

By the same Author
PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY CRITICISM
COLERIDGE ON IMAGINATION
MENCIVS ON THE MIND
BASIC ENGLISH AND ITS USES
INTERPRETATION IN TEACHING
THE REPUBLIC OF PLATO
THE WRATH OF ACHILLES

(PRACTICAL CRITICISM)

A Study of
LITERARY JUDGMENT

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INTRODUCTORY

I HAVE set three aims before me in constructing this book. First, to introduce a new kind of documentation to those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture whether as critics, as philosophers, as teachers, as psychologists, or merely as curious persons. Secondly, to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry (and cognate matters) and why they should like or dislike it. Thirdly, to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read.

For the first purpose I have used copious quotations from material supplied to me as a Lecturer at Cambridge and elsewhere. For some years I have made the experiment of issuing printed sheets of poems—ranging in character from a poem by Shakespeare to a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox—to audiences who were requested to comment freely in writing upon them. The authorship of the poems was not revealed, and with rare exceptions it was not recognised.

After a week's interval I would collect these comments, taking certain obvious precautions to preserve the anonymity of the commentators, since only through anonymity could complete liberty to express their genuine opinions be secured for the writers. Care was taken to refrain from influencing them either for or against any poem. Four poems were issued at a time in groupings indicated in the

Appendix, in which the poems I am here using will be found. I would, as a rule, hint that the poems were perhaps a mixed lot, but that was the full extent of my interference. I lectured the following week partly upon the poems, but rather more upon the comments, or protocols, as I call them.

Much astonishment both for the protocol-writers and for the Lecturer ensued from this procedure. The opinions expressed were not arrived at lightly or from one reading of the poems only. As a measure of indirect suggestion, I asked each writer to record on his protocol the number of 'readings' made of each poem. A number of perusals made at one session were to be counted together as one 'reading' provided that they aroused and sustained one single growing response to the poem, or alternatively led to no response at all and left the reader with nothing but the bare words before him on the paper. This description of a 'reading' was, I believe, well understood. It follows that readers who recorded as many as ten or a dozen readings had devoted no little time and energy to their critical endeavour. Few writers gave less than four attacks to any of the poems. On the whole it is fairly safe to assert that the poems received much more thorough study than, shall we say, most anthology pieces get in the ordinary course. It is from this thoroughness, prompted by the desire to arrive at some definite expressible opinion, and from the week's leisure allowed that these protocols derive their significance. The standing of the writers must be made clear. The majority were undergraduates reading English with a view to an Honours Degree. A considerable number were reading other subjects but there is no ground to suppose that these differed for this reason in any essential respect. There was a sprinkling of graduates, and a few members of the audience were non-academic. Men and women were probably

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included in about equal numbers, so, in what follows 'he' must constantly be read as equivalent to 'he or she'. There was no compulsion to return protocols. Those who took the trouble to write—about 60 per cent.—may be presumed to have been actuated by a more than ordinarily keen interest in poetry. From such comparisons as I have been able to make with protocols supplied by audiences of other types, I see no reason whatever to think that a higher standard of critical discernment can easily be found under our present cultural conditions. Doubtless, could the Royal Society of Literature or the Academic Committee of the English Association be impounded for purposes of experiment we might expect greater uniformity in the comments or at least in their style, and a more wary approach as regards some of the dangers of the test. But with regard to equally essential matters occasions for surprise might still occur. The precise conditions of this test are not duplicated in our everyday commerce with literature. Even the reviewers of new verse have as a rule a considerable body of the author's work to judge by. And editorial complaints are frequent as to the difficulty of obtaining good reviewing. Editors themselves will not be the slowest to agree with me upon the difficulty of judging verse without a hint as to its provenance.

Enough, for the moment, about the documentation of this book. My second aim is more ambitious and requires more explanation. It forms part of a general attempt to modify our procedure in certain forms of discussion. There are subjects—mathematics, physics and the descriptive sciences supply some of them—which can be discussed in terms of verifiable facts and precise hypotheses. There are other subjects—the concrete affairs of commerce, law, organisation and police work—which can be handled by rules of thumb and generally accepted conven-

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tions. But in between is the vast *corpus* of problems, assumptions, adumbrations, fictions, prejudices, tenets; the sphere of random beliefs and hopeful guesses; the whole world, in brief, of abstract opinion and disputation about matters of feeling. To this world belongs everything about which civilised man cares most. I need only instance ethics, metaphysics, morals, religion, aesthetics, and the discussions surrounding liberty, nationality, justice, love, truth, faith and knowledge to make this plain. As a subject-matter for discussion, poetry is a central and typical denizen of this world. It is so both by its own nature and by the type of discussion with which it is traditionally associated. It serves, therefore, as an eminently suitable *bait* for anyone who wishes to trap the current opinions and responses in this middle field for the purpose of examining and comparing them, and with a view to advancing our knowledge of what may be called the natural history of human opinions and feelings.

In part then this book is the record of a piece of field-work in comparative ideology. But I hope, not only to present an instructive collection of contemporary opinions, presuppositions, theories, beliefs, responses and the rest, but also to make some suggestions towards a better control of these tricky components of our lives. The way in which it is hoped to do this can only be briefly indicated at this point.

There are two ways of interpreting all but a very few utterances.

Whenever we hear or read any not too nonsensical opinion, a tendency so strong and so automatic that it must have been formed along with our earliest speech-habits, leads us to consider *what seems to be said* rather than the *mental operations* of the person who said it. If the speaker is a recognised and obvious liar this tendency is, of course, arrested.

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We do then neglect what he has said and turn our attention instead to the motives or mechanisms that have caused him to say it. But ordinarily we at once try to consider the objects his words seem to stand for and not the mental goings-on that led him to use the words. We say that we 'follow his thought' and mean, not that we have traced what happened in his mind, but merely that we have gone through a train of thinking that seems to end where he ended. We are in fact so anxious to discover whether we agree or not with what is being said that we overlook the mind that says it, unless some very special circumstance calls us back.

Compare now the attitude to speech of the alienist attempting to 'follow' the ravings of mania or the dream manderings of a neurotic. I do not suggest that we should treat one another altogether as 'mental cases' but merely that for some subject-matters and some types of discussion the alienist's attitude, his direction of attention, his order or plan of interpretation, is far more fruitful, and would lead to better understanding on both sides of the discussion, than the usual method that our language-habits force upon us. For normal minds are easier to 'follow' than diseased minds, and even more can be learned by adopting the psychologist's attitude to ordinary speech-situations than by studying aberrations.

It is very strange that we have no simple verbal means by which to describe these two different kinds of 'meaning'. Some device as unmistakable as the 'up' or 'down' of a railway signal ought to be place in these pages, if only to counteract the indecent tendencies of the scene. For here are our friends and neighbours—may our very brothers and sisters—caught at a moment of abandon giving themselves and their literary reputations away with an unexampled freedom. It is indeed a sobering spectacle, but like some sighs of the hospital-ward very serviceable to restore proportions and recall to us what humanity, behind all its lendings and pretences, is like.

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available. But there is none. Clumsy and pedantic looking psychological periphrases have to be employed instead. I shall, however, try to use one piece of shorthand consistently. In handling the piles of material supplied by the protocols I shall keep the term 'statement' for those utterances whose 'meaning' in the sense of what they say, or purport to say, is the prime-object of interest. I shall reserve the term 'expression' for those utterances where it is the mental operations of the writers which are to be considered.)

When the full range of this distinction is realised the study of criticism takes on a new significance. But the distinction is not easy to observe. Even the firmest resolution will be constantly broken down, so strong are our native language habits. When views that seem to conflict with our own prepossessions are set before us, the impulse to refute, to combat or to reconstruct them, rather than to investigate them, is all but overwhelming. So the history of criticism,¹ like the history of all the middle subjects alluded to above, is a history of dogmatism and argumentation rather than a history of research. And like all such histories the chief lesson to be learnt from it is the futility of all argumentation that precedes understanding. We cannot profitably attack any opinion until we have discovered what it expresses as well as what it states; and our present technique for investigating opinions must be admitted, for all these middle subjects, to be woefully inadequate.

Therefore, the second aim of this book is to improve this technique. We shall have before us several hundreds of opinions upon particular aspects of poetry, and the poems themselves to help us to

¹ We shall meet in the protocols plenty of living instances of famous critical doctrines that are often thought to be now merely curiosities of opinion long since extinct.

examine them. We shall have the great advantage of being able to compare numbers of extremely different opinions upon the same point. We shall be able to study what may be called the same opinion in different stages of development as it comes from different minds. And further, we shall be able in many instances to see what happens to a given opinion, when it is applied to a different detail or a different poem.

