

ENNUI.

“Tous les genres sont permis, hors le genre ennuyeux.”

“WANT and ennui,” says Schopenhauer, “are the two poles of human life.” The further we escape from one evil, the nearer we inevitably draw to the other. As soon as the first rude pressure of necessity is relieved, and man has leisure to think of something beyond his unsatisfied craving for food and shelter, then ennui steps in and claims him for her own. It is the price he pays, not merely for luxury, but for comfort. Time, the inexorable taskmaster of poor humanity, drives us hard with whip and spur when we are struggling under the heavy burden of work; but stays his hand, and prolongs the creeping hours, when we are delivered over to that weariness of spirit which weights each moment with lead. Time is, in fact, either our open oppressor or our false friend. He is that agent by which, at every instant, “all things in our hands become as nothing, and lose any real value they possess.”

Here is a doctrine distinctly discouraging, and stated with that relentless candor which compels our reluctant consideration. There can be no doubt that to Schopenhauer's mind ennui was an evil every whit as palpable as want. He hated and feared them both with the painful susceptibility of a self-centred man; and he strove resolutely from his youth to protect himself against these twin disasters of life. The determined fashion in which he guarded his patrimony from loss resembled the determined fashion in which he strove — with less success — to guard himself from boredom. The vapid talk, the little wearisome iterations, which most of us bear resignedly enough because custom has taught us patience, were to him intolerable afflictions. He retaliated by an ungracious dismissal of society as some-

thing pitiable and uniformly contemptible. His advice has not the grave and simple wisdom of Sir Thomas Browne, “Be able to be alone,” but is founded rather on Voltaire's disdainful maxim, “The world is full of people who are not worth speaking to,” and implies an almost savage rejection of one's fellow-beings. “Every fool is pathetically social,” says Schopenhauer, and the advantage of solitude consists less in the possession of ourselves than in the escape from others. With whimsical eagerness, he built barrier after barrier between himself and the dreaded enemy, ennui, only to see his citadel repeatedly stormed, and to find himself at the mercy of his foe. There is but one method, after all, by which the invader can be even partially disarmed, and this method was foreign to Schopenhauer's nature. It was practiced habitually by Sir Walter Scott, who, in addition to his sustained and splendid work, threw himself with such unselfish, unswerving ardor into the interests of his brother men that he never gave them a thorough chance to bore him. They did their part stoutly enough, and were doubtless as tiresome as they knew how to be; but his invincible sweet temper triumphed over their malignity, and enabled him to say, in the evening of his life, that he had suffered little at their hands, and had seldom found any one from whom he could not extract either amusement or edification.

Perhaps his journal tells a different tale, a tale of heavy moments stretching into hours, and borne with cheerful patience out of simple consideration for others. Men and women, friends and strangers, took forcible possession of his golden leisure, and he yielded it to them without a murmur. That which was well-nigh maddening to Carlyle's irritable nerves and selfish petulance, and

which strained even Charles Lamb's forbearance to the snapping-point, Sir Walter endured smilingly, as if it were the most reasonable thing in the world. Mr. Lang is right when he says Scott did not preach socialism, he practiced it; that is, he never permitted himself to assign to his own comfort or convenience a very important place in existence; he never supposed his own satisfaction to be the necessary formula of the universe. But his love for genial life, his keen enjoyment of social pleasures, made him singularly sensitive to ennui. He was able, indeed, like Sir Thomas Browne, to be alone, — when the charity of his fellow-creatures suffered it, — and he delighted in diverting companionship, whether of peers or hinds; but the weariness of daily intercourse with stupid people told as heavily upon him as upon less patient victims. Little notes scattered throughout his journal reveal his misery, and awaken sympathetic echoes in every long-tried soul. "Of all bores," he writes, "the greatest is to hear a dull and bashful man sing a facetious song." And again, with humorous intensity: "Miss Ayton's father is a bore, after the fashion of all fathers, mothers, aunts, and other chaperons of pretty actresses." And again, this time in a hasty scrawl to Ballantyne: —

"Oh, James! oh, James! two Irish dames
Oppress me very sore:
I groaning send one sheet I've penned,
For, hang them! there's no more."

