

# DOUGLAS JAMES

THEODORE  
WATTS-DUNTON: POET,  
NOVELIST, CRITIC

**James Douglas**  
**Theodore Watts-Dunton:**  
**Poet, Novelist, Critic**

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# **James Douglas**

## **Theodore Watts-Dunton:**

### **Poet, Novelist, Critic**

#### **NATURA BENIGNA**

What power is this? what witchery wins my feet  
To peaks so sheer they scorn the cloaking snow,  
All silent as the emerald gulfs below,  
Down whose ice-walls the wings of twilight beat?  
What thrill of earth and heaven—most wild, most sweet—  
What answering pulse that all the senses know,  
Comes leaping from the ruddy eastern glow  
Where, far away, the skies and mountains meet?  
Mother, 'tis I reborn: I know thee well:  
That throb I know and all it prophesies,  
O Mother and Queen, beneath the olden spell  
Of silence, gazing from thy hills and skies!  
Dumb Mother, struggling with the years to tell  
The secret at thy heart through helpless eyes.

# Introduction

‘It was necessary for Thomas Hood still to do one thing ere the wide circle and profound depth of his genius were to the full acknowledged: that one thing was – to die.’ – Douglas Jerrold.

Although in the inner circle of English letters this study of a living writer will need no apology, it may be well to explain for the general reader the reasons which moved me to undertake it.

Some time ago a distinguished scholar, the late S. Arthur Strong, Librarian of the House of Lords, was asked what had been the chief source of his education. He replied: “Cambridge, scholastically, and Watts-Dunton’s articles in the ‘Encyclopædia Britannica’ and the ‘Athenæum’ from the purely literary point of view. I have been a reader of them for many years, and it would be difficult for me to say what I should have been without them.” Mr. Richard Le Gallienne has said that he bought the ‘Encyclopædia Britannica’ simply to possess one article – Mr. Watts-Dunton’s article on Poetry. There are many other men of letters who would give similar testimony. With regard to his critical work, Mr. Swinburne in one of his essays, speaking of the treatise on Poetry, describes Mr. Watts-Dunton as ‘the first critic of our time, perhaps the largest-minded and surest-sighted

of any age,'<sup>1</sup> a judgment which, according to the article on Mr. Watts-Dunton in Chambers's 'Encyclopædia,' Rossetti endorsed. In this same article it is further said: —

“He came to exercise a most important influence on the art and culture of the day; but although he has written enough to fill many volumes – in the ‘Examiner,’ the ‘Athenæum’ (since 1876), the ‘Nineteenth Century,’ the ‘Fortnightly Review,’ etc. – he has let year after year go by without his collecting his essays, which, always dealing with first principles, have ceased to be really anonymous, and are quoted by the press both in England and in Germany as his. But, having wrapped up his talents in a weekly review, he is only ephemerally known to the general public, except for the sonnets and other poems that, from the ‘Athenæum,’ etc., have found their way into anthologies, and for the articles on poetic subjects that he has contributed to the ‘Encyclopædia Britannica,’ ‘Chambers’s Encyclopædia,’ etc. The chief note of his poetry – much of it written in youth – is its individuality, the source of its inspiration Nature and himself. For he who of all men has most influenced his brother poets has himself remained least influenced by them. So, too, his prose writings – literary mainly, but ranging also over folk-lore, ethnology, and science generally – are marked as much by their independence and originality as by their suggestiveness, harmony, incisive vigour, and depth and breadth of insight. They have made him a force in literature to which only Sainte-Beuve, not Jeffrey, is a

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Studies in Prose.’

parallel.”<sup>2</sup>

These citations from students of Mr. Watts-Dunton's work, written before his theory of the 'Renaissance of Wonder' was exemplified in 'Aylwin' and 'The Coming of Love,' show, I think, that this book would have had a right to exist even if his critical writings had been collected into volumes; but as this collection has never been made, and I believe never will be made by the author, I feel that to do what I am now doing is to render the reading public a real service. For many years he has been urged by his friends to collect his critical articles, but although several men of letters have offered to relieve him of that task, he has remained obdurate.

Speaking for myself, I scarcely remember the time when I was not an eager student of Mr. Watts-Dunton's writings. Like most boys born with the itch for writing, I began to spill ink on paper in my third lustre. The fermentation of the soul which drove me to write a dreadful elegy, modelled upon 'Lycidas,' on the death of an indulgent aunt, also drove me to welter in drowsy critical journals. By some humour of chance I stumbled upon the 'Athenæum,' and there I found week by week writing that made me tingle with the rapture of discovery. The personal magic of some unknown wizard led me into realms of gold and kingdoms of romance. I used to count the days till the 'Athenæum' appeared in my Irish home, and I spent my scanty pocket money in binding the piled numbers into ponderous tomes. Well I remember the

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<sup>2</sup> 'Chambers's Encyclopædia,' vol. x., p. 581.

advent of the old, white-bearded Ulster book-binder, bearing my precious volumes: even now I can smell the pungent odour of the damp paste and glue. In those days I was a solitary bookworm, living far from London, and I vainly tried to discover the name of the magician who was carrying me into so 'many goodly states and kingdoms.' With boyish audacity I wrote to the editor of the 'Athenæum,' begging him to disclose the secret; and I am sure my naïve appeal provoked a smile in Took's Court. But although the editor was dumb, I exulted in the meagre apparition of my initials, 'J. D.,' under the solemn rubric, 'To Correspondents.'

It was by collating certain signed sonnets and signed articles with the unsigned critical essays that I at last discovered the name of my hero, Theodore Watts. Of course, the sonnets set me sonneteering, and when my execrable imitation of 'Australia's Mother' was printed in the 'Belfast News-Letter' I felt like Byron when he woke up and found himself famous. Afterwards, when I had plunged into the surf of literary London, I learnt that the writer who had turned my boyhood into a romantic paradise was well known in cultivated circles, but quite unknown outside them.

There was, indeed, no account of him in print. It was not till 1887 that I found a brief but masterly memoir in 'Celebrities of the Century.' The article concluded with the statement that in the 'Athenæum' and in the Ninth Edition of the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' Mr. Watts-Dunton had 'founded a school of criticism which discarded conventional authority, and sought to test all literary effects by the light of first principles merely.' These



words encouraged me, for they told me that as a boy I had not been wrong in thinking that I had discovered a master and a guide in literature. Then came the memoir of Philip Bourke Marston by the American poetess, Louise Chandler Moulton, in which she described Mr. Watts-Dunton as 'a poet whose noble work won for him the intimate friendship of Rossetti and Browning and Lord Tennyson, and was the first link in that chain of more than brotherly love which binds him to Swinburne, his housemate at present and for many years past.' I also came across Clarence Stedman's remarks upon the opening of 'The Coming of Love,' 'Mother Carey's Chicken,' first printed in the 'Athenæum.' He was enthusiastic about the poet's perception of 'Nature's grander aspects,' and spoke of his poetry as being 'quite independent of any bias derived from the eminent poets with whom his life has been closely associated.'

When afterwards I made his acquaintance, our intercourse led to the formation of a friendship which has deepened my gratitude for the spiritual and intellectual guidance I have found in his writings for nearly twenty years. Owing to the popularity of 'The Coming of Love' and of 'Aylwin' – which the late Lord Acton, in 'The Annals of Politics and Culture,' placed at the head of the three most important books published in 1898 – Mr. Watts-Dunton's name is now familiar to every fairly educated person. About few men living is there so much literary curiosity; and this again is a reason for writing a book about him.

The idea of making an elaborate study of his work, however,

did not come to me until I received an invitation from Dr. Patrick, the editor of Chambers's 'Cyclopædia of English Literature,' to write for that publication an article on Mr. Watts-Dunton – an article which had been allotted to Professor Strong, but which he had been obliged through indisposition to abandon at the last moment. I undertook to do this. But within the limited space at my command I was able only very briefly to discuss his work as a poet. Soon afterwards I was invited by my friend, Dr. Robertson Nicoll, to write a monograph upon Mr. Watts-Dunton for Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, and, if I should see my way to do so, to sound him on the subject. My only difficulty was in approaching Mr. Watts-Dunton, for I knew how constantly he had been urged by the press to collect his essays, and how persistently he had declined to do so. Nevertheless, I wrote to him, telling him how gladly I should undertake the task, and how sure I was that the book was called for. His answer was so characteristic that I must give it here: —

“My dear Mr. Douglas, — It must now be something like fifteen years since Mr. John Lane, who was then compiling a bibliography of George Meredith, asked me to consent to his compiling a bibliography of my articles in the 'Athenæum' and elsewhere, and although I emphatically declined to sanction such a bibliography, he on several occasions did me the honour to renew his request. I told him, as I have told one or two other generous friends, that although I had put into these articles the best criticism and the best thought at my command, I considered them

too formless to have other than an ephemeral life. I must especially mention the name of Mr. Alfred Nutt, who for years has been urging me to let him publish a selection from my critical essays. I am really proud to record this, because Mr. Nutt is not only an eminent publisher but an admirable scholar and a man of astonishing accomplishments. I had for years, let me confess, cherished the idea that some day I might be able to take my various expressions of opinion upon literature, especially upon poetry, and mould them into a coherent and, perhaps, into a harmonious whole. This alone would have satisfied me. But year by year the body of critical writing from my pen has grown, and I felt and feel more and more unequal to the task of grappling with such a mass. To the last writer of eminence who gratified me by suggesting a collection of these essays – Dr. Robertson Nicoll – I wrote, and wrote it with entire candour, that in my opinion the view generally taken of the value of them is too generous. Still, they are the result of a good deal of reflection and not a little research, especially those in the ‘Encyclopædia Britannica,’ and I am not so entirely without literary aspiration as not to regret that, years ago, when the mass of material was more manageable, I neglected to collect them and edit them myself. But the impulse to do this is now gone. Owing to the quite unexpected popularity of ‘The Coming of Love’ and of ‘Aylwin,’ my mind has been diverted from criticism, and plunged into those much more fascinating waters of poetry and fiction in which I used to revel long before. If you really think that a selection of passages from the articles, and a critical examination and

estimate of the imaginative work would be of interest to any considerable body of readers, I do not know why I should withhold my consent. But I confess, judging from such work of your own as I have seen, I find it difficult to believe that it is worth your while to enter upon any such task.

I agree with you that it is difficult to see how you are to present and expound the principles of criticism advanced in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' the 'Athenæum,' etc., without discussing those two imaginative works the writing of which inspired the canons and generalizations in the critical work – 'Aylwin' and 'The Coming of Love.' As regards 'Aylwin,' however, I cannot help wincing under the thought that in these days when so much genius is at work in prose fiction, your discussion will seem to give quite an undue prominence to a writer who has published but one novel. This I confess does disturb me somewhat, and I wish you to bear well in mind this aspect of the matter before you seriously undertake the book. As to the prose fiction of the present moment, I constantly stand amazed at its wealth. If, however, you do touch upon 'Aylwin,' I hope you will modify those generous – too generous – expressions of yours which, I remember, you printed in a review of the book when it first appeared."

After getting this sanction I set to work, and soon found that my chief obstacle was the superabundance of material, which would fill several folio volumes. But although it is undoubtedly 'a mighty maze,' it is 'not without a plan.' In a certain sense the vast number of Mr. Watts-Dunton's generalizations upon literature,

art, philosophy, and what Emerson calls 'the conduct of life,' revolve round certain fixed principles which have guided me in the selection I have made. I also found that to understand these principles of romantic art, it was necessary to make a thorough critical study of the romance, 'Aylwin,' and of the book of poems, 'The Coming of Love.' I think I have made that study, and that I have connected the critical system with the imaginative work more thoroughly than has been done by any other writer, although the work of Mr. Watts-Dunton, both creative and critical, has been acutely discussed, not only in England but also in France and in Italy.

The creative originality of his criticism is as absolute as that of his poetry and fiction. He poured into his criticism the intellectual and imaginative force which other men pour into purely artistic channels, for he made criticism a vehicle for his humour, his philosophy, and his irony. His criticisms are the reflections of a lifetime. Their vitality is not impaired by the impermanence of their texts. No critic has surpassed his universality of range. Out of a full intellectual and imaginative life he has evolved speculations which cut deep not only into the fibre of modern thought but into the future of human development. Great teachers have their day and their disciples. Mr. Watts-Dunton's day and disciples belong to the young future whose dawn some of us already descry. For, as Mr. Justin McCarthy wrote of 'Aylwin,' 'it is inspired by the very spirit of youth,' and this is why so many of the younger writers are

beginning to accept him as their guide. Mr. Watts-Dunton has built up a new optimistic philosophy of life which, I think, is sure to arrest the devastating march of the pessimists across the history of the soul of man. That is the aspect of his work which calls for the comprehension of the new generation. The old cosmogonies are dead; here is the new cosmogony, the cosmogony in which the impulse of wonder reasserts its sovereignty, proclaiming anew the nobler religion of the spiritual imagination, with a faith in *Natura Benigna* which no assaults of science can shake.

But, although the main object of this book is to focus, as it were, the many scattered utterances of Mr. Watts-Dunton in prose and poetry upon the great subject of the Renaissance of Wonder, I have interspersed here and there essays which do not touch upon this theme, and also excerpts from those obituary notices of his friends which formed so fascinating a part of his contributions to the 'Athenæum.' For, of course, it was necessary to give the charm of variety to the book. Rossetti used to say, I believe, that there is one quality necessary in a poem which very many poets are apt to ignore – the quality of being amusing. I have always thought that there is great truth in this, and I have also thought that the remark is applicable to prose no less than to poetry. This is why I have occasionally enlivened these pages with extracts from his picturesque monographs; indeed, I have done more than this. Not having known Mr. Watts-Dunton's great contemporaries myself, I have looked about me for the

aid of certain others who did know them. I have not hesitated to collect from various sources such facts and details connected with Mr. Watts-Dunton and his friends as are necessarily beyond the scope of my own experience and knowledge. Among these I must prominently mention one to whom I have been specially indebted for reminiscences of Mr. Watts-Dunton and his circle. This is Mr. Thomas St. E. Hake, eldest son of the 'parable poet,' a gentleman of much too modest and retiring a disposition, who, from Mr. Watts-Dunton's first appearance in London right onwards, was brought into intimate relations with himself, his relatives, Rossetti, William Morris, Westland Marston, Philip Bourke Marston, Madox Brown, George Borrow, Stevenson, Minto, and many others. I have not only made free use of his articles, but I have had the greatest aid from him in many other respects, and it is my bare duty to express my gratitude to him for his services. I have also to thank the editor of the 'Athenæum' for cordially granting me permission to quote so freely from its columns; and I take this opportunity of acknowledging my debt to the many other publications from which I have drawn materials for this book.

# Chapter I

## THE RENASCENCE OF WONDER

“‘The renaissance of wonder,’ to employ Mr. Watts-Dunton’s appellation for what he justly considers the most striking and significant feature in the great romantic revival which has transformed literature, is proclaimed by this very appellation not to be the achievement of any one innovator, but a general reawakening of mankind to a perception that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in Horatio’s philosophy.” – Dr. R. Garnett: Monograph on Coleridge.

Undoubtedly the greatest philosophical generalization of our time is expressed in the four words, ‘The Renaissance of Wonder.’ They suggest that great spiritual theory of the universe which, according to Mr. Watts-Dunton, is bound to follow the wave of materialism that set in after the publication of Darwin’s great book. This phrase, which I first became familiar with in his ‘Encyclopædia Britannica’ article on Rossetti, seems really to have been used first in ‘Aylwin.’ The story seems originally to have been called ‘The Renaissance of Wonder,’ but the title was abandoned because the writer believed that an un-suggestive name, such as that of the autobiographer, was better from the practical point of view. For the knowledge of this I am indebted



to Mr. Hake, who says: —

“During the time that Mr. Swinburne was living in Great James Street, several of his friends had chambers in the same street, and among them were my late father, Dr. Gordon Hake – Rossetti’s friend and physician – Mr. Watts-Dunton and myself. Mr. Watts-Dunton, as is well known, was a brilliant raconteur long before he became famous as a writer. I have heard him tell scores of stories full of plot and character that have never appeared in print. On a certain occasion he was suffering from one of his periodical eye troubles that had used occasionally to embarrass him. He had just been telling Mr. Swinburne the plot of a suggested story, the motive of which was the ‘renascence of wonder in art and poetry’ depicting certain well-known characters.

I offered to act as his amanuensis in writing the story, and did so, with the occasional aid of my father and brothers. The story was sent to the late F. W. Robinson, the novelist, then at the zenith of his vogue, who declared that he ‘saw a fortune in it,’ and it was he who advised the author to send it to Messrs. Hurst & Blackett. As far as I remember, the time occupied by the work was between five and six months. When a large portion of it was in type it was read by many friends, – among others by the late Madox Brown, who thought some of the portraits too close, as the characters were then all living, except one, the character who figures as Cyril. Although unpublished, it was so well known that an article upon it appeared in the ‘Liverpool Mercury.’ This was more than twenty years ago.”

The important matter before us, however, is not when he first used this phrase, which has now become a sort of literary shorthand to express a wide and sweeping idea, but what it actually imports. Fortunately Mr. Watts-Dunton has quite lately given us a luminous exposition of what the words do precisely mean. Last year he wrote for that invaluable work, Chambers's 'Cyclopædia of English Literature,' the Introduction to volume iii., and no one can any longer say that there is any ambiguity in this now famous phrase: —

“As the storm-wind is the cause and not the effect of the mighty billows at sea, so the movement in question was the cause and not the effect of the French Revolution. It was nothing less than a great revived movement of the soul of man, after a long period of prosaic acceptance in all things, including literature and art. To this revival the present writer, in the introduction to an imaginative work dealing with this movement, has already, for convenience' sake, and in default of a better one, given the name of the Renaissance of Wonder. As was said on that occasion, 'The phrase, the Renaissance of Wonder, merely indicates that there are two great impulses governing man, and probably not man only, but the entire world of conscious life: the impulse of acceptance — the impulse to take unchallenged and for granted all the phenomena of the outer world as they are — and the impulse to confront these phenomena with eyes of inquiry and wonder.' It would seem that something works as inevitably and as logically as a physical law in the yearning which societies in a certain stage of

development show to get away, as far away as possible, from the condition of the natural man; to get away from that despised condition not only in material affairs, such as dress, domestic arrangements and economies, but also in the fine arts and in intellectual methods, till, having passed that inevitable stage, each society is liable to suffer (even if it does not in some cases actually suffer) a reaction, when nature and art are likely again to take the place of convention and artifice. Anthropologists have often asked, what was that lever-power lying enfolded in the dark womb of some remote semi-human brain, which, by first stirring, lifting, and vitalizing other potential and latent faculties, gave birth to man? Would it be rash to assume that this lever-power was a vigorous movement of the faculty of wonder? But certainly it is not rash, as regards the races of man, to affirm that the more intelligent the race the less it is governed by the instinct of acceptance, and the more it is governed by the instinct of wonder, that instinct which leads to the movement of challenge. The alternate action of the two great warring instincts is specially seen just now in the Japanese. Here the instinct of challenge which results in progress became active up to a certain point, and then suddenly became arrested, leaving the instinct of acceptance to have full play, and then everything became crystallized. Ages upon ages of an immense activity of the instinct of challenge were required before the Mongolian savage was developed into the Japanese of the period before the nature-worship of 'Shinto' had been assaulted by dogmatic Buddhism. But by that time the instinct of

challenge had resulted in such a high state of civilization that acceptance set in and there was an end, for the time being, of progress. There is no room here to say even a few words upon other great revivals in past times, such, for instance, as the Jewish-Arabian renaissance of the ninth and tenth centuries, when the interest in philosophical speculation, which had previously been arrested, was revived; when the old sciences were revived; and when some modern sciences were born. There are, of course, different kinds of wonder.”

