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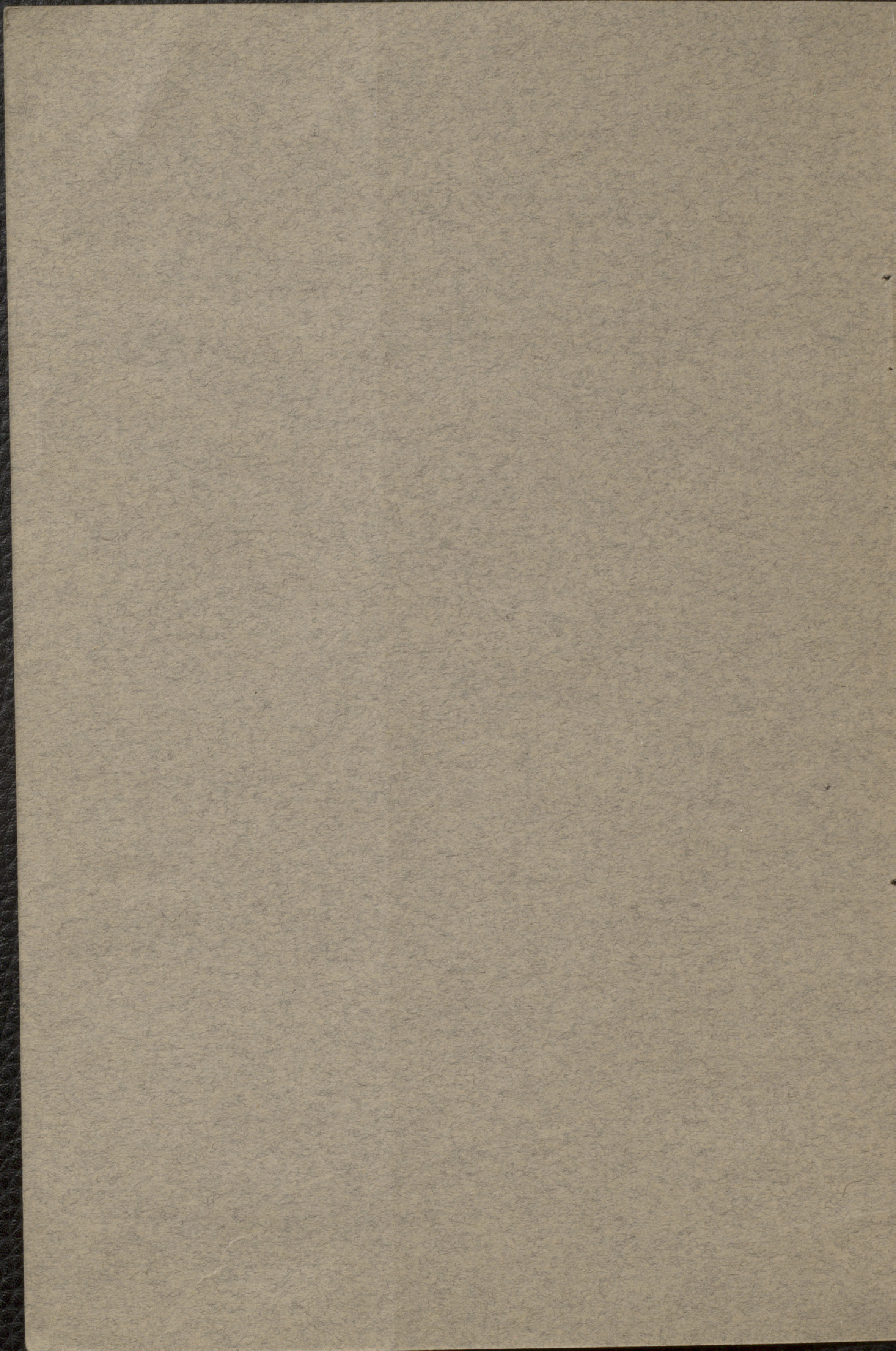

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THE FAMILY OF THE FAERIE QUEENE[1]

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THAT a great poem is always a great poem is a proposition as widely accepted as it is erroneous. The popular mind conceives of literary reputation as being something eternally fixed; they draw up lists of five great authors, ten great authors—for some unknown reason writers coagulate in multiples of five while wonders tend toward the more mysterious seven—and with these lists they lash the backs of the uncultured. If education be measured lineally by the number of feet and inches on a bookshelf, literary appreciation must be merely a matter of cubic content. Societies convene to discuss whether Dante is greater than Homer, whether Shakespeare and Sophocles are nicely equal, and the grandeur of Homer, the power of Sophocles, the intensity of Dante, the humanity of Shakespeare, and the depth of Goethe are each weighed and balanced. It is a pretty game, one that gives a sense of superiority to the players, but, clearly, it has little relation to fact. Greatness, if such an attribute be attributed to any poem in any but the historical sense, must be not static, but dynamic; it can be apparent only in the effect of the "great" poem upon others. And to have such an effect the first essential is that said poem should be read. No matter how theoretically great may have been the poet laureate of ancient Lydia, clearly he is no longer an actual force because we no longer read Lydian. In so extreme a case the proposition is self-evident. But are you willing to apply the same reasoning to the case of Homer? Some of us here are old enough to remember a time when the knowledge of Greek was

