

In the first place, Insurance Committees contain representatives of the Insured Persons, the Doctors and the State. They already receive State grants in respect of payment of Maternity Benefits and have the requisite constitutional authority and legal powers to administer such benefits under the National Health Insurance Act.

The powers of Committees and Societies would, of course, need to be extended, but "duplication of authorities covering the same ground" would occur if the proposals in the Bill were carried, and a truly chaotic state of affairs both from the point of view of the reformer and of the object of his efforts would result from the administration of one Maternity Benefit by an Insurance Committee, or an Approved Society, and the other by the L.G.B.—apart altogether from the utter loathsomeness of administration by the last-named authority.

It is rather surprising to find THE NEW STATESMAN joining the chorus indicated by the phrase, "how long the babies are to die." The sudden interest in this part of the baby question is, I think, largely hypocrisy, having regard to the history of the subject—and in any case to provide endowment for mothers is to commence at the wrong end of the problem.—Yours faithfully,

W. McLEAN.

Didsbury, Manchester.
August 1st.

Miscellany

ANY READER AND ANY WRITER

SINCE the following paper is intended to deal with the personal relations of Writers and Readers, it seems not unfitting, and I trust not unseemly, to begin with the recent meeting of a certain Reader and a certain Writer. Or, more strictly, with that meeting not having taken place. For, as I answered the kind invitation of our friend, I would rather not meet the Great Man in Question. My reason was that it had been borne in upon me that this Writer is most probably a classic. I do not mean thereby that his complete works can be procured for a shilling, or one and threepence in wartime. I only wish they could. I mean that a freak of the Great Devious Railway had unexpectedly carried me through a portion of this kingdom which I had never thought to see with the eyes of the body, perhaps because I had lived so long in contemplation thereof with the eyes of the spirit that it had become part of the greater, the unreal, reality. Smoke-curdled skies were shot with wicked sunset-crimson, and against them there hove in sight, rising out of lurid, huddled valleys and Stygian canals, outlines which might have been of some embattled Siena or San Gimignano, only with pennons of soot streaming from what seemed their towers and turrets; while behind sloped a screen of remote and improbable grass-land. Dantesque cities of Dis, though haunted by spectres which would have disconcerted Dante. I at once recognised that familiar unfamiliar landscape, and a station-board rushing by said that my guess had been correct. At that moment I became aware in myself of a rare and quite peculiar emotion; these places had been transformed into the stuff that dreams are made of, and were perhaps in process of becoming immortal. That being the case, I declined to meet the Writer in Question, and shall do so ever after. When a name on a Midland station has made you feel as if someone had said, "That's Troy," there is no sensible course open except to avoid setting eyes on the particular wizard who has succeeded in that most mysterious of all tricks.

Such at least is my opinion. And that is precisely what this paper is about. I do not base this theory (which answers, as you see, to my practice) upon mere experience. Not

even a professional diner-out (and I have ever been a diner-in) can have met many true Immortals in a lifetime; and even among the minute number of whom we possess a record it is quite possible (as I shall explain very soon) to meet with exceptions to my great unformulated rule, because just in proportion as a law of Nature is universal, it is sure to be met and deflected by some other equally ubiquitous law. Shelley, for instance, is quite as wonderful in Trelawney as in the *Ode to the West Wind*. But then Trelawney was himself a genius. Moreover, Shelley may have been, what I suspect Goethe also was in his early Apolline days—a genius who had not yet canalised all his radiance into his work, some of it running to waste in aureoling the divine young head. But the greatest works of poetry or prose are, to that extent, perfect organisms, or if you choose, perfect mechanisms wherein the great gods show what they can do for man's profit and pleasure. Now a perfect organism, even more a perfect machine, diminishes all waste. And so it comes about that great writers, perhaps more than artists of less intimately human arts, do not usually leave much of the gold of their works on the eager hands which they vouchsafe to grasp in friendship. Yet that is precisely what we readers expect, even when experience and reason have taught us the contrary. Man is a temporal creature and, if I may coin the expression, an *onward* one. His nature is set for *more, always more*; and even the least self-seeking among us are, in such spiritual matters, shamelessly grasping. Give them a taste, even a lavish sup, of heroism, virtue, or genius, and they take the giver for a perennial fountain thereof, like those figures of river gods and breast-squeezing mermaids which ran with wine and beer at mediæval rejoicings, filling the gutters with their overflow; or rather like the barley-sugar and gingerbread caryatids of the Witch's house in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, which she could eat to the last little finger and lick your own when you had done admiring them. The fault is too much imagination. . . . Rather, I fear, too little. For a sufficiency of it would surely help us to recognise that there are other things in this vast universe than what we happen to notice, and other things, especially, than those we happen to like; only children and ignoramuses (but who would not be an ignoramus in such things?) fancying that Pactolus rolls liquid guineas and diamond mines glitter all over like a theatre lit up *a giorno*. Is it not hard to admit that opals are mere miserable little seams in stuff like aged chocolate?