This passage has a peculiar interest for me, because I instinctively compare it with the author’s speech delivered at the St. Ives old Union Book Club dinner when he was a boy. It shows the same wide vision, the same sweep, and the same rush of eloquence. It is in view of this great generalization that I have determined to quote that speech later.

The essay then goes on in a swift way to point out the different kinds of wonder: —

“Primitive poetry is full of wonder – the naïve and eager wonder of the healthy child. It is this kind of wonder which makes the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Odyssey’ so delightful. The wonder of primitive poetry passes as the primitive conditions of civilization pass; and then for the most part it can only be succeeded by a very different kind of wonder – the wonder aroused by a recognition of the mystery of man’s life and the mystery of nature’s theatre on which the human drama is played – the wonder, in short, of Æschylus and Sophocles. And among the Romans, Virgil, though living under the

same kind of Augustan acceptance in which Horace, the typical poet of acceptance, lived, is full of this latter kind of wonder. Among the English poets who preceded the great Elizabethan epoch there is no room, and indeed there is no need, to allude to any poet besides Chaucer; and even he can only be slightly touched upon. He stands at the head of those who are organized to see more clearly than we can ourselves see the wonder of the 'world at hand.' Of the poets whose wonder is of the simply terrene kind, those whose eyes are occupied by the beauty of the earth and the romance of human life, he is the English king. But it is not the wonder of Chaucer that is to be specially discussed in the following sentences. It is the spiritual wonder which in our literature came afterwards. It is that kind of wonder which filled the souls of Spenser, of Marlowe, of Shakespeare, of Webster, of Ford, of Cyril Tourneur, and of the old ballads: it is that poetical attitude which the human mind assumes when confronting those unseen powers of the universe who, if they did not weave the web in which man finds himself entangled, dominate it. That this high temper should have passed and given place to a temper of prosaic acceptance is quite inexplicable, save by the theory of the action and reaction of the two great warring impulses advanced in the foregoing extract from the Introduction to 'Aylwin.' Perhaps the difference between the temper of the Elizabethan period and the temper of the Chaucerian on the one hand, and Augustanism on the other, will be better understood by a brief reference to the humour of the respective periods."

Then come luminous remarks upon his theory of absolute and

relative humour, which I shall deal with in relation to that type of absolute humour, his own Mrs. Gudgeon in ‘Aylwin.’

I will now quote a passage from an article in the ‘Quarterly Review’ on William Morris by one of Morris’s intimate friends:

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“The decorative renaissance in England is but an expression of the spirit of the pre-Raphaelite movement – a movement which has been defined by the most eminent of living critics as the renaissance of the ‘spirit of wonder’ in poetry and art. So defined, it falls into proper relationship with the continuous development of English literature, and of the romantic movement, during the last century and a half, and is no longer to be considered an isolated phenomenon called into being by an erratic genius. The English Romantic school, from its first inception with Chatterton, Macpherson, and the publication of the Percy ballads, does not, as Mr. Watts-Dunton has finely pointed out, aim merely at the revival of natural language; it seeks rather to reach through art and the forgotten world of old romance, that world of wonder and mystery and spiritual beauty of which poets gain glimpses through

magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.”

In an essay on Rossetti, Mr. Watts-Dunton says: —

“It was by inevitable instinct that Rossetti turned to that

mysterious side of nature and man's life which to other painters of his time had been a mere fancy-land, to be visited, if at all, on the wings of sport. It is not only in such masterpieces of his maturity as *Dante's Dream*, *La Pia*, etc., but in such early designs as *How they Met Themselves*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *Cassandra*, etc., that Rossetti shows how important a figure he is in the history of modern art, if modern art claims to be anything more than a mechanical imitation of the facts of nature.

For if there is any permanent vitality in the Renaissance of Wonder in modern Europe, if it is not a mere passing mood, if it is really the inevitable expression of the soul of man in a certain stage of civilization (when the sanctions which have made and moulded society are found to be not absolute and eternal, but relative, mundane, ephemeral, and subject to the higher sanctions of unseen powers that work behind 'the shows of things'), then perhaps one of the first questions to ask in regard to any imaginative painter of the nineteenth century is, In what relation does he stand to the newly-awakened spirit of romance? Had he a genuine and independent sympathy with that temper of wonder and mystery which all over Europe had preceded and now followed the temper of imitation, prosaic acceptance, pseudo-classicism, and domestic materialism? Or was his apparent sympathy with the temper of wonder, reverence and awe the result of artistic environment dictated to him by other and more powerful and original souls around him? I do not say that the mere fact of a painter's or poet's showing but an imperfect sympathy with the Renaissance of Wonder is

sufficient to place him below a poet in whom that sympathy is more nearly complete, because we should then be driven to place some of the disciples of Rossetti above our great realistic painters, and we should be driven to place a poet like the author of 'The Excursion' and 'The Prelude' beneath a poet like the author of 'The Queen's Wake'; but we do say that, other things being equal or anything like equal, a painter or poet of our time is to be judged very much by his sympathy with that great movement which we call the Renaissance of Wonder – call it so because the word romanticism never did express it even before it had been vulgarized by French poets, dramatists, doctrinaires, and literary harlequins.

To struggle against the prim traditions of the eighteenth century, the unities of Aristotle, the delineation of types instead of character, as Chateaubriand, Madame de Staël, Balzac, and Hugo struggled, was well. But in studying Rossetti's works we reach the very key of those 'high palaces of romance' which the English mind had never, even in the eighteenth century, wholly forgotten, but whose mystic gates no Frenchman ever yet unlocked. Not all the romantic feeling to be found in all the French romanticists (with their theory that not earnestness but the grotesque is the life-blood of romance) could equal the romantic spirit expressed in a single picture or drawing of Rossetti's, such, for instance, as Beata Beatrix or Pandora.

For while the French romanticists – inspired by the theories (drawn from English exemplars) of Novalis, Tieck, and Herder – cleverly simulated the old romantic feeling,



the ‘beautifully devotional feeling’ which Holman Hunt speaks of, Rossetti was steeped in it: he was so full of the old frank childlike wonder and awe which preceded the great renaissance of materialism that he might have lived and worked amidst the old masters. Hence, in point of design, so original is he that to match such ideas as are expressed in *Lilith*, *Hesterna Rosa*, Michael Scott’s *Wooing*, the *Sea Spell*, etc., we have to turn to the sister art of poetry, where only we can find an equally powerful artistic representation of the idea at the core of the old romanticism – the idea of the evil forces of nature assailing man through his sense of beauty. We must turn, we say, not to art – not even to the old masters themselves – but to the most perfect efflorescence of the poetry of wonder and mystery – to such ballads as ‘The Demon Lover,’ to Coleridge’s ‘Christabel’ and ‘Kubla Khan,’ to Keats’s ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci,’ for parallels to Rossetti’s most characteristic designs.”

These words about Coleridge recall to the students of Mr. Watts-Dunton’s work a splendid illustration of the true wonder of the great poetic temper which he gives in the before-mentioned essay on *The Renaissance of Wonder* in Chambers’s ‘Cyclopædia of English Literature’: —

“Coleridge’s ‘Christabel,’ ‘The Ancient Mariner,’ and ‘Kubla Khan’ are, as regards the romantic spirit, above – and far above – any work of any other English poet. Instances innumerable might be adduced showing how his very nature was steeped in the fountain from which the old balladists themselves drew, but in this brief and rapid survey there

is room to give only one. In the ‘Conclusion’ of the first part of ‘Christabel’ he recapitulates and summarizes, in lines that are at once matchless as poetry and matchless in succinctness of statement, the entire story of the bewitched maiden and her terrible foe which had gone before: —

A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
O Geraldine! since arms of thine  
Have been the lovely lady’s prison.  
O Geraldine! one hour was thine —  
Thou’st had thy will! By tairn and rill,  
The night-birds all that hour were still.  
But now they are jubilant anew,  
From cliff and tower, tu-whoo! tu-whoo!  
Tu-whoo! tu-whoo! from wood and fell!

Here we get that feeling of the inextricable web in which the human drama and external nature are woven which is the very soul of poetic wonder. So great is the maleficent power of the beautiful witch that a spell is thrown over all Nature. For an hour the very woods and fells remain in a shuddering state of sympathetic consciousness of her —

The night-birds all that hour were still.

When the spell is passed Nature awakes as from a hideous nightmare, and ‘the night-birds’ are jubilant anew. This is the very highest reach of poetic wonder – finer, if that be possible, than the night-storm during the murder of Duncan.”

And now let us turn again to the essay upon Rossetti from which I have already quoted: —

“Although the idea at the heart of the highest romantic poetry (allied perhaps to that apprehension of the warring of man’s soul with the appetites of the flesh which is the basis of the Christian idea), may not belong exclusively to what we call the romantic temper (the Greeks, and also most Asiatic peoples, were more or less familiar with it, as we see in the ‘Salámán’ and ‘Absál’ of Jámí), yet it became a peculiarly romantic note, as is seen from the fact that in the old masters it resulted in that asceticism which is its logical expression and which was once an inseparable incident of all romantic art. But, in order to express this stupendous idea as fully as the poets have expressed it, how is it possible to adopt the asceticism of the old masters? This is the question that Rossetti asked himself, and answered by his own progress in art.”

In the same article, Mr. Watts-Dunton discusses the crowning specimen of Rossetti’s romanticism before it had, as it were, gone to seed and passed into pure mysticism, the grand design, ‘Pandora,’ of which he possesses by far the noblest version: —

“In it is seen at its highest Rossetti’s unique faculty of treating classical legend in the true romantic spirit. The grand and sombre beauty of Pandora’s face, the mysterious haunting sadness in her deep blue-grey eyes as she tries in vain to re-close the fatal box from which are still escaping the smoke and flames that shape themselves as they curl

over her head into shadowy spirit faces, grey with agony, between tortured wings of sullen fire, are in the highest romantic mood.”

It is my privilege to be allowed to give here a reproduction of this masterpiece, for which I and my publishers cannot be too grateful. The influence of Mr. Watts-Dunton's teachings is seen in the fact that the idea of the Renaissance of Wonder has become expanded by theological writers and divines in order to include within its scope subjects connected with religion. Among others Dr. Robertson Nicoll has widened its ambit in a remarkable way in an essay upon Dr. Alexander White's 'Appreciation' of Bishop Butler. He quotes one of the Logia discovered by the explorers of the Egypt Fund: — 'Let not him that seeketh cease from his search until he find, and when he finds he shall wonder: wondering he shall reach the kingdom, and when he reaches the kingdom he shall have rest.' He then points out that Bishop Butler was 'one of the first to share in the Renaissance of Wonder, which was the Renaissance of religion.'

And now I must quote a passage alluding to the generalization upon absolute and relative humour which I shall give later when discussing the humour of Mrs. Gudgeon. I shall not be able in these remarks to dwell upon Mr. Watts-Dunton as a humourist, but the extracts will speak for themselves. Writing of the great social Pyramid of the Augustan age, Mr. Watts-Dunton says: —

“This Augustan pyramid of ours had all the symmetry which Blackstone so much admired in the English

constitution and its laws; and when, afterwards, the American colonies came to revolt and set up a pyramid of their own, it was on the Blackstonian model. At the base – patient as the tortoise beneath the elephant in the Indian cosmogony – was the people, born to be the base and born for nothing else. Resting on this foundation were the middle classes in their various strata, each stratum sharply marked off from the others. Then above these was the strictly genteel class, the patriciate, picturesque and elegant in dress if in nothing else, whose privileges were theirs as a matter of right. Above the patriciate was the earthly source of gentility, the monarch, who would, no doubt, have been the very apex of the sacred structure save that a little – a very little – above him sat God, the suzerain to whom the prayers even of the monarch himself were addressed. The leaders of the Rebellion had certainly done a daring thing, and an original thing, by striking off the apex of this pyramid, and it might reasonably have been expected that the building itself would collapse and crumble away. But it did nothing of the kind. It was simply a pyramid with the apex cut off – a structure to serve afterwards as a model of the American and French pyramids, both of which, though aspiring to be original structures, are really built on exactly the same scheme of hereditary honour and dishonour as that upon which the pyramids of Nineveh and Babylon were no doubt built. Then came the Restoration: the apex was restored: the structure was again complete; it was, indeed, more solid than ever, stronger than ever.

With regard to what we have called the realistic side

of the romantic movement as distinguished from its purely poetical and supernatural side, Nature was for the Augustan temper much too ungenteel to be described realistically. Yet we must not suppose that in the eighteenth century Nature turned out men without imaginations, without the natural gift of emotional speech, and without the faculty of gazing honestly in her face. She does not work in that way. In the time of the mammoth and the cave-bear she will give birth to a great artist whose materials may be a flint and a tusk. In the period before Greece was Greece, among a handful of Achaians she will give birth to the greatest poet, or, perhaps we should say, the greatest group of poets, the world has ever yet seen. In the time of Elizabeth she will give birth, among the illiterate yeomen of a diminutive country town, to a dramatist with such inconceivable insight and intellectual breadth that his generalizations cover not only the intellectual limbs of his own time, but the intellectual limbs of so complex an epoch as the twentieth century."

Rossetti had the theory, I believe, that important as humour is in prose fiction and also in worldly verse, it cannot be got into romantic poetry, as he himself understood romantic poetry; for he did not class ballads like *Kinmont Willie*, where there are such superb touches of humour, among the romantic ballads. And, as Mr. Watts-Dunton has somewhere remarked, his poems, like Morris's, are entirely devoid of humour, although both the poets were humourists. But the readers of Rhona's Letters in 'The Coming of Love' will admit that a delicious humour can be imported into the highest romantic poetry.

With one more quotation from the essay in Chambers's 'Cyclopædia of English Literature,' I must conclude my remarks upon the keynote of all Mr. Watts-Dunton's work, whether imaginative or critical: —

“The period of wonder in English poetry may perhaps be said to have ended with Milton. For Milton, although born only twenty-three years before the first of the great poets of acceptance, Dryden, belongs properly to the period of romantic poetry. He has no relation whatever to the poetry of Augustanism which followed Dryden, and which Dryden received partly from France and partly from certain contemporaries of the great romantic dramatists themselves, headed by Ben Jonson. From the moment when Augustanism really began — in the latter decades of the seventeenth century — the periwig poetry of Dryden and Pope crushed out all the natural singing of the true poets. All the periwig poets became too ‘polite’ to be natural. As acceptance is, of course, the parent of Augustanism or gentility, the most genteel character in the world is a Chinese mandarin, to whom everything is vulgar that contradicts the symmetry of the pyramid of Cathay.”

One of the things I purpose to show in this book is that the most powerful expression of the Renaissance of Wonder is not in Rossetti's poems, nor yet in his pictures, nor is it in 'Aylwin,' but in 'The Coming of Love.' But in order fully to understand Mr. Watts-Dunton's work it is necessary to know something of his life-history, and thanks to the aid I have received from certain of

his friends, and also to a little topographical work, the 'History of St. Ives,' by Mr. Herbert E. Norris, F.E.S., I shall be able to give glimpses of his early life long before he was known in London.



## Chapter II

# COWSLIP COUNTRY

Some time ago I was dipping into the 'official pictorial guides' of those three great trunk railways, the Midland, the Great Northern, and the Great Eastern, being curious to see what they had to say about St. Ives – not the famous town in Cornwall, but the little town in Huntingdonshire where, according to Carlyle, Oliver Cromwell spent those five years of meditation upon which his after life was nourished. In the Great Northern Guide I stumbled upon these words: 'At Slepe Hall dwelt the future Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, but by many this little Huntingdonshire town will be even better known as the birthplace of Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton, whose exquisite examples of the English sonnet and judicious criticisms in the kindred realms of poetry and art are familiar to lovers of our national literature.' 'Well,' I thought, when I found similar remarks in the other two guides, 'here at least is one case in which a prophet has honour in his own country.' This set me musing over a subject which had often tantalized me during my early Irish days, the whimsical workings of the Spirit of Place. To a poet, what are the advantages and what are the disadvantages of being born in a microcosm like St. Ives? If the fame of Mr. Watts-Dunton as a poet were as great as that of his living

friend, Mr. Swinburne, or as that of his dead friend, Rossetti, I should not have been surprised to find the place of his birth thus associated with his name. But whether or not Rossetti was right in saying that Mr. Watts-Dunton 'had sought obscurity as other poets seek fame,' it is certain that until quite lately he neglected to claim his proper place among his peers. Doubtless, as the 'Journal des Débats' has pointed out, the very originality of his work, both in subject and in style, has retarded the popular recognition of its unique quality; but although the names of Rossetti and Swinburne echo through the world, there is one respect in which they were less lucky than their friend. They were born in the macrocosm of London, where the Spirit of Place has so much to attend to that his memory can find but a small corner even for the author of 'The Blessed Damozel,' or for the author of 'Atalanta in Calydon.'

Mr. Watts-Dunton was born in the microcosm which was in those corn law repeal days a little metropolis in Cowslip Country – Buttercup Land, as the Ouse lanes are sometimes called, and therefore he was born to good luck. Cowslip Country will be as closely associated with him and with Rhona Boswell as Wessex is associated with Thomas Hardy and with Tess of the D'Urbervilles. For the poet born in a microcosm becomes identified with it in the public eye, whereas the poet born in a macrocosm is seldom associated with his birthplace.

To the novelist, if not to the poet, there is a still greater advantage in being born in a microcosm. He sees the drama

of life from a point of view entirely different from that of the novelist born in the macrocosm. The human microbe, or, as Mr. John Morley might prefer to say, the human cheese-mite in the macrocosm sees every other microbe or every other cheese-mite on the flat, but in the microcosm he sees every other microbe or every other cheese-mite in the round.

Mr. Watts-Dunton's work is saturated with memories of the Ouse. Cowper had already described the Ouse, but it was Mr. Watts-Dunton who first flung the rainbow of romance over the river and over the sweet meadows of Cowslip Land, through which it flows. In these lines he has described a sunset on the Ouse: —

More mellow falls the light and still more mellow  
Around the boat, as we two glide along  
'Tween grassy banks she loves where, tall and strong,  
The buttercups stand gleaming, smiling, yellow.  
She knows the nightingales of 'Portobello';  
Love makes her know each bird! In all that throng  
No voice seems like another: soul is song,  
And never nightingale was like its fellow;  
For, whether born in breast of Love's own bird,  
Singing its passion in those islet bowers  
Whose sunset-coloured maze of leaves and flowers  
The rosy river's glowing arms engird,  
Or born in human souls – twin souls like ours —  
Song leaps from deeps unplumbed by spoken word.