[1] Address delivered before the Tudor-Stuart Club, January 11, 1924.

the concomitant of the B.A.; today only a small proportion of college students take Greek. This fact means that they can know Homer only through the medium of an idiom foreign to him and through another personality, that of the translator. How, then, can they be expected to appreciate him? The same condition applies, although of course to a much less degree, with our own English authors of the past. Merely to understand the language of Shakespeare requires an effort—the actual words used are a hindrance to our comprehension, and to a real degree militate against his "greatness."

Not so evident, however, is the difficulty that lies, not in the ignorance of the words, but in the inability to comprehend sympathetically the points of view of the author. Will you pardon me if I illustrate what I mean? I am taking a passage from Kipling's story "*.007*" because I assume that you all have read it. You may remember that it deals with personified locomotives, and the scene is laid in a roundhouse.

"Ah! But—but are you not paralyzed by a sense of your overwhelming responsibilities?" said a curious husky voice from a corner.

"Who's that?" .007 whispered to the Jersey commuter.

"Compound—experiment—N.G. She's bin switchin' in the B. &. A. yards for six months, when she wasn't in the shops. She's economical (I call it mean) in her coal, but she takes it out in repairs. Ahem! I presume you found Boston somewhat isolated, Madam, after your New York season?"

"I am never so well occupied as when I am alone." The Compound seemed to be talking from half-way up her smoke-stack.

"Sure," said the irreverent Poney, under his breath. "They don't hanker after her any in the yard."

"But, with my constitution and temperament—my work lies in Boston—I find your *outrecuidance*—"

"Outer which?" said the Mogul freight. "Simple cylinders are good enough for me."

"Perhaps I should have said *faroucherie*," hissed the Compound.

"I don't hold with any make of papier-mâché wheel," the Mogul insisted.

The Compound sighed pityingly, and said no more.

"Git 'em all shapes in this world, don't ye?" said Poney. "That's

Mass'chusetts all over. They half start, an' then they stick on a dead-centre, an' blame it all on other folks' ways o' treatin' them."

Now imagine trying to teach such a passage in the year of our Lord twenty-three hundred and twenty-three, in a world where the parts of a locomotive are as unknown as the parts of a suit of armor are to us, when the various dialects are all equally forgotten and the humor due to the geographic characterizations entirely lost. Think of the unhappy schoolboy puzzling out the words in the glossary and then despondingly pawing over the notes. Can't you hear him ejaculating, "This stuff is supposed to be funny!" How can there fail, then, to be an obstruction between the twentieth century American and the Periclean Greek, or the fourteenth century Florentine? We necessarily see through the glass darkly, whereas their contemporaries saw face to face.

But granted that this obstruction must always exist, it yet does not follow that there are not degrees in the difficulty. When the general characteristics of one epoch resemble broadly those of a previous period, those writers are then read and imitated. Conversely, the writers of a dissimilar past tend to be ignored. For example, the people of the Queen Anne Age prided themselves upon being similar to the Romans of the time of Augustus. In both periods there was a great development in city life, with a corresponding love of nature improved by man, a highly artificial society, and a complex social order. The one great city was the one great social center. This was expressed in the saying "All roads lead to Rome," or the analogous one "The finest view in Scotland is the road that leads to London." Consequently we find them accepting Vergil as a standard and translating and imitating Horace. Conversely, *gothic* was a term of reproach and even Dryden's versions of Boccaccio and Chaucer are curiously unlike the spirit of their originals. And it is worthy of note that the great poem of that age

is not a *Divine Comedy*, or a *Paradise Lost*; it is a social satire, *The Rape of the Lock*.

But an age that produces as its masterpiece such a poem as *The Rape of the Lock* is conditioned by the demands of Society. Good form has become its ideal. For that violent emotion must be suppressed; one does not roar with laughter at a dinner. The fervor of religion will be toned down into tolerance; one cannot discuss the essentials of faith between courses. And that tolerance will be extended also to those that have no religion to be toned down, and scepticism will flourish like the green bay tree. Love becomes refined to an emasculated ideal, at the same time that animalism runs rampant; fine gentlemen at one moment whisper Platonic trifles, and at the next are brutes. But they are always clever. That is their aim. Between the entrée and the roast one does not search for truth; there is time only for the half-truth of an epigram. And if the epigram be neatly turned, the degree of truth does not much matter. Form, therefore, becomes of great value; brevity an essential; and intellectual ingenuity of supreme importance. Clarity and critical acumen will be the chief characteristics of the literature. Its profundity will consist in aphorisms on man in the abstract, and its conclusions will be pessimistic. They no longer justify the ways of God to man, as did Milton; they vindicate the ways of God to man, as did Pope, because they feel that God stands in need of vindication. What could such an age find in Spenser, Spenser idealistic, rambling, diffuse?

