

THE POSITION OF SIR WALTER SCOTT

Walter Scott is a writer who should just now be re-emerging into his own high place in letters, for unquestionably the recent, though now dwindling, schools of severely technical and æsthetic criticism have been unfavourable to him. He was a chaotic and unequal writer, and if there is one thing in which artists have improved since his time, it is in consistency and equality. It would perhaps be unkind to inquire whether the level of the modern man of letters, as compared with Scott, is due to the absence of valleys or the absence of mountains. But in any case, we have learnt in our day to arrange our literary effects carefully, and the only point in which we fall short of Scott is in the incidental misfortune that we have nothing particular to arrange.

It is said that Scott is neglected by modern readers; if so, the matter could be more appropriately described by saying that modern readers are neglected by Providence. The ground of this neglect, in so far as it exists, must be found, I suppose, in the general sentiment that, like the beard of Polonius, he is too long. Yet it is surely a peculiar thing that in literature alone a house should be despised because it is too large, or a host impugned because he is too generous. If romance be really a pleasure, it is difficult to understand the modern reader's consuming desire to get it over, and if it be not a pleasure, it is difficult to understand his desire to have it at all. Mere size, it seems to me, cannot be a fault. The fault must lie in some disproportion. If some of Scott's stories are dull and dilatory, it is not because they are giants, but because they are hunchbacks or cripples. Scott was very far indeed from being a perfect writer, but I do not think that it can be shown that the large and elaborate plan on which his stories are built was by any means an imperfection. He arranged his endless prefaces and his colossal introductions just as an architect plans great gates and long approaches to a really large house. He did not share the latter-day desire to get quickly through a story. He enjoyed narrative as a sensation; he did not wish to swallow a story like a pill, that it should do him good afterwards. He desired to taste it like a glass of port, that it might do him good at the time. The reader sits late at his banquets. His characters have that air of immortality which belongs to those of Dumas and Dickens. We should not be surprised to meet them in any number of sequels. Scott, in his heart of hearts, probably would have liked to write an endless story without either beginning or close.

Walter Scott is a great, and, therefore, mysterious man. He will never be understood until Romance is understood, and that will be only when Time, Man, and Eternity are understood. To say that Scott had more than any other man that ever lived a sense of the romantic seems, in these days, a slight and superficial

tribute. The whole modern theory arises from one fundamental mistake--the idea that romance is in some way a plaything with life, a figment, a conventionality, a thing upon the outside. No genuine criticism of romance will ever arise until we have grasped the fact that romance lies not upon the outside of life, but absolutely in the centre of it. The centre of every man's existence is a dream. Death, disease, insanity, are merely material accidents, like toothache or a twisted ankle. That these brutal forces always besiege and often capture the citadel does not prove that they are the citadel. The boast of the realist (applying what the reviewers call his scalpel) is that he cuts into the heart of life; but he makes a very shallow incision, if he only reaches as deep as habits and calamities and sins. Deeper than all these lies a man's vision of himself, as swaggering and sentimental as a penny novelette. The literature of can-dour unearths innumerable weaknesses and elements of lawlessness which is called romance. It perceives superficial habits like murder and dipsomania, but it does not perceive the deepest of sins--the sin of vanity--vanity which is the mother of all day-dreams and adventures, the one sin that is not shared with any boon companion, or whispered to any priest.

