

5. The State should do no more for writers than it should do for any other person who lives in it. The State should give shelter, food, warmth, etc., whether the person works for the State or not. Choice of work, and the money that comes from it should then be free for that man; what work, what money, is his own bother.

6. Yes and No, or *vice versa*. My advice to young people who wish to earn their living by writing is: DO.

HERMANN HESSE

A LIFE IN BRIEF¹

DURING the early post-war years I made two attempts to give a kind of summary bird's-eye view of my life for the benefit of my friends, to whom at that time I had become somewhat of a problem; they were written in fairy-tale form and in a semi-humoristic vein. The first of these remained a mere fragment, 'The Magician's Childhood'; the second was a venture, in the manner of Jean Paul, to forecast my future. It was entitled 'A Conjectural Biography' and appeared in the *Neue Rundschau* in Berlin in 1925. In the present story this has been subjected to only a few unimportant corrections—it had been my intention for several years to unite both works in some way, but until now I had been unable to find a suitable means of reconciling the two that are so different in tone and mood.

I WAS born towards the end of the Modern Age—shortly before the world started to slip back into the Middle Ages—under the sign of Sagittarius, with a favourable aspect of Jupiter. My birth took place in the early evening of a warm July day, and the temperature of that hour is something that I have sought and loved unconsciously all my life, and which when absent I have felt to be painfully lacking. I could never bear living in cold countries, and all my voluntary journeys have been towards the South. I was a child of pious parents whom I loved tenderly, and whom I should have loved even more tenderly had they not made me acquainted too early in life with the Fourth Commandment. Unfortunately commandments have always had a

¹ By permission of Rochefort Productions (Literary Property) Ltd. Copyright by the author.

fatal effect upon me, however just and well-meaning they may have been; I who am by nature as docile as a lamb and pliant as a soap-bubble have, even from earliest youth, deliberately set my face against commandments of any kind. I had only to hear the words 'Thou shalt not' for everything that was in me to rise up in revolt, and for me to become stubborn and intractable. It is easy to understand that this peculiarity had a very disadvantageous effect upon my school years. Our masters taught us, in that amusing branch of study which they called World History, that the world had always been ruled, guided and changed by men who had broken with the laws of their ancestors and had made their own laws, and we were told that these men were worthy of reverence. Only this was just as much of a lie as all their remaining teachings, for if one of us, whether with good or evil intent, ventured to show courage and protest against some commandment, foolish custom or convention, he was neither revered nor held up as an example, but was punished, ridiculed and repressed by the cowardly authority of the teacher.

Fortunately I had already learnt the most important and valuable things in life before going to school. I had fine, alert and delicate senses, upon which I could rely and from which I could draw much enjoyment; and even if at a later date I was to fall incurably under the allurements of metaphysics, and may at times have mortified and neglected my senses, it is the atmosphere of a tenderly developed sensuousness in matters of sight and hearing that has remained constant and true to me and plays a living part in the world of my thoughts, even when they appear to be abstract. I had therefore a certain equipment for life, which as I have already mentioned I had acquired before my school years. I was familiar with the ins and outs of our town, the chicken-yard, the woods and the workshops of the craftsmen; I knew the trees, birds and butterflies; I could sing songs and whistle through my teeth, and much beside that makes life worth while. To this, of course, must be added the knowledge obtained at school that came easily to me and amused me: for example, I took a real pleasure in the Latin tongue, and composed Latin as well as German verses at a very early age. For the art of lying and diplomacy I must thank my second year at school, when a tutor and a junior master put me in possession of this faculty after I had brought

down upon myself one misfortune after another as a result of my childish frankness and candour. Both these teachers clearly and successfully enlightened me of the fact that honesty and the love of truth were not characteristics that they looked for in their pupils. They blamed me for a misdemeanour—quite a trivial one—that had taken place in the classroom, of which I was completely innocent, and as they could not bring me to admit that I was the culprit a veritable state-trial ensued. They whipped and tortured me; but far from wringing from me the desired confession, they succeeded only in scourging out of me any belief I may have had in the propriety of the teaching profession. In the course of time, thank goodness, I came to know teachers who were just and worthy of respect, but the damage was done: not only my relationship with my schoolmasters but with authority as a whole was falsified and embittered. Generally speaking I was a good scholar during the first seven or eight years of my schooldays—at least I was always among the first pupils in my class. Only when that conflict began—which no one who is destined to be a personality is spared—did I become more and more at odds with the school. Some twenty years later I was to understand the full significance of those struggles, but at the time they were very real and all-embracing, and brought me, much against my desire, the greatest unhappiness.

