

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PROSE OF SMALL THINGS

THERE can be no doubt that in spite of what is called the "tyranny of fiction" the novel is slowly dying, and changing shape. There will be some new form of novel developed, no doubt, but it must be something totally different from the fiction which has been tyrannizing over literature for nearly a hundred years. Also poetry is changing; and the change is marked here, much more than it is in fiction, by a period of comparative silence.

Our business to-day is chiefly with prose; but some of the remarks which I shall have to make will also apply to poetry. A branch of literature dies only when the subject has been exhausted—at least this is the rule under natural conditions. What subjects have been exhausted in English literature to such a degree that further treatment of them has become impossible, or seemingly impossible? It is an interesting question, and will repay attention.

First of all we should remember that literature has its fashions, like everything else. Some fashions live but for a season, just like some particular fashion in dress. But there are other fashions or habits which last for very long periods,—just as the custom of wearing silk or wool, irrespective of the shape of the garments, may last for hundreds of years or even longer. We are apt, on account of the length of time during which certain literary customs last, to imagine them much more natural and indispensable than they really are. The changes now likely to take place in English literature are not changes in the form of the garment, so much as changes in the material of which the garment is to be made. But so long has this material been

used that many of us have been accustomed to think of the substance as literature itself, and as indispensable to literary creation.

To illustrate better what I mean let me ask you to think for a moment about what has most strongly impressed you as making a great difference between Western literatures generally and your own. You will understand at once that I am not speaking of form. When you read English poetry or fiction, French poetry or fiction, German poetry or fiction, and I might say drama as well, the impression you receive has a certain strangeness, a certain tone in it particularly foreign; and in every case or nearly every case this tone is about the same. Am I not right in suggesting that the sense of strangeness which you receive from foreign literature is particularly owing to the way in which the subject of sex-relations is treated in all literature of the West? Love has been the dominant subject throughout Western literature for hundreds of years, and that is why I think you feel that literature especially foreign to your own habits of thinking and feeling.

But the very fact that you do so find this difference, ought to have suggested to you that, after all, there must be something unnatural, artificial, in this passionate element of Western verse. Human character and human feeling are not essentially different on opposite sides of the world. The fundamental sentiments of society are everywhere pretty nearly the same, because they are based upon very nearly the same kinds of moral and social experience. If the descendant of one civilization finds something extremely different in the thinking and acting of the descendant of another civilization, he has a right to suppose that the difference is really a difference of custom. And customs must change just like fashions.

Fifty years ago — no, even twenty-five years ago — it would have been considered almost absurd to say that the subject of love in European literature was only a passing thing, a fashion, a custom assuredly destined to give place

to some other kind of material. Scholars and sociologists would have cried out in astonishment, and talked about the literatures of Greece and Rome, as testifying to the contrary. Even now there are many people who imagine that love must be eternally the theme of literature. But the greater thinkers, the men of to-day who can see, do not hesitate to declare that it is passing away. It was only a very, very old fashion.

Indeed, if you think about the history of English literature as it is now understood—and that is to say, about the history of European literature in general—you will find that the subject of love has not always been the dominant note, by any means. The earliest literature had very little to do with the subject at all; the old Anglo-Saxon poetry and prose, for example, dealt chiefly with heroic and sacred subjects. The Anglo-Norman literature touched the matter very sparingly indeed; and the great epic of the French conquerors, the *Song of Roland*, is remarkable for the fact that there are scarcely five lines in it with regard to the fair sex. But one incident of a tender character is mentioned—the death of the betrothed of Roland when she hears of the hero's fate. It was not until the time of the mediæval romances that the subject of love began to blossom and grow in European literature—so that, after all, the fashion is only some hundreds of years old. When the erotic literature began in earnest with the great singing period of Elizabeth, the inspiration was chiefly taken from the Latin and the Greek poets; it was not of the modern races at all, but was a renaissance from the past. What we call the Renaissance feeling accounted very much for the erotic literature between the Elizabethan period and the Classical period—the eighteenth century 'Augustan Age,' when the subject was considerably chilled in treatment by a new sense of the importance of restraint. But this tendency to restraint soon yielded before the charm of the freshly invented novel, and from the days of Richardson to our own, the dominant subject in English literature again became love. You see that

throughout the past it was not always the dominant note by any means. It was a fashion—and it is now passing away.

