

MATTHEW ARNOLD AS A WRITER OF PROSE

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REPUTATIONS in prose quickly come and lightly go. Fiction is the best preservative. History and philosophy, while capable of being almost as efficacious against decay, lie open to the disadvantage that historians and philosophers are notoriously careless of literary values, and—especially in our days—prostrate themselves before the superstition of fact and system. Matthew Arnold had neither fiction nor history to aid him, and we all remember how plaintively he pleaded guilty to having at his command no system with principles “co-ordinate, subordinate, interdependent and relative.” When he ventured upon the technicalities of the philosophic trade, as once he did with characteristic reckless *insouciance* in “God and the Bible,” he achieved a miracle of dulness, and his experiment was never repeated. Yet the essence of Arnold’s work at large is philosophic, and of diffused philosophy of the type that readily accommodates itself to literary expression there is in his prose no defect. While to us, if not to his contemporaries, it may be obvious enough that Arnold lives chiefly by his verse, it still would be unfair to say that the prose writer shines only in the reflected glory of the poet. He held certain ideas tenaciously, and conviction carries a skilful pen far in the direction of success. Were the ideas he fought for worth the energy he expended on them? Do they correspond with conditions that confront us today, and was his contribution to English thought in any peculiar degree original and stimulating? These are the questions that have prompted the following enquiry.

Arnold abandoned poetry deliberately, if reluctantly, and not because having reached the natural term of his labours in that sphere he had wisely determined to take farewell of the Muses while still they were graciously inclined, but rather because with technical skill undiminished he had arrived at an intellectual *impasse* from which poetry appeared to offer him no extrication. The pick and shovel work of prose seemed to afford the only exit from the doubts which his poetry had accumulated on his path. There were

other fortifying reasons, though that which I have advanced was the main one, for Arnold's deliberate abandonment of poetry. His inspectoral work was galling in its irksomeness and insipidity, and talent more spontaneous than that of Arnold might have fallen silent sooner than his.

The date—1867—of the *New Poems* shows him to have been a productive if not a prolific poet for twenty years, but a certain progressive deadening of his poetic enthusiasm—if not a diminishing of his skill—we must concede as a result of the treadmill life which circumstances forced him to lead. Then too his Oxford Professorship, while it prompted *Merope* the failure, prompted also the successful *Homer* and *Celtic Lectures*, and the critical pronouncements which grew by degrees into the first series of *Essays in Criticism*. He now discovered to his delight that through his prose he could reach a new and larger audience, and reach them as he imagined with greater effectiveness, than by the more aesthetic appeal of verse. For his old tens he now had hundreds, and this to a man with a message counts for much. He could not be prepared to see that time would reverse the verdict, and in any event he would go down to posterity bearing gifts in either hand. Other discoveries also he made, and self-discoveries these:—a gift of phrase-making, a turn for banter, and a humoristic fusion of the two which made it possible for him to annoy people to their advantage, and sting them—so he fondly hoped—into sweet reasonableness.

Such are some of the reasons that account for Arnold's incursion into prose. What his equipment was, and what his enthusiasms we may now fruitfully enquire.

Hazlitt made the discovery a hundred years ago that poets are but indifferent masters of prose,—“winged animals who can cleave the air like birds with ease to themselves and delight to the beholders but upon the ground of prose and matter-of-fact seem not to have the use of their feet.” Arnold may have been aware of his danger, for he guards well the secret of his poetic identity. A reader coming to his prose work ignorant of the facts of his career would deem him an interested and intelligent observer of poetry, but a practitioner of the craft—never. Indeed his fervours are under extraordinary control. The essays on Falkland and George Sand are said to be suffused with a glow suggestive of enthusiasm, but on inspection there is nothing extravagant, nothing dithyrambic about them. He abstains from description; at least one recalls nothing beyond stray touches in the letters where description was forced upon him, and there is of course, too, the somewhat famous reference to Oxford with the enchantment of the Middle Ages still

lingering about her,—a passage which exhibits indeed more of rapture than Matthew Arnold usually permits himself, but has much less wealth of intimate poetic detail than many a writer innocent of rhyme has perpetually at his disposal.

