RICHARD MIDDLETON

THE MAN AND HIS WORK

BY
HENRY SAVAGE

WITH PORTRAITS AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

“ Well I loved, but they who knew
What my laughing heart could be,
What my singing lips could do,
Lie a-dreaming here with me.
I can feel their finger-tips
Stroke the darkness from my face....”
Pagan Epitaph

LONDON
CECIL PALMER
OAKLEY HOUSE, BLOOMSBURY STREET, LONDON, W.C. 1

F I R S T
EDITION
1 9 2 2
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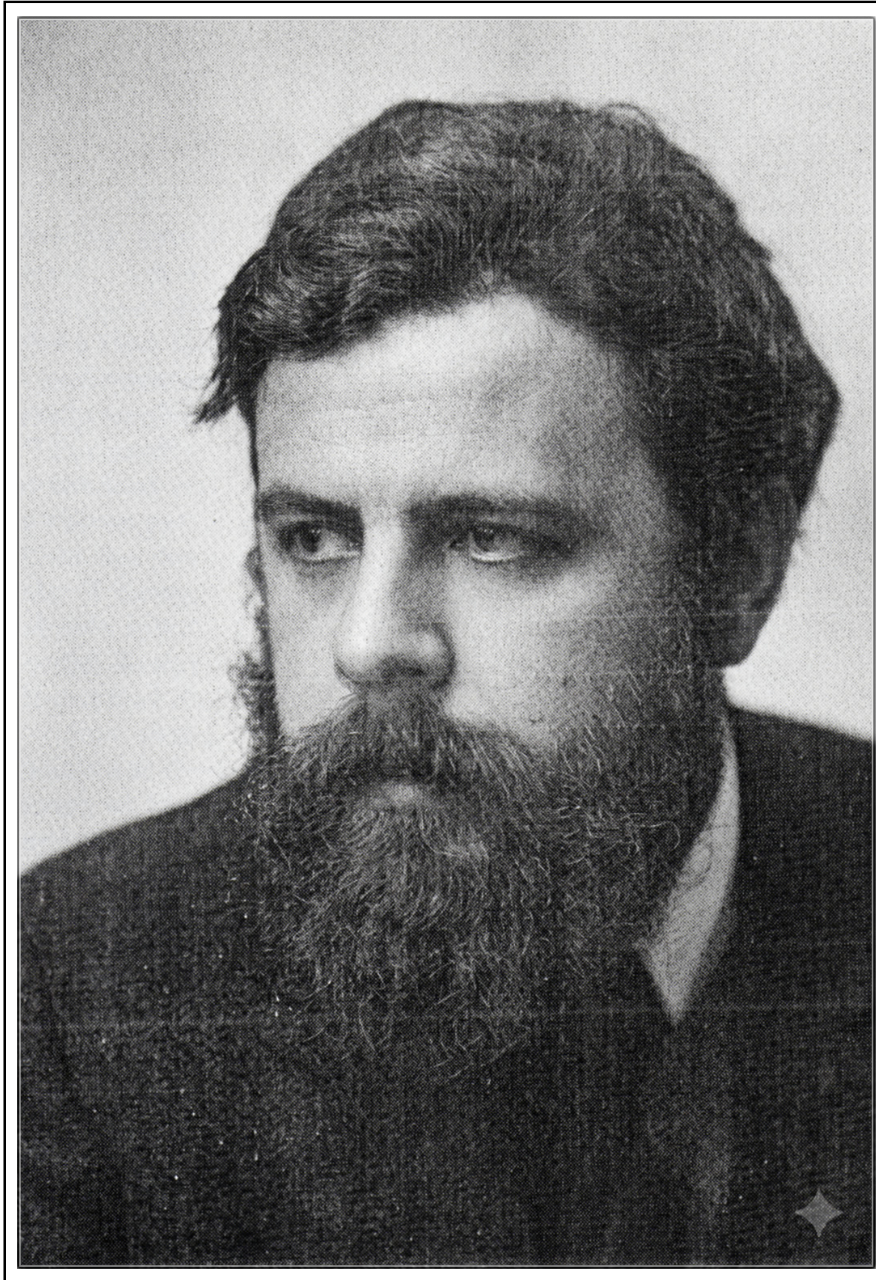

RICHARD MIDDLETON.

Camera Portrait by E.O. Hoppé.

“...He” (Carlyle) “did not fall into the vulgar error of despising hero-worshippers because they are content not to be heroes. Yet as I write it seems to me that the very name ’hero-worshipper’ has been spoilt by sneering lips ; we are asked to believe that they are only weak-minded enthusiasts with a turn for undiscriminating praise, and that they swallow their heroes, as a snake swallows a rabbit, bones and all.

“Personally I think this is a bad way in which to eat rabbits, but the best possible way in which to take a great man. I detest the cheese-paring enthusiasm that accepts the Olympian head and rejects the feet of human clay. Until Frank Harris taught me better I thought Shakespeare’s sonnets were capable of but one probable interpretation ; but I did not wag my head with the moralist Browning and cry, ’The less Shakespeare he !’ To-day I do not find Shakespeare less great because he loved Mary Fitton ; it seems impossible that anyone should. Yet Moore burnt Byron’s autobiography, Ruskin would not write a Life of Turner because of the nature of his relationship with women, Stevenson abandoned an essay on Hazlitt because of the ’Liber Amoris’ — Stevenson whose essay on Burns ’swells to heaven’ ! In the face of such spectacles as these it is surely permissible to pine for the blind generosity of the enthusiast, that incautious fullness of appreciation that lifts great men with their due complement of vices and follies on to a higher plane where the ordinary conventions of human conduct no longer apply.”—*Monologues*,p.224.

PREFACE

A brief Preface is needed to acknowledge indebtedness to three of my friends—Herbert Garland, Louis J. McQuilland and Arthur Machen—all of whom knew Middleton in the flesh, and who have been good enough to advise me in the preparation of this memoir. McQuilland, who read the memoir in proof, tells me I should have dealt more fully with Middleton as a writer of fiction. I have to some small extent remedied the deficiency by making additions to the bibliographical notes. Much with me, in writing the book, was the desire to make more widely known Middleton's excellence as a poet. His prose fantasy, *The Ghost Ship*, is now generally acknowledged to be one of the best short stories in the English language, but it seems to me that he is too much considered as the author of that story and at the expense of his poetry. I hope I have done a little towards arousing a wider interest in Poems and Songs, though very conscious that the expression has fallen short of the dream.

H. S.

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RICHARD MIDDLETON

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY DAYS

RICHARD BARHAM MIDDLETON was born of English parentage at Staines, in Middlesex, on the 28th of October, 1882. In a letter referring to money earned in his early days as a journalist he makes jocose mention of a Scottish ancestry, but whether or no he had Scots blood in his veins is not within my knowledge. While we were acquainted I had not only no inclination to gather facts relating to him, but an excessive contempt for facts in general. This memoir may suffer accordingly, as, again, it may suffer from my having made no effort to obtain information from his family since he died. As to that, however, I must leave others to judge. Middleton himself was no fact-lover. He preferred fancies, such as that he may have descended from an Elizabethan pirate. "I have an ancestor," he says (*Monologues*, p.210), "so runs the dearest of my family traditions, who was hanged as a pirate at Port Royal. How much of that priceless piratical blood the centuries may have transmitted to me I do not know, but if I were his very reincarnation I could hardly hoist the Jolly Roger in an age that may believe in fairies but certainly does not believe in pirates." Fancy apart, his more immediate ancestors, like Stevenson's, were engineers. "My father's firm shuts up for good in a fortnight after going for about 100 years," he writes under date August 16th, 1907. "My great-grandfather founded it. This day will be published a new volume entitled *The Fall of the House of Middleton.*" And he ends jauntily, "but we shall always be true to our Tory traditions."

On his mother's side he was a distant relative of the Rev. Thomas Barham, the author of *The Ingoldsby Legends*, a blood-tie of which he was, proud, but less so, I think, than of the buccaneer legend. Noteworthy also is the fact that, according to his own statement to me, there was, some insanity in the family, an aunt being ,thus afflicted. How far this taint affected his mind, if at all, it would be difficult to determine. He does not seem to have struck any of his acquaintance as being insane, and

certainly he never struck me as being so. Louis J. McQuilland, the poet and critic, who knew him well and has a serene wisdom of his own, in reply to some scurrility published after he died, stated that he was "one of the sanest men I have ever encountered. In character he was reserved, and in judgment accurate and well-balanced." It is safe to say that never at any time in his life, except, perhaps, during his last few days, would a mental specialist have certified him as insane. I dwell upon this point because of the manner of his end. In Brussels, on the 1st of December, 1911, soon after his twenty-ninth birthday, he committed suicide by taking poison.

His childhood, always allowing for his having been an abnormal youngster, as will be seen presently, seems to have been outwardly much akin to that of most children with brothers and sisters and a comfortable home. "A simple up-and-down April existence," he calls it in *The Day before Yesterday*, where appear most of his recollections of the period ; recollections, however, in all probability less of its rain than its sunshine, for, as he tells us :

> It is to be supposed that there are few men and women who do not occasionally look back on the days of their childhood with regret. The responsibilities of age are sometimes so pressing, its duties so irksome, that the most contented mind must travel back with envy to a period when responsibilities were not, and duties were merely the simple rules of a pleasing game, the due keeping of which was sure to entail proportionate reward.
>
> And this being so, and the delights of the Golden Age always being kept in the back of our mind, as a favourable contrast to the present state of things, it is hardly surprising that in course of time the memory of the earlier days of our life is apt to become gilded and resplendent, and very unlike the simple up-and-down April existence that was really ours. The dull, wet days, the lessons and the tears are all forgotten ; it is the, sunshine and the laughter and the play that remain.

Elsewhere, in an unpublished fragment of autobiography, the time is painted in darker colours.

> My own childhood I do not lament, and I hope I shall never have to endure that state of aggrieved helplessness again. I had some good games and some good dreams. But on the whole the atmosphere was charged with ugly mysteries like an Ibsen play, and I was too introspective to be a happy child.

When writing that passage he perhaps had less his boyhood in mind than the earlier period. In any case the distinction is of no great consequence. What may chiefly impress the reader of *The Day before Yesterday* is the extraordinary imagination its youthful hero must have possessed. Most of us who are grown up have presumably forgotten how we thought and felt when we were children.

If we saw

> a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower

we cannot tell what sort of world it was or what sort of heaven. But Middleton could vividly remember his early dreamings. The young brain would people an empty cupboard or send its fortunate possessor voyaging from China to Peru on a drawing-room rug. That "enchanted place which our elders contemptuously called the 'mouse-cupboard,' " a favourite refuge where could be found " solitude and darkness in which to scheme deeds of revenge and actions of a wonderful magnanimity turn by turn," was not long in becoming a smuggler's cave, the haunt, successively, of such heroes as Aladdin, Robinson Crusoe, Ben Gunn and Tom Sawyer, and ultimately—some one having discovered what it really resembled—the cabin of a ship.

> The fact that our cabin lacked portholes and was of an unusual shape did not trouble us. We could hear the water bubbling against the ship's side in a neighbouring cistern, and often enough the wind moaned and whistled. . . . Beneath us the waters chuckled restlessly, and sometimes we heard the feet of the watch overhead, and now and again the clanging of the great bell. In such an hour it was not difficult to picture the luminous tropic seas through which the *Black Margaret* was making her way. The skies of irradiant stars, the desert islands

> like baskets of glowing flowers, and the thousand marvels of the enchanted ocean—we saw them one and all.

The Day Before Yesterday is of the Kenneth Grahame order of books—books such as *Dream Days and The Golden Age*, which have faithfully recaptured the thoughts and feelings' of childhood. Few other modern writers can give such vivid glimpses of their "trailing clouds of glory," though Stevenson, with his *A Child's Garden of Verses*, may be said to be of the company. Their books should be known not only to lovers of *belles-lettres*, but to those "Olympians" Who, as Middleton puts it, "always seemed so sensible and yet could not understand. " And of the three, he, perhaps, is the least sophisticated. He was childlike himself in many ways—one reason why he is so difficult to visualise. "How plainly you must see him, your Villon !" said Pierre Champion, admiringly, to Marcel Schwob, after the latter had devoted years to the study of the erratic French poet; and "See him ? " replied Schwob; "I see but his little finger ! " So is it with me. A fascinating and baffling personality Middleton had, and has been a puzzle to me since I first met him in 1905. Childlike, I said. That is the chief clue to him. "Children," he remarks in one of his essays, "sometimes flatter me by treating me as an equal." Edgar Jepson, another writer who knew him in the flesh, wrote after he died: "I cannot possibly tell the children. We all had a real affection for him, and here he was always at his best." "What struck me about Middleton," says yet another friend, a lady, "was that he always did the nice thing—that and his great sympathy. . . . He never grew up, knew about everything and told you in a baby way." The view has points in common with that of Frank Harris: "There was in him a curious mixture of widest comprehension with a child's acceptance of vice and suffering and abnormalities. I say a child's because it was purely curious and without any tinge of ethical judgment." That Harris's portrait, however, is not too reliable is proved if only by his finding "curious" the mixture to which he alludes. "Shaggy Peter Pan with a briar pipe" that Middleton was—it is McQuilland's phrase, and McQuilland of all his acquaintance has perhaps written the most illuminative account of him—he might have toughly exercised the wits of a Blake or a Swinburne. What he saw of himself in this connection may be gleaned from his own writings.

> In age to wish for youth is full as vain
> As for a youth to turn a child again,

he quotes from Denham in *The Day Before Yesterday* ; and in the same book we find :

> I see the children go trooping by with their calm eyes, not, as is sometimes said, curious*[1], but rather tolerant of life, and I know that for them the universe is merely an aggregate of details, some agreeable and some stupid, while I must needs depress myself by regarding it as a whole. And this is the proved distinction between juvenile and adult philosophies, if we may be allowed to regard a child's very definite point of view as the effect of a philosophy.

Again, in his unpublished *The Autobiography of a Poet*, he says:

> Of all my shadows these are the least substantial; at a touch they fade one into the other and are recreated with a disconcerting interchange of features, so that George will wear Manxie's eyes and Melanie will have Arthur's twisted smile. But nevertheless, through all these whimsical metamorphoses they remain my very loyal and affectionate friends. . . . Looking back on my days I can say that I do not regret a single hour that I have passed in the company of children. It was not that their wayward hands spared my always vulnerable vanity; but they struck without malice, and their blows were as welcome as the rebukes of conscience.

So, as in a glass darkly, certain glimpses of him. Look at his photograph. What may be gathered from that ? The eyes haunt me. Thoughtful eyes they are, proud, sad and watchful. The mouth shows just a little resentment. He has a striking phrase for his mouth in *A Monologue on Love Songs*: "His thick lower lip gleams like a wet cherry between his moustache and his beard." That beard I never quite understood why he grew, so young a man as he was. He had an illness, I believe, at about the time when most men begin to shave. He may have let it grow, partly to *épater le bourgeois*, partly not liking that "thick lower lip." What the photograph does not bring out are the

*[1] This conception of children invites comparison with that of Frank Harris : "I say a child's because it was purely curious."

deep folds which furrowed the massive forehead. They are apparently whitened over. He must have been born with them. A lifetime of thinking would not have made them so deep.

One more quotation may serve to complete this sketch of his childhood:

> One sunny afternoon [he says in an unpublished fragment of MS.] my little sister and I found two long slender poles in the garden, and passed a pleasant hour or two carving the bark in beautiful spiral patterns. When we had finished I realised that we had there two magnificent lances, and that all we lacked was a foeman worthy of our steel. So when one of my brothers came out into the garden, I picked up my lance, and tilted at him gallantly. For some reason or other—perhaps governesses had been scolding him—he was in no mood for romance, so he caught my lance in his hands and broke it across his knee. Lost in my dream of chivalry, I could not recover from my illusion in a moment. I seized my sister's lance, and as my brother stood there with the broken pieces of mine in his hands, I bore at him again. Alas ! it went the same way as my own, and this time he crowned my ignominy by boxing my ears. I retreated to the shrubbery, followed by my sister, and gave way to my passionate sorrow. She tried to comfort me, patting my back with her little hands, but she could not know that my grief was founded on more than the destruction of our lances or a few paltry cuffs. Poor Don Quixote ! How long will the world continue to find the history of your sufferings amusing, how long must we laugh at anyone because he ["thinks," "hopes," both crossed out in MS.] too nobly of mankind ? Since that afternoon it has often been my lot to attack the brutalities of life with the slender weapons of my dreams, and I have always been defeated. Can it be wondered at that at the last I have become a cynic ?

That fragment gives us as memorable a picture, and tells us as much of him, of a brother, and of a loving sister, as any passage from his prose in general. Miss Middleton I remember as goodness itself. Doubtless at many another time besides that recorded she, figuratively speaking, "patted him on his back with her little hands."

RICHARD MIDDLETON AT THE AGE OF 7.

The story of his boyhood is to be found chiefly in *A Drama of Youth* and *The New Boy*, two autobiographical studies in *The Ghost Ship*. He was sent to a day school*[2], there to become more than ever the slave of the ugliness he hated. Farringdon Meat Market, through which he had to pass on his way, seems particularly to have nauseated him:

> Æsthetic butchers made the market hideous with mosaics of the intestines of animals, as if the horrors of suety pavements and bloody sawdust did not suffice. . . . I saw the greasy, red-faced men with their hands and aprons stained with blood . . . the masses of entrails, the heaps of repulsive hides; but most clearly of all I saw an ugly sad little boy with a satchel of books on his back set down in the midst of an enormous and hostile world.

Such unpleasant realism from the pen of, say, Bernard Shaw, who eschews flesh, would create no surprise, but from one who liked nothing better than a rich juicy steak it seems something of an inconsistency. Middleton was no nut-eater. Dreamers with the fond notion that poets live delicately like butterflies would have viewed with mixed feelings the way in which he could attack a good dinner. In Baudelaire's Lettres there is a passage referring to Proudhon which bears a remarkable resemblance to his manner at table:

> Il jasa beaucoup, violemment, amplement . . . et lâchant involontairement, pour ainsi dire, une foule de bons mots. J'observai que ce polémiste mangeait énormmément. . . . *Pour un homme de lettres*, lui dis-je, *vous* mangez étonnement.—*C'est que j'ai de grandes choses à faire*, me répondit-il, avec une telle simplicité que je ne pus diviner s'il parlait sérieusement ou s'il voulait bouffonner.

*[2] I have no exact knowledge of the names of the various schools at which Middleton was educated. In London he seems to have gone both to St. Paul's and Merchant Taylors', the former of which was probably the scene of A Drama of Youth. Among the records in my possession are four certificates. One, dated Mid-summer, 1893, from the College of Preceptors, mentions him as being a pupil at Quernmore House, Bromley, Kent. Some part of his school life he certainly spent at Cranbrook Grammar School. He matriculated as a student in the University of London, and was placed in the first division on July 19th, 1899; and in July, 1900, passed the Oxford and Cambridge Higher Certificate Examination, the subjects including elementary and additional mathematics (trigonometry and dynamics), English, and natural philosophy.

That was Middleton all over. Though not what could be called Gargantuan of appetite, he ate with relish, with gusto. And it may be added, that to a curious inquirer he would have returned just such another reply as that of Proudhon's. But, with mischief twinkling in those fine eyes of his, no question of his simplicity could have arisen.

Forcibly realistic, again, is the description of his life at school:

> The weariness of inventing lies that no one believed to account for my lateness and neglected homework, and the monotonous lessons that held me from my dreams without ever for a single instant capturing my interest—all these things made me ill with repulsion. Worst of all was the society of my cheerful, contented comrades, to avoid which I was compelled to mope in deserted corridors, the prey of a sorrow that could not be enjoyed, a hatred that was in no way stimulating. At the best of times the atmosphere of the place disgusted me. Desks, windows, and floors, and even the grass in the quadrangle, were greasy with London soot, and there was nowhere any clean air to breathe or smell. I hated the gritty asphalt that gave no peace to my feet and cut my knees when my clumsiness made me fall. I hated the long stone corridors whose echoes seemed to me to mock my hesitating footsteps when I passed from one dull class to another. I hated the stuffy malodorous class-rooms, with their whistling gas-jets and noise of inharmonious life. I would have hated the yellow fogs had they not sometimes shortened the hours of my bondage. That five hundred boys shared this horrible environment did not abate my sufferings a jot; for it was clear that they did not find it distasteful, and they therefore became as unsympathetic for me as the smell and noise and rotting stones of the school itself.

He is to be found next at a boarding school, his first introduction to which was marked by an event startlingly unexpected to one whose experiences had developed in him a stubborn hatred of all life outside his beloved dreams. A boy came up to him and broke down his carefully-prepared defences with words of sympathy. "You'll be

all right, you know," the stranger concluded after a few preliminary inquiries: "They're not a bad lot of chaps." And says our astonished Ishmael:

> I think it was the first time in my life a boy had spoken kindly to me. The revulsion nearly brought on a catastrophe, for the tears rose to my eyes and I gazed after him with a swimming head. I had prepared myself to receive blows and insults, but I had no armour with which to oppose the noble weapons of sympathy and good fellowship.

Further surprises of the kind were in store. His grim philosophy was to be pleasantly disturbed and altered. A master and one of the head boys both evinced a sympathetic understanding of his difficulties, the former leading him to see that he was unfortunate rather than criminal, and the latter that it was "a jolly good thing to be different." He began now to take pleasure in certain phases of school life. Football he already liked well enough, and the sensuous beauty of the church services on Sunday and the reading of the Scriptures each night in the school chapel also vastly appealed to him. Incidentally, his last message before death has a very significant quotation from the Psalms. But of that later. The new school-day view of things does not appear to have abated his habit of introspection. With the approach of the holidays we find him speculating upon their disadvantages.

> It seemed to me that a younger brother's portion of freedom would compare but poorly with the measure of intellectual liberty that I had secured for myself at school. My brothers were all very well in their way, but I would be expected to take my place in the background and do what I was told. . . . I should miss my sense of being superior to my environment, and my intensely emotional Sundays would no longer divide time into weeks. The more I thought of it the more I realised that I did not want to go home.
>
> On the last night of the term, when the dormitory had at length become quiet, I considered the whole case dispassionately in my bed. The labour of packing my playbox and writing labels for my luggage had given me a momentary thrill, but for the rest I moved amongst my insurgent comrades with a chilled

> heart. I knew now that I was too greedy of life, that I had always thought of the pleasant side of things when they were no longer within my grasp; but at the same time my discontent was not wholly unreasonable.I had learnt more of myself in three months than I had in all my life before, and from being a nervous, hysterical boy I had arrived at a complete understanding of my emotions, which I studied with an almost adult calmness of mind. I knew that in returning to the society of my healthy, boyish brothers, I was going back to a kind of life for which I was no longer fitted. I had changed, but I had the sense to see that it was a change that would not appeal to them, and that in consequence I would have another and harder battle to fight before I was allowed to go my own way.
>
> I saw further still. I saw that after a month at home I would not want to come back to school, and that I should have to endure another period of despondency. I saw that my whole school life would be punctuated by these violent uprootings*[3], and that the alternatives of term time and holidays would make it impossible for me to change life into a comfortable habit, and that even to the end of my schooldays it would be necessary for me to preserve my new found courage.
>
> As I lay thinking in the dark I was proud of the clarity of my mind, and glad that I had at last outwitted the tears that had made my childhood so unhappy. . . . All that I had to do was to watch myself ceaselessly, and to be able to explain to myself everything that I felt and did. In that way I should always be strong enough to guard my weaknesses from the eyes of the jealous world in which I moved.

Well ! there is the boy depicted largely by himself, and a remarkable picture it must be admitted it is. His years when he had arrived at this “complete understanding of his emotions” and “almost adult calmness of mind” I do not know with exactitude, but should judge, from the record of his various schools already noted, that he was no

*[3] “Do you remember the end of my *New Boy* where he realised that all his life he would be uprooted and flung back and so would find no peace ? It’s awful true of my life. Up and down, up and down. Only when I seem to be going up I am falling, and when I seem to fall I climb into my kingdom of heaven. . . .”—*Letter*, November 5th, 1911.

more than between ten and eleven. Most of the later extracts already given in this chapter are taken from *The Drama of Youth* and *The New Boy*, both of which essays are now to be found in *The Ghost Ship*. He contemplated a book of studies on the same lines as these, but it was never completed. Writing from Brussels under date April 28th, 1911, "The Book," he says,

> is quite simply *The Autobiography of a Young Man*. Sections 1, 2, 3: My childhood compiled from articles already written for different papers. Section 4: *The Drama of Youth*. Section 5: *The New Boy* (half written); and Section 6: *The Choice of a Career*, wholly conceived, will deal with my life and development at school. Section 7: *The Office*, which nobody has done properly before. After that there are a few sections of Blackfriars, Raynes Park, St. Albans, doing the life of an artist from within, and a final section at Brussels, with philosophies on the whole business and a prophecy of my new birth. And of course, there will be a *Preface* !
>
> Here's a book I think I can write, and I mean to take my time over it, and make it as good as *The Drama of Youth*, which is good whatever the damned critics are saying. Two or three at least of the sections should do for Harrison, if he cares to have them, as they will all be more or less complete in themselves, but the artist business done frankly will be great fun anyhow. . . .

The Harrison alluded to was Austin Harrison, of the *English Review*, who published a deal of his work in that periodical. His quarrel with the critics arose out of some disparaging remarks regarding his fine poem, *The Last Serenade*, which had been de-

scribed as "not rising above the level of magazine verse."*4 Exception had also been taken to one or other of the prose pieces. When it came to editing his work it was clear that sections 1, 2 and 3 (the childhood studies) were not so realistic in tone as the others. They were, therefore, made into the separate volume *The Day before Yesterday*. I have not quoted much from this last, because it seems to bear less upon his character than does his realism. But aesthetically considered, there are two passages to mind, both from the one essay, *Children and the Sea*, to detach which may give some impression of its charm and send the reader desirous of further pleasure to the volume itself*5. One reader at least the following has always pleased:

> A child would take a sample of it [the sea] in a bucket, and consider that in all its aspects; and then it would know that the sea is a great many bucketfuls of water, and further that by an odd freak of destiny this water is not fit to drink. Storms and ships and sand-castles and lighthouses and all the Other side-shows would follow later; but in the meantime the child would have seen the sea in a bucket, as it had previously seen the moon in a looking-glass, so would know all about it. The moon is a variable and interesting kind of lamp; the sea is

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*4 This drew the retort On a Critic in one of his note-books:

> " How shall the little breath
> Of man suffice to vex me,
> Having the thought of death
> Eternally to perplex me;
> Knowing my best endeavour
> Shall not endure for ever ?
> " I do but live my days—
> And though my song be lonely
> I need no critic's bays,
> Being a poet, only.
> The dog may eat his vomit,
> I get no sorrow from it."

*5 " Your article, The Magic Pool " [originally published in the *Academy* under Cecil Cowper's editorship and now included in *The Day before Yesterday*] " as I have told Cowper, is simply divine. Why don't you do a book of these things, man ? They would give you a higher reputation than Grahame's and higher than Barrie's. I call for a book, and as soon as the brute public read it they will call for more too. . . . You must write a book of these prose fancies. Why not A Poet's Boyhood or some such title ? You might put that divine poem of the Naked Boy " [*The Bathing Boy: Poems and Songs*] " at the beginning of it. Come man, work ! I want to read more of these things. They are simply beautiful. Harrison complains that you do not send him any stuff. Why don't you ? I have just sent him the Academy with your article. "—*Letter, Frank Harris to R. M.*, February 5th, 1911.

> buckets and buckets and buckets full of water. I think the stars are holes in a sort of black curtain or ceiling, and the sun is a piece of brightness, except at sunset or in a mist, when it is a whole Dutch cheese. The world is streets and fields and the seaside and our house.