As a matter of fact the subject is entirely exhausted, all through Europe. Such branches of erotic literature as could not be exhausted in England, owing to the particular character of the race, have been entirely exhausted in France, in Italy, and elsewhere. The world has become tired of love-stories and tired of love-poetry. The story-tellers and the poets of the future will have to find other and higher subjects.

But what subjects? Almost every subject has been exhausted in fiction. No mortal man could now invent a new plot, or tell a story that has not been told before. It is true that every year hundreds of novels are published, but all of them are but repetitions of what has been told before. The only thing that the writer now can do is to make recombinations with old material; and even the possibility of such combinations has now become almost exhausted.

The men most competent to make a prediction do not seem to be inclined to predict what is going to happen. Professor Saintsbury frankly says he does not know, but he has faith in the genius of the English race and language to produce something new. Professor Dowden also says that he does not know, but he thinks there is going to be a new literature and that philosophy will have much to do with it. Professor Gosse is the only one who speaks out boldly. He thinks that the novel will become impossible except by the method of Zola, which consists in describing within a single volume some whole branch of industry, art or commerce. But the method of Zola could be adopted only by some man of extraordinary working strength, as well as genius, and even such subjects as Zola's method deals with must eventually become exhausted. There is the psychological novel; but the example of George Meredith has shown that it has no chance of ever becoming popular. Fiction in the old sense is probably doomed, or will be restricted to the short

story. As for poetry, that will leave the subject of love almost alone, and will chiefly interest itself with the higher emotional life. In other words, we are to have a new psychological poetry. These views of Mr. Gosse are very interesting, but I cannot take the time to talk about his arguments in favour of them. I am only anxious that you should recognize the opinion of the great critics in regard to this probability—first, that love will not be the subject of the future prose or the future poetry, and secondly, that the higher emotional life will almost certainly take the place formerly given to the passional life.

It may seem like the waste of a great many words to tell all this about what is still supposititious. But if any of you hope to make literature your profession, it is above all things necessary that you should be prepared to follow the tendency of the age. Any man of letters who strives against the natural current of change will almost certainly be wrecked in consequence. Any book produced, no matter how well written, which can be classed with the productions of a dead school by its thought and feeling, will soon be forgotten. Moreover, in your private reading it is very, very essential to read in modern directions. Indeed, among many great educators of to-day it is a matter for regret that so much attention is given exclusively to the literature of past centuries, because that literature in sentiment and imagination is foreign to our own time, notwithstanding the beauty of its expression.

In future prose, two fields are certainly sure to find much cultivation—the field of the essay, and the field of the sketch. You are aware that during the nineteenth century the essay and the sketch have been much less cultivated in England than in France; and the reason is that writers of essays and sketches could not possibly compete with the writers of novels. The novel practically crushed the essay. It was as if an immense mass of rocks had been thrown down upon a grassy field; in order that the grass and flowers could bloom again, it was necessary that the pressure should

be removed. And it is likely to be removed very soon. The more speedily the novel decays, the more the essay and the sketch will come again into blossom and favour. Slight as such literature may seem to the superficial eye, it is really far more durable and much more valuable than fiction, in the majority of cases. A single fine essay may live for thousands of years—witness the little essays by Cicero, now translated into all languages, and studied everywhere for their beauty of expression and thought.