In estimating, therefore, the ground of Scott's pre-eminence in romance we must absolutely rid ourselves of the notion that romance or adventure are merely materialistic things involved in the tangle of a plot or the multiplicity of drawn swords. We must remember that it is, like tragedy or farce, a state of the soul, and that, for some dark and elemental reason which we can never understand, this state of the soul is evoked in us by the sight of certain places or the contemplation of certain human crises, by a stream rushing under a heavy and covered wooden bridge, or by a man plunging a knife or sword into tough timber. In the selection of these situations which catch the spirit of romance as in a net, Scott has never been equalled or even approached. His finest scenes affect us like fragments of a hilarious dream. They have the same quality which is often possessed by those nocturnal comedies--that of seeming more human than our waking life--even while they are less possible. Sir Arthur Wardour, with his daughter and the old beggar crouching in a cranny of the cliff as night falls and the tide closes around them, are actually in the coldest and bitterest of practical situations. Yet the whole incident has a quality that can only be called boyish. It is warmed with all the colours of an incredible sunset. Rob Roy trapped in the Tolbooth, and confronted with Bailie Nicol Jarvie, draws no sword, leaps from no window, affects none of the dazzling external acts upon which contemporary romance depends, yet that plain and humourous dialogue is full of the essential philosophy of romance which is an almost equal betting upon man and destiny. Perhaps the most profoundly thrilling of all Scott's situations is that in which the family of Colonel Mannering are waiting for the carriage which may or may not arrive by night to bring an unknown man into a princely possession. Yet almost the whole of that thrilling scene consists of a ridiculous conversation about food,

and flirtation between a frivolous old lawyer and a fashionable girl. We can say nothing about what makes these scenes, except that the wind bloweth where it listeth, and that here the wind blows strong.

It is in this quality of what may be called spiritual adventurousness that Scott stands at so different an elevation to the whole of the contemporary crop of romancers who have followed the leadership of Dumas. There has, indeed, been a great and inspiring revival of romance in our time, but it is partly frustrated in almost every case by this rooted conception that romance consists in the vast multiplication of incidents and the violent acceleration of narrative. The heroes of Mr. Stanley Weyman scarcely ever have their swords out of their hands; the deeper presence of romance is far better felt when the sword is at the hip ready for innumerable adventures too terrible to be pictured. The Stanley Weyman hero has scarcely time to eat his supper except in the act of leaping from a window or whilst his other hand is employed in lunging with a rapier. In Scott's heroes, on the other hand, there is no characteristic so typical or so worthy of humour as their disposition to linger over their meals. The conviviality of the Clerk of Copmanhurst or of Mr. Pleydell, and the thoroughly solid things they are described as eating, is one of the most perfect of Scott's poetic touches. In short, Mr. Stanley Weyman is filled with the conviction that the sole essence of romance is to move with insatiable rapidity from incident to incident. In the truer romance of Scott there is more of the sentiment of "Oh! still delay, thou art so fair"! more of a certain patriarchal enjoyment of things as they are--of the sword by the side and the wine-cup in the hand. Romance, indeed, does not consist by any means so much in experiencing adventures as in being ready for them. How little the actual boy cares for incidents in comparison to tools and weapons may be tested by the fact that the most popular story of adventure is concerned with a man who lived for years on a desert island with two guns and a sword, which he never had to use on an enemy.

Closely connected with this is one of the charges most commonly brought against Scott, particularly in his own day--the charge of a fanciful and monotonous insistence upon the details of armour and costume. The critic in the Edinburgh Review said indignantly that he could tolerate a somewhat detailed description of the apparel of Marmion, but when it came to an equally detailed account of the apparel of his pages and yeomen the mind could bear it no longer. The only thing to be said about that critic is that he had never been a little boy. He foolishly imagined that Scott valued the plume and dagger of Marmion for Marmion's sake. Not being himself romantic, he could not understand that Scott valued the plume because it was a plume, and the dagger because it was a dagger. Like a child, he loved weapons with a manual materialistic love, as one loves the softness of fur or the coolness of marble. One of the profound philosophical truths which are almost confined to infants is this love of things, not for their use or origin, but for

their own inherent characteristics, the child's love of the toughness of wood, the wetness of water, the magnificent soapiness of soap. So it was with Scott, who had so much of the child in him. Human beings were perhaps the principal characters in his stories, but they were certainly not the only characters. A battle-axe was a person of importance, a castle had a character and ways of its own. A church bell had a word to say in the matter. Like a true child, he almost ignored the distinction between the animate and inanimate. A two-handed sword might be carried only by a menial in a procession, but it was something important and immeasurably fascinating--it was a two-handed sword.