The effect of all this is remarkable. When the first dizzy bewilderment has worn off, as it very soon does, it is as though we were strolling through and about a building that hitherto we were only able to see from one or two distant standpoints. We gain a much more intimate understanding both of the poem and of the opinions it provokes.¹ Something like a plan of the most usual approaches can be sketched and we learn what to expect when a new object, a new poem, comes up for discussion.

It is as a step towards another training and technique in discussion that I would best like this book to be regarded. If we are to begin to understand half the opinions which appear in the protocols we shall need no little mental plasticity. And in the course of our comparisons, interpretations and extrapolations something like a plan of the ways in which the likely ambiguities of any given term or opinion-formula may radiate will make itself apparent. For the hope of a new technique in discussion lies in this: that the study of the ambiguities of one term assists in the elucidation of another. To trace the meanings of 'sentimentality', 'truth', 'sincerity', or 'meaning' itself, as these terms are used in criticism, can help us with other words used in other

¹ A strange light, incidentally, is thrown upon the sources of popularity for poetry. Indeed I am not without fears that my efforts may prove of assistance to young poets (and others) desiring to increase their sales. A set of formulae for 'nation-wide appeal' seems to be a just possible outcome.

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topics. Ambiguity in fact is systematic; the separate senses that a word may have are related to one another, if not as strictly as the various aspects of a building, at least to a remarkable extent. Something comparable to a 'perspective' which will include and enable us to control and 'place' the rival meanings that bewilder us in discussion and hide our minds from one another can be worked out. Perhaps every intelligence that has ever reflected upon this matter will agree that this may be so. Every one agrees but no one does any research into the matter, although this is an affair in which even the slightest step forward affects the whole frontier line of human thought and discussion.

The indispensable instrument for this inquiry is psychology. I am anxious to meet as far as may be the objection that may be brought by some psychologists, and these the best, that the protocols do not supply enough evidence for us really to be able to make out the motives of the writers and that therefore the whole investigation is superficial. But the beginning of every research ought to be superficial, and to find something to investigate that is accessible and detachable is one of the chief difficulties of psychology. I believe the chief merit of the experiment here made is that it gives us this. Had I wished to plumb the depths of these writers' Unconscious, where I am quite willing to agree the real motives of their likings and dislikings would be found, I should have devised something like a branch of psychoanalytic technique for the purpose. But it was clear that little progress would be made if we attempted to drag too deep a plough. However, even as it is, enough strange material is turned up.

After these explanations the reader will be prepared to find little argumentation in these pages, but much analysis, much rather strenuous exercise

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Navigation

in changing our ground and a good deal of rather intricate navigation. Navigation, in fact—the art of knowing where we are wherever, as mental travellers, we may go—is the main subject of the book. To discuss poetry and the ways in which it may be approached, appreciated and judged is, of course, its prime purpose. But poetry itself is a mode of communication. What it communicates and how it does so and the worth of what is communicated form the subject-matter of criticism. It follows that criticism itself is very largely, though not wholly, an exercise in navigation. It is all the more surprising then that no treatise on the art and science of intellectual and emotional navigation has yet been written; for logic, which might appear to cover part of this field, in actuality hardly touches it.

That the one and only goal of all critical endeavours, of all interpretation, appreciation, exhortation, praise or abuse, is improvement in communication may seem an exaggeration. But in practice it is so. The whole apparatus of critical rules and principles is a means to the attainment of finer—more precise, more discriminating communication. There is, it is true, a valuation side to criticism. When we have solved, completely, the communication problem, when we have got, perfectly, the experience, the mental condition relevant to the poem, we have still to judge it, still to decide upon its worth. But the later question nearly always settles itself; or rather, our own inmost nature and the nature of the world in which we live decide it for us. Our prime endeavour must be to get the relevant mental condition and then see what happens. If we cannot then decide whether it is good or bad, it is doubtful whether any principles, however refined and subtle, can help us much. Without the capacity to get the experience they cannot help us at all. This is still clearer if we consider the use of critical maxims in

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teaching. Value cannot be demonstrated except through the communication of what is valuable.

Greatest principles, in fact, need wary handling. They can never be a substitute for discernment though they may assist us to avoid unnecessary blunders. There has hardly ever been a critical rule, principle or maxim which has not been for wise men a helpful guide but for fools a will-o'-the-wisp. All the great watchwords of criticism from Aristotle's 'Poetry is an imitation' down to the doctrine that 'Poetry is expression', are ambiguous pointers that different people follow to very different destinations. Even the most sagacious critical principles may, as we shall see, become merely a cover for critical ineptitude; and the most trivial or baseless generalisation may really mask good and discerning judgment. Everything turns upon how the principles are applied. It is to be feared that critical formulas, even the best, are responsible for more bad judgment than good, because it is far easier to forget their subtle sense and apply them crudely than to remember it and apply them finely.

The astonishing variety of human responses makes irksome any too systematic scheme for arranging these extracts. I wish to present a sufficient selection to bring the situation concretely before the reader, reserving to the chapters of Part III any serious attempt to clear up the various difficulties with which the protocol-writers have been struggling. I shall proceed poem by poem, allowing the internal drama latent in every clash of opinion, of taste or temperament to guide the arrangement. Not all the poems, needless to say, raise the same problems in equal measure. In most, some one outstanding difficulty, some special occasion for a division of minds, takes precedence.

It is convenient therefore to place here a somewhat arbitrary list of the principal difficulties that may be encountered by one reader or another in the presence of almost any poem. This list is suggested by a study of the protocols themselves, and drawn up in an order which proceeds from the simplest, infant's, obstacle to successful reading up to the most insidious, intangible and bewildering of critical problems.

If some of these difficulties seem so simple as to be hardly worth discussion, I would beg my reader who feels a temptation to despise them not to leap lightly to his decision. Part of my purpose is documentation and I am confident of showing that the simple difficulties are those that most need attention as they are those that in fact receive least.

We soon advance, however, to points on which more doubt may be felt—where controversy, more and less enlightened, still continues—and we finish face to face with questions which no one will pretend are yet settled and with some which will not be settled till the Day of Judgment. In the memorable words of Benjamin Paul Blood, 'What is concluded that we should conclude anything about it?'

The following seem to be the chief difficulties of criticism or, at least, those which we shall have most occasion to consider here:— *The difficulties of crit.:*

A. First must come the difficulty of making out the plain sense of poetry. The most disturbing and impressive fact brought out by this experiment is that a large proportion of average-to-good (and in some cases, certainly, devoted) readers of poetry frequently and repeatedly fail to understand it, both as a statement and as an expression.

They fail to make out its prose sense, its plain, overt meaning, as a set of ordinary, intelligible, English sentences, taken quite apart from any

X further poetic significance. And equally, they misapprehend its feeling, its tone, and its intention. They would travesty it in a paraphrase. They fail to construe it just as a schoolboy fails to construe a piece of Caesar. How serious in its effects in different instances this failure may be, we shall have to consider with care. It is not confined to one class of readers; not only those whom we would suspect fall victims. Nor is it only the most abstruse poetry which so betrays us. In fact, to set down, for once, the brutal truth, no immunity is possessed on any occasion, not by the most reputable scholar, from this or any other of these critical dangers.

B. Parallel to, and not unconnected with, these difficulties of interpreting the meaning are the difficulties of sensuous apprehension. Words in sequence have a form to the mind's ear and the mind's tongue and larynx, even when silently read. They have a movement and may have a rhythm. The gulf is wide between a reader who naturally and immediately perceives this form and movement (by a conjunction of sensory, intellectual and emotional sagacity) and another reader, who either ignores it or has to build it up laboriously with finger-counting, table-tapping and the rest; and this difference has most far-reaching effects.

C. Next may come those difficulties that are connected with the place of imagery, principally visual imagery, in poetic reading. They arise in part from the incurable fact that we differ immensely in our capacity to visualise, and to produce imagery of the other senses. Also the importance of our imagery as a whole, as well as of some particular type of image, in our mental lives varies surprisingly. Some

minds can do nothing and get nowhere without images; others seem to be able to do everything and get anywhere, reach any and every state of thought and feeling without making use of them. Poets on the whole (though by no means all poets always) may be suspected of exceptional imaging capacity, and some readers are constitutionally prone to stress the place of imagery in reading, to pay great attention to it, and even to judge the value of the poetry by the images it excites in them. But images are erratic things; lively images aroused in one mind need have no similarity to the equally lively images stirred by the same line of poetry in another, and neither set need have anything to do with any images which may have existed in the poet's mind. Here is a troublesome source of critical deviations.

D. Thirdly, more obviously, we have to note the powerful very pervasive influence of mnemonic irrelevances. These are misleading effects of the reader's being reminded of some personal scene or adventure, erratic associations, the interference of emotional reverberations from a past which may have nothing to do with the poem. Relevance is not an easy notion to define or to apply, though some instances of irrelevant intrusions are among the simplest of all accidents to diagnose.