As for the sketch, I think it has a very great future; even now it is able to struggle a little against a novel. By the word sketch I mean any brief study in prose which is either an actual picture of life as seen with the eyes, or of life as felt with the mind. You know that the word strictly means a picture lightly and quickly drawn. A sketch may be a little story, providing it keeps within the world of fact and sincere feeling. It may take the form of a dialogue between two persons, providing that the conversation recorded makes for us a complete dramatic impression. It might be a prose-monologue, inspired by the experience of some country or town. It might be only a record of something seen, but so well seen that, when recorded, it is like a water-colour. In short, the sketch may take a hundred forms, a thousand forms, and it offers the widest possible range for the expression of every literary faculty. You may exercise your utmost power in reflection, in description, or in emotional expression, within the limits of the sketch. Of course the sketch ought to be short; but the charm of the form is that there is no rule about how short. You may make a sketch of only fifty lines, or you can make a sketch ten or twelve pages long. I do not think that a purely literary sketch ought to represent in print more than from ten to sixteen pages. But there is no rule.

There is something more to say about the importance to you of studying this branch of literature, of exercising yourself in the production of it. Remember that we are living in a very busy age, in which the opportunity for leisurely

literary work can come to but few. No matter how rich a man may be, the new exigencies of social existence will not allow him to enjoy the patient dreamy life of the past. In a century full of hurry, where every man is expected to do more than three men would have been asked to do some fifty years ago, it is much more easy and profitable to attempt brief forms of literature than long ones. Neither will the writers of a future generation have any reason to fear the competition between short and lengthy works of literary art, for the great public, no less than the literary classes, will certainly become tired of lengthy productions; their preference will be given to works of small compass which can be read in intervals of leisure.

I have said so much about the sketch for two reasons. One is that, unlike the essay, its value does not necessarily depend upon scholarship or philosophical capacity. The other reason is that it happens to be one of those few forms of literature in which Japan can hold her own with Western countries. Judged by recent translations, the old Japanese sketch, as I should call it, might be very favourably compared with the same class of work in England and France, and not suffer much by comparison. And yet the Japanese language, the written language, was at that time far inferior to Western languages as a medium of expression. The fact is that the literature of the sketch depends for its merit a great deal upon what has nothing to do with ornate style; it depends upon good thinking and sincere feeling. Critics have said that neither Japanese drama nor Japanese fiction can compare with Western fiction and drama. Whether they are right or wrong I leave you to judge. But if any critic should say that the Japanese sketch cannot compare with the same kind of literature abroad, he would prove himself incompetent. This kind of literature seems to be exactly suited to the genius of the language as well as to the genius of the national character; and in an age when the sketch is again likely to make for itself a great place in European literature, it would be well to give all

possible attention to its cultivation in Japanese literature.

Of course I need not further insist upon the difference between the sketch—which always should be something of a picture—and the essay, which requires exact scholarship and is rather an argument or analysis than anything else. But since a sketch may at times be narrative, it is quite necessary that you should be able to distinguish between a sketch and an anecdote, which is also narrative. The anecdote proper is simply the record of an incident, without any emotional or artistic detail. This kind of composition lends itself to humour, especially, and therefore we find that a great proportion of what we call anecdotes in English literature are of the humorous kind. It does not require any psychological art or descriptive power to tell a short funny story. Such a story ordinarily is not a sketch. But in those rare cases where a humorous story is told from the psychological point of view, so as to make the reader share all the emotions of the experience, then the narrative of incident may rise to the dignity of the sketch. A good example is furnished by the late English poet, Frederick Locker, whose prose is scarcely less delicate than his verse, and very much the same in tone. He has told us about a little experience of his, which we must call a sketch because it is very much more than an anecdote. It is simply his own account of a blunder which he made in the house of an aristocratic friend, by upsetting a bottle of ink upon a magnificent carpet. You see the happening is nothing at all in itself; but the way in which it is told, the way in which the feelings of the writer are conveyed to the reader, is admirable. I cannot quote it all, nor would you readily understand some of the allusions to English customs. But a few extracts will show you what I mean. He first describes his reception at the house of his friends, by the maidservant; for the friends were not at home. He introduces us to the servant:*

“This hand-maid was past her giddy youth, but had

* Frederick Locker, *Patchwork*, pp. 47–52, “My Guardian Angel.”

not nearly arrived at middle age. Some people might have called her comely, and some attractive; *I* found her anything but cordial; in fact, she had a slightly chilling manner, as if she was not immensely pleased to see me, and would not break her heart if she never saw me again. However, in I walked, and was taken to a drawing-room."

