

Unspoken Message

MAURICE SAMUEL

OUR SHIP had anchored half a mile out from Piraeus, and all day long the electric launch had carried passengers to and from the wharf; now, with the summer light beginning to mellow, it was making its last return trip. I stood in a crowd of Greeks, Italians, Americans and Englishmen, scarcely conscious of my surroundings, and eager to get to my cabin, so that I could fill out the brief notes I had jotted down on shore. My heart and my mind were full of my first day in Athens, and I was still trembling with the shock I had sustained when, coming round the ascent to the Acropolis, unwarned and unprepared, I had seen all at once the pillars of the Propylaea rising like flames into the blue Athenian sky.

I handed back my passport to the steward at the head of the stairs and turned left to the second class promenade deck. I nodded vaguely at a few passengers with whom I was on speaking terms and walked rapidly past the dining room. Then suddenly I stopped. A man was leaning on the rail, gazing intently at the highest promontory of Athens, the Lycabettus, which, seven or eight miles inland, stood up to the dying sunlight. I did not identify the man on the instant. I felt only a burst of happiness followed, almost accompanied, by a deep discomfort akin to shame. I felt also the rending of time and the destruction of years. Involuntarily, I said: "Dr. Birrel!"

The man turned his head without changing the posture of his body. I saw the thin, kindly face, marvelously the same as of old, lose its expression of absent-minded courtesy and take on one of surprise and delight. He

straightened out, called my name, and extended both his hands. The glories of Athens, the tinted marbles in the sunlight, the tremendous figures of the Erectheum, the columns of the Temple of Zeus Olympius, were swept from my mind, and my boyhood was with me again.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me.

"I've been on board all the way from Alexandria," I said, breathlessly. "How is it I haven't seen you before?"

"I've only just got on," he answered.

"And how are you?" I cried.

"I'm well." The gentle, grey eyes searched my face. "And you?"

"I'm splendid. But it's — it's — incredible, to meet you like this."

"Well, we had to meet, somewhere or other."

I could not ask him what he meant. I could not even ask him whether he was still teaching at the Western university where I had left him. I could not allude to the eight or nine years that had passed since I had stopped answering his letters, and had deliberately turned down his affectionate interest in me.

"I read some of your things now and again," he said.

"I wish you didn't," I answered, honestly.

"What?" he asked, smiling, "not even that?"

I do not know what I was going to say. A woman's voice behind me broke in on us.

"Oh! Theodore! Here you are! I thought you'd dropped overboard."

It was a shrill, panting voice, with a fluty overtone. Dr. Birrel looked past me, the smile still on his face and, as I half turned, said: "You remember my wife, don't you?"

Good God! I had forgotten about her.

I was nineteen, and in my second year at college, when

Theodore Birrel came out as assistant lecturer in philosophy. He was about thirty, a thin, quiet, friendly man who for sixteen hundred dollars a year was supposed to instil the love of higher thought into a crowd of noisy youngsters interested, at best, in becoming respectable successes. His learning was, even then, immense. He was a first rate classical scholar, with a wide range of reading in history and a solid scientific background. His knowledge was organic and integrated (which was what made him a philosopher) and he had a special ability for imparting information — to those who cared for it — as if it were important news. But he was a man without reputation. He did not write for the magazines. He had no flair for publicity, no taste for intrigue, no interest in the bitter rivalries of the learned. He was cheerfully indifferent to promotion — or, for that matter, recognition.

A few of us loved him, but most of the students treated him rather as a joke, for though he was a great teacher, he did not teach what they (or the faculty) wanted. The most popular philosophy professor was a nationally famous pep-and-uplift writer, who was syndicated to several hundred newspapers. *His* classes were crowded, partly because he was famous, partly because he was a snap course, and partly because he was thrilling. Birrel was lucky to get fifteen or twenty students for one of his courses. There was a feeling that he was irrelevant; he did not help one to get on; he did not worry about credits; he wandered from his subject matter — always under the pretext of showing us “how to think it through.” In short, he was something of a misfit.

