



W. D. HOWELLS

WE have so often praised Nature to the disadvantage of Art, or Fact to the confusion of Fiction, in this place, that it seems superfluous to allege new proofs of the superiority of Nature or Fact (or call them by the larger name of Life) in all the ways of invention. Any story that has been lived so transcends every story that has been fancied that but for the difficulty of knowing the stories which have been lived, no stories that have been fancied would be told. Perhaps in time to come some courageous witness of human experience will have the inspiration of telling the story of the common life as it is, and revealing the wonders of it, so far beyond the wonders of any life invented by fiction. But Biography will not yet awhile go seeking copy in the star-dust of our mother-earth; and the most we can ask of her is that she will show us how some noted life which she has chosen because it was concerned with great events and crowned with supreme results is interesting and surprising past all fabling, because it is full of the interest and surprise of the feelings, hopes, joys, ambitions, endeavors, sorrows, and sufferings which life embraces in every instance of humanity. The more self-effacingly she does this, the greater her achievement; the prime thing, the great thing, is to let the character, the human instance, be clearly seen through the crystal she holds up to nature, without vain refractions or prismatic colorings. Biography has not yet had her Shakespeare, her Dante, or even her Goethe; her supreme and only Boswell remains unapproached in the region where he dwells aloof from rivalry through such self-sacrifice as no other has been willing to make; but from Plutarch down, Biography has had the advantage of every other muse in the absolute simplicity of her duty. After

her choice of a hero, she has no choice but truth to the facts of his life, or any choice except between fullness or spareness in her devotion to them. If she is faithful to these, she will not have failed of her duty to her theme; and such is the charm of one man's life to all other men, she will not have failed of the fascination which every muse likes to exercise upon mortals.

It is very little time since Mr. William Roscoe Thayer gave a hostage to criticism which might well have been held against him for much longer time; but the *Life of John Hay*, which now follows so soon upon the *Life of Cavour*, is proof that the author's resources are ample for the redemption of that pledge of high work well done. One need not minify the importance of Cavour, or dispute the greatness of the European scene, in order to recognize the claim of John Hay and the events which he saw, and partly was, to remembrance. It was statesmanship unequalled in its time to make a small, defeated country partaker with the two chief powers of the world in a war which Cavour knew how to turn to her advantage beyond any that came to her tolerant, if not patronizing, allies, and out of Piedmont to evolve Italy. Yet prodigious as the event was which fulfilled itself through the political and moral genius of Cavour, another event of vaster meaning and magnitude was sentient in the heart of the future. It was to be ten years more before it was accomplished through powers beyond his, and in the life and death of Abraham Lincoln a nation was to be dedicated to such sense of justice as John Hay was able in the fullness of time to manifest.

It seems a long way from Abraham Lincoln to John Hay, but whoever will follow it through Mr. Roscoe's pages will find a continual purpose runs

toward realizing not only the greatness, but the goodness, of our country: the thing beyond all other things to be proud of her for. "What a business this has been in China!" Hay writes to his closest friend in 1900, when the European nations were waiting to make her the spoil of their common hate and greed. "So far we have got on by being honest and naïf. I do not know where we are to come the delayed cropper. But it will come. At least we are spared the infamy of an alliance with Germany. I would rather, I think, be the dupe of China than the chum of the Kaiser." This is the voice of Hay in the Old-World parlance of his literary and diplomatic experience, but it is the heart of Lincoln—kind, true, good, Western, unwarped from the homely ideals which Lincoln seemed to have learned from our mother-earth.