We may readily forget, then, in reading the essays that Arnold was a poet, but we forget this to the essential advantage of the writer of prose. In his poetry he was restrained and critical, and only by an eccentric miracle could he have been exuberant in his prose, or have evaded his natural inclination to test and prove all things dispassionately. What reconciles us most to his altered medium of expression is that in his poetry he had evidently reached the limits of self-discovery, while in his prose we are permitted to traverse a new region of his ideas and are admitted to a new region of his personality. His earliest published prose dates from 1853, and in this preface to his poems practically all the qualities of his later style—the clearness, the grace, and the rhythmic ease of his periods—are present. Here also we note his habitual willingness to illustrate by concrete example, and to reinforce an argument of his own by reference to some accredited authority,—Goethe, Menander, Aristotle,—whom you will. What he added later was partly for good and partly for ill. As a persuasive hortatory writer he was always eager to drive home his points, and was increasingly beset by the delusion that to reiterate is an essential element in clear expounding. Under the domination of the phrase he had a child-like—may I say an Oxford-like?—delight in displaying it at every turn of the discourse, drenching his argument with it much beyond the point of saturation. Another feature of his prose that is increasingly constant concerns the quality of his thought rather than the manner of its expression. My reference is to the half-sportive half-pugnacious bravado of his utterance, a device legitimately assumed as a refuge from the tedium of abstract argumentation.

All things considered, Arnold is a sound, if not an inspiring, model of effective prose writing. There are no hidden surprises in his work, none of the sudden felicities that endear to us such a writer as Sir Thomas Browne, nor any of those revealing intimacies of style, those delicate confidences which impart such relish to our reading of Lamb or Hazlitt. Rarely rising to eloquence, he constrains us to no sudden and disconcerting descents from the heights; but a constant workmanlike efficiency is everywhere observable, and the artist's unerring instinct for the appropriate rhythm, the fitting word. He is a legitimate descendant of Dryden, and is in the tradition of those masters of clear and refined French prose to whom he willingly subscribed himself disciple.

We can readily imagine how Arnold would have proceeded to a critical examination of himself, had he had the good fortune to discover upon some intellectual excursion the counterpart of so interesting a personage. He would not have concerned himself with investigating biographical details in order to estimate the interplay of circumstances and temperament; his interest in humanity was too abstract for that,—a class and racial rather than an individual interest. Neglecting this and other accredited methods of approach, he would have struck sharp home to the heart of the matter: What does this man stand for in the world of ideas? How has he adjusted himself and sought to adjust his fellows to the time-forces operating on his age? What is his central controlling passion, and what, if any, his cardinal defect or impediment? That is the Arnoldian way, and—incomplete though it is—it gives us probably the most important element in the whole truth about a man. Let us tentatively see what the Arnoldian method will reveal to us of Arnold and his ways.

He comes before us first as a poet. Can we truly say of him, as he said of Keats, that his whole life was moulded by “the yearning passion for the Beautiful”? Evidently we have not here discovered his “master-passion”, or the poet would not so readily have lost himself in the critic, and a man cannot be said to have “loved the principle of beauty in all things” whom the beauty of art and architecture left so cold and undiscerning. Had he Shelley’s passion for reforming the world, or Byron’s titanic dissatisfaction? Both of these, we may answer, but in a sadly diminished degree. Yet, as his love for the Beautiful had intensity enough to propel him into poetry, so not his passion but his temperate zeal for reforming the world and his playfully serious dissatisfaction with the follies of his age sufficed to furnish forth Arnold the critic, the exponent of culture, the disinterested interpreter of facts as they are. If it is urged that no lasting work can proceed save from burning convictions and from some central controlling passion, how shall the objection be answered? Shall we say that the critic of life and literature in order to be effective must be disinterested, and to be disinterested must occupy intermediary positions and keep his mind at all costs alert and flexible? This is evidently impossible, for the most unalert and dispassionate of critics, however comprehensive his sympathies, must have some central guiding principle to proceed from. And Arnold, with all his efforts towards disinterestedness, has fortunately not attained it. If we search for some master-passion from which he works as from a centre, we shall not fail to find it in his “cock-sureness”, in his unblushing acquiescence in the