> Old Spenser next, warm'd with poetick rage,
> In ancient tales amus'd a bar'brous age;
> An age that yet uncultivate and rude,
> Where-e'er the poet's fancy led, pursued
> To den of dragons and enchanted woods.
> But now the mystick tale, that pleas'd of yore,
> Can charm an understanding age no more;
> The long-spun allegories fulsom grow,
> While the dull moral lies too plain below.

> We view well-pleas'd at distance all the sights
> Of arms and palfries, battels, fields and fights,
> And damsels in distress, and courteous knights.
> But when we look too near, the shades decay,
> And all the pleasing landscape fades away.

You smile? But I am quoting one of the greatest of English critics, the great Mr. Addison, and he is here expressing the conviction of his age.

But the wheel of time in its turning is bringing us around to a position analogous to that of the English Augustins. The social and political conditions are similar, then and now; similar also are the mental states and the reactions to literature. Like them we are scientific, intellectual, sceptical, and critical. Like them, in literature we prefer an analytic presentation of life to nebulous emotions caused either by beauty or by nature. A hundred years ago the world echoed responsive to Byron:

> Oh! that the Desert were my dwelling place,
> With one fair Spirit for my minister,
> That I might all forget the human race,
> And, hating no one, love but only her.

Because,

> I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
> From these our interviews, in which I steal
> From all I may be, or have been before,
> To mingle with the Universe, and feel
> What I can ne'er express—yet cannot all conceal.

Today we go to nature for a vacation; our business is in the city. "Where a man's treasure is" . . . . Sunrise on the mountains when the peaks flush pink, noon in the valleys where the heavy shade darkens the silent pools, night on the plains when the great stars burn—all this is very well, but it is not Wall Street. Our cities dotted with great hotels, each hotel accommodating in itself numbers greater than the total population of the sixteenth century village—we are not primarily interested in nature; we

wish man. And literature naturally responds to the demand. The most popular collection of poems in the last decade was, I suppose, *The Spoon River Anthology.* Surely no one would turn to that to satisfy his love either of beauty or of nature. It combines the cynicism of Pope with the coarseness of Swift. One hundred and ninety-one years ago a great poet epitomized the great interest of his age:

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
> The proper study of Mankind is Man.
> Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
> A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
> With too much knowledge for the Sceptic's side,
> With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
> He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest;
> In doubt to deem himself a God or Beast;
> In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;
> Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
> Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
> Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
> Chaos of Thought and Passion all confus'd;
> Still by himself abus'd or disabus'd;
> Created half to rise, and half to fall;
> Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
> Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:
> The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

One hundred and ninety-one years ago—but how modern these lines are! It almost seems as though our modern novel were written to illustrate them; so much so, in fact, that it is unnecessary to cite examples. But in a world like this, what may be said for Spenser? Spenser, idealistic, rambling, diffuse? We all agree that Spenser is a great poet, that a knowledge of the *Faerie Queene* is an essential component to a liberal education, and consequently, while we ourselves are gathering our wraps and putting on our overcoats in preparation for going out to see *The Gods of Vengeance*, or *Rain*, or *Anna Christie*, or *The Lower Depths*, we hurl injunctions to our children to be sure in our absence to prepare the next day's assignment

in the *Faerie Queene.* We do not have to do it; we have read it. To be sure, it was so long ago that, although we studied only the First Book, we suffer under the misapprehension that we have read it all. And we studied that Book so thoroughly that we have never had the desire to read any more. Hypocrisy is more rampant in literature than in religion, and more dangerous because it is unconscious. We are bored by the *Faerie Queene,* but even to ourselves we will not admit that we can be bored by a "great" poem.

But what a pity it is that we should be bored. Life is hard enough that any pleasure that can alleviate legitimately the drab routine should be welcomed. And granted that we are conditioned by the spirit of our age, an age unsympathetic to such work as that of Spenser, it yet does not follow that we cannot, and should not, rise above the age. Many minds, certainly equal to ours, have found in Spenser a refuge from the daily dullness; why do we neglect as easy an opening of escape? Spenser is the gateway that leads from the worries of this work-a-day world,

> The weariness, the fever, and the fret,
> Here where men sit and hear each other groan.