There is one quality which is supreme and continuous in Scott which is little appreciated at present. One of the values we have really lost in recent fiction is the value of eloquence. The modern literary artist is compounded of almost every man except the orator. Yet Shakespeare and Scott are certainly alike in this, that they could both, if literature had failed, have earned a living as professional demagogues. The feudal heroes in the "Waverley Novels" retort upon each other with a passionate dignity, haughty and yet singularly human, which can hardly be paralleled in political eloquence except in "Julius Cæsar." With a certain fiery impartiality which stirs the blood, Scott distributes his noble orations equally among saints and villains. He may deny a villain every virtue or triumph, but he cannot endure to deny him a telling word; he will ruin a man, but he will not silence him. In truth, one of Scott's most splendid traits is his difficulty, or rather incapacity, for despising any of his characters. He did not scorn the most revolting miscreant as the realist of to-day commonly scorns his own hero. Though his soul may be in rags, every man of Scott can speak like a king.

This quality, as I have said, is sadly to seek in the fiction of the passing hour. The realist would, of course, repudiate the bare idea of putting a bold and brilliant tongue in every man's head, but even where the moment of the story naturally demands eloquence the eloquence seems frozen in the tap. Take any contemporary work of fiction and turn to the scene where the young Socialist denounces the millionaire, and then compare the stilted sociological lecture given by that self-sacrificing bore with the surging joy of words in Rob Roy's declaration of himself, or Athelstane's defiance of De Bracy. That ancient sea of human passion upon which high words and great phrases are the resplendent foam is just now at a low ebb. We have even gone the length of congratulating ourselves because we can see the mud and the monsters at the bottom.

In politics there is not a single man whose position is due to eloquence in the first degree; its place is taken by repartees and rejoinders purely intellectual, like those of an omnibus conductor. In discussing questions like the farm-burning in South Africa no critic of the war uses his material as Burke or Grattan (perhaps exaggeratively) would have used it--the speaker is content with facts and

expositions of facts. In another age he might have risen and hurled that great song in prose, perfect as prose and yet rising into a chant, which Meg Merrilies hurled at Ellangowan, at the rulers of Britain: "Ride your ways. Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram--this day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths. See if the fire in your ain parlour burns the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack of seven cottar houses. Look if your ain roof-tree stands the faster for that. Ye may stable your stirks in the sheilings of Dern-cleugh. See that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane of Ellangowan. Ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram."

The reason is, of course, that these men are afraid of bombast and Scott was not. A man will not reach eloquence if he is afraid of bombast, just as a man will not jump a hedge if he is afraid of a ditch. As the object of all eloquence is to find the least common denominator of men's souls, to fall just within the natural comprehension, it cannot obviously have any chance with a literary ambition which aims at falling just outside it. It is quite right to invent subtle analyses and detached criticisms, but it is unreasonable to expect them to be punctuated with roars of popular applause. It is possible to conceive of a mob shouting any central and simple sentiment, good or bad, but it is impossible to think of a mob shouting a distinction in terms. In the matter of eloquence, the whole question is one of the immediate effect of greatness, such as is produced even by fine bombast. It is absurd to call it merely superficial; here there is no question of superficiality; we might as well call a stone that strikes us between the eyes merely superficial. The very word "superficial" is founded on a fundamental mistake about life, the idea that second thoughts are best. The superficial impression of the world is by far the deepest. What we really feel, naturally and casually, about the look of skies and trees and the face of friends, that and that alone will almost certainly remain our vital philosophy to our dying day.

Scott's bombast, therefore, will always be stirring to anyone who approaches it, as he should approach all literature, as a little child. We could easily excuse the contemporary critic for not admiring melodramas and adventure stories, and Punch and Judy, if he would admit that it was a slight deficiency in his artistic sensibilities. Beyond all question, it marks a lack of literary instinct to be unable to simplify one's mind at the first signal of the advance of romance. "You do me wrong," said Brian de Bois-Guilbert to Rebecca. "Many a law, many a commandment have I broken, but my word, never." "Die," cries Balfour of Burley to the villain in "Old Mortality." "Die, hoping nothing, believing nothing--" "And fearing nothing," replies the other. This is the old and honourable fine art of bragging, as it was practised by the great worthies of antiquity. The man who cannot appreciate it goes along with the man who cannot appreciate beef or claret or a game with children or a brass band. They are afraid of making fools of themselves, and are unaware that that transformation has already been

triumphantly effected.