rightness of his own opinions. Why does Arminius make his pathetic appeal for *Geist*, for more brains, more brains?—Because a world of Arminiuses would not do the stupid things that hourly strangle progress and exasperate intelligence. Why this desire to devulgarize the middle classes?— Because the middle classes have not gone to a great public school, nor enjoyed the refinements of a great university. Why this impatience of nonconformity?—Because the dissenter has not known the steadying force of an establishment. And why this eagerness to rid the establishment of dogma and superstition?—Because the Church of England has not, like Arnold, felt the spell of those rigorous teachers who seized his youth and purged it with renovating fire. A humble member of the Anglican Church must feel on reading Arnold that his less fortunate friends outside the pale are at an enormous disadvantage, so clear a gain has he in the race for culture. But he must not be prematurely elated. If but a colonial member of that great body he misses the steadying influence that comes from an establishment, and he may have married his deceased wife's sister, or bear the name of Smith or Wragge, which will permanently disqualify him in the race; and almost inevitably he will have forfeited the advantages of Eton or Winchester, Oxford or Cambridge. But let us fight on as bravely as we may. The shining goal is before us, and even against terrible odds we may, indeed we must, struggle towards it. Such help as we get from our more favoured competitors, if not too disdainfully proffered, let us not reject.

It is evident, unless I have made unintentional travesty of the truth, that Arnold does not range himself among the accommodating writers who seek to insinuate themselves into our sympathies by yielding easily to the pressure of our prejudices. He has a sportsman's instinct for his game, and wherever he may delicately cast his fly is secure of a rise. But he is at bottom tender-hearted, and having enjoyed the pleasure of landing us he tosses us back to swim on our way with only a salutary memory of the barb. We are not, I think, so angered at his Olympic manner, his condescension and his superciliousness as were his contemporaries, and the Matthew Arnold with his pouncet-box,—the Jeremiah in white kid gloves—is a tradition that is rapidly passing away. I suspect that the coming generation will be provoked on quite other grounds, less that is to say because the "superior person" has found them at fault, than because they have detected in their censor a strain of wholly unmodern prejudice exhibiting itself more particularly in the primness of his moral judgments. Puritanism, Arnold ruefully tells us, turned the key on the spirit of England for two hundred years; he scarcely

suspected of himself that instead of bursting through the door of that prison he spent his life meticulously striving to pick the lock.

I shall consider the least contentious portion of Arnold's prose work. The list of his critical essays prompts the obvious remark that it is on quality rather than on bulk that his reputation as critic rests. His friend Sainte Beuve would have dealt with the same extent of material in the most leisurely half year of his life, with greater rather than less fullness of knowledge, with an ampler social and historic background, and with possibly a richer fund of general ideas. But the charm, I take it, and the value of Arnold's criticism lie in the fact that his work cannot be brought into damaging comparison with that of any other writer. One may concede more brilliance to Hazlitt, more profundity to Coleridge, more scholarship to whom you please, without prejudicing Arnold's title to our regard. He will still remain one of the most readable of our critics, and one of the exiguous group for whom criticism and literature are interchangeable terms, who while they criticise create.

When a man of letters who is also a poet turns critic, two things we reasonably expect: in his first capacity a bookish enthusiasm, and in his second a regard for the technical considerations of his art. Arnold satisfies neither of these expectations, but it is only the latter deficiency that I am personally inclined to regret. Of bookish critics there is always *foison*; Brunetière is the preeminent example, and we have had our Professor Dowden, and happily still have our Professor Saintsbury and our Mr. Gosse, men whose passion for books, their filiation, their interdependence, their impact and repercussion from generation to generation is the supreme consideration of life. To Arnold we will not deny his literary enthusiasms, but this monstrous begetting of books upon books left him cold, and his least and last desire was to appear before the world as a systematic critic.