Now, is that not delightful ? For myself, I may be wrong, but I see no reason why it should not please in the dim future as now it pleases to day. And take the other passage:

> A seaside child is no creature to be petted and laughed over; it were as easy to pet the tireless waters, and to laugh over the grave of a little cat; children whom one has known very well indeed in town will find new playing fields by the sea into which it is impossible to follow them. Dorothy weighs five stone four pounds at Maida Vale; at Littlehampton the sea wind blows her along like a feather; she is become a wispy, spiritual thing, a faint, fair creature a-dance on light feet that would make a fairy-girl of a poet's dream seem clumsy by comparison. She is nearer to us when she paddles. The warm sand creeping up through her toes, the silver thread of coolness about her legs, these things are within our comprehension though they fall no more within our experience. But when she flings herself along the beach with the wild hair and loose limbs and the song of an innocent Bacchante, when she bids the gold sands heave up and support her body, tired with play, when she stoops to gather diamonds and pearls from the shore made wet and smooth by the retreating waves, she is as far from us and our human qualities as a new-awakened butterfly. There have been sea-washed moments when I should not have been astonished if she had flung out a pair of mother-of-pearl wings and stood in the blue sky, like a child saint in a stained-glass window.

The style, good as it is, is not impeccable, not quite so rhythmical or balanced as it might be, but how moving, how human, is the matter ! I give the two passages because they have impressed themselves upon me, but conscious of an imperfect interpretation and that they may not reveal the best essential qualities of the whole volume. These are likely to be found in essays under titles such as *The Magic Carpet,*

On Going to Bed, On Digging Holes, On Children's Gardens, and the like. In the book is the wonder of childhood and its dreams, its simple joys and sorrows; all that country, in short, so remote and mysterious—a Lost Atlantis—to those of us who have settled in other and perhaps less desirable lands, or are still afloat, drifting we know not whither, but with the conviction that, evil notwithstanding, a Wisdom, fathomable or unfathomable, is behind this veil of things.

CHAPTER II

LIFE IN A CITY OFFICE

THERE is some slight evidence of the boy's precocity as a writer. A humorsome essay in *The Day before Yesterday* begins :

> I cannot remember how old I was when I wrote the thrilling poem about the tiger who swallowed the horse, nor am I quite certain that it was my first literary effort, but I know that I was still at the tight knickerbocker stage, and that my previous poems, if there had been any, had remained secrets of my own.

Whilst at school he also contributed to *The Cranbrookian*, and extant, too, is a poem in MS. of no merit, marked "My first poem, in my brother's handwriting," and beginning, characteristically :

> As I was walking upon the plain,
> Alone, because I liked it . . .

As the appended editorial letter proves, at an early age he even bearded the lions of the periodical press. The letter should be inserted here if only as exhibiting a rare sympathy with literary adventurers.

> I am afraid we can't use your story [it runs] though thank you very much for submitting it. The faults are perhaps that it is a little crude in conception, that the tragedies follow each other in bewildering sequence without any apparent reason except the exigencies of the story, and that there is all through a tendency to strain after effect. These are the faults of every young writer, and as I judge from the fact of your being at school that you are not far up in years you will perhaps pardon my putting it in this way. You have evidently some gift with the pen, and if you want to persevere as a story writer, may I suggest to you that you give yourself a little longer to gain experience of life, in the mean-

time setting your thoughts on more cheerful happenings than death, debauchery, and broken hearts ?

But evident as it is that he must have indulged dreams of becoming an author, he does not seem to have opposed parental wishes in the adoption of a "commonsense" profession. Early in 1901 he was engaged as a temporary clerk in the offices of the Royal Exchange Assurance Corporation, and nine months later was appointed to the staff. With this company he served some five years before taking to journalism. Clerking was not congenial employment. He was a conscientious worker and considered a valuable servant, but the vocation could not be other than obnoxious to a young poet and dreamer. Under date May 14th, 1907, soon after resigning his post, he writes that he "never thought that life could be so unredeemedly good as it has been for the last six weeks—and after the hell of the office." His leisure while with the Corporation was mainly spent in bookshops or underground cafés, or in entertaining parties of children, references to whom are frequent in a journal he kept at this period. With his customary introspectiveness he reasons that his is not a character likely to be generally popular. "The world is liable rather to judge a man by his bad humours than by striking a happy mean between those and his happier moments." Consequently, "I must be content to choose my friends amongst children, who always see me at my best. And what better friends could I want ?" In the same journal we hear of him, at the age of twenty-one, as "always thinking a great deal too much about my own mind and doings. In others I dislike chiefly the defects that are most prominent in my own character. I have an unsatisfactory habit of thinking the right thing and doing the wrong one. I am always watching myself, and consequently am inclined to behave as though I was always walking the stage." An earlier entry, dated 1901, bears witness to his having been to the theatre ninety-seven times in one year ! He seems, nevertheless, to have worked hard at his writing. Contributions flowed into Fleet Street and flowed back again. Not until 1905, when the *Morning Leader* awarded him a prize of five guineas for a short story, did he first taste the joy of acceptance. It seems hardly necessary to add that he read omnivorously. A passage in the journal for 1908 somewhat remorsefully records that "the only books I take much delight in

nowadays are those which treat of the lives and letters of authors. . . . Last night I read a *Life of Heine* which affected me greatly." Other intimate companions were the Elizabethans and—of the moderns—chiefly Stevenson, Barrie and Andrew Lang. In a letter written in 1907, "I think I like reading the works of artists better than those of men of genius," he observes. "That is why Browning is my favourite poet, that is why I love my Stevenson." The classification is careless, but will serve to indicate earlier influences. That of Stevenson was to some extent ethical. "We are not damned for doing wrong but for not doing right," was an aphorism frequently on his lips. And again : "In moments of effort we learn to do the easy things that people like." As to the "favourite poet," there is a Browningesque terminology in some of his immature verse. But, with the possible exception of *The Coffin Merchant*, one of the stories in *The Ghost Ship* with a Stevensonian flavour, it would be hard to detect the influence of other authors in his published work.

Some account of his office life is given in *The Autobiography of a Poet* already mentioned. I select the following passage : —

> At the time when I first took my desire to express myself seriously I was nominally employed in the city during the day. When I got home at night with a fresh mind and a body none the better for consuming innumerable cups of coffee, I would sit at a little table inconveniently heaped with books and write blank verse plays after the manner of the minor Elizabethan dramatists, while Sylvia [his sister Margaret] played the piano to me, Grieg and Mendelssohn and Chopin, such music as my emotions could understand. Save that they were quite as outspoken as their models these compositions had no particle of original merit, but as theyprovided really valuable practice in the handling of words, I am sure those evenings were not wasted. Also they were amongst the most enjoyable that I have spent in my life. The æsthetic charm of music when heard by lamplight, the atmosphere of high endeavour, and, since youth derives certain advantages from its birthright of folly, the proud fever of great accomplishment sent me to bed pulsing with happiness. I would stand before the mirror looking with an interest beyond vanity at the face of the man who had

wrought such miracles. . . . And if my days were hardly worthy of their evenings they had their charm nevertheless. All the money that I did not lose backing horses I spent on books, and I passed many delightful hours browsing in the shop of Messrs. Jones and Evans of Queen St., the best bookshop I have ever known, where one might discover all sorts of queer little publications that never seemed to see the light anywhere else. Then there were languourous afternoons spent in underground cafes where the sun never shone, and there was a rapturous welcome for the rare customer. Of the city as a place wherein business was transacted I knew nothing then and know but little now. Sometimes I used to write some figures in a great book, add them up and rule a double line underneath to prove that some task of infinitesimal significance had been completed. It may surprise the reader to learn that I did this to the satis faction of those I served, and was considered to have a reasonably bright future before me, until on a fine spring morning I put leaves in my hair and walked out to return no more. As offices go we were rather cultured. We all belonged to Mudie's and we all liked to look at the pictures in the "Studio," yet I believe my fellow-clerks were astonished at my folly in leaving the city on my mad quest for Parnassus. Personally, I think it was probably the only sensible thing I have ever done in my life, for if I did not reach the blessed mountain, I have been privileged to behold it close at hand, and it was worth going to see.

My only contribution to the practical side of business was the proposal that instead of starting clerks at a low salary and raising it by slow degrees with more regard to their age than to their ability, their salary should commence at the maximum and be subject to an annual reduction. This would enable them to marry before they were senile, and would encourage them to beget children to earn handsome salaries when that of their fathers was reduced to a pittance. Also they would have money when they were young enough to enjoy it as money should be enjoyed. This proposal was welcomed by the clerks of my own age, but only met with a cold reception from the older men. . . .

The pleasing humour of that last paragraph serves to remind me that even his most despondent letters were seldom without some witty or humorous observation. It was not so much that, like Figaro, he made haste to laugh from fear of being compelled to weep, but because he was naturally a man of wit and humour. This will be seen presently in his correspondence rather than in particular conversational *mots* I can remember. “His brilliancies,” as McQuilland says happily, “were scattered as the little jewels of Buckingham.”

RICHARD MIDDLETON IN FANCY DRESS.

CHAPTER III

BOHEMIAN DAYS AND NIGHTS

TOWARDS the close of the year 1905 the following advertisement appeared in that literary review of many vicissitudes, the Academy*[6] :

> The New Bohemians, an unexpected society, mainly devoted to the encouragement of intelligent conversation among journalists, bookmen, critics, artists, and others, is prepared to consider the admission of aspirants. The curious may make written application to the secretary, *Academy* office (Advt. Dept.), 12, Southampton St., Strand. University men are not necessarily disqualified. Acquaintanceship with Omar, Rabelais, Pepys, Lamb, Stevenson and Whistler will be regarded as an asset, but literary heresies are not considered unorthodox.

A more tempting appeal to a young man with literary ambitions and hungry for the society of his kind would be difficult to conceive. It aroused the curiosity of only some half a dozen persons, Middleton and I being of the company. The story of his application will be best told in the words of his sister, who, with faith in her brother's "future," took upon herself at times the *rôle* of a loving Boswell. One extract has been preserved of what must have been an excellent excursion into biography :

> He saw an advertisement of a club that sounded as if it would be congenial to him. He wrote a lively letter . . . "owing to the folly of editors I am one of the

*[6] The *Academy* was founded in 1869 by John Murray, its first editor being Dr. Appleton. I do not know if it passed out of Murray's hands between that time and 1896, when it was acquired by John Morgan Richards, the father of John Oliver Hobbes. Sidney Colvin edited it for a time, I believe. Under Richards, Lewis Hind held the editorship until the days of Alfred Douglas and Crosland. Douglas sold it for £2,500 to Earl Fitzwilliam and Lord Howard de Walden, but when, in 1915, it had fallen on evil days, I secured it for a five-pound note. Crosland and I then ran it for some six months, though how we ran it, with Europe ablaze and no money behind us, heaven alone knows. Its full history would make entertaining reading, and may be told in another place.

'others' ; for the rest I can claim acquaintanceship with all the gentlemen mentioned, and especially do I delight in R. L. S., who is my little tin god. I am twenty-three years of age and have grown a beard. If this tempts you I shall be glad to have further particulars of your esteemed society. If not, I shall have wasted my penny stamp."

The letter did tempt them, and he had a letter in reply that left him with mingled feelings. The names of the former members (Mr. Chesterton, Mr. Hilaire Belloc) filled him with terror, a terror half assumed. Indeed, under a somewhat conceited manner he concealed great modesty as to his intellectual attainments. In the letter from the secretary inviting him to The Prince's Head (to be initiated into the mysteries !) there was a split infinitive. He wrote accepting, pointing out the split infinitive and using one himself. He noticed it, however. I was very anxious on the night of his trial and left a note on his supper table imploring him to write a line telling me how he enjoyed it. He did. "If they don't kick me out I shall be late every Thurdsay."

I have not written this at all as I meant to. I have not shown his tremors, his "Lord, I am such an ignorant man," his "when I think of all those chaps they'll all know more than I do," his "I feel like an impostor" ; and then, "if they don't accept me I'll write them such letters they'll be bound to have me. I will tell them that to be unexpected they ought to kick out all the eligible men."

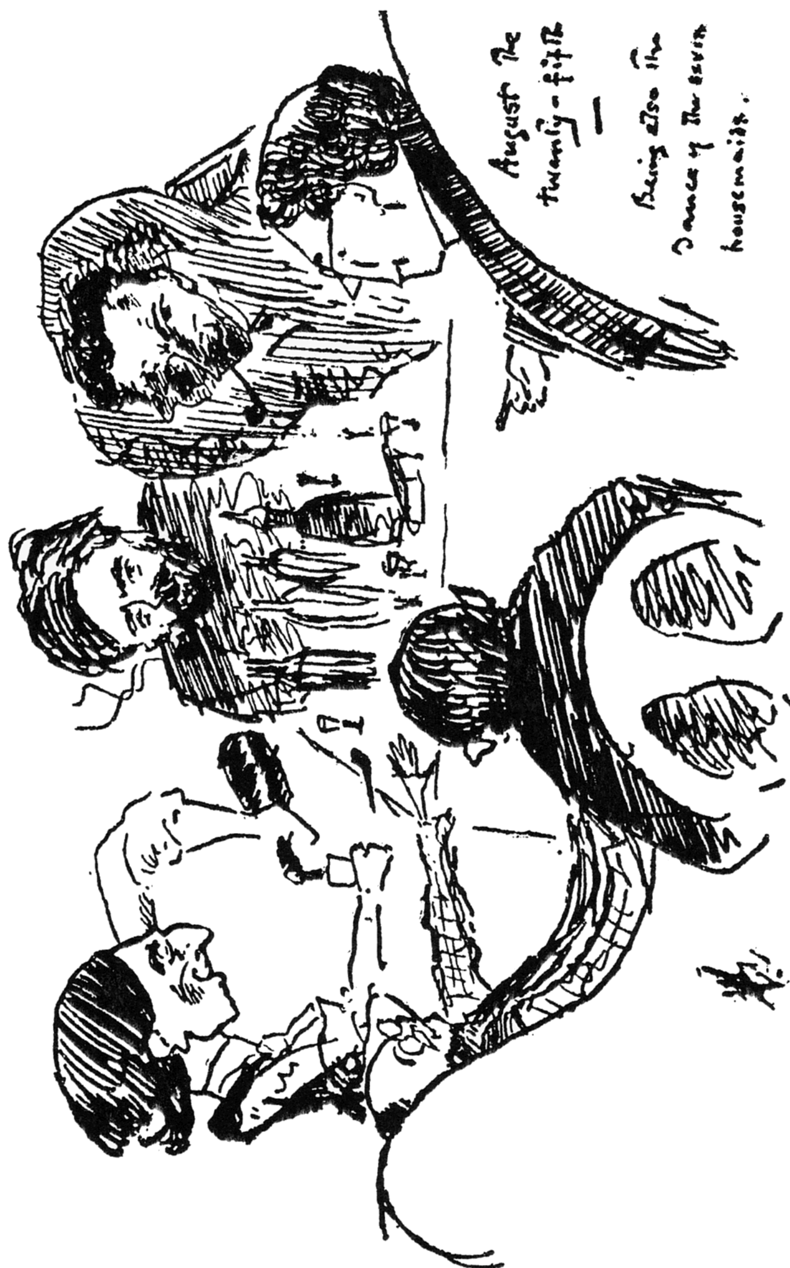
There was no occasion for tremors. As the then secretary, McQuilland, observes : "He made an instantaneous appeal by his youth and charm of intellect to a group of men not too jaded to appreciate a fresh new gift." I myself sat next to him on that first evening, and, not knowing that he had a talent for *blague*, was mystified by his undertaking a defence of a famous newspaper magnate. On the whole, however, he said but little ; was reserved rather than loquacious. After the party broke up we discovered that our respective homes were reached by the same railway—a chance which had much to do with the development of our friendship—and, as in due course we were accepted as members of the society, we were both of us for a long time "late every Thursday."

The process by which undesirable applicants were eliminated was very simple. An invitation was posted twice, and if it was not thought politic to issue a third the would-be member had to swallow his mortification as best he could. There was no subscription, and the expenses other than those incurred for liquor were nil, the room allotted us being rent free. We sat around a large table on which was a slitted cigar-box for the reception of moneys towards a common fund for the evening's drink bill. In the rare event of a deficit when the proceedings ended, the balance was made up by the wealthier members, a superfluity at any time being the perquisite of the Hebe who waited on us. At their leisure members signed their names in the minute book, sketched in it, or took it home to record impressions of the evening or anything in verse or prose that the whim dictated. The "first fine careless rapture" of those early days of bohemian company recalls Beaumont's lines :

What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid !

Around the tavern table we drank and smoked and upheld the Society's motto, "Talk for talk's sake" ; laughing, lunging and parrying with all the good-will imaginable. Verses were read, sketches and caricatures were drawn and passed round ; anecdotes, quotations, views of the last new book or play, all served to swell the evening's enjoyment. At closing time (half-past twelve in those days) members reluctant to cry "Enough!" wandered about the streets, talking, joking, chanting verses, enlivening the moments of homeless folk at coffee stalls. Or we would seek out the lodgings of some boon companion and there carouse till dawn. "Oh God, night and day, night and day !" as somebody's poor servant girl moaned once when called up at three o'clock in the morning to be asked where the beer had been put.

I sometimes think, when I get out of bed
On Friday morning, that the Prince's Head
Is not so big as mine—but let it pass !
The soul of me was greatly comforted.



A BOHEMIAN GATHERING
(Sketch by Herbert Garland)

There were days, too, other than Thursdays, when some of us would meet to walk together. Hampstead was a favourite objective. What a night was that on which Christopher Wilson, the composer, tore down the moonlit hill with me, both of us chanting Swinburne's *A Ballad of Life* and wholly at one in our ecstasy ! Good, life-loving Wilson is dead now, but for me at least he lives in the spirit for those rapturous moments. "Where's your Socialism now ?" he exclaimed exultantly one early morning in his rooms after reading a long passage from the *Eikon Basilike*. I didn't know where it was, being no Socialist, but there was no doubt about Wilson's enthusiasm—that was the thing that mattered. Once we played a cricket match at Raynes Park, thereafter in the cool of evening to drink beer out of quart pewter pots in a garden. On another night, after closing time, a troop invaded the sacred precincts of the National Liberal Club, led there by an intrepid young man who took us in as his guests. When a polite attendant, our drinks being consumed, said, "I beg your pardon, Sir Charles, but your name does not appear to be on our list of members," we retired with what dignity we could muster while our host "carried it off" with the somewhat perturbed officials. I think he explained that he had entered the premises under the impression that they were those of the Athenæum.

It was a time when, as Stevenson puts it, "Youth, taking fortune by the beard, demands joy as a right." Middleton, also, has something to say on the matter. In his essay, *The True Bohemia* (*Monologues*) he speaks of

> that effort to obtain from every moment of existence a perfect expression of life, which stirs the Bohemian to a constant sense of his own vitality, and lends his most trivial actions an air of unconsciousness so manifest that they must needs be interpreted by the sleepers and the half-dead as fragments of an indecently scornful pose. Full of a sense that he is making history for his old age, he tastes life as a man tastes wine, and he mixes his drinks ; so that if you see him roystering in a tavern to-day you may depend upon it he will be reading fairy stories to a nurseryful of babies to-morow.

At the next meeting he produced verses inspired by his first evening with the Society. They have not been published, and, with other work of the kind to follow, are includ-

ed in these earlier pages, not because they are of much account as poetry but as being characteristic of him.

It was a Friday, halfway down the Strand,
I saw a maiden selling pretty posies,
And, loveliest of all, was in her hand
A bunch of crimson roses.

" Where gather you these lovely flowers," I said,
" Sweet maid, these blossoms thus your
hand adorning ? "
She smiled, " I get them from the Prince's Head,
Sir, every Friday morning.

" For there they tell me of a Thursday night
They hear brave laughter set the windows ringing,
Or with a gentler fullness of delight,
Voices of poets singing.

And in the room where these great hearts have passed,
Under the stars they capture with their laughter,
Forth from the fullness of their riches cast
Are found these blossoms after. "

I took the buds, and from the jealous sky,
Lest the gods smote me, bore them closely shaded
Glad to my home, and now the roses lie
Sweet in my heart unfaded.
Then pardon me that I a man alone,
No god to whom the sky its song discloses,
Am come to-night to see these flowers grown,
Having no crimson roses.

There was no danger that the author of the above lines would not receive his third invitation. They have, as I say, no great poetic merit, but their flattering appeal was not to be resisted. I see the men now as they bent over the MS. after he had read them. “Under the stars they capture with their laughter,” murmured one of the party ; “that’s a fine line.” And so, it must be owned, it is.

Two of his poems we were never tired of calling for at our gatherings ; both of them, truth to tell, received with an interest which in after days was not always accorded his more beautiful efforts. One runs as follows :

In the brave year nineteen fifty
  When the snow has kissed our locks,

And our books in milky vellum
  Nestle in the penny box ;
And our lives are in the papers
  With our photographs aged two—
May I wander to this tavern
  And renew my youth with you.

Not for fame we worked and waited,
  Not for guineas sang our song,
But because the nights were starry
  And because the world was wrong.
Though we sometimes sighed for roses
  And the kingcups on the lawn,
Yet we bore and suffered Harmsworth
  With our eyes towards the dawn.

In the brave year nineteen fifty
  Though our sun is down the sky,
May we show the world together
  That Bohemia does not die.
Though our songs are sung by pirates

And our names are in *Who's Who*—
May I wander to this tavern
And renew my youth with you.

Worse ditties have been written. The other, a piece of gay cynicism he called *The Rubáiyât*, was even more popular :

The soft white hand of a woman
Set with little pink nails,
The curling handle of a clean pint pot
And beer in pails.
The soft red lips of a woman
To kiss and say Amen,
The cold round edge of a clean pint pot
To kiss and kiss again.
The soft bright eyes of a woman,
The salt salt tears that set 'em,
And once again a clean pint pot
In which one may forget 'em.

Always sure of appreciation was this morsel. That a spirit of originality breathes in it and in the other verses must be granted by the least amiably disposed critic of his work. It did not occur to me, however, to think of him primarily as a poet until, some months after our first meeting, he sent me a copy of his *The Last Cruise*, since published in *Poems and Songs*. Before then his personality only had impressed me ; it impressed, indeed, everybody with whom he came into contact. To quote McQuilland again :

> How can one describe him but as a Personality, as a man who convinced without effort ? It can be said with absolute certainty that no one ever met Richard Middleton, even in in the most casual and fugitive measure, without being impressed by his force. His effects were obtained not by mere outward

eccentricity or mannerisms, though he was, indeed, the most unconventional of men, but by sheer flashing originality.

The Last Cruise thrilled me. A new planet had swam into my ken, and I remember writing to him with prophecies of a great future. My heart, how young we were ! Later, in the days of his disillusionment, he was to confess :

> Those were great nights when we used to read each other's verses and congratulate the world on its possession of our united genius. That is really the poet's hour, his rich reward for years of unprofitable labour, when the poets of his own unripe age receive his work with enthusiasm—an enthusiasm which in all honesty and all modesty he shares himself. Unhappily he is paid in advance ; sooner or later he wakes to find that he is worshipping before the shrine of his own genius, and the shrine is empty. That is why I am half pleased and half melancholy when young men tell me that Antony Starbright, aged twenty, is the greatest poet since Keats. If they only knew that I too in my hour was one of a group of greatest poets who all wrote poems to Pan and Hylas, when on summer nights that sometimes stretched far into summer mornings we were all hero-worshippers together and we ourselves were the heroes.*[7]

They were good days, truly ; "le bon temps," as Anatole France puts it, "quand nous n'avions pas le sens commun." But here is the poem :

The stars were out overhead and "Lo !" I cried, "nevermore,
  Nevermore shall the palace know me," and high on the masts
The white sails trembled as skyward the good good ship bore
        Her cargo of shadows.
Never a word of regret as I stood on her moonlit poop
  And sang not of old past things but of wonders to be ;
And saw great birds with a glory of plumage swoop
        Down the sea's meadows.
Ah ! the wind on my forehead that might not blow on the earth,

*[7] *Monologues*, p. 230. The same thought is expressed in that fine essay *The Great Man* (*The Gholt Ship*).

Surely the gates were open and I might forget
The quiet eyes of the past that seemed life's worth,
That were but seeming.
I saw the lights of a ship march slowly over the sea,
And the land fell away behind me, and into the night
That covereth all things and passeth no more for me,
My heart went dreaming.

Good poetry is that. Who that has seen ships at sea by night but must recognise the truth of the image,

I saw the lights of a ship march slowly over the sea.

The word "march"—the *mot juste*—makes poetry of the line where with "pass" or some other word it would be mere verse. What colour, again, is suggested by those great birds with their glory of plumage ! And how quietly the poem ends, or, rather, fades out. Dreamer and dreamship pass like the gentlest of airs, merged in what calm of the spirit. That Middleton could write like this I had not for one moment imagined. He was a man to be with, and I had long lived among people who cared nothing for literature and whose humanity did not at that time compensate for their philistinism. With no faith or philosophy of life of my own, I must needs look up to one who apparently knew his own mind. I was a snob, too, where men who could "do things" were concerned. Above all, perhaps, I admired him in that he had no petty meannesses, he was not little of soul. Here, then, was a hero made to my hand. We quarrelled of course ; bitterly at times ; but long letters would follow on the subject of such eruptions, and they would end in our being better friends than ever. "Man, if you only knew my pride !" he exclaimed one day, friendly relations having been resumed after a difference. We had sat for some two hours in the same room in mutual hatred. It was perhaps the only occasion on which I ever felt deep resentment against him. For once I gave up probing for causes, and relieved myself by writing a sonnet while he raged silently at another table. In the main, however, his "nonsense suited my nonsense." We got on very well together ; were attracted to the same ideals and pleasures ; were good friends in short.

There are many references to the New Bohemians in our earlier letters. His were seldom dated, but while I was still being addressed by my surname I find him writing :

> I dined with a select assemblage of Bohemians last night and had a jolly time. But, oh, Savage, I was talkative ; talkative, Savage. No longer the shy retreating Middleton of McQuilland's delightful romances, but a new Middleton, a base Middleton, a thing blatant. In the golden light of morn I can remember saying fifty silly things last night. An'I said a wise one I recall it not. I hereby take a vow of silence. Henceforth I shall wander on my wild lone in solitary places like Kipling's cat.

These blushes express what most of us have felt after a night in good company, but they must not be allowed to distort other views of the assertiveness of which he speaks. Yet again to quote McQuilland:

> There are a number of good talkers in London, but Richard Middleton had a quality of tingling unexpectedness in his talk which distinguished him from all other varieties of good talkers whatsoever. His mind was a remarkably sane, lucid and logical one, but his imagination was whimsically and delightfully freakish, giving continual expositions of realism in fairyland, of flashes of joy shooting through forests of nightmare. He was a genuine talker, not an expert monologuist with a prepared text. His inspirations were often minted from the remarks of others, a process in which small change was transmuted into bright gold. . . .

Another portrait illustrating his capacity as a talker is to be found in Arthur Ransome's *Bohemia in London*. Ransome, describing his first meeting with him in the Café de l'Europe, says :

> A huge felt hat banged freely down over a wealth of thick black hair, bright blue eyes*[8], an enormous black beard, a magnificent manner (now and again he would rise and bow profoundly, with his hat upon his heart, to some girls on

*[8] "Ransome lies about the colour of my eyes, damn him. Blue forsooth, as if my name were Albert ! "—*Letter*, 1906.

> the other side of the room), a way of throwing his head back when he drank, of thrusting it forward when he spoke, an air of complete abandonment to the moment and the moment's thought; he took me tremendously. He seemed to be delighting his friends with extempore poetry. I carried my pot of beer to a table just beside him, where I could see him better and also hear his conversation. It was twaddle, but such downright, spirited splendid twaddle, flung out from the heart of him in a grand, careless way that made me think of largesse scattered royally on a mob.

