

Deus Terminus

The practical Roman, stern constructor of roads and codes, when he needs must worship, loved a deity practical as himself; and in his parcelling of the known world into plots, saying unto this man, Bide here, and to that, Sit you down there, he could scarce fail to evolve the god Terminus: visible witness of possession and dominion, type of solid facts not to be quibbled away. We Romans of this latter day -- so hailed by others, or complacently christened by ourselves -- are Roman in nothing more than in this; and, as much in the less tangible realms of thought as in our solid acres, we are fain to set up the statue which shall proclaim that so much country is explored, marked out, allotted, and done with; that such and such ramblings and excursions are practicable and permissible, and all else is exploded, illegal, or absurd. And in this way we are left with naught but a vague lingering tradition of the happier days before the advent of the ruthless deity.

The sylvan glories of yonder stretch of woodland renew themselves each autumn, regal as ever. It is only the old enchantment that is gone; banished by the matter-of-fact deity, who has stolidly settled exactly where Lord A.'s shooting ends and Squire B.'s begins. Once, no such petty limitations fettered the mind. A step into the woodland was a step over the border -- the margin of the material; and then, good-bye to the modern world of the land-agent and the "Field" advertisement! A chiming of little bells over your head, and lo! the peregrine, with

eyes like jewels, fluttered through the trees, her jesses catching in the boughs. 'Twas the favourite of the Princess, the windows of whose father's castle already gleamed through the trees, where honours and favours awaited the adventurous. The white doe sprang away through the thicket, her snowy flank stained with blood; she made for the enchanted cot, and for entrance you too had the pass-word. Did you fail on her traces, nor fox nor mole was too busy to spare a moment for friendly advice or information. Little hands were stretched to trip you, fairy gibe and mockery pelted you from every rabbit-hole; and O what Dryads you have kissed among the leaves, in that brief blissful moment ere they hardened into tree! 'Tis pity, indeed, that this sort of thing should have been made to share the suspicion attaching to the poacher; that the stony stare of the boundary god should confront you at the end of every green ride and rabbit-run; while the very rabbits themselves are too disgusted with the altered circumstances to tarry a moment for so much as to exchange the time of day.

Truly this age is born, like Falstaff, with a white head and something a round belly: and will none of your jigs and fantasies. The golden era of princesses is past. For your really virtuous 'prentices there still remain a merchant's daughter or two, and a bottle of port o' Sundays on the Clapham mahogany. For the rest of us, one or two decent clubs, and plenty of nice roomy lunatic asylums. ``Go spin, you jade, go spin!" is the one greeting for Imagination. And yet -- what a lip the slut has! What an ankle! Go to: there's nobody looking; let us

lock the door, pull down the blinds, and write us a merry ballad.

'Tis ungracious, perhaps, to regret what is gone for ever, when so much is given in return. A humour we have, that is entirely new; and allotments that shall win back Astræa. Our Labor Program stands for evidence that the Board School, at least, has done enduring work; and the useless race of poets is fast dying out. Though we no longer conjecture what song the Sirens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, yet many a prize (of guineas galore) awaits the competitor who will stoop, week by week, to more practical research. "Le monde marche," as Renan hath it, "vers une sorte d'americanisme.... Peut-être la vulgarité générale sera-t-elle un jour la condition du bonheur des élus. Nous n'avons pas le droit d'être fort difficiles." We will be very facile, then, since needs must; remembering the good old proverb that "scornful dogs eat dirty puddings." But, ere we show Terminus the door, at least let us fling one stone at the shrieking sulphureous houses of damnation erected as temples in his honour, and dignified with his name! There, 'mid clangour, dirt, and pestilence of crowding humanity, the very spirit of worry and unrest sits embodied. The old Roman was not such a bad fellow. His deity of demarcation at least breathed open air, and knew the kindly touch of sun and wind. His simple rites were performed amid flowers and under blue sky, by sunny roads or tranquil waters; and on this particular altar the sacrifice was ordained to be free from any stain of gore. Our hour of sacrifice, alas, has not yet come. When it does -- (et haud procul absit!) -- let the offering be no bloodless

one, but let (for choice) a fat and succulent stationmaster smoke and crackle on the altar of expiation!