That Sir Walter forgot his sufferings as soon as they were over is proof, not of callousness, but of magnanimity. He forgave his tormentors the instant they ceased to torment him, and then found time to deplore his previous irritation. "I might at least have asked him to dinner," he was heard murmuring self-reproachfully, when an unscrupulous intruder had at last departed from Abbotsford; and on another occasion, when some impatient lads refused to emulate his forbearance, he recalled them

with prompt insistence to their forgotten sense of propriety. "Come, come, young gentlemen," he expostulated. "It requires no small ability, I assure you, to be a decided bore. You must endeavor to show a little more respect."

The self-inflicted pangs of ennui are less salutary and infinitely more onerous than those we suffer at the hands of others. It is natural that our just resentment when people weary us should result in a temporary taste for solitude, a temporary exaltation of our own society. Like most sentiments erected on an airy trestlework of vanity, this is an agreeable delusion while it lasts; but it seldom does last after we are bold enough to put it to the test. The inevitable and rational discontent which lies at the bottom of our hearts is not a thing to be banished by noise, or lulled to sleep by silence. We are not sufficient for ourselves, and companionship is not sufficient for us. "Venez, monsieur," said Louis XIII. to a listless courtier; "allons nous ennuyer ensemble." We fancy it is the detail of life, its small grievances, its apparent monotony, its fretful cares, its hours alternately lagging and feverish, that wear out the joy of existence. This is not so. Were each day differently filled, the result would be much the same. Young Maurice de Guérin, struggling with a depression he too clearly understands, strikes at the very root of the matter in one dejected sentence: "Mon Dieu, que je souffre de la vie! Non dans ses accidents, un peu de philosophie y suffit; mais dans elle-même, dans sa substance, à part tout phénomène." To which the steadfast optimist opposes an admirable retort: "It is a pity that M. de Guérin should have permitted himself this relentless analysis of a misery which is never bettered by contemplation." Happiness may not be, as we are sometimes told, the legacy of the barbarian, but neither is it a final outcome of civilization. Men can weary, and do weary, of

every stage that represents a step in the world's progress, and the ennui of mental starvation is equaled only by the ennui of mental satiety.

It is curious how much of this temper is reflected in the somewhat dispiriting literature which attains popularity to-day. Mr. Hamlin Garland, whose leaden-hued sketches called — I think unfairly — *Main-Travelled Roads* have deprived most of us of some cheerful hours, paints with an unfaltering hand a life in which ennui sits enthroned. It is not the poverty of his Western farmers that oppresses us. Real biting poverty, which withers lesser evils with its deadly breath, is not known to these people at all. They have roofs, fire, food, and clothing. It is not the ceaseless labor, the rough fare, the gray skies, the muddy barnyards, which stand for the trouble in their lives. It is the dreadful weariness of living. It is the burden of a dull existence, clogged at every pore, and the hopeless melancholy of which they have sufficient intelligence to understand. Theirs is the ennui of emptiness, and the implied reproach on every page is that a portion, and only a portion, of mankind is doomed to walk along these shaded paths; while happier mortals who abide in New York, or perhaps in Paris, spend their days in a pleasant tumult of intellectual and artistic excitation. The clearest denial of this fallacy may be found in that matchless and desolate sketch of Mr. Pater's called *Sebastian van Storek*, where we have painted for us with penetrating distinctness man's deliberate rejection of those crowded accessories which, to the empty-handed, represent the joys of life. Never has the undying essence of ennui been revealed to our unwilling gaze as in this merciless picture. Never has it been so portrayed in its awful nakedness, amid a plenty which it cannot be persuaded to share. We see the rich, warm, highly colored surroundings, the vehement intensity of work and pastime,