The two men, so differently alike (if we may force a meaning out of the phrase), were as remote from each other as possible in their primal aspirations. Lincoln's were always political; but in the beginning Hay wished to be a poet, or, if not a poet, something as literary or more, and he felt a poet's loathing for the rude conditions which Lincoln used as the staff of his success. He was of incomparably finer and gentler race than the greater man, while he was really less tenderly romantic and lived less in the ideal. He wished to escape from the environment where he was born so out of place, and he rapturously passed from Warsaw, Illinois, to Providence, Rhode Island, where, in the lettered tradition and training of his family, he entered Brown University. All that part of his life is treated by his biographer with admirable intelligence and sense of its relative value, and it would be a great mistake for the reader to slight the record which the young hero is allowed to make, after his academic triumphs and his exile from their scene, in his letters from Warsaw to the forgotten poetesses of the East who had befriended the muse returned to languish in the backwoods. All that is most interesting, and very touching; one is far from laughing at the amusing literary pose, the longing for the world where Hay knew himself fitted

to shine; and when he plucks himself up out of his superfine despair, and boldly accepts the challenge of life, one thrills with a sense of that in him which no fate can dismay. He studies law, statute law being the only thing in the time and place which can enable him truly to interpret the law of his being; he is presently in the State capital, where he learns to know Lincoln in the full local sense of his greatness; and when Lincoln is called to prop the nation doddering, as from premature superannuation, to its fall, and his young German-American secretary (the hyphenation then meant the love of liberty) wishes Hay to go with him to the capital as his assistant, "'We can't take all Illinois with us down to Washington,' the President-elect says, good-humoredly; and then after a pause, as if relenting, he adds, 'Well, let Hay come,'" and so, with the simplicity that is so perfectly great on the right occasion, the thing was done and done for ever.

It did not remain long for Hay lastingly to associate his name with Lincoln's. If he had never joined with his fellow-secretary, Nicolay, in writing that history of their chief, which is the history of the war for the Union, Lincoln could not be perfectly known apart from Hay, or scarcely more than Hay apart from him. Hay was not the poet he had fondly wished himself; there was not the making in him of the poetry which he thought he loved more than anything in the world, but he was beyond poets and novelists a diviner of men, their greatness or meanness, and this instinct compelled him to the love of Lincoln from the instant of their familiar relation in Washington. There is not only a filial affection in his devotion; there is the beauty of such honor, such noble fealty as only a magnanimity like Hay's could render to such magnanimity as Lincoln's.

Mr. Thayer's book is interesting from beginning to end, but there is no part of it more important than this very skillfully handled passage of Hay's life. Without it we should scarcely realize how the world failed to spoil the young secretary when after Lincoln's death he learned what was best knowing in diplomacy at the courts of Paris and Vienna

and Madrid. If he had not been at Lincoln's side during these four years and seen with impassioned sympathy his sufficing patience and unselfish modesty under every form of treachery and misconception and malice, he would scarcely have been able to judge mere princes and to realize with how little wisdom their world is misgoverned. But that certain gaiety of heart which always helped him to carry off the melancholy at the bottom of his nature as part of life's joke enabled him to see the joke of the vanity and folly and cruelty that followed Lincoln almost to his death, and from his own thoroughly contrasting make to bear the sight of the tragedy in like spirit with Lincoln's humorous sense of it. In a word, they were both Westerners, and though Hay was destined to take on the East, to take on Europe itself, as Lincoln never could if he had survived innumerable more martyrdoms than he suffered, yet something in their native earth and air, which Hay so loathed in his esthetic nonage, always kept the almost unimaginably different men akin.

It was this something which qualified Hay in his history of Lincoln approximately to convey his own understanding of him. It was the West saying to the East, to all America, to the whole world, that which the West alone could feel with original force. Mr. Thayer tells the story of that history — a monumental work which our literature, if any literature, has not the like of — entertainingly and with due recognition of Nicolay's part in it which Hay, with whatever masterfulness, was always generously eager to make their more private public feel. He would not let you suppose that he had done it all, or entirely or mainly governed its effect. Whether this was from a certain lovable perverseness which made him exaggerate the powers and virtues of his friends, we cannot say, but it is certain that where he gave his heart he gave it wholly. Probably he always knew what he was doing, or overdoing, but all the same he did it. He had a liking for coverts in certain matters, as the authorship which preferred anonymity; he not only gave himself all Sir Walter's length and breadth of disallowance in regard

to *The Breadwinners*, but in regard to *Democracy*, believed to have come from the close circle of his intimates at Washington, he was insistent in denying that a certain one of them had written it, as if he felt that the attribution of it to this particular friend might be particularly injurious to him.