He did more for us — I am speaking of the few who were drawn to him — outside class than in it. There did not seem to be an hour of the night or day when he was not ready to receive us in his little frame house in the

cheap district twenty minutes walk from the campus. He *enjoyed* us. As long as anyone was interested Birrel placed at his disposal all his resources of scholarship and patience. There was nothing pedantic about him, nothing of the professional teacher; and he was much more concerned with the simple wisdom of life and of day-to-day relations between people than with the massive systems of the master-thinkers.

He would often say things that, coming from others, would have sounded crotchety or “daring.” But he spoke so gently, with such care and absorption, with such indifference to effect, that we would forget to become antagonistic. He was not at all anxious to prove that he, Theodore Birrel, was not the kind of man to be impressed by reputation or carried away by cant. He was not in the picture; the thoughts mattered, not he or we.

From old notebooks I have fished out sayings of his and fragments of discourses. Here is one:

“All knaves are alike in denying that they are knaves, but they differ in the manner of the denial, falling into two classes. The first kind of knave justifies himself by a private system. He acknowledges the rightness of the accepted code, but tries to prove that *his* knavishness is somehow different, and isn’t knavishness. The second kind denies the validity of the code, and tries to convert the whole world in order to vindicate himself. The second kind is the more dangerous because he is often a good imitation of a saint. The first kind of knave is a burglar, the second a statesman.”

The following was occasioned by the remark that some student or other “worshipped” him:

“All hero-worship is self-worship. Notice with what special fury a man flares up when you attack his idol. Is it because he loves his idol more than himself? No. He

loves his idol only as the projected image of himself. In defending his idol he can both defend himself and get credit for selflessness and loyalty. That is, he can be virtuous and murderous at the same time, and the more virtuous, the more murderous — a most tempting combination.”

Once, *per contra*, a student was impudent to Birrel in class, and we asked him why he took it so easily. He said:

“The man who lets himself be insulted is more wicked than the man who does the insulting; just as the ‘fence’ is more wicked than the thief. For the ‘fence’ is the real occasion of theft, and without him there would be little stealing. So the touchy man is the occasion of insult. If he refused to ‘bite’, the insulter would get no pleasure out of it and desist.”

All this sounds rather lofty and preachy, and may give a false picture of Theodore Birrel. He was most lovably direct and ordinary. He was cheerful and playful and companionable. His spiritual calmness did not rise from a serene conviction of his unassailable superiority. He was not falsely courteous, like so many pedagogues who have picked up a technique of seeming patience. He did not take advantage of his learning to crowd us out of an argument when he could not convince us; and when he did “win” an argument he did not betray, because he did not feel, the triumph of the successful disputant. The truth is, he was interested in us. He saw each one of us as irreplaceable personalities. He wanted to hear our views, because even when we were foolish and obstinate and exhibitionistic (which was most of the time) he was anxious to find out why we talked as we did, and what it was in us that made us hostile to the truth.

And in spite of all this, or because of it, few were attracted to him. He lacked the art of popularity, the

boosting spirit, and the knack of making people feel important in his presence. And then, there was his wife, Theresa.

She was a freak. How he had come to fall in love with this stupid, affected, vulgar creature was beyond all of us. She was not even good-looking. She was short and plump; not smoothly and comfortably plump, but irregularly, with unexpected recessions and protuberances. She had fiery red hair, a fat face, a fleshy, turned-up nose and little eyes. Her voice was tense and fluty. And she was incredibly, indescribably silly. Her nickname was the Nightmare. (Birrel's was the Rabbit.)

We took it that she was in love with her husband. Why shouldn't she be? But she made him ridiculous on the campus. She talked about him to everybody, students, members of the faculty and tradesmen. Her theme was always the world's failure to appreciate his greatness. She said she did not mind living in poverty (which was a lie, as we shall see); what she could not bear was to see her husband made a fool of. Then she would cite chapter and verse; how he had been maneuvered out of this or that popular course; how his name had been all but omitted from the Annual; how Professor So-and-so was credited with writing the Latin addresses and proclamations which were so admired throughout the academic world, when it was her husband who did them all.