Now, will it be believed that this lovely river – so famous too among English anglers for its roach, perch, pike, dace, chub, and gudgeon – has been libelled? Yes, it has been libelled, and libelled by no less a person than Thomas Carlyle. Mr. Norris, vindicating with righteous wrath the reputation of his beloved Ouse, says: —

“There is, as far as I know, nothing like the Ouse elsewhere in England. I do not mean that our river surpasses or even equals in picturesqueness such rivers as the Wye, the Severn, the Thames, but that its beauty is unique. There is not to be seen anywhere else so wide and stately a stream moving so slowly and yet so clearly. Consequently there is no other river which reflects with such beauty the scenery of the clouds floating overhead. This, I think, is owing to the stream moving over a bottom which is both flat and gravelly. When Carlyle spoke of the Ouse dragging in a half-stagnant way under a coating of floating oils, he showed ‘how vivid were his perceptive faculties and also how untrustworthy.’ I have made a good deal of enquiry into the matter of Carlyle’s visit to St. Ives, and have learnt that, having spent some time exploring Ely Cathedral in search of mementoes of Cromwell, he rode on to St. Ives, and spent about an hour there before proceeding on his journey. Among the objects at which he gave a hasty glance was the river, covered from the bridge to the Holmes by one of those enormous fleets of barges which were frequently to be seen at that time, and it was from the newly tarred keels of this fleet of barges that came the oily exudation which Carlyle, in his ignorance of

the physical sciences and his contempt for them, believed to arise from a greasy river-bottom. And to this mistake the world is indebted for this description of the Ouse, which has been slavishly followed by all subsequent writers on Cromwell. This is what makes strangers, walking along the tow-path of Hemingford meadow, express so much surprise when, instead of seeing the oily scum they expected, they see a broad mirror as clear as glass, whose iridescence is caused by the reflection of the clouds overhead and by the gold and white water lilies on the surface of the stream.”

If the beauty of the Ouse inspired Mr. Norris to praise it so eloquently in prose, we need not wonder at the pictorial fascination of what Rossetti styled in a letter to a friend ‘Watts’s magnificent star sonnet’: —

The mirrored stars lit all the bulrush spears,  
And all the flags and broad-leaved lily-isles;  
The ripples shook the stars to golden smiles,  
Then smoothed them back to happy golden spheres.  
We rowed – we sang; her voice seemed in mine ears  
An angel’s, yet with woman’s dearer wiles;  
But shadows fell from gathering cloudy piles  
And ripples shook the stars to fiery tears.

What shaped those shadows like another boat  
Where Rhona sat and he Love made a liar?  
There, where the Scollard sank, I saw it float,  
While ripples shook the stars to symbols dire;

We wept – we kissed – while starry fingers wrote,  
And ripples shook the stars to a snake of fire.

According to Mr. Sharp, Rossetti pronounced this sonnet to be the finest of all the versions of the Doppelganger idea, and for many years he seriously purposed to render it in art. It is easy to understand why Rossetti never carried out his intention, for the pictorial magic of the sonnet is so powerful that even the greatest of all romantic painters could hardly have rendered it on canvas. Poetry can suggest to the imagination deeper mysteries than the subtlest romantic painting.

No sonnet has been more frequently localized – erroneously localized than this. It is often supposed to depict the Thames above Kew, but Mr. Norris says that ‘every one familiar with Hemingford Meadow will see that it describes the Ouse backwater near Porto Bello, where the author as a young man was constantly seen on summer evenings listening from a canoe to the blackcaps and nightingales of the Thicket.’

That excellent critic, Mr. Earl Hodgson, the editor of Dr. Gordon Hake’s ‘New Day,’ seems to think that the ‘lily-isles’ are on the Thames at Kelmscott, while other writers have frequently localized these ‘lily-isles’ on the Avon at Stratford. But, no doubt, Mr. Norris is right in placing them on the Ouse.

This, however, gives me a good opportunity of saying a few words about Mr. Watts-Dunton’s love of the Avon. The sacred old town of Stratford-on-Avon has always been a favourite haunt

of Mr. Watts-Dunton's. No poet of our time has shown a greater love of our English rivers, but he seems to love the Avon even more passionately than the Ouse. He cannot describe the soft sands of Petit Bot Bay in Guernsey without bringing in an allusion to 'Avon's sacred silt.' It was at Stratford-on-Avon that he wrote several of his poems, notably the two sonnets which appeared first in the 'Athenæum,' and afterwards in the little volume, 'Jubilee Greetings at Spithead to the Men of Greater Britain.' They are entitled 'The Breath of Avon: To English-speaking Pilgrims on Shakspeare's Birthday': —

Whate'er of woe the Dark may hide in womb  
For England, mother of kings of battle and song —  
Rapine, or racial hate's mysterious wrong,  
Blizzard of Chance, or fiery dart of Doom —  
Let breath of Avon, rich of meadow-bloom,  
Bind her to that great daughter sever'd long —  
To near and far-off children young and strong —  
With fetters woven of Avon's flower perfume.  
Welcome, ye English-speaking pilgrims, ye  
Whose hands around the world are join'd by him,  
Who make his speech the language of the sea,  
Till winds of Ocean waft from rim to rim  
The Breath of Avon: let this great day be  
A Feast of Race no power shall ever dim.

From where the steeds of Earth's twin oceans toss  
Their manes along Columbia's chariot-way;

From where Australia's long blue billows play;  
From where the morn, quenching the Southern Cross,  
Startling the frigate-bird and albatross  
Asleep in air, breaks over Table Bay —  
Come hither, pilgrims, where these rushes sway  
'Tween grassy banks of Avon soft as moss!  
For, if ye found the breath of Ocean sweet,  
Sweeter is Avon's earthy, flowery smell,  
Distill'd from roots that feel the coming spell  
Of May, who bids all flowers that lov'd him meet  
In meadows that, remembering Shakspeare's feet,  
Hold still a dream of music where they fell.

It was during a visit to Stratford-on-Avon in 1880 that Mr. Watts-Dunton wrote the cantata, 'Christmas at the Mermaid,' a poem in which breathes the very atmosphere of Shakespeare's town. There are no poetical descriptions of the Avon that can stand for a moment beside the descriptions in this poem, which I shall discuss later.

A typical meadow of Cowslip Country, or, as it is sometimes called, 'The Green Country,' is Hemingford Meadow, adjoining St. Ives. It is a level tract of land on the banks of the Ouse, consisting of deposits of alluvium from the overflowings of the river. In summer it is clothed with gay flowers, and in winter, during floods and frosts, it is used as a skating-ground, for St. Ives, being on the border of the Fens, is a famous skating centre. On the opposite side of the meadow is The Thicket, of which



I am able to give a lovely picture. This, no doubt, is the scene described in one of Mr. Watts-Dunton's birthday addresses to Tennyson: —

Another birthday breaks: he is with us still.  
There through the branches of the glittering trees  
The birthday sun gilds grass and flower: the breeze  
Sends forth methinks a thrill – a conscious thrill  
That tells yon meadows by the steaming rill —  
Where, o'er the clover waiting for the bees,  
The mist shines round the cattle to their knees —  
'Another birthday breaks: he is with us still!'

The meadow leads to what the 'oldest rustic inhabitant' calls the 'First Hemingford,' or 'Hemingford Grey.' The imagination of this same 'oldest inhabitant' used to go even beyond the First Hemingford to the Second Hemingford, and then of course came Ultima Thule! The meadow has quite a wide fame among those students of nature who love English grasses in their endless varieties. Owing to the richness of the soil, the luxuriant growth of these beautiful grasses is said to be unparalleled in England. For years the two Hemingfords have been the favourite haunt of a group of landscape painters the chief of whom are the brothers Fraser, two of whose water-colours are reproduced in this book.

Nowhere can the bustling activity of haymaking be seen to more advantage than in Cowslip Country, which extends right through Huntingdonshire into East Anglia. It was not, however,

near St. Ives, but in another somewhat distant part of Cowslip Country that the gypsies depicted in 'The Coming of Love' took an active part in haymaking. But alas! in these times of mechanical haymaking the lover of local customs can no longer hope to see such a picture as that painted in the now famous gypsy haymaking song which Mr. Watts-Dunton puts into the mouth of Rhona Boswell. Moreover, the prosperous gryengroes depicted by Borrow and by the author of 'The Coming of Love' have now entirely vanished from the scene. The present generation knows them not. But it is impossible for the student of Mr. Watts-Dunton's poetry to ramble along any part of Cowslip Country, with the fragrance of newly-made hay in his nostrils, without recalling this chant, which I have the kind permission of the editor of the 'Saturday Review' (April 19, 1902) to quote: —

Make the kas while the kem says, 'Make it!' <sup>3</sup>  
Shinin' there on meadow an' grove,  
Sayin, 'You Romany chies, you take it,  
Toss it, tumble it, cock it, rake it,  
Singin' the ghyllie the while you shake it  
To lennor and love!

Hark, the sharpenin' scythes that tingle!  
See they come, the farmin' ryes!  
'Leave the dell,' they say, 'an' pingle!  
Never a gorgie, married or single,

---

<sup>3</sup> The meanings of the gypsy words are:

Can toss the kas in dell or dingle  
Like Romany chies.'  
Make the kas while the kem says 'Make it!'

Bees are a-buzzin' in chaw an' clover  
Stealin' the honey from sperrits o' morn,  
Shoshus leap in puv an' cover,  
Doves are a-cooin' like lover to lover,  
Larks are awake an' a-warblin' over  
Their kairs in the corn.  
Make the kas while the kem says 'Make it!'

Smell the kas on the baval blowin'!  
What is that the gorgies say?  
Never a garden rose a-glowin',  
Never a meadow flower a-growin',  
Can match the smell from a Rington mowin'  
Of new made hay.

All along the river reaches  
'Cheep, cheep, chee!' – from osier an' sedge;  
'Cuckoo, cuckoo!' rings from the beeches;  
Every chirikel's song beseeches  
Ryes to larn what lennor teaches  
From copse an' hedge.  
Make the kas while the kem says 'Make it!'

Lennor sets 'em singin' an' pairin',  
Chirikels all in tree an' grass,

Farmers say, 'Them gals are darin',  
Sometimes dukkerin', sometimes snarin';  
But see their forks at a quick kas-kairin',  
Toss the kas!

Make the kas while the kem says, 'Make it!'  
Shinin' there on meadow an' grove,  
Sayin', 'You Romany chies, you take it,  
Toss it, tumble it, cock it, rake it,  
Singin' the ghyllie the while you shake it  
To lennor and love!'

Mr. Norris tells us that the old Saxon name of St. Ives was Slepe, and that Oliver Cromwell is said to have resided as a farmer for five years in Slepe Hall, which was pulled down in the late forties. When Mr. Watts-Dunton's friend, Madox Brown, went down to St. Ives to paint the scenery for his famous picture, 'Oliver Cromwell at St. Ives,' he could present only an imaginary farm.

Perhaps my theory about the advantage of a story-teller being born in a microcosm accounts for that faculty of improvizing stories full of local colour and character which, according to friends of D. G. Rossetti, would keep the poet-painter up half the night, and which was dwelt upon by Mr. Hake in his account of the origin of 'Aylwin' which I have already given. I may give here an anecdote connected with Slepe Hall which I have heard Mr. Watts-Dunton tell, and which would certainly make a

good nucleus for a short story. It is connected with Slepe Hall, of which Mr. Clement Shorter, in some reminiscences of his published some time ago, writes: "My mother was born at St. Ives, in Huntingdonshire, and still owns by inheritance some freehold cottages built on land once occupied by Slepe Hall, where Oliver Cromwell is supposed to have farmed. At Slepe Hall, a picturesque building, she went to school in girlhood. She remembers Mr. Watts-Dunton, the author of 'Aylwin,' who was also born at St. Ives, as a pretty little boy then unknown to fame."

When the owners of Slepe Hall, the White family, pulled it down, they sold the materials of the building and also the site and grounds in building lots. It was then discovered that the house in which Cromwell was said to have lived was built upon the foundations of a much older house whose cellars remained intact. This was, of course, a tremendous event in the microcosm, and the place became a rendezvous of the schoolboys of the neighbourhood, whose delight from morning to eve was to watch the workmen in their task of demolition. In the early stages of this work, when the upper stories were being demolished, curiosity was centred on the great question as to what secret chamber would be found, whence Oliver Cromwell's ghost, before he was driven into hiding by his terror of the school girls, used to issue, to take his moonlit walks about the grounds, and fish for roach in the old fish ponds. But no such secret chamber could be found. When at length the work had proceeded so far as the foundations, the centre of curiosity was shifted: a treasure was supposed to

be hidden there; for, although, as a matter of fact, Cromwell was born at Huntingdon and lived at St. Ives only five years, it was not at Huntingdon, but at the little Nonconformist town of St. Ives, that he was the idol: it was indeed the old story of every hero of the world —

*Imposteur à la Mecque et prophète à Mèdine.*

Although in all probability Cromwell never lived at Slepe Hall, but at the Green End Farm at the other end of the town, there was a legend that, before the Ironsides started on a famous expedition, Noll went back to St. Ives and concealed his own plate, and the plate of all his rebel friends, in Slepe Hall cellars. No treasure turned up, but what was found was a collection of old bottles of wine which was at once christened ‘Cromwell’s wine’ by the local humourist of the town, who was also one of its most prosperous inhabitants, and who felt as much interest as the boys in the exploration. The workmen, of course, at once began knocking off the bottles’ necks and drinking the wine, and were soon in what may be called a mellow condition; the humourist, being a teetotaler, would not drink, but he insisted on the boys being allowed to take away their share of it in order that they might say in after days that they had drunk Oliver Cromwell’s wine and perhaps imbibed some of the Cromwellian spirit and pluck. Consequently the young urchins carried off a few bottles and sat down in a ring under a tree called ‘Oliver’s Tree,’ and knocked off the tops of the bottles and began to drink. The wine turned out to be extremely sweet, thick and sticky, and appears to have been

a wine for which Cowslip Land has always been famous – elder wine. Abstemious by temperament and by rearing as Mr. Watts-Dunton was, he could not resist the temptation to drink freely of Cromwell's elder-wine; so freely, in fact, that he has said, 'I was never even excited by drink except once, and that was when I came near to being drunk on Oliver Cromwell's elder-wine.' The wine was probably about a century old.

I should have stated that Mr. Watts-Dunton at the age of eleven or twelve was sent to a school at Cambridge, where he remained for a longer time than is usual. He received there and afterwards at home a somewhat elaborate education, comprising the physical sciences, particularly biology, and also art and music. As has been said in the notice of him in 'Poets and Poetry of the Century,' he is one of the few contemporary poets with a scientific knowledge of music. Owing to his father's passion for science, he was specially educated as a naturalist, and this accounts for the innumerable allusions to natural science in his writings, and for his many expressions of a passionate interest in the lower animals.

Upon the subject of "the great human fallacy expressed in the phrase, 'the dumb animals,'" Mr. Watts-Dunton has written much, and he has often been eloquent about 'those who have seen through the fallacy, such as St. Francis of Assisi, Cowper, Burns, Coleridge, and Bisset, the wonderful animal-trainer of Perth of the last century, who, if we are to believe the accounts of him, taught a turtle in six months to fetch and carry like a dog; and

having chalked the floor and blackened its claws, could direct it to trace out any given name in the company.’

“Of course,” he says, “the ‘lower animals’ are no more dumb than we are. With them, as with us, there is the same yearning to escape from isolation – to get as close as may be to some other conscious thing – which is a great factor of progress. With them, as with us, each individual tries to warm itself by communication with the others around it by arbitrary signs; with them, as with us, countless accidents through countless years have contributed to determine what these signs and sounds shall be. Those among us who have gone at all underneath conventional thought and conventional expression – those who have penetrated underneath conventional feeling – know that neither thought nor emotion can really be expressed at all. The voice cannot do it, as we see by comparing one language with another. Wordsworth calls language the incarnation of thought. But the mere fact of there being such a Babel of different tongues disproves this. If there were but one universal language, such as speculators dream of, the idea might, at least, be not superficially absurd. Soul cannot communicate with soul save by signs made by the body; and when you can once establish a *Lingua Franca* between yourself and a ‘lower animal,’ interchange of feeling and even of thought is as easy with them as it is with men. Nay, with some temperaments and in some moods, the communication is far, far closer. ‘When I am assailed with heavy tribulation,’ said Luther, ‘I rush out among my pigs rather than remain



alone by myself.’ And there is no creature that does not at some points sympathize with man. People have laughed at Erskine because every evening after dinner he used to have placed upon the table a vessel full of his pet leeches, upon which he used to lavish his endearments. Neither I nor my companion had a pet passion for leeches. Erskine probably knew leeches better than we, for, as the Arabian proverb says, mankind hate only the thing of which they know nothing. Like most dog lovers, we had no special love for cats, but that was clearly from lack of knowledge. ‘I wish women would purr when they are pleased,’ said Horne Tooke to Rogers once.”

## Chapter III

# THE CRITIC IN THE BUD

One of my special weaknesses is my delight in forgotten records of the nooks of old England and 'ould Ireland'; I have a propensity for 'dawdling and dandering' among them whenever the occasion arises, and I am yielding to it here.

Besides the interesting history of St. Ives from which I have been compelled to quote so liberally, Mr. Norris has written a series of brochures upon the surrounding villages. One of these, called 'St. Ives and the Printing Press,' has greatly interested me, for it reveals the wealth of the material for topographical literature which in the rural districts lies ready for the picking up. I am tempted to quote from this, for it shows how strong since Cromwell's time the temper which produced Cromwell has remained. During the time when at Cambridge George Dyer and his associates, William Frend, Fellow of Jesus, and John Hammond of Fenstanton, Fellow of Queen's, revolted against the discipline and the doctrine of the Church of England, St. Ives was the very place where the Cambridge revolutionists had their books printed. The house whence issued these fulminations was the 'Old House' in Crown Street, now pulled down, which for a time belonged to Mr. Watts-Dunton's father, having remained during all this time a printing office. Mr. Norris gives a very

picturesque description of this old printing office at the top of the house, with its pointed roof, 'king posts' and panelling, reminding one of the pictures of the ancient German printing offices. Mr. Norris also tells us that it was at the house adjoining this, the 'Crown Inn,' that William Penn died in 1718, having ridden thither from Huntingdon to hear the lawsuit between himself and the St. Ives churchwardens. According to Mr. Norris, the fountain-head of the Cambridge revolt was the John Hammond above alluded to, who was a friend of Mr. Watts-Dunton's father when the latter was quite a young man under articles for a solicitor. A curious character must have been this long-forgotten rebel, to whom Dyer addressed an ode, with an enormous tail of learned notes showing the eccentric pedantry which was such an infinite source of amusement to Lamb, and inspired some of Elia's most delightful touches of humour. This poem of Dyer's opens thus: —

Though much I love th' Æolian lyre,  
Whose varying sounds beguil'd my youthful day,  
And still, as fancy guides, I love to stray  
In fabled groves, among th' Aonian choir:  
Yet more on native fields, thro' milder skies,  
Nature's mysterious harmonies delight:  
There rests my heart; for let the sun but rise,  
What is the moon's pale orb that cheer'd the lonesome night?  
I cannot leave thee, classic ground,  
Nor bid your labyrinths of song adieu;

Yet scenes to me more dear arise to view:  
And my ear drinks in notes of clearer sound.  
No purple Venus round my Hammond's bow'r,  
No blue-ey'd graces, wanton mirth diffuse,  
The king of gods here rains no golden show'r,  
Nor have these lips e'er sipt Castilian dew.