the artistic completeness of every detail, the solicitations of love, the delicate and alluring touches which give to every day its separate delight, its individual value; and, amid all these things, the impatient soul striving vainly to adjust itself to a life which seems so worth the living. Here, indeed, is one of "Fortune's favorites," whom she decks with garlands like a sacrificial heifer, and at whom, unseen, she points her mocking finger. Encompassed from childhood by the "thriving genius" of the Dutch, by the restless activity which made dry land and populous towns where nature had willed the sea, and by the admirable art which added each year to the heaped-up treasures of Holland, *Sebastian van Storek* has but one vital impulse which shapes itself to an end, — escape; escape from an existence made unendurable by its stifling fullness, its vivid and marvelous accomplishment.

It is an interesting question to determine, or to endeavor to determine, how far animals share man's melancholy capacity for ennui. Schopenhauer, who, like Hartmann and all other professional pessimists, steadfastly maintains that beasts are happier than men, is disposed to believe that in their natural state they never suffer from this malady, and that, even when domesticated, only the most intelligent give any indication of its presence. But how does Schopenhauer know that which he so confidently affirms? The bird, impelled by an instinct she is powerless to resist, sits patiently on her eggs until they are hatched; but who can say she is not weary of the pastime? What loneliness and discontent may find expression in the lion's dreadful roar, which is said to be as mournful as it is terrible! We are naturally tempted, in moments of fretfulness and dejection, to seek relief — not unmixed with envy — in contemplating with Sir Thomas Browne "the happiness of inferior creatures who in tranquillity possess their

constitutions." But freedom from care, and from the apprehension that is worse than care, does not necessarily imply freedom from all disagreeable sensations; and the surest claim of the brute to satisfaction, its absolute adequacy to the place it is designed to fill, is destroyed by our interference in its behalf. As a result, domestic pets reveal plainly to every close observer how frequently they suffer from ennui. They pay, in smaller coin, the same price that man pays for comfortable living. Mr. Ruskin has written with ready sympathy of the house dog, who bears resignedly long hours of dull inaction, and only shows by his frantic delight what a relief it is to be taken out for the mild dissipation of a stroll. I have myself watched and pitied the too evident ennui of my cat, poor little beast of prey, deprived in a mouseless home of the supreme pleasures of the hunt; fed until dinner ceases to be a coveted enjoyment; housed, cushioned, combed, caressed, and forced to bear upon her pretty shoulders the burden of a wearisome opulence, — or what represents opulence to a pussy. I have seen Agrippina listlessly moving from chair to chair, and from sofa to sofa, in a vain attempt to nap; looking for a few languid minutes out of the window with the air of a great lady sadly bored at the play; and then turning dejectedly back into the room whose attractions she had long since exhausted. Her expressive eyes lifted to mine betrayed her discontent; the lassitude of an irksome luxury unnerved her graceful limbs; if she could have spoken, it would have been to complain with Charles Lamb of that "dumb, soporific good-for-nothingness" which clogs the wheels of life.

It is a pleasant fancy, baseless and proofless, which makes us imagine the existence of fishes to be peculiarly tranquil and unmolested. The element in which they live appears to shelter them from so many evils; noises especially,

and the sharpness of sudden change, scorching heats, and the inclement skies of winter. A delightful mystery wraps them round, and the smooth apathy with which they glide through the water suggests content approaching to complacency. That old-fashioned poem beginning "Deep in the wave is a coral grove,