She was a slattern. The house was always in disorder, and as a rule it was Birrel who made tea and served his visitors. Her laziness had one advantage; she would rather sleep than sit in our discussions. When she did join us the result was horrible, for she had no suspicion of her limitations. Her cultural attainments were those of a small-town high-school girl, and her intrusions into the conversation produced the grotesque effect of parodies.

We were talking once of the moral impulse in man, which Birrel held to be innate, like the physical appetites. To illustrate the depth and universality of the longing for goodness and the revulsion from wickedness, he quoted at some length Browning's *Instans Tyrannus*, the poem beginning,

Of the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess.

When he had finished Theresa chimed in with: "Oh, but I do think Tennyson's poetry is so much more beautiful, like

The splendor falls on castle walls,
And snowy summits old in story."

And she went on through two stanzas, imparting a more than ordinary flutiness to her voice and gesticulating dramatically.

There are some people of whom you feel that no system of psychic therapy, no miracle of re-education, can ever make them normally acceptable human beings. Theresa was of those. We pitied Birrel, and tried to conceal our distress from him. Sometimes we thought he had taken her as his life's penance, his hermit's hair-shirt. If so, he was inhumanly self-disciplined, for he let no sign of discomfort escape him. The only other alternative, if it can be called that, was, that he still loved her. But somehow the very idea was revolting.

We never got used to her, but for his sake we tried hard to treat her kindly. A few of us understood, even then, that Birrel was by far our most important and enduring experience at college; though how important, and how enduring, is another matter. For my own part, I know that I fell away from him in a few years. It is hard to get along without some measure of external success, and I made my play for it. In my relations with

people, as well as in my work as a writer, I put up with second and third best if I could only get by and collect results quickly. I am not concerned here with making a public confession; I am only explaining why I finally let Theodore Birrel drop. We corresponded for a time, but my letters to him became increasingly dishonest and superficial. Sometimes I had the grace to be ashamed of myself; more often I braved it out and said to myself that after all he was only an obscure and penniless schoolmaster who could talk nobly because in any case a career was out of his reach. In time I managed to squash the disturbing memory completely (or so I thought) or to sentimentalise it out of recognition. And now, suddenly, he was confronting me again, on a ship in the Aegean, and I knew by the agitation which the meeting awakened in me that I had repressed but not destroyed the significance which he had had for me.

She had not improved with the years. If anything, she had become worse; or perhaps I had forgotten the full, original flavor of her presence. Her ugliness verged now on the grotesque; but since there is scarcely a degree or variety of human ugliness which cannot be redeemed by grace of spirit, her repulsiveness (I know it is not decent to speak thus of a human being, but my only alternative would be hypocrisy) her repulsiveness had something to do with her galvanic stupidity. The three of us were thrown together a great deal, for, having boarded ship at Athens, they had not had time to pick up any friendships. I longed with all my heart to have an hour or two alone with Birrel, but she did not give us five minutes together. It was not that she needed his company all the time; I noticed that as long as he was not talking with anyone — he might be reading or simply staring at the sea — she

could leave him alone. I believe she was jealous; perhaps she was obscurely afraid, too.

Twice I managed to get started with him on conversations which promised to mean something to me. The first time I asked him frankly what he had meant by saying that we had had to meet again, somehow, he and I.

"I've always had the feeling," he answered, "that there was something I didn't manage to tell you, years ago. I'm not quite sure what it is. But it's something important, something that I'm destined as it were to convey to you, I don't know yet how. Or why, either."

At this point Theresa marched over to us, dragging her chair halfway across the deck. She began at once to talk about the good old days when she and Theodore, newlyweds, had begun college work together. It occurred to me for the first time that she looked on herself as her husband's partner in his educational career. My original conversation with Birrel was washed away.

I had a second chance, as I thought, when we were under the impression that Theresa was taking a nap in her cabin. We talked at first about the colored statues adorning the modern classic buildings on the main business street of Athens. Both of us found them incongruous. Then Birrel let fall a remark which seemed intended to reopen the personal discussion of the day before. He said that the basic art was that of simple communication between man and man, and all the so-called "arts" were deflections of it. Before he had finished the sentence Theresa was upon us. She broke in with: "Do you know the most glorious thing I've seen on our tour?"

"No," I answered.