Scott is separated, then, from much of the later conception of fiction by this quality of eloquence. The whole of the best and finest work of the modern novelist (such as the work of Mr. Henry James) is primarily concerned with that delicate and fascinating speech which burrows deeper and deeper like a mole; but we have wholly forgotten that speech which mounts higher and higher like a wave and falls in a crashing peroration. Perhaps the most thoroughly brilliant and typical man of this decade is Mr. Bernard Shaw. In his admirable play of "Candida" it is clearly a part of the character of the Socialist clergyman that he should be eloquent, but he is not eloquent because the whole "G.B.S." condition of mind renders impossible that poetic simplicity which eloquence requires. Scott takes his heroes and villains seriously, which is, after all, the way that heroes and villains take themselves--especially villains. It is the custom to call these old romantic poses artificial; but the word artificial is the last and silliest evasion of criticism. There was never anything in the world that was really artificial. It had some motive or ideal behind it, and generally a much better one than we think.

Of the faults of Scott as an artist it is not very necessary to speak, for faults are generally and easily pointed out, while there is yet no adequate valuation of the varieties and contrasts of virtue. We have compiled a complete botanical classification of the weeds in the poetical garden, but the flowers still flourish, neglected and nameless. It is true, for example, that Scott had an incomparably stiff and pedantic way of dealing with his heroines: he made a lively girl of eighteen refuse an offer in the language of Dr. Johnson. To him, as to most men of his time, woman was not an individual, but an institution--a toast that was drunk some time after that of Church and King. But it is far better to consider the difference rather as a special merit, in that he stood for all those clean and bracing shocks of incident which are untouched by passion or weakness, for a certain breezy bachelorhood, which is almost essential to the literature of adventure. With all his faults, and all his triumphs, he stands for the great mass of natural manliness which must be absorbed into art unless art is to be a mere luxury and freak. An appreciation of Scott might be made almost a test of decadence. If ever we lose touch with this one most reckless and defective writer, it will be a proof to us that we have erected round ourselves a false cosmos, a world of lying and horrible perfection, leaving outside of it Walter Scott and that strange old world which is as confused and as indefensible and as inspiring and as healthy as he.

BRET HARTE

There are more than nine hundred and ninety-nine excellent reasons which we could all have for admiring the work of Bret Harte. But one supreme reason

stands not in a certain general superiority to them all--a reason which may be stated in three propositions united in a common conclusion: first, that he was a genuine American; second, that he was a genuine humourist; and, third, that he was not an American humourist. Bret Harte had his own peculiar humour, but it had nothing in particular to do with American humour. American humour has its own peculiar excellence, but it has nothing in particular to do with Bret Harte. American humour is purely exaggerative; Bret Harte's humour was sympathetic and analytical.

In order fully to understand this, it is necessary to realise, genuinely and thoroughly, that there is such a thing as an international difference in humour. If we take the crudest joke in the world--the joke, let us say, of a man sitting down on his hat--we shall yet find that all the nations would differ in their way of treating it humourously, and that if American humour treated it at all, it would be in a purely American manner. For example, there was a case of an orator in the House of Commons, who, after denouncing all the public abuses he could think of, did sit down on his hat. An Irishman immediately rose, full of the whole wealth of Irish humour, and said, "Should I be in order, Sir, in congratulating the honourable gentleman on the fact that when he sat down on his hat his head was not in it?" Here is a glorious example of Irish humour--the bull not unconscious, not entirely conscious, but rather an idea so absurd that even the utterer of it can hardly realise how abysmally absurd it is. But every other nation would have treated the idea in a manner slightly different. The Frenchman's humour would have been logical: he would have said, "The orator denounces modern abuses and destroys to himself the top-hat: behold a good example!" What the Scotchman's humour would have said I am not so certain, but it would probably have dealt with the serious advisability of making such speeches on top of someone else's hat. But American humour on such a general theme would be the humour of exaggeration. The American humourist would say that the English politicians so often sat down on their hats that the noise of the House of Commons was one crackle of silk. He would say that when an important orator rose to speak in the House of Commons, long rows of hatters waited outside the House with note-books to take down orders from the participants in the debate. He would say that the whole hat trade of London was disorganised by the news that a clever remark had been made by a young M. P. on the subject of the imports of Jamaica. In short, American humour, neither unfathomably absurd like the Irish, nor transfiguringly lucid and appropriate like the French, nor sharp and sensible and full of realities of life like the Scotch, is simply the humour of imagination. It consists in piling towers on towers and mountains on mountains; of heaping a joke up to the stars and extending it to the end of the world.