Mr. Thayer pauses to sketch this group of very uncommon people, and to make a study of McKinley which will leave the reader more kindly and justly appreciative of a man whom his tragical death did not wholly clear from misgivings of his forces and qualities as a politician, before he takes up Hay's career in his final importance as a diplomat and his goodness and greatness as a statesman. It is to be noted that Hay did not estimate McKinley so slightly as much of the larger public did, perhaps a little because of the great personal kindness always between them. He kept his aversions for Cleveland, for Harrison in slighter degree, but supremely for the German Emperor, though hardly less so for McClellan, and to the end he does not seem to have parted with any of his conclusions regarding them. For Louis Napoleon, in whom he made his first acquaintance with monarchy, he conceived an instant disgust which sought expression ever afterward in any mention he made of him. He had indeed to thank him for a just conception of the essential falsity of monarchy which might otherwise have dazzled the eyes of youth, for Hay was scarcely more than a boy, though a rarely experienced boy, when he went to Paris in 1865.

One sees, looking back over his career, that there was always the potentiality of a final severity in him which with all his poetic gentleness and sweetness, his humane patience with human nature, and his avoidance of all rashness, leaves a very distinct impression. He did not in the course of events seem to be a man of prejudices, but he had certain prepossessions which in the retrospect are very evident, such as his feeling for the sacredness of property, which may be identified as the animating principle of *The Breadwinners*, otherwise so recognizant of the natural solidarity of men. Whatever he did was the effect appar-

ently of a deeply pondered decision. He acted after the same consideration, evidently, in saving China from dismemberment and in dismembering the United States of Colombia, and he could not have been more indignant with a suggestion that he repented setting wide the Open Door than with the notion that he felt remorse for abetting the secession of Panama from the South American image of our own Union. There is nothing more important in Mr. Thayer's book than the passages dealing with Hay's part in that affair, and showing that he acted from the belief that he had to do with a corrupt political ring bent upon plunder rather than with a nation jealous of its sovereign integrity. To many the light thrown upon the fact will come, as we own it came to us, with relief from the uneasy sense that our government had played some such part as England and France might have played in instantly recognizing the independence of South Carolina when she seceded in 1861.

Upon an impulse which one might not know at once for its conventionality one would be apt to say that the literary side of Hay's life had not received due consideration from this country, which has been eager to measure generously and to pay fully its civic debt to him. But this would be a mistake. His place in our literature has been as eagerly allowed as it was easily won. He owned the grotesque witchery of the romantic West in his *Pike County Ballads*, which enjoyed a popularity beyond even Bret Harte's lyrical exaggerations of the early California life; and in his more serious poetry he had the good fortune to win for certain pieces the sort of devotion which prompts the reader to mark them for remembrance in the book and to recur to them with lasting affection. He suffered much from the somewhat boisterous acclaim of the Pike County things, and would perhaps have been willing to disown them, but he had a rightful tenderness for what he thought his more dignified verse, and in his unfailing modesty a just estimation. As to his prose, he never explicitly confessed the authorship of *The Bread-winners*, or his part, if he had any, in *Democracy*. There was no such reason

or occasion for reluctance concerning *Castilian Days*, and that study of a perennially interesting civilization remains, with whatever touches of youthful excess in some of its judgments, his worthy representative in prose.