This is only light fun; but we understand from it exactly the somewhat hard character of the girl and the uncomfortable feelings of the visitor. The author goes on to describe the room in a few bright sentences, each of which is a suggestive drawing. The visitor decides then to pass his waiting time in writing some poetry; and he looks for an inkstand. At last he finds one—an immense glass inkstand—of which he draws a picture for us. As he tries to lift up the inkstand by the top, the upper part breaks away from the lower part, and over the magnificent carpet pours the ink. And now the visitor, author of this awful mischief, finds himself obliged to be very, very humble to that servant-girl whom at first he spoke of so scornfully:

"Can you conceive my feelings? I spun around the room in an agony. I tore at the bell, then at the other bell, then at both the bells, then I dashed into the library and rang the bells there, and then back again to the drawing-room. The maid who had admitted me, came up almost immediately, looking as calm as possible, and when she saw the mischief, *she seemed, all at once, to rise to the gravity of the occasion.* She did not say a word—she did not even look dismayed—but, in answer to my frenzied appeal, she smiled and vanished. In the twinkling of an eye,* however, she was back again with hot water, soap, sponge, &c., and was soon mopping up the copious stains with a damp flannel, kneeling, and looking beautiful as she knelt.

"Then did I throw myself into a chair, exhausted with excitement, and, I may say agony of mind, and I exclaimed† to myself, 'Good heavens, if the blessed creature does really help me in this frightful emergency, I will give her a

* † Hearn's emendations for *In the twinkling of a bed-post*, and *I said*.

sovereign. It will be cheap at a sovereign; yes, she shall have 20 s.' ”

How well this is all told—the sudden respect which the visitor feels, in the moment of his humiliation, for the somewhat hard girl who alone can help him. And the first impulse which he has is of course to make her a handsome present. One pound, or ten yen, is a big present for a servant-girl. But we are only at the beginning of the psychological part of the story. As the girl sponges, gradually the stains upon the carpet disappear. It is a labour of twenty minutes, but it is successful. At last the stains entirely disappear, and the poet says that his Guardian Angel rise to her feet, and asks him with a quiet smile, as if it were all the most natural thing in the world, “if I should like to have a cup of tea.” So the agony is over. But the gratitude is not now quite so strong as at first. He now thinks that he must certainly give her fifteen shillings.

Presently his friends come back; and of course they tell him how terribly particular they are about their carpet. And he describes all the agitation which their remarks produce in his mind, with admirable humour. But the end of the story is this—

“I forgot to say that I presented my Guardian Angel with a handsome donation of five shillings. And this is the end of a true story.”

There is a fine little study of human nature here; and this study is what raises the narrative far above anecdote. The truth to actual life of the feelings described is unimpeachable. Probably every one of us has had the same waxing and waning of generous impulse—gratitude first impelling us to be too kind, and reason and selfishness combining later on to reduce the promised reward.

There is a comic sketch for you; it is trifling, of course, because the humorous side of things must always be trifling. But a trifling subject does not necessarily mean a trifling sketch. A philosopher can write about a broom-stick, and a really artistic sketch-writer can deal with almost any sub-

ject. One of the best sketch-writers, though not the best of modern times, was the great French novelist, Alphonse Daudet. Daudet is chiefly known through his novels; but that is only because it requires more than popular taste to appreciate his delightful little sketches. Now, talking about trifling subjects, what do you think of eating as a subject? Surely that is trifling enough. But a number of Daudet's sketches are all about eating; he made a series of them, each describing the memory relating to some one national dish eaten in a foreign country. I may attempt to indicate the character of the set, by roughly translating to you the sketch entitled "La Bouillabaisse," the name of a famous dish about which the English poet Thackeray wrote a very beautiful meditative poem. Here is an illustration of how two great artistic minds, though very differently constituted, can alike find inspiration in small and commonplace things.