My second statement seems to need some defence. A poetic critic should set a high price upon craftsmanship, and it seems overbold to charge Matthew Arnold with a deficient regard for form. Is not he the exceptional man in his generation who ventured to re-apply the neo-classic theories to the art of poetry, who told us that great literature implied "fit details strictly combined, in view of a large general result nobly conceived," and shrivelled Burns's reputation in the flame of that doctrine, who formulated and applied the famous touchstone theory whereby a poet's verse stood condemned because Dante had written a finer line,—(for evidently Chaucer with his "martyr souted in virginite" must be a lesser poet than Dante with his "in la sua voluntadè è nostra pace"),

and who finally exhibited the courage of his convictions by withdrawing his *Empedocles* by reason of its defective action?

I pass lightly by the ineffectiveness and unfairness of Arnold's use of the touchstone method, and its incompatibility with his expressed disregard of "striking single thoughts" or happy images; and I hazard the question merely whether Arnold has not in the first place made formal judgments invalid by establishing too severe a standard of form, and whether in the second place he is not unduly prone in his criticism to confuse moral and formal issues, with the result that technical beauties receive scant justice at his hands.

The "grand style" is not a measuring yard designed to take the stature of your ordinary poet. The mesh of the net our critic casts is woven for Leviathans,—the smaller fry and even the fish of ampler girth swim through without impediment. I shall not dogmatize upon the question of what the "grand style" really may be. It is not, as the name suggests, mere magniloquence; turgidity had no keener foe than Arnold. Neither is it to be found in the "easy slipping movement" of Spenser, nor in the sudden felicities and "natural magic" of Keats. Transient splendours of diction stand condemned by the man for whom Shakespeare was too "fanciful", and whose standard of excellence was the even flowing power of the ancients.—But this incommunicable and mysterious essence is no figment or abstraction. We cannot adequately describe it, but Arnold has told us where its concrete embodiment is to be found. To discover it in art we must go to Phidias and Michael Angelo, to find it in poetry to Homer, to Sophocles, to Dante, to Milton. Confusion rather than concord flows from this enumeration. Phidias is almost too mythical to discuss, but grace and harmony of line were the qualities that incontestably dominated his art. Simplicity, dignity, nobility, the concomitants of the grand style are evidently there; but what kinship is there between the man who projected and permanently fixed his ideal types of almost expressionless beauty and that first and greatest of the Romantics whose tragic conception of life found an immediate embodiment in marbles that still imprison the pent up agonies of his mind? Either Phidias or Angelo should be cast out; or shall we preserve them each as severally exhibiting attributes of grandeur rarely found combined—Phidias the qualities of restraint and dignity, and Michael Angelo the attributes of tragic intensity which in their unmitigated expression in any medium save marble would be intolerable? The presence of Homer among the poets permits us to think that an element of playfulness, provided that it is dignified fun, is not incompatible with grandeur, or at least that an occasional lapse from grandeur is a permissible thing in art.

Sophocles, Dante and Milton are consistently dignified, and hold in common a view of life which we may describe as nobly and reverently pessimistic. Our conclusion then must be that the grand style emerges from a fusion of matter and manner so subtle that the universal world of letters can furnish us with only the rarest examples of the union, examples indeed so rare as to embarrass the critic in his task of valuation and comparison. In this intimate blending of matter and manner it is difficult to distinguish the qualities that pertain separately to each. The matter must be serious and dignified, and its tragic issue severely controlled; and what more shall we say of the manner than that it is these serious, these dignified, and these tragic views of life clothing themselves with their absolute and inevitable expression? Though the grand style is necessarily narrow in its range, yet the personal accent may colour it sufficiently to mark an individual difference, and there is room within its limits alike for the naive directness of Homer, the pregnant and springing vigour of Dante, and the laborious fullness of Milton. Has not enough been said to prove that Arnold by virtue of his very exactingness invalidates the appeal to form?