But is it easy? Primarily the language is not the trouble. As a matter of fact, it is not much more difficult to us than it was to the poet's contemporaries. Ben Jonson's dictum still holds: "Spenser, in affecting the ancients, writ no language;" or, as many years later Gay characterized it as "not only such as in the present time is not uttered but was never uttered in times past; and, if I judge aright, will never be uttered in times future." Therefore, if in the past men could leap the bar of Spenser's vocabulary, so can we. But the difficulty lies in adjusting our minds to his sixteenth century point of view to comprehend the aim of the poet, to see what he is trying to do, and why he is trying to do it, and, conversely, not to waste our strength in looking for what is not there.

But to do this requires a long detour over ground which at first sight seems of little connection with the *Faerie Queene.* And the road, like so many roads in the sixteenth century, leads to Italy. Today no one would compare England and Italy as centers of literary forces; in the sixteenth century no one would compare Italy and England as literary foci for exactly opposite reasons. So when Spenser planned his poem, his eyes turned southward for literary precedent. We know this because the poet had told his friend Harvey that he aimed to "emulate" and "hoped" to "overgo" the *Orlando Furioso.* So if we in our turn wish to appreciate the poem, our eyes also must turn southward, and there in Italy we shall find the literary ancestors of the *Faerie Queene.* In life, the child is both a definite concrete personality and yet she has the family traits and recalls her grandmothers. In fact, really to understand any child, one should have known intimately all her immediate ancestors. Perhaps that is the reason why it is so difficult to understand one's own children! Anyway, it is true in literature, and we turn to the past to comprehend the present.

And the past, in this case, is very far away. At the time when Europe was busy assimilating the very diverse elements that were to make our modern peoples, when Charlemagne was still on the throne, and the Great Turk a perilously equal rival to Christendom, a rear guard of Charlemagne's army, commanded by Roland, was cut off in one of the defiles of the Pyrenees, and Roland himself was slain. Although it was not a great battle, it was a dolorous defeat. And the popular mind fastened on it, chanting the tragedy of Christendom, and the final victory. As men could not read, poets told and re-told and re-told the story in the long medieval evenings, by the firelight in the long medieval winters. And as century after century the tales were told, the actual historic personages became transmogrified. Charlemagne sinks into an old man in senile dotage. Roland the hero is betrayed

by the traitor Ganélon. Other changes follow. When men cannot travel, mystery lies just beyond the horizon; and in the firelight they see giants; when men do not know science, wonder lies around; and in the firelight they see magic and enchantments. Thus like a snowball accumulating through the ages grew the great Charlemagne cycle, a heterogeneous mass of folk-song, vague race memories, and Oriental experience learned in the crusades. And in the twelfth century it was given papal sanction when Calixtus II authorized the *Chronicle of Turpin*. Of course it was believed and loved for five hundred years—is still, for that matter, in Italy today.

The question, rather beside the point, is sometimes asked why the poets did not choose rather the analogous Arthur story. From the Italian point of view the answer is easy. For centuries the states of Italy were in conflict with the Turk. To them England was more remote than Iceland is to us, whereas Turkish galleys and Barbary pirates were only too familiar. In the struggle with Paganism Italy geographically was in the front rank. And also, negatively, the Celtic strain of esoteric mysticism and of idealistic chivalry was antagonistic to the hardheaded burghers of the Italian communes. Add also, as Symonds suggests, the tradition of Rome and the actuality of the Holy Roman Empire and there is explanation a-plenty why the Italian street singers should hymn the "matter of France."

There is one characteristic common to the mass of these writings; both the author and the audience believed in the tale. In the Renaissance, however, the age of faith had gone. Macchiavelli may be considered cynical and cold, but no one has ever accused him of being credulous. The same is true of the court gathered a generation earlier around Lorenzo at Florence. And what a brilliant lot they are! Lorenzo himself, clever poet but still more clever politician, and in both poetry and politics perfectly sure of himself and the aim he desired to accomplish; Politian,

the young Homer, unlike Homer in that his verses are as hard and as brilliant as enamel; Landino, the great editor of Dante; Ficino, the great Platonist. Can't you see that group gathered in the Riccardi Palaggio on what is now Via Cavour, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Lorenzo's famous mother, collecting around her all that was brilliant among the Florentine men in an age when Florence led the world in intellect, and all that was beautiful among the Florentine women in an age when Florence led the world in art? They amused themselves like any other group of lively young people, in telling stories to each other. Among them, Luigi Pulci, a wild scatter-brained young fellow, determined to retell the old medieval stories of Charlemagne, as they were sung by the Florentine street singers. He actually took two old poems, *Lo Spagna* and the *Orlando*, as his basis. For this reason, like the street singers, each canto begins with an invocation:

> O Blessed Soul, magnificent, serene,
> Pillar of our faith, angelic, purest dove,
> Thou Holy Virgin, lowly Nazarene,
> Yet Spouse of God, Bride of Immortal Love,
> Keep me, O keep me in the golden mean
> That of my fancies I may rise above.
> Hearten my heart, strengthen my fainting fears,
> That this, my song, may please these listening ears.