"We were sailing along the Sardinian coast. It was early morning. The rowers were rowing very slowly; and I, leaning over the edge of the boat, looked down into the sea, which was as transparent as a mountain spring, and illuminated by the sun even to the very bottom. Jelly-fish and star-fish were visible among the weeds below. Immense lobsters were resting there motionless as if asleep, with their long horns resting upon the fine sand. And all this was to be seen at a depth of eighteen or twenty feet, in a queer artificial way that made one think of looking into a great aquarium of crystal. At the prow of the boat a fisherman, standing erect, with a long split reed in hand, suddenly made a sign to the rowers—*piano, piano!* (go softly—softly)—and suddenly between the points of his fishing-trident he displayed suspended a beautiful lobster, stretching out his claws in a fit of terror which showed that he was still imperfectly awakened. Beside me another boatman kept throwing his line on the surface of the water, in the wake of the boat, and continually brought up marvellous little fishes, which, in dying, took a thousand different shapes of changing colour. It was like an agony looked a through a prism.

“The fishing was over; we went on shore and climbed amongst the great high grey rocks. Quickly a fire was lighted—a fire that looked so pale in the great light of the sun!—large slices of bread were cut and heaped upon little plates of red earthenware; and there we took our places, seated, around the cooking pot, each with his plate held in readiness, inhaling with delight the odour of the cooking. . . . And was it the landscape—or the earth—or that great horizon of sky and water? I do not know, but I never in my life ate anything better than that lobster Bouillabaisse, and afterwards what a delightful siesta we had upon the sand!—our sleep still full of the rocking sensation of the sea, whose myriad little scale-flashings of light still seemed to be palpitating before our eyes.”

That is all, but it tells you all the feelings of one happy day, and the incidents, and the things heard and smelled and seen; and you cannot forget. That is the sketch in the very best meaning of the word. How short it is, and how bright. And Daudet has written a great many sketches. Perhaps you do not know that one of them, or a series of them, treat of Japanese subjects. In Paris Daudet made the acquaintance of Philipp Franz von Siebold, whose name is well known as a scientific explorer of Japan. Siebold was then trying to interest Napoleon III in the project of a great European commercial company, to be organized for the purpose of trading with Japan. Daudet was very much interested by Siebold, not in the commercial company which he was attempting to form, but in Japanese literature and art, of which scarcely anything was then known. Siebold especially delighted Daudet by stories of the Japanese theatre. “I will give you,” he said to Daudet, “a beautiful Japanese tragedy, called ‘The Blind Emperor’; we shall translate it together, and you will publish it in French, and everybody will be delighted.” Daudet wanted very much to do so. But at that time Siebold was seventy-two years of age, his memory a little weak, and his energies rapidly failing. He kept putting off the fulfilment of his promise,

up to the time when he left Paris for ever; and Daudet actually went to Germany after him, in order to get that Japanese tragedy. He found Siebold; and Siebold had the tragedy all ready, he said, to give him—but he died only the night after. So Daudet never got the tragedy. I wonder if there is any tragedy of that name.* But I was going to tell you that Daudet told his Siebold experiences in a series of delicious little sketches whose value happens to be quite independent of the existence of the tragedy. Perhaps you will not be uninterested in a free translation of the prose, which is touching. Daudet is describing the house of Siebold on the morning of his death.

“People were going in and coming out, looking very sad. One felt that in that little house something had happened, too much of a catastrophe for so small a house to contain, and therefore issuing from it, overflowing from it, like a source of grief. On arriving I heard sobs inside. It was at the end of the little corridor, the room where he was lying—a large room, encumbered and low-lighted like a class-room. I saw there a long table of plain white wood—heaps of books and manuscripts—a glass case containing collections—picture-books bound in embroidered silks; on the wall were hanging Japanese weapons, some prints, several large maps; and in the midst of all this disorder of travel and of study, the Colonel was lying in his bed with his long white beard descending over his dress, and his poor niece kneeling and weeping in a corner. Siebold had died suddenly in the night.