Arnold's preoccupation with moral issues introduces another confusing element into his judgments. One feels tempted to revise his vulgar fractions. If conduct is three-fourths of life it crowds all other elements into a narrow space, and leaves distressingly little room for bad conduct. If conduct is to be also three-fourths of art, excellence lies then at the mercy of an arithmetical computation. Arnold is happily less severe than his formulas, yet he is by no means so liberal in their interpretation as to occupy the disinterested position he so exactly demands from other critics of men and books and the general business of the world. No one seriously denies the moral reaction of art, though to explain how beauty expresses itself in terms of conduct lies beyond the reach of our current psychology. There is room and need in our poetry for Rossetti's "fundamental brain-work", room and need also for Arnold's "criticism of life." Our only complaint is that these things are such necessary and obvious elements in greatness that it seems a waste of energy to accentuate their value, and to emphasise them at the expense of qualities of harmony and imagination is a critical vice from which Arnold is not wholly free.

Let us examine the list of his critical essays to see what it may reveal to us of Arnold's critical bias. Out of some twenty-five essays (the *Homer* and the *Celtic Literature* may count as books) six essays, namely those on Tolstoi, Amiel, Emerson, Joubert, Marcus Aurelius, and Obermann, concern themselves with moral-

ists. Of the remaining subjects practically all are approached from the moral rather than from the artistic standpoint. The Milton studies are an exception. The brief address at St. Margaret's dwells only on Milton's secure perfection of form. "In the sure and flawless perfection of his rhythm and diction he is as admirable as Vergil or Dante, and in this respect he is unique amongst us. No one else in English literature and art possesses the like distinction. Shakespeare is divinely strong, rich, and attractive. But sureness of perfect style Shakespeare himself does not possess." "Milton, from one end of *Paradise Lost* to the other, is in his diction and rhythm constantly a great artist in the great style. Whatever may be said as to the subject of his poem, as to the conditions under which he received his subject and treated it, that praise at any rate is assured to him."

Milton's book is the outstanding example of the power of style to redeem an intractable subject matter. The Wordsworth essay gives us virtually the obverse of the problem. Wordsworth's Miltonese is either stilted or insipid. His powers lie, not in the possession of the "grand style," for only occasionally does he master its resources, but in the seriousness and effectiveness of his matter, in the comprehensive insight which carries him into the unexplored recesses of our consciousness. Of many styles essayed by him the most intimately Wordsworthian is discovered by Arnold in such a line as this from *Michael*, "And never lifted up a single stone," in which sheer fact is given us without adornment. With the examples in our mind of one poet who lives by style in spite of a defective matter and of another who lives by the high seriousness of his matter despite a defective style, let us consider now a poet who has been variously accused of possessing neither style nor matter, neither artistic conscience nor character. Let us consider Byron.

"When the year 1900 is turned, and our nation comes to recount her poetic glories in the century which has then just ended, the first names with her will be these—Wordsworth and Byron." Lord Morley's potent advocacy coupled with his own has not sufficed to implement this prophecy. Wordsworth now would only divide the suffrages with Keats and Shelley, and Byron would assuredly yield rank to them and to Coleridge, whom Arnold seems never to have adequately valued. The point of interest is to discover Arnold's grounds of admiration for a man who as to character was licentious, cynical and theatrical, and as to style lacked every quality of greatness save vigour and wit. Now Arnold is at some pains to justify his position, and he makes allowances for Byron

that he concedes to no other poet. In the Shelley essay Arnold has acknowledged to the full Byron's "deep grain of coarseness and commonness, his affectation, his brutal selfishness." In the Byron essay proper he seeks refuge in Goethe's estimate of Byron's "puissant personality," and maintains with Swinburne, in other respects an unsparing critic of the poet, that the fundamental qualities of his character were its splendid sincerity and strength. Byron's poetry more than that of any other poets of the time was steeped in actuality, and constitutes in consequence the most effective instrument of criticism which nineteenth century Europe has bequeathed to us. It is not as an artist then, but as a force, that Byron continues to live; and Arnold, who has promised us such gratifying results from our cultivation of the masters of expression, now plainly informs us that the grand style is so rigidly limited in its range that we can only in a negative sense apply it to the works of Byron and poets in general. "Truth and seriousness of substance and matter, felicity and perfection of diction and manner as they are exhibited in the best poets are what constitute a criticism of life made in conformity with the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty; and it is only by knowing and feeling the work of those poets that we learn to recognize the fulfilment and non-fulfilment of such conditions. The moment, however, that we leave the small band of the very best poets, and deal with poets of the next rank, we shall find that perfect truth and seriousness of matter, in close alliance with perfect truth and felicity of manner, is the rule no longer. We have now to take what we can get, to forego something here, to admit compensation for it there, to strike a balance, and to see how our poets stand in respect to one another when that balance has been struck."