The fact was that I wanted to be a poet—a poet and nothing else. From my thirteenth year onwards I was quite clear in this conviction. But gradually I became aware of another painful fact: it was possible to become a teacher, a parson, a doctor, a craftsman, tradesman or post office official, also a musician, painter or architect, for towards every vocation in the world there led a path, there were preliminaries, a school, a course of study for the beginner; but for the poet there was nothing. It was permissible and even an honour to be a poet—that is to say a well-known and successful poet, but unfortunately in the majority of cases one was by that time already dead—but to *become* one, that was impossible; to *wish* to become one a farce and a scandal, as I soon learned. I quickly absorbed all there was to know of the situation. A poet was something one must be, not something one should try to become; furthermore, an interest in poetry and individual poetic talent made one suspect to the teachers, and in consequence one was either distrusted, ridiculed or even grossly

insulted. The poet, at one with the hero and with all strong, beautiful, courageous and unusual figures and efforts was magnificent in the past, and every schoolbook sings his praises; but in the present and in reality he was hated—and presumably the teachers were appointed and trained expressly to prevent the development of free and complete human beings, and the possibility of great and noble deeds being performed.

I saw nothing but an abyss stretching between myself and my far-off goal, everything became uncertain and devalued and only one fact remained constant: I wished to become a poet whether it were difficult or easy, whether it were laughable or laudable. The external consequences of this decision—in fact this curse—were as follows.

At the age of thirteen, when the struggle had already begun, my conduct left so much to be desired both at home and at school that I was banished to a grammar school in another town. A year later I became a pupil in a theological seminary, where I learned the Hebrew alphabet and came near to grasping the significance of the Dagesch *forte implicitum*; when suddenly the storm broke. It welled up from within and completely engulfed me, leading to my flight from the monastery school, to punishment with rigid detention, and finally to my expulsion from the seminary.

For a while I took pains to advance my studies in a college, but there, too, detention and dismissal were my lot. For three days I became a tradesman's apprentice, ran away once more, and for several days and nights caused my parents great anxiety by my disappearance. For six months I helped my father, and then for a year and a half I was taken on as a probationer in a mechanical workshop and turret-clock factory.

In short, for more than four whole years everything I did that was required of me went awry, no school would keep me, and I could hold no apprenticeship for any length of time. Every attempt to make a useful citizen of me failed, often with shame and scandal, flight or dismissal. And yet it was generally admitted that I was talented and even that my intentions were honest. In addition to this I was always passably diligent—I have always admired the high virtue of idleness with awe, but have never been an adept in the art. At the age of fifteen, after I had failed at school, I began consciously and energetically to educate myself; it was fortunate, and proved a source of constant joy to me, that there was in my father's house a huge ancestral library, a whole roomful of old

books, which contained among other treasures the entire German poetry and philosophy of the eighteenth century. Between my sixteenth and twentieth years, not only did I cover reams of paper with my own poetic efforts, but during those years I read half the classic literature of the world as well as the history of art, and studied languages and philosophy with a tenacity that would have been amply sufficient for a normal school course.

Then I became a bookseller in order at last to be able to earn my own living. In any case, I had much more in common with books than with the vices and cast-iron cog-wheels that had tormented me so much as a mechanic. At first this plunge into the new and newest literature was an almost intoxicating pleasure, but I soon realized that spiritual life in the mere present is insupportable and senseless, and that a spiritual life is made possible only by a steadfast relationship with the past, with history and with the old and age-old. So, after my preliminary pleasure had been exhausted, I felt a need to revert from this spate of modernity to the ancient, and I accomplished this by transferring to an antiquarian bookseller. I remained faithful to this vocation, however, only so long as I needed it to earn my own living. At the age of twenty-six, as a result of my first literary success, I gave this up as well.