“I left Munich the same evening, not having the courage to intrude upon all that grief merely in order to gratify a literary whim; and that is how it happened that I never knew anything about the marvellous Japanese tragedy except its title, *l'Empereur Aveugle.*’ But since that time we had to see the performance of another tragedy to which that title might very well have been given—a terrible tragedy

* *Imoseyama* by Hanji Chikamatsu. Siebold saw it acted at Osaka, June 12. 1826.

full of blood and tears; and that was not a Japanese tragedy at all."

He is referring to the Franco-Prussian War and the folly of Napoleon III who caused it. It was Napoleon III who was really the blind emperor.

Altogether it may be said that the sketch is particularly French, as a special department of literature, and I think that it ought to become especially Japanese, because the genius of the race is in the direction of the sketch. But at present the best models to study are nearly all French. Daudet is but one of a host. Maupassant is another and a greater — many of his wonderful so-called stories being really sketches, not stories. For example, three of his compositions described three different things which he happened to see while travelling on a train. Incidents of human life thus seen and powerfully described, may have an emotional interest much greater than that of the average story; and yet we must not call them stories. Anatole France, perhaps the greatest French man of letters to-day, and Jules Lemaitre, the greatest living French critic, are both of them admirable sketch-writers, as well as story-tellers. The first great realistic attempt in this direction was probably that of Prosper Mérimée; and Flaubert carried the method to great perfection. I spoke of these men before as story-tellers, not as sketch-writers. The best example of the sketch by Mérimée is the account of the storming of a fort, told by a soldier who was one of the storming party. As a sketch that has never been surpassed. But to-day in France there are published every month hundreds of sketches, and a very considerable number of them are good. In England the novel has been too popular to allow of the same development. But there are good English sketch-writers; and these are particularly noticeable in books of travel—for example, "Eothen," by Kinglake, the historian,—a little book entirely formed of exquisite sketches which will certainly live after Kinglake's historical work has been entirely forgotten.

Of course this book is representative only of the travel-sketch—a kind apart. Now there is one thing to notice about the conservatism of English literary feeling, as compared to the French, in regard to the sketch. In England a volume of sketches will be favourably considered only upon condition that the sketches be consecutive—that they figure in one series of events, or that they all have some other form of interconnection. Thus the little book of travel by Kinglake and the travel-sketches by Stevenson depended much for their popularity upon the fact that they were all upon kindred subjects, and strung together by a train of narrative. This is true even of the older sketch work in England—that of Thackeray; that of the famous Dr. Brown of Edinburgh, who wrote the delicious book about the feelings and thoughts of a little girl; that of the eighteenth century sketch-writers of the school of Addison and Steele. But it is quite different with French work. The French artist of to-day can make a volume of sketches no one of which has the least relation to the other; and his work is never criticized upon that score. All that is insisted upon is the quality of the production; each sketch should be a complete work of art in itself. This being the case, it is of no more importance whether the sketches be related to each other than whether the paintings in a picture gallery happen all to be on the same subject. This freedom will certainly be enjoyed later on by men of letters—that is the tendency. But there is still a great deal of foolish conservatism, and writers like Kipling, who attempt to make sketches the material of their books, are judged to have broken the literary canons unless the sketches have some connection between them.

As I have said before, the various capabilities of the sketch cannot be properly suggested without some illustrative fragments; and I must quote one or two examples more. The humorous sketch, the little sketch of incident, the little sketch of memory—the memory of acquaintanceship or travel—we have noticed. You can easily imagine a

hundred kinds of each. But I have not yet said anything about another kind of sketch which is now likely to come into fashion—the sketch of psychological impressions. It must be interesting, even if scientific; and it may be both. The best usually are. American literature first gave strong examples of work in this particular direction—that is, in English literature proper. But it is significant that Dr. Holmes, the pioneer in it, studied a long time in France, and, though no imitator, he was no doubt much influenced by the best quality of French sketch work. Then again, his training in science—first as a practising physician and afterwards as a professor of anatomy in a medical school—naturally inclined him to the consideration of matter altogether outside of the beaten tracks. Very slight happenings take, in such a mind, an importance which extends far beyond the range of the common mind. And his great book, “The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table,” now known wherever the English language is spoken, entirely consists of little sketches about very ordinary things considered in a very extraordinary way—for example, the mystery of the charm that exists in certain human voices. He hears a child speak, or a woman, and asks himself why the sweetness of the tone pleases so much—and tells us at the same time of memories which the voice awakens in his mind. We all have vague notions about these things, but we seldom try to define them. Indeed, it requires a very great talent to define them to any literary purpose. But listen to this:*