This is medieval, not of the Renaissance.

But the listening ears were not medieval; the full tide of the Renaissance was upon them. The old poems of a credulous age were not for them. So although Pulci narrates the events, he neither believes his stories nor does he expect his hearers to believe in them. His aim is amusement. His left eye slowly closes, and he pushes events to their absurdly logical conclusion. This he does by visualizing the actuality. To the poet of the past giants were not only possible, but plausible. He had scriptural warrant for believing that "there were giants in those days." To the Renaissance sceptic, a giant is

too ridiculous to need refutation. In the old story, Roland had converted a well-intentioned giant, who became a worthy warrior for the Lord. Those of us that remember the story of Saint Christopher can see the treatment. Pulci tells the story. The giant in a playful way had been throwing great rocks at the monastery to the consternation of the monks. When Roland brings him back after his conversion, both the abbot and his monks are frankly doubtful, inquiring

> Do you really mean to bring that thing inside?

Reassured, the abbot is cheered and quotes Scripture:

> Greater joy God feels for one alone
> Than ninety-nine already safe in Heaven.

Of course the size of Morgante might well be the equivalent of ninety-nine little men! And to pleasure him the abbot gives him a horse. The result is disastrous because Morgante, just like a child, forgets his weight and tries to ride it.

> Morgante wished to ride the horse alone,
> To show his paces, curvets, back, and leg.
> He must have thought the beast was made of stone,
> Or he himself too light to break an egg.
> Of course the horse collapsed with an equine moan
> And flattened out like putty from a keg.
> Says Morgante then: "Get up, get up, old mill-horse,"
> And tries to spur him, making matters still worse.
>
> At last convinced, sadly he did dismount,
> And puzzled said: "I'm light as any feather!
> He's squashed all right! Say, aint it funny, Count?"
> And Roland answered . . . .

Armed with the tongue of a great bell from the abbey, Morgante, it is unnecessary to assure you, proves a doughty champion of Christendom, dealing terrible blows to the foul fiends of Mahound, among whom but recently he himself was numbered. I am illustrating with Morgante,

perhaps because Rabelais admired and copied him, but equally well I might have chosen Margutte, the impersonation of the deadly sin of gluttony. The method here is curiously that which we associate with America. A situation or a character is exaggerated beyond the bounds of possibility and the resultant treated with careful realism. And the effect is necessarily broad comedy. Like *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, the first intention of the author is amusement. Some of the scenes are almost farcical, in contrast with the manner of the writer. On his face there is never a smile—but he is the only one that doesn't laugh. But a second factor follows from the first. One does not ridicule the institution that one loves. So your farcical treatment turns, more or less unconsciously, into attack. Certainly is that true with Mark Twain. With him one feels a hatred of chivalry and "girly-girly" romance. We know it because he tells us so:

> Against the crimes of the French Revolution and of Bonaparte may be set two compensating benefactions: the Revolution broke the chains of the ancien régime and of the Church, and made of a nation of abject slaves a nation of freemen; and Bonaparte instituted the setting of merit above birth. . . . . Such benefactions as these compensate for the temporary harm which Bonaparte and the Revolution did. . . . . Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this wave of progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded forms of government; with the silliness and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote.

To a man that felt like this, you can trust him if ever the opportunity offers, to ridicule and to attack the "sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society." But in the Renaissance that society was not long-vanished. It was the immediate past which they were endeavoring to forget.

To Politian, with the suavity of Horace before his eyes, knights seemed uneducated brutes; to Ficino, with the reasoning of Plato in his ears, the legends of the Church were silly drivel. From one side, at least, the *Morgante* must be read with a broad smile. The whole concept of chivalry has been depressed. For all their gorgeous trappings, the knights are only bourgeois in disguise, and the motives for their actions are eminently commonplace.

But a contempt of the past as represented by the old romances was only one side of the Renaissance. That is negative only. A barrier broken down is only a broken down barrier until one passes beyond it. And in the third quarter of the quattrocento the human spirit was feeling its way, timidly and hesitantly, into the unknown beyond of modern life. The effect of the intrusion of Greek rationalism and Greek speculation was a fresh daring into the confines of thought. Old ideas, ideas that had served well for generations, were now being discarded for new ones that were not yet believed. This is not comedy but tragedy, and this is portrayed in the *Morgante* by the demon Astarotte. His function in the poem is to convey two knights to Roncevalle in order that they may take part in the battle. He does this with more willingness since they are destined to kill a number of pagans whose souls will go straight to Hell. This consideration renders him goodhumored and makes him a most delightful travelling companion. As Arturo Graf phrases it: "He is the wisest, best, and most courteous devil that ever lived in this world." Or as Pulci makes his knight exclaim:

> I'm sorry to have you go; I now can tell
> Good breeding and courtesy are found in Hell.