The letter referring to his talkativeness has a not uninteresting comment on Walter Scott:

> I am making an almost honest effort to read a book called *Quentin Durward* by one Walter Scott. But Lord ! what bags of clothes his puppets are. He gives you their characteristics but none of the little human touches that would make them live. At least for me. A faint suggestion of a poor historical drama played by a fourth-rate touring company. But his notes and introduction are blooming interesting and reproach ignorance.

Thus the critic. In another letter of the period the artist peeps out. After delivering himself of a squib expressive of his distaste for Philistia and his appreciation of our beloved Bohemian Society, hegoesontosay:

> I fancy we have all tried to do this at times—felt that we would sacrifice everything to obtain perfect expression of one thing. . . . As a matter of fact, I can't. I haven't got the big thing to sacrifice. But my wish is "Oh to love something desperately so that I could smash it and write great things about it." This is quite immoral but natural enough I suppose. Still, I looks to you to condemn it for me in nice stalwart English full of damns Mister Savage but don't damn my werses because I rather likes 'em man.

In yet another letter he replies to one of mine, evidently written in a mood de *profundis*. The following extract throws light on his view of other people's philosophies:

. . . after all, as you know well enough, the word that will help you can only come from yourself. So the futility of philosophers. They can only give you their own philosophy, they cannot help you to yours, and thus the problem of finding oneself becomes more complex as one reads. . . . As far as I see it there are only two philosophies to build upon. The one consists in taking the way of least resistance, and this, the poor weak way, is mine. Optimism. Yours is the better way. Of course, no one really wishes to find himself. But we want to see the way lying clearly ahead, so that our ideals may appear possible. And this is where other people's philosophies are so hurtful. They make us doubt, and that way lies madness. I shut my eyes to my doubts. You, with your fighting mind, should be able to overcome yours. Throw Nietzsche out of window and go forth by yourself and believe me

Yours very sincerely,

RICHARD MIDDLETON.

(I fear I have a small soul. I *love* writing my name.)

My shelves at that time certainly curved under the weight of philosophical treatises. Being much impressed once by a passage from Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*, I read it aloud to him, challenging him to reject its truth. He listened attentively, not wholly from politeness, but as who should think, "Well, there may be something in this after all." Exactly what was going on in his mind the while, however, only a full knowledge of him could determine. It is perhaps worthy of note that I forget his reply on that occasion, remembering only his attitude. But though he had but small use for philosophers, he was attracted by gloomy views of life more or less disguised in works of art.*[9] *L'Ile des Pingouins*, with its pessimistic last chapter, he jestingly called his Bible. Its author's *joie de vivre* and profound humanity as expressed in *La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque*, impressed him less deeply than that

*[9] Middleton's critical vision was undoubtedly obscured by his temperament. Though he did not bother to read Walter Pater, his æsthetio was akin to that of the great Victorian critic. In studying Pater we should ask ourselves the value of a realised impression which excludes a realisation of the object impressing. Thus might art and morality be seen as two sides of a coin as it were.

Solomonic spirit in the great Frenchman which emphasises the futility of human endeavour. But Anatole France keeps on endeavouring, just as Housman is still alive, who advises us to

> Play the man, stand up and end you
> When your sickness is your soul.

Housman, by the way, is the hero—if hero he can be called—of the essay, *The Poet who was*.*[10] Harris, Austin Harrison and Middleton, admirers all of his poetry, asked him to lunch with them, but from the essay in question he does not seem to have created a favourable impression. They realised that gods have feet of clay, and in their disillusionment were perhaps not sympathetic enough with the clay. Middleton's copy of *The Shropshire Lad* is pencilled mainly at morbid and dark passages. The only strictly æsthetic judgment is that upon the poem *The New Mistress*, against which he has written: “ Better than Kipling.” Zola's *L'Œuvre*, Gissing's *New Grub Street*, and what he called “ that depressing masterpiece,” Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*—these also appealed to him. In one of his notebooks is a fragment of criticism on *L'Œuvre* and *La Débacle* which throws light not only on those two novels:

> Zola's women are as sentimental, as tearfully false as Dickens's heroines. It is extraordinary that so clever a man should have known so little about them. *La Débacle* is an astonishing failure. The tragedy, perhaps, was too real for him. L'Œuvre— admirable book that no artist ought to read. Claude is Manet. Sandoz is Zola himself. The real moral seems to me to be that genius produces nothing, because the expression must always fall short of the dream. Art is an imperfect thing, and genius cannot tolerate imperfection. But the human man says, “ Oh well, perhaps it's good enough.” And so it is, sometimes.

He meant, not that genius produces nothing, but nothing satisfactory to itself. It must be remembered that many writers have the habit of jotting down thoughts which on reflection are polished or destroyed. The extract is quoted less for its opinions than

*[10] *Monologues*. It appeared originally in the *Academy*, its publication there being followed by an appreciative letter from a German author asking permission to translate it.

as an aid towards understanding the man. What are we to make of one who could write of a book that “ no artist ought to read ” it ? That he was easily influenced ? That he had some fear of being ultimately found wanting ? “ Of course, no one really wishes to find himself,” he says in the letter just quoted. I sometimes wish he were here now, if only that I might say to him, “ I have thrown Nietzsche out of window. When you told me to do so, did you know that you were harbouring such skeletons as Zola, Housman and Company in your own cupboard ? ” And we would laugh, remembering poetry, and the South Downs of England, and forgetful of any dream that was ever dreamed.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADVENTURE OF JOURNALISM

IN 1906 Middleton left the house of his parents at Hampton Court for two rooms at No. 7, Blackfriars Road. The house has since been converted into a Lyons tea-shop. Contact with " Journalists, Bookmen, Critics, Artists, and others" had doubtless much to do with the decision to take up bachelor quarters. And proud of them he was, too. The living-room was furnished chiefly with bookshelves, the bed-room with but one bed, and as there was no sofa we dozed about in deck chairs or lay curled up on rugs if any of us spent the night there. The few letters sent me during this year reflect his usual moods of high elation or black depression. Here is one—in verse—of the former variety :

My name is Richard Middleton, I'm living at Blackfriars,
Two stories up, above the street, to chasten my desires;
I have no purple heather here, no field, nor living tree—
But every night when I look out God lights the stars for me.
My name is Richard Middleton and once upon a day
I read a story in a book and once I learnt to pray,
And once I learnt to sing a song to charm the weary whiles—
And now I read and pray and sing, and God looks down and smiles.
For we are happy people here, a-living in Blackfriars;
St. Paul's lies through the window-panes and half a hundred spires ;
And all the world goes laughing by, and we have found it true
That everywhere above the grey brave eyes may see the blue.
I am not rich nor hope to be, but mine are day and night,
And all the world to look upon, and laughter, and the light,
Where I can set my torch ablaze to make the beacon burn,

> And show to God that in Blackfriars, two stories up, I yearn.
> And God looks down from heaven and he sees my beacon fires,
> And says, " That's Richard Middleton a-living in Blackfriars. "
> He does not grant me roses here, nor sunny field nor tree,
> But every night when I look out he lights the stars for me.

When this light-hearted jingle was written he was still employed in the city and still dividing his leisure between life and literature. But not so many penny stamps were now being wasted on editors : he was beginning to see the unwisdom of that practice if carried on without influence. His first published poem appeared, through the good offices of George Francis Wilson, the poet, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but the innocent cause of his getting any considerable body of work accepted was myself. An unsigned article on Rossetti in the Academy had roused my youthful enthusiasm to the extent of wishing to meet its author, who, to my surprise, turned out to be Lord Alfred Douglas, then editor of the paper. Douglas accepted an invitation to meet the New Bohemians, and it was not long before Middleton, Arthur Machen, Randal Charlton, and T. Michael Pope, of our membership, became regular contributors. This accident, which occurred in 1907, must have determined to some extent his departure from the insurance world. He took the plunge in April, though not with out some private misgivings and much opposition from his family. A rough draft of a letter to some one in authority at the office expresses the fear that his—

> absence without leave or explanation will have appeared somewhat discourteous, but it is only my natural hesitation to take so decisive a step as the resignation of my post that has prevented me from writing before. I may say briefly that recently my work has become so distasteful to me that I fear I have to a considerable extent neglected it. . . .

The outlook, in point of fact, was not too un promising. His articles were appearing fairly regularly in the *Academy*, and in addition he was given a deal of review work. Under date May 14th, 1907, he writes : " Oh, but the reviewing is great fun, an' the man Douglas is a peach with a stone in it to let me do it." That this kind of work, however, grew after a while somewhat stale with him is not surprising. " Nowadays,"

he writes later, " I have exchanged the brilliant make-belief of the amateur for the stolid insincerity of the professional" ; and, more significantly, " They have sent me a book by one Synge—thank heavens not a novel ! "*[11] Later still, in October, came an invitation from Edgar Jepson to do " some sort of secretarial work for me " on *Vanity Fair*; and presently he is to be found writing : " I saw Jepson again at the V.F. offices. He was very decent and desires of my verses for that journal and commissions another article." Thus, with two papers throwing open their columns to him, the adventure of literature might have had less auspicious beginnings. Not that he shone as a journalist. In the sense in which that term is understood in Fleet Street in these days he was never a journalist at all, nor could ever have been. " Casual and cheerfully unpunctual" is how Harris, then editing *Vanity Fair*, describes him. Jepson, too, had occasion sometimes mildly to reprove him; and Douglas's secretary " would be glad if you would send in your reviews of the books recently sent to you, or if you have not time to do them, will you please return the books. It is a long while since we had any copy from you."

In the meantime, the meetings of the New Bohemian Society were becoming less attractive. New members crept in whom the motto " Talk for talk's sake " did not wholly charm. In the camp was an argumentative spirit impatient of poetry and epigram. We were divided into groups discussing different subjects. At one part of the table sat urbane Arthur Machen and his little band of followers in quiet consideration of the forms and ceremonies of the Anglican Church. Iram, indeed, had gone and all his rose. In grave, devout, enraptured tones they talked now of copes and stoles and the like. Others, with feelings akin to those of Monk's army on Blackheath at the Restoration, gloomily saw the end of all things in the Machen heresies, the argumentative warring of the Socialists and the gradual dissolution of the communal spirit which at one time had kept the whole table united. Purple nights, such as that on which we sallied forth into the streets clad in Cavalier costumes as a protest against

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*[11] The book was *The Aran Isles*. As a reviewer he did his beBt towards popularising Synge, and, among others, De Vere Stacpoole (*The Blue Lagoon*—though a better book of Stacpoole's, we agreed, was that comely novel *The Street of the Flute-Player*), Harris (*The Man Shakespeare*), Kenneth Grahame (*The Wind in the Willows*), and D. H. Lawrence (*The White Peacock*).

Puritanism, were few and far between. Some of us on Thursday evenings took to meeting at alien taverns or prolonging dinner to a late hour in Soho restaurants, arriving at the club premises only when the proceedings were nearly over. " Eat, drink, and be merry," wrote Middleton ruefully, " for to-morrow we shall be Fabians." And in another letter:

> I also go not to the N.B.'s for a month or so. The more I see of them the more I see that it is the old members who count. . . . What a gang of ripping chaps every one of them ! Thinking of the old meetings makes me sad so many of them are combat horses now. The rest of us may be mighty fine fellows but we ain't clubable. We're not willing to make the little sacrifices to the german silver gods of our neighbours that make for fine evenings. We are damned individualists and ashamed of ourselves at that. . . .

For all its drooping spirit, however, the Society was " an unconscionable time a-dying " ; and indeed, it is not dead yet. Out of the flame of those early days came the friendships of a lifetime. Some of the members still meet occasionally to while a pleasant hour away with pipe and glass, to talk of things temporal and eternal, and to revive memories of that full Mermaid wine of which of old we drank so deeply. And if, in days to come, long after we who now remain are gone, there is no club of a like nature somewhere about this world of ours, what better club, it may be well asked, is to take its place ?

The letter with Middleton's lament for the Society's decadence introduces yet another of his recreations. He goes on to say :

> I think my heaven would be a judicious combination of a Thursday night at the Prince's Head and a fine afternoon at the Oval (Hayward and Hayes batting), with a library in one corner and a playground full of children in the other. . . . The perfect state of happiness in this world would be to be a professional cricketer attached to the Surrey club, with a gift for writing minor verse. What a life ! And people would buy your verses because you were a cricketer. . . . I see that I have forgotten the picture gallery and the string band in my heaven,

> but these are details. Oh and calm days, and better still, calm nights at sea, and woods of pines and Simpson's saddle of mutton. There are such a lot of good things in life, though we do not always attain to the kinglike happiness.

Cricket was no game of mine, but I did allow myself to be lured to Lord's on one occasion. We were accompanied by William Owen Summers, the founder of the Gallery Firstnighters' Club, whom many must remember as a prominent figure in the theatrical and Bohemian London of his day. But only Middleton saw the match. Summers and I were so hypnotised by the enormous boots of a horse drawing a roller on the adjoining practice pitch, we lay watching that performance till it finally sent us to sleep. A very human, humorous, and lovable little man was " Willy " Summers, the most popular member of our circle, and nothing if not communal. He was one of a somewhat vinous party I had invited along to my house one night to carry on a convivial gathering interrupted by closing time at the public-house we then frequented. On our arrival, Willy, in all probability, neither knew where he was nor why he was there; it was enough to be among friends. As I fumbled with the key of the door the discreet silence was broken by his hoarse and earnest reminder, " If it's a burglary I'm in it! " He died under moving circumstances in 1915, penniless and worn out by aphasia of the brain. With what was probably some instinctive premonition of the end, he set out to walk to the home of his friend, Edwin Pugh, the novelist, a distance of about forty miles from London; was found lying exhausted within a mile or so of the town he sought, and died in the infirmary.

Willy had lived precariously as a journeyman tailor, with no gift for making money and no desire to earn more than sufficed for the passing day. Well-intentioned friends once subscribed to start him in business, but the attempt to make a good bourgeois of a pronounced Bohemian was one at which Sisyphus would have stared blankly. And yet, in spite of the last phase of his life when, owing to physical infirmity, he was largely dependent upon the charity of his friends, it is hard to believe that his life was altogether a failure. Our standards of success are measured by what we most want to achieve. Difficult as it is to convey the impression, Willy is chiefly associated in my mind with the idea of genius. He created nothing but a memory which must pass, but

his wit and humour were so spontaneous, it was so certain he rehearsed nothing, the spirit flashed and darted from him naturally. A great domed forehead he had for so little a man. " He looks like Shakespeare," said Randal Charlton quietly, as we stood gazing at him in the mortuary. And with everything unifying for a moment at that remark, it had all the force of a truth.

Middleton's fondness for cricket never found expression in song as did Francis Thompson's. The game was more of a nerves-drug to him than a live source of inspiration. Not that it could be said to have been much more than that to the other poet. " It induces a proper state of peacefulness," wrote Middleton, probably in answer to some rallying remark of mine.

> Watching cricket matches is a very happy way of passing an afternoon and restful to the mind. To-day I am virtuous and work. . . . I lost my temper on Thursday and ended by calling — a liar and getting drunk; a fine end to my good resolutions. But a day at the Oval yesterday restored me to my senses, so there is something in county cricket after all you will perceive.

A word here to correct any impression that he was a drunkard—that is to say, an habitual and excessive drinker, as Verlaine was, for example. In this comparison, being not qualified to undertake the delicate work of separating sheep from goats, I do not speak ethically; I mean simply that, with Verlaine, drunkenness was a habit and that with Middleton it was not.*[12] In general, Verlaine's, from all accounts, was the weaker character, which does not necessarily mean the worser.*[13] Only twice did I see Middleton more advanced in liquor than was usual with him. The first time was when, having all of us overdone the honours to St. Patrick, and fearing he might lose his money, we very carefully relieved him of it before seeing him into a cab for Waterloo. It nearly came to a fight with the driver—so he told us afterwards—before that

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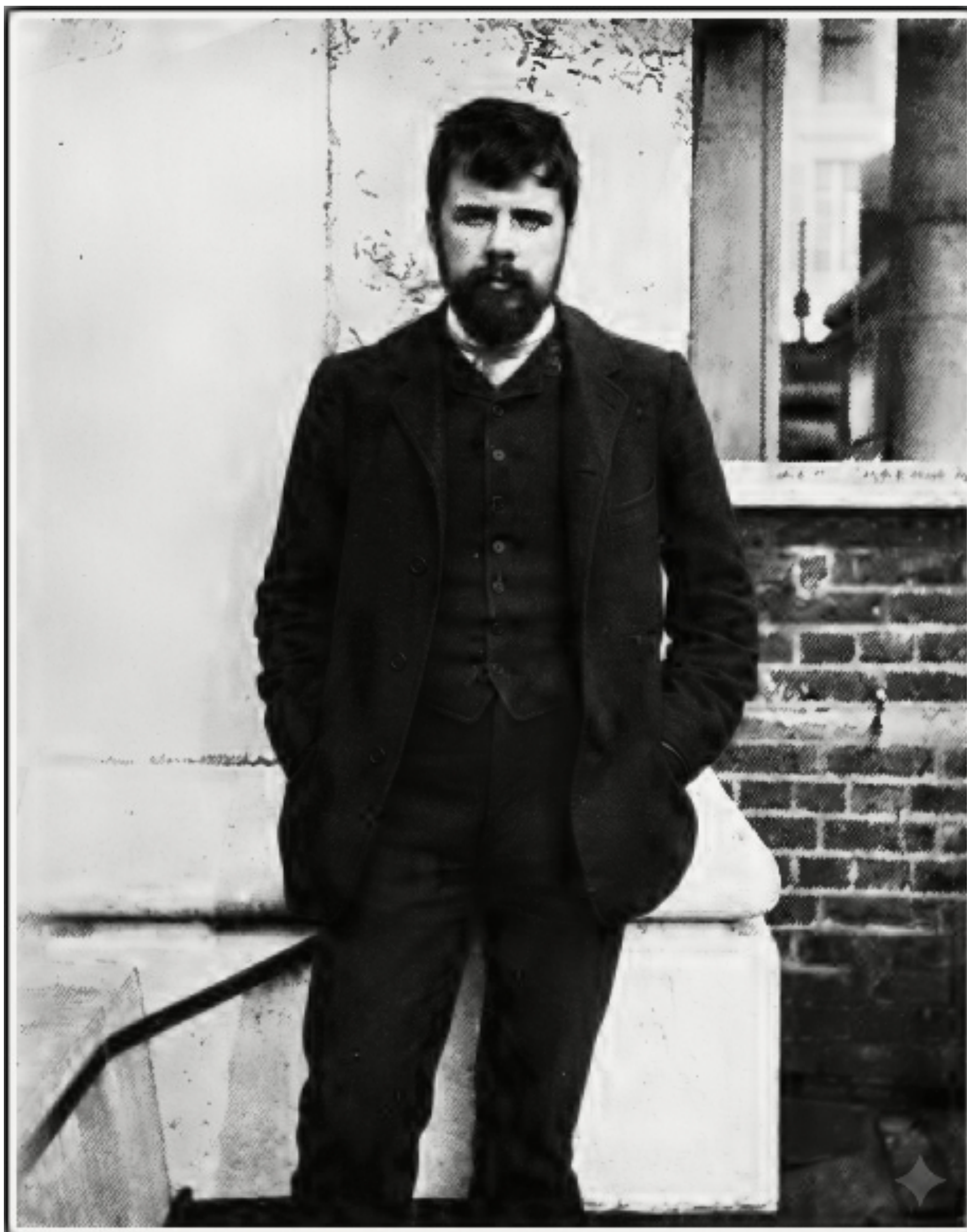
*[12] For his views on this subject see his essay *The Virtues of Getting Drunk* (*Monologues*).

*[13] "He is the carol-boy of English poetry ; he is our Verlaine," said Austin Harrison arrestingly. There is some truth in the view. Not altogether *apropos de bottes*, Middleton was only very lightly versed in French poetry. "You and your Bawdylaire !" he mocked once, knowing my admiration for Baudelaire. A joke, of course, but he had never read that poet, probably only something about him. Had he done so he would have known that the "damned soul" was anything but bawdy. Better for him if he had been.

worthy could be persuaded of his innocence in the matter. The other story is against myself alone. On arriving home with me one wet night he insisted on going to sleep on a flower-bed in the back garden; in much the same penitent spirit, I suspect—save that the selection of the flower-bed was a subtle tribute to beauty—that prompted Dr. Johnson to stand bareheaded in the rain before his father's statue at Lichfield. As he would not be convinced that it was by no means an ideal night for sleeping out, I covered him with a rug and — took his boots off !



RICHARD MIDDLETON AT THE AGE OF 20.

Another story relates to this period. With others of the society we attended the ceremony in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral when Rodin's bust of Henley was unveiled there. Present also were several literary notables, one of whom recognising, " Look, Richard," I whispered snobbishly, " there's Austin Dobson." He liked the work of that poet, but, deeply interested in the proceedings and resenting the interruption, drew back with a gesture of mingled pride, dignity and annoyance, and retorted, " And here's Richard Middleton ! " The snub was deserved, but I am uncertain whether at the moment I was most quenched or amused. Yet another story is illustrative of his practicality. " He was that very practical person the artist," as a reviewer said of him. Sitting up late one windy night together, I cursed the rattling of the windows. He rose quietly, secured the catches, and remarked dryly the while : " These things, Henry, are meant for other purposes than keeping out burglars." There is a certain practicality, too, in his comment on that familiar tablet" No hawkers, no canvassers " at the gates of many suburban residences. " What fools people are," he exclaimed on seeing one of these. " They might be refusing the door to happiness! "

So went the Bohemian days along. Wine and song—there was as yet no woman in his life—to say nothing of high endeavour ; such was his life in the Blackfriars Road, where " God lit the stars " for him. Two letters from a bundle of correspondence of the year 1907 are so characteristic they should be included here. One runs as follows:

> You must have condemned me as the worst of correspondents, but I have a good excuse, or rather two. I have been working and I have been gazing on the faces of my friends. To-night, however, I can't work, so very properly I write letters. . . . And you, you, oh philosopher, ask why children grow up ! This is abhorrent, brutish pessimism on your part, and demands rebuke. I have been asking myself, more healthily, why we start by being young. If we ended by being children, everybody would believe in God; but the present deterioration seems so wanton. It is as if every man started life with a little shining fish like a jewel on his breast, and spent three-quarters of his existence hating the inevitable stink of the finny denizens of the deep if kept too long out of water. This is a fine figure of speech. R——, whose books I saw the other day, has an

> autograph copy of one of Swinburne's books, presented by that poet to Oscar Wilde. I gazed upon it with awe and thought of you. . . .
>
> I fear you will find the old country greatly changed when you return. There is a vague unrest in certain quarters with regard to the coaxing seriousness of the N.B.'s, and M—— and I dined last night with P—— instead of going to the club. I foresee alarums and excursions anon. Meanwhile I confess that I am happy without quite knowing what I have done to earn that feeling. It would be frightful to become used to one's own little way, wouldn't it ? And yet I don't know. I don't think either my sins or my asceticisms move me as much as they used to. Perhaps one morning there will come one running to say that Peter Pan is dead, and that Richard Middleton has just been born, aged twenty-five. I shall hear the news with the chaste resignation of an Ophelia who has been rescued from the deep by a super-gallant policeman. I looks towards yer.

The mood of the other letter is darker. His judgment: "Up and down, up and down—it's awful true of my life," has already been quoted. Or as he puts it elsewhere : " You see I am cheerful and I rejoice that it takes as little to make me happy as it does to make me suicidal." But here is the extract:

> Life is such a simple business to me that I sometimes feel afraid of it. I walk along the streets and I understand everything, the sky and the stones and the people on the pavements, and my very knowledge affects me with a horror of it all. I want miracles, bloody red miracles, not to support my faith but to upset it. I have sometimes thought that I had a certain belief in possibilities—but all my possibilities are possible and I am lost. If John the Baptist stood on my door step and preached the simple life I would watch his transference to a lunatic asylum unmoved. I want something to happen that has never happened before, something beyond my imagining, something new. That is an old cry, I think, and it will survive me.

There are, perhaps, readers to whom that extract is not puzzling. But what does it all mean ? What sort of knowledge (if knowledge it was) was that which affected him

" with a horror of it all ? " Even if Middleton had not made a name for himself his life would yet be worth studying. For that matter, any person's life is worth studying, but as obviously we cannot as individuals give attention to everybody, we must seek to realise what has most deeply impressed us in our own experience. In trying to do so is there not a chance that we may hit upon a way of ridding ourselves the more easily of the black moods we have in common with those persons who have impressed us—moods which they themselves did not, or do not, know how to conquer ?

The darkness is all about,
It hides the blue ;
But I conquer it with my shout,
And pierce it through.

He did not conquer it with his shout, probably because it is not to be so conquered.

But the sound of my shouting dies,
And the shadows fall,
For Death is upon the skies
And upon us all.
The shadows fall and the still,
I am loath to sing,
I have wondered and kissed my fill
On the lips of spring.
But the golden cities are gone
And the stars are fled,
And I know that I am alone,
And I am dead.
No more than a dream that sings
In the streets of space;
Ah, would that my soul had wings,
Or a resting-place!

The reader may thrill to that lyricism as I have thrilled, but, poetry apart, here is a case of a man often crying from the depths and eventually flinging his life away.

> Brother ! yet something must be wrong
> That you should read a dead man's song !

he exclaims elsewhere perplexedly. It seems incredible that he could have understood everything as he says he did. How far his trouble penetrated my obtuseness, selfishness, or what ever it was, in the old days I cannot say. I was moved to action at times, but that I had no power to alter his fate (if any of us have power to alter the fate of another person) is proved by the event. In a letter of 1909, " of course what is the matter with both you and myself," he says,

> is that we are selfish almost to genius (that's why we get on so well together) and therefore when our tragic moments come, we feel that both their causes and their manifestations are annoyingly disproportionate to life as a whole. . . . And the drawback of being selfish, individual is a prettier word, lies in this : that the person of individuality (= selfishness) derives no pleasure from his own defeats because he realises that after all they are only trumpery affairs. Christ could endure his crucifixion because all humanity was crucified with him. You and I must suffer alone; it is the price of our superhumanity.

There seems to be more cleverness than truth in that passage, true to fact though it was that we were selfish. One of us was at least. What is certain is that he was in no enviable state of mind wanting " bloody red miracles." In a lame way, Job's-comforter-like, I used to remind him of the miracle of life, the overwhelming fact of existence, the wonder and mystery of it, but he would retort angrily and not without some reason that it would be just as wonderful if nothing existed at all. True it is that if we are wondering we are not worrying, and to be able to recall the sense of wonder when perturbed is not without some calming effect on the mind, but, living as we must do to some extent in a material world, we are obviously here for other purposes as well as the contemplation of mystery.

> Wonder is all that my dim spirit knows,
> Wonder, and strange disquiet,

he says in one of his poems. As a poet he probably wondered more than most people and knew something of the value of it. I need scarcely have reminded him of what efficacies it has.

Another view of him at this period may fitly be inserted here. I am indebted for it to my friend, Herbert Garland, a later New Bohemians' secretary and an essayist of imagination whose work is well known in bibliographical circles and should be better known outside of them.

