

fire, in ecstasy at so much comfort after so much stress. We shall not, most of us, have grown out of them, a melancholy commentary on the inches which we supposed the physical and bayonet training of war had added to our mental girth. Even if we find certain of them slightly threadbare, our affection for them will make light of such deficiencies.

Our old political fancy waistcoat, party-colored, how neat it looks! Those stout boots of social prejudice, why, they will last for years. Surely it would be madness to throw them away. Besides, it would be extremely expensive to lay in a complete new outfit. The outlay of time and energy would be almost prohibitive, and our personal command of these resources seems to have diminished as surely as our personal incomes, for we can hardly meet the demands made on either. The temptation certainly is strong to pop on one or two of the most becoming vanities, as we linger before the admirable figure which we cut in our own reflections, and to put the rest of the dear old things away in their accustomed drawers, thus saving our time for pleasanter, or, as we think, more necessary, objects, and serving the interests of economy and comfort.

Those who succumb most easily to the temptation will generally be the ones who would be particularly improved by a new outfit. No two individual cases will be entirely alike. Some—the author of *Heartbreak House*, for instance—have only to take their sage's robe out of camphor and ensue wisdom as before; others have been stripped so naked that, whether they will or no, they must acquire a new covering, be it only one of sackcloth; others, again, whose war garments were as offensive as those they wore in peace, will swagger imperturbably in them to the tomb.

But the average man, if he devote some graver moments to the survey of his mental wardrobe, is bound to be assailed by some misgivings regarding the durability of the things he put away in 1914; or, if they are still in good condition, they may appear too far behind the best fashion of to-day to warrant their retention unaltered. He will not even put his khaki away without reflection, lest he should bury some component of more than transitory value. And he will almost certainly come to the conclusion that modifications are necessary, if he is to cut a decent figure in the world, unless he is content to wrap himself in the old cloak of self-satisfaction and have done with it. The worst of it is that, whatever is necessary to be done, he will have to be his own tailor: the stitching and darning, the taking in and the letting out will have to be performed with the intellectual needle of each Sartor Resartus, for there are no wholesale or retail purveyors of new costumes for the spirit. Let us wish him the sartorial eye of a Poole or a Paquin, so that he may combine simplicity with exquisite taste and perfect workmanship, and fit himself without too many tryings-on.

[*The Times*]

### THE PASSING OF MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

THE good which we are bidden to speak of the dead must be free of the insult of flattery. To flatter the memory of Mrs. Humphry Ward by saying that *Harvest*\* is worthy of her would be to insult *Robert Elsmere* and *David Grieve* and *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. It is a plain tale of a fine-natured woman torn between love and the fear of revealing her past; and it ends in a cut-

\* *Harvest*. By Mrs. Humphry Ward. Collins. 7s. 6d. net.

ting of the knot by violent death. Criticism must be bold now, as it will certainly be a few decades hence, to say that Mrs. Ward's later novels were not as good as the novels of her early period and her prime. Therein lies something of a tragic irony. It is generally accepted, we believe, that Mrs. Ward was not a true story-teller. Late in her career, we are told (perhaps not before *The Marriage of William Ashe*), she began to make use of plot, of a 'story' of incident for its own sake. Thence onward, she made more and more use of plot, until, in her penultimate novel, *Cousin Philip*, the exciting incident definitely interferes with the 'idea-plot,' and *Harvest* is little else than a plot of mystery and exciting incident. There lies the irony. During most of her working life her critics were clamoring for 'story'; when she comes to write stories, it is found that she does it no better than a hundred novelists with but a hundredth part of her intellect and her knowledge of life.

Yet a story-teller she was — 'a story-teller to the core,' as was said of her some fifteen years ago in the *Literary Supplement*. She began, not with *Robert Elsmere*, but with *Milly and Olly* and with *Miss Bretherton*. From *Robert Elsmere* to *Eleanor* she was telling the sort of story that she most wanted to tell and that she could tell best. After that her desire to tell stories was unabated; to some extent her power of telling stories was unimpaired. But she had never been (if we may put it so) a 'mere' story-teller. The best of her could find expression only when something else came in to fortify her love of telling stories; and that something else slipped from her grasp simply because her work had done its work. Times had changed and went on changing. In religion and social service her novels had helped,

to a degree perhaps not generally realized, to bring about the state of things which she desired to see. In politics, her visioned rule of an enlightened aristocracy had been left a vision by the march of events. Her 'message' had, in fact, been delivered. She turned for her matter to stories of the past, to the world outside England, to the shows of the moment, and used them only for the telling of 'mere' stories; and then it became gradually clear that 'mere' story-telling was not the means through which her peculiar quality as author could find its best expression. What else was needed had been by now diverted into direct social and political service.