And so at last, after many storms and sacrifices, my goal was reached. I had, incredible as it seemed, become a poet, and had apparently won in my long tough struggle with the world. The bitterness of my school and adolescent years, to which I often so nearly succumbed, was now laughed at and forgotten; relations and friends, who had previously despaired of me, now smiled amicably. I had won. Now my stupidest and most worthless actions were found enchanting—and I too was extremely enchanted with myself. I noticed for the first time in what abominable loneliness, asceticism and danger I had lived for so many years; the warm air of recognition did me good, and I began to be a contented man.

For a good while my outward life followed a calm and pleasant course. I had a wife, children, and a house with a garden. I wrote my books and was esteemed as an amiable poet, and I lived at peace with the world. In 1905 I helped to found a periodical which was directed primarily against the personal government of Wilhelm II, without however taking these political aims too

seriously. I travelled extensively in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Italy and India. Everything seemed to be in order.

Then came the summer of 1914, and both internally and externally everything took on a different aspect. It appeared that our former prosperity had been based on unsure foundations, and that now a period of adversity, that great Educator, was beginning. The so-called Heroic Age had dawned, and I cannot say that it struck me as being any better equipped, worthier or more heroic than all the others. The one thing that made me different from most of my fellow men was that I was lacking in that great consolation that so many of them seemed to possess—enthusiasm. I was brought violently back to earth, and found myself once again in conflict with myself and the outside world; I had to return to school for a second time, I had once again to unlearn the contentment I had felt with myself and my fellows, and with this experience cross over the threshold of initiation into life. I have never forgotten a trifling experience that happened to me during the first year of the war: I was on a visit to a large military hospital, where I was trying to enrol as a volunteer and to adapt myself intelligently to this changed world. It then still seemed to me possible. In that hospital for the wounded I met an old spinster who had been in good circumstances before the war, and who was now doing her duty as a nurse. She told me with touching enthusiasm how glad she was that she had been allowed to live through this Heroic Age. I found this comprehensible, because for this lady it had required a war to make her change her lazy and selfish elderly spinsterhood for an active and worthier life. But as she informed me of her good fortune in a corridor full of bandaged and mutilated soldiers, which ran between wards filled to overflowing with the disabled and the dying, my heart turned right over; and yet, although I understood this good woman's enthusiasm so completely, I could neither share it nor approve of it. If ten wounded soldiers were needed to bring happiness to each enthusiastic hospital nurse, then the price was far too high.

No, I could not share in the joy over the Heroic Age. From the very beginning I suffered miserably under the war, and defended myself desperately year after year against a misfortune that seemed to have fallen from outside and from out of a clear sky, while all around me the world behaved as though it were enchanted by this misfortune. And when in the newspapers I read

articles by writers who purported to have discovered the blessings of war, the exhortations of the professors, and all the war-poems from the studios of famous poets, I was even more wretched.

One day in 1915 I let slip an admission of this misery in public, and added a word of regret that even the so-called men of the spirit found nothing better to do than to preach hatred, spread falsehoods and hold the great misfortune in high esteem. The result of this modestly outspoken regret was that I was declared a traitor to my country in the newspapers—a new experience for me, for, despite several clashes with the Press, I had never yet been in the position of one who is spat upon by the majority. The article which contained this particular indictment appeared in twenty different papers in Germany, and of all the friends I thought I had among the journalists, only two dared to speak on my behalf. Old friends informed me that they had nursed a viper in their bosoms, and that their hearts no longer beat for me, the degenerate, but for the Kaiser and their Country. Anonymous letters of abuse came in their hundreds, and booksellers let me know that an author with such subversive views no longer interested them. I became acquainted for the first time with a pretty little ornament with which many of these letters were adorned: it was a little round stamp bearing the inscription 'Gott strafe England'. One might have thought that I laughed heartily at this lack of understanding on their part, but I could not bring myself to do so. This experience, in itself so unimportant, brought about the second great transformation of my life.

It will be remembered that the first change occurred at the moment when I consciously made the decision to become a poet. The former model pupil Hesse had from then on become a bad scholar, had been punished and thrown out, could do nothing right, and had caused himself and his parents care upon care—and all this only because he could see no possible reconciliation between the world as it was, or seemed to be, and the voice of his own heart. This repeated itself anew during the war years. Once again I saw myself in conflict with the world in which I had hitherto lived in peace. Once again everything failed me, I was alone and wretched, and all that I said and did met with misunderstanding and hostility. Again I saw a hopeless abyss yawning between reality and that which to me seemed desirable, reasonable and good.