> I first met Middleton [he writes] in 1906 on my introduction to the tavern club known as the New Bohemians. He sat opposite me at the large table, his fingers playing nervously with a long row of spent matches, talking continuously in that strident voice of his with which others in a large company were apt to find themselves talked down." Then, as at any time, however, there were few who were not content to listen to his talk. As a controversialist he was both ingenious and obstinate, taking a delight in defending unpopular positions; as an extemporist on themes suggested by personal experiences he can have had but few equals. There was in him a mixture of introspection and exuberance, qualities which sometimes did not blend but more often were productive of talk of an unusual and most fascinating kind. I do not remember what he talked about on this first meeting, neither do I remember the words of kindly welcome he went out of his way at the end of an exacting evening to address to me, a younger man and exceedingly shy. Later on, when I knew him better, I was always puzzled at the contrast between his brusque indifference to the feelings of quite inoffensive people and his consideration of the feelings of others who were no less vulnerable, but of whom he thought apparently that they were defenceless. At one moment he would unreasonably refuse to move an inch, and at another he would at a minute's notice journey to Scotland in the dismal company of a friend stricken with a
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> sudden grief.
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> For a season during the period Middleton was in lodgings in the Blackfriars Road I saw him almost daily. He partook of a late and enormous breakfast at the very hour when the exigencies of an office compelled me to make an early lunch in an underground tea-shop at Westminster. There, amid the disgruntled chess-players and rattlers of dominoes incidental to such places, was gathered a

small company who contrived to anticipate or continue nocturnal festivals. I remember him here in irresponsible moods of gaiety, moods in which the originality of his mind was displayed at its best. His appearance was then at its most fantastic stage, with hair and beard untrimmed and garments that grew tattered. This negligence of attire, subsequently reformed, was born of a *quartier latin* of his imagination and took even little street boys by surprise.

Middleton had by then contributed to *The Academy* and *The English Review*, and was writing for *Vanity Fair* stories which would be brandished in their proof state for our delectation. These, however, were but a part of his invention, for he would discuss projects for poems and detail plots of stories which he purposed writing, some of them more remarkable than those actually written. We in our small circle were privately convinced of his brilliant future. What he himself thought I do not know. Once he said to me with sudden earnestness : “ There will be no second-rate for me. I have either a first-class brain or a tenth-rate brain ” ; while at other times, usually when he was alone with you, a simplicity and even humility was expressed which contrasted oddly with the notion of him prevalent among those who knew him only in larger assemblies. His aim in life, as we knew it, was a serious one of accomplishing creative literature, but he was far from being merely “ literary ” or assuming characteristics proverbial to the minor poet. His interests were wide and his roundabout knowledge of the world was precocious and extensive. It was always amusing to watch the transformation in the all sorts and conditions of men who on encountering Middleton were first startled and inclined to be derisive at his appearance, gestures and voice, and then grew unaffectedly entertained by his whimsical geniality and shrewdness. Of his fascination for children I had no experience, which, to my mind, were less studied and more successful than his written stories and essays about them.

Looking back with a knowledge after the event it is easy to discern a quality in him which connects itself with his ultimate failure. The introspective side of his mentality was abnormally developed, but was apparently balanced by a

frank and youthful gusto in living which later gave place to a too patient benignity. So successful was this side of him dissembled that in the earlier days I am sure there were people who were unaware of its existence. The truth is that his introspection was irreconcilable with either the mysticism of an inner or the brutality of an outer world. Emotions were probed and tested in a way that in company was made by his dexterous handling conversationally amusing, but alone it must have become neurasthenic and devastating.

Even those to whom he was personally inimical never denied his wit, and his memory invokes recollections of mirth, of quarrels conceived in that youthful seriousness which becomes merely droll on maturer reflection, and of a real capacity for friendship. During the period I knew him best the demands he made on friendship were not always easy to meet by those whose lives were regulated to some extent by home or office ties. He once complained of a mutual friend that there were times when he must be passed in the street with a " how do you do" nod, and he commended another for making-up long absences by a cheerful readiness to spend a week with you when he put in a casual appearance, while of a third who was lately married he complained *apropos* of all Benedicts: " When you call you find his wife is having a baby and there is no tea ready."

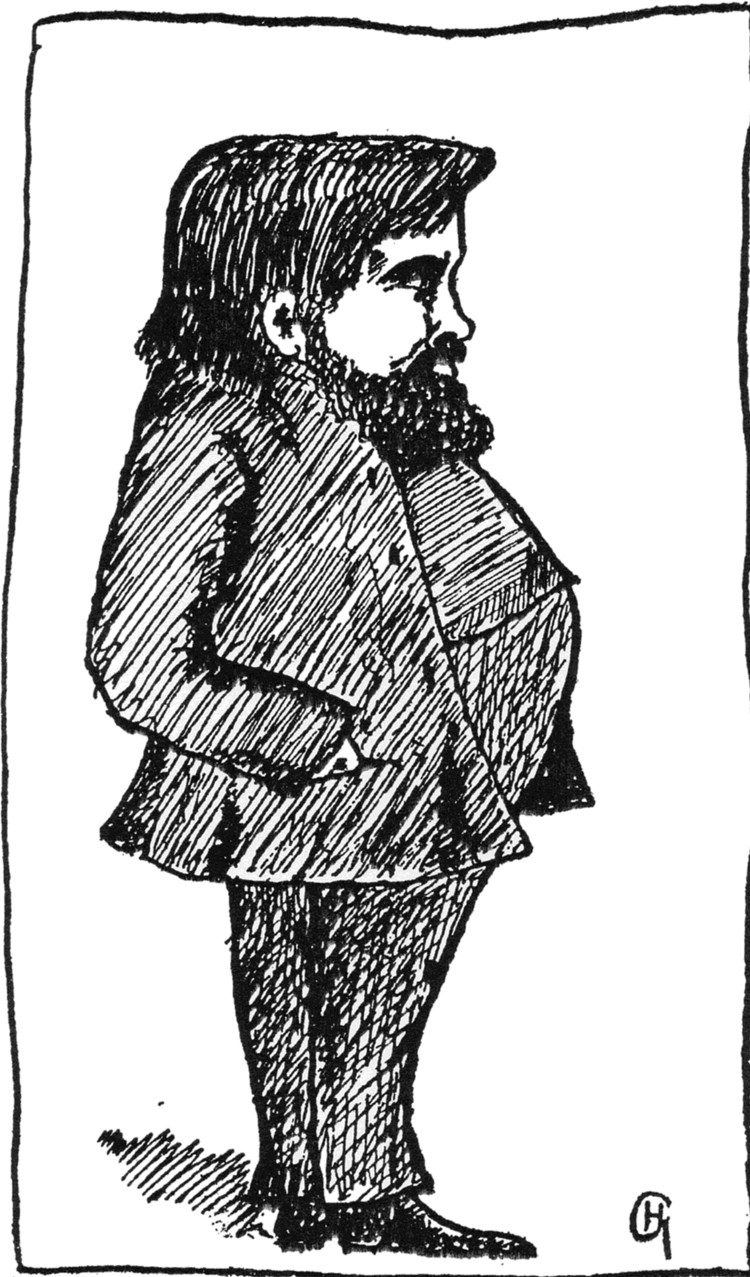
On his rare visits to England after he had gone to live in Brussels the change in him was marked. His wit was unimpaired, but his vivacity was gone and his boisterous pugnacity was daunted by a sensitiveness fully revealed. He was capable now of being wounded in a way that made one more cautious in speech. He met shafts that deserved his previous indifference or bright retorts with a gentleness born of no settled philosophy apparently, but of weariness. In place of the old whimsicality there crept into his conversation a cynicism that was not youthful. Lesser and luckier men then, as now, were being published. He, already a practised writer, was seriously speaking unpublished. He was not a man to write for posterity and eat oatmeal. His notion of a meal was a seven-course dinner, and he was never at pains to disguise a frank desire for immedi-

> ate applause. I knew nothing of his relations with editors and publishers, but I conjectured that a competent clerk in an insurance office by all accounts became an indifferent business man in literary life.

In the above excellent account of him the following passage particularly impresses me :

> Usually when he was alone with you, simplicity and even humility was expressed which contrasted oddly with the notion of him prevalent among those who knew him only in larger assemblies.

True it is of him that he was never quite at ease in the society of more or less sophisticated people, and would sometimes adopt a mask of boisterousness and even aggressiveness to hide what was perhaps a shyness he could not overcome. With simple folk and children, however, it was different. I once happened upon him accidentally when a little girl was tip-toeing up to him to kiss good-bye, her arms about his neck. It was worth seeing. And the saying of Jepson may be recalled—Jepson who knew him at the Bohemian meetings, as a journalist, and in the intimacy of home. " I do not know how I can possibly tell the children . . . and here he was always at his best."



CARICATURE BY HERBERT GARLAND.

CHAPTER V

THE POET AS LOVER

THE journalistic career which had opened not without promise was soon to prove an uncertain means of livelihood. Middleton's independent spirit rebelled against much that others accept as part of the business of getting a living. In his correspondence with Frank Harris, that pugnacious counsellor frequently warns him not to neglect his material interests. "Keep in with X——," he advises; "You must not drop stitches. . . . These editors need perpetual teaching." And again : "You should have cultivated Y—— a little more. There is nothing like competition for keeping editors informed of your value. The worst of you dreamers is that you know all these things as well as we do, but you will not represent to yourselves the virtue of practising them." But all aglow at a Shakespeare theory though he could be, this worldy wisdom had probably little or no effect upon him. Again to quote Harris : "His characteristic attitude was a dignified, somewhat disdainful acceptance of life's perverse iniquity." Introduced once to an editor amiable enough at dinner, he was invited to call at the editorial office in the morning. "I went there," he related afterwards, "and overheard him saying to the office boy that he was not in and I was to call another day. I told the boy to tell him to go to hell."

To avoid hunger he began to sell his books—a sacrifice painful even to those of us who suspect truth in the advice to lay up for ourselves only treasures in heaven. And now began a new phase of his life, which more than ever taxed his financial resources. The year 1908 was to see him for the first time in love.

Randal Charlton, acquainted only superficially with his love affairs, in reviewing his posthumous work surprised me by stating that he was never really in love at all, and that his poems were the "metrical exercises" of an artist who selected love as his sub-

ject and wrote accordingly. This Poe-like theory lends to speculation upon possible differences between the love affairs of artists and others than artists, but if it has any truth in it there is not much. He was most powerfully attracted towards the young girl who first inspired him, and later, and yet more powerfully, towards that other—the Christine of his poems— through whom the greater part of his poetic work was accomplished.

> The What may I give thee then? these sunlit flowers,
> These blossoms of the night to thee belong,
> And thine is all the merit of my song.

No doubt, again, he saw in them what would not be seen by men not their lovers. All human beings have that in them which is mystical and miraculous, but we deem ordinary those who in no extraordinary way move us individually. “I don’t know what he could see in her” is a familiar but foolish saying. In this sense, then, these girls of his were ordinary, unintellectual, pleasure-loving young persons, charming enough with their good looks and freshness of youth, but in whom only their lovers would find any sustained interest. He himself did not know quite what to make of his feelings in regard to them. Nobody having read his letters of the period but would recognise that he was swept off his feet by forces beyond him, but there are intervening letters when, with his intellect asserting itself, he cannot find the word for his heightened condition of being:

> My garland of Lily’s [he says, referring to the poems inspired by the girl of that name] proceeds apace and contains, I know, some good lines. But I wonder whether I love Lily or youth, or is it only compassion for the little boy I never was that moves me ? The doubt does not prevent my writing good verses. I want to love something or other anyhow: love kills the ego with a surfeit of egoism, and I appreciate but do not like mine. Elegy on an ego, dead of the springtime. Yet I was sorry when I sought to bury it kitten-wise under the vine. It is no use muddling our egos—we must try and hatch them into little bare-bottomed Cupids by means of the incubator of love. Columbus cracked his at

> one end and so they named America after somebody else, a circumstance which on reflection seems fortunate for Columbus.

On the other hand, in another letter he speaks of having "fallen into love as I fell into life, headlong," and, the year following, of the girls being the "whole object and aim of my existence." He must have been greatly fascinated by *something*. How else could the poetry have poured out of him as it did at this time? In seeking to understand what it was possessed him and the extent to which he was possessed, I am reminded now of Francis Thompson's dubious "Uranian" exaltations,*[14] now of the pallid love of Ernest Dowson for the incarnate Cynara who accepted that poet's homage and verses but ultimately married the waiter of the restaurant where she served in a like capacity.*[15] The passion perhaps affects poets in a way different from that in which it affects other men. Not only in their dreaming and singing—

> it must ever be
> That we dwell, in our dreaming and singing,
> A little apart from ye

—but in their loving may they differ. Rupert Brooke's fine sonnet has also some bearing on the matter :

> Love soars from earth to ecstasies unwist,
> Love is flung Lucifer-like from heaven to hell.
>
> But there are wanderers in the middle mist,
> Who cry for shadows, clutch, and cannot tell
>
> Whether they love at all, or, loving, whom :
> An old song's lady, a fool in fancy dress,
>
> Or phantoms, or their own face in the gloom ;
> For love of Love, or from heart's loneliness.

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*[14] " While I own to loving Francis Thompson for his poems about children, it is a poem called *Memorat Memoria* that takes my breath away, because I am one of the very unfortunate persons who really know what it means. " —*Monologues*.

*[15] *Cf.* Arthur Symons's Introduction to the *Collected Poems* of Ernest Dowson.

Pleasure's not theirs, nor pain. They doubt, and sigh,
And do not love at all. Of these am I.

Middleton was a man of strong passions, but what of natural desire was in him seems, so far at least as these girls were concerned, to have turned inward to be expressed in song. It need scarcely be added that his love was not returned. Lily was probably no more than flattered by his attentions, and Christine grew to care for him only when he had cooled towards her.*16 He has her mind on the subject in that good little poem, *The Lass that loved a Poet* :

But oh ! what shall I do ?
His looks affright me,
His ways delight me,
My heart is torn in two.

Had he had a settled position he could have persuaded her to marry him, but as he said : " She is not of the type that would starve prettily. " And then again, he was to

*16 " Have received your sad letter, *which has upset me more than you will ever know !* You asked me to be brave, but so eager was I to read your letter, thinking I should hear some news of my dearest friend, and being too proud again to write him, having written and not received an answer ! I opened your letter and fell in a dead faint. Yes, I will try to be brave ! but as much as I loved him if you had written and told me he had married I could have endured the shock ; but to think he is dead ! and I will never see him again, it is terrible, I cannot believe it ! If you could only write again and say that it is all a joke it would make me the happiest girl on earth. I suppose it will surprise you to hear me speak like this, but I can assure you it is true; that I have cared for him for over twelve months now, but he never knew, I did not intend that he should ! that was my secret ; as I knew that he had grown to dislike me very much lately, and I was very much hurt. Do please write to me soon and tell me if it is really true; tell me what was the cause of his death and all about it. You have said in your last letter that death was not terrible but a calm friend ! Why should it be like that ? Had he been suffering very much with his illness ? I cannot imagine any one being glad to die who had everything he wanted in life ! and was getting on successfully in his station and would one day be very famous. I shall never forget him ; it is impossible. You see, I am not so brave as you thought ! and I pray to God to take me soon to be with him ! I am so sad and miserable, I am making my confession to you now, but I should never have told while he lived, for one reason because I feared that he disliked me ! and another because I expected one day he would be very famous, and then we should have parted for ever. I have all his dear letters, which I shall always keep, they were so nice, but then I did not appreciate them. Please forgive me for writing like this to you ! You must think me a silly girl, but you were his dearest friend, and I am writing as my heart bids me. I shall be ever so pleased if you will kindly send me the names of the publishers where his books are to be published that I may buy them. I cannot write more now because I am too upset. Kindly write soon and give me all the details, for which I shall be most obliged to you. *I was always proud to have known Mr. Middleton.* "

It will be seen that these two were kept apart by a fine pride.

" Pluck out the eyes of pride ! thy mouth to mine !
Never ! though I die thirsting. Go thy ways ! "

some extent satisfied with the glow the girls afforded him and the poems they occasioned. A character in Shakespeare has it that " the lunatic, the lover, and the poet, are of imagination all compact, " but the poet differs in that he has the satisfaction of being able to express himself in terms of art. It was much to him that he was moved extraordinarily. They inspired him even when his intellect saw in them, a year or so later, " a lower order of thing than I had imagined, and quite incapable of appreciating dispassionate friendliness. " That was not altogether true of them, and especially of Christine. His feelings towards her were not wholly dispassionate. The matter is summed up, without being explained, in the poem *To Althea, who loves me not*, where after singing of his lady's many imperfections, her " mean, ignoble mind, " and the rest of it, he ends vehemently with :

> Damn you, in some queer way I love you still !

Queer enough it always was to him, even when the glow had gone and the ashes were cold. In writing, under date April 28th, 1911, seven months before he died, of a book he was then planning, he says :

> Love I mean to leave out altogether if I possibly can because I won't accept their damned convention. It has helped me to make a mess of things sometimes but I don't know that it has had any great spiritual influence on my life. I shall find out as I go if it is possible to ignore it. It will make the book stronger if I can.

That he would have been able to ignore it seems unlikely. The feelings which had been expressed in such work as he had then achieved would apparently have had to be considered when it came to the task of trying to realise his past. As to the spiritual influence of love on his life, in one poem at least, *The Welcome*,*[17] is a suggestion of

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*[17] In this poem, by the way, a line reads :

> " And moonlit dew begem the brake. "

It read originally:

> " And moonlit dew enjewel the brake, "

which, personally, in spite of the assonance, I prefer. Frank Harris induced him to alter it. A small point, but perhaps worth noting.

intense spiritual conflict. This poem—the theme of which recalls that remarkable chapter in Kenneth Grahame's prose masterpiece, *The Wind in the Willows*, where the awed animals are given their vision of the god Pan—hurries along a little too quickly, but it has some fine lines indicative of struggle going on deep within him :

> And where Pan squanders with his court,
> Love shall not spare the hornèd King,
> With red lips drawn to wanton sport
> And teeth to bite and hands to cling.
> And where the wood-boys bathe and fling
> Across the world their limbs made cool,
> Love tarries with his alms-giving,
> And there is trouble by the pool.

As poetry the first half of that stanza is so-so, but the latter part soars on wings of inspiration towards the heavens. But my point is concerned with the love of which it sings. Here surely is evidence of conflict between the Christian idea and paganism. How deeply he was impressed by that idea, how often he pondered it, is hard now to say. I remember no confidences on the subject, and take it that as a rule things really spiritual are fought out alone. Harris's view of him, I think, in this connection does not go very deep.

> At twenty-five Middleton had come to his full growth and was extraordinarily ripe. In every respect a typical artist, he had no religious belief, death seemed to him the proper and only climax to the fleeting show, but he delighted in the pageantry of life, and the melody of words entranced him. This visible world and the passions of men and women were all his care.

Well ! there is much danger that a biographer, all of whose care is not for this visible world, may fall into the error of reading too much of his own mind into that of his subject, but, on the other hand, one whose chief care is apparently for " the fleeting show " is likely to err in the other direction. That Middleton at twenty-five was extraordinarily ripe is credible, and it is possible that in a sense he had come to his full

growth. But, granted that he had no religious belief (and querying, incidentally, if all artists are without one), and that death may have seemed to him " the proper and fitting climax to the fleeting show," it is certain that he did not so regard it in respect of life in general. In his poems he not only welcomes the idea of death, he frequently expresses his dislike of it.

> Death is upon the skies
>   And upon us all.

And again :

> Having the thought of death
>   Eternally to perplex me.

A man eternally perplexed by death cannot be said to regard it as a proper and fitting climax. However, it is with a valuation of Middleton's love affairs that this chapter is chiefly concerned, and on these further light may be thrown by a consideration of the poem, *To Althea, who loves me not*. As poetry it is to be ranked among his best, though, personally, I am somewhat out of sympathy with its spirit. There seems to be much fine ado about nothing in it. He does not realise that it was not the poor girl's fault that he had become disillusioned. Why vent your wrath upon your *inamorata* because " the name of love " has been " dishonoured " in her " guise " ? " I can forgive your pride, " he cries :

> the decent veil
> That guards serene vacuity from shame ;

— a fine phrase that, by the way, —

> And that my passion's eloquence should fail
>   To move you, irks me not; but that the name
> Of love should be dishonoured in your guise,
>   That to this hateful and contaminate end
> I should have brought my faith, my spirit cries
>   Pardon of love and makes this harsh amend.

It is conceivable that he should be angry with her for not loving him, but only a child would blame her for the other reason. The poem—in its present form, at any rate—but for this childishness would, of course, not have been written, but there is no getting away from the flaw in it—a flaw all the more regrettable because otherwise it is a good piece of work; one of those containing good passages although the whole is not greater than any part. A mark of the true poet is the more or less memorable, magical line or passage in which is some thought or image enshrined in beauty, greatest, of course, in Keats and Shakespeare. Take, for example, the following :

even while I sing,
Worlds die and are created, still you move
Sole mistress of your imperturbable hour
As though that hour held all. . . .

And here is one better still:

from out the hopeless fight
The souls of men seek forlorn burial
And eyes that praised you range the eternal night.

Passion it has, too; and this is another quality in which Middleton excels. Keats, Browning, Tennyson*[18] even—to name three poets to mind—have this quality, but it is anything but conspicuous in modern poetry. Where, in this century's literature, is such passion to be found as in *The Silent Lover ?**[19] The poem should be quoted in full:

*[18] Tennyson's *Fatima*, in Arthur Machen's good judgment, is one of the most passionate poems in our language.

*[19] *Poems and Songs*, I. Another good example of passion in his work is the poem *Serenade* in the same volume. Here is the final stanza:

" Beloved, can you hear ? They sing
Words that no mortal lips can sound ;
Love through the world has taken wing,
My passions are unbound.
And now, and now, my lips, my eyes,
Are stricken dumb with hope and fear,
It is my burning soul that cries,
Beloved, can you hear ? "

I cannot sing, I have no words
To love you, hate you, make you mine—
To win your ear like mating birds,
To brim your veins with wanton wine ;
But all my longing senses cry
Their faltering, broken oratory.

My words rehearsed, my songs new sung,
Are lost beneath this fierce suspense,
I cannot sound with human tongue
My heart's insurgent eloquence,
Now of your lips, now of your eyes,
Now of your falling melodies !

I have no words, but Time shall prove
This song of mine the best of all,
My lips shall be as Love's, for love
Shall make their silence musical ;
And on some rapt, enchanted night,
They shall reveal my heart's delight.

I have myself no words to do justice to this poem. Such passion is beyond me. I can only feel its intense fervour enough to be sure that many lovers will appreciate it more fully and believe with the poet that this strain of his will be " the best of all. " Incidentally, it should be noted here that in this poem, as elsewhere, following the tradition of the great singers, he prophesies his future fame. Mere versifiers, for all their vanity, dare not thus challenge posterity in their lucubrations.

Harking back to his love affairs, that he remained puzzled by them, never saw them as they really were—if anything can be seen as it really is—is certain. Almost one of his last articles was *A Monologue on Love-Songs*, in which, in the person of an imaginary *café* acquaintance, he says:

> Yes, I have read your poems, and I thought they were very pretty. Some of them seem to have been felt; I think you must have been in love with something or other when you wrote them. But what you were in love with—whether it was a girl or the idea of a girl, or yourself, or something that you had found in a book—I really don't know; and that is my criticism of nearly all the love-poems that have ever been written.

That was as much as he knew of the matter. But whatever the degree of his love—whether he approximated most to the great lovers of the world or " the lap-dog lovers who whine as they chew "—a category in which he could not be placed—his poems at any rate were no more " metrical exercises " than are the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare or the *Book of Airs* of Campion.

He left a word-portrait of Lily throwing further light on his attitude towards his " dear, dreamy creatures, " as he called them. It is a fragment, the beginning of an article meant for publication I fancy, but abandoned, probably, as being too intimate :

> I have her picture here [it runs], a photograph where she leans forward gracefully in her pretty fancy dress and raises her finger daintily like a girl on a fan. Yet when I meet her she does not strike me as fragile; I am rather impressed with a sense that behind her childish face there is something strong and primitive. Her pouting mouth is wonderful of course and her eyes—her eyelashes are longer than any I have ever seen; but I believe it is her strength or perhaps concentration of character that enchants and torments and bewilders me. The child Lily I have met often enough. She is rather troublesome as children go; lacking in sympathy and generosity and very difficult to persuade; but there is another Lilian whom I have never met, and whom I want most passionately to meet. The child Lily has a lover, a decent enough youth I imagine, but I am so little jealous of him that I think I could watch him kissing her with a calm mind if she did not enjoy it too much. But the other Lilian has, I am sure, no lover, nor has she kissed the lips of anyone yet. I have not met her but I have seen her in dreams. She is the girl for whom those eyes were made and screened with lovely lashes. She is the girl whose leaping blood has thickened those lips and

> set them apart as if entreating God to be good to her and make her life passionately amusing. One spring day or perhaps on one of those languourous nights of summer when girls cannot sleep, I think she will rise and murder the other Lily without a pang. If I am allowed to know her after that, I hope she will understand me better than she does now. I wish her so well and she is such a baby that I am always trying to impose my will on her, and under the child the real Lily hates me for it. . . .

A very human piece of writing is this. For myself, I saw very little in Lily but an agreeable smile and an unusual capacity for oblivious detachment when on the stage with others of the theatrical company to which she belonged. She was certainly individual. When it was not her turn to be singing something, she stood immobile, wrapped in a dream which was probably very practical. She married the lover abovementioned—a newsboy—and when last I heard of her was the stout mother of very many children. As for Christine, poor, pretty, sentimental Christine, like an old-fashioned figure strayed from grandmother days of antimacassars and croquet—she also married. Not long after the war broke out her husband fell ill with influenza; she nursed him, caught it herself, and died. I have sometimes thought that had Middleton married her he might have made a success of his appearance on this temporary stage of the eternal journey. But who can tell ? Does the mere being married or remaining single—or, for that matter, the being born or dying—make any change in us essentially ? There are deeper dreams.

CHAPTER VI

POEMS AND SONGS

OF what may be called their author's pre-love poems, several are not without merit. *The Last Cruise* has been already commented upon. *The Ballad of the Bacchanals*, though to the ear running too quickly, is not a bad piece of work, and, of others, his *Dream Song* has a certain effective elvish imagery:

Twisted and lank and hairy,
With wanton eyes and wary,
They stretch and chuckle in the wind . . .

The picture is vivid enough. A stanza from *The Glad Nights of Spring* should also be quoted :

Her voice is like the song of hidden streams
Laughing at dusk, her feet are wet with dew,
Her eyes are set with God's eternal blue.
She is the perfect lady of our dreams,
And far across the night and far and far,
We seek her like a star.

There may be only an echo of what is perhaps the supreme quality in poetry, magic, in that passage—charm only—but it has at least some power of enchantment, and, whatever its value, *a singer* wrote it.

This, again, from *The Blind Cripple*, is not unworthy of note:

And they have said that even as the blood
Of this blind cripple is the crimson wine
That greets the seasons in this heart of mine

And wakes my body with its passionate flood,
Calling " Oh joy, my joy, thou art in vain,
The spring is come again ! "

With the coming of love his poetry was to increase greatly in strength. Following *The Last Cruise*, the next poem to take me aback was *Lament for Lilian*. Who loves rhythm and melody knows how, quickened by inspiration, words will sometimes gather force and flow serenely onward like a deep, clear stream. Some of Swinburne's poems have this quality pre-eminently :

O smitten lips where through this voice of mine
Came softer with her praise,
Abide a little for our lady's love.
The kisses of her mouth were more than wine
And more than peace the passage of her days.

The last two lines of that passage flow perfectly. And now, in *Lament for Lilian*, was a stronger, deeper flowing with, in it, a magic such as he had never yet achieved. Take the following, for example:

My love was more than any life of mine
And more than me, before its sudden gleam
The years that knew me faded like a dream,
I was as one who drinks enchanted wine
To sport with gods; and yet there shone for me
Across my madness, Lily, laughingwise,
A human blossom glad for human eyes
Made pagan by a child's serenity.

A poet-critic could reconstruct, almost with exactitude, the state of mind and feeling in which that stanza was composed. Its author had just written:

Beneath her feet the green earth rolled away
From sea to sea, and I might understand
The water's song, the music of the land,

The lingering choruses of night and day,
That gave me with a dole of childish tears,
The knowledge of my blood's supreme delight,
The yearning of the morning for the night,
The timeless passion of the hemispheres.