The irony of this failure may, perhaps, be regarded as tragic; many a critic has found it so. We are always being assured that Mrs. Humphry Ward was not an 'artist' in fiction; that she could not 'create' character; that she lacked humor; that she was devoid of sensuousness and could not depict passion. Each of the charges has some truth in it. But healthy criticism will always look upon the positive achievement, will try to make out what it is that the author *could* do. We might begin by granting all the charges, and then point to the big balance on the credit side, to relieve us of all idea of tragedy. But the charges must not all be granted. *Helbeck of Bannisdale* alone would prove that its author was an artist; and to that complete work of art could be added a good long list of fragments — the country scenes in *David Grieve*; much of *Sir George Tressady*, especially the scene in which Marcella comes to apologize to Lady Tressady; the interview between Lady Crayston and the Glenwilliam girl in *The Crayston Family*; and — to come down to the latest novels — the scene where Helena

Pitstone, in *Cousin Philip*, waits, because those were her orders, at a safe distance from the riots in the burning town; or in this last novel, *Harvest*, the scene in which Rachel Henderson in her bedroom faces the misery caused by her own want of truth and faith, while downstairs three innocent-hearted women are singing patriotic songs in celebration of the armistice. These and other scenes have the intensity, the self-existence, as it were, which is the mark of the artist's hand. So, too, with some of the descriptions of scenery. There are long, dull, lifeless descriptions in Mrs. Ward's novels. There are also — always when she is up north in her beloved Lake Country, and now and then when she sees with fresh eyes the Buckinghamshire of her adoption — descriptions in which every word is alive and luminous. She could not create character? She created Catherine Elsmere, Laura Fountain, Diana Mallory, Lady Tressady, Fanny Merton, and several other vivid studies in meanness or vulgarity, a dozen or more of quite 'real' young girls, terrible old Elizabeth Mason of Browhead, and more terrible Hannah in *David Grieve*. There are one or two men, also, though not many; they include Helbeck and Lord Wing in *Eltham House* among the characters whom we remember not as embodiments of ideas or principles or social states, but as people whom we have met. For her humor, it was her weakest spot. The lack of it shows most clearly not so much in the absence of 'comic relief,' from which, very wisely, she abstained, as in a constant gravity of the kind commonly called 'portentous.' We think, with pardonable if malicious pleasure, of the caricature by Mr. Max Beerbohm in which a little Mary Augusta Arnold asks her smiling Uncle Matthew why he is 'never wholly serious.' And yet, if

Mrs. Ward engaged with high seriousness people and situations that were scarcely worth it, is there not a deep-lying humor in her treatment, say, of Hannah in *David Grieve* and of Lady Coryston when she had been routed by the Glenwilliam girl, and in her whole relation, as mother or creator, to Laura Fountain, or to Lady Kitty Ashe, or to American Lucy in *Eleanor*? The charge of want of sensuousness will break down at a single consideration of the exquisite delight which Mrs. Ward takes in the beauty of her heroines, of color in landscape, and of those stately homes of England in which she liked to set her people. And as for passion — that is a matter which each reader must settle for himself. If he likes detail about embraces, he will not get it from Mrs. Humphry Ward. But he must be sadly in need of emotional stimulus if he cannot feel that — to take the last book alone — Rachel Henderson was passionately in love with George Ellesborough.

So much for Mrs. Ward's attainment as story-teller. We are inclined to think that, on the whole, it has received less recognition than it deserved, just because our easy, lazy habit of docketing things is threatened by the peculiar quality of her best books. The unit in fiction is supposed to be the person. Is it bound to be so? At any rate, in Mrs. Humphry Ward's case it was not. The unit was a social or intellectual state, involving not one man but many. Such a method is not unparalleled. The units in *Esmond* are surely not the people in the story, but the features of the period. That is not wholly untrue, perhaps, of *The Cloister and the Hearth*. It is certainly true (to turn to another branch of literary art) of Shakespeare's Histories and of *The Dynasts*. The positive achievement of Mrs. Humphry Ward was that, being a story-teller, she chose

to approach story-telling from a new angle. Most of her readers know the passage from the preface of *David Grieve* which says:

I am so made that I cannot picture a human being's development without wanting to know the whole, his religion as well as his business, his thoughts as well as his actions. I cannot try to reflect my time without taking account of forces which are at least as real and living as any other forces, and have at least as much to do with the drama of human existence about me.