But this time I was not spared a heart-searching. It was not long

before I found that I would have to look within myself for the source of my suffering and not in the outside world, for I saw clearly that no man or God, let alone I, had the right to accuse the whole world of madness and brutality. There must therefore have been some disorder within myself that had brought me into conflict with the world: and in truth there did exist a great disorder. It was by no means a pleasant task to come to grips with it and try to achieve some reintegration. One thing was quite certain: my former good relations with the world had not only been too dearly bought but had become as hollow as the peace of the outside world. I had thought, by reason of the long and difficult struggles of my youth, to have earned my place in society, and at last to have become a poet, but in the meantime success and prosperity had had their usual influence upon me, and I had become contented and complacent—and when I looked closely, as a writer I was hardly distinguishable from the popular light novelist. I had become too prosperous, and now that adversity, which is always a hard and energetic school, had brought its host of cares, I learnt more and more to let the affairs of the world take their own course and to busy myself with my own part in the chaos and guilt of the whole. I must leave it to my readers to study the effects of this preoccupation in my writings. Yet I always nourished the secret hope that in time my people too—not as a whole, but perhaps large numbers of aware and responsible individuals among them—would undertake a similar scrutiny of themselves, and that instead of laments and abuse against the evil war, the evil enemy and the evil revolution, the questions would be raised in a thousand hearts: how am I personally responsible, and how can I free myself from guilt? For innocence can always be recaptured when one recognizes one's sorrow and guilt, and suffers to the end instead of searching for the guilt in others.

As this new change began to appear in my life and writings, many of my friends shook their heads, many of them also forsook me. But all that belonged to the changed image of my life—just as the loss of my house, my family and other possessions and comforts. This was a period of daily farewells, and every day I was astonished that I could suffer it all and still live, that I could still love anything in this strange life that seemed to bring nothing but pain, disappointment and loss.

However, I must add that even during the war years I had something in the nature of a good star or a guardian angel. Although I felt very much alone in my suffering, and up to the beginning of my transformation found my fate a perpetually unhappy and undesirable one, this very suffering and my distracted state served as a protection and armour against the outside world. I spent the war years in such an abysmal environment of politics, espionage, corruption and opportunism as even in those times it would have been difficult to find in many parts of the world in so concentrated a form. Actually it was in Berne, the centre of German, neutral and enemy diplomacy, a town that overnight had become over-populated with diplomats, political agents, spies, journalists, speculators and profiteers. I lived among diplomats and soldiers, and associated with men of many and often enemy nations, and the air around me was a veritable network of espionage and counter-espionage, informing, intrigues, political and private activities—and of all this during those years I noticed absolutely nothing! I was pumped, informed against and spied upon, was suspected, alternately by the enemy, the neutrals and my own countrymen; and noticed nothing at all. Only long afterwards did I learn some of the details for the first time, and could not understand how I had managed to survive untouched and undamaged in this atmosphere—but it had been so.

With the end of the war my transformation was complete: my ordeal of self-scrutiny had reached its peak. My sufferings had nothing more to do with the war or the fate of the world at large, nor did the thought of Germany's defeat, which we abroad had foreseen for the past two years with certainty, hold any further terrors. I was sunk completely within myself and in my own destiny, but I had the impression at times that I was grappling with the fate of Man as a whole. I found mirrored within myself all war, all the blood lust of the world, all the irresponsibility, coarse sensationalism and cowardice of Man. I had first to lose my self-respect, and then my self-contempt . . . and finally nothing remained but to plumb the depths of Chaos in the hope, alternately rising and falling, of rediscovering nature and innocence once more beyond. Every aware and truly enlightened man—it would be a sheer waste of effort to speak of the others—at one time or another takes this narrow path through the wilderness.

