

[*The New Statesman*]
CURSING THE CLIMATE

BY HILAIRE BELLOC

WHEN you curse the weather (as I do now) summon to your aid a great group of vapid Aurelian thoughts. It will do you no harm. Such thoughts are a pleasant repose for the mind, a sort of pap.

If you doubt that they are such, either read the notes that Marcus Aurelius left, or, what is better, go to the British Museum and see the statue of that booby upon his horse. The horse is more intelligent than he.

What, then, are these which I call 'Aurelian thoughts'? They are not unlike, in motive (though far inferior in quality), to the contrasted categories of Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe*, admirably parodied by Mr. Barry Pain in *The New Robinson Crusoe*, a book than which . . .

These categories you will remember consist in two columns: the first, grouse; the second, ingenious gratitude. In the first column, 'I find myself upon a beach, shipwrecked, without any money, and very damp and with nothing to eat.' In the opposite column: 'On the other hand I might have been born a consumptive chimpanzee in a place where chimpanzees are hunted.'

It is one way of getting consolation, and a very epicurean way, in the strictest sense of the term epicurean.

Do the same about the weather. 'It rains. I have not seen the sun for three months. But, on the other hand, I might be freezing to death in the Arctic, or sitting up with a candle killing scorpions on some damned barren island of the Levantine Seas.'

The crab about this method is that it does not really satisfy the mind. I have only to use these words 'Levantine Seas,' when at once the man deprived of sun thinks of sunlight and the man deprived of warmth thinks of warmth, and the scorpion seems a delightful beast, and if the island is barren, so much the better; it means that there is not too much water, which is a curse.

I have noticed that men living in climates not human, never even try to console themselves, as do people living in England. They do not say: 'Would that I were in a place of clouds and water!' They sit down sullenly (though with bright eyes), endure it, and die. It is only people just on the edge of perfection who complain. It is so with social things. The loudest cry rises from the man who finds that there is something wrong with his big motor car, or that he cannot reserve a carriage to the Riviera, but has to travel in a train full of Frenchmen.

And to go back to climate.

If one could exactly balance all the things which one desires in a climate, I will tell you what would happen. One would lose three things, each more important than the last — energy, decent morals, and happiness. I suppose that what one would exactly balance in a climate would be a sufficiency of moisture without discomfort, a sufficiency of light without loss of repose, and a sufficiency of heat without the breeding of noxious things. I take it that the climate of the Balearics in early March carried on throughout the

year would fill the bill; or rather the climate of the Balearics supplemented by large rivers which had no mud upon their banks and never overflowed or ran down, deep forests which were never tangled or marshy, and sublime mountains which never sent one tempest or any other disaster, and which were not, as most mountains are, inhabited by demons.

Well, if one lived in such a climate, I say that one would lose energy and morals and happiness. They say that the mind turns inward upon suffering too much sorrow. That is true; but it is still alive. It turns inward also, but in a permanent, *dead* fashion, when it has no stimulus at all. What people really mean when they say that they would like a perfect climate (granted that they are human beings and not immortals) is that they would like to preserve all the advantages they have acquired from living in their own climate, and yet have them in another and a more delightful climate. Another way of putting it is that they would like all the advantages of contrast without the disadvantages of tedium. Or, to put it more simply still, they would like to go on assuaging their thirst forever and yet never assuaging it. It is a contradiction in terms; at least, for mortals.

The immortals, by the way, had very odd ideas upon climate. It was the custom of the Gods of Hellas (who had an excellent climate offered them on the slopes of the hills) to take their leisure above the snow line, and then at a moment's notice to go south of the first cataract of the Nile into a fiendish heat and do a stunt with the Ethiopians, just as our rich go to the Riviera. But with this difference: that they went to Ethiopia not only for climate but for the morals of the inhabitants -- which is more than you can say of those who go to the Riviera, my experi-

ence of which detestable belt is that no one can decide who most despises the other, the aboriginal or his visitants.

The Gods of Hellas also (now dead, because the climate changed) rather concerned themselves with controlling climate than with enjoying it. And that, by the way, is a lesson for us. They were the masters of their environment, and not its subjects. The same is true of very young people, whom I, with these mine eyes, have seen deliberately taking a walk in the rain, or picking up cold snow in their hands, or (what may seem incredible) bathing in cold water and swimming about in it: and when I say cold water I mean very cold water, as, for instance, the English seas in April.

There is not on earth a man more miserable than the man who wanders about following the climate. Before the war very wealthy men were able to do this in Western Europe, and they did it with damnable insistence. If the war should compel them to know their own country, it will have done a little good. But I notice also about these wealthy men (and women) -- on the whole; it was truer of the wealthy women than of the wealthy men -- that they did not even keep to the silly rules of their silly class. They did not know where the climate was to be found which they were seeking. Which of them knew the Rousillon? Or which of them the divine coast of the Peaks of Europe above Caradonga and the hundred little bays of that more glorious Devonshire of the Asturias?