The passage is worth recalling in days when there is a tendency to take it for granted that every novel with an idea or a purpose in it must, *ipso facto*, be a bad novel. But with Mrs. Humphry Ward it went further than that. The real characters in her novels are not this man and that woman, with their loves and hates, even with their thoughts and ideals. There are this or that thought or ideal, this or that social condition or theory of order. Between these, and not between the human characters, comes the clash; and what Mrs. Ward at her best achieved with peculiar success — call it 'art' or not, as we please — was the setting of the board and the conduct of the game between forces wider than any particular character. The popular success of *Robert Elsmere* — a novel of religion, of itself a forbidden and forbidding subject — came from this: that Elsmere's thoughts were, at that period, the thoughts of thousands of men and women who could be reached only through a novel.

In the religious and the political novels she grasps the ideas and tendencies of her time, sets them out faithfully, and develops the conflict between them with a constructive precision and a four-squareness that

are not (other things left aside) unworthy of comparison with the mastery of Mr. Hardy. She could see and explain forces and movements in the great world so as to enlarge the vision of those who did not, like her, know the great world from the top. To the last she tried to keep in touch with the mood of the moment and the latest change in the social fabric.

She wrote of herself that the work which seemed to her of her best had been written 'intellectually, following out a logical sequence.' There lay her strength: in her intellectual grasp and method. She 'knew how it ought to be done' and she 'knew how it was done.' But she realized also that —

there are times and crises in imaginative work when this process seems to be quite superseded by another. Something intervened — a tranced, absorbed state, in which the action of certain normal faculties seemed suspended in order that others might work with exceptional ease — like tools that elves had sharpened in the night.

She trusted those tools too little, and they came too seldom to her hand. They would have given her prose more quality and color to relieve its serene respectability. They would have written for her more books in which, as in *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, the two patterns, the idea pattern and the human pattern, were fused into one. They would have given life-blood and diversity to many of her characters which lack them. Yet to have trusted them more would have been, in the end, to diverge from the high task to which she deliberately devoted her gift for story-telling. It might have left us more lively and racy fiction. It would have resulted in something other than Mrs. Humphry Ward's positive and peculiar achievement.

# THE TWELVE

BY ALEXANDER BLOK

*(Specially translated from the Russian for the LIVING AGE)*

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This poem by Blok is considered the most brilliant piece of literary writing produced during the present Russian crisis. Blok himself is one of the greatest living Russian poets. What his present views are is not known. But the poem represents Blok's view of what took place in Russia during the early stages of the Bolshevik régime, when the poem was written.

Blok's poem is a literary expression of the idea that whatever the present situation in Russia, whatever the cruelty and the horror of the passing moment, there is a mighty force back of it all. This idea is the result of the mysticism, in which for some time past individuals and groups in Russia sought refuge and justification. To them the masses are right, no matter what their action. It is a kind of religious mysticism that was by no means general, but was a very characteristic manifestation of the manifold and many-sided Russian soul. It is doubtful whether there is anything left of this mysticism to-day: the Bolshevik reality could not but have dispelled it.

In the poem, Blok gives a series of poetic figures which present a striking picture of the coming of the Bolshevik régime and the period immediately preceding it. There is a curious reflection of these conditions in the very rhythm of the poem. The ragged, uneven metre of the first stanzas is used, consciously or unconsciously, to exemplify the unsettled condition of the first period of the revolution. Dominated by the idea of the Constituent Assembly and the slogan, 'All power to the Constituent Assembly,' this first period of general chaos and disorganization is full of fear and suspicion. And over all this sweeps a mighty tempest, rising to greater and greater fury.

Then the Bolshevik upheaval comes — represented by the twelve men, graphically described in these lines:

'Their caps are crushed. Each cigarette glares.  
The badge of criminals ought to be theirs!'

'Holy Russia' is represented as Katya (or Katka — the form which denotes contempt), the girl, also graphically described as follows:

'Chocolates but the best would suit you,  
When in thin, gray spats you stalked?  
Only officers would suit you?  
Now with soldiers you have walked!'

The masses have arisen, and their march begins. Even though they are represented by the twelve criminals, their march is now more regular, reflected in the regular, beating rhythm that runs through the later stanzas. The twelve march on through Russia, shooting, and robbing, and destroying.

There is an element of regret for some of the things of the past which they are destroying so ruthlessly, in the psychology of the twelve. And there are also gnawing doubts and fears, and attempts to assure themselves, both through words and through needless and often aimless cruelty, that success is bound to come:

'Come, surrender now to me!  
I shall get you, get you surely,  
Comrade, come, before I fire! . . .'

The sinister twelve of the poem are the destructive power of the Bolshevik revolution. The ugly, hungry hound, trudging along at their heels, is the old world, doomed to perdition. The twelve march forward, bent upon their determined aim:

'For the bourgeois woe and sorrow  
We shall start a world-wide fire,  
And with blood that fire we'll blend. . . .'

In the process of enkindling this 'world-wide fire,' they shoot down 'Holy Russia,' leaving her lying low, 'all like a carcass in the snow.'