Sometimes when friends abandoned me I felt a certain grief,

but never discomfort. I looked upon their estrangement as a substantiation of my chosen path. These former friends were quite right when they affirmed that previously I had been a sympathetic poet and human being, whereas now, in my present problematical phase, I was simply intolerable. On questions of taste and character I had by this time advanced to a point where there was no one among them to whom my language was intelligible. Their reproaches were probably justified when they told me that my writings had lost their beauty and harmony. Such statements only made me laugh, for what is beauty or harmony to a man who is condemned to death, or who is running for his life from beneath collapsing walls? Perhaps, contrary to my lifelong belief, I was not a poet at all, and the whole of my æsthetic activity had been a mistake. Why not indeed? But even that was no longer of any importance.

Most of that in which I had come to believe during my infernal journey had proved worthless and a fraud, including perhaps my frenzied belief in my vocation and talents. Yet how insignificant that was now. What I had once envisaged with conceit and childish joy as my mission in life was no longer there. I saw my task—or rather my way of salvation—no longer in the realms of lyrical poetry or philosophy, or any other similar specialized art form, but only in allowing that little that was truly vital and strong in me to live its life, only in absolute fidelity towards that which I still felt living within me. That was life, that was God. Later, when such times of high and perilous tension are over, everything looks strangely different, because the erstwhile contents and their nomenclature become meaningless, and that which was holy yesterday may sound almost ludicrous today.

As, in the spring of 1919, the war at last came to an end for me too, I retired to a remote corner of Switzerland and became a hermit. Because all my life (and this was a legacy from my parents and grandparents) I had been deeply engrossed in the wisdom of the Indians and the Chinese, and because I partly expressed my new experiences in Oriental metaphor, I was frequently referred to as a 'Buddhist'; but at this I could only laugh, because I knew in my heart that no one could be further removed from that belief than myself. And yet there was a grain of truth in it, as I was to learn later. If it were somehow

conceivable that a man might choose his own religion, I know that I personally, due to my innermost yearnings, should have chosen a conservative one—such as Confucianism, Brahmanism, or the Catholic Church. I should have made this choice out of a desire for the antithesis and not because of an innate affinity, for it was only by chance that I was born the son of pious Protestants: I am a Protestant by nature and disposition (hence my great antipathy to modern Protestantism shows no contradiction). The true Protestant defends himself against his own Church and others alike, for his nature accepts more easily the ‘becoming’ than the ‘being’; in this sense Buddha too was a Protestant. My belief in my craft and in the value of my literary work had been uprooted since my transformation, and writing no longer gave me any real pleasure. But a man must have some pleasure, and even in my most miserable periods I made this demand. I could renounce justice, reason, the supposed meaning of life and the world—for I have seen that the world comes through magnificently without the aid of these abstractions—but I could not renounce a little joy; and this longing was now one of those small flames within me in which I still believed, and out of which I thought to build my life anew. I often sought pleasure, dreams and forgetfulness in a flask of wine, which often enough brought me solace, and I was duly grateful. But it was not enough. Then one day I discovered a brand new joy: at the age of forty I began to paint. Not that I presumed to be a painter or wished to become one, but painting is wonderful recreation and makes one happier and more patient. From then on my fingers were not only black from ink, but red and blue. Many of my friends were angered afresh by this new manifestation. In this I am always unlucky; whenever I undertake something essential, happy and beautiful, people invariably become unpleasant. They would like one always to remain the same and never alter one’s face; but my face rebels and often wants to change. It is a vital need.

Another reproach they levelled at me I also found to be quite just: they accused me of lacking in a sense of reality. Neither my writings nor my paintings do in actual fact conform to reality, and when I compose I often forget all the things that an educated reader demands of a good book—and above all I am lacking in a true *respect* for reality. I consider it to be something one should trouble least about, for it is ever present and burdensome enough,

while there are other more important and beautiful things to call for our care and attention. Reality is something with which no one under any circumstances can ever be content, something which should never be adored and revered, for it is the hazard and refuse of life. And this shabby, constantly disappointing and barren reality is impossible to change except by a denial of it and by showing that we are the stronger.

In my poems, then, the normal respect for reality is often absent, and when I paint my trees have faces and the houses laugh, dance or weep—and generally it is difficult to recognize the tree for a pear or a chestnut. Yes, I must submit to this reproach. I confess that my own life often appears exactly like a fairy tale, and I often feel and see the outside world in perfect harmony and accord with my inner feelings—which I can only call magic.