E. More puzzling and more interesting are the critical traps that surround what may be called Stock Responses. These have their opportunity whenever a poem seems to, or does, involve views and emotions already fully prepared in the reader's mind, so that what happens appears to be more of the reader's doing than the poet's. The button is pressed, and then the author's

work is done, for immediately the record starts playing in quasi- (or total) independence of the poem which is supposed to be its origin or instrument.

Whenever this lamentable redistribution of the poet's and reader's share in the labour of poetry occurs, or is in danger of occurring, we require to be especially on our guard. Every kind of injustice may be committed as well by those who just escape as by those who are caught.

F. Sentimentality is a peril that needs less comment here. It is a question of the due measure of response. This over-facility in certain emotional directions is the Scylla whose Charybdis is—

G. Inhibition. This, as much as Sentimentality, is a positive phenomenon, though less studied until recent years and somewhat masked under the title of Hardness of Heart. But neither can well be considered in isolation.

H. Doctrinal Adhesions present another troublesome problem. Very much poetry—religious poetry may be instanced—seems to contain or imply views and beliefs, true or false, about the world. If this be so, what bearing has the truth-value of the views upon the worth of the poetry? Even if it be not so, if the beliefs are not really contained or implied, but only seem so to a non-poetical reading, what should be the bearing of the reader's conviction, if any, upon his estimate of the poetry? Has poetry anything to say; if not, why not, and if so, how? Difficulties at this point are a fertile source of confusion and erratic judgment.

I. Passing now to a different order of difficulties, the effects of technical presuppositions have to be noted. When something has once been well

done in a certain fashion we tend to expect similar things to be done in the future in the same fashion, and are disappointed or do not reorganise them if they are done differently. Conversely, a technique which has shown its ineptitude for one purpose tends to become discredited for all. Both are cases of mistaking means for ends. Whenever we attempt to judge poetry from outside by technical details we are putting means before ends, and such is our ignorance of cause and effect in poetry—we shall be lucky if we do not make even worse blunders. We have to try to avoid judging pianists by their hair.

J. Finally, general critical preconceptions (prior demands made upon poetry as a result of theories—conscious or unconscious—about its nature and value), intervene endlessly, as the history of criticism shows only too well, between the reader and the poem. Like an unlucky dietetic formula they may cut him off from what he is starving for, even when it is at his very lips.

These difficulties, as will have been observed, are not unconnected with one another and indeed overlap. They might have been collected under more heads or fewer. Yet, if we set aside certain extreme twists or trends of the personality (for example, blinding narcissism or grovelling self-abasement—aberrations, temporary or permanent, of the self-regarding sentiment) together with undue accumulations or depletions of energy, I believe that most of the principal obstacles and causes of failure in the reading and judgment of poetry may without much straining be brought under these ten heads. But they are too roughly sketched here for this to be judged.

More by good luck than by artful design, each poem, as a rule, proved an invitation to the mass of its readers to grapple with some *one* of the difficulties that have just been indicated. Thus a certain sporting interest may be felt by the sagacious critic in divining where, in each case, the dividing line of opinion will fall, and upon what considerations it will turn. No attempt will be made, in the survey which follows, to do more than shake out and air these variegated opinions. Elucidations, both of the poems and the opinions, will be for the most part postponed, as well as my endeavours to adjudicate upon the poetic worth of the unfortunate subjects of debate.

A very natural suspicion may fittingly be countered in this place. Certain doubts were occasionally expressed to me after a lecture that not all the protocol extracts were equally genuine. It was hinted that I might have myself composed some of those which came in most handily to illustrate a point. But none of the protocols have been tampered with and nothing has been added. I have even left the spelling and punctuation unchanged in all significant places.

But another falsification may perhaps be charged against me, falsification through bias in selection. Space, and respect for the reader's impatience, obviously forbade my printing the whole of my material. Selected extracts alone could be ventured. With a little cunning it would be possible to make selections that would give very different impressions. I can only say that I have been on my guard against unfairness. I ought to add perhaps that the part of the material least adequately represented is the havering, non-committal, vague, sit-on-the-fence, middle-body of opinion. I would have put in more of this if it were not such profitless reading.

Subjectivity

note:
D. N. Chubb

PART TWO DOCUMENTATION

But enough of this : there is such a variety of game springing up before me, that I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty.

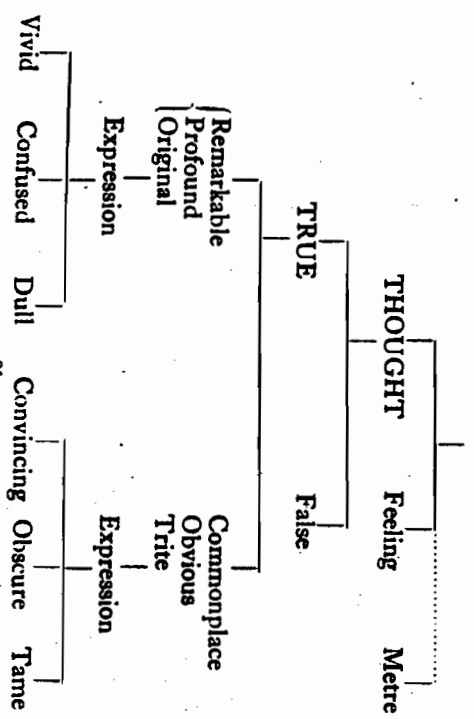
DRYDEN on the *Canterbury Pilgrims*.

Life's more than breath and the quick round of blood.
 'Tis a great spirit and a busy heart ;
 The coward and the small in soul scarce do live.
 One generous feeling, one great thought, one deed
 Of good, ere night, would make life longer seem
 Than if each year might number a thousand days
 Spent as is this by nations of mankind.
 We live in deeds, not years ; in thoughts, not breaths ;
 In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
 We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
 Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

POEM I

- message
- truth
- worth

HERE, for once, in the opinions maintained about the central point, Nature shows a taste for system, and gives us the rare satisfaction of seeing nearly all the logical possibilities well represented in living and lively form. The central dispute concerned the place and value of the doctrine these verses propound, and whether that doctrine be well or ill expressed. Differing replies upon these matters were associated with high degrees of delight or disgust. That the thought contained is true ; that, on the contrary, it is false ; that, though true enough, it is commonplace ; that it is original and profound ; that, as a commonplace or as a paradox, it is finely or tamely, clearly or confusedly expressed ; these were the questions agitated. The various possible answers were so well represented that it seems worth while making up a table :—



First let the advocates of its excellence be heard.

1.11.1 Truth is the essence of art, and the outstanding feature of this passage is truth. The poet has expressed in vivid terms his conception of the higher, if not the highest plane of life and we who read his work, cannot fail to appreciate its *nobility of thought*² and realise its challenge to mankind. The verse is full of sentiment, but sentiment of the best kind.

Alas! we often fail to appreciate it, as is lamentably shown in what follows. But let those of more elevated temper continue.

1.12. Here is *noble thought* clothed fittingly and strikingly in *powerful verse*. The first nine lines especially appeal to me, ending, as they do, in effective antithesis.

1.13. A noble message, well conveyed by the form chosen.

'Noble' seems indeed a key-word to this passage.

1.14. These lines express the thoughts of a lofty soul in a simple yet impressive manner. They are lines which are worth remembering both on account of their thought and their concise and clear expression. The last phrase haunts the mind, but apart from this *the whole passage moves forward with a gentle motion* which tends to infix the words on the memory.

1 This numbering of the protocols is primarily introduced to facilitate reference. But the decimal system allows me also to use it to suggest certain groupings. The number before the decimal point (1— to 13—) indicates the poem which is being discussed. The first number after the point suggests, when it remains the same for a sequence of extracts, that the same general problem, approach, or view is being illustrated. Thus 1.11, 1.12, 1.13 . . . have some cognate bearing, but with 1.2 a different general topic has taken its place. Similarly with the later decimal places. For example, 1.141, 1.142 . . . may be especially considered along with 1.14, all being concerned in different ways with the same secondary point. (Here the metrical qualities of the passage.)

But I have not attempted to make this numbering strictly systematic. It is used as a rough indication of the moments when we pass over to a new question; it is a mere supplement to paragraphing, and any reader may neglect it at his discretion.

Unless otherwise expressly stated a different number implies a different writer.

² The italics in all cases are mine and are introduced not to distort the protocols (the reader will become used to them) but to direct the reader's attention without toil to the points with which, for the moment, my commentary is concerned—or to indicate where comparisons may be interesting.

It may seem strange that the phrase 'acts the best' should haunt the mind, but this is possibly not what the writer intended.

Not all those who agree about the lofty nobility of the passage and who most admire its expression are at one as to why this expression is to be admired.