Which is good poetry, by the way, and the last two lines rise to greatness. He had just written the stanza, I say, and for a moment would pause now on the tide of inspiration to pick up the thought and begin anew. And so forward again until suddenly the full tide would take him :

I was as one who drinks enchanted wine
To sport with gods; and yet there shone for me
Across my madness, Lily, laughingwise,
A human blossom glad for human eyes
Made pagan by a child's serenity.

Great, again, are the last two lines of *that* passage. . . . There had been no need to think while the tide was upon him. He would be borne away on it, carried along with hardly a pause before the next stanza :

Ah ! Lord of Love, these are my eyes that weep,
These are my lips that do lament her so,

and so on to the poem's end with its reflective

Song is no tribute to a singing girl
For whom the wanton earth makes madrigals,

and the final and somewhat self-pitiful shrug of the shoulders :

Dear God, what means a poet more or less ?

These few extracts are doubtless inadequate to convey the full beauty of *Lament for Lilian*, which must be read as it stands in *Poems and Songs*. How Professor Saintsbury, whose judgment is so respectable, with this poem and so many others before him, could see in them " only the outward character of poetry, " was staggering to me

until I reflected that the worthy professor, a great critic, was yet himself no poet. Poets, we know, are not always good critics, but they will sometimes see what eludes the critical eye. Swinburne has amazingly bad judgment at times, but than his book on Blake there are few better in our language. I must risk the charge of arrogance and deny the professor's judgment in this instance; and, of course, further attempt to substantiate my own faith. There was a time when, with this poetry coming new and hot to me from the pen, I was too enthusiastic, but I am curious now only of seeing it as in itself it really is. The years, at any rate, will decide, and, after all, there are more important things to discover in life than the proper niches in which to place poets.

Christine's Guest.

Love, the dear anchorite, has found a cell
Within your heart, your eyes have late confessed
Your knowledge of your sweet, esteemèd guest,
And your soft lips have praised him like a bell;
Though yet you will not sound his gentle name,
Love is the guest your happy eyes proclaim.

[sic. encumberance] Oh sweet encumbrance! oh welcome pain!
Christine's in love, how pretty she is grown!
Her eyes do change the mountains from dull stone
To eager flesh, Christine's in love again —
To view her face the rivers leave their beds,
And kingly pines bend down their crownèd heads.

Keep your glad visitor, dear child, and make
Your heart his home, he will not hurt you long
But he will give new wonder to your song
And bless the singer for his welcome's sake;
Make him your own, dear heart, the eyes I wooed
Are all transfigured by his gratitude

Richard Middleton.

HOLOGRAPH MS. REPRODUCTION OF A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED POEM.

A few more specimens may tempt lovers of poetry themselves to search for others. The first I detach from the poem *For He had Great Possessions*:

Ah, who shall hearten when the music stops,
For joy of silence ? While they dreamed above,
She showed me love upon the mountain tops
And in the valleys, love.
And while the wise found heaven with their charts
And lore of souls, she made an earth for me
More sweet than all, and from our beating hearts
She called the pulsing sea.

Really, that is very beautiful! Beauty, indeed, is spread about the two volumes of *Poems and Songs* like wild-flowers in a field. Turn over the pages anywhere:

Shaped like a flower new-moulded out of sleep
I see your body, marvellously slim,
Gleam in the dusk; I hear the murmurous song
Of drowsy childhood charm the listening night,
And with an all-dispassionate delight
My heart takes rest. . . .

What feelings are evoked, what images are suggested by the following from *To Dorothy*:

And far upon the silent hills there roll
Strange shapes of mist, and soft bewildered things
Beat on my shrinking face with noisome wings. . . .

How beautiful is *At the Gates*, with its lovely imagery woven about the dawn !

The delicate fabric of the stars is frayed
Where dawn lets in the light ;
And in the scented glade
The thrushes thread day’s lattices. . . .

Beautiful, again, are these lines from *Lament for Lilian:*

the moon a-stir,
Binds the wet flowers in garlands with her beams
To deck the brows of sleep. . . .

And he can do that most difficult of things in this form of literature—he can make poetry of proper nouns, so using them that they do not jar:

The nightingale across the crimson bowl
Gave you to Omar ; by the forsaken waves
Ulysses found you dreaming; Shakespeare's soul
Drew its clear song from yours ; and sullen slaves
Peered on your beauty through their heavy lids
And with their hearts' blood built the Pyramids.

In reflective poetry, moreover, epigrammatic or otherwise, embodying some opinion or belief, he challenges its masters :

Love is no victim for a wanton's kiss,
Nor shall he be imprisoned by her hand.

Or take his best longer passage of this order :

For though man only lives his sombre days
To sicken at his task of life and die,
Dreading the silent and unfriendly sky
That has not heard his message, still he plays
His part in God's great pageant, and obeys
His soul's command, albeit grudgingly ;
And where his hesitant feet have wandered by,
His footprints scar the world, and by his ways
A hundred ages tread; his heedless phrase
Rings in their ears like an angelic cry
Heard before birth and treasured time-lessly,

And all his timid hopes and quick dismays
Thrill in their hearts and build their heavens on high.

It challenges the masters, I say. Leaving aside the value of the passage as a whole, there is surely the memorable, the great, line in

where his hesitant feet have wandered by
His footprints scar the world . . .

They can be detached, it will be seen, from their context, these passages, unities in themselves. And moth and rust will be long in disposing of them.

Many of the poems, of course, fine as they are, do not permit of justice being done to them unless quoted entire. I would gladly deal at length with the greater part of them, analysing and appraising, but here, obviously, is a case where the plea that space forbids is genuine. *Christine*, the best of the few sonnets he wrote in that form, should be included in any sonnet anthology. *Any Lover, any Lass*, in the Elizabethan tradition, is as fresh, and more tender, than anything by W. H. Davis. And in that same tradition *Love's Logic* and *Mad Maid's Song* must be mentioned. Walter de la Mare, who of modern poets nearest approaches magic, specially quoted *A. C. M.* when reviewing *Poems and Songs* on its first appearance. Not that the poem has magic, and de la Mare may have picked it out rather as being characteristic of the man than of his work, or because it met some mood of his own at the time, but it is good, nevertheless; light, simple, and inspired. More the product of the enchanter is *Queen Mélanie and the Wood-Boy*, which, with another, *The Last Serenade*, probably his best for its compactness of form and its yearning restrained passion, sets me thinking of qualities characteristic of the work of the master-artist among poets and the master-craftsman, Keats. It has beauty, certainly, has this *Queen Mélanie*. There is colour in it and deep natural feeling ; art's " lordly pleasure-house " and the world of nature are here and finely contrasted. More objective than most of its author's work, its theme is the woman weary of all sensual enjoyment and craving the motherhood she has not experienced :

Ah ! were that tongue unknown that nightly charms
My cruel dreams, I should not stretch in vain
Across the world my unassuagèd arms,
That crave so light a burden ; not again
Should I awake at dawn and grieve for him,
Slipped forth between my heart's most jealous bars,
The child who all night long in meadows dim
Peeps through my fingers babewise at the stars.

With the coming of the wood-boy to her tired palace, where

languour measureless
Troubled the earth beneath the brooding sky,

her heart is swiftly with him and her dream half realised.

Through his drooping eyes
I saw the wonder of the untrodden woods,
When roused by night the savage creatures hear
Pan piping to his moonlit solitudes,
And all the forest stays its breath for fear.
I saw the seasons; spring in the windy eaves
Calling the birds to song and summer's pride.
Now autumn flung largesse of golden leaves
For beggared earth to clutch, the autumn died
And winter lit the leafless woods with frost
And every shivering twig bediamonded,
But best I loved the spring, when brown earth tossed
Exultant in labour on her starry bed.

No other poem in the collection is quite like Queen Mélanie.*[20] And that, again, is remarkable about Middleton's poetry. So few of the poems can be put into groups ; most of them have an individual note of their own. I have been thrilled, too, and puzzled—as any one in the circumstances would be puzzled—by a new beauty in two or three of them ; a new beauty of cadence, a sort of rapture of lyricism or bird-like liquidity, as in

The shadows fall and the still,

or more pronouncedly and concretely—if that is the word—in his exquisite *To Mélisande* :

Now is the morning very fair,
On every leaf the dew is lit,
Oh heart of mine, let down your hair
And all the winds shall play with it.

Across my face, across mine eyes,
The wind shall blow for my delight
The curtain of your hair, the skies
Shall win the pomp of night.

And all about my head shall wreathe
New winds and blossoms new,

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*[20] This poem, though apparently complete, was really unfinished. In the MS., after the line:

" And down the silent galleries crept night, "

the last in the printed version, are another stanza and a line, as follows:

" Jealous of joys that were not hers she came,
And scornful of our mortal happiness,
Less constant than her dreams that bring no shame ;
She loosed her hair's abundance, tress by tress,
Staining the marble pavements, till her grace
Conquered my world and stole away my prize,
I could not smooth the shadows from his face
Or keep her knowledge from his waking eyes.
" Oh sweet, not twice beheld of mortal eyes. "

Middleton crossed these out and himself passed the poem as it stands in the *English Review*, and when editing *Poems and Songs* I, of course, followed his reading.

And yours shall be the air I breathe
  And all my darkness, you.

The tears the sunlit roses weep
  May not assuage my pain,
Mine are the broken stars of sleep
  And the cool night again.

Within the shadow of our dreams
  I draw my little breath,
And I heed not the sunbeams,
  I have no care for death.

Nay, though the mocker everywhere
  Echoes his jest and stales his wit,
Let down your hair, let down your hair,
  I'll make my shroud of it.

There is lyricism pure and bird-like. No need to define the word ! Listen again to the fourth stanza :

Mine are the broken stars of sleep
  And the cool night again.

If that has only the " outward character of poetry, " then are some of us indeed damned—in one world, at least—damned even as Touchstone says: " like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side. " And take, again, a song to my mind even more exquisite ; a light air; a breath you might say ; one of those lyrics of the kind which moved Pater to some good prose when writing of Du Bellay's delicate masterpiece. *Song*, Middleton called it, simply :

What is a lover worth
Who may not win his flower ?
I was born of earth
All in a sunless hour.

My father was a wind,
My mother a rose tree,
But I was deaf and blind
Till love discovered me.
Last night I kissed her eyes,
Her hair, her little ears ;
She praised me with soft cries,
Her tears were all my tears ;
And all her body's red
Leapt to her cheek to see
The moon hang down her head
When love discovered me.

That is placed away in my treasury of dreams—laid up in lavender with *D'un Vanneur de Blé aux Vents* and Shelley's *Lines to an Indian Air* and his perfect little song beginning " A widow bird sat mourning for her love. " Nor is there any need to broaden the " i " in the word " wind " that it may rhyme better with " blind. " The final " nd " is quite sufficient and, indeed, more effective.

The biography of some of these poems may be not uninteresting. On the MS. of the song above given is scribbled : " Richard Middleton, poet, smoking broken cigars in a pipe and drinking sweet port ' to keep his heart from breaking,' " his own quotation being from the first stanza of Ashe's poem *Weaknesses* :

Stealing away from home,
  All human things forsaking,
Unto the grave I come,
Singing sweet sad songs
  To keep my heart from breaking.

Ashe, by the way, who wrote that lovely thing *Meet we no angels, Pansie ?* is a true poet long neglected.*[21] Middleton was much taken by his work on first coming across it. The MS. of the poem *Pain*, too, has a scrawl across it : “ Neuralgia wrote this ” ; and on that of yet another—*Slave of Dreams*, which, complete as it seems in print, is unfinished—is scribbled : “ At this moment a little boy passes the window whistling ’ Put me among the girls.’ ” The interruption evidently started a new train of thought and put an end to the poem, the unpublished further stanza he had started being crossed out. I seldom saw him at work on any poem, but as to *The Poet and his Dead*, which in MS. is unusually illegible, he came bursting into my room one day with the MS., exclaiming, “ I’ve done the big thing at last! ” His excitement was so extraordinary I was both amused and startled. It is a curious poem, inspired by no human being, with varying musics not always to be apprehended at once of the ear, and ending with an unpleasant douche of ugly actualism :

> She was so beautiful, she is beautiful, with her face like snow ;
> White wax whiter than the bees know
> In the quiet room ; I killed all the blue-bottles hours ago——
> Dirty creatures——

What he thought he had achieved, I fancy, was a reconciliation of the ideal and the actual, but in some way vague to me it seems that the poem, good as it is, doesn’t quite “ come off, ” as we used to say.*[22]

Again, *The Bathing Boy*, also good, but which Frank Harris overpraises (“ finer than Herrick, nearly as beautiful, indeed, as *The Grecian Urn* ”—which is nonsense)—this poem was inspired by a picture-postcard. Other biographical details to mind include a laughing discussion between us upon the poem *Epithalamium*, which reveals him in

*[21] He deserved neglect ; careless of art, lazily trusting nearly always to inspiration. But now and again poetry came out of him which, “ while word shall chime with word, ” must live. *Pansie*, for example, and throughout his large output are many good isolated passages.

*[22] This poem was contemptuously read out in court during the hearing of a libel action following the publication of an article on Middleton in the *English Review*. “ Did I think it was poetry ? ” Nettled by counsel’s ignorance, I retorted that I did think it was poetry, that he knew nothing about poetry, and that, in any event, questions of poetic values had nothing to do with the case. The action is worth a note because in the course of it Mr. Justice Horridge, following tradition but in all kindly innocence, inquired, “ Who was Verlaine ? ”

one of his petulant, ironical moods occasioned by the coyness of Christine. Having imagined a future lover for her,

> Granting you for your heart's delight,
> The love that you can understand,

he goes on to observe bitterly :

> The love that made you mine shall bear
> Harsh fruit before the end of this,
> For in the darkness you shall hear
> An echo that is none of his,
> And you will droop with sudden fear
> Beneath his fond, adulterous kiss.

I thought it a good idea, though not *grand chose* as poetry, and queried the word " adulterous " as the *mot juste*. On his insisting that it was: " Well, you may be right, " I admitted, " but good Lord, you *do* think that that young woman belongs to you ! "

Some of the feminine names heading his poems are pure inventions—Dorothy, Marjorie, Marguerite, Diana, and the like, inspired, some by Christine, others by just an idea arriving harmoniously. " Give me a name for this, " he asked one day as to the poem *To Diana*, which he had just written. " If they " (meaning the *Vanity Fair* staff of that time) " think it's written to a woman they're sure to see something dirty in it. " So as the poem suggested that it might have been written to the moon, in it went under its present title. *To Irene* and two or three other poems—*Under the Whip*, *Love's Freedom*, and perhaps *Irene*—not to be confused with *To Irene*—have a more personal history. They were inspired by a young harlot of our acquaintance whose vine leaves were too much for the police one evening; she was taken in hand by a Rescue Home. An odd girl was Irene. There was something not only wild and untamed in her, Mænad-like, but something, too, must have been quenched or numbed in her early youth. She unfolded only to Middleton, and that, judging by the poem *To Irene*, in a way that must have amazed him.

And then you thrilled with some supreme desire
  That was not of my dreams, your pulses beat
  Time to the world, and with rebellious feet
Your triumphing passions scaled the gates of fire;
And lo, I was as dust ! in some far place
  My soul paid tribute to tremendous kings,
  Who bowed their heads before your gleaming wings
And praised your beauty with averted face.
Love is too great for me, from this dead world
  Wherein I hold a child's uncertainties,
  I may not dare the glamour of his skies
Scatheless, nor see his magic wings unfurled. . . .

Good poetry is that. In *Love's Freedom* he moralises a trifle about her and distinguishes between forms of love :

This is not all of love, for more than this,
The purer breezes of this gentler land
Bless me and make me glad, where heaven is
I see the palace of my mistress stand ;
Love is no victim for a wanton's kiss,
Nor shall he be imprisoned by her hand.

I myself knew but little of the girl ; her soul, I mean, being a mysterious locked garden to me. Something of what she revealed to Middleton he expresses in *Under the Whip* :

It well may be that death is God's last boon,
  For with the hours life's tapestry is blurred
  To strange, unshapen nothings; I have heard
Eve in the twilight singing to the moon
The passionate song that has no human tune,
  And some fierce echo in my bosom stirred,

Greeting the cry, as an imprisoned bird
The piping of the day. Oh Death, be soon !
For there is nothing left in life but this,
And to this scarlet shrine is beauty fled
Since Paradise grew earth and men were wise ;
But who can breathe beneath your final kiss,
Love ! and who would not rather be well dead
Than feed the torment in your laughing eyes !

As poetry that is not a bad sonnet, but its chief interest, I think, is in its feminine psychology—as with *To Irene*—and in the thought occasioned that " death is God's last boon. " He has a thought of like nature in the poem beginning " I am not god, or devil, or wholly man " :

For now I gathered roses one by one,
And now I sought grey heavens in the mire
That folds about our hearts, till my desire
Lay a dead thing and cold beneath the sun.
And suddenly death seemed the final boon . . .

It must have come to him often, more often than was good for him. " I shut my eyes to *my* doubts, " he is recorded as having said in a previous chapter. But he didn't, or else accepted too readily the belief, pessimistic, certainly, in a young man, that death *is* a boon; though this conflicts with the earlier quoted :

Having the thought of death,
Eternally to perplex me.

However, let us return to his poetry.

A copy of *Dust of Dreams* he sent me has the comment " Good verse ! " at foot, and good verse it is, and more than that. This poem was published originally in that long defunct quarterly, *The Neolith*, the creation of Mrs. Bland, copies of which fetch high prices in Charing Cross Road. The quarterly was edited, I believe, from Dym-church—that " flower that smells of honey and the sea "—westward of Hythe by the

marshlands, where Conrad, Perceval Gibbon, Jepson and other literary people were at times wont to foregather. Middleton looked after my house while I was holidaying there one August, a result of his caretakership being the whimsical essay *A Distinguished Guest* in *The Day before Yesterday*. The guest was the family cat.*[23]

Another poem, *To Raie*, is worth noting for a stanza good and revelatory of his state of mind when Christine was most indifferent:

Kiss me and ease this passionate unrest,
There are so many voices in my breast
Singing, " Oh eyes that shine! Oh lips that part ! "
I cannot hear my heart.

Good also is *Irene*, with its pagan spirit, for such concluding stanzas as

Love played with us beneath the laughing trees;
We praised him for his eyes and silver skin,
And for the little teeth that shone within
His ruddy lips; the bracken touched his knees,
Earth wrapped his body in her softest breeze,
And through the hours that held no count of sin
We kept his court, until above our din,
Night westward drove her glittering argosies.
Oh, lovely days long dead! There falls on me,
In this dim world I may not understand,
An echo of your sweetness ; in my hand
One frail, sad rose inspires eternity

*[23] To these scraps of biography may be added two others within my recollection. We were in a public-house one day when a young man—a sort of strayed child—professing to tell character by handwriting, remarked upon the shape of his thoughts. They were sometimes oblong, he said. Hence

" All my black and oblong thoughts "

in *Mad Harry's Vision (Poems and Songs)*.

There is another poem—and a very fine poem, too—*A Catechism*, unpublished before it appeared in *Poems and Songs*, which in MS. is called *The Harlot's Catechism.* This was the only concession I made, as editor, to Fisher Unwin's excessive respect for Bowdler.

With dreams that are no more, and from the sea
  That beats upon this grey perplexèd land,
  Blows rumour of some merry drunken band
That keeps your revels still in Arcady.

He must have felt much pleasure on laying down the pen after finishing poetry of that high order. And the pleasure a poet gets in expression, even if but of the moment, I must not forget, lest this picture of him be painted in too sombre colours. Rose-coloured moods, too, as expressed here and there in *Poems and Songs*, must be remembered:

Well I loved, but they who knew
  What my laughing heart could be,
What my singing lips could do,
  Lie a-dreaming here with me. . . .

So his *Pagan Epitaph*; and we have the same note again in *A. C. M.* :

Heart, the winds that blow
  Lightly o'er my leisure,
Haply they shall measure
  My glad life-time here ;
Laughing, " Well we know
  Love was all his treasure,
  Pain and pride and pleasure,
    Hope and fear."

Leaving personal characteristics awhile, however, the poem which may come to be recognised as the crown of his achievement is *The Last Serenade*. A remarkable quality of this poem is its restrained fervour of passion. It must be given here from its first deliberate ascent towards the heights of song to its final passionate exultation :

Courage, my song, and like a lover climb
  To her high balcony ; this is the night
When in a star-lit valley where old Time

Pauses to latch his way-worn shoe, delight
Shall blossom like a flower ; though she rest
Within her highest turret, this my song
Shall bring her down to my insurgent breast
Where the blood burns that has been cool too long.

Be silent now, oh moon, and be you dumb,
Oh too importunate stars ! I will not hear
Your dulcet tales that make my senses numb
With easeless longing, for the hour is near
When I will go, who with my love abide,
Dreaming across your luminous seas no more
To the far gate of heaven, where the tide
Flings wrack of worlds upon the reverberate shore.

Nay, though my eyes grieve for the way we went,
Peace shall attend my heart and love shall steep
My passionate soul in waters of content ;
No more enamoured of my lady Sleep
I shall explore in tranquil wakefulness
My love's own universe ; her little hands,
Her eyes, her lips, are all my loveliness,
And these are all my heritable lands.

This is the end of all things, thou shalt cease,
Oh heart, thy timeless journey followed far,
For all thy days shall be inviolate peace
And all thy starry nights shall know one star
Irradiant and serene ; and thou, oh mind,
Weary of thy long questionings, shalt prove

Servant of my enchanted life and find
In all thy ways the wisdom that is love.

The world is drunk with night, there gather slow
From some remoter heaven to tempt my blood
The mutable stars processional, and lo !
On all the hills the moonlight is in flood ;
But I am wakeful yet. Oh song, ascend
Swift to her ears and bid her dreams depart.
To-night the sombre years shall have an end,
To-night, to-night shall bring her to my heart !

If that is not nearly perfect, I must stand rebuked in my judgment. Doubts will come to us at times. The verdict of a Saintsbury ; Coleridge aglow for Bowles ; Byron too flamingly white-hot for Pope ; even the foolish utterance of the reviewer who said the poem did " not rise above the level of magazine verse "—these shades rise with warning fingers to remind us of glitter that is not gold. On the other hand, let us be quite sure we are not Giffords or Crokers, or the thousand others who have mistaken gold for lead. " Nothing in verse or out of verse is more wearisome than the delivery of reluctant doubt, of half-hearted hope and half-incredulous faith, " says the dogmatic and fiery Swinburne as critic. " Wearisome, " it should be noted, is the word he uses. Doubt was wearisome to him as it is to all of us, but the threat—for it is a threat—should not set us trying to dispose of doubt and weariness by any method which involves our being untrue to ourselves. How much of vanity, again, is in our judgments we must consider. I was vain and proud of knowing Middleton, and so exaggerated, and perhaps to some extent still exaggerate, the value of his work. But all doubts notwithstanding, I yet feel that there is that in it which analysis cannot dissolve into nothingness. *El pur si muove !* And if this feeling is indeed " such stuff as dreams are made on, " it will nevertheless yet do its little towards making order in the house of literature. Could knowledge be without opinion, truth without error, good without evil, substance without shadow ? The blackguardism of Croker hastened the

crowning of Keats. Even unsound judgments have their value. They excite in us a desire, which might else stagnate, for what is sound.

> The active spirit of man soon sleeps, and soon
> He seeks unbroken quiet ; therefore I
> Have given him the Devil for a companion,
> Who may provoke him to some sort of work,
> And must create for ever . . .

If we believe that " wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness, " we are not likely to " go about the country stealing ducks," influenced by that idea of the wise—and worldly-wise—Goethe.

CHAPTER VII

LOVE, POVERTY AND NEURALGIA

MIDDLETON'S letters for the years 1908 and 1909 tell a story chiefly of love, poverty and neuralgia. Jepson once said that a new set of teeth might have saved him, and the view, despite its materialism, must be considered in any attempt towards a portrait. At least three of his poems were inspired by neuralgia, one of these being *The Ascetic's Love Song*, in which some eyes have professed to see a perversity it may, or may not, contain. It was rejected by the friendly editor of an annual magazine, who probably thought that it masochistically glorified physical suffering.*[24] Such lines as the following may have lent to the opinion :

> For at her kiss my senses wake, mine eyes
> Win braver colours than our sunsets hold,
> My ears achieve the deathless melodies
> Our songs but faintly echo. . . .

At Pain's kiss is meant, of course. If, however, we come to look into the poem as a whole, and more deeply, it may perhaps be justified. Let further passages bear witness :

> Cleansing the mortal part of me with fire
> Of her consuming love, I am made pure. . . .
> I droop with life's excess, who once would plan
> That at the last I might be more than man.[25]

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*[24] Editors are sometimes curious beings. In an article, I once described as " perverse " Hedda Gabler's mirthless appreciation of the symbolism represented by Lövborg " with vine-leaves in his hair. " The offending word—the right one, surely !—was altered to " contrary " !

*[25] Compare with the sentiment expressed in his Pagan Epitaph : " When I lived I sought no wings, Schemed no heaven, planned no hell, But, content with little things, Made an earth, and it was well. "

But serving her, our souls seem nothing worth
Fashioned by idle apes for apes to wear ;
There's never a weeping thing upon the earth
That knows itself immortal, but we dare
To make our frail humanity our pride,
And by our senses we are crucified.

In those lines is decidedly no eulogy of the senses—a valuation of them indeed very different from that of the out-and-out sensualist who makes no effort to conquer his appetites. " I feel the anguish of my rotting clay, " he says elsewhere in the poem, and of his cruel mistress :

I bid her reign
Empress of my aspiring dust, and kill
My rebel soul that would be master still.

Further light on this matter is afforded by another poem of which it will be as well to give the whole :

I looked upon the face of Pain
Until I found her charmings vain,
Her drooping mouth, her dewy eyes,
Her strange insistent melodies,
Her subtle feet that dance with death,
Her sinuous hands that muffle breath,
Her pallid breasts, her lackless hair;
I saw and found no sweetness there.

" Now in the days to come, " I said,
" Fate's hand shall pass me as one dead,
For I have learned all misery,
And in my life there cannot be
Or torturing rains or tedious suns
Or riotous companions

’Twixt life and death, ’twixt love and hate—
Surely I have outwitted fate. ”

Beneath some grey unbroken sky
The days might blossom quietly,
Wither and pass in empty nights
Undarkened by God’s twittering lights,
And I might always dream, nor feel
The roughness of the human wheel
That stops and starts and blunders on
The high road to oblivion.

I cannot, though my mind may crave,
While yet my body has no grave,
A twilit peace, accomplish this ;
And though Pain had all bitterness
Long since, yet crave I for her grace,
The ancient beauty of her face,
While wearily I tread my measure
Beneath the silken whip of Pleasure.

What now do these two poems mean but that their author, racked by pain, tried to make it more endurable with some small hope that it might be one means of attaining spiritual peace ? Are we foolish, unbalanced, in craving peace and in the expression of our craving in terms of art ? It may be so : I ask the question. Who knows why we are here and the whole duty of man ? who, nicely, how much should be rendered to the spirit and how much to the senses ? “ It is only in denying my flesh that I win any battles, ” he says in one of his last letters, “ and as I am not naturally ascetic the

denial must be compulsory. "[26] Plentifully endowed as he was with thick lips, his mind yet must have warred to weariness against the creed which Walter Pater failed to refine to heaven. Nor did he masochistically seek pain with a view to sensual pleasure. He hated it. His long bouts of physical torture were borne with a fortitude which seemed wholly admirable to me. Pasty-faced and dumbly-enduring—that is how I remember him under the despotic sway of neuralgia.