Where the purple mullet and goldfish rove," filled my childish heart with a profound envy of these happy creatures, which was greatly increased by reading a curious story of Father Faber's called *The Melancholy Heart*. In this tale, a little shipwrecked girl is carried to the depths of the ocean, and sees the green sea swinging to and fro because it is so full of joy, and the fishes waving their glistening fins in silent satisfaction, and the oysters opening and shutting their shells in lazy raptures of delight. Afterwards she visits the birds and beasts and insects, and finds amongst them intelligence, industry, patience, ingenuity, — a whole host of admirable qualities, — but nowhere else the sweet contentment of that dumb watery life. So universal is this fallible sentiment that even Leopardi, while assigning to all created things their full share of pain, reluctantly admits that the passive serenity of the less vivacious creatures of the sea — starfish and their numerous brothers and sisters — is the nearest possible approach to an utterly impossible happiness. And indeed it is difficult to look at a sea-urchin slowly moving its countless spines in the clear shallow water without thinking that here, at least, is an existence equally free from excitability and from ennui; here is a state of being sufficient for itself, and embracing all the enjoyment it can hold. The other side of the story is presented when we discover the little prickly cup lying empty and dry on the peak of a neighboring rock, and know that a crow's sharp beak has relentlessly dug the poor urchin from its comfortable cradle, and ended its slumbrous felicity. Yet the

sudden cessation of life has nothing whatever to do with its reasonable contentment. The question is, not how soon is it over, or how does it come to an end, but is it worth living while it lasts? Moreover, the chances of death make the sweetness of self-preservation; and this is precisely the sentiment which Leigh Hunt has so admirably embodied in those lines — the finest, I think, he ever wrote — where the fish pleads for its own pleasant and satisfactory existence: —

“A cold, sweet, silver life, wrapped in round waves,
Quickened with touches of transporting fear.”

Here, as elsewhere, fear is the best antidote for ennui. The early settlers of America, surrounded by hostile Indians, and doubtful each morning whether the coming nightfall would not see their rude homes given to the flames, probably suffered but little from the dullness which seems so oppressive to the peaceful agriculturist of to-day. The mediæval women, who were content to pass their time in weaving endless tapestries, had less chance to complain of the monotony of life than their artistic, scientific, literary, and philanthropic sisters of our age; for at any hour, breaking in upon their tranquil labors, might be heard the trumpet's blast; at any hour might come the tidings, good or bad, which meant a few more years of security, or the horrors of siege and pillage.

It is pleasant to turn our consideration from the ennui which is inevitable, and consequently tragic, to the ennui which is accidental, and consequently diverting. The first is part of ourselves, from which there is no escape; the second is, as a rule, the contribution of our neighbors, and may be eluded if fortune and our own wits favor us. Lord Byron, for example, finding himself hard beset by Madame de Staël, whom he abhorred, had the dexterity to entrap poor little “Monk” Lewis into the conversation, and then slipped away from both, leav-

ing them the dismally congenial task of wearying each other without mercy. “A bore,” says Bishop Selwyn, “is a man who will persist in talking about himself when you want to talk about yourself;” and this simple explanation offers a satisfactory solution of much of the ennui suffered in society. People with theories of life are, perhaps, the most relentless of their kind, for no time or place is sacred from their devastating elucidations. A theoretic socialist — not the practical working kind, like Sir Walter — is adamant to the fatigue of his listeners. “Eloquence,” says Mr. Lowell feelingly, “has no bowels for its victims;” and one of the most pathetic figures in the history of literature is poor Heine, awakened from his sweet morning nap by Ludwig Börne, who sat relentlessly on the edge of the bed and talked patriotism. I hardly think that even this wanton injury justified Heine in his cruel attack upon Börne, when the latter was dead and could offer no defense; yet who knows how many drops of concentrated bitterness were stored up in those dreary moments of boredom! The only other instance of ennui which seems as grievous and as cruel is the picture of the Baron Fouqué's brilliant wife condemned to play loto every evening with the officers of the victorious French army; an illustration equally novel and malign of the devastating inhumanity of war.