1.141. The rather rugged metre makes the best possible setting for the *noble idea* of the poet. It carries one along with it, conveying the idea of someone speaking rapidly, his *words almost tumbling over each other*, in the stress of emotion: an instance of how a *noble theme* can inspire a poet to clothe it in *noble diction*, without any of the verbal embroideries often employed by poets, to make inferior themes palatable.

Words which 'almost tumble over one another' and yet 'move forward with a gentle motion' would seem impossibly versatile if we did not know how much this kind of movement in verse depends upon the reader. Several other views about the verse qualities are also found even among admirers.

1.142. The thought is the most important thing about this poem. The hint of paradox arrests the reader's attention, the truth of it gives one a feeling of satisfaction. It is expressed in *plain, straightforward speech* which is the best medium for a didactic poem.

1.143. I admire this because I think the thought expressed is true and interesting, and original in that it gives the impression of vivid personal experience, and it is of interest to all since it concerns all. The choice of common everyday words drives home the thought, by connecting it closely to ordinary life. The passage *gains little from the beauty of rhythm* and might with little or no loss have been written in prose.

1.144. A stimulating thought well expressed. The Author protests against half-heartedness. The theme, dealing with the true way of living, is naturally of a lofty character, and *blank verse* suits the subject-matter with peculiar felicity.

1.145. The short phrases in line four and the long sweep in 5, 6 dying away in 7, are magnificent. The last four lines clinch the argument perfectly.

Let us now hear something of the other side of the case before turning to the extreme enthusiasts.

r.15. The poem is worthless. The underlying idea, that life must be measured by its intensity as well as its duration is a familiar one. Consequently the poem is to be judged by its strength and originality of expression. The author has brought no freshness to his material; *his thought is flabby and confused; his verse is pedestrian*. Away with him!

The next writer adds a complaint which looks as though it might apply to much blank verse.

r.16. The moralising of this poem is too deliberate to be swallowed without a grimace. The poet had a few trite precepts of which to deliver himself, and failed to make the pills palatable by poetic wrappings. The metre and necessary accentuations are awkward, and *no relief is offered by any sort of rime scheme*.

Still more severe upon the same point is r.161; it is left to r.162 to restore the balance.

r.161. Excellent prose but not good verse; *not even smallest attempt at metre or rhyme*. Writer probably more of a philosopher than a poet: too matter-of-fact, too little Imagination and Fancy.

r.162. It is difficult to express one's attitude to this. The sentiment is very proper, but fails to rouse one to enthusiasm. What does the vague phrase "Spent as this is by nations of mankind", mean? And the construction from lines 4 to 7 is very clumsy. The thing could have been said five times more quickly—and would have been so in poetry. *This is prose, chopped up to fit a metrical scheme*. Contrast its rhetorical phrases with the concentration and fullness of No. 3.

An approach through comparisons is also made by r.163 which is more introspective and shows more emancipation from the tyranny of the 'message'.

r.163. Reminded of the pitched-up movement or strong artificial accent of post-Elizabethans. But this is without their complexity of thought, especially shown in metaphor. Imitative. Here the movement becomes more reflective, less an experience; a deliberate loading of rhythm—influence of the didactic pre-tensions. Wordsworth? Spurious. Mid-Victorian poetic drama? A collection of commonplace aphorisms on borrowed stils. I accept the statements with indifference. It might

have been written for a Calendar of Great Thoughts. Reading it aloud, I have to mouth it, and I felt ridiculously morally dignified.

Truth, of some kind, has hitherto been claimed or allowed by all, but more than one of the poet's assertions challenged a division.

r.17. On reading this my mind jumps up and disagrees—if *living is measured by intensity of feeling, cowards live as much as heroes*. Line 3 might be parodied with equal truth—

"One wounded feeling, one foul thought, one deed
Of crime, ere night, would make life longer seem".

The impression received was one of the self-satisfaction of the author (I do not say "poet")—a spinster devoted to good works, and sentimentally inclined, or perhaps Wordsworth. Large query to the last line.

Why Wordsworth's name should be considered such a telling missile is uncertain.

Still more vigorous is dissent upon the temporal issue.

r.18. Finally I disagree entirely that "great thoughts", "good deeds" or "noble feelings", make life seem longer, personally I feel they make it seem shorter.

But there are some who refuse to let a little difference like this come between them and the poet.

r.181. This poem expresses for me just that view of the difference between mere existence and life which seems truest. I never can conceive of time as some measurement indicated "in figures on a dial". Thought is the chief activity regarded as foolish or with complete indifference by those with whom one comes in contact *oftenest, i.e. "the small in soul"*. I do not speak in any bitterness but from my normal experience. It is this conclusion to which I seem to be forced which makes such a stanza as this seem to me to be fit to be 'shouted from the house tops'. That is why it appeals to me.

I do not agree however that "one great thought, one deed of good . . . would make life longer seem", than it does to men each humdrum day, but rather think "shorter" would express the idea better. I may think of it in a special sense however, which would not appeal to most and which I should find it almost impossible to explain, and in any case metaphysics is banned. I am sorry, for the idea is always the chief joy to me in poetry.

I must have been responsible for the ban on metaphysics by some request that the protocols should deal with the poetry rather than with the Universe. The 'stanza' remark may offset 1.16 and 1.161. The misanthropy finds a slight echo in 1.182 which again expresses doubt based on the facts of Temporal Perception; but a balm for disillusionment is discovered by 1.183.

1.182. Good on the whole, though it is doubtful if life really seems longer to the good than to the wicked or to the merely passive.

The lines are worth reading twice because they really do express something instead of just drivelling on like those of number II.

1.183. Suggests Browning to me, and is more interesting for that reason. But there is in this piece a more all-round handling of the idea than Browning would have given it. It seems to be the product of a man of middle age, who has taken the sweets of life and proved them mere vanity, but who has not turned cynic. It is at once healthy and profound.

Browning figures again in 1.19, where Wordsworth has some amends made to him.

1.19. One thought clearly and forcibly expressed. Idea expressed in the first two lines, amplified in the next seven and finally summed up in the last two. Chief effect—a familiar thought brought home with new conviction. The rhythm of blank verse—restraint combined with even flow—expressive of the meditateness and yet obvious truth of the idea. The passage reminiscent of the whole effort and accomplishment of the greatest poets, and in a secondary way of passages in Shakespeare, Shelley, Wordsworth, Browning, etc.

1.191. The thought a little obvious and I don't find anything in the expression to drive it home.

1.192. It is not a new thought, but the symmetry and perfect meter makes the old thought more impressive than if said in prose. The meter lends dignity, and makes it serious and profound.

After these jarring voices a more unanimous chorus will make a soothing close. It will be noticed

that the central issue, the doctrinal aspect of the passage, becomes less and less prominent and that Mnemonic Irrelevances and the possibilities of Sentimentality take its place.

1.193. I don't know why, but as soon as I read it, I linked it somehow with that poem of Julian Grenfell's, "Into Battle", and especially with this stanza, which immediately came into my mind.

"The black-bird sings to him, Brother, brother,
If this be the last song you shall sing,
Sing well, for you may not sing another,
—Brother, sing."

I think this was suggested by "we shall count time by heart-throbs" once again. A phrase of Robert Lynd's also came into my mind "the great hours of life—hours of passionate happiness and passionate sorrow". And I thought to myself "how true that is. These ARE the only hours in life that mean anything. Any why? Because they lift one to the infinite . . . 'le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie!'"

1.194. Appeals to me because it sums up my creed as a Socialist, of service not self. A further appeal lies in its emphasis of a fact we are too apt to forget, namely, that the real test of life is action and nobility of thought and feeling, not length of years. This amounts to a solemn warning, and as befits the solemnity of the theme the movement is wedded to the thought. The long line and the slow movement, rendered more impressive by the number of long vowels, hammer the thought into the mind.

But even the 'lofty ideal' of the passage has its turn to be challenged.

1.195. This appeals; not as a passion, not by sympathetic interests nor as beauty, but by its simple truth and teaching—a teaching which seems to come from a fellow human being, and one to which we may all attain. There is no lofty ideal, the regard of which makes us feel poor creatures and realise the impossibilities of perfection. True it may be judged sentimental if carefully dissected, but some amount of sentimental appeals naturally to the instincts of every one: what moral teaching is successful without some appeal to sentiment? It is a call not to sense, nor to the soul but to the heart.

A Transatlantic smack¹ now makes itself unmistakably felt and continues through several extracts.

1-2. This is *fine*—a grand appeal to us to make our lives bigger, greater, more sublime, to put aside the petty and material interests which shut in our souls and *let forth our big and generous impulses*. It is an appeal to us to *live*, and not merely to exist, and this appeal culminates in a grand climax in the last two lines.

The superb luxuriance of the style in 1-21 has as characteristic a savour as the looser idioms of 1-22. Nor are the contents less significant in their rendering of one powerful trend of that western world.