But weakened as his powers of endurance must have been by this malady, other and more subtle forces were at work on him than those merely physical. He had now " fallen in love with a touring company, " as he puts it in a letter. His thrills were intense, ecstatic ; his heavens high, and his hells, presumably, correspondingly deep. He was experiencing, in short, the life that Pater recommends :

> A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses ? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greater number of vital forces unite in their purest energy ?
>
> To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. . . . While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange

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[26] In one of the books he presented to me—Robert Ross's *Masques and Phases*—a fly-leaf inscription contains the following sly twin portrait :

" To Henry Savage
Sensualist, poet and dreamer
From
Richard Middleton
Dreamer, poet and sensualist. "

Characteristic of him also are the words he wrote in my copy of the plays of Thomas Middleton :

" Harry Savage from Richard Middleton, who endeavours to support, not unworthily, the great traditions of his name. "

And a presentation copy of Chesterton's *Tremendous Trifles* bears the Browning quotation :

" Speech half asleep or song half awake ? "

Not a bad criticism of G. K.

> dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. . . .

I need not quote further. It is a doctrine the wisdom of which is dubious. That Pater had doubts about it is proved by his omission of the conclusion to his *The Renaissance* from the second edition of that book ; he " conceived it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall. " We know that the doctrine was accepted unquestionably by Wilde and the weaker spirits of the 'nineties. They were perhaps predisposed by nature so as to absorb it, but to try to justify it on that account is to accept a fatalism as dubious as the doctrine itself. We cannot be sure that " to burn always with this hard gem-like flame " is " success in life. " Pater says that " all melts under our feet. " We cannot be sure that that is so. The phrase recalls the parable of the man who built his house upon the sands. He talks of exquisite passions and contributions to knowledge that " *seem* " to set the spirit free. So much for three points only in the brief passage quoted. We may at least suspect that that way does not lie true success. That Middleton ever read *The Renaissance* is doubtful. It would be absurd to suggest, subtly and indirectly pervasive as are ideas, that the book had anything but the remotest responsibility for his " passionate search for enjoyment " and the desire for " violent emotional stimulants " of which he speaks elsewhere. But he was sensual— " not naturally ascetic, " as he says—and so not too distantly related to the spirit of the 'nineties. It is indeed difficult to know where to place him, so very much himself as he was. He would have strongly objected to Pater, I believe, and he was highly dubious of, and antipathetic to, Wilde. His love of Stevenson may be recalled—Stevenson, between whom and Wilde was little in common—and, too, his admiration for Kenneth Grahame and the attraction that the pessimistic Housman and the gentle, melancholy Ashe had for him. Browning, again, was his " favourite poet, " probably, leaving aside purely poetical qualities, for his virility and passion. Nor must his admiration for Harris's work be forgotten. The chief characteristics of all these writers differ distinctly, but all of them come to mind when I try clearly to visualise him.

RICHARD MIDDLETON.

Caricature by H. R. Millar.

Here, perhaps, is the place to discredit rumours current after his death as to his having been at heart in favour of, or having actually practised, homo-sexuality. I believe now that my own slight impression that he had leanings towards this form of perversity was due mainly to his habit, in the earlier days of our acquaintance, of making himself out to be other than he was, acting after the fashion of Barrie's Sentimental Tommy : " I am inclined to behave as though I was always walking the stage. " From my intimate knowledge the rumours were not true of him ; I should say so if they were ; nor would he have hidden anything of the kind from me. In editing *Poems and Songs*, I was not without hesitation in including the poem *Hylas*, fearing that some people might see dirt in it. Soon after it first appeared in *Vanity Fair,* Aleister Crowley came bounding towards its author with mingled exultation and irony exclaiming, " I've read, " or " I liked your poem "—I'm not sure which ; it was his attitude which impressed me—" and I've just written one about ——" a subject too gross to mention. I let the poem stand because, æsthetically considered, it passes muster. There is no more and no less in it than there is in Whitman's *Calamus*.

In the spring of 1908 he was so far behind with his rent at Blackfriars Road, and so weary of avoiding an importunate landlord that he decided to put his faith in " the unexpected " to the test. Characteristically, he spent his last few shillings on a seat at a play and then walked out into the night towards Brighton. But no material good came of the adventure. It gave him only an illness and a short story.*[27] " The great scheme failed somehow, " he wrote soon afterwards, boyishly.

> I starved for four days and walked back from Brighton on my uppers. I had some adventures however. Have you ever lived for four days on £0—0—0 ? It can be done. I shall tell you about these things when I see you. At present I am a wreck stopping with my people for a day or two. They think I have been on an ordinary walking tour and rather overdone it. I have seen dawns and sunsets*[28] —I really have. And tramps and policemen and servants' halls. I bor-

*[27] *The Brighton Road*, in *The Ghost Ship and Other Stories.*

*[28] He was thinking of Masefield's poem *Beauty* :
" I have seen dawns and sunsets on moors and windy hills."

> rowed a shilling from a policeman at Norbury to help me back to town ! I was half-arrested at Brighton for being homeless and destitute. Oh Great Larks for short stories and things. . . .

He repeated this experiment in the summer, but with no greater success. What he learnt from his trampings was expressed in one of his *Academy* articles for the year 1911. " The man who is hard ridden by his desires, " he says therein, " will find peace no easier to win in the midst of the desert than by his own fireside. His body may travel ceaselessly between the two Poles ; his mind and his heart are imprisoned still in their lifelong cells. " One advantage only he saw in moving from one place to another : " We shall never discover Arcadia or escape the anguish of existence, but in a fresh environment we may succeed in exploring some untrodden byway of our own natures. "

The trouble with the landlord was patched up for a time and settled finally towards the end of the year, when it was arranged that he should take up his residence with myself. But this arrangement, after some three months, also fell through. There is a parallel in the triangular difficulty presented by Dr. Johnson and the Boswell *ménage*. In the meantime he was still contributing verse and short stories to *Vanity Fair* (a new influence had appeared at the *Academy* which excluded him) and assisting Frank Harris in the preparation of *The Man Shakespeare*.

> Very ingenious your commentary on Tyler [wrote Harris], and absolutely what I have taken and done in my play called " Shakespeare and his love " ; but still, Tyler's theory that Pembroke was a knave, Mary Fitton a loose woman and Shakespeare a kind of sycophant stands.
>
> I have done my chapters on the Sonnets which are to follow yours ; in fact, I am waiting for yours before finally correcting mine. Please let me have it as soon as possible.

Middleton accepted *in toto* the Harris portrait of Shakespeare, but in this, influenced by Harris's personality, he was not at his best as a critic. *The Man Shakespeare* makes good reading, but the portrait, though it has a shadowy inchoate Shakespearean aura

or atmosphere, as it were, is less that of the master dramatist than of the redoubtable Frank himself. This criticism, of course, is outside of Harris's relations with Middleton, whom he helped financially, and but for the latter's pride would have helped more, I believe. But about his circumstances generally Middleton was ever reticent, except perhaps with myself. " You must not think that I afflict humanity with these sombre visions, " a letter says. " You are the only person to whom I write. I have left letters unanswered from —— and —— and —— because they all expect me to be cheerful and I have not the energy to send them fictions." The remark : " Man, if you only knew my pride ! " constantly recurs to my mind as one of the chief clues to him.

Following the failure of our *ménage à trois* (to which, by the way, he had looked forward optimistically, only to be sorely disillusioned later) and a short holiday at Hastings, he settled, early in 1909, in lodgings at 3, Alexandra Road, Wimbledon, not far from where I was then living. A fragment of MS., under date April 6th, 1909, gives us something of his inner life there.

> So [it runs] with a strange sense of having wandered a long way, I have come at last to this little room. It has that illusionary suggestion of finality that haunts all the resting-places of men who like myself are emotional wayfarers, travellers from sensation to sensation. As I am still young, at least as far as mere physical age is reckoned, I suppose there are further deaths and further births before me. Troubled by other environments no more real than that which troubles me now, I shall make further testaments, disposing as an artist may, of the love I may not lose, the world I do not believe in and the dreams that are no longer mine. I shall look out of my window as I may now, and see the green buds breaking on the trees, and marvel because there is no spring in my heart. One of the old tailors who work in the little tin shed below my window came out a minute ago and stood for a while, blinking pleasantly at the sun. It was plain that for him the spring brought a definite and welcome message : perhaps it promised him warm hands and feet, or merely congratulated him on having conquered another winter. But to me this blue sky and these buds and

> these happy birds are inharmonious. I saw the first butter-cups of the year in a railway cutting yesterday and they annoyed me like a misprint in a favourite poem. For in my emotional year we are now deep in autumn, and the faded petals of old desires rustle pityfully beneath my feet. I know that my autumn is as transitory as this human spring, and that when these buds are forgotten and the old tailor has perhaps finished with his needle and thread, I may well be gathering my roses and my nectarines with Dorothy and Irene and all the dream-girls once more by my side. But now I am dying or dead. It is the price I pay for my dreams.
>
> In moments of emotional depression my concrete environment becomes intolerably artificial to me. The houses, the trees, the little boy in a blue pinafore who teases a patient, black cat, everything in short that I can see from my window, are like the careless productions of an uninspired stage-carpenter. Even my landlady's washing flaps on the line in an unconvincing manner, as though it were cut out of paper. Perhaps after all the existence of these things depends on my whim, and my spirit paints a careless landscape when there is no probability of emotional ecstasy.
>
> Yesterday afternoon I walked across Wimbledon Common like a ghost who takes no pride in his supernatural mummeries. In the evening there was a problem. As things are, is anything to be gained by seeking the company of Lily and Christine and Louise and the others ?

This somewhat melancholy document sets me wondering if, as some have said, egoism was part of his burden—if, again, egoism *is* a burden. " Indeed, " he wrote, not long before his death and with a flash of his old wit, " it is not hard to put a name to my disease: but one man is an egoist just as another is a negro, and the Ethiopian changes his skin more easily than the egoist gets rid of his heavy bundle of eggs. We shall continue our cackling till the day of judgment. But it is in revulsion from this task that I have lately developed the Dickensian sentimentality that you refer to in your letter. I feel drawn to young children, and girls like Annie [Christine] and ——

who are simple and kindly and not too clever. They give me a glimpse of the life that I have missed in my passionate search for enjoyment. . . . "

In an earlier letter, writing of Meredith's book on the subject, he offers the following shrewd piece of criticism :

> I re-read " The Egoist " and find Willoughby overdone not in what he thinks but in what he says. And he is lacking in those frantic moments common to all egoists, when they lose or rather mislay their faith in themselves, and flutter with timorous wings above the bottomless pit.

A certain amount of egoism—if the quality can be measured—he had undoubtedly. But how much ? Some people are more egotistical than others ; some may be more so than others who, less cautious or wise, are more publicly expressive of themselves ; and all who are in any way egotistical are more so at one time than another. The label is attached to those in whom egoism is marked, and to me it did not seem that he was so marked.*[29] On the other hand, McQuilland said of him that he was " a supreme egotist—all fine artists are—but he could joke of his Ego with unfailing good humour, which the dull little prigs of literature never can. " The attempt to value him in this respect is made, of course, with a view to seeing the cure for what, if not a disease, is at any rate a limitation. Are we to take Flaubert's advice as proffered in *L'Education Sentimentale ?* " Peu à peu, " he says, " la sérénité du tra-

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*[29] " I am inclined to think that you make a mistake in essaying such personal forms of art. Naturally, every time you happen to write that difficult pronoun ' I,' you are dragged back on your philosophical, metaphysical, introspective prayer-mat. I think you ought to drop your task of self-expression and try to create. Write impersonally, write like Walter Pater, write like the gifted author of Genesis. If you wish you can begin by creating an imaginary author to write your books for you ; a foolish person who accepts the arbitrary meanings of words because he knows no better. Let him be as the serpent that stops her ears, if only he gets on with his work. These be counsels of wisdom, and hot- tempered youth—you have that priceless boon—is impatient of sich, so for the moment I forbear. . . . "—*Letter*, December 9th, 1910.

" I now approach a quality, or rather the lack of a quality, that is in itself of so debatable a character, that were it not of the utmost importance in considering the life of Charles Stephen Dale " (George Bernard Shaw), " I should prefer not to mention it. I refer to his complete lack of a sense of humour, the consciousness of which deficiency went so far to detract from his importance as an artist and a man. The difficulty which I mentioned above lies in the fact that, while every one has a clear conception of what they mean by the phrase, no one has yet succeeded in defining it satisfactorily. Here I would venture to suggest that it is a kind of magnificent sense of proportion, a sense that relates the infinite greatness of the universe to the finite smallness of man, and draws the inevitable conclusion as to the importance of our joys and sorrows and labours. I am aware that this definition errs on the side of vagueness; but possibly it may be found to include the truth. . . . "—*The Biography of a Superman* (*The Ghost Ship*).

vail l'apaisa. En plongeant dans la personalité des autres, il oublia la sienne, ce qui est la seule manière peutêtre de n'en pas souffrir. " The " peutêtre " should be noted. It makes the passage read more than ever like a pessimistic stoic's counsel to make the best of a bad job. There's no more hope in it than in Middleton's opinion that egoism is ineradicable, or in Pater's vision of " the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world " ; and less, indeed, than in the thought that we know nothing. Perhaps never shall we be rid of it until we realise that we may see ourselves in anything but a mirror. Middleton had his moments of freedom. In one of his note-books, under the title *On Richmond Park*, he wrote :

Here the sun takes his ease,
  Here the stars shine ;
These trees are my trees,
  This earth is mine !

Why then could he not wait ? We grow tired, I suppose, some of us. We forget the promise of the moments of freedom, the flashes of vision when we are at one with all existence. The body weighs us down, and, as the years go by, the moments with their truth become more rare. We do not all win through to that serenity which is the crown of life.

There are other trifles in that same note-book worthy of record in these pages. A cheeky fling at Tennyson, for instance :

Tennyson said—you know the man —
  " I do but sing because I must. "
  Mine is a better way I trust :
I do but sing because I can.

And here is a gay triolet :

Ah ! let the women chatter :
  It is their only joy
To gossip and to flatter.
Ah ! let the women chatter,

It really doesn't matter,
You needn't listen, boy.
But let the women chatter,
It is their only joy.

In the same book is a record of moneys received from 13 Oct. '10 to 21 Oct. '11, amounting to £148 18s. 3d.—a year's earnings—and headed " My total income from my pen ! " For a freelance journalist in pre-war days it was not to be exclaimed against, but, if we think of the uncertainty in connection with its getting, we are hardly likely to conclude with satisfaction that at least he had enough to live upon. In his last year, writing from Brussels, " If I had £150 a year of my own, " he says, " I could write great works. " He knew something, not only of the true value of money, but of the compensations not to be reckoned in terms of money which are at times the lot of the poet. " We knight the throwers of brickbats, " he tells us in Monologues, " and starve the majority of the poets, but I would be the last to deny the justice of this arrangement, for if the former class has taken the daylight earth to itself, the poets hold in their treasuries the title deeds of the fertile pastures and purple mountains of sleep. I know who is the richer. "

He may have known, but the knowledge was of no great value to him, apparently.

What was the grief sat gnawing at his heart ?
What love's betrayal turned his heart to gall ?
What bodily anguish tore his soul apart ?
The grave-mound covers all.

So our friend W. R. Titterton on him. " The poor chap must have carried a hell of a weight, " said some one else, discussing him with me after he died.

CHAPTER VIII

BRIGHTER MEMORIES

LET us turn to brighter memories. Hitherto I have dwelt a little too much, perhaps, on the grey side of Middleton's world. He was not always suffering, and when the gods did present the cup of enjoyment he drained it, dregs and all when there were any. No one ever appreciated the theatre more than he did. I forget how many times we saw *Miss Hook of Holland* performed. That excellent musical comedy, with its harmonious tunes by Paul Rubens—" jingles " their composer modestly called them —was played by children at matinees, and only undiscriminating playgoers could have preferred the evening performance of their sophisticated elders. Duncan, again —the incomparable Isadora—was delighting tasteful Londoners at that time with her dancing. She was Terpsichore herself. Nearly every night in the gallery of the Duke of York's Theatre we sat entranced to ecstasy. Had we been rich men we would have heaped the alley leading to the stage-door with flowers that our divinity might walk knee-deep amongst them. I recall also that laughable function, the dinner given to Robert Ross at the Ritz Hotel, in recognition of his services to Wilde. It was rendered laughable by the plain speaking of Frank Harris. All fashionable literary London was there from Duchesses downwards. The dinner was good, but the speeches—the speeches lent such an atmosphere of portentousness and solemnity to the occasion one would have thought that all humour had gone out of the world. Following some academic oratory by H. G. Wells came, to wind up the proceedings, a douche of candidness by Harris, the effect of which on that highly-charged atmosphere was amazing. In forthright fashion, without fal-de-lals of speech or exaggerating the importance of Wilde or of Letters in general, he told the truth as he saw it about his ill-fated friend, sat down again, and the polite assemblage melted away in shocked silence. We wanted to finish the night somewhere. Robert Sherard, another friend of Wilde,

enormous of bulk, the very picture of dignity, stood on the steps of the plutocratic hotel, looking as though he owned it. “ Are you coming along ? ” I queried. “ We’re going off to a club. ” He gazed at me with overwhelming hauteur. “ I *live* here, ” he said crushingly. It was a fitting climax to a good night’s entertainment.

Yet again, there was that time at Bedford with the girls (they were performing there) and the Red Lion burgundy. He paid tribute to the visit in the poem, *One Summer’s Day* :*30

> If I have choice of all that seems
>   Most precious here, this boon I choose,
>   To see once more on merry Ouse
> Ophelia steer her bark of dreams.

In prose, too, that happy time was celebrated. I often used to wonder what the staid supporters of *Vanity Fair*—joyously anarchic as it was in those days under Harris—used to make of that journal. “ I can promise you, ” wrote Middleton, sending me the proof of one of my own articles, “ that it will not disturb the prevailing intellectual gloom of our fashionable readers. ” But to the extract. It is from a review of some book or other, by the way.

> There is another reason why this book failed to impress me. I had something better to think about. Last week I spent two very happy days, and though the fact can be of no importance to anyone save myself, I wish to chronicle them before the Germans come. I spent them at Bedford, a pleasant town where the sun shines and the bells play tunes, and there is a very proper river called the Ouse. To do justice to those two days would involve the composition of many books, and masterpieces at that. On the other hand, to pick a thread or two from life’s tapestry, and say, “ This was enjoyment, and this, ” is a task that demands either the intuition of a great poet or the complacency of a successful philosopher. Still, it is always possible in loving the past to concentrate one’s

*30 *Poems and Songs*, I

> affections on one or two emotional moments, as when we elect to crown a day for a look or a kiss or the tone of a good-night. . . .
>
> There are five young people with me in the punt, and they are arranged—remember I write for posterity !—two girls immediately in front of me, so that I can see nothing but their hair, then another girl lying facing in my direction, and beyond, at the other end of the punt, there sprawl two boys, dabbling their hands in the water and crying occasional news of the fish. The sky is very blue; there is a hot sun, and on each side of the river there are meadows full of flowers, cowslips and daisies and kingcups, " triumphing " as Mr. Gosse says.*[31] It is the girl in the middle of the boat on whom I would concentrate your attention. She is a pretty English girl of eighteen years of age, with a fair skin and dark hair and rounded features. She is dressed in white, and one of the boys has just sprinkled a great handful of cuckoo-flowers all over her, and for a dainty moment she lets them stay on her dress and her hands and her hair, and lies still as if she were asleep. She is like the Ophelia of Millais in the Tate Gallery. Soon she sits up with a little laugh, and as I paddle on the flowers slip by on the water. Presently we shall come to the Fortunate Islands. . . .

That is worthy of preservation, I think ; and not only as evidence of his having had moments of happiness. It was at this period, too, that he was writing the best of his poetry and beginning to look forward to its being published in book-form. Austin Harrison, through the good offices of Harris, printed anything he sent in to the *English Review*. The *Evening Standard*, the *Saturday Review* and *T.P.'s Weekly* accepted occasional articles ; and when *Vanity Fair* passed out of Harris's hands and was no longer open to him, he succeeded in getting in again with the *Academy*, which had now become the property of Lord Howard de Walden. Not that he was ever quite free of the harassing problem of ways and means. Free-lance work at the best provides an

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*[31] " Thou hast the colours of the spring,
The gold of king-cups triumphing. "

The lines begin the poem *To my Daughter Teresa*, which Stevenson was not alone in thinking " blooming good. "

uncertain income. It was a financial crisis, I believe, which caused his departure from the lodgings at Wimbledon. In the summer of 1910 he returned to the parental roof, now at St. Albans, remaining there until he went to live at Brussels early in 1911. This surrender doubtless somewhat troubled his independent spirit, but by this time his family had grown more to accept his choice of a career, and there was no great friction. It was not a good environment for effort, however. " I live in the haunts of ancient peace, " he writes under date June 4th, 1910, " and hazard the theory that peace, while agreeable to the bodies, is not good for the souls of poets. . . . We see nothing in the country, and feel but little more. We eats and we —— no we don't sleeps because of the neuralgy which is grossly over-estimating the amount of inspiration necessary for one poem. "

An extract from another letter, written late in July, will also serve to give an idea of his life at this time :

> Yours with its philosophies duly to hand. I dree my weird without much aid from philosophy, whether among the flesh-pots of Frank Harris, or the domestic tyrannies of St. Albans. I am looking forward to my holiday at 45 *[32] . . . this place has got on my nerves lately and smitten my singing lips to shamed silence. I want to play the hermit among your books, and forget things for a little. Nowadays I am doing neither wrong nor right, and my heart is choked with the sands of mere existence. I must pay a visit to the Celestial Surgeon.
>
> Austin Harrison has written a decent letter to me demanding articles and stories for the E.R., so I'm trying to work, but Lord ! my spirit has wings of lead. I shall do an article on the Criticism of Poetry that should annoy a few people, however. I have meant to write it for a long time.
>
> I had a reproachful but amiable letter from Christine. I must try to see her again soon. I am still in her debt I think. . . .

So the year ran—and a good year on the whole it was for him in spite of the ever-persistent worm that dieth not. I myself was as much mouthed by that same worm as

*[32] It had been arranged that he was to take charge of my house while I was away for a few weeks.

he was, perhaps. “ You’re a man with an uneasy mind, ” he once remarked to me with conviction.*33 I began now to think seriously of breaking away from my environment, and proposed a sort of Verlaine-and-Rimbaud excursion abroad. Why should we not together undertake the adventure of literature in Brussels ? I suggested. Living was cheap in that capital. We had friends there—Georges Eekhoud, Abel Torçy and others. He was on good terms with the *Academy* people—that meant a fairly regular income. “ Dropping from the veils of the morning ” might come the peace we sought.

He was dubious about it at first ; not on his own account but on mine.

> If I were in your place [he wrote] I should postpone the practical exploitation of the dream called Brussels as long as possible, because the world, *i.e.* life, has a rough way with dreamers when they change their fairy gold for earthly coppers. I know that your mind likes to take refuge in this particular dream, but in truth I think that’s all it’s fit for. I am game for Brussels whenever you like, but I hope for your sake that you will never wish it. . . .

When it was settled that we should go his readiness was still tempered with caution. A letter dated February 9th, 1911, has it that :

> your judicious poet always has his barque on the shore and his mooring-ropes are but cobwebs. If I may make a suggestion it is that you should secure all the money possible to give the firm a good send off. I have not had my cheque yet, but it should amount to £10 when it comes—this week-end for sure. . . . Personally I think such a scheme if soberly carried out may save your soul alive. Mine I have doubts about, but anyhow it can’t do either of us any harm. But above all things we have got to be practical.

There was a brief delay. On receiving his money he was soon rid of it. “ There is still a certain Richard Middleton to be reckoned with,” he explains in a by no means apologetic letter :

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*33 Is it true that when we are impressed by something in another person we are seeing, as through a veil, what is really in ourselves ? It must be, I think.

> In this connection I recall a sound aphorism of Heine's. The acts of a genius like those of a drunkard lie outside all reckoning. You may call me which you will, I have my own ideas on the point. But when you bade me keep my money for a possible trip to Brussels you under-rated the strength of my desires. . . . In some subtle way your letter contributed to my mood, because you were not just to me when you accused me of wanting to go on the bust in Brussels—I never thought of or suggested such a thing. Were you not rather expressing a secret fear as to a possible calamity that might wreck our enterprise ? . . . Then there was a phrase of Stevenson's as to the virtues of action. You know how these things help us to do what we want. . . .

A few weeks later we crossed the water. We had been in Belgium together for a few days some eighteen months before. It was a holiday on that occasion, a friend connected with a shipping agency having arranged a passage for us in one of those narrow-gutted little cargo-boats built for canal navigation between Antwerp and Brussels. An incident of that trip impressed me deeply. In Ostend—from which port we returned by the ordinary mail-service packet-boat—seated outside a *café* we were joined by a couple of cosmopolitan ladies whose questions we answered with a polite negative. Could they drink with us, then ? —the season was at an end : they were less concerned with *les affaires* than with distraction. Yes, they could drink with us, but it was to be clearly understood that we were not in the mood for *les affaires*. With this *bien entendu*, as they proved to be entertaining companions, we moved on with them to another *café*, where in course of time others attached themselves to our party. My impression is of about a dozen laughing women seated in a semicircle while Middleton, a bottle of brandied cherries in one hand and a spoon in the other, gravely passed along feeding each expectant mouth in turn. They were like a crowd of happy children together. It was one of those rare occasions when the gay life is not wholly independent of true gaiety.

Traffic on the Belgian canals may have suggested his fantastic story *The Ghost Ship*, in which a pirate vessel is blown inland by the wind and anchors in a field of turnips. Barges and other canal craft, seen from a distance, give the illusion that they are mov-

ing over, or stationary on, the meadows. *The Ghost Ship*, by general consent, is his best short story. “ I declare, ” says Machen, in an Introduction to the book of which it forms part, “ I would not exchange this short, crazy, enchanting fantasy for a whole wilderness of seemly novels, proclaiming in decorous accents the undoubted truth that there are milestones on the Portsmouth Road. ” *The Times*, again, eulogised it and the other stories. “ It is the atmosphere of these stories that gives them their intensity as well as their beauty. They are reality in amber. They charm the mind back to life of the strangest solitude and silence, of wisdom as opposed to knowledge, and to a reality whose only counterpart in after life is the world of dreams. . . . Of all Middleton’s stories, *The Ghost Ship* for its fantasticalness—which is imagination masked and at the carnival—is the rarest treasure trove. . . . It is a crazy, delicious, magic story told for the sheer joy of the telling. ” The passage is well worth resuscitating if only for its finely-phrased definition of fantasticalness. For myself, who am less at ease with prose than poetry, I like *The Ghost Ship* mainly for the following :

> we both raised our glasses to our mouths, only to stop half-way and look at each other in amaze. For the wind that had been howling outside like an outrageous dog had all of a sudden turned as melodious as the carolboys of a Christmas Eve. . . .
>
> We went to the door, and the wind burst it open so that the handle was driven clean into the plaster of the wall. But we didn’t think about that at the time; for over our heads, sailing very comfortably through the windy stars, was the ship that had passed the summer in landlord’s field. Her portholes and her bay-window were blazing with lights, and there was a noise of singing and fiddling on her decks. “ He’s gone, ” shouted landlord above the storm, “ and he’s taken half the village with him ! ” I could only nod in ans

The story, rejected by an English magazine, was taken eventually by the New York *The Century*. But Middleton never knew of this. A cable accepting it came a week after he died. With the money—£25—at his disposal he would not have committed suicide when he did—that is fairly certain. But short of other good luck cropping up

while it lasted, it is hard to believe it would have done more than delay the manner of his end.