In fact, amusements which do not amuse are among the most depressing of earthly evils. When Sir George Cornwall Lewis candidly confessed that life would be tolerable were it not for its pleasures, he had little notion that he was uttering a witticism fated to enjoy a melancholy immortality. His protest was purely personal, and society, prompt to recognize a grievance when it is presented, has gone on ever since peevishly and monotonously echoing his lament. We crave diversion so eagerly, we need it so sorely, that our disappointment in its elusiveness is fed by the flickering

of perpetual hope. Ennui has been defined as a desire for activity without the capacity for action, as a state of inertia quickened by discontent. But it is rather a desire for amusement than for activity; it is a rational instinct warped by the irony of circumstances, and by our own selfish limitations. It was not activity that Schopenhauer lacked. He worked hard all his life, and with the concentrated industry of a man who knew exactly what he wanted to do. It was the common need of enjoyment, which he shared with the rest of mankind, and his own singular incapacity for enjoying himself which chafed him into bitterness, and made him so unreasonably angry with the world. "In human existence," says Leopardi, "the intervals between pleasure and pain are occupied by ennui. And since all pleasures are like cobwebs, exceedingly fragile, thin, and transparent, ennui penetrates their tissue and saturates them, just as air penetrates the webs. It is, indeed, nothing but a yearning for happiness, without the illusion of pleasure or the reality of pain. This yearning is never satisfied, since true happiness does not exist. So that life is interwoven with weariness and suffering, and one of these evils disappears only to give place to the other. Such is the destiny of man."

Now, to endure pain resolutely courage is required; to endure ennui, one must be bred to the task. The restraints of a purely artificial society are sufferable to those only whom custom has rendered docile, and who have been trained to subordinate their own impulses and desires. The more elaborate the social conditions, the more relentless this need of adjustment, which makes a harmonious whole at the cost of individual development. We all know how, when poor Frances Burney was lifted suddenly from the cheerful freedom of middle-class life to the wearisome etiquette of a court, she drooped and fretted under the burden of an honor which brought

her nothing but vexation. Macaulay, who champions her cause with burning zeal, is pleased to represent the monotony of court as simple slavery with no extenuating circumstances. He likens Dr. Burney conducting his daughter to the palace to a Circassian father selling his own child into bondage. The sight of the authoress of *Evelina* assisting at the queen's toilet or chatting sleepily with the ladies in waiting thrills him with indignation; the thought of her playing cards night after night with Madame Schwellenberg reduces him to despair. And indeed, card-playing, if you have not the grace to like it, is the most unprofitable form of social martyrdom; you suffer horribly yourself, and you add very little to the pleasure of your neighbor. The Baroness Fouqué may have conquered the infantine imbecilities of *loto* with no great mental exhaustion. If she were painfully bored, her patience alone was taxed. The Frenchmen probably thought her a pleased and animated companion. But Miss Burney, delicate, sleepy, fatigued, loathing cards, and inwardly rebellious at her fate, must have made the game drag sadly before bedtime. It was a dreary waste of moments for her; but a less intolerant partisan than Macaulay would have some sympathy to spare for poor Madame Schwellenberg, who, like most women of rank, adored the popular pastime, and who doubtless found the distinguished young novelist a very unsatisfactory associate.

It is salutary to turn from Miss Burney and her wrathful historian to the letters of Charlotte Elizabeth, mother of the Regent d'Orléans, and see how the oppressive monotony of the French court was cheerfully endured for fifty years by a woman exiled from home and kindred, whose pleasures were few, whose annoyances were manifold. Madame would have enjoyed nothing better than a bowl of beer soup or a dish of sausages eaten in congenial company. She