He would probably have claimed no greater excellence in it than its severest censor would allow, for he was, without undue diffidence, absolutely modest concerning his literary work. He was a man who in all respects knew himself past the self-knowledge of most men whom the world has widely known. He was almost lifelong a sick man, and he knew the limits of his strength better than the science which too optimistically ascertained them. He died quite literally worn out by generous overwork, by magnanimous self-sacrifice. His biographer closes the well-told story of his life with a passage from his diary written a fortnight before his death, which we would like to give again because of the modern wisdom, the classical beauty, we find in it: "I say to myself that I should not rebel at the thought of my life ending at this time. I have lived to be old, something I never expected in my youth. I have had many blessings, domestic happiness being the greatest of all. I have lived my life. I have had success beyond all the dreams of my boyhood. My name is printed in the journals of the world without descriptive qualifications, which may, I suppose, be called fame. By mere length of service I shall occupy a modest place in the history of my time. If I were to live several years more I should probably add nothing to my existing reputation; while I could not reasonably expect any further enjoyment of life, such as falls to the lot of old men in sound health. I know death is the common lot, and what is universal ought not to be deemed a misfortune; and yet, instead of confronting it with dignity and philosophy, I cling instinctively to life and the things of life as eagerly as if I had not had my chance at happiness and gained nearly all the prizes."

So some great soul of the Hellenized Roman world might have spoken, if touched by the modern self-judging sincerity which that world did not know.





HENRY MILLS ALDEN

M JULES DE GAULTIER, whom Benjamin de Casseres calls "the Prospero of Philosophy, the first thinker to give the Imagination its proper rank in the law of evolution," declares that man "is compelled to see himself and all things as he and they are not." This is his formulation of the law of psychical evolution.

It is really the most ancient of formulas, and the most persistent, from the Hindu idea of universal illusion to Bergson's idea of intuition, reiterated by the seer, prophet, and poet in every age. Paul declared that the things that are not bring to naught the things that are. Plato, Plotinus, Berkeley—all agree with the poet Longfellow that "things are not what they seem."

To Faith, Philosophy, and Poetry, the things that are not stand for Reality, and are our only refuge from the bewilderment of actualities. To M. de Gaultier, while they are the only justification of life, the only excuse for optimism, they stand for the bewilderment, the error, the deception of a world whose god is Chance, and a perpetual cheat of the human imagination, based upon man's sublime egotism. "Everything we desire or approach is dressed in colors other than they really have, and we spread over our own natures the same thaumaturgy. We glisten ourselves with the oil of our pride and egotism. We have a tattooed image of ourselves—a tattooed, grandiose, and ideal super-I that we try to materialize, to eternize. The Hindus have personified this instinct as Maya, the evil genius of life. Jules de Gaultier calls it the bovaryizing instinct of humanity, or the magical and unique power given to the human sensibility to create superb fictional escapes from Hell—that is, Reality."

Thus the ideal is divorced from the

real, beauty from truth—in marked contradiction to the poet Keats's intuitive sense of their identity; and both beauty and ideality spell futility. Possibly Mr. de Casseres may, from his own individual view of man and the world, have unconsciously overaccentuated some of the bolder aspects of de Gaultier's scheme, but a theory, expanding from Gustave Flaubert's splendid fiction, *Madame Bovary*, into a philosophy of universal fiction, must needs be fantastic, however reservedly interpreted. One is not disposed to take such a scheme seriously, preferring to regard the startling hypothesis, like the novel it links with itself, as an imaginative creation intended for general entertainment. That is, in the region of philosophic speculation, one classes it with the extravagances of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. When such bold imaginings have frankly taken the form of fiction, as in the cases of Swift and Rabelais, the humorous or satirical intention is at once recognized, and the grotesquery of genius needs no condonation. Of such gigantic proportions, indeed, is the remarkable work which Mark Twain left behind him, and which will in the near future be presented to the readers of this Magazine.

As witnesses of a dramatic spectacle, tragic or comic, we are willing and even expect that the curtain should fall upon the climactic situation. But we demand that it shall rise again, and that it shall not finally fall until the tension has found its ultimate relaxation. The demand upon philosophic speculation, which is on its own plane as much a reflex of life as the drama is, and just as tropical, is equally urgent; that it shall disclose not only the errant course but the recourse, not only the contradiction but its reconciliation, though not its conclusion, for philosophy