diametrically opposed, in intention and in result, to those obsequious, fulsome words and attentions which fill us with false hopes and encourage us by deceitful representations.

108

MY LADY
TEAZLE

XIX

“HERE comes Lady Teazle! Excuse me; walk on and I will follow,” and my incomprehensible friend disappeared suddenly into a shop which a moment before she had no thought of entering. Soon afterwards I heard her quick footsteps behind me, and with a smile she replied to my astonished look, “The morning is too lovely to be spoiled.”

“Who is this Mrs. Teazle?” I questioned.

“She bears another name in the blue book,” was the answer. “Teazle is her pseudonym. No, not after Sheridan. Did you ever visit a cloth factory? Nothing has ever been invented that is so effectual as the field teazle for raising a nap on cloth.”

109