lunched daily alone, on hated French messes, stared at by twenty footmen, from whose supercilious eyes she was glad to escape with hunger still unsatisfied. Madame detested sermons. She listened to them endlessly without complaint, and was grateful for the occasional privilege of a nap. Madame liked cards. She was not permitted to play, nor even to show herself at the lansquenet table. She never gambled, — in fact she had no money, — and it was a fancy of her husband's that she brought him ill luck by hovering near. Neither was she allowed to retire. "All the old women who do not play have to be entertained by me," she writes with surpassing good humor. "This goes on from seven to ten, and makes me yawn frightfully." Supper was eaten at the royal table, where the guests often waited three quarters of an hour for the king to appear, and where nobody spoke a word during the meal. "I live as though I were quite alone in the world," confesses this friendless exile to her favorite correspondent, the Raugravine Louise. "But I am resigned to such a state of things, and I meddle in nothing." Here was a woman trained to the endurance of ennui. The theatre and the chase were her sole amusements; letter-writing was her only occupation. Her healthy German nature had in it no trace of languor, no bitterness born of useless rebellion against fate. She knew how to accept the inevitable, and how to enjoy the accidental; and this double philosophy afforded her something closely resembling content. Napoleon, it is said, once desired some comedians to play at court; and M. de Talleyrand gravely announced to the audience waiting to hear them, "Gentlemen, the emperor earnestly requests you to be amused." Had Charlotte Elizabeth — long before laid to sleep in St. Denis — been one of that patient group, she would have literally obeyed the royal commands. She would have responded with prompt docility to any

offered entertainment. This is not an easy task. "Amuse me, if you can find out how to do it," was the melancholy direction of Richelieu to Boisrobert, when the pains of ennui grew unbearable, and even kittens ceased to be diverting. Amuse! amuse! amuse! is the plea of a weariness as wide as the world, and as old as humanity. Amuse me for a little while, that I may think I have escaped from myself.

It is curious that England should have to borrow from France the word "ennui," while the French are unanimous in their opinion that the thing itself is emphatically of English growth. The old rhyme,

"Jean Rosbif écuyer,

Qui pendit soi-même pour se désennuyer,"

has never lost its application, though the present generation of English-speaking men are able to digest a great deal of dullness without seeking such violent forms of relief. In fact, Mr. Oscar Wilde, prompt to offer an unwelcome criticism, explains the amazing popularity of the psychological and religiously irreligious novel on the ground that the *genre ennuyeux*, which no Frenchman can bring himself to pardon, is the one form of literature which his countrymen thoroughly enjoy. They have a kindly tolerance for stupid people as well, and the ill-natured term "bore" has only forced itself of late years upon an urbane and long-suffering public. Johnson's dictionary is innocent of the word, though Johnson himself was well acquainted with the article. As late as 1822, a reviewer in Colburn's Magazine entreats his readers to use the word "bore;" to write it, if they please; to print it, even, if necessary. Why shrink from the expression, when the creature itself is so common, and "daily gaining ground in the country"?

Before this date, however, one English writer had given to literature some priceless illustrations of the species. "Could we but study our bores as Miss Austen

must have studied hers in her country village," says Mrs. Ritchie, "what a delightful world this might be!" But I seriously doubt whether any real enjoyment could be extracted from Miss Bates or Mr. Rushworth or Sir William Lucas in the flesh. If we knew them, we should probably feel precisely as did Emma Woodhouse and Maria Bertram and Elizabeth Bennet, — vastly weary of their company. In fact, only their brief appearances make the two gentlemen bores so diverting, even in fiction; and Miss Bates, I must confess, taxes my patience sorely. She is so tiresome that she tires, and I am invariably tempted to do what her less fortunate townspeople would have gladly done, — run away from her to more congenial society. Surely comedy ceases, and tragedy begins, when poor Jane Fairfax escapes from the strawberry party at Donwell, and seeks, under the burning noonday sun, the blessed relief of solitude. "We all know at times what it is to be wearied in spirits. Mine, I admit, are exhausted," is the confession wrung from the silent lips of a girl who has borne all that human nature can bear from Miss Bates's affectionate solicitude. Perhaps the best word ever spoken upon the creation of such characters in novels comes from Cardinal Newman. "It is very difficult," he says, "to delineate a bore in a narrative, for the simple reason that he is a bore. A tale must aim at condensation, but a bore acts in solution. It is only in the long run that he is ascertained." And when he is ascertained, and his identity established beyond reach of doubt, what profit have we in his desolating perfections? Miss Austen was far from enjoying the dull people whom she knew in life. We have the testimony of her letters to this effect. Has not Mrs. Stent, otherwise lost to fame, been crowned with direful immortality as the woman who bored Jane Austen? "We may come to be Mrs. Stents ourselves," she writes, with facile self-reproach at