With so cultivated a devil, naturally, one asks questions. Among the friends of Lorenzo the old medieval concept of the earth as a flat plain with Jerusalem at the center was a thing of the past. So perhaps it will not cause sur-

prise that four years before Columbus Astarotte tells his companions:

So know that this opinion is all vain,
Because much farther men will navigate.
The ocean everywhere is like a plain;
And the earth, a wheel, slowly doth rotate . . . .

Into the other half then men may go,
Since from the center all things are depended;
So that the earth, in a mysterious flow,
Among the stars sublimely is suspended;
Beyond the sea are monarchs high and low . . . .

Afterward Columbus merely translated into action the common thought.

But a man's religion is more important. Through the mouth of Astarotte Pulci voices the new spirit, the now old attempt to rationalize religion. He starts with what in modern terms would be called force. Here I am abandoning my own futile efforts to confine the fluid Italian into our harsh Anglo-Saxon, and am quoting Symonds' translation.

You say: Three Persons in one entity,
One substance; and to this we too adhere:
One flawless, pure, unmixed activity:—
Wherefore it follows from what went before,
That this alone is what you all adore.

One Mover, whence all movement is impelled;
One order, whence all order hath its rise;
One cause, whereby all causes are compelled;
One power, whence flow all powers and energies;
One fire, wherein all radiances are held;
One principle, which every truth implies;
One knowledge, whence all wisdom hath been given;
One Good, which made all good in earth and heaven.

This is that Father and that ancient King,
Who made all things and can all things know,
But cannot change His own wise ordering,
Else heaven and earth to ruin both would go.

Adam knew not the nature of his sin;
Therefore his primal error was forgiven,

Because the tempter took him in a gin:
Only his disobedience angered heaven;
Therefore, though cast from Eden, he might win
Grace, when repentance from his heart had driven
The wicked will, with peace to end his strife,
And mercy also in eternal life.

But the angelic nature, once debased,
Can never more to purity return . . . .

Thrice happy Christians! One small tear can sever
Your bonds!—One sigh, sent from the contrite will:
Lord, to Thee only did I sin!—But never
Shall we find grace: we sinned once: now we lie
Sentenced to Hell for all eternity.

Have I quoted enough to give you the idea of this logical reasoning devil? A devil for whom one has sympathy? In fact, a very modern devil? I hope so, because in English literature he appears again in the Mephistopheles of Christopher Marlowe. In the work of the great agnostic among the Elizabethans appears the same spiritual conception of evil and the same logical reason for eternal damnation. As a side issue, it may be added in passing that Astarotte is a pranksome spirit and plays jokes on Queen Blanda when she is eating. He seizes a plate and it vanishes to the discomfiture of the servants; she starts to drink and one of the knights, invisible, snatches the cup. A scene of buffoonery. Here again you are conscious of the parallelism with Marlowe, and you see the origin of the comic dinner of the Pope in the *Faustbuch* and in Marlowe.

I have lingered over long over the first paternal ancestor of the *Faerie Queene*, partly because the author who inspired both Rabelais and Marlowe is not so well known as he should be, and partly because Pulci illustrates the variety and range of the appeal. Necessarily we must hurry over the chivalric Boiardo. With him the scene changes. We leave the Florentine burghers to enter the half-feudal castle that still dominates and contrasts with the gay little town of Ferrara. Outside in the brilliant

sunlight groups laugh and chatter; the voices die away as their eyes fall upon the square machiolated towers, the stagnant moat, and the ponderous drawbridge of the castello. Curious stories are told of dungeons just below that drawbridge, and the arms of the Duke are long. The castello thus strikes a curiously anachronistic note. The Renaissance is to be found in the Schifanoja with its wide sunny windows and its brightly colored frescoes of the school of Tura. Life there is consonant with the gay side of the period; but the grim old castello enshrouds the memories of the House of Este, a House whose heir was rarely legitimate. Not pleasant memories, only, has the old castello! And these also are the characteristics of the *Roland in Love*. Pulci was a merry soul, fond of people, fond of life; his contemporary, Matteo Mari Boiardo, the great Count of Scandiano, the friend and companion of princes, looks down on the *popolaccio* with the disdain of the over-lord. In rough, turbid, rushing stanzas he sings of the feats of heroes. He has no time for idle digressions, extended metaphors, or luscious descriptions. His effects are gained by mass architectural construction; there is nothing merely pretty here. Even the language is rough hewn, dialectic. But it is eminently virile. The figures stand out like those by the school of Tura. There is power here, but it lacks the subtlety of the master. Yet he is of the Renaissance. He tells the story of Roland in *love*, because no longer can women be ignored. He does it grudgingly, it is true, but he is forced to acknowledge that love is a powerful motive with even the greatest of heroes. Time fails to enter upon the vexed question of Berni's *rifaciamento* of Boiardo's poem, and the still more vexed question of a possible *rifaciamento* of the *rifaciamento*. The point to be noted here is that when Ariosto in his turn began the *Orlando Furioso*, he assumed a knowledge of Boiardo in the reader and consciously built upon the foundations of his predecessor.