1-21. It successfully catches the rhythm of the human heart beat—the fundamental rhythm of all music and of all poetry. The swing catches the heart and the emotions, *the thought leads the mind on to inspiration*. The more you read the verse the more the rhythm and the theme, the two together, catch your soul and carry you completely in tune on to the end; and you wish there were more.

Even the first reading takes you into its cadence and its spirit. It wears better with each succeeding reading that you really have concentrated on.

It is an *inspirational bit*, yet full-blooded and perfectly conversant with life as it is in its sorrows, despairs, and its fulfilled and unfulfilled hopes. More than much poetry it has a taste of life—life as Shakespeare knew it and Hugo, not as Shelley or Keats, or a shallow modern novelist know it. In it is a punch, an energy and *the vigour of red-blooded manhood tinged with a deep tone* of "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world" *if you do your own fighting* to live your own full, rich life.

It surely has inspired something here!

1-22. Worldly ideals and philosophy run through it. It is modern, speaking of self-expression. *It says to self-express a full emotional and a rich intellectual life*.

It is clear in parts at first. Subsequent readings show subtlety as well as clarity.

Not poetic in comparison with the Romantic age, it being *too serious and too of the soil and the streetcar for the average romantic*.

¹ I cannot plume myself that my literary acumen alone is responsible for this perception. I have other evidence.

We go back now to English speech-rhythm, but the crescendo of praise does not flag.

1-3. After reading over this passage for the first time, I received one impression—"How much every one of those words *means*,—ordinary words they are, too, such as I myself probably use every day—every rift loaded with ore". And then I read it again. And this impression deepened, and others arose. The vividness of the thing! What a sure hand guided this pen . . . how strong it is! And what a gradual rise to the glorious lifting of the veil in the last line but one "*we should count time by heart-throbs*". The voice has risen for an instant to passion. And then it dies away, firm and masterful to the end.

From this high peak of admiration to the complete union of hearts, with all the appropriate trappings of a romantic attachment thrown in, is a mere *glissade*. ^{to slide w/o skis (etc.)}

1-31. Yes, intensely. This is first rate. Why? [in order].

(1) Curious way it suggests immediately great intimacy with the author. FRIENDSHIP. A room at night, curtains drawn, roaring log fire, chimney corner, author musing, old inns, you and him alone.

One of those rare and inexplicable moments which stand out as REAL in a world of phantasms. When your mind seems to touch another's, and you realise that far beyond our being brothers, we are all ONE person.

(2) Most loveable nobility [unconscious] to which I immediately respond.

(3) Artistic reasons

a. Topping condensation of language. No vapid and ineffectual adjectives. Each word contains multitudes.

b. Freedom and balance of lines. Like wonderful music.

Could the variety of the human garden be better displayed, even in the sunlight, than in this pot-pourri of academic lubrications?

With *Poem I* we have been concerned chiefly with

the problem of the 'message', the truth and worth of the doctrine embodied in the poem. Discussion of this general question of the place of 'messages' and doctrines in poetry is postponed until Part III, especially Chapter VII. (The Index may also be consulted.) With *Poem II* we pass to a different group of critical difficulties.

CHAPTER VII

DOCTRINE IN POETRY

Logic is the ethics of thinking, in the sense in which ethics is the bringing to bear of self-control, for the purpose of realising our desires.

CHARLES SAUNDERS PIERCE.

WITH most of our critical difficulties what we have had to explain is how mistakes come to be so frequent. But here we are in the opposite case, we have to explain how they come to be so rare. For it would seem evident that poetry which has been built upon firm and definite beliefs about the world, *The Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost*, or Donne's *Divine Poems*, or Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, or Hardy's *The Dynasts*, must appear differently to readers who do and readers who do not hold similar beliefs. Yet in fact most readers, and nearly all good readers, are very little disturbed by even a direct opposition between their own beliefs and the beliefs of the poet. Lucretius and Virgil, Euripides and Aeschylus, we currently assume, are equally accessible, given the necessary scholarship, to a Roman Catholic, to a Buddhist and to a confirmed sceptic. Equally accessible in the sense that these different readers, after due study, may respond in the same way to the poetry and arrive at similar judgments about it. And when they differ, their divergencies will commonly not be a result of their different positions with regard to the doctrines¹ of the authors, but are more likely to derive from

¹ I am not accusing these authors of doctrinal poetry in the narrow sense of verse whose sole object is to teach. But that a body of doctrine is presented by each of these poets, even by Virgil, can hardly escape any reader's notice.

other causes—in their temperaments and personal experience.

I have instanced religious poetry because the beliefs there concerned have the widest implications, and are the most seriously entertained of any. But the same problem arises with nearly all poetry; with mythology very evidently; with such supernatural machinery as appears in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

The horned Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip,

with Blake's manifestoes; but equally, though less obtrusively, with every passage which seems to make a statement, or depend upon an assumption, that a reader may dissent from, without thereby giving proof of mental derangement.

It is essential to recognise that the problem¹ is the same whether the possible stumbling-block, the point of dissent, be trivial or important. When the point is trivial, we easily satisfy ourselves with an explanation in terms of 'poetic fictions'. When it is a matter of no consequence whether we assent or dissent, the theory that these disputable statements, so constantly presented to us in poetry, are merely *assumptions* introduced for poetic purposes, seems an adequate explanation. And when the statements, for example, Homer's account of 'the monkey-shines of the Olympian troupe', are frankly incredible, if paraded solemnly before the bar of reasoned judgment, the same explanation applies. But as the assumptions grow more plausible, and as the consequences for our view of the world grow important, the matter seems less simple. Until, in the end, with Donne's Sonnet (*Poem III*), for example, it becomes very difficult not to think that *actual*

¹ A supplementary and fuller discussion of this whole matter will be found in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Ch. XXXII-XXXV, where difficulties, which here must be passed by, are treated in detail.

belief in the doctrine that appears in the poem is required for its full and perfect imaginative realisation. The mere assumption of Donne's theology, as a poetic fiction, may seem insufficient in view of the intensity of the feeling which is supported and conveyed to us by its means. It is at least certain, as the protocols show (3.15, 5.42, 5.37, 5.38, 7.21), that many who try to read religious poetry find themselves strongly invited to the beliefs presented, and that doctrinal dissent is a very serious obstacle to their reading. Conversely, many successful but dissenting readers find themselves in a mental attitude towards the doctrine which, if it is not belief, closely resembles belief.

Yet if we suppose that, beyond this mere 'poetic' assumption, a definite state of belief in this particular doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body is required for a full reading of Donne's poem, great difficulties at once arise. We shall have to suppose that readers who hold different beliefs incompatible with this particular doctrine must either not be able to read the poem, or must temporarily while reading it abandon their own beliefs and adopt Donne's. Both suppositions *seem* contrary to the facts, though these are matters upon which certainty is hazardous. We shall do better, however, to examine the 'poetic fiction', or assumption, theory more closely and see whether when fully stated it is capable of meeting the complaint of inadequacy noticed above.

In the first place the very word 'assumption' is unsuitable here. Ordinarily an assumption is a proposition, an object of thought, entertained intellectually in order to trace its logical consequences as a hypothesis. But here we are concerned very little with logical consequences and almost exclusively with emotional consequences. In the effect of the thought upon our feelings and attitudes, all its importance, for poetry, lies. But there are

clearly two ways in which we may entertain an assumption: intellectually, that is in a context of other thoughts ready to support, contradict, or establish other logical relations with it; and emotionally, in a context of sentiments, feelings, desires and attitudes ready to group themselves around it. Behind the intellectual assumption stands the desire for logical consistency and order in the receptive side of the mind. But behind the emotional assumption stands the desire or need for order of the whole outgoing emotional side of the personality, the side that is turned towards action.

Corresponding to this distinction there are two forms of belief and similarly two forms of disbelief. Intellectual belief more resembles a weighting of an idea than anything else, a loading¹ which makes other, less heavily weighted, ideas, adjust themselves to it rather than *vice versa*. The loading may be legitimate; the quantity of evidence, its immediacy, the extent and complexity of the supporting systems of ideas are obvious forms of legitimate loading: or it may be illegitimate; our liking for the idea, its brilliance, the trouble that changing it may involve, emotional satisfactions from it, are illegitimate—*from the standpoint of intellectual belief* be it understood. The whole use of intellectual belief is to bring *all* our ideas into as perfect an ordered system as possible. We disbelieve only because we believe something else that is incompatible, as Spinoza long ago pointed out. Similarly, we perhaps only believe because it is necessary to disbelieve whatever is logically contradictory to our belief. *Neither belief nor disbelief arises, in this intellectual sense, unless the logical context of our ideas is in*

¹ To introspection this loading seems like a feeling of trust—or trustworthiness. We 'side with the better' intellectually, and through traditionary belief has been discussed along with judgment it is, as William James pointed out, more allied to choice.

question. Apart from these logical connections the idea is neither believed nor disbelieved, nor doubted nor questioned; it is just present. Most of the ideas of the child, of primitive man, of the peasant, of the non-intellectual world and of most poetry are in this happy condition of real intellectual disconnection.