her impatience, "unequal to anything, and unwelcome to anybody;" an apprehension manifestly manufactured out of nothingness to strengthen some wavering purpose of amendment. Stupidity is acknowledged to be the one natural gift which cannot be cultivated, and Miss Austen well knew it lay beyond her grasp. With as much sincerity could Emma Woodhouse have said, "I may come in time to be a second Miss Bates."

There is a small, compact, and enviable minority among us, who, through no merit of their own, are incapable of being bored, and consequently escape the endless pangs of ennui. They are so clearly recognized as a body that a great deal of the world's work is prepared especially for their entertainment and instruction. Books are written for them, sermons are preached to them, lectures are given to them, papers are read to them, societies and clubs are organized for them, discussions after the order of Melchizedek are carried on monotonously in their behalf. A brand new school of fiction has been invented for their exclusive diversion; and several complicated systems of religion have been put together for their recent edification. It is hardly a matter of surprise that, fed on such meats, they should wax scornful, and deride their hungry fellow-creatures. It is even less amazing that these fellow-creatures should weary from time to time of the crumbs that fall from their table. It is told of Pliny the younger that, being invited to a dinner, he consented to come on the express condition that the conversation should abound in Socratic discourses. Here was a man equally insensible to ennui and to the sufferings of others. The guests at that ill-starred banquet appear to have been sacrificed as ruthlessly as the fish and game they ate. They had not even the loophole of escape which Mr. Bagehot contemplates so admiringly in *Paradise Lost*. Whenever Adam's remarks expand too obviously into a

sermon, Eve, in the most discreet and wife-like manner, steps softly away, and refreshes herself with slumber. Indeed, when we come to think of it, conversation between these two must have been difficult at times, because they had nobody to talk about. If we exiled our neighbors permanently from our discussions, we should soon be reduced to silence; and if we confined ourselves even to laudatory remarks, we should probably say but little. Miss Frances Power Cobbe, who is uncompromisingly hostile to the feeble vices of society, insists that it is the duty of every woman to look bored when she hears a piece of scandal; but this mandate is hardly in accord with Miss Cobbe's other requisite for true womanhood, absolute and undeviating sincerity. How can she look bored when she does not feel bored, unless she plays the hypocrite? And while many women are shocked and repelled by scandal, few, alas! are wont to find it tiresome. I have not even observed any exceeding weariness in men when subjected to a similar ordeal. In that pitiless dialogue of Landor's between Catherine of Russia and Princess Dashkov, we find some opinions on this subject stated with appalling candor. "Believe me," says the empress, "there is nothing so delightful in life as to find a liar in a person of repute. Have you never heard good folks rejoicing at it? Or rather, can you mention to me any one who has not been in raptures when he could communicate such glad tidings? The goutiest man would go on foot to tell his friend of it at midnight; and would cross the Neva for the purpose, when he doubted whether the ice would bear him." Here, indeed, we find the very soul and essence of ennui; not virtuous disgust which revolts at the disclosure of another's faults, but that deep and deadly ennui of life which welcomes evil as a distraction. The same selfish lassitude which made the gladiatorial combats a pleasant sight for the jaded

eyes which witnessed them finds relief for its tediousness to-day in the swift destruction of confidence and reputation.