The truth is that the unexpected alone floods the mind -- speaking, I say, of mortals. *In Hoc Lachrymarum Vade*. Of the other side I say nothing.

You are going by night, having missed your way, through an abominable Alpine mist, and you would willingly die if you could find some place to die in. There comes a glim-

mering of light through the fog, a little whisper of warmer air, the wreathing of the cloud. You are in a chestnut grove, and it dawns. You get a little lower down in the fragrant forest, you are in its open glades. You hear the torrent, and just before it is day, things are so pleasant that you go to sleep upon the tufted and now dry grass. As you go to sleep you say: 'I am in Paradise.' So you are. But you would not be if you lived there more than three days.

I think it is the business of the sea which makes men get nearest to the truth in this matter of climate. I have noticed that men who sail the seas never speak of climate, but of weather, and talk of the Tropics and the Arctic, gale and calm and fog and drought and all the million colors and changes of this earthly vestibule of heaven, as though they were a matter of course, like the furniture of one's house. I never yet heard a sailor say: 'Would that I were in this or that climate!' and I never yet knew a sailor who did not settle down at home, here in England, when at last he could, often in a comfortable native slum. And this is especially true of pilots.

But in all this I have used the word 'immortal,' writing as though this acquiescence in climate, this restraint of desire, were suitable only for mortals. I will admit that, in some unchanging place where the soul also is unchanging, a permanent climate, permanently suited to the permanent soul, may do well enough and may be better

even than a cold, rainy, sunless day in the deep mud of the Weald. Indeed, I know such a place, for I visited it once in company with immortal spirits for more than half an hour. It is in the Sierras, where the trees are so high that they are part of the sky. It is in the Tuolumne valley, toward the upper waters of it. In that place men obtain a vision which corresponds to the word 'Paradise.'

And, talking of Paradise, what fortune is attached to a word! Here is a Persian word wandering about, hopping from tree to tree like a bird, flying to Greece, nesting in the western liturgy, caged by the monks of the dark ages, making a good stay among the French, but settling down at last to be a supreme symbol in the language of the English. So that, to-day, there is no word in English to beat it. It can give the word 'heaven' great odds and come to the post with all the world to spare. That is a great lesson in the history of words.

But if I go on at this rate, there would be no end to my writing, for I should be led on from word to word, and that is the temptation of all writers, against which it is their duty to fight, as it is the duty of an honest man in a late, frosty, wet, diseased, green, sogging winter in the clay of the Weald to fight against any disparagement of his climate: his climate of the mud, where falls not rain, nor hail, nor any snow, but only a perpetual drizzle day after day after day.

[*The Dickensian*]

THE WOMEN OF DICKENS

BY ADA SHURMER

So many people have asserted that Dickens was not so successful with his women characters as with his men. As one of his most devoted admirers, I utterly deny the charge and hope to prove that such an accusation has no foundation in fact. But, first I want to take a preliminary canter into the realm of ghosts. I hope everyone in the Dickens Fellowship believes in ghosts! The ghosts of Dickens are to be met with everywhere. I met Lord Frederick Verisopht and Sir Mulberry Hawk every day in Piccadilly. Once I met Mr. Micawber, also in Piccadilly. I have sat opposite Mr. Pickwick at a club dinner. Some time ago I nearly fell down before the Law Courts on beholding little Miss Flite tripping down the steps wearing the very same cape and pinched bonnet and carrying the same reticule stuffed with documents. I have been in an omnibus with Miss Betsey Trotwood, wearing the same bonnet with which she hit the doctor, because Mrs. Copperfield's baby was not a girl.

Now the statement that Dickens did not know how to depict a really fine female character is entirely unfounded. It is to be remembered that all the heroism shown by both his women and men, was a quiet heroism and also quiet sacrifice, but all the more difficult to practise. If the readers of Dickens will take the trouble to go over his books again they will perhaps be surprised to find how many really fine women he has depicted. It is also asserted that he had a ready

sneer for the old maid, and that his attitude to unmarried women was contemptuous. Those who remember Miss Abbey Potterson, Miss La Creevy, and Miss Betsey Trotwood, will not believe that assertion either. Miss Trotwood, indeed, was a married woman as she had good reason to know. Her husband treated her so badly that she separated from him early in their married life, and for all practical purposes she was an unmarried woman.

We have also to consider, in the times in which Dickens wrote, matrimony was the only career open to women. In those days girls were often sold to the highest bidder by match-making mammas, and if they did not manage to secure a man, or even an apology for one, they were labeled as more or less useless lumber, and relegated to the top shelf. It is little wonder then that marriage was eagerly competed for. Girls were often married at fifteen or seventeen, on the shelf at twenty-five, and old at thirty. Not much time you see. If for hundreds of years matrimony had been the only career open to men they would have been falling over each other in their eager desire to get in, and then it would have been those men who failed who would have been labeled as 'more or less useless lumber.'

I would like to ask every woman who may read this article to compare the position of her sex now, with what it was in the time of Dickens. Now, almost every career is open to women, then there was practically none. I