“There are sweet voices among us, we all know, and voices not musical, it may be, to those who hear them for the first time, yet sweeter to us than any we shall hear until we listen to some warbling angel in the overture to that eternity of blissful harmonies we hope to enjoy.—But why should I tell lies? . . . I never heard but two voices in my life that frightened me by their sweetness. . . . Yes, frightened me. They made me feel as if there might be constituted a creature with such a chord in her voice to some string in

* From *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, IX.

another's soul, that, if she but spoke, he would leave all and follow her, though it were into the jaws of Erebus. . . .

"Whose were those two voices that bewitched me so? They both belonged to German women. One was a chamber-maid, not otherwise fascinating. The key of my room at a certain great hotel was missing, and this Teutonic maiden was summoned to give information respecting it. The simple soul was evidently not long from her motherland, and spoke with sweet uncertainty of dialect. But to hear her wonder and lament and suggest with soft, liquid inflections, and low, sad murmurs, in tones as full of serious tenderness for the fate of the lost key as if it had been a child that had strayed from its mother, was so winning, that, had her features and figure been as delicious as her accents, — if she had looked like the marble Clytie, for example, — why, I should have drowned myself."

Why would he have drowned himself? Because, he tells us, in that case he would want to marry her; and if he had married her, it would have been a case of *mésalliance*, according to the rules of society to which he belonged,— and that would have made a great deal of unhappiness for both of them and for their children. And it would therefore have been better for the sake of future generations, as well as his own, that he should have drowned himself. But now let us hear him describe the other voice of another German woman:

"That voice had so much of *woman* in it, — *muliebrity*, as well as *femineity*; — no self-assertion, such as free suffrage introduces into every word and movement; large, vigorous nature, running back to those huge-limbed Germans of Tacitus, but subdued by the reverential training and tuned by the kindly culture of fifty generations." And he goes on to tell us no American woman could possibly have such a beautiful voice, because no American woman has had the cultured ancestors whose influences combined to make the sweetness of that voice. Remember that it is an American who is speaking — but he speaks the truth. He means that

in the voice of this lady there was at once sweetness and a strength that gave the impression of everything at once wifely and womanly, — of everything that is implied in the beautiful German term “mother soul” and of “centuries of habitual obedience and delicacy and desire to please.”

He has one more reminiscence to give us, about the voice of a child; and the experience is a painful one. It is not every doctor who can write of such a memory with such fine feeling.

“Ah, but I must not forget that dear little child I saw and heard in a French hospital. Between two and three years old. Fell out of her chair and snapped both thigh-bones. Lying in bed, patient, gentle. Rough students round her, some in white aprons, looking fearfully business-like; but the child was placid, perfectly still. I spoke to her, and the blessed little creature answered me in a voice of such heavenly sweetness, and with that reedy thrill in it which you have heard in the thrush’s even-song, that I seem to hear it at this moment, while I am writing, so many, many years afterwards. *C’est tout comme un serin*, (It is quite like a canary bird), said the French student at my side.”

He goes on to say that there was an old story to the effect that most human beings were devils, who were born for a respite into the state of men and women, and that considering the wicked side of human nature the story might seem true; but those who have heard certain sweet voices must be assured that all human beings have not been devils—and that some heavenly spirits must have been born among them, as by accident. This is a very pretty example of a little sketch of sensation. The whole book is made of dainty reflections and memories of this sort, interspersed with bits of arguments and conversation and commentary. However, the fact that all the parts are united by the thinnest possible thread of a story certainly helped the book to the great success which it obtained in conservative England.