There is a curious and melancholy fable of Leopardi's, in which he seeks to explain what always puzzled him sorely, the continued endurance of life. In the beginning, he says, the gods gave to men an existence without care, and an earth without evil. The world was small, and easily traversed. No seas divided it, no mountains rose frowning from its bosom, no extremes of heat or cold afflicted its inhabitants. Their wants were supplied, their pleasures provided; their happiness, Jove thought, was assured. For a time all things went well; but as the human race outgrew its infancy, it tired of this smooth perfection, and little by little there dawned upon men the inherent worthlessness of life. Every day they sounded its depths more clearly, and every day they wearied afresh of all they knew and were. Illusions vanished, and the insupportable pains of ennui forced them to cast aside a gift in which they found no value. They desired death, and sought it at their own hands.

Then Jove, half in wrath and half in pity, devised a means by which his rebellious creatures might be preserved. He enlarged the earth, moulded the mountains, and poured into mighty hollows the restless and pitiless seas. Burning heat and icy cold he sent, diseases and dangers of every kind, craving desires that could never be satisfied, vain ambitions, a babble of many tongues, and the deep-rooted animosities of nations. Gone was the old tranquillity, vanished the old ennui. A new race, struggling amid terrible hardships, fought bravely and bitterly for the preservation of an existence they had formerly despised. Man found his life filled with toil, sweetened by peril, checked by manifold disasters, and was deluded into cherishing at any cost that which

was so painful to sustain. The greater the difficulties and dangers, the more he opposed to them his own indomitable purpose, the more determined he was to live. The zest of perpetual effort, the keenness of contention, the brief, sweet triumph over adversity, — these left him

neither the time nor the disposition to question the value of all that he wrung from fate.

It is a cheerless philosophy, but not without value to the sanguine socialist of to-day, who dreams of preparing for all of us a lifetime of unbroken ennui.

Agnes Repplier.

WOMANHOOD IN THE ILIAD.

THE *Iliad* offers us the oldest picture which we have of the life of man on the continent of Europe. This picture is also a most vivid and beautiful one. There is a constant temptation, therefore, to treat this poem as a starting-point and substantial basis for the history of our civilization. Any attempt of this kind, however, seems to me almost utterly vain and elusive. Before we undertake to recover, by sifting the materials at our command, the true picture of Homeric manners, customs, and beliefs, let us seriously imagine Macaulay's New Zealander, three thousand years hence, employed in reconstructing England as it was under the Tudors, with no materials save the Faery Queen and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. Or, to match the *Theogony* and *Works* and *Days* of Hesiod, let him be furnished with *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Snowbound*. Instead of the fragments of the Greek lyric poets, we may generously permit Andrew Lang's *Blue Book of Poetry* to drift down intact. We should still fail to recognize our kinsfolk in the picture he would draw.

Perhaps, however, my feeling can be better illustrated by a figure. A traveler, crossing the Alps by rail at night, may be awakened by a peal of thunder, and, pushing aside his curtains sees, perchance, across a wide interval, a panorama of stately mountains, their outlines half shrouded in storm-clouds.

The scene is illuminated for a single instant by the unearthly glare of the lightning. The next second he falls back into dreamless slumber. In the morning, indeed for life, that picture abides with him: whether in memory or in imagination he hardly knows, but certainly little associated, if at all, with the scenes, whatever they may be, that greet him in the familiar light of the sun.

The pilgrim is the Western Aryan. The vision of the night is the Homeric age. For the real dawn of our historical knowledge, the awakening of the race, as it were, to its own continuous life, lies not far behind the first historian, Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century before our era. Even to him, the men his grandsires knew — gentle Cræsus and ruthless Cyrus, Solon the wise and Polycrates the fortunate — stand with blurred outlines against a background of fable. How long before himself the poet Homer had lived Herodotus can only conjecture, and his conjecture is, four centuries, — just the gap that yawns to-day between us and Columbus. And think what impenetrable mystery would now enshroud the figure of the Genoese adventurer, had his age transmitted to us, through generations utterly destitute of historical records, nothing save a metrical romance!

But even Homer, or, let us say, the Homeric poets, avowedly described, not