Sometimes I committed stupid blunders. For example, I once made a harmless statement about the famous German writer Schiller, whereupon a number of South German bowling clubs declared that I was a profaner of national shrines. But happily for years now I have succeeded in refraining from making any more utterances that are likely to desecrate holy relics and make men scarlet with anger. I see in this some progress. And because so-called reality no longer plays a very great part in my life, because I am often as full of the past as the present, events of today already seem to me endlessly remote, and I can no longer distinguish the future from the past as clearly as most people do. I live a great deal in the future—and so I have no need to bring my biography to a close with the present day, but may safely let it proceed. . . .

I will now relate in short the full span of my life.

During the years up to 1930 I wrote a few more books, finally to turn my back on this profession for ever. The question as to whether I was to be reckoned a poet or not was taken up by two industrious young men and used in their theses for their doctorates. But the question remained unanswered. A careful observation of the newer literature revealed that the stuff that goes to make a poet had, in modern times, shown itself in such an extraordinarily diluted form that the difference between the poet and the literary man could no longer be determined. From this objective analysis the two candidates came to diametrically opposed conclusions. The first, rather more sympathetic, was of the opinion that such

Unfortunately, I did not succeed in finishing this opera; it suffered much the same fate as my poetry. I had felt obliged to give up writing poetry when I realized that everything which seemed to me important to say had been said already in *The Golden Vessel* and *Henry of Ofterdingen* a thousand times better than I could have said it. And so it went this way with my opera, too. No sooner had I completed my year-long musical studies, written one or two preliminary scores, and tried to visualize as penetratingly as possible the actual sense and content of my work, than I suddenly perceived that my opera was likewise nothing more than a striving to say what had already been said magnificently in *The Magic Flute*.

So I laid this work aside, and turned my full attention to the practice of magic. If my artist's dream had been an illusion, and if I were not capable of producing a *Golden Vessel* or a *Magic Flute*, then I was born to be a magician. I had advanced sufficiently along the Eastern Way of Laotse and in the I Ching to know for certain the hazardous nature and commutability of so-called reality. I now compelled this reality to conform to my conceptions of it through magic—and I must say I was overjoyed at the results. I must also admit that I did not always limit myself to that enchanted garden which is known as White Magic, for from time to time I drew the small living flames within me over towards the Black Art.

When I was well over seventy, and just when I had been awarded the twin distinction of honorary degrees by two Universities, I was brought before the judges on a charge of seducing a young girl through the instrument of magic. In prison I asked permission to busy myself with my paints, and this request was granted. Friends brought me in colours and artist's materials, and I painted a miniature landscape on the walls of my cell. Once again I had turned to art, and all the shipwrecks I had previously experienced as an artist did not prevent me from draining once more this most exquisite beaker, from once again refreshing my heart and building a small but beloved toy world like some child at play, from once again putting aside all wisdom and abstraction in favour of the primitive joy of creation. So I painted again, mixed my colours and dipped my brush, tasting once more the rapture of all this infinite magic: the gay light ring of vermilion, the pure full tone of yellow, the deep emotion of blue, and the

ridiculously trituated poetry was not entitled to the name and was valueless as literature; that which was called poetry today might just as well be allowed to die a peaceful death. The other was a confirmed admirer of poetry, even in its most rarefied forms, and considered that it was better to allow, out of caution, a hundred non-poets to be accounted as poets than to be unjust to one who still had perhaps a single drop of true Parnassian blood in his veins.

My chief occupations were my painting and the study of Chinese methods of magic, but during the years that followed I became more and more absorbed in music. It was my ambition in later life to write a kind of opera wherein human life in its so-called reality would be taken far from seriously and even held up to ridicule; it would instead be made to shine out in its eternal value as an image—as the fugitive garment of Divinity. The magical conception of life has always been near to me: I had never become a modern man, and had always found Hoffmann's *Golden Vessel* and even *Henry of Ofterdingen* to be more valuable text books than all the world's history and natural history books; the latter, whenever I read them, had always seemed to me like so many charming fables. But now I had reached a period of life when it was senseless to build up and elaborate any further an already complete and sufficiently differentiated personality, when my task lay rather in allowing my precious ego to sink once more into the world, and to bring it into line, in the light of the transitory, with the eternal and changeless orders. To express these thoughts or life moods seemed possible only through the medium of the fairy tale, and I saw in the opera the highest form of the fairy tale—presumably because I could no longer truly believe in the magic of words in our misused and dying language, whereas music appeared to me as a living tree upon whose branches Hesperidean apples could still grow. I wished to achieve in my opera what I had not entirely succeeded in doing in my poems: to give an exalting and charming sense to human life. I wished to extol the innocence and inexhaustibility of nature, and to depict its course to the point where it would be compelled through inevitable suffering to turn to the spirit, the far off opposite pole, to portray the oscillation of life between the two poles of nature and the spirit with all the serenity, glitter and perfection of the rainbow's arch.