Ariosto—but what can I say of Ariosto? I surely shall

not try to translate him. First and foremost Ariosto is a great poet; he possesses to a supreme degree the mastery of sounds, sounds so musical that even yet, it is said, gondoliers chant them to the swing of the oar. Before writing this, I have been reading Sir John Harington's translation. You may remember the old yarn how Harington, a lively young fellow in 1591, showed his translation of the Giocondo story to Queen Bess, and shocked her to such a degree that she exiled him from court and ordered him to translate the rest of the poem. His translation is in the ottava rima, the original stanza form—a not small feat considering the difficulty of that stanza in English. I am willing to concede all that may be said and has been said of its excellences, but compared to the original it is flat champagne. The sparkle, the brilliancy, the aroma are all gone—but I cannot make a better! In my copy of the Harington in a contemporary handwriting is written: "A Curse on my thick scull my Brainless Blockhead of a pate Such a Clumsy varlet never was in ye wearld a very Joseph demon of a fellow." I sometimes wonder whether the original owner of my copy had been comparing the translation with Ariosto, trying to catch the magic of the original, and that this was his recorded judgment on his efforts. I have tried, and I repeat: A curse on my thick skull, my brainless blockhead of a pate! But I notice also that Symonds gives it up! Ariosto's verse has the cadence and clarity of Italian air. You smell the orange groves of Sorrento; you are haunted by the memories of Rome; you feel the mists from the Mantuan marshes, and the mystery of the Venetian lagoon. English!—You can no more put that into English than you can transfer the roll of Milton's organ to the piano accompaniment of French rime. A poet lives in his sounds, and with the study of German brought in by Coleridge and Carlyle Italian is neglected and Ariosto is lost.

The loss is the greater because Ariosto is the epitome of the Italian Renaissance. Life was then joyous and

gay. We take our pleasures sadly and our conduct is expressed by the colors of our clothes. Oh, I know our way is better; I recognize the austere beauty of the Ten Commandments, sublime if you will—*mais ce n'est pas gai!* And our eyes turn back, a bit wistfully, toward the forbidden Paradise of beauty, the entrance to which is barred by the angel of the Puritan conscience, holding in its right hand the flaming sword of Respectability. Ariosto had full run of that garden. Through his supple effortless verses the whole gamut of the Renaissance life is played, its grandeur, its beauty, its licentiousness, its pathos, its despair. In that great age of art, Michelangelo and Titian, Georgione and Leonardo—with them Ariosto takes his place. He is always the artist; he draws the thing as he sees it; he has the supreme mastery of his medium. In this he is like Raphael. In a Madonna of Raphael you are conscious of the beauty and the humanity and the wonderful skill—but you are also conscious of the lack of spiritual elevation. The age of faith is gone. So here in Ariosto. He does not believe in the wild tales he tells, he does not believe in the magic world his pencil creates. He is not shocked by what his people do, nor horrified, nor pleased; he is merely amused. There is none of the fierce indignation of Swift that makes him lash humanity because it fails to rise to the height of his ideal. Ariosto has no ideal. He is never the moralist; he is always the artist. With an immense fund of worldly wisdom, with little expectation of heroic action, he watches the world wag past with smiling interest. Shocked, you protest—to be met with a shrug of the shoulders and the quiet affirmation that that is what men do. He does not even say that he is sorry. He has no more conscious rectitude than has Chaucer. He is called the "divine," the "Italian Homer;" not at all—he is not the divine, he is the human; he is not the Homer, he is the Shakespeare of the Italian Renaissance.

