

challenge to the girl just left school that she should leap the fence as soon as possible? In any case the air is deadly, and it would need some adjectives from Les Halles, vigorously pronounced, to express its true character.

I pass by others worse written, scarcely more detestable on that account, and light upon reminiscences of an egoist by himself, which for intense absorption in his own person will not easily be matched. Impressions, moments, passive surrender to influences, so long as they are neither Christian nor ethical, but always for the Ego's delectation; thus do we get a lively sensuous present, a past agreeable to memory. Nothing heavenly behind the veil; and not much of a veil in other respects. It is as if the soul, which might have looked through these artist-eyes, had been struck dead long ago. And the art falls to sheer *gaminerie*, graceful tumbling, tricks on the tight-rope, a journal slighter than Goncourt's, but as elaborately trivial. The attraction is that which lurks for some in memoirs of a waiting-woman, time of Louis Quinze. Not a particle otherwise, except in brief touches that here and there glimpse the landscape for us. But people will not buy these sketches of an unsentimental journey to rave about the landscape.

A last author whom it is sad to find in such company, who knows his Paris, and judges it, brings us to the point we were making towards. He grants that no sophistry will shake the house built on a rock which serious old Puritans have dwelt in, the light-tower of ethics, of religion, reared above the waves to do battle with tempests. But the city of pleasure on the Seine haunts him; and seriously, note-book in hand, he goes round it, his brave but rather stupid English explorer, to whom he serves as guide, meeting the usual adventures. They are but an episode for the young man's enlightenment; he passes in and out of them, as if he were crossing the stage. And his biographer muses—undoubtedly in the national character a strain lofty and severe denies to the Briton that sense of amusement in law-breaking which has created Paris with all its illusions. For the men who have made Imperial England, he concludes, there is a nobler mystery than sex. We will phrase it another way. Love may be an instinct, a passion, or an ideal. If no more than instinct, it is base; if only passion, evanescent; if an ideal, the star of Dante which leads up to highest Heaven. Heroic love is divine. But in these fevers and attachments without law, where does the heroism appear?

So little of the human is there, despite pretence and loud talk, in such relations by themselves that, were it not for the idea of something forbidden to which we are constantly drawn, even by the impressionist, they would

be profoundly uninteresting. Man is a living soul, not a bundle of impulses. He has a wider outlook than the animal seeking his mate. He rises to philosophies; he alone, of all beings known to us, can lapse into crime. These authors whom I cite to the bar of public opinion, know, as surely as the Puritan whom they despise, that to fall deliberately below the highest and to plead for brute instinct against law, is criminal. They cater to "la Bête Humaine," in the hope of sharing his spoils. But once for all it must be said, the great stories that shine in literature have kept their place by the faith, hope, justice, purity, strength of conviction shadowed forth in them. No supreme book preaches moral anarchy. The alternative to be decided by readers—chiefly women—who make the fortune of English fiction, is whether we shall continue the splendidly wise and tender-hearted tradition of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, or fall upon the garbage spread out in the sun by imitators of the erotic, absinthe-drenched, nerve-racked decadents who swarm about Paris cafés. Do we choose the latter? Then our novel is doomed. It will be a thing illicit and unmentionable, to be shunned by the self-respecting; a bad habit which lowers vitality, clouds the brain, and clamours for increase of poison till nothing remains but an appetite, *le soif de la mort*. Literature will have sunk to pathology; and the physician may be compelled to treat the modern story as if it were a shameful disease.

"It will be generally agreed that the dangers which threaten to lower the standard of judgment in literature and taste are on the increase." So runs a declaration recently put forth above the names of eminent writers, publishers, professors, and artists, who tell us that the "authority of the best literary tradition" is undermined; that the permanent demands of intellect are sacrificed to the ephemeral; that popular taste is the sole measure of good and bad in our present writing. These are symptoms of death. How to arrest them? We must put aside all fantastic and disordered imagination, though boasting itself to be realism. Our books and our lives must be set to the music of a majestic temperance. Our art must aim at wisdom, and every instinct be subject to the law that we recognise throughout all worlds, whereby things are established on a scale of values never to be altered, however fools rage and foam. The true classics are everlasting because they own that law. Decadence begins in conduct as in art when it is wantonly broken. If our literature declines on these lower levels, it will be indeed a misfortune, but chiefly because when the prophet has become merely a profligate, heroic England will have seen its best days. Therefore I enter my protest against the degradation of the novel.

A MAN OF LETTERS.