At the 'Old House' in Crown Street there used to be held in Dyer's time, if not earlier, the meetings of the St. Ives old Union Book Club, and at this very Book Club, Walter Theodore Watts first delivered himself of his boyish ideas about science, literature, and things in general. Filled with juvenile emphasis as it is, I mean to give here nearly in full that boyish utterance. It interests me much, because I seem to see in it adumbrations of many interesting extracts from his works with which I hope to enrich these pages. I cannot let slip the opportunity of taking advantage of a lucky accident – the accident that a member of Mr. Watts-Dunton's family was able to furnish me with an old yellow-brown newspaper cutting in which the speech is reported. In 1854, 'W. Theodore Watts,' as he is described in the cutting, although too young to be himself a member – if he was not still at school at Cambridge, he had just left it – on account of his father's great local reputation as a man of learning, was invited to the dinner, and called upon to respond to the toast, 'Science.' In the 'Cambridge Chronicle' of that date the proceedings of the dinner were reported, and great prominence was given to the speech of the precocious boy, a speech delivered, as is evident by

the allusions to persons present, without a single note, and largely improvised. The subject which he discussed was ‘The Influence of Science upon Modern Civilization’: —

“It is one of the many beautiful remarks of the great philosophical lawyer, Lord Bacon, that knowledge resembles a tree, which runs straight for some time, and then parts itself into branches. Now, of all the branches of the tree of knowledge, in my opinion, the most hopeful one for humanity is physical science – that branch of the tree which, before the time of the great lawyer, had scarcely begun to bud, and which he, above all men, helped to bring to its present wondrous state of development. I am aware that the assertion that Lord Bacon is the Father of Physical Science will be considered by many of you as rather heterodox, and fitting to come from a person young and inexperienced as myself. It is heterodox; it clashes, for instance, with the venerable superstition of ‘the wisdom of the ancients’ – a superstition, by the bye, as old in our literature as my friend Mr. Wright’s old friend Chaucer, whom we have this moment been talking about, and who, I remember, has this sarcastic verse to the point: —

For out of the olde fieldes, as men saith,  
Cometh all this new corn from yeare to yeare,  
And out of olde bookes; in good faith,  
Cometh all this new science that men lere.

But, gentlemen, if by the wisdom of the ancients we

mean their wisdom in matters of Physical Science (as some do), I contend that we simply abuse terms; and that the phrase, whether applied to the ancients more properly, or to our own English ancestors, is a fallacy. It is the error of applying qualities to communities of men which belong only to individuals. There can be no doubt that, of contemporary individuals, the oldest of them has had the greatest experience, and is therefore, or ought therefore, to be the wisest; but with generations of men, surely the reverse of this must be the fact. As Sydney Smith says in his own inimitably droll way, ‘Those who came first (our ancestors), are the young people, and have the least experience. Our ancestors up to the Conquest were children in arms – chubby boys in the time of Edward the First; striplings under Elizabeth; men in the reign of Queen Anne; and we only are the white-bearded, silver-headed ancients who have treasured up, and are prepared to profit by, all the experience which human life can supply.

And, gentlemen, I think the wit was right, both as regards our own English ancestors, and the nations of antiquity. What, for instance, was the much-vaunted Astronomy of the ancient Chaldeans – what but the wildest Astrology? What schoolboy has not chuckled over the ingenious old Herodotus’s description of the sun being blown out of the heavens? Or again, at old Plutarch’s veracious story of the hedgehogs and the grapes? Nay, there are absurdities enough in such great philosophers as Pliny, Plato, and Aristotle, to convince us that the ancients were profoundly ignorant in most matters appertaining to the Physical

Sciences.

Gentlemen, I would be the last one in the room to disparage the ancients: my admiration of them amounts simply to reverence. But theirs was essentially the day of poetry and imagination; our day – though there are still poets among us, as Alexander Smith has been proving to us lately – is, as essentially, the day of Science. I might, if I had time, dwell upon another point here – the constitution of the Greek mind (for it is upon Greece I am now especially looking as the soul of antiquity). Was that scientific? Surely not.

The predominant intuition of the Greek mind, as you well know, was beauty, sensuous beauty. This prevailing passion for the beautiful exhibits itself in everything they did, and in everything they said: it breathes in their poetry, in their oratory, in their drama, in their architecture, and above all in their marvellous sculpture. The productions of the Greek intellect are pure temples of the beautiful, and, as such, will never fade and decay, for

## **A thing of beauty is a joy for ever**

Nevertheless, I may as well confess at once that I believe that Science could never have found a home in the Europe of antiquity. Athens was too imaginative and poetical. Sparta was too warlike and barbarous. Rome was too sensual and gross. It had to wait for the steady Teutonic mind – the plodding brains of modern England and modern Germany.

That Homer is the father of poetry – that Æschylus is a wonder of sublimity – that Sophocles and Euripides are profound masters of human passion and human pathos – that Aristophanes is an exhaustless fountain of sparkling wit and richest humour – no one in this room, or out of it, is more willing to admit than I am. But is that to blind us to the fact, gentlemen, that Humboldt and Murchison and Lyell are greater natural philosophers than Lucretius or Aristotle?

The Athenian philosopher, Socrates, believed that he was accompanied through life by a spiritual good genius and evil genius. Every right action he did, and every right thought that entered his mind, he attributed to the influence of his good Genius; while every bad thought and action he attributed to his evil Genius. And this was not the mere poetic figment of a poetic brain: it was a living and breathing faith with him. He believed it in his childhood, in his youth, in his manhood, and he believed it on his death-bed, when the deadly hemlock was winding its fold, like the fatal serpent of Laocoon, around his giant brain. Well, gentlemen, don't let us laugh at this idea of the grand old Athenian; for it is, after all, a beautiful one, and typical of many great truths. And I have often thought that the idea might be applied to a greater man than Socrates. I mean the great man – mankind. He, too, has his good genius and his evil genius. The former we will designate science, the latter we will call superstition. For ages upon ages, superstition has had the sway over him – that evil genius, who blotted out the lamp of truth that God had implanted within his breast, and substituted all manner of blinding errors – errors which



have made him play

Such fantastic tricks before high heaven

As make the angels weep.

This evil genius it was who made him look upon the fair face of creation, not as a book in which God may be read, as St. Paul tells us, but as a book full of frightful and horrid mysteries. In a word, the great Man who ought to have been only a little lower than the angels, has been made, by superstition, only a little above the fiends.

But, at last, God has permitted man's long, long experience to be followed by wisdom; and we have thrown off the yoke of this ancient enemy, and clasped the hands of Science – Science, that good genius who makes matter the obedient slave of mind; who imprisons the ethereal lightning and makes it the messenger of commerce; who reigns king of the raging sea and winds; who compresses the life of Methusaleh into seventy years; who unlocks the casket of the human frame, and ranges through its most secret chambers, until at last nothing, save the mysterious germ of life itself, shall be hidden; who maps out all the nations of the earth; showing how the sable Ethiopian, the dusky Polynesian, the besotted Mongolian, the intellectual European, are but differently developed exemplars of the same type of manhood, and warning man that he is still his 'brother's keeper' now as in the primeval days of Cain and Abel.

The good genius, Science, it is who bears us on his dædal wings up into the starry night, there where 'God's name is writ in worlds,' and discourses to us of the laws which bind

the planets revolving around their planetary suns, and those suns again circling for ever around the great central sun – ‘The Great White Throne of God!’

The good genius, Science, it is who takes us back through the long vista of years, and shows us this world of ours, this beautiful world which the wisest and the best of us are so unwilling to leave, first, as a vast drop of liquid lava-fire, starting on that mysterious course which is to end only with time itself; then, as a dark humid mass, ‘without form and void,’ where earth, sea, and sky, are mingled in unutterable confusion; then, after countless, countless ages, having grown to something like the thing of beauty the Creator had intended, bringing forth the first embryonic germs of vegetable life, to be succeeded, in due time, by gigantic trees and towering ferns, compared with which the forest monarchs of our day are veritable dwarfs; then, slowly, gradually, developing the still greater wonder of animal life, from the primitive, half-vegetable, half-conscious forms, till such mighty creatures as the Megatherium, the Saurian, the Mammoth, the Iguanodon, roam about the luxuriant forests, and bellow in chaotic caves, and wallow in the teeming seas, and circle in the humid atmosphere, making the earth rock and tremble beneath their monstrous movements; then, last of all, the wonder of wonders, the climax towards which the whole had been tending, the noblest and the basest work of God – the creation of the thinking, reasoning, sinning animal, Man.

And thus, gentlemen, will this good genius still go on, instructing and improving, and purifying the human mind,

and aiding in the grand work of developing the divinity within it. I know, indeed, that it is a favourite argument of some people that modern civilization will decline and vanish, 'like the civilizations of old.' But I venture to deny it in toto. From a human point of view, it is utterly impossible. And without going into the question (for I see the time is running on) as to whether ancient civilization really has passed away, or whether the old germ did not rather spring into new life after the dark ages, and is now bearing fruit, ten thousand times more glorious than it ever did of old; without arguing this point, I contend that all comparisons between ancient civilization and modern must of necessity be futile and fallacious. And for this reason, that independently of the civilizing effects of Christianity, Science has knit the modern nations into one: whereas each nation of antiquity had to work out its own problems of social and political life, and come to its own conclusions. So isolated, indeed, was one nation from another, that nations were in some instances ignorant of each other's existence. A new idea, or invention, born at Nineveh, was for Assyria alone; at Athens, for Greece alone; at Rome, for Italy alone. There was no science then to 'put a girdle round about the earth' (as Puck says) 'in forty minutes.' But now, a new idea brought to light in modern London, or Paris, or New York, is for the whole world; it is wafted on the wings of science around the whole habitable globe – from Ireland to New Zealand, from India to Peru. I am not going to say, gentlemen, that Britannia must always be the ruler of the waves. The day may come that will see her sink to a second-rate, a third-

rate, or a fourth-rate power in Europe. In spite of all we have been saying this evening, the day may come that will see Russia the dominant power in Europe. The day may come that will see Sydney and Melbourne the fountain heads of refinement and learning. It may have been ordained in Heaven at the first that each race upon the globe shall be in its turn the dominant race – that the negro race shall one day lord it over the Caucasian, as the Caucasian race is now lording it over the negro. Why not? It would be only equity. But I am not talking of races; I am not talking of nationalities. I speak again of the great man, Mankind – the one indivisible man that Science is making him. He will never retrograde, because ‘matter and mind comprise the universe,’ and matter must entirely sink beneath the weight of mind – because good must one day conquer ill, or why was the world made? Henceforth his road is onward – onward. Science has helped to give him such a start that nothing shall hold him back – nothing can hold him back – save a fiat, a direct fiat from the throne of Almighty God.”

But I am wandering from the subject of the ‘Old House’ in Crown Street and its connection with printing. The last important book that was ever printed there was a very remarkable one. It was the famous essay on Pantheism by Mr. Watts-Dunton’s friend, the Rev. John Hunt, D.D., at that time a curate of the St. Ives Church – a book that was the result of an enormous amount of learning, research, and original thought, a book, moreover, which has had a great effect upon modern thought. It has passed through several editions since it was printed at St. Ives in 1866.

## Chapter IV

# CHARACTERS IN THE MICROCOSM

Mrs. Craigie has recently protested against the metropolitan fable that London enjoys a monopoly of culture, and has reminded us that in the provinces may be found a great part of the intellectual energy of the nation. It would be hard to find a more intellectual environment than that in which Theodore Watts grew up. Indeed, his early life may be compared to that of John Stuart Mill, although he escaped the hardening and narrowing influences which marred the austere educational system of the Mill family. Mr. Watts-Dunton's father was in many respects a very remarkable man. 'He was,' says the famous gypsologist, F. H. Groome, in Chambers's Encyclopædia, 'a naturalist intimately connected with Murchison, Lyell, and other geologists, a pre-Darwinian evolutionist of considerable mark in the scientific world of London, and the Gilbert White of the Ouse valley.' There is, as the 'Times' said in its review of 'Aylwin,' so much of manifest Wahrheit mingled with the Dichtung of the story, that it is not surprising that attempts have often been made to identify all the characters. Many of these guesses have been wrong; and indeed, the only writer who has spoken with authority seems to be Mr. Hake, who, in two papers in 'Notes and Queries'

identified many of the characters. Until he wrote on the subject, it was generally assumed that the spiritual protagonist from whom springs the entire action of the story, Philip Aylwin, was Mr. Watts-Dunton's father. Mr. Hake, however, tells us that this is not so. Philip Aylwin is a portrait of the author's uncle, an extraordinary man of whom I shall have something to say later. I feel myself fortunate in having discovered an admirable account of Mr. Watts-Dunton's father in Mr. Norris's 'History of St. Ives':

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“For many years one of the most interesting of St. Ives figures was the late Mr. J. K. Watts, who was born at St. Ives in 1808, though his family on both sides came from Hemingford Grey and Hemingford Abbots. According to the following extracts from ‘The Cambridge Chronicle and University Journal’ of August 15, 1884, Mr. Watts died quite suddenly on August 7 of that year: ‘We record with much regret the sudden death at Over of our townsman, Mr. J. K. Watts, who died after an hour’s illness of heart disease at Berry House, whither he had been taken after the seizure. Dr. J. Ellis, of Swavesey, was called in, but without avail. At the inquest the post-mortem examination disclosed that the cause of death was a long-standing fatty degeneration of the heart, which had, on several occasions, resulted in syncope. Deceased had been driven to Willingham and back to Over upon a matter of business with Mr. Hawkes, and the extreme heat of the weather seems to have acted as the proximate cause of death.

Mr. Watts had practised in St. Ives from 1840, and

was one of the oldest solicitors in the county. He had also devoted much time and study to scientific subjects, and was, in his earlier life, a well-known figure in the scientific circles of London. He was for years connected with Section E of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and elected on the Committee. He read papers on geology and cognate subjects before that Association and other Societies during the time that Murchison and Lyell were the apostles of geology. Afterwards he made a special study of luminous meteors, and in the Association's reports upon this subject some of the most interesting observations of luminous meteors are those recorded by Mr. Watts. He was one of the earliest Fellows of the Geographical Society, and one of the Founders of the Anthropological Society.'

Mr. Watts never collected his papers and essays, but up to the last moment of his life he gave attention to those subjects to which he had devoted himself, as may be seen by referring to the 'Antiquary' for 1883 and 1884, where will be found two articles on Cambridgeshire Antiquities, one of which did not get into type till several months after his death. It was, however, not by Archæology, but by his geological and geographical writings that he made his reputation. And it was these which brought him into contact with Murchison, Livingstone, Lyell, Whewell, and Darwin, and also with the geographers, some of whom, such as Du Chaillu, Findlay, Dr. Norton Shaw, visited him at the Red House on the Market Hill, now occupied by Mr. Matton. In the sketches of the life of Dr. Latham it is mentioned that the famous ethnologist was a frequent visitor to Mr. Watts at

St. Ives. Since his death there have been frequent references to him as a man of 'encyclopædic general knowledge.'

He was of an exceedingly retiring disposition, and few men in St. Ives have been more liked or more generally respected. His great delight seemed to be roaming about in meadows and lanes observing the changes of the vegetation and the bird and insect life in which our neighbourhood is as rich as Selborne itself. On such occasions the present writer has often met him and had many interesting conversations with him upon subjects connected with natural science."

With regard to the family of Mr. Watts-Dunton's mother, the Duntons, although in the seventeenth century a branch of the family lived in Huntingdonshire, some of them being clergymen there for several generations, they are entirely East Anglian; and some very romantic chapters in the history of the family have been touched upon by Dr. Jessopp in his charming essay, 'Ups and Downs of an Old Nunnery.' This essay was based upon a paper, communicated by Miss Mary Bateson to the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society, and treating of the Register of Crab House Nunnery. In 1896 Walter Theodore Watts added his mother's to his father's name, by a deed in Chancery.

I could not give a more pregnant instance of the difference in temperament between a father and a son than by repeating a story about Mr. Watts-Dunton which Rossetti (who was rich in anecdotes of his friend) used to tell. When the future poet and critic was a boy in jackets pursuing his studies at the Cambridge school, he found in the school library a copy of



Wells's 'Stories after Nature,' and read them with great avidity. Shortly afterwards, when he had left school and was reading all sorts of things, and also cultivating on the sly a small family of Gryengroes encamped in the neighbourhood, he was amazed to find, in a number of the 'Illuminated Magazine,' a periodical which his father, on account of Douglas Jerrold, had taken in from the first, one of the 'Stories after Nature' reprinted with an illustration by the designer and engraver Linton. He said to his father, 'Why, I have read this story before!' 'That is quite impossible,' said his father, 'quite impossible that you should have before read a new story in a new number of a magazine.' 'I have read it before; I know all about it,' said the boy. 'As I do not think you untruthful,' said the father, 'I think I can explain your hallucination about this matter.' 'Do, father,' said the son. 'Well,' said the father, 'I do not know whether or not you are a poet. But I do know that you are a dreamer of dreams. You have told me before extraordinary stories to the effect that when you see a landscape that is new to you, it seems to you that you have seen it before.' 'Yes, father, that often occurs.' 'Well, the reason for that is this, as you will understand when you come to know a little more about physiology. The brain is divided into two hemispheres, exactly answering to each other, and they act so simultaneously that they work like one brain; but it often happens that when dreamers like you see things or read things, one of the hemispheres has lapsed into a kind of drowsiness, and the other one sees the object for itself; but in a second or two

the lazy hemisphere wakes up and thinks it has seen the picture before.’ The explanation seemed convincing, and yet it could not convince the boy.

The very next month the magazine gave another of the stories, and the father said, ‘Well, Walter, have you read this before?’ ‘Yes,’ said the boy falteringly, ‘unless, of course, it is all done by the double brain, father.’ And so it went on from month to month. When the boy had grown into a man and came to meet Rossetti, one of the very first of the literary subjects discussed between them was that of Charles Wells’s ‘Joseph and His Brethren’ and ‘Stories after Nature.’ Rossetti was agreeably surprised that although his new friend knew nothing of ‘Joseph and His Brethren,’ he was very familiar with the ‘Stories after Nature.’ ‘Well,’ said Mr. Watts-Dunton, ‘they appeared in the “Illuminated Magazine.”’ ‘Who should have thought,’ said Rossetti, ‘that the “Illuminated Magazine” in its moribund days, when Linton took it up, should have got down to St. Ives. Its circulation, I think, was only a few hundreds. Among Linton’s manœuvres for keeping the magazine alive was to reprint and illustrate Charles Wells’s “Stories after Nature” without telling the public that they had previously appeared in book form.’ ‘They did then appear in book form first?’ said Mr. Watts-Dunton. ‘Yes, but there can’t have been over a hundred or two sold,’ said Rossetti. ‘I discovered it at the British Museum.’ ‘I read it at Cambridge in my school library,’ said Mr. Watts-Dunton. It was the startled look on Rossetti’s face which caused Mr. Watts-

Dunton to tell him the story about his father and the 'Illuminated Magazine.'