CHAPTER IX

EARLY DAYS IN BRUSSELS

ONE of our Brussels friends had arranged lodgings for us at 10, Rue de Joncker. This was the house in which Middleton was to die a few months later. He describes it in a fragment of MS., evidently the beginning of an abandoned article :

> I am living in a large house of a type very common in Brussels, with rooms of an exaggerated loftiness and doors twelve feet high which make me feel like Lemuel Gulliver in Brobdignag. But although the house is large I never cease to wonder at the number of people who seem to live in it, for whenever I leave my rooms I find the staircases and halls full of men and women whom I have never seen before and will never see again. Just now in one of the corridors I came across a small girl of four years old who invited me to play with her. It seemed a simple game ; we stood at opposite ends of a tiled hall and threw marbles at each other, but presently it appeared that some subtlety of the sport had escaped my notice, for I was accused of cheating, and had to beat a retreat with a shrill voice calling " *Monsieur le tricheur* " after me up the stairs. At intervals while I write, the door of my sitting room opens a little, and my late playfellow cries " *Mauvais sujet !* " reprovingly through the crack.

Board and lodging were cheap. Brussels, indeed, was a cheap city in which to live in those days, and as we had resolved to keep a sharp eye on our expenses there seemed no reason—unless the *English Review* and the *Academy* closed down—why Middleton should not get ahead without the worry of financial embarrassment. While he worked at his articles I sought tranquillity of mind in the *Musée*, dreaming over the pictures there, or browsed among the bookstalls in the arcades. It was a quiet, uneventful time. In the evenings we talked and drank Geuze Lambec—the strong ale of

Belgium—at *cafés* with such men as we knew ; or were invited to their homes. One incident of the partnership was not without humour. Arriving back once for the mid-day meal I found him pacing angrily up and down the room with a copy of Wilde's *Intentions* in his hand. " It's all lies, lies ! " he exclaimed on becoming aware of me. " And *you* believe in him. " I didn't " believe in him " so much as all that, but I had certainly been much impressed by Wilde's work. Whether it has truth in it or not is another matter, and the book that will give us its value has yet to be written, but victory over it will not be achieved by calling it lies and leaving it at that, or by denunciation after the manner of Crosland's *The First Stone*—remarkable as that book is as a piece of invective. Later on, after my return to England, he wrote : " I have been reading *De Profundis* again and still think he made of humility a last rampart to protect his arrogance. " To me it seems that Wilde was an idealist who, following his hard experience, saw clearly that humility was indeed a virtue and expressed his vision with no great illusion that he himself was humble. To see virtue does not make us virtuous, but it does at least make vice uncomfortable and sets us wondering how our natures can be altered. Wilde sank back into fatalism. *Apropos*, Middleton in his penultimate letter to me, a fortnight before the end, wrote of certain *café* acquaintances with whom he had been arguing against Socialism : " They drive me to arrogance just when I want to feel humble. "

Another incident occurred in time of carnival. We were seated outside a *café* one evening, interested in the various processions passing along the boulevards, when it became obvious that something unusual was taking place. A couple of lighthearted and lightly-clad young girls—Liègeoises we found out they were afterwards—were dancing along at the head of an angry crowd and turning now and again to spit laughter and insults at it. As they were passing our table, urged by I know not what mingled spirit of English sportsmanship, romance and the moment, we offered our protection, which was accepted, the girls sitting the while on the marble-topped tables, volubly explaining the situation between further insults at the sullen populace now standing all around in a ring. They were a dirty lot of Puritans, the Flemish, we gathered, and knew nothing of the true spirit of carnival as expressed in the Wallon cities

of the south. Eventually, the crowd became so threatening that we thought it as well to seek refuge in a neighbouring *café*, and later still, fearing the *gendarmes*, we had to fly the fair damsels themselves, they having taken it into their heads to quarrel and start fighting like cats in the crowded Place de la Monnaie. It is curious what trifles will impress us on such occasions. During the fiery discussion in patois preceding the battle proper, one of the little spitfires passionately tore in pieces the huge bouquet of violets she had been carrying about all the evening. I remember reflecting that the action seemed to be in some way symbolical of the triumph of passion over beauty.

After I left Brussels to " dree my weird " in England once more correspondence naturally started again between us. Under date April 28th, 1911, he is to be found writing :

> Many thanks for the letter. . . . For f1.50 I buy half a kilogramme, or eighteen ounces of Appleterre, which is a Belgian tobacco much better for pipes than Semois. I store this up in Waverley Mixture tins and regard the result with simple pride. I still live in our palatial room, and as I think a change of environment is good for artists, I write at all the different tables in turn. On the same principle I try experiments with different kinds of paper and penholders, and if I only had the necessary dexterity I believe I could write a fine article with my toes. . . .
>
> Don't forget to look out for notices of the English Review. Send me bad ones as well as good ones, for they may be useful to me in the preface of the book, in dealing with possible criticisms. . . .

The " book " was the contemplated *The Autobiography of a Young Man*, referred to in an earlier chapter. His book of poems under title *Dust of Dreams* was at this time going the rounds of the publishers. Late in 1910 he had written : " I have sent the book to Wilson*[34] who purports sending it to John Lane, who is a friend of his. I shouldn't think the canny John would care for such perilous stuff. " The " canny John " didn't. It was refused, and was now with another publisher concerning whose

*[34] J. G. Wilson, formerly of Jones and Evans's, now of Bumpus's, and a bookseller of the old-fashioned type with a fine taste in letters.

later rejection of it he observes only—May 18th, 1911—" the great work duly returned by Foulis. " In September, Harris was busying himself on behalf of it. " He has been working hard trying to find a publisher for the poems. He seems confident of success in that onerous venture. Well, well. It would have given me more pleasure two years ago. "

Harris did not succeed. No book of Middleton's was published during his lifetime. But some philosophy was behind temporary disappointments occasioned by the failure to achieve book form for his poetry. " The commercial side of literature, " he says in the fourth article of a series entitled *The Poet's Holiday*, which was now appearing in the *Academy*, " is an unpleasing business that no longer concerns poets—they, at least, are free from any harassing doubts as to the pecuniary consequences of their work ; and this is as it should be, for love is the only wage that can command the noblest labour. That it will not pay hotel bills is the fault of society and not of the publishers. " Some pleasure he had from appreciation of individual poems or essays. One of his letters begins :

> " But altho' the subject and the author are obscure, the poem [*Queen Mélanie and the Wood-boy*, which had just appeared in the *English Review*] is rather exceptional. It is held in a suspension of music and reverie, and has an outline in vagueness that is flung out to be apprehended, not dissected. " Thus the " Literary Digest " of New York and thereafter prints Melanie from one end to the other. I don't know what it means, but it tremendously impressed some Americans who are stopping here for three days. They look at me now with wide eyes as being a real poet approved by the Literary Digest. (Avec telle nomme. . . .)

This same letter is full of high spirits and humour. His humour, by the way, was sometimes too free for quotation, but the following passages should be given, if only that this memoir of him may not appear too one-sided. " And yet, they might well reflect," he goes on to say :

> this celebrity is sad . . . sad as a man may well be who has worked hard for a week and produced nothing . . . I am sad, yes even though a French ménage is breaking up with some violence the other side of the folding doors, behind your empty bed. Every now and then the lady strikes the gentleman a sounding smack in the face, and somebody is packing, though I don't know which. The gentleman has just expressed the opinion that it is abominable to have to pay for one's kisses. . . . The youthful Adolphine, the child of the house I discovered yesterday deep in the fifth volume of Casanova his memoirs. I was so surprised that I told her it was not a suitable book for a little girl of fourteen. Woe is me, I half believe that it isn't.

Ending the letter three days later, he is, however, in one of his moods of depression again.

> I have had a bad attack of the hump and have foreborne to trouble you with the history of my melancholies. . . . The Academy cheque is late again which worries me a good deal more than it ought to. I shall never have any material tranquillity in this world never. To-day Madame asked me the second time for the rent. . . . If it were not for the little Gilberte who plays sedately with me nearly every morning I should lay down and die these sweltering airless days. . . .

Many of his letters between the above (which is undated, but written in May or June, I fancy) and the next in my collection with envelopes bearing September postmarks, must have been lost, but some guide to his movements (at least) is provided by a notebook entry which runs as follows :

> Came to Brussels, Feb. 19th, 1911.
> Went to Montjoie, June 22nd.
> —— Brussels, June 30th.
> —— London, July 2nd.
> —— Brussels, July 15th.
> —— Heyst S/Mer, July 28th.

—— St. Albans, Aug. 16th.

—— Brussels, Oct. 10th.

The trip to Montjoie he made use of in the essay *Montjoie*, now to be found in *Monologues*. He fell in love with the place, the result being as good a piece of prose as any to be found elsewhere in his writings. Here are two passages justifying this praise, I imagine :

> Between the wide chimneys the slates are spread like butter on a new loaf, in ambitious and tumultuous waves. They are local slates of a delicate colour, so that from the hills Montjoie resembles a colony of brooding doves, and it is easy to fancy that if one threw a stone into their midst the sky would be darkened by flapping wings and the valley would be left untenanted and desolate. . . .
>
> Like all men, I am a thousand men, and one man of me wanders still in those steep, uneven streets, looking at the faces of the houses, and waiting for the hour when they shall disclose their secret. Once in a dream I found Time sitting in a garden, and with a dreamer's courage I raised his shaggy eye brows to peer into his eyes. They were as gentle and kind as a dog's. Perhaps the magic charm of old houses preserves the love and comradeship of the men and women who have lived in them. Perhaps when my spirit wanders by night in Montjoie it is cleansed and quickened by the fellowship of the immortal dead.

It was nearly all prose that he was writing in these days; in this, his last year, indeed, he was moved to express himself in verse hardly at all. When rallied upon this neglect of Euterpe he retorted that he couldn't afford to waste time on her, which was to some extent true; but it must be remembered that he was not now in love with Christine. For the first two or three months of his exile he was chiefly occupied with the

series of articles just mentioned—*The Poet's Holiday*.*35 He wrote these from the principle that " our tourists would be far more sincere, and therefore far more amusing, if they would write about the things that excite them, though it be only the queer little gooseberry tartlets they have for lunch." Wherefore, under such headings as *The Philosophy of Travel*, *Little Paris*, The Failure of the Crowd, and others, we have Brussels viewed in these papers from his own individual and delightful angle:

> To my eyes [he writes] the Palais de Justice lacks dignity [he once told me he thought it looked like a monster wedding cake—thereby destroying what beauty it had for me for ever] and Wiertz was an artist with a touch of that madness that is not akin to genius; but I doubt whether my principal impression of Brussels is at all more dignified than that of the average tourist. Brussels, having wide streets and being moreover hilly, is a windy city, and if I had to make an allegorical drawing of the city and its inhabitants I think I should draw a picture of a cynic running after his hat. Everybody one meets here who is at all intelligent is proportionately cynical; but their splendid phrases of disillusionment are always spoilt by the malevolent genius of the place, which sends them running after their hats like children after butterflies. It is only indoors that they can bring their witty condemnation of life to a joyous conclusion.

In another article, vainly seeking inspiration for a purposed learned examination of the " Flamandisation of the University of Ghent, " it occurred to him, he says,

> to speculate as to the sensations of a tree in the Spring. First, it seemed to me, it is woken from its winter sleep by a spirit of restlessness that by degrees takes the form of an intense irritation throughout the bark of the tree. I realised this stage so vividly that I know that old trees tell the young ones not to scratch. Afterwards the tree feels little threads of pain running through its channels, and

*35 They lie buried still in the Academy. I disinterred one of the articles—A Great Man—for The Ghost Ship and Other Stories. With careful editing, a volume of miscellanea from his work unpublished in book form might be compiled and would be worth reading. There are, for instance, reviews which would give a better idea of his critical judgment of contemporaries ; a few passable poems ; The Autobiography of a Poet, which is not bad reading; and his one-act play, The District Visitor, a satire on Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird, and performed at the Court Theatre by Edyth Olive in 1915.

> these become more and more frequent, till the tree aches in every branch, and the image of each remotest twig is etched on the consciousness of the tree by suffering. Then, slowly at first, but afterwards quicker and quicker, each breaking bud brings relief, till long before the last bud has popped the whole tree is singing with pride of its great achievement. Some trees look upon their leaves as umbrellas, some as hats, and some as wearing apparel. It seemed to me that it would be a breach of manners to mention the Winter in the hearing of this last kind of tree.

He must have thoroughly enjoyed writing thus fancifully, but although the series improved rather than deteriorated in quality, Cowper, the editor, more matter-of-fact than imaginative, closed it down at the tenth article. A Miss Gouldsmith was secretary, or assisting in some other way, on the paper at this period and would sometimes give him its news. One of her letters serves humorously to remind us that it is not always literary " chiels amangst us " who are " takin' notes. "

> Herewith please find a proof of your fourth article. I still like them very much indeed. How do you think our paper is progressing ? Mr. Belloc on Political Economy is not in his best humour, is he ? . . . Frank Harris, too, is using up some of the back-of-the-drawer papers on us I think. . . . But there they go. They all of them try to write too much and have their chief eye on the loaves and fishes I'm thinking.

Following his London holiday in July and soon after his return to Brussels, I was surprised to hear of him from Heyst S/Mer, to which watering-place he had fled, it appeared, in disgust with a sordid *amour* in which he had become entangled. While at Heyst he wrote such glowing accounts of that resort it was arranged that my mother and sister should spend a holiday there. I mention this visit because my mother, an old lady with whom he had not hitherto been on understanding terms, there grew to like him and ever afterwards spoke of him with affection. When his posthumous volumes were published she read them without any remembered comment, but some time later, " Give me those books, boy, " she said unexpectedly. " When I'm reading

them it's just as if he were sitting opposite talking to me. " A finer tribute was never paid him.

RICHARD MIDDLETON.
Caricature by David Wilson.

CHAPTER X

THE DESCENT OF AVERNUS

FROM Heyst he moved back to St. Albans. But for the notebook record beforementioned I should not have remembered that he spent so long a period there as two months before returning for the last time to Brussels. Two letters addressed respectively from " At the Sign of the Crimson Pig or The Idle Poet " and " At the Sign of the Ineffective Journalist over against St. Albans," have escaped destruction and show him in a fairly cheery humour. In the first he says :

> I owe you seven letters, three postcards and a newspaper cutting, the latter concerning life. These are debts that a softening of the brain due to sterile effort (for guineas not for fame) will not permit me to pay. But here is a piece of paper with words on it. From certain points of view you might—if charitably dispoged—take it for a letter. Yes indeed, indeed ! A letter. To that end I will disguise it in a real envelope adorned with your name and address and a caricature of the King, God bless him. May it fare well and meet with a decent reception at its journey's end. Poor thing, poor thing, poor thing; but mine own. Dagont ! . . .
>
> (Interlude with a savage kitten who likes playing with dynamic pen-holders.)
>
> On Wednesday I lunch with the immortal Frank who is finishing another book on Shakespeare (called I believe, but it's private, the Woman Shakespeare !). On Thursday I shall likely seek the Bohemians in search of inspiration. The quiet life though pleasant for the fleshly individual is hell for the imaginative artist. . . . Some mad young men would do me good at present.
>
> It's fairly certain that I shall not go back to Brussels till the beginning of October. Then for the masterpieces damn my eyes. Is Richard Middleton played

out ? No, by thunder ! Then why does the kitten spit on this my letter ? Answer me that Herr Savage.

Monday. Another blue day busted idle away. And Sister Carrie for which blessed minx I thank you. My mind continues to soften. I thread beads on strings and admire my own handiwork. The sea hath its pearls and R. M. threads beads like stars. 'Tis a work that charms, that stealeth over the spirit of decayed poets. I have beads as big as O and as small as . ! Rubies and male-sapphires and trebizonds as large as bowler hats. Speak me kindly and I will make thee an eloquent necklace or a bracelet perilously remote. Beads !

How goes the book ? I hope it fares better with you than it does with me. Every page done is an argument in favour of our existence. Proceed, continue, and after wards go on. I am not the first saint excluded from the heavenly Marathon.

No I will babble no more. Let us be optimists, writers of books, pleasant fellows. Even the weariest sea climbs some way up the river. The water of the Thames, I have heard, is noticeably salt at London Bridge.

And, till Phillipi unites us
I am
Yours ever
RICHARD
A Teller of Beads.

The postscript to this effusion is a sketch with legend : " Design for a necklace. Original. Richard Middleton (aged $3\frac{1}{2}$). " The other letter, after telling of a " great night" at the New Bohemians, goes on to say :

No, I'm not a pessimist though I have a headache to-day. Pessimism is a disease of the liver. When you feel like that you ought to go for a six miles walk on the Common. Next day your mind would return to work. Verb. sap. . . .

> I want to do a lot of work and spend no money ; these are my desires. My Heyst article *36 was nearly damned good and in effect was damned bad. A touch one way or the other makes the difference. But I sweated over it a bit. This next week I am on safer and less ambitious ground. To say the truth I am a rotten journalist.
>
> Saturday. Dear, oh dear ! Boy Bertrand was in the right of it,*37 but we who have not his chance must endure our staying here even as our coming hither. I find Sister Carrie too utterly depressing, I will read it no more. I must read the joyous humbugging books that aid the illusion of happiness, the books where lovers and dreamers inherit fortunes at the right hour. . . .

A vivid, closely-analysed and fragmentary study of an acquaintance (now deceased), written at or about this period, is revelatory not only of the person studied but of the author of it. From my own knowledge of the other man I think the portrait, just as it tries to be, misses that quality in him which made for a real respect in his own circle. But here it is for its light on Middleton :

> I looked at this man, and marvelled that our mutual distaste for each other's society should spring from nothing more than a difference of creed. I found beauty in art and in nature as realised by my senses ; he found it in respectability, in success and in an unhesitating acceptance of all conventions good and bad. For every trait in his character that aroused my dislike, there was a parallel trait in my own that aroused his hatred, and I could not admit the justice of my attitude without in some way granting the reasonable nature of his. I thought his air of the successful tradesman, self-satisfaction with a gold watch-chain and a motor-car, repellant ; he thought my Bohemian aspect, my careless clothes, my shock of hair, indecent. I found his wealth ignoble ; he found my poverty dishonest. I despised the vulgarity of his ignorance ; he was affronted by the arrogance of my culture. I found his life as useless with its pre-occupa-

*36 *A Summer Holiday* (*Monologues*).

*37 The child of a friend of ours had just died.

> tion of money-getting, as he found mine with its energies that kept no office hours. The parallel could be extended endlessly. It held even in our vices. He sometimes drank too much while condemning inebriety on moral grounds ; I sometimes drank too much while condemning it because it interfered with the work that was the only justification for my existence. In measuring our characters side by side there was only one small superiority that I could claim with any certainty. I was generous enough to allow that he might possibly be right in his attitude towards life, while I felt absolutely convinced that he had never wavered in his conviction that I was wrong. I was clearsighted enough to see the logical force of his point of view ; I doubted whether he would admit that I had a point of view at all.
>
> At one time circumstances forced me to see a good deal of this man who typified for me the narrowest kind of success, and I was brought to realise how heavily we pay for the hospitality of those we do not like. When I fed at his table he made me feel that I was stealing my victuals, and when I rode in his motor-car I could not help considering him as a taxi-cab driver whom I was dishonestly depriving of a fare. For it seemed to me that from everyone in his environment who was not rich he expected homage, and that in accepting his company without paying for it, I was robbing him of his due. Yet during the many hours that friendship for others induced me to spend in his company, we never exchanged an unfriendly word. Only we looked at each other with covert hatred. . . .

On October 10th he returned to Brussels. What chiefly determined this last fatal journey is hard to say ; perhaps because he had heard that some of the girls were going on tour there—Christine amongst them—and they now represented for him at least congenial company. I remember, too, his writing earlier in the year—though the letter is not extant—that he was likely in the future to be able to say that some of his happiest days had been spent in the Belgian capital. Back, at any rate, he went, and the next news of him is that he was once more in the old room " with three francs in my pocket and feeling as though I had never been away at all."

> The girls are here [he goes on to say]. I saw —— at what they call a concert aperitif yesterday but I had no chance to speak to her. She was looking extremely pretty I thought. Christine I haven't seen yet, and I shall not if I can help it before the *Academy* cheque arrives. In this, of course, I wrong her !
>
> I am going to try and write some good short stories between now and Christmas, for I believe that that way lies the lazy kind of prosperity that I desire. Within the last twelve months I have received a hundred and twelve pounds for the sweat of my brow. Next year it must be two hundred and will be, I think. These are my literary ambitions !

From this letter, written less than three months before the end, we may conclude that he had then no intention of killing himself. What happened within that brief period his later correspondence will partly reveal. A cheque for £18 18s. from the *English Review* on October 13th, a further £10 from that magazine the week following, and the *Academy* cheque for £7 13*s*. 9*d*. on October 21st had doubtless much to do with the period of idleness which followed. His next letter reads :

> As life colours art, so creme de menthe mixed with hot milk maketh the hand of the correspondent to tremble in the mornings. Never mind. One day I shall discover a drink. Naturally I have no news. I have been eaten by mosquitoes (when I was a little boy we used to call them gnats) I have had some toothache. . . . Last night a woman said to me : " You are a real philosopher, you are a philosopher in your soul " which is a good idea, though not flattering from a woman. I have been reading George Moore's Confessions which should be called the audacities of a commonplace mind. He is a man who cheapens the immortal with his praise and flatters the negligible with his censure. . . . Fisher Unwin the publisher wrote me a letter about the stories in the English Review, saying that of course they were not the makings of a book but that perhaps I had something else by me he could publish. . . . I wrote him a civil letter with an eye on potential cakes and ale. Nothing happens but perhaps tomorrow I shall be singing a great song. . . .

With money to spend, the girls to take about, the ever-gnawing worm, and no light in the darkness, the descent of Avernus was easy. On October 24th he writes :

> Thank you for your cheerful letter. I am sorry that I cannot reply in the same blythe key. My body is devoured by mosquitoes and my heart is gnawed of rats. . . . I have done no work since I have been here, 'tis a fortnight to-day, but I have just started a short story that may bring me somewhere. I am doing my best to quarrel with the Academy because they haven't been putting in my articles, and I don't intend to send them anything more. The English Review relieved Mafeking by sending me eighteen guineas for my stories. When I wrote and grumbled Harrison bunged me another tenner with a charming note, so you see like you and —— I have had the wherewithal to bust. Well I've spent some of it carousing mildly and it gives me no satisfaction. Toothache and a bad attack of nerves complete the tale of my woes. I must aim at a nobler mark though Lord knows my disillusionment is not complete enough to be desirable. I cry like the lady in the song " J'aurais mieux fait de rester tranquille." . . .
>
> Wednesday. This morning my story*[38] returned by the London Magazine which is a nasty smack in the eye as I thought they were going to take it. The Academy preserves a dignified silence and does not answer my letters. . . . It is a pity I don't know any decent people here ; all the English people I have spotted have been impossible . . . why shouldn't you and —— go to Paris for a week (Polaire is there now)*[39] and I will come and join you there ? Only

*[38] *The Ghost Ship.*

*[39] The French actress. A rhymed impression of her in *Le Visiteur* from one of his note-books may be worth giving :

> " Rose-pink is her reticent nose
> With an ivory spot on the tip ;
> Her mouth is an overblown rose,
> There's a little moustache on her lip ;
> She has never a tint or a speck
> On her cheek where the colour should be,
> But a dimple far down on her neck
> Like a flower in a rippleless sea."

make up your minds before I bust my money. Personally I have the hump as you may detect in this letter and I should like a little holiday.

Yours ever

RICHARD

Lord luv 'im.

My motter : " J'aurais mieux fait de rester tranquille." Your motter : " Fetch aft the rum, Darby ! "

Either among the papers found in his room or enclosed in a letter to me was a squib probably written at this time which, in the light of after events, is significant and should find its place here. In a grimly humorous way it is his life's history :

Life put a hair brush in my bed,
A water-jug upon my door,
A lizard down my back, and said,
" What are you wanting more,
Now that your flesh is sore ? "

Love brought a pretty girl to me,
But when she saw that I was fat
She cried, " My heart, can such things be ! "
And then she laid me flat
And used me as a mat.

My flesh is worn, my heart is bruised,
The thing I had to say is said,
And all my senses are confused.
They'll soon put me in bed
And say " Hullo ! he's dead ! "

It will be seen that he was still somewhat sorry for himself. Dazzled by his poetic gift, I no doubt thought him wiser than he was, more capable of dealing with life, of knowing what to do. I should have remembered Shelley. His last few letters,

however, would have awakened apprehension in the most obtuse intellect. The next to follow is dated November 5th and endorsed " Guy Fawkes Day. The Dawn of the 47th Vita Nuova." After replying to my own news it goes on to say :

> I myself am so much in the deeps that I grow more hopeful. This is no paradox, but a plain statement of my attitude towards existence. To-morrow I shall have been here four weeks, four weeks of drunkenness and riggishness and unbroken idleness. Dur ing the whole of that period I have been distinctly ill and very unhappy. I have no nerves left and my stomach is completely disordered, " more like a whore's than a man's." *[40] And it was not till eleven o'clock last night that my spirit was enlightened as to the causes of my sorrows. At that hour I put my hand in my pocket and found with a delicate astonishment that I had three francs left out of something over forty pounds I have received since I've been here. " Drink and the devil had done for the rest." *[41] And forthwith the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre and Richard M rose again from the dead. I spent two of the francs on a book and walked home feeling light-hearted for the first time since I've been here. Poverty is my mother and my sister and my brother ; Prosperity the most evil of all my dreams. I can't stand the bitch. She makes me an eater of ordures, a lover of strabysmic worms. I have lost four weeks of my life and now I am going back to work. . . . It is only in denying my flesh that I win any battles and as I am not naturally ascetic the denial must be compulsory. . . . The sheer monotony of penury is a spur to work.
>
> The girls —— and Christine, who probably move on in a week's time, I shall see no more. They will think me unkind, but I have realised that the truest kindness I can do them is to let them go their own way. I am no man for women, least of all for two such decent little things, for whom the whole of the darker side of human nature is an unfathomed mystery. I live in an emotional

*[40] Kipling's *The Mary Gloucester* :

" And your rooms at college were beastly," etc.

*[41] Stevenson, *Treasure Island.*

world, which, if they are fortunate, they will never even hear of. They are good girls, and goodness is a kind of ignorance, I think.

I am still rather ill, but doubtless high-thinking will make me well in a day or two. I am in for a very rough time . . . but my bloated and over-crammed soul will be the better for the whip. Meanwhile I shall be glad to hear of the further progress of you and the enamelled —— ; it seems to me you have both recovered your lost youth which you never had.

I have met an American fiddler here whom you would love. He tells stories of his amours . . . with a blend of smut and sentiment that strikes me dumb. A queer company of us sat down in an underground kitchen and talked politics and women for hours. This new society will help me to endure my punishment perhaps.

Yours ever
RICHARD
Man of Letters.

So alarmed was I by this letter that I wrote to him at once advising him to come back to England. This reply was among the other papers previously mentioned as having been found in his room, and I may be permitted to quote an extract :

Your letter startled me. . . . I wish you were in England . . . and I don't see many difficulties in the way of alternative sojournings between St. Albans and Lambton Rd.*[42] Brussels from your letter seems quite impossible—even allowing for the idiosyncrasies of the imaginative. Nor do I want you to think that I am too shocked—don't get writing optimistically if you don't feel it. I mean by this last that you think too much of the feelings of others (*vide* your treatment of Christine and ——). When will you admit the possibility that *it does people good to be hurt*—that is, to know the truth ? But what's the good of talking. Whichever way we look at it—convention or unconvention, code or no code, truth or humbug—you are bound to suffer. I wander. Think about the

*[42] *I.e.*, his parents' house and mine.

> England scheme. I will write later on. And try and buck up. I will do anything you like and don't see why not.