Like Shakespeare, Ariosto comes at the closing of a great age. Three years after the *Orlando* was finished, Luther

nailed his theses to the door at Wittenberg and the Reformation had begun; man discovered that he had a conscience and ever since has been saddened by his sense of responsibility. Eight years after the *Orlando* was finished, the Pope capitulated to the Emperor at Bologna, and the Italian Renaissance was over. The Spanish domination in Italy! I wonder why we think of Spain as joyous and bright. Actually it is dignified, gloomy, drear. It is the country of the Inquisition. Its barren mountains and its bleak plateaux develop a spirit the antithesis to that produced by the cornlands of France or the vineyards of Italy. So with this race comes a veil over the bright Italian humor. Criticism of life and art takes the place of living and creation. There is no longer time for an idle song; there is time a-plenty for lengthy disquisitions on the nature of poetry and the proper subjects. Castelvetro and Della Casa argue shrilly about the proper vocabulary, and the dead Petrarch becomes a burden to the living writer. Imitations of imitations of imitations of past masters flourish, each splendidly dull and deadly serious. That is the Italy that Sidney found when he went to study in Padua. That is the literary theory he brought back with him to young England, even then girding her loins for her great grapple with Spain. The aim of poetry is to delight and to instruct, he tells us; in other words, beauty is the sugar coating to the moral pill. The work of art is valuable for the moral instruction that may be deduced from it. Naturally he found little in England of which he could conscientiously approve. Chaucer he accepts on account of his "reverend antiquity;" Surrey on account of his rank; that horrible old morgue of literature, *The Mirror for Magistrates* (he does not even cite the title correctly), is "meetly furnished of bewtiful partes;" and the *Shepheardes Calendar*. That is all. I wonder sometimes whether those who quote Sidney so authoritatively realize the practical result of his dicta. But is it true? Let us apply it to Shakespeare. Unquestionably from *Macbeth* the moral may be deduced that it is inexpedient to murder

guests, no matter how great the temptation. And there is a good deal to be said for that point of view, as we all know from experience, but frankly I confess to a doubt whether Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* to inculcate that moral. This illustration is no more absurd than what happened to the *Furioso* in the half century after Ariosto's death. Conscientious, well-intentioned men went over the poem, line by line, to extract the quintessence of morality from it. For example: Alstolfo on his winged steed is seeking to recover Roland's wits; in his journey he passes the entrance of Hell and determines to investigate. The place is full of pitchy smoke, and he retreats with his armor all sooty, so befouled that he has to scrub it off. Obviously this is miles away from the terrible grimness of Dante. Hell to Ariosto is amusing because he does not believe there is any. Naturally, after you have been in a smoky place, your armor is tarnished and you have the bother of polishing it.

> For why the smoke without and eak within
> Tainted his clothes, his armour, and his skin.

But to a careful moral-hunter these lines must mean more. Consequently Harington notes:

> First, whereas Astolfo washeth himselfe in a Christall well of cleare water, before he can fly up to Paradise, it signifieth, that after a man shall by remorse, and devout consideration, weigh and behold the filthiness of his sinne, he must then wash himself with the cleare spring water of prayer and repentance, and then and not before, he may mount to Paradise, which may here be understood the comfortable peace of conscience, the only true Paradise of this world.

I think it may be granted that with Harington as interpreter the morals of the maids of the Virgin Queene were quite safe. And he is here following the contemporary Italian interpretation. Tasso, the last of the great singers, goes mad in the effort to reconcile his aesthetic and moral conscience, and his *Jerusalem Delivered* is re-written and ruined as *Jerusalem Conquered*, conquered by the theories of critics and poetasters.

Such was Italy in the decline, and such were the critical

theories with which the Areopagiticus, Sidney and Harvey and Dwyer, sought to shackle the young poet Spenser; Spenser, sensitive to life and love and beauty. Marlowe was saved by his defiant paganism, Shakespeare, because in an age of caste he was beneath critical notice, and Jonson by his weight of classical precedent. But to Spenser critical opinion was represented by the great Sir Phillip Sidney, the nephew of Leicester, the reputed paramour of the Queen—and in an age of caste we are getting close to the source whence all honor and income flow—and it was represented to him by the pedantry of Harvey, and when one is young, art seems very long. That critical opinion weighed artistic excellence in the scales of moral instruction. So Spenser deformed his poem by the introduction of an absurd allegory which no one, including the poet himself, has ever been able to follow. For this he had the English precedents of Hawes and Heywood, and the endorsement of the Italian critics. Is it any wonder that he was unable to rise above the pressure of his age? Our sage and serious Spenser, and a great teacher according to Milton! But the tragedy lies in this: he committed the great crime against his art.

But he did not kill his art. In spite of his earnest intentions the poetry persists and in every age it will find readers. In spite of the fact that high-souled high school teachers preach to restless boys and girls that Una means Truth and the Lamb means Innocence, yet here and there an ear will be caught by the melody of the phrase and the charm of the verse. Lulled by the sound of the falling vocables, they will dream dreams more beautiful than their minds could conceive. They will enter a mystic land of enchanted loveliness, the long shadows will creep across the lawns where knights and ladies appear and disappear in an opaline mist of words. The work-a-day world with

> The weariness, the fever and the fret

will be forgotten, and

> A gentle knight is pricking on the plain.