Emotional belief is a very different matter. In primitive man, as innumerable observers have remarked, any idea which opens a ready outlet to emotion or points to a line of action in conformity with custom is quickly believed. We remain much more primitive in this phase of our behaviour than in intellectual matters. Given a need¹ (whether conscious as a *desire* or not), any idea which can be taken as a step on the way to its fulfilment is accepted, unless some other need equally active at the moment bars it out. This acceptance, this use of the idea—by our interests, desires, feelings, attitudes, tendencies to action and what not—is emotional belief. So far as the idea is useful to them it is believed, and the sense of attachment, of adhesion, of conviction, which we feel, and to which we give the name of belief, is the result of this implication of the idea in our activities.

Most beliefs, of course, that have any strength or persistence are mixtures of intellectual and emotional belief. A purely intellectual belief need have little strength, no quality of conviction about it, for unless the idea is very original and contrary to received ideas, it needs little loading to hold its own. When we find a modern physicist, for example, passionately attached to a particular theory, we may suspect

¹ I use 'need' here to stand for an imbalance mental or physical, a tendency, given suitable conditions, for a movement towards an end-state of equilibrium. A swinging pendulum might thus be said to be actuated by a need to come to rest, and to constantly overdo its movements towards that end. We are much more like pendulums than we think, though, of course, our imbalances are infinitely more intricate.

intell
 belief
 susp
 emotion
 belief

belief
 emotion

illegitimate loading, his reputation is perhaps involved in its acceptance. Conversely, a very strong emotional belief may have little persistence. Last night's revelation grows dim amid this morning's affairs, for the need which gave it such glamorous reality was only a need of the moment. Of this kind are most of the revelations received from poetry and music. But though the sense of revelation has faded, we should not suppose that the shaping influence of such experiences must be lost. The mind has found through them a pattern of response which may remain, and it is this pattern rather than the revelation which is important.

The great difference between these two kinds of belief, as I have defined them, appears most plainly if we consider what *justification* amounts to for each. Whether an intellectual belief is justified is entirely a matter of its logical place in the largest, most completely ordered, system of ideas we can attain to. Now the central, most stable, mass of our ideas has already an order and arrangement fixed for it by the facts of Nature. We must bring our ideas of these facts into correspondence with them or we promptly perish. And this order among the everyday facts of our surroundings determines the arrangement of yet another system of our ideas: namely, physical theory. These ideas are thereby weighted beyond the power of irreconcilable ideas to disturb them. Anyone who understands them cannot help believing in them, and disbelieving *intellectually* in irreconcilable ideas, provided that he brings them close enough together to perceive their irreconcilability. There are obviously countless ideas in poetry which, if put into this logical context, must be disbelieved at once.

But this intellectual disbelief does not imply that emotional belief in the same idea is either impossible or even difficult—much less that it is undesirable.

For an emotional belief is not justified through any logical relations between its idea and other ideas. Its only justification is its success in meeting our needs—due regard being paid to the relative claims of our many needs one against another. It is a matter, to put it simply, of the *prudence* (in view of all the needs of our being) of the kind of emotional activities the belief subserves. The desirability or undesirability of an emotional belief has nothing to do with its intellectual status, provided it is kept from interfering with the intellectual system. And poetry is an extraordinarily successful device for preventing these interferences from arising.

Coleridge, when he remarked that 'a willing suspension of disbelief' accompanied much poetry, was noting an important fact, but not quite in the happiest terms, for we are neither aware of a disbelief nor voluntarily suspending it in these cases. It is better to say that the question of belief or disbelief, in the intellectual sense, never arises when we are reading well. If unfortunately it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we have for the moment ceased to be reading poetry and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in quite a different type of activity.

But a possible misconception must be noted here. The intellectual exploration of the internal coherence of the poem, and the intellectual examination of the relations of its ideas to other ideas of ordinary experience which are *emotionally* relevant to it, are not only permissible but necessary in the reading of much poetry, as we saw in connection with the sea-harp in *Poem IX*, and in connection with the sentimentality and stock-response problems of *Poems IV, VIII* and *XIII*. But this restricted intellectual inquiry is a different thing from the all-embracing attempt to systematise our ideas which alone brings up the problem of intellectual belief.

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We can now turn back to *Poem III*, to the point from which this long analysis started. There are many readers who feel a difficulty in giving to Donne's theology just that kind of acceptance, *and no more*, that they give to Coleridge's 'star within the nether tip'. They feel an invitation to accord to the poem that belief in its ideas which we can hardly help supposing to have been, in Donne's mind, a powerful influence over its shaping. These readers may, perhaps, be content if we insist that the fullest possible *emotional* belief is fitting and desirable. At the same time there are many who are unable to accord *intellectual* belief to these particular theological tenets. Such readers may feel that a threatened liberty is not thereby denied them. The fact that Donne probably gave both forms of belief to these ideas need not, I think, prevent a good reader from giving the fullest emotional belief while withholding intellectual belief, or rather while not allowing the question of intellectual belief to arise. The evidence is fragmentary upon the point, largely because it has been so strangely little discussed. But the very fact that the need to discuss it has not insistently arisen—seeing how many people from how many different intellectual positions have been able to agree about the value of such doctrinal poems—points strongly in this direction. The absence of intellectual belief need not cripple emotional belief, though evidently enough in some persons it may. But the habit of attaching emotional belief only to intellectually certified ideas is strong in some people; it is encouraged by some forms of education; it is perhaps becoming, through the increased prestige of science, more common.¹ For those whom it conquers it means 'Good-bye to poetry'.

¹ I have discussed this danger at length in *Science and Poetry*. There is reason to think that poetry has often arisen through fusion (or confusion) between the two forms of belief, the boundary between

For the difficulty crops up, as I have insisted, over all poetry that departs, for its own purposes, from the most ordinary universal facts of common experience or from the most necessary deductions of scientific theory. It waylays the strict rationalist with Blake's 'Sunflower', Wordsworth's 'River Duddon', and Shelley's 'Cloud', no less than with their more transcendental utterances. Shakespeare's Lark is as shocking as his Phoenix. Even so honest a man as Gray attributes very disputable motives to his Owl. As for Dryden's 'new-kindled star', the last verse of Keats' *Ode to Melancholy*, or Landor's *Rose Aylmer*—it is very clear where we should be with them if we could not give emotional assent apart from intellectual conviction. The slightest poetry may present the problem as clearly (though not so acutely) as the greatest. And the fact that we solve it, in practice, without the least difficulty in minor cases shows, I think, that even in the major instances of philosophic and religious issues the same solution is applicable. But the temptation to confuse the two forms of belief is there greater.

For in these cases an appearance of incompleteness or insincerity may attach to emotional acceptance divorced from intellectual assent.¹ That this is

what is intellectually certified and what is not being much less sharply defined in former centuries and *defined in another manner*. The standard of *verification* used in science to-day is comparatively a new thing. As the scientific view of the world (including our own nature) develops, we shall probably be forced into making a division between fact and fiction that, unless we can meet it with a twofold theory of belief on the lines suggested above, would be fatal not only to poetry but to all our finer, more spiritual, responses. That is the problem.

¹ The most important example of this divorce that history provides is in the attitude of Confucius towards ancestor-worship. Here are the remarks of his chief English translator, James Legge, upon the matter. 'It will not be supposed that I wish to advocate or defend the practice of sacrificing to the dead. My object has been to point out how Confucius recognised it, without acknowledging the faith from which it must have originated, and how he enforced it as a matter of form or ceremony. It thus connects itself with the most serious charge that can be brought against him—the charge of

simply a mistake due to a double-meaning of 'belief' has been my contention. To 'pretend to believe' what we 'don't really believe' would certainly be insincerity, if the two kinds of believing were one and the same; but if they are not, the confusion is merely another example of the prodigious power of words over our lives. And this will be the best place to take up the uncomfortable problem of 'sincerity', a word much used in criticism, but not often with any precise definition of its meaning.