His reply to this advice was that he had " better hang on here for another month and see how things go." Other extracts from the same reply reveal his still unenviable frame of mind.

> I think I lack money more than I need it, at least I hope such a philosophy is within my reach. . . . I wish you could wire me a new soul. How eagerly I would rush to the postoffice and over-rule their absurd demands for identity papers. " Dear God " I would cry " can't you see that in all Brussels there is no one who needs it so much as I." Alas ! No. One is the allowance and if we mislay it we must go hunt for it again. . . . I can't think or write or even pray. Only I grow a little warmer towards men and women in general, now that I am no longer clever. . . .
>
> The reason I write you these long drivels is because I can't do anything else, and it comforts me to keep writing. You will know what I mean, because you have been there yourself. You needn't answer 'em. The weather is a little warmer and I'm glad, because I hate the cold. Nowadays it seems to go deeper than the flesh with me, and I feel as if my spirit had been sitting in a draught. I am thinking of going to church next Sunday night to see whether evening services have anything of the old charm. No, I am not going over to Rome or even to England. I believe nothing. That is, I can't accept any of the inventions of our ancestors. When I feel the need I shall create God for myself, and I shall certainly not make him in my own image. That is a very primitive idea, isn't it ? Perhaps he is a force like electricity or a rare chemical like radium. Perhaps the Christians are right and he really is a bit like —— [the man of whom the portrait was given in the earlier part of this chapter]. Anyhow it's only guess-work, and we moderns are precisians though I can't spell it. . . . Intellectual liberty, the kind I have, is not to be borne. I would give all my poems for a good dream or two. What's become of them all ? I see things so clearly now, and they are black as soot. My chief pleasure is walking, and looking at peo-

ple's faces. It's wonderful what a lot of nice faces there are to be seen. I suppose my real mis take has been cutting myself off so from life and human companionship. I don't mean in coming to Brussels, but in rejecting all the conventions of my kind, and not making a thousand acquaintances. But like — — I would not suffer fools gladly and nothing leads quicker to loneliness than that kind of intolerance. Of course the craving for the society of others is born of the dread of one's own company.

Friday morning. And now here's your letter inviting me over to England and I don't quite know what to say. You see what I lack at present is the will to work and perhaps a little the will to struggle with or to obey Destiny, i.e. the will to live. For the moment I have lost faith in myself and it appears that that was all the faith I had. I must get it back or go under wherever I am. . . . Perhaps I stood in need of a spiritual purge. I am having it. . . . As for the money, now that the girls are going, I am not likely to be embarrassed by the lack of it. . . . Madame must wait for the rent . . . my recent abundance has left me with a faint golden halo, as of one who rides freely in taxi-cabs and misses all his meals. Some time or other I will have a cheque for six or seven pounds from the Academy so that sooner or later I can square things up for the month. The crash will come after that when I shall have nothing to look forward to, but a month's a month.

I'm sorry to trouble your Arcadia (?) with such cheerless letters but I grow very old and tired and I don't think I shall go dancing with the children any more. And you ? I always have the fancy that you are about three years younger than I am while as a matter of fact you are older. But you seem to be continually renewing your youth while I decay. Oh fortunate young man, what is your secret ?

Yours ever,

EMMANUEL BURDEN.

This letter scarcely needs comment, it reveals his mind so clearly. I may mention, however, as evidence of his boyish reckless gaiety, that on many of the envelopes addressed to me during this last Brussels period were such added Christian names as Henry Hildebrand, Henry Narcissus, Henry Harland and the like. It did not occur to me then that a man who is too apathetic or desperate to pray must be in a very bad way indeed.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST FORTNIGHT

I COME now to his last three letters—two long ones written respectively a fortnight and ten days before the end, and the last a brief farewell message found by his bed-side :

> Thanks for your letter [runs the first, under date November 15th] which was a good one. I liked Ellis's poem too, though after all I wish he would tidy up his metres.*43 You are quite right to dance in the sun while it lasts ; that is the only philosophy for a rational hedonist. " No Arcadia is ever wholly lost " I wrote in the hours of my pride and I believe it still. But mine has suffered a sea-change and I can no longer recognise it as being an Arcadia. I am busy seeing my life in perspective and I don't like it ; the moments may have sometimes been good, but the years are so many crimes. I have waited too much and acted too little. I have not the pluck to start work when I think how little I have done. But this is no new mood, it is only a recurrence, and it seems to be part of the mockery of life that our very moments of have gone before and that we have almost forgotten. When I think of these things I do not wish that I were dead : I wish that I had never lived. . . .

Follows the passage on his egoism quoted in a previous chapter. The letter continues :

> Incidentally they [the girls] leave Brussels early to-morrow morning for Bordeaux. To avoid embarrassments I wrote to them two days ago to say I was called away on business, and how sorry I was not to be able to say good-bye. I feel intuitively that I shall never see them again, but in my letter I said I would come to Bordeaux. I suppose it is a mean kind of vanity that dictates such lies,

*43 Vivian Locke-Ellis, whose earlier poetry we had both much admired.

but it is none the less certain that the truth would hurt them more. And if I started telling them the truth now it would only be vanity over again. Anyhow I follow the line of least resistance. And now they have gone out of my life and taken nearly everything that blesses me and makes me sad with them. It is strange how my sorrows have always been more creditable than my joys. And now I will not or perhaps cannot move my little finger to rise above the mud that chokes me. Poor Christine had better marry her Swiss boy. . . . I met Leon the other day *[44] . . . He has moved but I have not been to his new house yet—I don't want to go but I suppose my new philosophy of loving humanity imperfect though it is at present, will ultimately bring me to the sacrifice.

As for England, I don't know what to say. I daren't look a day a-head for everything seems absolutely hopeless unless I can get back to work. I have a story in my head called " The Flapper " for Austin Harrison—it's about Lily—but when shall I be able to write it ? And what shall I do meanwhile if I can't get back the trick of writing articles ? The Noise of Life isn't it ? *[45] When the Academy sends their cheque I can struggle on somehow to the tenth of next month, if nothing terrible happens in the meanwhile. After that all is a blank like the mind of

Yours ever

SILAS TAYLOR COMBERBATCH.

A postscript added the following morning gives me a few scraps of news and reveals him in a somewhat more cheerful humour. But that the thought in his mind, whether he was conscious of it or not, was taking stronger possession of him is evident from

*[44] My cousin Léon Bochoms—the " mad Belgian architect " mentioned in *Montjoie*. I include this passage because of the " new philosophy " to which M. refers. He wrote once from Blaokfriars Road, I being in Belgium at the time : " Commend me to your cousin Léon (with an accent oh purist !) and tell him that the art of a nation is in inverse ratio to its artistic conceit. In England we believe that we are successful shopkeepers and therefore we have artists. In Belgium they believe they are artists and therefore they have shopkeepers. . . . " Inconsistently, in the matter of minor pedantry, when at St. Albans in 1910, he sent from there a postcard request having regard to the poem *Mélisande* he had just written : " Let me know if there is an accent over the first ' e ' in Mélisande."

*[45] A reference to de Musset's aphorism—something to the effect that it is not life itself, but the noise of life with which most of us are concerned.

what he calls the intuition that he would never see the girls again, and from the ominous " if nothing terrible happens in the meanwhile." Curiously enough, like a kind of false dawn, the next letter, dated November 20th, is not only devoid of gloom but full of gaiety, humorous shrewdness and good resolutions :

> In the last three days [it runs] I have written two articles, The Wet Day and The Flute-Player.*[46] I give you the titles so that you will spot them when they come out in the Academy, and know that they were produced after a period of uncommon drouth. But I believe they are good nevertheless. Also I finished an idiot article on Belgium which will pay a washing-bill and that's all it's good for. But now I have started work again there's hope for the far future. Presently when all is well again, I shall try to do something big for the E.R. Work, work, work, in poverty, hunger and dirk. That's me. . . . Madame has just collared the petty cash for sundry trifles that I had forgotten. But she says she is in no hurry for the rent which is good news. . . . I have two pounds and a quarter of Appleterre. I am a great man of letters. My next article is to be The Wool-Gatherer. Voila un titre.
>
> And now . . . you propose to start work. That is the kind of resolution which wakes an echo in my bosom, because it's the kind of resolution that I form myself. If I may drop a suggestion, I should try to do the Eton boys gambling at Windsor if I were you. 'Tis a good picture, and if done simply one of the Liberal dailies would take it as like as not. The Conservative papers would suspect a criticism of their glorious institutions. Unless the Mail wanted to start a correspondence. . . . It's only an idea of mine. We might discuss these things seriously if I appear at Christmas. If —— were anything but an agreeable butterfly he would have lured you into work a long time ago. He works hard enough himself, the dog, when no-one's looking.
>
> The girls have gone and I hope I have done with love for a long, long time. The truth is I have had a sort of nervous breakdown (? a neurasthenic rag-

*[46] *A Wet Day* is in *The Ghost Ship and Other Stories* ; *The Flute Player* and *The Wool Gatherer* (mentioned later in the same letter) are in *The Day before Yesterday*.

time) and at the present moment women make me feel sick, prostitutes and the like I mean. . . . The story of the last month and the exhaustion that follows the effort to love Cynara, the Hottentot Venus and half a dozen Jennies at one and the same time, would make a great moral romance if England were not such a desperately immoral country. There was one fine moment in the sorry story. When on my fourth consecutive sleepless night at an alien hotel I got out of bed and looked out of window and saw some ducks swimming on a pond by the sad light of dawn. I felt then just the one thing about Nature that Wordsworth couldn't feel because he never got far enough away from the complex bitch. I shall do some of these things yet when I find the right form. . . .

I have just been pointing out to two Socialists, a Bulgarian and an Armenian that you cannot achieve liberty by suppressing other people, even if they are priests or rich men. They called me an idealist, with which triumph I was satisfied. When people tell me that England is the country of freedom I can't help being annoyed. Why they won't even let you wear your hair long there ! The whole world is raving mad. I alone am sane, I and Ricquette.*[47]

The Tragic Comedians is the only book of Meredith's that I have never been able to finish, though I confess that I have not tried it for some years. So I won't write about it because I can't. Max *[48] was enormously impressed by Sister Carrie. Also by the Man of Property. I have given him the Patricians. God knows what he'll make of it. If you see the White Peacock *[49] for a shilling you might buy it for him.

Yours ever

RICHARD.

*[47] This may be an allusion either to a domestic animal at his lodgings or to the dog in the Anatole France Bergeret series.

*[48] Abel Torçy, author of *A L'Ombre des Saules*, *Le Canard Domestique*, and other works. A refugee in England and maker of shells, he died broken-hearted during the war.

*[49] D. H. Lawrence's first book, which M. had eulogistically reviewed on its appearance.

This optimistic epistle probably allayed my fears, but, eleven days later, no further word from him having arrived, I wrote, on the day he died, a letter which I myself opened later in Brussels. It contains the following extract :

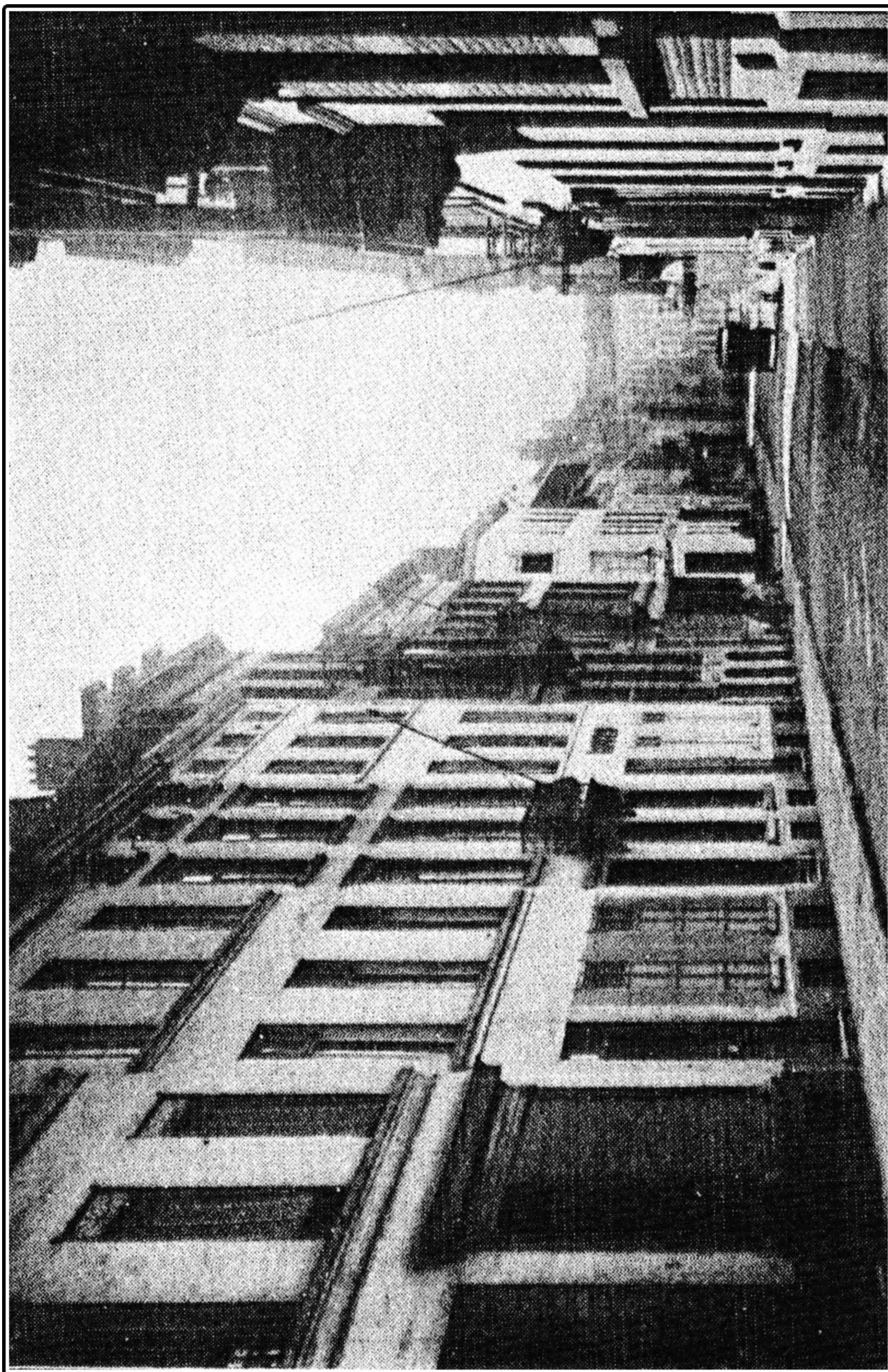
> I am getting rather anxious about you, Richard—not having heard from you such a while. If you are ill please get one of the youngsters to send a postcard or something. I don't mean by this to ask you for letters if you are not inclined to write. Perhaps some of our post has miscarried. Your last envelope is postmarked the 20th Nov. My last letter, with an enclosure, was sent, I think, a week ago.
>
> I have no heart to prattle to-day. You are not in the Academy again and I do think you had better get back by or before Christmas and be *on the spot*. Harris ought to be doing something about your poems. I feel sometimes like a reincarnation of Swift.

This last sentence is uncanny. I had in mind the fact that Swift had written an essay on Stella on the night of her death, and as a matter of fact, my letter being posted, I did ease myself that same night in similar fashion. On returning home at midnight there was a telegram awaiting me from Mme. Grey, his landlady. " Richard Middleton died to-day in Brussels," it said.

CHAPTER XII

THE END

RANDAL CHARLTON was staying with me at the time and accompanied me by the nine o'clock boat in the morning. We found at the house one Charles Palmer, an English *café* acquaintance of Middleton's, who had been called in by Madame Grey, and who, with my name and address on the dead poet's last message as a guide, had forwarded the telegram. The *gendarmes* had sealed the door of the death chamber, the English consul had not yet arrived, and none seemed to know what was to be done. While Charlton went upstairs, broke the door in and filled a bag with papers, I sat below hearing Palmer's news of the tragedy. This will be best told in a letter he had posted the day before to me, not anticipating our speedy arrival :



THE HOUSE IN THE RUE DE JONCKER.

> As I had not seen him at the *café* since Monday last [the letter is dated Saturday, December 2nd, 1911] I daily inquiring if he had visited same concluded he was ill so I called this morn at 10 Rue Joncker to ask if I could see him. This was about 1 p.m. and Mme. Grey informed me he would not answer to repeated knocking at his bedroom door. I then said I would speak to him from outside, but failed to receive a reply. I told Madame I would return at 6 p.m. to-night and in the event of his not then answering I would take the liberty of bursting open his bedroom door, as I should consider he had fainted ! During my absence, Mme. Grey informs me, she was not satisfied, so called in the police and they found him dead. . . .

Middleton's message was written on a print-stamped and addressed post-card. He had probably intended to send it. I have hesitated to give its contents wholly, but not to do so would perhaps be as unwise as the suppression of any part. It may be that, after all, most, if not all, of our actions are not deserving of thanks. For myself, at any rate, I have never felt that Middleton owed me anything :

> Good-bye ! Harry [the message runs] I'm going adventuring again, and thanks to you I shall have some pleasant memories in my knapsack. As for the many bitter ones, perhaps they will not weigh so heavy now as they did before. " A broken and a contrite heart, oh Lord, thou shalt not despise."
>
> RICHARD.

A child to the last, it might almost be observed, from his mention of adventure and knapsacks. A curious feature is that he probably penned the note on November 26th. That date is crossed out and December 1st added in lighter inking than that in which the message itself is written. We are left to infer that he fought for five days after coming to his decision. On the other hand, in his anguish of mind he may have been at first not clear as to the date, but that, from the difference of shading in the ink, is less likely it seems. What happened, after his optimistic letter of November 20th, that led to the fatal change of course ; what was the last straw ; will probably never be

known. The *Academy* cheque had not arrived—he died penniless. But such misadventures are perhaps less causes than occasions, and comparatively unimportant. He could have borrowed money and did not.*50 " Man, if you only knew my pride ! " Another bout of neuralgia may have turned the scale. And always that brooding ; always the temptation to end it all ; always the absence of light.

There was another message. On an envelope received at Brussels on November 25th, addressed to him from Christine, with no evidence to show when they were written, were the brief words :

Poor little girl. Someone must write to her nicely to break the news.

His last action had been very deliberate, so Charlton said afterwards. In order to make more sure of the effect of the chloroform he had stuffed cotton-wool in his nostrils. The air of the room was unbearable. Charlton opened the windows. " Desolation," he murmured, " desolation."

The next day we made arrangements for the burial. Sisters of Charity did their gracious work and, when I went up to take a last look at him, were watching by the bedside. We called on the consul, who agreed to satisfy the police as to our illegality in breaking into the room. It had been decided that we would spare the Middleton family the news until our return to England, but the consul, the meantime, had wired Middleton *père*, and the dead man's father and mother arrived on the eve of the funeral.

He was buried, with the rites of the Church of England, at Calvoet, a hilly, windswept cemetery on the outskirts of Brussels.

There must he lie, though it be high broad noon
Or Venus glister in the darkling firs,
The roses and the music are forgot. . . .

He made boast that he would not forget them.

---

*50 " The bitterness of the unhonoured prophet is cumulative, and in the end his message smashed John Davidson . . . it may well be that the prophet Davidson grew weary of waiting for the tardy ravens ; but it is certain that the poet, the man who wrote *The Ballad of a Nun* and *The Runnable Stag*, did not kill himself for lack of an extra hundred a year. Nor, indeed, is he dead."— *Monologues*, p. 67.

With the word my story closes,
For I died, and on that day
High they covered me with roses,
And I smelt them as I lay.

Who knows ? We are flashed on the screen a moment to play our parts and are gone. The terrible thought has to be conquered that some of us must go, as did Richard Middleton, to the very end without light. But all the hosts of pessimism cannot prevail against the one faint gleam in the darkness. Swiftly as brother follows brother it is not certain that we go " from sunshine to the sunless land." The sunless land it may be. But none knows if we may not awaken from this life, so mysterious, so miraculous, to a dawn lovelier than any yet imagined and the morning stars singing together and all the sons of God shouting for joy.

ADDENDA

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MIDDLETON'S work in prose and poetry is published by T. Fisher Unwin, of Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C. There are five volumes, all of which appeared after their author's death. The first editions are uniformly bound in blue buckram, cr. 8vo, and lettered on back and front in gilt.

The Ghost Ship and other Stories (1912: pp. 270) has an Introduction by Arthur Machen. Most of the stories, twenty in number, originally appeared either in the *English Review*, the *Academy* or *Vanity Fair*. Some critics have valued this book more highly than the poems. Arthur Machen says of it in his Introduction: " It is an extraordinary book, and all the work in it is full of a quite curious and distinctive quality. In my opinion it is very fine work indeed." On publication (simultaneously with *Poems and Songs*) the *Daily News* review had it that " there can be not the least doubt of the high and lasting work contained in the present volumes; it has everywhere the grand manner, a complete mastery of expression, and an implicit philosophy of life,"

Two of the stories are less stories than studies, as, for instance, *A Wet Day* and *The Biography of a Superman*, which gives Middleton's view of George Bernard Shaw. *The Poet's Allegory* was written as a retort to a pessimistic article by John Galsworthy, and, as originally printed in *Vanity Fair*, ended with the sentence : "Oh Mr. Galsworthy, do you smoke my allegory ? " This was omitted on publication in book form.

Under title *Le Poisson sur le toit et autres contes sensibles*, the book has been recently translated into French by Maurice Beerblock.

Poems and Songs (1912: pp. 144) has an Introduction by Henry Savage and is dedicated to Frank Harris. Five of the poems were first printed in the *English Review*,

one in the *Neolith*, and the bulk of the remainder in *Vanity Fair* under Harris's editorship.

The Day before Yesterday (1912: pp. 246) is a book of essays of childhood, most of them reprinted from the pages of the *Academy*, *Vanity Fair* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Poems and Songs : Second Series (1912: pp. 184) has a Preface by Henry Savage. Many of these poems did not appear previous to publication in book form ; the others were taken from the *English Review*, the *Academy* and *Vanity Fair*.

Monologues (1913: pp. 287) is a book of general essays reflecting the spirit of their period, 1906-11. It contains for the most part its author's more " journalistic " work for *Vanity Fair* and the *Academy*, and was freely edited on publication in book form, occasional local and topical allusions being excised.

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Articles on Middleton have appeared in : —

The Gypsy and Folk Lore Gazette : No. 3. Louis J. McQuilland.

The English Review. July, 1912. Henry Savage.

Rhythm. August, 1912. Frank Harris. This article was afterwards enlarged and included in the same author's *Contemporary Portraits* (Methuen).

The Academy. September 18th, 1915. Henry Savage.

The Fortnightly Review. October, 1916. S. P. B. Mais.

The Bookman's Journal. November 28th, 1919. Louis J. McQuilland.

The Bookman's Journal. November 5th, 1920. Henry Savage.

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Nos. 1 and 2 of *The Gypsy*, a quarterly, contained *Some Letters of Richard Middleton*.

Vincent Starrett, of Chicago, in 1920 published in America *Two Suicides*, a study of Middleton and Hubert Crackanthorpe.

Critical references appear in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. XIII. (Professor Saintsbury), and *The Influence of Baudelaire* (L. Turquet-Milnes).

Three poems are included in *The Victorian Anthology*, edited by Professor A. T. Quiller-Couch.

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Poems by Middleton not yet published in book form appeared in *The Gypsy* (Nos. 1 and 2) under titles *To a Daughter of Joy* and *Nocturne*. A few not deemed worthy of inclusion in *Poems and Songs* (1 and 2) are scattered about the pages of *Vanity Fair*, 1907-9. Middleton's output includes a large quantity of immature and unfinished verse, with which some editor of the future may deal as he thinks fit. But he would get little or nothing of value out of it. Enough interesting miscellanea to form a volume is, however, available. And a selection of the best poetry of the two series of *Poems and Songs*, with a critical Introduction, would make a pleasant volume.

POETICAL TRIBUTES

THE following tributes in verse are reprinted by kind permission of their authors : the poem by W. R. Titterton, from his book *Guns and, Guitars* (Cecil Palmer), the two sonnets by William Kean Seymour and Arthur Coles Armstrong, respectively, from *Swords and Flutes* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* of December 6th, 1913.

A DEAD POET

THERE is a gap within our ranks to-night;
The chairs are filled, and yet I miss his face
Whose singing was a fragrance and a light
About our meeting-place ;

Whose petulant rough gesture and wild hair
Were as a frame for his shy, tender eyes—
Dream-slept from out his much tormented chair,
Calm in the earth he lies.

Calmly he rests whose soul was like a sea
Vexed by desires unsatisfied, unnamed ;
Was like a trapped god struggling to be free,
A hidden fire that flamed.

The golden cities that his verses piled
Rise on the mountain-tops serene and strong ;

Part woman, part swashbuckler and part child,
He was a lord of song.

You know the man—square-seated at the board,
Rapping your knuckles with a bludgeon phrase,
Turning your counter on a happy word
Gentler than woman's ways.

You know that glumness with a bitter gang,
That wild, gay humour lurking in his curls,
That shy, reluctant, reckless voice that sang
Of all his golden girls !

Ah, golden girls ! you watch for him in vain ;
'Tis but a stranger tapping at the door.
Your burly play-boy of a Western lane
Comes to you never more.

Ah, golden girls ! leave your fair locks undone,
Your dainty shapes unlaced, your tears undried !
Weep that of all of you not one, not one
Was with him when he died !

Bah ! let the sentimental tosh go hang I
The lamp is out—and life and love have end.
Better than all the kisses that he sang,
They say he left a friend.

A friend ! that's much ! —some verses, and a clod—
A clod that yesterday drew glorious breath ;
But not one word to tell us why he trod
The backstairs way to death.

What was the grief set gnawing at his heart ?
What love's betrayal turned his blood to gall ?
What bodily anguish tore his soul apart ?
The grave-mound covers all.

But, whether the devil of dearth, grown insolent,
Stamped on his naked brain with feet gold-shod,
Or life went when desire of dreaming went,
This murder cries to God.

W. R. Titterton.

RICHARD MIDDLETON :
In Memoriam

O DREAMER with Love's roses on thy brow
Entwined with bitter sprays of mournful yew ;
O singer with the faery voice and view
Of insubstantial realms of Beauty ; thou
Whom ignorance and scorn condemned to bow
Too soon before the careless Scythe ; who knew
A dreamer's anguish and a dreamer's due
From those who dream not—art thou dreamless now ?

Or dost thou pace, with sudden princely tread,
Triumphantly among the immortal dead,
Trailing thy earthly dreams like flowers along
Dim labyrinths, and with thy lyric tongue
Starting remembrance in each classic head
And troubling dusty centuries with song ?

William Kean Seymour.

WITH RICHARD MIDDLETON ALONG THE DOVER ROAD.

HE of the straggled beard, the Vulcan frame,
The tender voice, the ego undefiled,
To whom the stars were fairies, coyly wild,
That lived in purple woods whence dragons came ;
Lover of ships, and strange full moons aflame
With pirates' blood—oh ! shaggy, man-grown child,
What talk was ours, as league on league we piled,
And list'ning hedgerows fancy-struck became !

Embroidered sails on blue Pacific seas ;
Sad violets and laughter ; lilies pale ;
Fair gabled Cloisterham ; performing fleas ;
The dead astream before a Lethean gale ;
The flaming soul of Dickens—preludes these
To bread and cheese, and gallant Kentish ale !

Arthur Coles Armstrong.

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TITLES of Middleton's books, poems or essays are in italics ; those of work by other authors are also italicised and have the author's names in parentheses. Reviews, magazines and news papers are set between inverted commas. Brussels is indexed only so far as mention is made of that city before Middleton went to live there.

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE WHITEFRIARS PRESS, LTD., LONDON AND TONBRIDGE.