We see then how Byron slips through the meshes of Arnold's theory, for in him we have a poet of all but highest rank who as to morals is loose, and whose style is the "hit or miss" proceeding that Byron himself has described to us—the tiger's leap at his prey, and the snarling retreat to the jungle when the fangs have failed to strike home. The George Sand essays give us another extreme instance of Arnold's relaxation of severity. Her peccancies and peccadilloes concern him not at all, and the romantic urgencies of her style offer no impediment to his praise. Byron, as we have noted, was redeemed by his fundamental sense of fact, by his sincerity and his forcefulness. George Sand, who for a generation has been like Byron in the backwaters of popular favour and critical enthusiasm, finds redemption in her unerring social instinct, and in her grasp of the corporate unity of her nation. In no small measure she has

the credit of propelling Arnold upon his own path as a critic of society.

Keats is judged almost entirely from the standpoint of character, and we can only be grateful to Arnold for asserting the native manliness of a poet whom sentimental admirers and detractors alike had combined to condemn as a weakling. Arnold of course is bound to recognize the sensuous basis of Keats's character, but he rightly holds that his yearning passion for the Beautiful was not chiefly a passion of the sensuous or sentimental man, or of the sensuous or sentimental poet, but was rather an intellectual and spiritual passion "connected and made one with the ambition of the intellect." In the Keats essay, as in the others I have cursorily considered, we are not given a comprehensive survey of a man's complete performance. Arnold did not pretend to be systematic or profound, but what he was anxious to do he succeeded in doing,—to give us, namely, a point of view from which to consider an author and his work.

To Shelley Arnold is notoriously unfair. He complains of his incurable want of substance, of the rudderless irregularity of his life, and of the vulgarity of the set he moved among. The value of the Shelley criticism is that there is just enough of justification in its mild harshness to temper the vehemence of partizanship which Shelley more than ordinary poets evokes. The intelligent reading world will not accept Arnold's comparative estimate of Shelley and Byron, but all of us, intelligent or otherwise, will gain something by realizing the grounds of his opinion, which bases itself upon the belief that Byron, dealing more largely and more sanely with life, is therefore a poet of more scope and power. I need pursue no further my enquiry into the individual essays. They all possess Arnold's un-failing charm of expression, and their crisp judgments stir the reader's mind to a fruitful activity, and an activity the more fruitful perhaps when we are constrained to resist them. In no instance can we say that he has enabled us to see round and about and through an author; his Byron essay, for example, is a delicately phrased and fragile thing beside the powerful study from Lord Morley's pen, but he is incomparable whether in prose or verse for the art of giving us the root qualities of a man from which all the various ramifications derive. I do not think he is always to be trusted in the generalizations he throws out as to the tendencies and spiritual conformation of a period. He has not grasped the meaning of our Elizabethan age; he does not, outside of Milton and the Anglican divines, appear to know our seventeenth century;—Dryden's importance for him is merely that he ushered in a period of intelligible prose; he has not grasped the critical importance of our eighteenth

century, and wilfully characterizes our early nineteenth century as an epoch of concentration that falls short of greatness because the preceding age had not furnished it with ideas, whereas the German writers of the same period are working upon material plentifully provided for them and adequately prepared by critical pioneers of power. We cannot go far with generalizations so airily thin as these.

One final disappointment I wish to register, and my tale of complaints is closed. None of our critics has had a livelier sense of our need to deinsularize ourselves as a literary nation. Coleridge and Carlyle had traversed the ground of German thought before him, and had left Arnold only the important omission of Heine to supply. Pioneer work of the utmost importance remained to be done with respect to French and Italian literature. Of the latter, save for Dante, Arnold was pardonably ignorant, for all things even a critic cannot know, but French literature—which he professed to know—he failed often where it was strongest and most characteristic to understand.