It was a necessity that a boy so reared should feel the impulse to express himself in literature rather early. But it will be new to many, and especially to the editor of the 'Athenæum,' that as a mere child he contributed to its pages. When he was a boy he read the 'Athenæum,' which his father took in regularly. One day he caught a correspondent of the 'Athenæum' – no less a person than John P. Collier – tripping on a point of Shakespearean scholarship, being able to do so by chance. He had stumbled on the matter in question while reading one of his father's books. He wrote to the editor in his childish round hand, stigmatizing the blunder with youthful scorn. In due time the correction was noted in the Literary Gossip of the journal. Soon after, his father had occasion to consult the book, and finding a pencil mark opposite the passage, he said, 'Walter, have you been marking this book?' 'Yes, father.' 'But you know I object?' 'Yes, father, but I was interested in the point.' 'Why,' said his father, 'somebody has been writing about this very passage to the "Athenæum."' 'Yes, father,' replied the boy, red and ungrammatical with proud confusion, 'it was me.' 'You!' cried his astonished father, 'you!' And thus the matter was explained. Mr. Watts-Dunton confesses that he was never tired of thumbing that, his first contribution to the 'Athenæum.'

Whatever may have been the influence of his father upon Mr. Watts-Dunton, it was not, I think, nearly so great as that of

his uncle, James Orlando Watts. His father may have made him scientific: his uncle seems to have made him philosophical with a dash of mysticism. As I have already pointed out, Mr. Hake has identified this uncle as the prototype of Philip Aylwin, the father of the hero. The importance of this character in 'Aylwin' is shown by the fact that, if we analyze the story, we find that the character of Philip is its motive power. After his death, everything that occurs is brought about by his doctrines and his dreams, his fantasies and his whims. This effect of making a man dominate from his grave the entire course of the life of his descendants seems to be unique in imaginative literature; and yet, although the fingers of some critics (notably Mr. Coulson Kernahan) burn close to the subject, there they leave it. What Mr. Watts-Dunton calls 'the tragic mischief' of the drama is not brought about by any villain, but by the vagaries and mystical speculations of a dead man, the author of 'The Veiled Queen.' There were few things in which James Orlando Watts did not take an interest. He was a deep student of the drama, Greek, English, Spanish, and German. And it is a singular fact that this dreamy man was a lover of the acted drama. One of his stories in connection with acting is this. A party of strolling players who went to St. Ives got permission to act for a period in a vast stone-built barn, called Priory Barn, and sometimes Cromwell's Barn. Mr. J. O. Watts went to see them, and on returning home after the performance said, 'I have seen a little actor who is a real genius. He reminds me of what I have read about Edmund Kean's acting. I shall go

and see him every night. And he went. The actor's name was Robson. When, afterwards, Mr. Watts went to reside in London, he learnt that an actor named Robson was acting in one of the second-rate theatres called the Grecian Saloon. He went to the theatre and found, as he expected, that it was the same actor who had so impressed him down at St. Ives. From that time he followed Robson to whatsoever theatre in London he went, and afterward became a well-known figure among the playgoers of the Olympic. He always contended that Robson was the only histrionic genius of his time. Mr. Hake seems to have known James Orlando Watts only after he had left St. Ives to live in London: —

“He was,” says Mr. Hake, “a man of extraordinary learning in the academic sense of the word, and he possessed still more extraordinary general knowledge. He lived for many years the strangest kind of hermit life, surrounded by his books and old manuscripts. His two great passions were philology and occultism, but he also took great interest in rubbings from brass monuments. He knew more, I think, of those strange writers discussed in Vaughan's ‘Hours with the Mystics’ than any other person — including perhaps, Vaughan himself; but he managed to combine with his love of mysticism a deep passion for the physical sciences, especially astronomy. He seemed to be learning languages up to almost the last year of his life. His method of learning languages was the opposite of that of George Borrow — that is to say, he made great use of

grammars; and when he died, it is said that from four to five hundred treatises on grammar were found among his books. He used to express great contempt for Borrow's method of learning languages from dictionaries only. I do not think that any one connected with literature – with the sole exception of Mr. Swinburne, my father, and Dr. R. G. Latham – knew so much of him as I did. His personal appearance was exactly like that of Philip Aylwin, as described in the novel. Although he never wrote poetry, he translated, I believe, a good deal from the Spanish and Portuguese poets. I remember that he was an extraordinary admirer of Shelley. His knowledge of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists was a link between him and Mr. Swinburne.

At a time when I was a busy reader at the British Museum reading room, I used frequently to see him, and he never seemed to know anyone among the readers except myself, and whenever he spoke to me it was always in a hushed whisper, lest he should disturb the other readers, which in his eyes would have been a heinous offence. For very many years he had been extremely well known to the second-hand booksellers, for he was a constant purchaser of their wares. He was a great pedestrian, and, being very much attached to the north of London, would take long, slow tramps ten miles out in the direction of Highgate, Wood Green, etc. I have a very distinct recollection of calling upon him in Myddelton Square at the time when I was living close to him in Percy Circus. Books were piled up from floor to ceiling, apparently in great confusion; but he seemed to remember where to find every book and what there

was in it. It is a singular fact that the only person outside those I have mentioned who seems to have known him was that brilliant but eccentric journalist, Thomas Purnell, who had an immense opinion of him and used to call him 'the scholar.' How Purnell managed to break through the icy wall that surrounded the recluse always puzzled me; but I suppose they must have come across one another at one of those pleasant inns in the north of London where 'the scholar' was taking his chop and bottle of Beaune. He was a man that never made new friends, and as one after another of his old friends died he was left so entirely alone that, I think, he saw no one except Mr. Swinburne, the author of 'Aylwin,' and myself. But at Christmas he always spent a week at The Pines, when and where my father and I used to meet him. His memory was so powerful that he seemed to be able to recall, not only all that he had read, but the very conversations in which he had taken a part. He died, I think, at a little over eighty, and his faculties up to the last were exactly like those of a man in the prime of life. He always reminded me of Charles Lamb's description of George Dyer.

Such is my outside picture of this extraordinary man; and it is only of externals that I am free to speak here, even if I were competent to touch upon his inner life. He was a still greater recluse than the 'Philip Aylwin' of the novel. I think I am right in saying that he took up one or two Oriental tongues when he was seventy years of age. Another of his passions was numismatics, and it was in these studies that he sympathized with the author of 'Aylwin's' friend, the late

Lord de Tabley. I remember one story of his peculiarities which will give an idea of the kind of man he was. He had a brother, Mr. William K. Watts, who was the exact opposite of him in every way – strikingly good-looking, with great charm of manner and savoir faire, but with an ordinary intellect and a very superficial knowledge of literature, or, indeed, anything else, except records of British military and naval exploits – where he was really learned. Being full of admiration of his student brother, and having a parrot-like instinct for mimicry, he used to talk with great volubility upon all kinds of subjects wherever he went, and repeat in the same words what he had been listening to from his brother, until at last he got to be called the ‘walking encyclopædia.’ The result was that he got the reputation of being a great reader and an original thinker, while the true student and book-lover was frequently complimented on the way in which he took after his learned brother. This did not in the least annoy the real student, it simply amused him, and he would give with a dry humour most amusing stories as to what people had said to him on this subject.”<sup>4</sup>

Balzac might have made this singular anecdote the nucleus of one of his stories. I may add that the editor of ‘Notes and Queries,’ Mr. Joseph Knight, knew James Orlando Watts, and he has stated that he ‘can testify to the truth’ of Mr. Hake’s ‘portraiture.’

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Notes and Queries,’ August 2, 1902.



## Chapter V

# EARLY GLIMPSES OF THE GYPSIES

Although an East Midlander by birth it seems to have been to East Anglia that Mr. Watts-Dunton's sympathies were most strongly drawn. It was there that he first made acquaintance with the sea, and it was to East Anglia that his gypsy friends belonged.

On the East Anglian side of St. Ives, opposite to the Hemingford side already described, the country, though not so lovely as the western side, is at first fairly attractive; but it becomes less and less so as it nears the Fens. The Fens, however, would seem to have a charm of their own, and Mr. Watts-Dunton himself has described them with a vividness that could hardly be surpassed. It was here as a boy that he made friends with the Gryengroes – that superior variety of the Romanies which Borrow had known years before. These gypsies used to bring their Welsh ponies to England and sell them at the fairs. I must now go back for some years in order to enrich my pages with Mr. Watts-Dunton's graphic description of his first meeting with the gypsies in the Fen country, which appeared in 'Great Thoughts' in 1903.

"I shall never forget my earliest recollections of them. My father used sometimes to drive in a dogcart to see

friends of his through about twelve miles of Fen country, and he used to take me with him. Let me say that the Fen country is much more striking than is generally supposed. Instead of leafy quick hedgerows, as in the midlands, or walls, as in the north country, the fields are divided by dykes; not a tree is to be seen in some parts for miles and miles. This gives an importance to the skies such as is observed nowhere else except on the open sea. The flashing opalescent radiance of the sea is apt to challenge the riches of the sky, and in a certain degree tends to neutralize it; but in the Fen country the level, monotonous greenery of the crops in summer, and, in autumn and winter, the vast expanse of black earth, make the dome of the sky, by contrast, so bright and glorious that in cloudless weather it gleams and suggests a roof of rainbows; and in cloudy weather it seems almost the only living sight in the universe, and becomes thus more magical still. And as to sunsets, I do not know of any, either by land or sea, to be compared with the sunsets to be seen in the Fen country. The humidity of the atmosphere has, no doubt, a good deal to do with it. The sun frequently sets in a pageantry of gauzy vapour of every colour, quite indescribable.

The first evening that I took one of these drives, while I was watching the wreaths of blue curling smoke from countless heaps of twitch-grass, set burning by the farm-labourers, which stretched right up to the sky-line, my father pulled up the dogcart and pointed to a ruddy fire glowing, flickering, and smoking in an angle where a green grassy drove-way met the dark-looking high-road

some yards ahead. And then I saw some tents, and then a number of dusky figures, some squatting near the fire, some moving about. ‘The gypsies!’ I said, in the greatest state of exultation, which soon fled, however, when I heard a shrill whistle and saw a lot of these dusky people running and leaping like wild things towards the dog-cart. ‘Will they kill us, father?’ I said. ‘Kill us? No,’ he said, laughing; ‘they are friends of mine. They’ve only come to lead the mare past the fire and keep her from shying at it.’ They came flocking up. So far from the mare starting, as she would have done at such an invasion by English people, she seemed to know and welcome the gypsies by instinct, and seemed to enjoy their stroking her nose with their tawny but well-shaped fingers, and caressing her neck. Among them was one of the prettiest little gypsy girls I ever saw. When the gypsies conducted us past their camp I was fascinated by the charm of the picture. Outside the tents in front of the fire, over which a kettle was suspended from an upright iron bar, which I afterwards knew as the kettle-prop, was spread a large dazzling white table-cloth, covered with white crockery, among which glittered a goodly number of silver spoons. I afterwards learnt that to possess good linen, good crockery, and real silver spoons, was as ‘passionate a desire in the Romany chi as in the most ambitious farmer’s wife in the Fen country.’ It was from this little incident that my intimacy with the gypsies dated. I associated much with them in after life, and I have had more experiences among them than I have yet had an opportunity of recording in print.”

This pretty gypsy girl was the prototype, I believe, of the famous Rhona Boswell herself.

It must of course have been after the meeting with Rhona in the East Midlands – supposing always that we are allowed to identify the novelist with the hero, a bold supposition – that Mr. Watts-Dunton again came across her – this time in East Anglia. Whether this is so or not, I must give this picture of her from ‘Aylwin’: —

“It was at this time that I made the acquaintance of Winnie’s friend, Rhona Boswell, a charming little Gypsy girl. Graylingham Wood and Rington Wood, like the entire neighbourhood, were favourite haunts of a superior kind of Gypsies called Gryengroes, that is to say, horse-dealers. Their business was to buy ponies in Wales and sell them in the Eastern Counties and the East Midlands. Thus it was that Winnie had known many of the East Midland Gypsies in Wales. Compared with Rhona Boswell, who was more like a fairy than a child, Winnie seemed quite a grave little person. Rhona’s limbs were always on the move, and the movement sprang always from her emotions. Her laugh seemed to ring through the woods like silver bells, a sound that it was impossible to mistake for any other. The laughter of most Gypsy girls is full of music and of charm, and yet Rhona’s laughter was a sound by itself, and it was no doubt this which afterwards, when she grew up, attracted my kinsman, Percy Aylwin, towards her. It seemed to emanate, not from her throat merely, but from her entire frame. If one could imagine a strain of merriment and fun

blending with the ecstatic notes of a skylark soaring and singing, one might form some idea of the laugh of Rhona Boswell. Ah, what days they were! Rhona would come from Gypsy Dell, a romantic place in Rington Manor, some miles off, especially to show us some newly devised coronet of flowers that she had been weaving for herself. This induced Winnie to weave for herself a coronet of seaweeds, and an entire morning was passed in grave discussion as to which coronet excelled the other.”

## Chapter VI

# SPORT AND WORK

It was at this period that, like so many young Englishmen who were his contemporaries, he gave attention to field sports, and took interest in that athleticism which, to judge from Wilkie Collins's scathing pictures, was quite as rampant and absurd then as it is in our own time. It was then too that he acquired that familiarity with the figures prominent in the ring which startles one in his reminiscences of George Borrow. But it will scarcely interest the readers of this book to dwell long upon this subject. Nor have I time to repeat the humorous stories I have heard him tell about the queer characters who could then be met at St. Ives Fair (said to have been the largest cattle fair in England), and at another favourite resort of his, Stourbridge Fair, near Cambridge. Stourbridge Fair still exists, but its glory was departing when Mr. Watts-Dunton was familiar with it; and now, possibly, it has departed for ever. Of Cambridge and the entire county he tells many anecdotes. Here is a specimen: —

Once in the early sixties he and his brother and some friends were greatly exercised by the news that Deerfoot, the famous American Indian runner in whom Borrow took such an interest, was to run at Cambridge against the English champion. When the day came, they drove to Cambridge in a dog-cart from St.

Ives, about a dozen miles. The race took place in a field called Fenner's Ground, much used by cricketers. This is how, as far as I can recall the words, he tells the anecdote: —

“The place was crammed with all sorts of young men — ’varsity men and others. There were not many young farmers or squires or yeomen within a radius of a good many miles that did not put in an appearance on that occasion. The Indian won easily, and at the conclusion of the race there was a frantic rush to get near him and shake his hand. The rush was so wild and so insensate that it irritated me more than I should at the present moment consider it possible to be irritated. But I ought to say that at that time of my life I had developed into a strangely imperious little chap. I had been over-indulged — not at home, but at the Cambridge school to which I had been sent — and spoilt. This seems odd, but it’s true. It was the boys who spoilt me in a curious way — a way which will not be understood by those who went to public schools like Eton, where the fagging principle would have stood in the way of the development of the curious relation between me and my fellow-pupils which I am alluding to. There is an inscrutable form of the monarchic instinct in the genus homo which causes boys, without in the least knowing why, to select one boy as a kind of leader, or rather emperor, and spoil him, almost unfit him indeed for that sense of equality which is so valuable in the social struggle for life that follows school-days. This kind of emperor I had been at that school. It indicated no sort of real superiority on my part; for I learnt that immediately after I

had left the vacant post it was filled by another boy – filled for an equally inscrutable reason. The result of it was that I became (as I often think when I recall those days) the most masterful young urchin that ever lived. If I had not been so, I could not have got into a fury at being jostled by a good-humoured crowd. My brother, who had not been so spoilt at school, was very different, and kept urging me to keep my temper. ‘It’s capital fun,’ he said; ‘look at this blue-eyed young chap jostling and being jostled close to us. He’s fond of a hustle, and no mistake. That’s the kind of chap I should like to know’; and he indicated a young ‘varsity man of whose elbow at that moment I was unpleasantly conscious, and who seemed to be in a state of delight at other elbows being pushed into his ribs. I soon perceived that certain men whom he was with seemed angry, not on their own account, but on account of this youth of the laughing lips and blue eyes. As they were trying to make a ring round him, ‘Hanged if it isn’t the Prince!’ said my brother. ‘And look how he takes it! Surely you can stand what he stands!’ It was, in fact, the Prince of Wales, who had come to see the American runner. I needed only two or three years of buffeting with the great life outside the schoolroom to lose all my imperiousness and learn the essential lesson of give-and-take.”

For a time Mr. Watts-Dunton wavered about being articled to his father as a solicitor. His love of the woods and fields was too great at that time for him to find life in a solicitor’s office at all tolerable. Moreover, it would seem that he who had



been so precocious a student, and who had lived in books, felt a temporary revulsion from them, and an irresistible impulse to study Nature apart from books, to study her face to face. And it was at this time that, as the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' remarks, he 'moved much among the East Anglian gypsies, of whose superstitions and folklore he made a careful study.' But of this period of his life I have but little knowledge. Judging from Groome's remarks upon 'Aylwin' in the 'Bookman,' he alone had Mr. Watts-Dunton's full confidence in the matter. So great was his desire to pore over the book of nature, there appears to have been some likelihood, perhaps I ought to say some danger, of his feeling the impulse which had taken George Borrow away from civilization. He seems, besides, to have shared with the Greeks and with Montaigne a belief in the value of leisure. It was at this period, to judge from his writings, that he exclaimed with Montaigne, 'Have you known how to regulate your conduct, you have done a great deal more than he who has composed books. Have you known how to take repose, you have done more than he who has taken empires and cities.' I suppose, however, that this was the time when he composed that unpublished 'Dictionary for Nature-worshippers,' from which he often used to quote in the 'Athenæum.' There is nothing in his writings so characteristic as those definitions. Work and Sport are thus defined: 'Work: that activity of mind or body which exhausts the vital forces without yielding pleasure or health to the individual. Sport: that activity of mind or body which, in exhausting the vital forces,

yields pleasure and health to the individual. The activity, however severe, of a born artist at his easel, of a born poet at his rhymings, of a born carpenter at his plane, is sport. The activity, however slight, of the born artist or poet at the merchant's desk, is work. Hence, to work is not to pray. We have called the heresy of Work modern because it is the characteristic one of our time; but, alas! like all heresies, it is old. It was preached by Zoroaster in almost Mr. Carlyle's words when Concord itself was in the woods and ere Chelsea was.'

In one of his books Mr. Watts-Dunton writes with great eloquence upon this subject: —

"How hateful is the word 'experience' in the mouth of the *littérateur*. They all seem to think that this universe exists to educate them, and that they should write books about it. They never look on a sunrise without thinking what an experience it is; how it is educating them for bookmaking. It is this that so often turns the true Nature-worshipper away from books altogether, that makes him bless with what at times seems such malicious fervour those two great benefactors of the human race, Caliph Omar and Warburton's cook.

In Thoreau there was an almost perpetual warring of the Nature instinct with the Humanity instinct. And, to say the truth, the number is smaller than even Nature-worshippers themselves are aware — those in whom there is not that warring of these two great primal instincts. For six or eight months at a time there are many, perhaps, who could revel

in ‘utter solitude,’ as companionship with Nature is called; with no minster clock to tell them the time of day, but, instead, the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle in the morning, the shifting of the shadows at noon, and the cawing of rooks going home at sunset. But then to these, there comes suddenly, and without the smallest warning, a half-recognized but secretly sweet pleasure in looking at the smooth high-road, and thinking that it leads to the city – a beating of the heart at the sound of the distant railway-whistle, as the train winds its way, like a vast gliding snake, to the whirlpool they have left.