With this distinctively American humour Bret Harte had little or nothing in common. The wild, sky-breaking humour of America has its fine qualities, but it

must in the nature of things be deficient in two qualities, not only of supreme importance to life and letters, but of supreme importance to humour--reverence and sympathy. And these two qualities were knit into the closest texture of Bret Harte's humour. Everyone who has read and enjoyed Mark Twain as he ought to be read and enjoyed will remember a very funny and irreverent story about an organist who was asked to play appropriate music to an address upon the parable of the Prodigal Son, and who proceeded to play with great spirit, "We'll all get blind drunk, when Johnny comes marching home." The best way of distinguishing Bret Harte from the rest of American humour is to say that if Bret Harte had described that scene, it would in some subtle way have combined a sense of the absurdity of the incident with some sense of the sublimity and pathos of the theme. You would have felt that the organist's tune was funny, but not that the Prodigal Son was funny. But America is under a kind of despotism of humour. Everyone is afraid of humour: the meanest of human nightmares. Bret Harte had, to express the matter briefly but more or less essentially, the power of laughing not only at things, but also with them. America has laughed at things magnificently, with Gargantuan reverberations of laughter. But she has not even begun to learn the richer lesson of laughing with them.

The supreme proof of the fact that Bret Harte had the instinct of reverence may be found in the fact that he was a really great parodist. This may have the appearance of being a paradox, but, as in the case of many other paradoxes, it is not so important whether it is a paradox as whether it is not obviously true. Mere derision, mere contempt, never produced or could produce parody. A man who simply despises Paderewski for having long hair is not necessarily fitted to give an admirable imitation of his particular touch on the piano. If a man wishes to parody Paderewski's style of execution, he must emphatically go through one process first: he must admire it, and even reverence it. Bret Harte had a real power of imitating great authors, as in his parodies on Dumas, on Victor Hugo, on Charlotte Brontë. This means, and can only mean, that he had perceived the real beauty, the real ambition of Dumas and Victor Hugo and Charlotte Brontë. To take an example, Bret Harte has in his imitation of Hugo a passage like this:

"M. Madeline was, if possible, better than M. Myriel. M. Myriel was an angel. M. Madeline was a good man." I do not know whether Victor Hugo ever used this antithesis; but I am certain that he would have used it and thanked his stars if he had thought of it. This is real parody, inseparable from admiration. It is the same in the parody of Dumas, which is arranged on the system of "Aramis killed three of them. Porthos three. Athos three." You cannot write that kind of thing unless you have first exulted in the arithmetical ingenuity of the plots of Dumas. It is the same in the parody of Charlotte Brontë, which opens with a dream of a storm-beaten cliff, containing jewels and pelicans. Bret Harte could not have written it unless he had really understood the triumph of the Brontës, the

triumph of asserting that great mysteries lie under the surface of the most sullen life, and that the most real part of a man is in his dreams.

This kind of parody is for ever removed from the purview of ordinary American humour. Can anyone imagine Mark Twain, that admirable author, writing even a tolerable imitation of authors so intellectually individual as Hugo or Charlotte Brontë? Mark Twain would yield to the spirit of contempt which destroys parody. All those who hate authors fail to satirise them, for they always accuse them of the wrong faults. The enemies of Thackeray call him a worldling, instead of what he was, a man too ready to believe in the goodness of the unworldly. The enemies of Meredith call his gospel too subtle, instead of what it is, a gospel, if anything, too robust. And it is this vulgar misunderstanding which we find in most parody--which we find in all American parody--but which we never find in the parodies of Bret Harte.