The ideas, vague and precise, for which 'sincere' stands must have been constantly in the reader's mind during our discussion both of Stock Responses and of Sentimentality. We can set aside at once the ordinary 'business' sense in which a man is insincere when he deliberately attempts to deceive, and sincere when his statements and acts are governed by 'the best of his knowledge and belief'. And we can deal briefly with another sense, already touched upon in connection with *Poem VII* (see p. 95), in which a man is insincere when 'he kides *himself*', when he mistakes his own motives and so professes feelings which are different from those that are in fact actuating him. Two subtle points, however, must be noted before we set this sense aside. The feelings need not be stated or even openly expressed; it is enough if they are hinted to us. And they need not be actual personal 'real, live feelings'; they may imagined feelings. All that is required for this kind of insincerity is a discrepancy between the poem's claim upon our response and its *shaping* impulses in the poet's mind. But only the shaping impulses are relevant. A good poem can perfectly well be written for money or from pique or ambition, provided these initial external motives do not interfere

insincerity', *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. I, Prolegomena, Ch. V, p. 100. How far Legge was qualified to expound the Confucian doctrine of sincerity may perhaps be divined from this passage.

with its growth. Interferences of all kinds—notably the desire to make the poem 'original', 'striking', or 'poetic'—are, of course, the usual cause of insincerity in this sense. A sense which ought not, it may be remarked, to impute blame to the author, unless we are willing to agree that all men who are not good poets are therefore blameworthy in a high degree.

These subtleties were necessary to escape the conclusion that irony, for example—where the feeling really present is often the exact contrary to that overtly professed—is as insincere as simple readers often suppose it must be.

A more troublesome problem is raised if we ask whether an emotion, by itself and apart from its expression, can be sincere or insincere. We often speak as if this were so (witness 4·2, 4·23 and 8·51), and though sometimes no doubt this is only an effective way of saying that we approve (or disapprove) of the emotion, there are senses in which a fact about the emotion, not about our feelings about it, is meant. Sincere emotions, we say, are genuine or authentic, as opposed to spurious emotions, and the several senses which we may imply thereby are worth examining. We may mean that the emotion is genuine in the sense that every product of a perfect mind would be genuine. It would result only from the prompting situation *plus* all the relevant experience of that mind, and be free from impurities and from all interferences, from impulses that had in any way got out of place and become disordered. Since such minds are nowhere obtainable in this obstructive world, such a sense is useful only as an ideal standard by which to measure degrees of relative insincerity. There is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not. Some great poetry, we might say, represents the closest approach to sincerity that can be found. And for extreme degrees of insin-

cerity we should look in asylums. Possibly however, the perfect mind, if it ever appeared among us, might be put there too.

But this is plainly not a sense of sincerity which we often use, it is not what people ordinarily mean. For we would agree that stupid people can be very sincere, though their minds may be very much in a muddle, and we might even suggest that they are more likely to be sincere than the clever. Simplicity, we may think, has something to do with sincerity, for there is a sense in which 'genuine' is opposed to 'sophisticated'. The sincere feeling, it may be suggested, is one which has been left in its natural state, not worked over and complicated by reflection. Thus strong spontaneous feelings would be more likely to be sincere than feelings that have run the gauntlet of self-criticism, and a dog, for example, might be regarded as a more sincere animal than any man.

This is certainly a sense which is frequent, though whether we should praise emotions that are sincere in this sense as much as most people do, is extremely doubtful. It is partly an echo of Rousseau's romantic fiction, the 'Natural Man'. Admiration for the 'spontaneous' and 'natural' tends to select favourable examples and turns a very blind eye to the less attractive phenomena. Moreover, many emotions which look simple and natural are nothing of the kind, they result from cultivated self-control, so consummate as to seem instantaneous. These cases, and an attractive but limited virtue in some children's behaviour, explain, I believe, the popularity of sincerity in this sense. So used, the word is of little service in criticism, for this kind of sincerity in poetry must necessarily be rare.

It will be worth while hunting a little longer for a satisfactory sense of 'sincerity'. Whatever it is, it is the quality we most insistently require in poetry.

It is also the quality we most need as critics. And, perhaps, in the proportion that we possess it we shall acknowledge that it is not a quality that we can take for granted in ourselves as our inalienable birthright. It fluctuates with our state of health, with the quality of our recent companions, with our responsibility and our nearness to the object, with a score of conditions that are not easy to take account of. We can *feel* very sincere when, in fact, as others can see clearly, there is no sincerity in us. Bogus forms of the virtue waylay us—confident inner assurances and invasive rootless convictions. And when we doubt our own sincerity and ask ourselves, 'Do I *really* think so; do I really feel so?' an honest answer is not easily come by. A direct effort to be sincere, like other effects to will ourselves into action, more often than not frustrates its intention. For all these reasons any light that can be gained upon the nature of sincerity, upon possible tests for it and means for inducing and promoting it, is extremely serviceable to the critic.

The most stimulating discussion of this topic is to be found in the *Chung Yung*¹ (The Doctrine of the Mean, or Equilibrium and Harmony), the treatise that embodies the most interesting and the most puzzling part of the teachings of Confucius. A more distinct (and distinguished) word than 'stimulating' would be in place to describe this treatise, were the invigorating effect of a careful reading easier to define. Sincerity—the object of some idea that seems to lie in the territory that 'sincerity' covers—appears there as the beginning and end of personal

¹ As might be expected, no translation that entirely commends itself is available. Those to whom Legge's edition of *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. I, is not available, may consult the translation by L. A. Lyall and King Chien Kün, *The Chung Yung or The Centre, the Common* (Longmans), very literal, but perhaps slightly too much tinged with a Y.M.C.A. flavour. Here what is translated by others 'sincerity' or 'singleness' is rendered by 'to be true and 'being' true'.

Sincerity

character, the secret of the good life, the only means to good government, the means to give full development to our own natures, to give full development to the nature of others, and very much more. This virtue is as mysterious as it is powerful; and, where so many great sinologists and Chinese scholars have confessed themselves baffled, it would be absurd for one who knows no Chinese to suggest interpretations. But some speculations generated by a reading of translations may round off this chapter.

The following extracts from the *Chung Yung* seem the most relevant to our discussion.

'Sincerity is the way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the way of men. He who possesses sincerity, is he who, without an effort, hits what is right, and apprehends, without the exercise of thought; he is the sage who naturally and easily embodies the right way. He who attains to sincerity, is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast' (Legge, XX, 18). 'Sincerity is that whereby self-completion is effected, and its way is that by which man must direct himself' (Legge, XXV, 1). 'In self-completion the superior man completes other men and things also . . . and this is the way by which a union is effected of the external and the internal' (XXV, 3). 'In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "In hewing an axe-handle, in hewing an axe-handle, the pattern is not far off". We grasp one axe-handle to hew the other, and yet, if we look askance from the one to the other, we may consider them as apart' (XIII, 2). 'There is a way to the attainment of sincerity in one's self; if a man does not understand what is good, he will not attain sincerity in himself' (XX, 17). 'When we have intelligence resulting from sincerity, this condition is to be ascribed to nature; when we have sincerity resulting from intelligence, this condition is to be ascribed to instruction. But given the sincerity,

there shall be the intelligence, given the intelligence there shall be the sincerity' (XXI). How far apart any detailed precise exposition in English, or in any modern Western language, must be from the form of thought of the original, is shown if we compare a more literal version of this last passage: 'Being true begets light, we call that nature. Light leads to being true, we call that teaching. What is true grows light; what is light grows true' (Lyll and King Chien-Kün, p. 16).

Meditating upon this chain of pronouncements we can perhaps construct (or discover) another sense of sincerity. One important enough to justify the stress so often laid upon this quality by critics, yet not compelling us to require an impossible perfection or inviting us to sentimental (Sense 3) indiscriminate over-admiration of the ebullitions of infants. And it may be possible, by apprehending this sense more clearly, to see what general conditions will encourage sincerity and what steps may be suggested to promote this mysterious but necessary virtue in the critic.

We may take self-completion as our starting-point. The completed mind would be that perfect mind we envisaged above, in which no disorder, no mutual frustration of impulses remained. Let us suppose that in the irremediable default of this perfection, default due to man's innate constitution and to the accidents to which he is exposed, there exists a tendency towards increased order,¹ a tendency which

¹ I have in several other places made prolonged and determined efforts to indicate the types of mental order I have in mind (*The Foundations of Aesthetics*, § XIV; *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Ch. XXII; *Science and Poetry*, § 11), but without escaping certain large misunderstandings that I had hoped to have guarded myself against. Thus Mr Eliot, reviewing *Science and Poetry in The Dial*, describes my ideal order as 'Efficiency, a perfectly-working mental Roneo Steel Cabinet System'; and Mr Read performing a similar service for *Principles in The Criticton*, seemed to understand that where I spoke of 'the organisation of impulses' I meant that kind of

takes effect unless baffled by physical interferences (disease) or by fixations of habit that prevent us from continuing to learn by experience, or by ideas too invested with emotion for other ideas that disturb them to be formed, or by too lax and volatile a bond between our interests (a frivolousness that is perhaps due to the draining off of energy elsewhere) so that no formations firm enough to build upon result.