In order to realize the folly of the modern Carlylean heresy of work, it is necessary to realize fully how infinitely rich is Nature, and how generous, and consequently what a sacred duty as well as wise resolve it is that, before he ‘returns unto the ground,’ man should drink deeply while he may at the fountain of Life. Let it be enough for the Nature-worshipper to know that he, at least, has been blessed. Suppose he were to preach in London or Paris or New York against this bastard civilization, and expatiate on Nature’s largess, of which it robs us? Suppose he were to say to people to whom opinion is the breath of life, ‘What is it that this civilization of yours can give you by way of compensation for that of which it robs you? Is it your art? Is it your literature? Is it your music? Is it your science?’ Suppose, for instance, he were to say to the collector of Claudes, or Turners, or David Coxes: ‘Your possessions are precious undoubtedly, but what are even they when set against the tamest and quietest sunrise, in the tamest and

quietest district of Cambridge or Lincoln, in this tame and quiet month, when, over the treeless flat you may see, and for nothing, purple bar after purple bar trembling along the grey, as the cows lift up their heads from the sheet of silver mist in which they are lying? How can you really enjoy your Turners, you who have never seen a sunrise in your lives?" Or suppose he were to say to the opera-goer: "Those notes of your favourite soprano were superb indeed; and superb they ought to be to keep you in the opera-house on a June night, when all over the south of England a thousand thickets, warm with the perfumed breath of the summer night, are musical with the gurgle of the nightingales." Thoreau preached after this fashion, and was deservedly laughed at for his pains.

Yet it is not a little singular that this heresy of the sacredness of work should be most flourishing at the very time when the sophism on which it was originally built is exploded; the sophism, we mean, that Nature herself is the result of Work, whereas she is the result of growth. One would have thought that this was the very time for recognizing what the sophism had blinded us to, that Nature's permanent temper – whatever may be said of this or that mood of hers – is the temper of Sport, that her pet abhorrence, which is said to be a vacuum, is really Work. We see this clearly enough in what are called the lower animals – whether it be a tiger or a gazelle, a ferret or a coney, a bat or a butterfly – the final cause of the existence of every conscious thing is that it should sport. It has no other use than that. For this end it was that 'the great

Vishnu yearned to create a world.' Yet over the toiling and moiling world sits Moloch Work; while those whose hearts are withering up with hatred of him are told by certain writers to fall down before him and pretend to love.

The worker of the mischief is, of course, civilization in excess, or rather, civilization in wrong directions. For this word, too, has to be newly defined in the Dictionary before mentioned, where you will find it thus given: – Civilization: a widening and enriching of human life. Bastard or Modern Western Civilization: the art of inventing fictitious wants and working to supply them. In bastard civilization life becomes poorer and poorer, paltrier and paltrier, till at last life goes out of fashion altogether, and is supplanted by work. True freedom is more remote from us than ever. For modern Freedom is thus defined: the exchange of the slavery of feudality for the slavery of opinion. Thoreau realized this, and tried to preach men back to common-sense and Nature. Here was his mistake – in trying to preach. No man ever yet had the Nature-instinct preached into him.”

## Chapter VII

### EAST ANGLIA

Whatever may have been those experiences with the gryengroes which made Groome, when speaking of the gypsies of 'Aylwin,' say 'the author writes only of what he knows,' it seems to have been after his intercourse with the gypsies that he and a younger brother, Alfred Eugene Watts (elsewhere described), were articulated as solicitors to their father. His bent, however, was always towards literature, especially poetry, of which he had now written a great deal – indeed, the major part of the volume which was destined to lie unpublished for so many years. But before I deal with the most important period of Mr. Watts-Dunton's life – his life in London – it seems necessary to say a word or two about his visits to East Anglia, and especially to the Norfolk coast. There are some admirable remarks upon the East Coast in Mr. William Sharp's chapter on 'Aylwinland' in 'Literary Geography,' and he notes the way in which Rhona Boswell links it with Cowslip Land; but he does not give examples of the poems which thus link it, such as the double roundel called 'The Golden Hand.'

# THE GOLDEN HAND <sup>5</sup>

## Percy

Do you forget that day on Rington strand  
When, near the crumbling ruin's parapet,  
I saw you stand beside the long-shore net  
The gorgios spread to dry on sunlit sand?

## Rhona

Do I forget?

---

<sup>5</sup> Among the gypsies of all countries the happiest possible 'Dukkeripen' (i.e. prophetic symbol of Natura Mystica) is a hand-shaped golden cloud floating in the sky. It is singular that the same idea is found among races entirely disconnected with them – the Finns, for instance, with whom Ukko, the 'sky god,' or 'angel of the sunrise,' was called the 'golden king' and 'leader of the clouds,' and his Golden Hand was more powerful than all the army of Death. The 'Golden Hand' is sometimes called the Lover's Dukkeripen.

## **Percy**

You wove the wood-flowers in a dewy band  
Around your hair which shone as black as jet:  
No fairy's crown of bloom was ever set  
Round brows so sweet as those the wood-flowers spanned.

I see that picture now; hair dewy-wet:  
Dark eyes that pictures in the sky expand:  
Love-lips (with one tattoo 'for dukkerin' <sup>6</sup>) tanned  
By sunny winds that kiss them as you stand.

## **Rhona**

Do I forget?  
The Golden Hand shone there: it's you forget,  
Or p'raps us Romanies onldy understand  
The way the Lover's Dukkeripen is planned  
Which shone that second time when us two met.

---

<sup>6</sup> Good-luck.



## Percy

Blest 'Golden Hand'!

## Rhona

The wind, that mixed the smell o' violet  
Wi' chirp o' bird, a-blowin' from the land  
Where my dear Mammy lies, said as it fanned  
My heart-like, 'Them 'ere tears makes Mammy fret.'  
She loves to see her chavi <sup>7</sup> lookin' grand,  
So I made what you call'd a coronet,  
And in the front I put her amulet:  
She sent the Hand to show she sees me yet.

## Percy

Blest 'Golden Hand'!

---

<sup>7</sup> Child.

In the same way that the velvety green of Hunts is seen in the verses I have already quoted, so the softer side of the inland scenery of East Anglia is described in the following lines, where also we find an exquisite use of the East Anglian fancy about the fairies and the foxglove bells.

At a waltz during certain Venetian revels after the liberation from the Austrian yoke, a forsaken lover stands and watches a lady whose child-love he had won in England: —

Has she forgotten for such halls as these  
The domes the angels built in holy times,  
When wings were ours in childhood's flowery climes  
To dance with butterflies and golden bees? —  
Forgotten how the sunny-fingered breeze  
Shook out those English harebells' magic chimes  
On that child-wedding morn, 'neath English limes,  
'Mid wild-flowers tall enough to kiss her knees?

The love that childhood cradled – girlhood nursed —  
Has she forgotten it for this dull play,  
Where far-off pigmies seem to waltz and sway  
Like dancers in a telescope reversed?  
Or does not pallid Conscience come and say,  
'Who sells her glory of beauty stands accursed'?

But was it this that bought her – this poor splendour  
That won her from her troth and wild-flower wreath  
Who 'cracked the foxglove bells' on Grayland Heath,

Or played with playful winds that tried to bend her,  
Or, tripping through the deer-park, tall and slender,  
Answered the larks above, the crakes beneath,  
Or mocked, with glitter of laughing lips and teeth,  
When Love grew grave – to hide her soul's surrender?

Mr. Sharp has dwelt upon the striking way in which the scenery and atmosphere are rendered in 'Aylwin,' but this, as I think, is even more clearly seen in the poems. And in none of these is it seen so vividly as in that exhilarating poem, 'Gypsy Heather,' published in the 'Athenæum,' and not yet garnered in a volume. This poem also shows his lyrical power, which never seems to be at its very best unless he is depicting Romany life and Romany passion. The metre of this poem is as original as that of 'The Gypsy Haymaking Song,' quoted in an earlier chapter. It has a swing like that of no other poem: —

## **GYPSY HEATHER**

'If you breathe on a heather-spray and send it to your man it'll show him the selfsame heather where it wur born.'  
— Sinfi Lovell.

[Percy Aylwin, standing on the deck of the 'Petrel,' takes from his pocket a letter which, before he had set sail to return to the south seas, the Melbourne post had brought him – a letter from Rhona, staying then with the Boswells on a patch of heath much favoured by the Boswells, called

‘Gypsy Heather.’ He takes from the envelope a withered heather-spray, encircled by a little scroll of paper on which Rhona has written the words, ‘Remember Gypsy Heather.’]

## I

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
Remember Jasper’s camping-place  
Where heath-bells meet the grassy dingle,  
And scents of meadow, wood and chase,  
Wild thyme and whin-flower seem to mingle?  
Remember where, in Rington Furze,  
I kissed her and she asked me whether  
I ‘thought my lips of teazel-burrs,  
That pricked her jis like whin-bush spurs,  
Felt nice on a rinkenny moey <sup>8</sup> like hers?’ —  
Gypsy Heather!

## II

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
Remember her whom nought could tame  
But love of me, the poacher-maiden

---

<sup>8</sup> Pretty mouth.

Who showed me once my father's game  
With which her plump round arms were laden  
Who, when my glances spoke reproach,  
Said, "Things o' fur an' fin an' feather  
Like coneys, pheasants, perch an' loach,  
An' even the famous 'Rington roach,'  
Wur born for Romany chies to poach!" —  
Gypsy Heather!

### III

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
Atolls and reefs, you change, you change  
To dells of England dewy and tender;  
You palm-trees in yon coral range  
Seem 'Rington Birches' sweet and slender  
Shading the ocean's fiery glare:  
We two are in the Dell together —  
My body is here, my soul is there  
With lords of trap and net and snare,  
The Children of the Open Air, —  
Gypsy Heather!

## IV

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
Its pungent breath is on the wind,  
Killing the scent of tropic water;  
I see her suitors swarthy skinned,  
Who pine in vain for Jasper's daughter.  
The 'Scollard,' with his features tanned  
By sun and wind as brown as leather —  
His forehead scarred with Passion's brand —  
Scowling at Sinfi tall and grand,  
Who sits with Pharaoh by her hand, —  
Gypsy Heather!

## V

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
Now Rhona sits beneath the tree  
That shades our tent, alone and weeping;  
And him, the 'Scollard,' him I see:  
From bush to bush I see him creeping —  
I see her mock him, see her run  
And free his pony from the tether,  
Who lays his ears in love and fun,

And gallops with her in the sun  
Through lace the gossamers have spun, —  
Gypsy Heather!

## VI

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
She reaches 'Rington Birches'; now,  
Dismounting from the 'Scollard's' pony,  
She sits alone with heavy brow,  
Thinking, but not of hare or coney.  
The hot sea holds each sight, each sound  
Of England's golden autumn weather:  
The Romanies now are sitting round  
The tea-cloth spread on grassy ground;  
Now Rhona dances heather-crowned, —  
Gypsy Heather!

## VII

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
She's thinking of this withered spray  
Through all the dance; her eyes are gleaming  
Darker than night, yet bright as day,

While round her a gypsy shawl is streaming;  
I see the lips – the upper curled,  
A saucy rose-leaf, from the nether,  
Whence – while the floating shawl is twirled,  
As if a ruddy cloud were swirled —  
Her scornful laugh at him is hurled, —  
Gypsy Heather!

## VIII

Remember Gypsy Heather?  
In storm or calm, in sun or rain,  
There's magic, Rhona, in the writing  
Wound round these flowers whose purple stain  
Dims the dear scrawl of Love's inditing:  
Dear girl, this spray between the leaves  
(Now fading like a draggled feather  
With which the nesting song-bird weaves)  
Makes every wave the vessel cleaves  
Seem purple of heather as it heaves, —  
Gypsy Heather!

## IX



Remember Gypsy Heather?  
Oh, Rhona! sights and sounds of home  
Are everywhere; the skylark winging  
Through amber cloud-films till the dome  
Seems filled with love, our love, a-singing.  
The sea-wind seems an English breeze  
Bearing the bleat of ewe and wether  
Over the heath from Rington Leas,  
Where, to the hymn of birds and bees,  
You taught me Romany 'neath the trees, —  
Gypsy Heather!

Another reason that makes it necessary for me to touch upon the inland part of East Anglia is that I have certain remarks to make upon what are called 'the Omarian poems of Mr. Watts-Dunton.' Although, as I have before hinted, St. Ives, being in Hunts, belongs topographically to the East Midlands, its sympathies are East Anglian. This perhaps is partly because it is the extreme east of Hunts, and partly because the mouth of the Ouse is at Lynn: to those whom Mr. Norris affectionately calls St. Ivians and Hemingfordians, the seaside means Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Cromer, Hunstanton, and the towns on the Suffolk coast. The splendour of Norfolk ale may also partly account for it. This perhaps also explains why the famous East Anglian translator of Omar Khayyàm would seem to have been known to a few Omarians on the banks of the Ouse and Cam as soon as the great discoverer of good things, Rossetti, pounced upon it in the

penny box of a second-hand bookseller. Readers of Mr. Watts-Dunton's obituary notice of F. H. Groome in the 'Athenæum' will recall these words: —

“It was not merely upon Romany subjects that Groome found points of sympathy at ‘The Pines’ during that first luncheon; there was that other subject before mentioned, Edward FitzGerald and Omar Khayyàm. We, a handful of Omarians of those antediluvian days, were perhaps all the more intense in our cult because we believed it to be esoteric. And here was a guest who had been brought into actual personal contact with the wonderful old ‘Fitz.’ As a child of eight he had seen him, talked with him, been patted on the head by him. Groome’s father, the Archdeacon of Suffolk, was one of FitzGerald’s most intimate friends. This was at once a delightful and a powerful link between Frank Groome and those at the luncheon table; and when he heard, as he soon did, the toast to ‘Omar Khayyàm,’ none drank that toast with more gusto than he. The fact is, as the Romanies say, true friendship, like true love, is apt to begin at first sight.”

This is the poem alluded to: it is entitled, ‘Toast to Omar Khayyàm: An East Anglian echo-chorus inscribed to old Omarian Friends in memory of happy days by Ouse and Cam’:

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## Chorus

In this red wine, where memory's eyes seem glowing,  
And days when wines were bright by Ouse and Cam,  
And Norfolk's foaming nectar glittered, showing  
What beard of gold John Barleycorn was growing,  
We drink to thee, right heir of Nature's knowing,  
Omar Khayyàm!

### I

Star-gazer, who canst read, when Night is strowing  
Her scripted orbs on Time's wide oriflamme,  
Nature's proud blazon: 'Who shall bless or damn?  
Life, Death, and Doom are all of my bestowing!'  
Chorus: Omar Khayyàm!

### II

Poet, whose stream of balm and music, flowing  
Through Persian gardens, widened till it swam —

A fragrant tide no bank of Time shall dam —  
Through Suffolk meads, where gorse and may were blowing,  
—

Chorus: Omar Khayyàm!

### III

Who blent thy song with sound of cattle lowing,  
And caw of rooks that perch on ewe and ram,  
And hymn of lark, and bleat of orphan lamb,  
And swish of scythe in Bredfield's dewy mowing?

Chorus: Omar Khayyàm!

### IV

'Twas Fitz, 'Old Fitz,' whose knowledge, farther going  
Than lore of Omar, 'Wisdom's starry Cham,'  
Made richer still thine opulent epigram:  
Sowed seed from seed of thine immortal sowing. —

Chorus: Omar Khayyàm!

## V

In this red wine, where Memory's eyes seem glowing,  
And days when wines were bright by Ouse and Cam,  
And Norfolk's foaming nectar glittered, showing  
What beard of gold John Barleycorn was growing,  
We drink to thee till, hark! the cock is crowing!  
Omar Khayyàm!

It was many years after this – it was as a member of another Omar Khayyàm Club of much greater celebrity than the little brotherhood of Ouse and Cam – not large enough to be called a club – that Mr. Watts-Dunton wrote the following well-known sonnet: —

### PRAYER TO THE WINDS

On planting at the head of FitzGerald's grave two rose-trees whose ancestors had scattered their petals over the tomb of Omar Khayyàm.

“My tomb shall be on a spot where the north wind may strow roses upon it.”

*Omar Khayyàm to Kwájah Nizami.*

Hear us, ye winds! From where the north-wind strows  
Blossoms that crown 'the King of Wisdom's' tomb,  
The trees here planted bring remembered bloom,  
Dreaming in seed of Love's ancestral rose,  
To meadows where a braver north-wind blows  
O'er greener grass, o'er hedge-rose, may, and broom,  
And all that make East England's field-perfume  
Dearer than any fragrance Persia knows.

Hear us, ye winds, North, East, and West, and South!  
This granite covers him whose golden mouth  
Made wiser ev'n the Word of Wisdom's King:  
Blow softly over Omar's Western herald  
Till roses rich of Omar's dust shall spring  
From richer dust of Suffolk's rare FitzGerald.

I must now quote another of Mr. Watts-Dunton's East Anglian poems, partly because it depicts the weird charm of the Norfolk coast, and partly because it illustrates that sympathy between the poet and the lower animals which I have already noted. I have another reason: not long ago, that good East Anglian, Mr. Rider Haggard interested us all by telling how telepathy seemed to have the power of operating between a dog and its beloved master in certain rare and extraordinary cases. When the poem appeared in the 'Saturday Review' (December 20, 1902), it was described as 'part of a forthcoming romance.' It records a case of telepathy between man and dog quite as wonderful as that narrated by Mr. Rider Haggard: —

## CAUGHT IN THE EBBING TIDE

The mightiest Titan's stroke could not withstand  
An ebbing tide like this. These swirls denote  
How wind and tide conspire. I can but float  
To the open sea and strike no more for land.  
Farewell, brown cliffs, farewell, beloved sand  
Her feet have pressed – farewell, dear little boat  
Where Gelert, <sup>9</sup> calmly sitting on my coat,  
Unconscious of my peril, gazes bland!

All dangers grip me save the deadliest, fear:  
Yet these air-pictures of the past that glide —  
These death-mirages o'er the heaving tide —  
Showing two lovers in an alcove clear,  
Will break my heart. I see them and I hear  
As there they sit at morning, side by side.

### The First Vision

*With Raxton elms behind – in front the sea,  
Sitting in rosy light in that alcove,*

---

<sup>9</sup> A famous swimming dog belonging to the writer.

*They hear the first lark rise o'er Raxton Grove;  
'What should I do with fame, dear heart?' says he.  
'You talk of fame, poetic fame, to me  
Whose crown is not of laurel but of love—  
To me who would not give this little glove  
On this dear hand for Shakspeare's dower in fee.*

*While, rising red and kindling every billow,  
The sun's shield shines 'neath many a golden spear,  
To lean with you against this leafy pillow,  
To murmur words of love in this loved ear—  
To feel you bending like a bending willow,  
This is to be a poet—this, my dear!'*

O God, to die and leave her – die and leave  
The heaven so lately won! – And then, to know  
What misery will be hers – what lonely woe! —  
To see the bright eyes weep, to see her grieve  
Will make me a coward as I sink, and cleave  
To life though Destiny has bid me go.  
How shall I bear the pictures that will glow  
Above the glowing billows as they heave?

One picture fades, and now above the spray  
Another shines: ah, do I know the bowers  
Where that sweet woman stands – the woodland flowers,  
In that bright wreath of grass and new-mown hay —  
That birthday wreath I wove when earthly hours  
Wore angel-wings, – till portents brought dismay?



## The Second Vision

Proud of her wreath as laureate of his laurel,  
She smiles on him—on him, the prouder giver,  
As there they stand beside the sunlit river  
Where petals flush with rose the grass and sorrel:  
The chirping reed-birds, in their play or quarrel,  
Make musical the stream where lilies quiver—  
Ah! suddenly he feels her slim waist shiver:  
She speaks: her lips grow grey—her lips of coral!