Yet another kind of sketch work is that which offers us a picture of something very large within a very small space,

like a glimpse of the heavens by night, or the geographical configuration of a whole country. This can be done quite as certainly as it might be done in mosaic, or in very skilful painting, or by a coloured photograph. For example, Ruskin has described the whole of Italy in about half a page. Of course in order to do such a thing as this, complete knowledge of the subject, with all its details, must first be acquired; only then can we know how to make the great lines of the picture quite accurate and to give the proper sense of proportion. See how Ruskin does it. We all have in our minds a vague picture or idea of Italy. This helps us to collect and to define. It was not written originally as a sketch; but it is a sketch quite detached from its context, and altogether complete in itself.

“We are accustomed to hear the south of Italy spoken of as a beautiful country. Its mountain forms are graceful above others, its sea bays exquisite in outline and hue; but it is only beautiful in superficial aspect. In closer detail it is wild and melancholy. Its forests are sombre-leaved, labyrinth-stemmed; the carubbe, the olive, laurel, and ilex, are alike in that strange feverish twisting of their branches, as if in spasms of half human pain:—Avernus forests; one fears to break their boughs, lest they should cry to us from the rents; the rocks they shade are of ashes, or thrice-molten lava; iron sponge whose every pore has been filled with fire. Silent villages, earthquake shaken, without commerce, without industry, without knowledge, without hope, gleam in white ruin from hillside to hillside; far-winding wrecks of immemorial walls surround the dust of cities long forsaken: the mountain streams moan through the cold arches of their foundations, green with weed, and rage over the heaps of their fallen towers. Far above, in thunder-blue serration, stand the eternal edges of the angry Apennine, dark with rolling impendence of volcanic cloud.”*

There is here not merely a suggestion of beauty seen far away and of ghastliness seen near at hand but also

* *Modern Painters*, Vol. V, Pt. IX, Ch. IV, § 12.

suggestions of old mythology, old Greek primal settlements on the Italian coasts, old cataclysms, old decay of wealth and commerce—in short, suggestions about everything characteristic of the modern state of the country. To produce this kind of work one must know imagination does not help us. The sentences each and all represent successive personal experience. From the first example which I gave you to the last there is a range of extraordinary possibility. The very simplest power may here be contrasted with the very greatest. I think we did well to begin with the playful and end with the majestic. All these are possible within the compass of the sketch.

Now I may close with a brief suggestion about a modern tendency in the literature of the sketch. It is not my own; I found it the other day in the work of the greatest sketch-writer at present living—in the work of that wonderful French author who has given an account of what he saw on the way to Peking, after the late war.* He describes a great many things too horrible even to mention in a lecture, and many very touching things, and many strange things; and the general effect of the book is to leave in the reader's mind a very great feeling of regret and sympathy for China. In spite of the weather and the horrors, and difficulties of many kinds, he was able to visit the great memorial temple of Confucius, and to give us wonderful pictures representing every part of it. Now the most impressive thing was a sentence inscribed upon some tablets in one of the rooms there—inscribed from very ancient time; and it was translated to him as signifying these words: "The literature of the Future will be the literature of Pity." Very probably the effect of reading this ancient prophecy was greatly increased by the previous experiences of the writer, who had passed out of the waste of horrors and death, and absence of all pity, out of the plains where dogs were devouring the dead, into that solemn quietude, where the tablet was suspended. I do not know

* That of the Boxers' agitation, 1900.

whether the translation would be questioned by scholars or not. But if the rendering of the characters was correct, that old Chinese prophecy about the future of literature certainly startles us by its truth. That is the tendency of the best thought and the best feeling of this literary age in the West. The literature of the future will be the literature of pity—pity in the old Roman sense, and in the old Greek sense, which did not mean contempt mixed with pity, but pure sympathy with all forms of human suffering. I think that the modern word “humanity” would best express what the Greeks meant by pity. Now the kind of writing which has been the subject of this lecture is especially suited to the Literature of Pity. It is by giving to the world little pictures of life and thought and feeling, joy and sorrow, gladness and gloom, that the average mind can best be awakened to a final sense of what the age most profoundly needs—the sense of unselfish sympathy. And here we may end our lecture on the Sketch.