The portion of Arnold's work that evoked the loudest comment in his lifetime is now the deadest part of his message to the world. He was drawn into theological controversy reluctantly, he left it gladly, and before the close of his life he candidly confessed his failure: "Religious disputes have for so long a time touched the innermost fibre of our nation's being that they still attract great attention, and create passions and parties, but certainly they have not the significance they once had. The moral is that whoever treats religion, discussions, questions of churches and sects as absorbing, is not in vital sympathy with the movement of men's minds at present." A man so susceptible as Arnold was to the impression of the *Zeitgeist* could not pass upon himself a more absolute condemnation.

His avowed purpose was to save the Christian religion from threatened disintegration, and the net result of his endeavours was to offend the orthodox by his boldness and the sceptical by his timidity. The Church is to satisfy itself with a God who is not the Father, with a Saviour who is not the Son, and with a Holy Ghost who is a pious survival from a credulous age. It must make shift to do without miracles and dogma; with miracles must go the physical resurrection of Christ and with dogma the cherished doctrine of immortality. These purgations accomplished, the true life of the Church begins. It must take its stand only upon verifiable beliefs, and will have as its final and unassailable refuge the Israelitic conception of righteousness and the exemplary character of Christ. "A very pretty religion, Mr. Arnold, but it is not Christianity." So far as I can follow his meaning, Arnold does not press for any alterations in the

formulas of the liturgy, nor does he want to minimize in the least the institutional value of the Church. Like some divinely appointed French Academy, it is to give tone to our morals and distinction to our worship. The Church of England as at present constituted (though with a liberal interpretation of its dogmas) satisfies our immediate requirements; yet Arnold considers that a relaxed Catholicism may give us the national Church of the future. Dissent has no legitimate business in the land. Separatism upon non-moral grounds is vicious, and as the nonconformist body seceded originally on political and dogmatic issues, so their state to-day is a "fractious mixture of politics and religion," and their vulgarity and rigidity are a perpetual menace to our civilization.

This last statement, which savours so little of the "sweet reasonableness" of his Master, has the merit of bringing sharply home to us the main matter and point of departure of all our author's various writings. "The master-thought by which my politics are governed . . . is the thought of the bad civilization of the English middle class." I shall not pause to inquire how readily the nonconformist might confute various items in the indictment. Potent nonconformist pens have busied themselves not unsuccessfully at the task of refutation, and most of the issues have had by now a decent burial. What is important to note is Arnold's conviction that our modern English civilization (he concerned himself, save for purposes of comparison with no other) is not pursuing a safe line of development, and his equally confident belief that the individuals who constitute the nation are not so irredeemable that the true path for their advance may not be found.

An examination of social conditions as Arnold sees them and of the remedies proposed will enable us to reach our own conclusions in the matter. Civilization in Arnold's view is primarily an affair of expansion, in a material sense it is an expansion in the direction of trade, in an ideal sense it is a striving after the benefits of liberty and equality. Not less essential to a perfect civilization is the expansion of our natures which comes from the satisfaction of "the power of conduct, the power of intellect, the power of beauty, and the power of social life and manners." These powers combined and fully satisfied in the individuals of a nation, we arrive at the perfect state, which is the corporate and collective expression of our best selves. That such individuals are rare, and that a state so ideally ordered has no present and possibly no future existence does not prejudice Arnold's argument, for he holds that progress lies in the striving after perfection rather than in its passionless possession. Reviewing past and existing civilizations, Arnold con-