‘From out my wreath two heart-shaped seeds are swaying,  
The seeds of which that gypsy girl has spoken—  
’Tis fairy grass, alas! the lover’s token.’  
She lifts her fingers to her forehead, saying,  
‘Touch the twin hearts.’ Says he, ‘’Tis idle playing’:  
He touches them; they fall—fall bruised and broken.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shall I turn coward here who sailed with Death  
Through many a tempest on mine own North Sea,  
And quail like him of old who bowed the knee —

Faithless – to billows of Genesereth?  
Did I turn coward when my very breath  
Froze on my lips that Alpine night when he  
Stood glimmering there, the Skeleton, with me,  
While avalanches rolled from peaks beneath?

Each billow bears me nearer to the verge  
Of realms where she is not – where love must wait. —  
If Gelert, there, could hear, no need to urge  
That friend, so faithful, true, affectionate,  
To come and help me, or to share my fate.  
Ah! surely I see him springing through the surge.

*[The dog, plunging into the tide and striking  
towards him with immense strength, reaches  
him and swims round him.]*

Oh, Gelert, strong of wind and strong of paw  
Here gazing like your namesake, ‘Snowdon’s Hound,’  
When great Llewelyn’s child could not be found,  
And all the warriors stood in speechless awe —  
Mute as your namesake when his master saw  
The cradle tossed – the rushes red around —  
With never a word, but only a whimpering sound  
To tell what meant the blood on lip and jaw.

In such a strait, to aid this gaze so fond,  
Should I, brave friend, have needed other speech  
Than this dear whimper? Is there not a bond

Stronger than words that binds us each to each? —  
But Death has caught us both. 'Tis far beyond  
The strength of man or dog to win the beach.

Through tangle-weed – through coils of slippery kelp  
Decking your shaggy forehead, those brave eyes  
Shine true – shine deep of love's divine surmise  
As hers who gave you – then a Titan whelp!  
I think you know my danger and would help!  
See how I point to yonder smack that lies  
At anchor – Go! His countenance replies.  
Hope's music rings in Gelert's eager yelp!

*[The dog swims swiftly away down the tide.*

Now, life and love and death swim out with him!  
If he should reach the smack, the men will guess  
The dog has left his master in distress.  
You taught him in these very waves to swim —  
'The prince of pups,' you said, 'for wind and limb' —  
And now those lessons, darling, come to bless.

## Envoy

(The day after the rescue: Gelert and I walking along the sand.)

'Twas in no glittering tourney's mimic strife, —  
'Twas in that bloody fight in Raxton Grove,  
While hungry ravens croaked from boughs above,  
And frightened blackbirds shrilled the warning fife —  
'Twas there, in days when Friendship still was rife,  
Mine ancestor who threw the challenge-glove  
Conquered and found his foe a soul to love,  
Found friendship – Life's great second crown of life.

So I this morning love our North Sea more  
Because he fought me well, because these waves  
Now weaving sunbows for us by the shore  
Strove with me, tossed me in those emerald caves  
That yawned above my head like conscious graves —  
I love him as I never loved before.

In these days when so much is written about the intelligence of the lower animals, when 'Hans,' the 'thinking horse,' is 'interviewed' by eminent scientists, the exploit of the Second Gelert is not without interest. I may, perhaps, mention a strange experience of my own. The late Betts Bey, a well-known figure in St. Peter's Port, Guernsey, had a fine black retriever, named Caro. During a long summer holiday which we spent in Guernsey, Caro became greatly attached to a friend, and Betts Bey presented him to her. He was a magnificent fellow, valiant as a lion, and a splendid diver and swimmer. He often plunged off the parapet of the bridge which spans the Serpentine.

Indeed, he would have dived from any height. His intelligence was surprising. If we wished to make him understand that he was not to accompany us, we had only to say, 'Caro, we are going to church!' As soon as he heard the word 'church' his barks would cease, his tail would drop, and he would look mournfully resigned. One evening, as I was writing in my room, Caro began to scratch outside the door, uttering those strange 'woof-woofs' which were his canine language. I let him in, but he would not rest. He stood gazing at me with an intense expression, and, turning towards the door, waited impatiently. For some time I took no notice of his dumb appeal, but his excitement increased, and suddenly a vague sense of ill seemed to pass from him into my mind. Drawn half-consciously I rose, and at once with a strange half-human whine Caro dashed upstairs. I followed him. He ran into a bedroom, and there in the dark I found my friend lying unconscious. It is well-nigh certain that Caro thus saved my friend's life.

## Chapter VIII

### LONDON

Between Mr. Watts-Dunton and the brother who came next to him, before mentioned, there was a very great affection, although the difference between them, mentally and physically, was quite noticeable. They were articled to their father on the same day and admitted solicitors on the same day, a very unusual thing with solicitors and their sons. Mr. Watts-Dunton afterwards passed a short term in one of the great conveyancing offices in London in order to become proficient in conveyancing. His brother did the same in another office in Bedford Row; but he afterwards practised for himself. Mr. A. E. Watts soon had a considerable practice as family solicitor and conveyancer. Mr. Hake identifies him with Cyril Aylwin, but before I quote Mr. Hake's interesting account of him, I will give the vivid description of Cyril in 'Aylwin': —

“Juvenile curls clustered thick and short beneath his wideawake. He had at first struck me as being not much more than a lad, till, as he gave me that rapid, searching glance in passing, I perceived the little crow's feet round his eyes, and he then struck me immediately as being probably on the verge of thirty-five. His figure was slim and thin, his waist almost girlish in its fall. I should have considered him small, had not the unusually deep, loud, manly, and

sonorous voice with which he had accosted Sinfi conveyed an impression of size and weight such as even big men do not often produce. This deep voice, coupled with that gaunt kind of cheek which we associate with the most demure people, produced an effect of sedateness.. but in the one glance I had got from those watchful, sagacious, twinkling eyes, there was an expression quite peculiar to them, quite inscrutable, quite indescribable.”

Cyril Aylwin was at first thought to be a portrait of Whistler, which is not quite so outrageously absurd as the wild conjecture that William Morris was the original of Wilderspin. Mr. Hake says: —

“I am especially able to speak of this character, who has been inquired about more than any other in the book. I knew him, I think, even before I knew Rossetti and Morris, or any of that group. He was a brother of Mr. Watts-Dunton’s — Mr. Alfred Eugene Watts. He lived at Sydenham, and died suddenly, either in 1870 or 1871, very shortly after I had met him at a wedding party. Among the set in which I moved at that time he had a great reputation as a wit and humorist. His style of humour always struck me as being more American than English. While bringing out humorous things that would set a dinner table in a roar, he would himself maintain a perfectly unmoved countenance. And it was said of him, as ‘Wilderspin’ says of ‘Cyril Aylwin,’ that he was never known to laugh.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Notes and Queries,’ June 7, 1902.

After a time Mr. Watts-Dunton joined his brother, and the two practised together in London. They also lived together at Sydenham. Some time after this, however, Mr. Watts-Dunton determined to abandon the law for literature. The brothers migrated to Sydenham, because at that time Mr. Watts-Dunton pursued music with an avidity and interest which threatened for a time to interfere with those literary energies which it was now his intention to exercise. At that time the orchestral concerts at the Crystal Palace under Manns, given every morning and every afternoon, were a great attraction to music lovers, and Mr. Watts-Dunton, who lived close by, rarely missed either the morning or the afternoon concert. It was in this way that he became steeped in German music; and afterwards, when he became intimate with Dr. F. Hueffer, the musical critic of the 'Times,' and the exponent of Wagner in Great Britain, he became a thorough Wagnerian.

It was during this time, and through the extraordinary social attractions of his brother, that Mr. Watts-Dunton began to move very much in London life, and saw a great deal of what is called London society. After his brother's death he took chambers in Great James Street, close to Mr. Swinburne, with whom he had already become intimate. And according to Mr. Hake, in his paper in 'T. P.'s Weekly' above quoted from, it was here that he wrote 'Aylwin.' I have already alluded to his record of this most interesting event: —

"I have just read," he says, "with the greatest interest the article in your number of Sept. 18, 1903, called 'How



Authors Work Best.’ But the following sentence in it set me reflecting: ‘Flaubert took ten years to write and repolish “Madame Bovary,” Watts-Dunton twenty years to write, recast, and conclude “Aylwin.”’ The statement about ‘Aylwin’ has often been made, and in these days of hasty production it may well be taken by the author as a compliment; but it is as entirely apocryphal as that about Scott’s brother having written the Waverley Novels, and as that about Bramwell Brontë having written ‘Wuthering Heights.’ As to ‘Aylwin,’ I happen to be in a peculiarly authoritative position to speak upon the genesis of this very popular book. If any one were to peruse the original manuscript of the story he would find it in four different handwritings – my late father’s, and two of my brothers’, but principally in mine.

Yet I can aver that it was not written by us, and also that its composition did not take twenty years to achieve. It was dictated to us.”

Dr. Gordon Hake is mainly known as the ‘parable poet,’ but as a fact he was a physician of extraordinary talent, who had practised first at Bury St. Edmunds and afterwards at Spring Gardens, until he partly retired to be private physician to the late Lady Ripon. After her death he left practice altogether in order to devote himself to literature, for which he had very great equipments. As ‘Aylwin’ touched upon certain subtle nervous phases it must have been a great advantage to the author to dictate these portions of the story to so skilled and experienced a friend. The rare kind of cerebral exaltation into which Henry Aylwin

passed after his appalling experience in the Cove, in which the entire nervous system was disturbed, was not what is known as brain fever. The record of it in 'Aylwin' is, I understand, a literal account of a rare and wonderful case brought under the professional notice of Dr. Hake.

As physician to Rossetti, a few years after the death of his beloved wife, Dr. Hake's services must have been priceless to the poet-painter; for, as is only too well known, Rossetti's grief for the death of his wife had for some time a devastating effect upon his mind. It was one of the causes of that terrible insomnia to relieve himself from which he resorted to chloral, though later on the attacks upon him by certain foes intensified the distressing ailment. The insomnia produced fits of melancholia, an ailment, according to the skilled opinion of Dr. Hake, more difficult than all others to deal with; for when the nervous system has sunk to a certain state of depression, the mind roams over the universe, as it were, in quest of imaginary causes for the depression. This accounts for the 'cock and bull' stories that were somewhat rife immediately after Rossetti's death about his having expressed remorse on account of his ill-treatment of his wife. No one of his intimates took the least notice of these wild and whirling words. For he would express remorse on account of the most fantastic things when the fits of melancholia were upon him; and when these fits were past he would smile at the foolish things he had said. I get this knowledge from a very high authority, Dr. Hake's son – Mr. Thomas St. E. Hake, before mentioned – who knew

Rossetti intimately from 1871 until his death, having lived under the same roof with him at Cheyne Walk, Bognor and Kelmscott. After Rossetti's most serious attack of melancholia, his relations and friends persuaded him to stay with Dr. Hake at Roehampton, and it was there that the terrible crisis of his illness was passed.

It is interesting to know that in the original form of 'Aylwin' the important part taken in the development of the story by D'Arcy was taken by Dr. Hake, under the name of Gordon, and that afterwards, when all sorts of ungenerous things were written about Rossetti, D'Arcy was substituted for Gordon in order to give the author an opportunity of bringing out and showing the world the absolute nobility and charm of Rossetti's character.

Among the many varieties of life which Mr. Watts-Dunton saw at this time was life in the slums; and this was long before the once fashionable pastime of 'slumming' was invented. The following lines in Dr. Hake's 'New Day' allude to the deep interest that Mr. Watts-Dunton has always shown in the poor — shown years before the writers who now deal with the slums had written a line. Artistically, they are not fair specimens of Dr. Gordon Hake's verses, but nevertheless it is interesting to quote them here: —

Know you a widow's home? an orphanage?  
A place of shelter for the crippled poor?  
Did ever limbless men your care engage  
Whom you assisted of your larger store?  
Know you the young who are to early die —

At their frail form sinks not your heart within?  
Know you the old who paralytic lie  
While you the freshness of your life begin?  
Know you the great pain-bearers who long carry  
The bullet in the breast that does not kill?  
And those who in the house of madness tarry,  
Beyond the blest relief of human skill?  
These have you visited, all these assisted,  
In the high ranks of charity enlisted.

That Mr. Watts-Dunton has retained his interest in the poor is shown by the sonnet, 'Father Christmas in Famine Street,' which was originally printed as 'an appeal' on Christmas Eve in the 'Athenæum': —

When Father Christmas went down Famine Street  
He saw two little sisters: one was trying  
To lift the other, pallid, wasted, dying,  
Within an arch, beyond the slush and sleet.

From out the glazing eyes a glimmer sweet  
Leapt, as in answer to the other's sighing,  
While came a murmur, 'Don't 'ee keep on crying —  
I wants to die: you'll get my share to eat.'  
Her knell was tolled by joy-bells of the city  
Hymning the birth of Jesus, Lord of Pity,  
Lover of children, Shepherd of Compassion.  
Said Father Christmas, while his eyes grew dim,  
'They do His bidding – if in thrifty fashion:

They let the little children go to Him.’

With this sonnet should be placed that entitled, ‘Dickens Returns on Christmas Day’: —

A ragged girl in Drury Lane was heard to exclaim:  
‘Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?’ – June  
9, 1870.

‘Dickens is dead!’ Beneath that grievous cry  
London seemed shivering in the summer heat;  
Strangers took up the tale like friends that meet:  
‘Dickens is dead!’ said they, and hurried by;  
Street children stopped their games – they knew not why,  
But some new night seemed darkening down the street.  
A girl in rags, staying her wayworn feet,  
Cried, ‘Dickens dead? Will Father Christmas die?’

City he loved, take courage on thy way!  
He loves thee still, in all thy joys and fears.  
Though he whose smile made bright thine eyes of grey —  
Though he whose voice, uttering thy burthened years,  
Made laughter bubble through thy sea of tears —  
Is gone, Dickens returns on Christmas Day!

Let me say here, parenthetically, that ‘The Pines’ is so far out of date that for twenty-five years it has been famous for its sympathy with the Christmas sentiment which now seems to be fading, as this sonnet shows: —

## THE CHRISTMAS TREE AT 'THE PINES.'

Life still hath one romance that naught can bury —  
Not Time himself, who coffins Life's romances —  
For still will Christmas gild the year's mischances,  
If Childhood comes, as here, to make him merry —  
To kiss with lips more ruddy than the cherry —  
To smile with eyes outshining by their glances  
The Christmas tree – to dance with fairy dances

And crown his hoary brow with leaf and berry.  
And as to us, dear friend, the carols sung  
Are fresh as ever. Bright is yonder bough  
Of mistletoe as that which shone and swung  
When you and I and Friendship made a vow  
That Childhood's Christmas still should seal each brow —  
Friendship's, and yours, and mine – and keep us young.

I may also quote from 'Prophetic Pictures at Venice' this romantic description of the Rosicrucian Christmas: —

(The morning light falls on the Rosicrucian panel-picture called 'The Rosy Scar,' depicting Christian galley-slaves on board an Algerine galley, watching, on Christmas Eve, for the promised appearance of Rosenkreutz, as a 'rosy phantom.' The Lover reads aloud the descriptive verses on

the frame.)

While Night's dark horses waited for the wind,  
He stood – he shone – where Sunset's fiery glaives  
Flickered behind the clouds; then, o'er the waves,  
He came to them, Faith's remnant sorrow-thinned.  
The Paynim sailors clustering, tawny-skinned,  
Cried, 'Who is he that comes to Christian slaves?  
Nor water-sprite nor jinni of sunset caves,  
The rosy phantom stands nor winged nor finned.'

All night he stood till shone the Christmas star;  
Slowly the Rosy Cross, streak after streak,  
Flushed the grey sky – flushed sea and sail and spar,  
Flushed, blessing every slave's woe-wasted cheek.  
Then did great Rosenkreutz, the Dew-King speak:  
'Sufferers, take heart! Christ lends the Rosy Scar.'

# Chapter IX

## GEORGE BORROW

It was not until 1872 that Mr. Watts-Dunton was introduced to Borrow by Dr. Gordon Hake, Borrow's most intimate friend.

The way in which this meeting came about has been familiar to the readers of an autobiographical romance (not even yet published!) wherein Borrow appears under the name of Dereham, and Hake under the name of Gordon. But as some of these passages in a modified form have appeared in print in an introduction by Mr. Watts-Dunton to the edition of Borrow's 'Lavengro,' published by Messrs. Ward, Lock & Co., in 1893, there will be nothing incongruous in my quoting them here: —

“Great as was the difference in age between Gordon and me, there soon grew up an intimacy between us. It has been my experience to learn that an enormous deal of nonsense has been written about difference of age between friends of either sex. At that time I do not think I had one intimate friend of my own age except Rosamond, while I was on terms of something like intimacy with two or three distinguished men, each one of whom was certainly old enough to be my father. Basevi was one of these: so was Lineham. I daresay it was owing to some idiosyncrasy of mine, but the intimacy between me and the young fellows with whom I was brought into contact was mainly confined



to matters connected with field-sports. I found it far easier to be brought into relations of close intimacy with women of my own age than with men. But as Basevi told me that it was the same with himself, I suppose that this was not an eccentricity after all. When Gordon and I were together it never occurred to me that there was any difference in our ages at all, and he told me that it was the same with himself.

One day when I was sitting with him in his delightful house near Roehampton, whose windows at the back looked over Richmond Park, and in front over the wildest part of Wimbledon Common, one of his sons came in and said that he had seen Dereham striding across the common, evidently bound for the house.

‘Dereham!’ I said. ‘Is there a man in the world I should so like to see as Dereham?’

And then I told Gordon how I had seen him years before swimming in the sea off Yarmouth, but had never spoken to him.

‘Why do you want so much to see him?’ asked Gordon.

‘Well, among other things I want to see if he is a true Child of the Open Air.’

Gordon laughed, perfectly understanding what I meant. But it is necessary here to explain what that meaning was.