harmony of their mixture culminating in the palest of greys. Happy and childlike I indulged in my game of creation and painted a landscape on the cell wall; it contained all that in which I had found pleasure during my life—rivers, mountains, sea and clouds, peasants at harvest time, and a mass of lovely things that I had enjoyed. A miniature railway ran through the centre of the picture; it led up the side of a mountain and the train, whose engine had already disappeared into the mountain-side, looked for all the world like a worm in an apple; it was just entering a small tunnel from whose mouth issued clouds of woolly black smoke.

Never before had a game brought me so much pleasure. I quite forgot, in this return to my art, that I was a prisoner and an accused man—and that there was really little hope of my ending my life anywhere else but in this cell. I even forgot about my magical exercises, for I seemed to be sorcerer enough when I painted dwarf trees or a small bright cloud with my fine brush.

In the meantime so-called reality, with which I was now completely at variance, did its level best to destroy and ridicule my dream. Nearly every day I was led out under guard into the most dismal offices where, amidst a host of papers, sat unsympathetic men who questioned me, were unwilling to believe me, snapped at me and treated me alternately like a three-year-old child and a hardened criminal. You do not necessarily have to be an accused person to become acquainted with this remarkable and truly hellish world of bureaucracy: you need only desire to change your address, to get married, procure an identity card or a passport to be obliged to descend into this hell and waste hours in the musty rooms of this world of papers. Of all the infernos that man in his strangeness has devised for himself this has always appeared to me to be the most diabolical. You will be questioned, barked at by bored, impatient and joyless men who disbelieve your simplest and truest statement, and you will be treated either as a schoolchild or a criminal. But all this is common knowledge. I should long since have been suffocated and have withered right away had not my colours time and again consoled me, and had not my picture—my beautiful miniature landscape—brought me renewed life and a breath of fresh air.

One day I was standing before my picture when the warders appeared with their usual wearisome summons, wishing to tear me away from my pleasant occupation. I felt a sense of fatigue,

and almost a revulsion against all this activity—against the whole of this brutal and soulless reality. The time now seemed ripe to make an end of it all: if I were not allowed to play my innocent artist's game in peace, I must resort to that more serious art to which I had devoted so many years of my life. This world was unbearable without magic.

Recalling my Chinese ritual, I stood for a while with my breath held, and slowly released myself from the illusion of reality. I begged the warders in a friendly tone to be patient for a moment while I climbed into my little train in the picture, as there was something there that I had to attend to. They laughed in their usual manner—for they looked upon me as mentally deranged.

I made myself small, climbed into my little train, and drove it deep into the tunnel. For a short while the woolly smoke could be seen pouring from the round hole in the mountain; and then it slowly evaporated and with it the whole picture, myself included.

The warders stared at the blank wall in the utmost embarrassment.

[Translated by MERVYN SAVILL]

ROBIN IRONSIDE

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

WHEN we read in *Under the Hill* how the Abbé Fanfreluche 'stood doubtfully for a moment beneath the ombre gateway of the mysterious Hill . . . at taper-time' in suave anticipation, as it turns out, of admission to the court of Helen, whose favourite ladies are made known to us by such titles as La Zambinella and Pappelarde, it is impossible to suppress a shadow of sympathy with the attitude of the writer who, under the pseudonym of Max Mereboom, ridiculed in *Punch* the art of Daubaway Weirdsley. Beardsley's unfinished romantic *nouvelle*, as he might have called it, has many painful phrases; the affectations in his published letters, the use of 'touchant' for 'touching', of the adverb 'vastly' or of the epithet 'simply too, too' embarrass us, today; and even in his drawings our appreciation is apt to be interrupted by a vulgarity of affectation which has no sanction