"The Staglieno, in Genoa. Have you been there?"

"Yes."

"All those thousands and thousands of statues! So beautiful! So full of reverence!"

The Staglieno is a famous cemetery in which is concentrated all that is most crushing in the esthetic ideals of the Italian middle class. Plump angels which are nothing but smooth and transfigured grocers lean yearning in hordes over babies and simpering mothers; fathers with voluminous side-burns strike heroic poses; heavy virgins cling gently to crosses; it is treacle in marble, family albums of the 'eighties in three dimensions and multiplied ad infinitum.

"Theodore doesn't care for them," gushed Theresa. "Our tastes are so different. Don't you think it's rather fine that we should be able to disagree so fundamentally without quarreling over it?"

"Rather fine!" The phrase stuck out in her speech, one of the cant expressions of cultured discussions.

The second night out from Athens we passed through the Straits of Messina. At about ten o'clock I was standing alone at the starboard rail. On the right Reggio was strung out in countless constellations above the invisible shoreline, and opposite, on the Sicilian side, another town (Messina, I think) signalled back with a thousand golden clusters. Far to the front, and somewhat to the left of the aperture between the dark shores, Stromboli was just visible, a grim cone lifted out of the sea, crowned with an aureole of cloud produced by the glow of the crater. On the third class deck, just below ours, a group of Italian boys and girls sat with mandolins and guitars. They were singing a bawdy and blasphemous song with a pleasant melody, *Padre Formica! Padre Formica! Cosa volete? Cosa volete?* and the sweet sound of their voices and of the instruments mingled with the sound of the water rushing past the ship. I was in a kind of trance, and thinking

of nothing, when Theresa joined me. She said, in a low, thrilled voice: "Isn't it all utterly, utterly lovely?"

I nodded.

"I could look at this for hours and hours. It's something in me. I wonder if you can understand it. I've always wanted to travel. Ever since I was a little girl."

"I'm very fond of travel, too," I said.

"Ah! It's easy for you to talk. You're a writer. You can go wherever you like. But if you were tied down, it would be different, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," I answered, "I can see that."

"Do you know this is our first trip abroad? It's like our honeymoon. We couldn't afford it when we got married. We couldn't even afford it when Theodore got his first sabbatical. We had to wait for the second, and save and save and save. God knows if we'll ever be able to do it again, on Theodore's salary."

"It is a shame," I said. "The finest work is so often the most poorly paid."

"A shame?" she cried, becoming very lively. "Yes. But whose fault do you think it is? There are plenty of fat salaries going at the university, believe you me. But why is Theodore nothing but a lecturer — not even an assistant professor, mind you — after fourteen years work at the same university?"

How like the old days!

"He's not very worldly," I murmured.

"Oh, that's a wonderful way of saying it, I know." She was all pent up. It must have been quite a time since she had unburdened her heart. She put her hand on my arm and said, impulsively: "Listen! I want to have a little talk with you. Let's go on the upper deck, in a corner, somewhere where he won't find us."

I followed her miserably. We found our way to a dark

corner, and Theresa pulled two deck-chairs together energetically. We sat down and she began.

"I know you admire Theodore, and I know he thinks the world of you. I wouldn't be talking like this to you otherwise, would I?"

I made a vague noise in my throat, but she did not wait for a coherent answer. I remembered now her practice of interspersing her monologues with questions which were intended only to test the attention of the listener, not to elicit a reply.

"There's something wrong with him, isn't there? Don't pretend, out of loyalty. Everybody knows there's something wrong with him. I knew it when I married him, and I hoped to be able to change him. God knows I've tried, as every wife should. It was my duty. But I'm beaten. Do you know what that means?"

I made the same noise as before.

"I'm beaten. He needs something more than my help. He needs a psychoanalyst. Yes! That's the conclusion I've reached. And that's why I'm talking to you."

I started. I was beginning to get afraid of the conversation.

"You remember Gussart," she said, eagerly, "who used to teach psychology at the university, and then went and set up in private practice in New York?"

"He's not a psychoanalyst," I answered. "He's an individual psychologist."