There is much to be said in favour of such a supposition. This tendency would be a need, in the sense defined above in this chapter—deriving in fact from *the* fundamental imbalance¹ to which biological development may be supposed to be due. This development with man (and his animal neighbours) seems to be predominantly in the direction of greater complexity and finer differentiation of responses. And it is easy to conceive the organism as relieving, through this differentiation, the strain put upon it by life in a partly uncongenial environment. It is but a step further to conceive it as also tending to relieve internal strains due to these developments imposed from without. And a re-ordering of its impulses so as to reduce their interferences with one another to a minimum would

deliberate planning and arrangement which the controllers of a good railway or large shop must carry out. But 'organisation' for me stood for that kind of interdependence of parts which we allude to when we speak of living things as 'organisms'; and the 'order' which I make out to be so important is not tidiness. The distinguished names cited in this foot-note will protect the reader from a sense that these explanations are insulting to his intelligence. A good idea of some of the possibilities of order and disorder in the mind may be gained from Pavlov's *Conditioned Reflexes*.

¹ Whether we can profitably posit a primal imbalance in certain forms of matter for which the appearance of living substances and their development in increasingly complex forms right up to Shakespeare would be, as it were, the swings of the pendulum 'attempting' to come to rest again, is a speculation that has perhaps only an amusement value. The great difficulty would be to get round the separation of the reproductive functions, but that is a difficulty for any cosmologist.

be the most successful—and the 'natural'—direction which this tendency would take.

Such a re-ordering would be a partial self-completion, temporary and provisional upon the external world remaining for the individual much what it had been in the past. And by such self-completion the superior man *would* effect a union of the external and the internal. Being more at one within itself the mind thereby becomes more appropriately responsive to the outer world. I am not suggesting that this is what Confucius meant. For him 'to complete other men and things too', is possibly the prerogative of the force of example, other men merely imitating the conduct of the sage. But he *may* have meant that freedom calls out freedom; that those who are 'most themselves' cause others about them to become also 'more themselves'; which would, perhaps, be a more sagacious observation. Perhaps, too, 'the union of the external and the internal' meant for him something different from the accordance of our thoughts and feelings with reality. But certainly, for us, this accordance is one of the fruits of sincerity.

This tendency towards a more perfect order, as it takes effect, enables us, without effort, to hit what is right, and, without the exercise of thought, to apprehend. The 'exercise of thought' here must be understood as that process of deliberately setting aside inappropriate ideas and feelings, which, in default of a sufficient inner order—a sufficient sincerity—is still very necessary. Confucius has enough to say elsewhere in the *Chung Yung* (Ch. XX, 20) of the need for unremitting research and reflection *before* sincerity is attained to clear himself from any charge of recommending 'intuition' as an *alternative* to investigation. 'Intuition' is the prerogative only of those who have attained to sincerity. It is only the superior man who 'naturally and easily embodies

the right way'. And the superior man will know when his sincerity is insufficient and take ceaseless steps to remedy it. 'If another man (more sincere) succeed by one effort, *he* will use a hundred efforts. If another man succeed by ten efforts, he will use a thousand' (*Chung Yung*, XX, 20). It is the sincerity to which the superior man has already attained which enables him to know when it is insufficient; if it does not yet enable him to embody the right way, it at least enables him to refrain from embodying the wrong, as those who trust intuition too soon are likely to do. Indeed, looking back over the history of thought, we might say, 'are certain to do', so heavy are the probabilities against the success of guess-work.

Sincerity, then, in this sense, is obedience to that tendency which 'seeks' a more perfect order within the mind. When the tendency is frustrated (e.g., by fatigue or by an idea or feeling that has lost its link with experience, or has become fixed beyond the possibility of change) we have insincerity. When confusion reigns and we are unable to decide what we think or feel (to be distinguished sharply from the case when *decided* thoughts or feelings are present, but we are unable to define or express them) we need be neither sincere nor insincere. We are in a transitional stage which may result in either. Most good critics will confess to themselves that this is the state in which a first reading of any poem of an unfamiliar type leaves them. They know that more study is needed if they are to achieve a genuine response, and they know this in virtue of the sincerity they have already attained. It follows that people with clear definite ideas and feelings, with a high degree of practical efficiency, may be insincere in this sense. Other kinds of sincerity, fidelity to convictions for example, will not save them, and indeed it may well be this fidelity which

is thwarting the life of the spirit (*Chung Yung*, XXIV) in them.

Any response (however mistaken from other points of view) which embodies the present activity of this tendency to inner adjustment will be sincere, and any response that conflicts with it or inhibits it will be insincere. Thus to be sincere is to act, feel and think in accordance with 'one's true nature', and to be insincere is to act, feel or think in a contrary manner. But the sense to be given to 'one's true nature' is, as we have seen, a matter largely conjectural. To define it more exactly would perhaps be tedious and, for our purposes here, needless. In practice we often seem to grasp it very clearly; and all that I have attempted here is to sketch the state of affairs which we then seem to grasp. 'What heaven has conferred is man's Nature; an accordance with this is the Path' (*Chung Yung*, I). Sometimes we can be certain that we have left it.¹

On the ways in which sincerity may be increased and extended Confucius is very definite. If we seek a standard for a new response whose sincerity may be in doubt, we shall find it, he says, in the very responses which make the new one possible. The pattern for the new axe-handle is already in our hand, though its very nearness, our firm possession of it, may hide it from us. We need, of course, a founded assurance of the sincerity of these instrumental responses themselves, and this we can gain by comparison. What is meant by 'making the thoughts sincere' is the allowing no self-deception. 'as when we hate a bad smell, and as when

¹ But see *Chung Yung*, I, 2. 'The path may not be left for an instant. If it could be left, it would not be the path.' Possibly we can escape this difficulty by admitting that all mental activities are, to some degree, the operation of the tendency we have been speaking of. Thus all are the Path. But the Path can be obstructed, and may have loops. 'The regulation of (what keeps trim) the path is instruction' (*Chung Yung*, I, 1).

we love what is beautiful' (*The Great Learning*, VI, i). When we hate a bad smell we can have no doubt that our response is sincere. We can all, at least, find *some* responses beyond suspicion. These are our standard. By studying our sincerity in the fields in which we are fully competent we can extend it into the fields in which our ability is still feeling its way. This seems to be the meaning of 'choosing what is good and firmly holding fast to it,' where 'good' stands not for our Western ethical notion so much as for the fit and proper, sane and healthy. The man who does not 'hate a bad smell,' 'does not understand what is good'; having no basis or standards, 'he will not attain to sincerity'.

Together with these, the simplest most definite responses, there may be suggested also, as standards for sincerity, the responses we make to the most baffling objects that can be presented to our consciousness. Something like a technique or ritual for heightening sincerity might well be worked out. When our response to a poem after our best efforts remains uncertain, when we are unsure whether the feelings it excites come from a deep source in our experience, whether our liking or disliking is genuine, is *ours*, or an accident of fashion, a response to surface detail or to essentials, we may perhaps help ourselves by considering it in a frame of feelings whose sincerity is beyond our questioning. Such are the feelings that may be aroused by contemplation of the following:

- i. Man's loneliness (the isolation of the human situation).
- ii. The facts of birth, and of death, in their inexplicable oddity.
- iii. The inconceivable immensity of the Universe.
- iv. Man's place in the perspective of time.
- v. The enormity of his ignorance.

Taking these not as targets for doctrine,¹ but as the most incomprehensible and inexhaustible objects for meditation, while their reverberation lasts pass the poem through the mind, silently reciting it as slowly as it allows. Whether what it can stir in us is important or not to us will, perhaps, show itself then. Many religious exercises and some of the practices of divination and magic may be thought to be directed in part towards a similar quest for sanction, to be rituals designed to provide standards of sincerity.

¹ The perhaps not unintentional obliquity of Mr. Eliot's interpretations of my phrases in *The Use of Poetry*, pp. 131-5, prompts me to add these references:—

i. Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison (*The Waste Land*, l. 414).

ii. My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it."

(F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 346.)

iii. But Love has pitched his mansion in

The place of excrement.

(*Crazy Jews talks with the Bishop*.)

iv. More distant and more solemn

Than a fading star.

(*The Hollow Men*, II.)

v. Je ne sais qui m'a mis au monde, ni ce que c'est que le monde, ni que moi-même : je suis dans une ignorance terrible de toutes choses . . .

'je vois ces effroyables espaces de l'univers qui m'enferment, et je me trouve attaché à un coin de cette vaste étendue, sans que je sache pourquoi je suis plutôt placé en ce lieu qu'en un autre, ni pourquoi ce peu de temps qui m'est donné à vivre m'est assigné à ce point plutôt qu'à un autre de toute l'éternité qui m'a précédé et de toute celle qui me suit.'

To Pascal such contemplations, when they did not lead to religious belief, seemed monstrous and insupportable, Mr. Eliot seems to think they must be trivial.

v. Enormity not enormoussness. The knowledge which is the opposite of ignorance here is *knowledge how*. It is by man's fault that he is so ignorant, he has not made his thoughts sincere. Cf. p. 288.