cluded that Greece in her great period, defective only in the power of conduct, ranks highest in the scale of excellence. France, with less material advancement than ourselves, has in much larger measure the benefits of equality, and has in like degree with the ancient Greeks the sense of social life and manners which lurks with us only among our haughty "barbarians", and filters down but slowly and imperfectly into the mass of our people. Germany's scientific leadership and the exactness of her scholarship (I quote Arnold's view) bespeak her lead in the department of intellect and knowledge. Materially speaking we are presumably in the van, and of the liberty to do as one likes we have a superflux. Defective, because of our Puritanism and our passion for inequality, in the sense of social life and manners; limited in our range of intellect and knowledge, we take our stand upon our power of conduct which seems by its excess to have sapped the strength and virtue from all the other essential elements of our national life. One knows the familiar ring of Arnold's arraignment of Puritanism,—that it has left us with "a narrow range of intellect and knowledge, a stunted sense of beauty, and a low standard of social life and manners." The middle class, where now the force of the country resides, with its resistance to "sweetness and light" and with its belated Puritanism, is our chief obstacle upon the path of progress. In consequence Arnold feels himself at liberty to neglect his Barbarians with only a faint remonstrance against their materialism and inaccessibility to ideas, and the populace with only a mildly expressed regret at their addiction to "beer and fun," and brings all the bitterness of his attack to bear upon the shortcomings of the middle classes. Clearly his educational programme is designed for them, all his arguments for social reform point in their direction, and his reconstruction of religion, though it undoubtedly has the duplicate purpose of making Christianity acceptable to the cultured sceptic, is mainly an attempt to point out and to remedy the elements of vulgarity in the nonconformist faith and the nonconformist practice.

We are now in a position to estimate the residual value of Arnold's prose work. His literary criticism is generally and not improperly held to be, after that of Coleridge and Hazlitt, the most significant in the century. His theological criticism has receded into the background where only the inquisitively bold will penetrate. There remains his social criticism which has been variously estimated, and which still has to find its proper place in our English social philosophy. The general statement may be ventured that nothing so literary in the way of political speculation has been produced in our time. *Friendship's Garland* for its Voltairean qualities of

brightness, of grace, of delicately veiled irony, and *Culture and Anarchy* with its continuous charm, and its easy flow of argument, have been justly praised, but never I think in excess of their merit. However, political philosophy must in the last analysis be judged for its matter, and the true comparison will lie, not between the masculine but somewhat clumsy vigour of a Bagehot or a Mill and the deft craftsmanship of Arnold, but between the close and concrete reasoning of the former and Arnold's brilliant generalizations.

An early developed mode of attack concerned itself with Arnold's inadequate analysis of our difficulties, and with the remedies he so jauntily proposed. In the first place it was urged that his generalizations lacked foundation; in what respect, for example, is the country of Newton and Darwin deficient in the power of intellect and knowledge? It was further argued that, even could we concede his preliminary analysis, his proposal of culture as a ready way out of our difficulties is purely academic, and—while human nature remains as it is—not within measurable distance of consummation. To the critics of *Culture* as a mere aesthetic adjunct of our nature, Arnold has a ready reply: "It is common to hear remarks on the frequent divorce between culture and character, and to infer from this that culture is a mere varnish, and that character only deserves serious attention. No error can be more fatal. Culture without character is no doubt something frivolous, vain and weak; but character without culture is on the other hand, something raw, blind and dangerous." Culture is then, in his opinion, the harmonious co-operation of all the higher powers of our nature, and has a connotation wider than religion, or character, or intelligence, for it embraces them all. As such it must be a thing of rarest occurrence in the individual, and so difficult of achievement for a nation at large that the civilization which Arnold desiderates can have existence only in the Utopia of our dreams. The critics who condemn Arnold as unpractical have then much matter for their argument, but for them too our author has his imperturbable reply; "It is only by remaining collected, and refusing to lend himself to the point of view of the practical man, that the critic can do the practical man any service," and what we need is "to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best that has been thought and said in the world, and through this knowledge to turn a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically; vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically."

Though this is a fortifying argument against the hastily-snatched

opinions which our "ordinary selves" are inclined to form, and our inveterate worship of machinery and shibboleths, it is still the lily-fingered Arnold who speaks, and our weakness craves for robuster counsel. Yet, all subtractions made, Arnold's work deserves to endure, and its matter no less than its form will keep it vital. Already Carlyle is much more antiquated, and his fierce thrusts at our contemporary abuses have lost much of their primal force. Of the two Arnold is the shrewder critic, and will accommodate himself more readily to the tastes of a future age. The dissenter and the practical politician will be the last to acknowledge his merit, but Arnold cherished the not unreasonable hope that even with them his day would come.