"Oh, let's not quibble about that. The man's a real wonder. I'll tell you what he did for my younger sister, Janet. She's married to a very decent boy by the name of Tom Sutcliffe, who has quite an important position with the Breton Engineering Company in New York. Until about three years ago they were very, very happy, I mean Tom and Janet. And then they passed through

the most terrible crisis. Everybody thought they were going to break up. It wasn't money. Tom didn't lose his job. Only the president of the company shifted Tom to the personnel department, where he had to hire and fire men, and Tom said he couldn't stand it. I mean he couldn't face the men he had to fire. He used to come home evenings black and miserable. He said he couldn't sit there drawing a big salary for acting as the company's executioner. Those were his exact words. He wanted to go and be a bricklayer or something. He carried on dreadfully. And Janet is such a sensitive girl — I can't tell you. He made her days and nights miserable. She even had to come and live with me for two months. Of course in a way I can understand Tom, but after all Janet was right, though she didn't face it in the right way. So I told her to send Tom to Gussart — and she did. And I want to tell you you'd be amazed, simply amazed — I'm not exaggerating — how Gussart set Tom on his feet again. I don't know what kind of complex he found in Tom; but whatever it was, he found it, and got it out, that's all. He taught Tom how to fire a man without getting excited and panicky. That's what Tom always complained about: it made him panicky. Gussart made Tom see — this *was* really wonderful — that you could do a man a service by firing him the right way, so as not to discourage him, I mean like firing him soullessly, not caring how he took it. You see what I mean?"

I muttered something to myself.

"Exactly. He taught Tom to take a pride in his work, to face it creatively. And I can't tell you what a difference it made. Tom became more and more cheerful. He would come home and tell Janet how he'd handled this case, and that case — and difficult cases too, men who'd worked for the firm ten or fifteen years. Don't you think

it's marvelous, what psychoanalysis can help to do?"

The cooing, panting voice let up for a minute. I said: "Yes, I've heard of some extraordinary cases."

"You see! There you are. I've got only one hope now, and that's to send Theodore to a man like Gussart, so that he can get rid of his inferiority complex. That's all it really is! That's why he doesn't stand up for his rights, and lets everyone bully him and fool him and cheat him."

She was panting more heavily, and leaning over.

"The things they do to him, the insults, the way they pass him over and ignore him. And when I tell him to stand up and fight like a man, he only smiles. Sometimes I think I'll go mad. Don't you think a woman must have a great love for a man to stick to him through all that? Don't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"But of course when I spoke about his going to Gussart, he said, No. He doesn't think he ought to. He says, 'I know I've got many faults, but I don't think I ought to go to Gussart.' Then I tell him, of course, that nobody ever wants to go to a psychoanalyst. They all fight against it. They want to stay sick, because deep down they really like to be that way, no matter how it makes others suffer. I've begged him on my knees. I've threatened to leave him — though I know I couldn't do that. And he knows it, too. Oh yes, he knows it, and he takes advantage of it. Don't you think so?"

There was a queer, sick feeling rising in me, a hot and cold feeling of approaching nausea. I wanted to get away. I said: "It's very hard for me to judge. It's so many years . . ."

"But I want you to help me," she begged, coming so close that her breath was on my face. "I want you to try

and persuade him. Only of course he mustn't know that I asked you. That would spoil everything. But he won't suspect, if you go about it the right way. I mean you could begin by asking him about his work, and how much he earns now, and pretend to be surprised that such a gifted man isn't a professor yet, and then — "

"No," I said, in a strangled voice, "I'd rather not."

"I wonder if you know what this means to me," she pleaded.

"No, no, I won't do it," I said, harshly.

"Friends are such cowards," she cried. "All they think of is how to *seem* to be nice, instead of how to help you."

"I'm sorry," I said.

The tone of my voice convinced her that it was useless to persist. She rose from her chair, and when I too had risen she said, "Now I suppose you'll go and repeat everything to Theodore."

"Certainly not!" I exclaimed, horrified.

"That's what they all say," she flung back, bitterly.