"The skies they were ashen and sober, The streets they were dirty and drear,
It was the dark month of October, In that most immemorial year. Like the
skies, I was perfectly sober, But my thoughts they were palsied and sear, Yes,
my thoughts were decidedly queer."

This could only be written by a genuine admirer of Edgar Allan Poe, who permitted himself for a moment to see the fun of the thing. Parody might indeed be defined as the worshipper's half-holiday.

The same general characteristic of sympathy amounting to reverence marks Bret Harte's humour in his better-known class of works, the short stories. He does not make his characters absurd in order to make them contemptible: it might almost be said that he makes them absurd in order to make them dignified. For example, the greatest creation of Bret Harte, greater even than Colonel Starbottle (and how terrible it is to speak of anyone greater than Colonel Starbottle!) is that unutterable being who goes by the name of Yuba Bill. He is, of course, the coach-driver in the Bret Harte district. Some ingenious person, whose remarks I read the other day, had compared him on this ground with old Mr. Weller. It would be difficult to find a comparison indicating a more completely futile instinct for literature. Tony Weller and Yuba Bill were both coach-drivers, and this fact establishes a resemblance just about as much as the fact that Jobson in "Rob Roy" and George Warrington in "Pendennis" were both lawyers; or that Antonio and Mr. Pickwick were both merchants; or that Sir Galahad and Sir Willoughby Patten were both knights. Tony Weller is a magnificent grotesque. He is a gargoyle, and his mouth, like the mouths of so many gargoyles, is always open. He is garrulous, exuberant, flowery, preposterously sociable. He holds that great creed of the convivial, the creed which is at the back of so much that is greatest in Dickens, the creed that eternity begins at ten o'clock at night, and that nights

last forever. But Yuba Bill is a figure of a widely different character. He is not convivial; it might almost be said that he is too great ever to be sociable. A circle of quiescence and solitude such as that which might ring a saint or a hermit rings this majestic and profound humourist. His jokes do not flow upon him like those of Mr. Weller, sparkling, continual, and deliberate, like the play of a fountain in a pleasure garden; they fall suddenly and capriciously, like a crash of avalanches from a great mountain. Tony Weller has the noisy humour of London, Yuba Bill has the silent humour of the earth.

One of the worst of the disadvantages of the rich and random fertility of Bret Harte is the fact that it is very difficult to trace or recover all the stories that he has written. I have not within reach at the moment the story in which the character of Yuba Bill is exhibited in its most solemn grandeur, but I remember that it concerned a ride on the San Francisco stage coach, a difficulty arising from storm and darkness, and an intelligent young man who suggested to Yuba Bill that a certain manner of driving the coach in a certain direction might minimise the dangers of the journey. A profound silence followed the intelligent young man's suggestion, and then (I quote from memory) Yuba Bill observed at last:

"Air you settin' any value on that remark?"

The young man professed not fully to comprehend him, and Yuba Bill continued reflectively:

"'Cos there's a comic paper in 'Frisco pays for them things, and I've seen worse in it."

To be rebuked thus is like being rebuked by the Pyramids or by the starry heavens. There is about Yuba Bill this air of a pugnacious calm, a stepping back to get his distance for a shattering blow, which is like that of Dr. Johnson at his best. And the effect is inexpressively increased by the background and the whole picture which Bret Harte paints so powerfully; the stormy skies, the sombre gorge, the rocking and spinning coach, and high above the feverish passengers the huge dark form of Yuba Bill, a silent mountain of humour.