We both agreed that, with all the recent cultivation of the picturesque by means of watercolour landscape, descriptive novels, ‘Cook’s excursions,’ etc., the real passion for Nature is as rare as ever it was – perhaps rarer. It was, we believed, quite an affair of individual temperament: it cannot be learned; it cannot be lost. That no writer has ever tried to

explain it shows how little it is known. Often it has but little to do with poetry, little with science. The poet, indeed, rarely has it at its very highest; the man of science as rarely. I wish I could define it. In human souls – in one, perhaps, as much as in another – there is always that instinct for contact which is a great factor of progress; there is always an irresistible yearning to escape from isolation, to get as close as may be to some other conscious thing. In most individuals this yearning is simply for contact with other human souls; in some few it is not. There are some in every country of whom it is the blessing, not the bane that, owing to some exceptional power, or to some exceptional infirmity, they can get closer to ‘Natura Benigna’ herself, closer to her whom we now call ‘Inanimate Nature,’ than to brother, sister, wife, or friend. Darwin among English savants, and Emily Brontë among English poets, and Sinfi Lovell among English gypsies, showed a good deal of the characteristics of the ‘Children of the Open Air.’ But in regard to Darwin, besides the strength of his family ties, the pedantic inquisitiveness, the methodizing pedantry of the man of science; in Emily Brontë, the sensitivity to human contact; and in Sinn Lovell, subjection to the love passion – disturbed, and indeed partially stifled, the native instinct with which they were undoubtedly endowed. I was perfectly conscious that I belonged to the third case of Nature-worshippers – that is, I was one of those who, howsoever strongly drawn to Nature and to a free and unconventional life, felt the strength of the love passion to such a degree that it prevented my claiming to be a genuine Child of the

## Open Air.

Between the true 'Children of the Open Air' and their fellows there are barriers of idiosyncrasy, barriers of convention, or other barriers quite indefinable, which they find most difficult to overpass, and, even when they succeed in overpassing them, the attempt is not found to be worth the making. For, what this kind of Nature-worshipper finds in intercourse with his fellow-men is, not the unegoistic frankness of Nature, his first love, inviting him to touch her close, soul to soul – but another ego enisled like his own – sensitive, shrinking, like his own – a soul which, love him as it may, is, nevertheless, and for all its love, the central ego of the universe to itself, the very Alcyone round whom all other Nature-worshippers revolve like the rest of the human constellations. But between these and Nature there is no such barrier, and upon Nature they lavish their love, 'a most equal love' that varies no more with her change of mood than does the love of a man for a beautiful woman, whether she smiles, or weeps, or frowns. To them a Highland glen is most beautiful; so is a green meadow; so is a mountain gorge or a barren peak; so is a South American savannah. A balmy summer is beautiful, but not more beautiful than a winter's sleet beating about the face, and stinging every nerve into delicious life.

To the 'Child of the Open Air' life has but few ills; poverty cannot touch him. Let the Stock Exchange rob him of his bonds, and he will go and tend sheep in Sacramento Valley, perfectly content to see a dozen faces in a year; so far from being lonely, he has got the sky, the wind, the brown

grass, and the sheep. And as life goes on, love of Nature grows, both as a cultus and a passion, and in time Nature seems 'to know him and love him' in her turn.

Dereham entered, and, suddenly coming upon me, there was no retreating, and we were introduced.

He tried to be as civil as possible, but evidently he was much annoyed. Yet there was something in the very tone of his voice that drew my heart to him, for to me he was the hero of my boyhood still. My own shyness was being rapidly fingered off by the rough handling of the world, but his retained all the bloom of youth, and a terrible barrier it was; yet I attacked it manfully. I knew from his books that Dereham had read but little except in his own out-of-the-way directions; but then, unfortunately, like all specialists, he considered that in these his own special directions lay all the knowledge that was of any value. Accordingly, what appeared to Dereham as the most striking characteristic of the present age was its ignorance. Unfortunately, too, I knew that for strangers to talk of his own published books, or of gypsies, appeared to him to be 'prying,' though there I should have been quite at home. I knew, however, from his books that in the obscure English pamphlet literature of the last century, recording the sayings and doings of eccentric people and strange adventures, Dereham was very learned, and I too chanced to be far from ignorant in that direction. I touched on Bamfylde Moore Carew, but without effect. Dereham evidently considered that every properly educated man was familiar with the story of Bamfylde Moore Carew in its every detail. Then I touched upon beer, the British

bruiser, ‘gentility nonsense,’ and other ‘nonsense’; then upon etymology – traced hoity-toityism to ‘toit,’ a roof – but only to have my shallow philology dismissed with a withering smile. I tried other subjects in the same direction, but with small success, till in a lucky moment I bethought myself of Ambrose Gwinett. There is a very scarce eighteenth century pamphlet narrating the story of Ambrose Gwinett, the man who, after having been hanged and gibbeted for murdering a traveller with whom he had shared a double-bedded room at a seaside inn, revived in the night, escaped from the gibbet-irons, went to sea as a common sailor, and afterwards met on a British man-of-war the very man he had been hanged for murdering. The truth was that Gwinett’s supposed victim, having been seized on the night in question with a violent bleeding at the nose, had risen and left the house for a few minutes’ walk in the sea-breeze, when the press-gang captured him and bore him off to sea, where he had been in service ever since. I introduced the subject of Ambrose Gwinett, and Douglas Jerrold’s play upon it, and at once the ice between us thawed and we became friends.

We all went out of the house and looked over the common. It chanced that at that very moment there were a few gypsies encamped on the sunken road opposite to Gordon’s house. These same gypsies, by the by, form the subject of a charming sketch by Herkomer which appeared in the ‘Graphic.’ Borrow took the trouble to assure us that they were not of the better class of gypsies, the gryengroes, but basket-makers. After passing this group we went on the common. We did not at first talk much, but it delighted me

to see the mighty figure, strengthened by the years rather than stricken by them, striding along between the whin bushes or through the quags, now stooping over the water to pluck the wild mint he loved, whose lilac-coloured blossoms perfumed the air as he crushed them, now stopping to watch the water wagtails by the ponds.

After the stroll we turned back and went, at Dereham's suggestion, for a ramble through Richmond Park, calling on the way at the 'Bald-Faced Stag' in Kingston Vale, in order that Dereham should introduce me to Jerry Abershaw's sword, which was one of the special glories of that once famous hostelry. A divine summer day it was I remember – a day whose heat would have been oppressive had it not been tempered every now and then by a playful silvery shower falling from an occasional wandering cloud, whose slate-coloured body thinned at the edges to a fringe of lace brighter than any silver.

These showers, however, seemed, as Dereham remarked, merely to give a rich colour to the sunshine, and to make the wild flowers in the meadows on the left breathe more freely. In a word, it was one of those uncertain summer days whose peculiarly English charm was Dereham's special delight. He liked rain, but he liked it falling on the green umbrella (enormous, shaggy, like a gypsy-tent after a summer storm) he generally carried. As we entered the Robin Hood Gate we were confronted by a sudden weird yellow radiance, magical and mysterious, which showed clearly enough that in the sky behind us there was gleaming over the fields and over Wimbledon

Common a rainbow of exceptional brilliance, while the raindrops sparkling on the ferns seemed answering every hue in the magic arch far away. Dereham told us some interesting stories of Romany superstition in connection with the rainbow – how, by making a ‘trus’hul’ (cross) of two sticks, the Romany chi who ‘pens the dukkerin can wipe the rainbow out of the sky,’ etc. Whereupon Gordon, quite as original a man as Dereham, and a humourist of a rarer temper, launched out into a strain of wit and whim, which it is not my business here to record, upon the subject of the ‘Spirit of the Rainbow’ which I, as a child, went out to find.

Dereham loved Richmond Park, and he seemed to know every tree. I found also that he was extremely learned in deer, and seemed familiar with every dappled coat which, washed and burnished by the showers, seemed to shine in the sun like metal. Of course, I observed him closely, and I began to wonder whether I had encountered, in the silvery-haired giant striding by my side, with a vast umbrella under his arm, a true ‘Child of the Open Air.’

‘Did a true Child of the Open Air ever carry a gigantic green umbrella that would have satisfied Sarah Gamp herself?’ I murmured to Gordon, while Dereham lingered under a tree and, looking round the Park, said in a dreamy way, ‘Old England! Old England!’

It was the umbrella, green, manifold and bulging, under Dereham’s arm, that made me ask Gordon, as Dereham walked along beneath the trees, ‘Is he a genuine Child of the Open Air?’ And then, calling to mind the books he had written, I said: ‘He went into the Dingle, and lived alone

– went there, not as an experiment in self-education, as Thoreau went and lived by Walden Pond. He could enjoy living alone, for the ‘horrors’ to which he was occasionally subject did not spring from solitary living. He was never disturbed by passion as was the Nature-worshipper who once played such selfish tricks with Sinfi Lovell, and as Emily Brontë would certainly have been had she been placed in such circumstances as Charlotte Brontë placed Shirley.’

‘But the most damning thing of all,’ said Gordon, ‘is that umbrella, gigantic and green: a painful thought that has often occurred to me.’

‘Passion has certainly never disturbed his nature-worship,’ said I. ‘So devoid of passion is he that to depict a tragic situation is quite beyond his powers. Picturesque he always is, powerful never. No one reading an account of the privations of the hero of this story finds himself able to realize from Dereham’s description the misery of a young man tenderly reared, and with all the pride of an East Anglian gentleman, living on bread and water in a garret, with starvation staring him in the face. It is not passion,’ I said to Gordon, ‘that prevents Dereham from enjoying the peace of the Nature-worshipper. It is Ambition! His books show that he could never cleanse his stuffed bosom of the perilous stuff of ambition. To become renowned, judging from many a peroration in his books, was as great an incentive to Dereham to learn languages as to Alexander Smith’s poet-hero it was an incentive to write poetry.’

‘Ambition and the green gamp,’ said Gordon. ‘But look,



the rainbow is fading from the sky without the intervention of gypsy sorceries; and see how the ferns are changing colour with the change in the light.'

But I soon found that if Dereham was not a perfect Child of the Open Air, he was something better: a man of that deep sympathy with human kind which the 'Child of the Open Air' must needs lack.

Knowing Dereham's extraordinary shyness and his great dislike of meeting strangers, Gordon, while Dereham was trying to get as close to the deer as they would allow, expressed to me his surprise at the terms of cordial friendship that sprang up between us during that walk. But I was not surprised: there were several reasons why Dereham should at once take to me – reasons that had nothing whatever to do with any inherent attractiveness of my own.

By recalling what occurred I can throw a more brilliant light upon Dereham's character than by any kind of analytical disquisition.

Two herons rose from the Ponds and flew away to where they probably had their nests. By the expression on Dereham's face as he stood and gazed at them, I knew that, like myself, he had a passion for herons.

'Were there many herons around Whittlesea Mere before it was drained?' I said.

'I should think so,' said he dreamily, 'and every kind of water bird.'

Then, suddenly turning round upon me with a start, he said, 'But how do you know that I knew Whittlesea Mere?'

‘You say in one of your books that you played among the reeds of Whittlesea Mere when you were a child.’

‘I don’t mention Whittlesea Mere in any of my books,’ he said.

‘No,’ said I, ‘but you speak of a lake near the old State prison at Norman Cross, and that was Whittlesea Mere.’

‘Then you know Whittlesea Mere?’ said Dereham, much interested.

‘I know the place that was Whittlesea Mere before it was drained,’ I said, ‘and I know the vipers around Norman Cross, and I think I know the lane where you first met that gypsy you have immortalized. He was a generation before my time. Indeed, I never was thrown much across the Petulengroes in the Eastern Counties, but I knew some of the Hernes and the Lees and the Lovells.’

I then told him what I knew about Romanies and vipers, and also gave him Marcianus’s story about the Moors being invulnerable to the viper’s bite, and about their putting the true breed of a suspected child to the test by setting it to grasp a viper – as he, Dereham, when a child, grasped one of the vipers of Norman Cross.

‘The gypsies,’ said Dereham, ‘always believed me to be a Romany. But surely you are not a Romany Rye?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘but I am a student of folk-lore; and besides, as it has been my fortune to see every kind of life in England, high and low, I could not entirely neglect the Romanies, could I?’

‘I should think not,’ said Dereham indignantly.

‘But I hope you don’t know the literary class among the

rest.'

'Gordon is my only link to that dark world,' I said, 'and even you don't object to Gordon. I am purer than he, purer than you, from the taint of printers' ink.'

He laughed. 'Who are you?'

'The very question I have been asking myself ever since I was a child in short frocks,' I said, 'and have never yet found an answer. But Gordon agrees with me that no well-bred soul should embarrass itself with any such troublesome query.'

This gave a chance to Gordon, who in such local reminiscences as these had been able to take no part. The humorous mystery of Man's personality had often been a subject of joke between him and me in many a ramble in the Park and elsewhere. At once he threw himself into a strain of whimsical philosophy which partly amused and partly vexed Dereham, who stood waiting to return to the subject of the gypsies and East Anglia.

'You are an Englishman?' said Dereham.

'Not only an Englishman, but an East Englishman,' I said, using a phrase of his own in one of his books – 'if not a thorough East Anglian, an East Midlander; who, you will admit, is nearly as good.'

'Nearly,' said Dereham.

And when I went on to tell him that I once used to drive a genuine 'Shales mare,' a descendant of that same famous Norfolk trotter who could trot fabulous miles an hour, to whom he with the Norfolk farmers raised his hat in reverence at the Norwich horse fair; and when I promised

to show him a portrait of this same East Anglian mare with myself behind her in a dogcart – an East Anglian dogcart; when I praised the stinging saltiness of the sea water off Yarmouth, Lowestoft, and Cromer, the quality which makes it the best, the most buoyant, the most delightful of all sea-water to swim in; when I told him that the only English river in which you could see reflected the rainbow he loved was ‘the glassy Ouse’ of East Anglia, and the only place in England where you could see it reflected in the wet sand was the Norfolk coast; and when I told him a good many things showing that I was in very truth, not only an Englishman, but an East Englishman, my conquest of Dereham was complete, and from that moment we became friends.

Gordon meanwhile stood listening to the rooks in the distance. He turned and asked Dereham whether he had never noticed a similarity between the kind of muffled rattling roar made by the sea waves upon a distant pebbly beach and the sound of a large rookery in the distance.

‘It is on sand alone,’ said Dereham, ‘that the sea strikes its true music – Norfolk sand; a rattle is not music.’

‘The best of the sea’s lutes,’ I said, ‘is made by the sands of Cromer.’”

These famous walks with Borrow (or Dereham, as he is called in the above quotation) in Richmond Park and the neighbourhood, have been thus described by the ‘Gordon’ of the story in one of the sonnets in ‘The New Day’: —

And he the walking lord of gipsy lore!

How often 'mid the deer that grazed the park,  
Or in the fields and heath and windy moor,  
Made musical with many a soaring lark,  
Have we not held brisk commune with him there,  
While Lavengro, there towering by your side,  
With rose complexion and bright silvery hair,  
Would stop amid his swift and lounging stride  
To tell the legends of the fading race —  
As at the summons of his piercing glance,  
Its story peopling his brown eyes and face,  
While you called up that pendant of romance  
To Petulengro with his boxing glory,  
Your Amazonian Sinfi's noble story!

In the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' and in Chambers' 'Cyclopædia of English Literature,' and scattered through scores of articles in the 'Athenæum,' I find descriptions of Borrow and allusions to him without number. They afford absolutely the only portrait of that wonderful man that exists or is ever likely to exist. But, of course, it is quite impossible for me to fill my pages with Borrow when there are so many more important figures waiting to be introduced. Still, I must find room for the most brilliant little Borrow scene of all, for it will flush these pages with a colour which I feel they need. Mr. Watts-Dunton has been described as the most picturesque of all living writers, whether in verse or in prose, and it is not for me to gainsay that judgment; but never, I think, is he so picturesque as when he is writing about

Borrow.

I am not quite clear as to where the following picture of gypsy life is to be localized; but the scenery seems to be that of the part of England where East Anglia and the Midlands join. It adds interest to the incident to know that the beautiful gypsy girl was the prototype of Rhona Boswell, and that Dereham is George Borrow. This also is a chapter from the unpublished story before mentioned, which was afterwards modified to be used in an introductory essay to another of Borrow's books: —

“It was in the late summer, just before the trees were clothed with what Dereham called ‘gypsy gold,’ and the bright green of the foliage showed scarcely a touch of bronze – at that very moment, indeed, when the spirits of all the wild flowers that have left the commons and the hedgerows seem to come back for an hour and mingle their half-forgotten perfumes with the new breath of calamint, ground ivy, and pimpernel. Dereham gave me as hearty a greeting as so shy a man could give. He told me that he was bound for a certain camp of gryengroes, old friends of his in his wandering days. In conversation I reminded him of our previous talk, and I told him I chanced at that very moment to have in my pocket a copy of the volume of Matthew Arnold in which appears ‘The Scholar-Gypsy.’ Dereham said he well remembered my directing his attention to ‘The Scholar-Gypsy.’ After listening attentively to it, Dereham declared that there was scarcely any latter-day poetry worth reading, and also that, whatever the merits of Matthew Arnold's poem might be, from any supposed artistic point

of view, it showed that Arnold had no conception of the Romany temper, and that no gypsy could sympathise with it, or even understand its motive in the least degree. I challenged this, contending that howsoever Arnold's classic language might soar above a gypsy's intelligence, the motive was so clearly developed that the most illiterate person could grasp it.

'I wish,' said Dereham, 'you would come with me to the camp and try the poem upon the first intelligent gypsy woman we meet at the camp. As to gypsy men,' said he, 'they are too prosaic to furnish a fair test.'

We agreed, and as we were walking across the country Dereham became very communicative, and talked very volubly upon gentility-nonsense, and many other pet subjects of his. I already knew that he was no lover of the aristocracy of England, or, as he called them, the 'trumpery great,' although in other regards he was such a John Bull. By this time we had proceeded a good way on our little expedition. As we were walking along, Dereham's eyes, which were as longsighted as a gypsy's, perceived a white speck in a twisted old hawthorn-bush some distance off. He stopped and said: 'At first I thought that white speck in the bush was a piece of paper, but it's a magpie,' – next to the water-wagtail, the gypsies' most famous bird. On going up to the bush we discovered a magpie couched among the leaves. As it did not stir at our approach, I said to him: 'It is wounded – or else dying – or is it a tamed bird escaped from a cage?' 'Hawk!' said Dereham laconically, and turned up his face and gazed into the sky. 'The magpie is waiting

till the hawk has caught his quarry and made his meal. I fancied he has himself been ‘chivvied’ by the hawk, as the gypsies would say.’

And there, sure enough, beneath one of the silver clouds that speckled the dazzling blue, a hawk – one of the kind which takes its prey in the open rather than in the thick woodlands – was wheeling up and up, trying its best to get above a poor little lark in order to swoop at and devour it. That the magpie had seen the hawk and had been a witness of the opening of the tragedy of the lark was evident, for in its dread of the common foe of all well-intentioned and honest birds, it had forgotten its fear of all creatures except the hawk. Man, in such a crisis as this, it looked upon as a protecting friend.

As we were gazing at the bird a woman’s voice at our elbows said, —

‘It’s lucky to chivvy the hawk what chivvies a magpie. I shall stop here till the hawk’s flew away.’

We turned round, and there stood a fine young gypsy woman, carrying, gypsy fashion, a weakly child that in spite of its sallow and wasted cheek proclaimed itself to be hers. By her side stood a young gypsy girl. She was beautiful – quite remarkably so – but her beauty was not of the typical Romany kind. It was, as I afterwards learned, more like the beauty of a Capri girl.

She was bareheaded – there was not even a gypsy handkerchief on her head – her hair was not plaited, and was not smooth and glossy like a gypsy girl’s hair, but flowed thick and heavy and rippling down the back of her neck and



upon her shoulders. In the tumbled tresses glittered certain objects, which at first sight seemed to be jewels. They were small dead dragonflies, of the crimson kind called 'sylphs.'

To Dereham these gypsies were evidently well known. The woman with the child was one of the Boswells; I dare not say what was her connection, if any, with 'Boswell the Great' – I mean Sylvester Boswell, the grammarian and 'well-known and popalated gypsy of Codling Gap,' who, on a memorable occasion, wrote so eloquently about the superiority of the gypsy mode of life to all others, 'on the account of health, sweetness of air, and for enjoying the pleasure of Nature's life.'

Dereham told me in a whisper that her name was Perpinia, and that the other gypsy, the girl of the dragonflies, was the famous beauty of the neighbourhood – Rhona Boswell, of whom many stories had reached him with regard to Percy Aylwin, a relative of Rosamond's father.

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