After this incident there was no hope left of a quiet, uninterrupted talk with Birrel. The prospect, or lack of it, depressed me; first on general grounds, because my old love for him had returned like a tidal wave, and I wanted to tell him that I knew where I had gone wrong; I wanted to hear from him, also, what I ought to do. Second, I had been teased, and even stirred, by his curious remark about something that he had never managed to put across to me, something that he was destined — so he felt — to make me understand, he knew not exactly why or how. But there was less than a day between Regio and Naples; in Naples the Birrels were to spend forty-eight hours, then catch one of the large Italian liners to New York. Theresa was not likely to relax her vigilance during this brief period.

So it turned out. I could have both of them together, but neither of them separately. Still I hung on. We arrived at Naples in the midst of a sirocco. The undistinguished streets were grey with dust in the thick, blurred sunlight. I had no appetite for sightseeing. We went up, on my advice, to a little hotel just below the San Martino monastery. Thence, at least, we had the view of the bay, and of Vesuvius with her sister hill opposite, and when we sat on the balcony an occasional gust of wind, soon discouraged, brought an illusion of momentary coolness.

The Birrels were out a good deal more than I. Theodore was not affected by the heat; Theresa insisted that, heat or no heat, she had to get everything out of her trip. They had seen Genoa, Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome and Brindisi on the outward journey; they had left Naples, Capri and Pompeii for the return journey. On the second day they left early, and we arranged to meet in Pompeii at three o'clock. I told Theodore (who spoke a passable Italian) to take the trolley to the railroad station, whence it was a short ride to Pompeii. The conducted tour — if there was one that day — was too expensive for them; besides, it was not what Theodore wanted. I explained very carefully that they were to meet me in the little restaurant at the side of the station, in front of the gate opening into Pompeii.

I have been in Naples five or six times, and I have never failed to visit Pompeii. It pleases me to think that I know its streets and principal buildings at least as well as those of New York, London and Paris; and I have often thought with amusement of making an appointment there — it would have to be with some charming woman — say at the corner of Nola and Vico streets. Yet the exhumed city itself, or the memory of it, does not fill me with pleasant thoughts. I am drawn to it rather

by a species of depression looking for the outlet of a symbol; and that depression has nothing to do with our usual graveyard reflections on mortality, futility, the brevity of the mortal span and the rest of it.

When I got to the appointed place, shortly after three, the Birrels were not there. I sat down at a table. The restaurant is small, ugly, shabby and ill-furnished. The table-cloths are spotty and threadbare. You ask for something to eat or drink, and the moment you sit down two "musicians" materialise from somewhere, even if the place is practically deserted, and break into a duet, accompanying themselves on mandolin and guitar. They sing, without the slightest interest, *Santa Lucia*, *There Are Smiles that Make You Happy*, *Mama Mia*, and similar pieces, two wretched, ragged, undersized, unshaven *lazzaroni*. After fifteen minutes of this unutterably depressing nagging they put out their hands for tips.

It is always so. It was so on that stifling afternoon, when I was the only customer in the restaurant. I had not the energy to chase them away. I looked out of the dirty window-panes and felt my heart sinking lower and lower. Then, at half past three, I decided that the Birrels had lost their way, or changed their minds, and I went out of the restaurant into the ruins.

So frightful was the heat that I did not encounter even a guide; no, not even a peddler of photographic reproductions of obscene Pompeian frescos. I wandered slowly down the Via Marina into the Strada dell'Abondanza, with the sun burning my back. Then I turned left, retraced my way by the Strada di Nola, and went along by the Road of Tombs which leads to Herculaneum. Tombs in Pompeii — really the last word in superfluous emphasis. The grass-covered hills on my left, hiding unexcavated ruins, were not less suggestive of death than

the alley through which I was walking. Yet it was not death that lay so heavily on my spirits, not the thought of the vanity of all human effort. This sickness and wretchedness of the heart, which always assailed me in Pompeii, was connected with my hatred of Roman civilisation, its immense brutality and ruthlessness, its crassness and furious materialism.