Another unrecovered and possibly irrecoverable fragment about Yuba Bill, I recall in a story about his visiting a lad who had once been his protégé in the Wild West, and who had since become a distinguished literary man in Boston. Yuba Bill visits him, and on finding him in evening dress lifts up his voice in a superb lamentation over the tragedy of finding his old friend at last "a 'otel waiter." Then, vindictively pursuing the satire, he calls fiercely to his young friend, "Hi, Alphonse! bring me a patty de foy gras, damme." These are the things that make

us love the eminent Bill. He is one of those who achieve the noblest and most difficult of all the triumphs of a fictitious character--the triumph of giving us the impression of having a great deal more in him than appears between the two boards of the story. Smaller characters give us the impression that the author has told the whole truth about them, greater characters give the impression that the author has given of them, not the truth, but merely a few hints and samples. In some mysterious way we seem to feel that even if Shakespeare was wrong about Falstaff, Falstaff existed and was real; that even if Dickens was wrong about Micawber, Micawber existed and was real. So we feel that there is in the great salt-sea of Yuba Bill's humour as good fish as ever came out of it. The fleeting jests which Yuba Bill throws to the coach passengers only give us the opportunity of fancying and deducing the vast mass of jests which Yuba Bill shares with his creator.

Bret Harte had to deal with countries and communities of an almost unexampled laxity, a laxity passing the laxity of savages, the laxity of civilised men grown savage. He dealt with a life which we in a venerable and historic society may find it somewhat difficult to realise. It was the life of an entirely new people, a people who, having no certain past, could have no certain future. The strangest of all the sardonic jests that history has ever played may be found in this fact: that there is a city which is of all cities the most typical of innovation and dissipation, and a certain almost splendid vulgarity, and that this city bears the name in a quaint old European language of the most perfect exponent of the simplicity and holiness of the Christian tradition; the city is called San Francisco. San Francisco, the capital of the Bret Harte country, is a city typifying novelty in a manner in which it is typified by few modern localities. San Francisco has in all probability its cathedrals, but it may well be that its cathedrals are less old and less traditional than many of our hotels. If its inhabitants built a temple to the most primal and forgotten god of whose worship we can find a trace, that temple would still be a modern thing compared with many taverns in Suffolk round which there lingers a faint tradition of Mr. Pickwick. And everything in that new gold country was new, even to the individual inhabitants. Good, bad, and indifferent, heroes and dastards, they were all men from nowhere.

Most of us have come across the practical problem of London landladies, the problem of the doubtful foreign gentleman in a street of respectable English people. Those who have done so can form some idea of what it would be to live in a street full of doubtful foreign gentlemen, in a parish, in a city, in a nation composed entirely of doubtful foreign gentlemen. Old California, at the time of the first rush after gold, was actually this paradox of the nation of foreigners. It was a republic of incognitos: no one knew who anyone else was, and only the more ill-mannered and uneasy even desired to know. In such a country as this, gentlemen took more trouble to conceal their gentility than thieves living in South

Kensington would take to conceal their blackguardism. In such a country everyone is an equal, because everyone is a stranger. In such a country it is not strange if men in moral matters feel something of the irresponsibility of a dream. To plan plans which are continually miscarrying against men who are continually disappearing by the assistance of you know not whom, to crush you know not whom, this must be a demoralising life for any man; it must be beyond description demoralising for those who have been trained in no lofty or orderly scheme of right. Small blame to them indeed if they become callous and supercilious and cynical. And the great glory and achievement of Bret Harte consists in this, that he realised that they do not become callous, supercilious, and cynical, but that they do become sentimental and romantic, and profoundly affectionate. He discovered the intense sensibility of the primitive man. To him we owe the realisation of the fact that while modern barbarians of genius like Mr. Henley, and in his weaker moments Mr. Rudyard Kipling, delight in describing the coarseness and crude cynicism and fierce humour of the unlettered classes, the unlettered classes are in reality highly sentimental and religious, and not in the least like the creations of Mr. Henley and Mr. Kipling. Bret Harte tells the truth about the wildest, the grossest, the most rapacious of all the districts of the earth--the truth that, while it is very rare indeed in the world to find a thoroughly good man, it is rarer still, rare to the point of monstrosity, to find a man who does not either desire to be one, or imagine that he is one already.