Sometimes I have been among ruins, or in graveyards, where I have conjured up (wrongly, perhaps, but that does not matter) vague pictures of a kindly, gentle life which was once and is no more. Then, instead of depression, I have experienced a feeling of sweetness, of gratitude and even of encouragement. How heartening to think of some gracious, generous episode in the biologic history of the planet! Even if it never returns, it was worth while! Though this earth will at last fall into the sun, though for the rest of time there will be nothing but a blind rushing to and fro of lifeless masses in black, immeasurable space, it will somehow have meant something that, in a certain corner, at a certain, unrecallable moment, there blossomed love and the happiness which springs from love.

But in Pompeii I recalled always that purse-proud and upright patrician, Cato the elder, who used to turn an honest penny by selling his old, decrepit slaves; I recalled the monstrous destruction of an entire civilisation, the Carthaginian; I recalled the brutal property laws, the slavery and the gladiatorial shows. It was not the memory of individual maniacs, like Nero or Elagabalus, that sickened me, just as I could not find relief in the thought of such pure figures as Marcus Aurelius and Pertinax: it was the entirety of that phenomenon subsumed under the name of Rome, from the early days of harsh, self-righteous and rapacious puritanism to the

latter days of parasitism and perversion: that heartlessness and ambition, that lust for power, that hunger for triumphant experience which made such an impression on the drivelling genius of Nietzsche. No thought for the weak, no patience with the unhappiness of the incompetent, no concession to helplessness: only an immense, organised jungle, out of which rose, as the "best" spiritual product, a proud, cold, loveless system of ethics.

This it was that oppressed me as I plodded dully from street to street, encountering no one. It seemed to me, also, that the world had gone forward very little since that day when Vesuvius sent down its torrents of lava on the city, and one horrified inhabitant, before he fled or died, had scribbled on a wall the words "Sodoma! Gomora!" He had had time, in that awful moment, to remember an earlier world doomed like his own; and I thought now of my world, also doomed, perhaps, but to a cataclysm of our own making. For the world was becoming Romanised! And there was no escape! We were trapped in evil, we were compelled to confirm evil and contribute to it. And even those who spoke of making the world "a better place to live in" were harsh and masterful, diminishing on every hand the amount of forbearance and forgiveness current among the human species.

It was getting late, and the gates of Pompeii would soon close. Tired and despondent, I began to make my way back. The sun was already over the Tyrrhenean sea, and Vesuvius glowed behind me as I came down the Via del Labirintu, dragging my feet along the smooth, wide cobblestones. Then, as I passed along the House of the Faun, I caught sight of two living figures, as motionless as the nymph standing at the center of the empty basin in the courtyard. It was the Birrels. They were seated in the

shade. Theresa was leaning against the wall, asleep. Her hat was on one side. Her face, relaxed, was like that of a sick, unhappy child, which had for a moment achieved a little self-forgetfulness. Theodore sat at the edge of the pavement, half turned toward Theresa. On his face there was a look of such peculiar, piercing sweetness that I stopped dead, and involuntarily put my hand up to my heart. So I stood for a moment, frightened by something I could not understand. Then, becoming aware of my presence, he looked up and lifted a finger to his lips to bid me be silent.

The Meaning of Modern Architecture

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ARCHITECTURE is a social art, and every architectural movement has a social origin. Life, today, differs radically even from that of a hundred years ago, and it is the great change in the fundamental characteristics of our lives that is necessitating a new form of shelter. Life today is mobile, swift, dynamic. We move freely and quickly from place to place, office to home, city to suburb. Activities crowd our days, and time is weighed as never before.

On the architect has fallen the problem of so constructing buildings and houses (and even cities) that all movement is smooth and quick and economical of time and energy. Order is the order of the day. For our massed activities cannot be carried on in disorder. This necessity is the root of modern architecture, as functional order is its very essence. And modern architecture has come to look differently from all previous forms, because it is as different as the life it is designed for.

The forces that changed society had their origin in the industrial revolution. Transforming the nature of production and distribution transformed society. So modern architecture has been made possible by the development of modern industry. New materials, methods and technique not only enlarged the possibilities of building, but fundamentally changed its character. Steel and concrete, increasing strength, opened new structural vistas. They gave us freedom of ground plan, and independence from supporting wall. The whole building bulk was loosened and lightened. Space, formerly so firmly inclosed, could now be treated as something free. Walls, no longer