But this being so, why should the human being out of whom providential printers and publishers occasionally extract a work of genius be pure, solid genius through and through? I do not wish to be misapprehended, and am afraid it may seem as if, in my opinion, the genius sucks everything valuable out of the creature devoted to being its nutrient envelope, a superb exhausting parasite which leaves nothing tolerable over. This is not the case. And least of all is it my view of these matters. Lots of humanity, nice quite as much as nasty, remain; often, indeed, where-withal to fit out a human creature humanly worth having or worth studying; an admirable son, brother, father, friend, as well as the reverse. But it is not that person who produces the work of art, nor is it that for which the work of art makes us insatiable. We may indeed take vain delight in the domestic felicity, the business squabbles of the artist or writer, feeling by so much the nearer to the source of wonder and really about to tap it for our private delectation. But that is delusion, mere play of *association by contiguity*, as psychologists say; and a button off Mozart's waistcoat has, in my experience, worked this miracle just as well as details of his life. Meanwhile what produces the work of art, the great piece of literature, or rather what makes its greatness, is, as I hinted, only a portion of the living creature, although the underlying one:

temperament (whatever that may prove to mean in terms of brain and nerves, of heart, respiration, and the manifold mysteries of tone of muscle and chemical exchange of substance). That underlying *something* is common to the mere man's gesture, gait and demeanour and to the godlike bearing (*incessu patet*) of his work. And the day is coming when we shall study in the handwriting of Michelangelo's penurious household accounts (washing but a small item, I fear) the tragic clenching and smiting which determines the outline of his Prophets and Sibyls and the morose grandeur of his epigram, "Grato m'è il sonno, e più l'esser di sasso mentre il danno e la vergogna dura." That innermost mystery of temperament is, I take it, common to the man's life and ways and to his works. But in his life it is united to, often impoverished, adulterated by, life's everyday concerns; while in the work, painting, or music, or even poem or novel (seemingly so much more personal) it contracts a glorious *mésalliance* with that thing of oldest lineage, of most numerous and noblest quarterings, which is called an art's tradition. Hence it is not hyperbole, but mere illustrative metaphor, to say that the artist, of whatsoever art, lives a double life, one for eternity in an Olympus peopled with all his spiritual ancestry of gods and demigods; the other . . . Well, at such dinner-tables and house-parties as we, privileged and deluded admirers, are invited to meet him at. Meet him and recognise (though delusion may save us to the last from this recognition!) that he is no more interesting to watch and listen to than you or me.

For, as philosophers teach us, art and literature (*"Le mensonge de l'art,"* wrote the late truthful Ferdinand Brunetière) are but illusion. Or rather they are the outcome of a higher spiritual reality potential in us all, but set apart in the particular creature who has genius, whence it becomes manifest, not in glimmers and flashes as in our obscure souls, but in a steady effulgence full of shape and meaning. All well and good; and, of course, we are duly grateful. Yet there remains that urgent instinct to penetrate beyond the work to the man. Must that be brought up short, our appetite for greatness and beauty whetted and then balked of the *more, always more*, for which it craves? By no means. That *more* is really there, and we can take our fill of it. But not in the self-same creature who has given us art. The qualities which the great writer or artist welds together in imperishable masses, exist dispersed in our surroundings; and it is by no means his least beneficent function to make us, if we are worthy, perceive and cherish them wherever they may be; for the work of art, as Goethe already and Ruskin knew, teaches us also to see real life in its own modes of significance and loveliness. These qualities are in skies and hills and waters, in men and women often obscure, people who have never set hand to art or *writing*, but who are themselves a picture or poem. "*Beauty like hers,*" as Rossetti wrote in his finest line, "*is genius.*" And the same radiance which we feel in the greatest art may shine in the golden bloom of a red-haired child. Not to speak of the greatness of moral demeanour we see in certain of our neighbours. What is collected, clarified, and isolated in art lies in its commonplace matrix on every side; you have but to extract it. It may be even in the great artist himself. On one of two conditions: that you forget his being such and take him as a mere man; or that you make him up an unsuspected work of your own fashioning, in defiance of reality, in obedience to your heart's desire.

That, however, is a faculty belonging to youth, as for the rest does genius in most cases. And in the sere and yellow it is more epicurean, and perhaps also kinder to seek for the artist only in his work. At all events, that is how I have come to view the relations of Any Reader to Any Writer.

VERNON LEE.

DIFFUGERE NIVES, 1917

To ———

The snows have fled, the hail, the lashing rain,
Before the Spring.

The grass is starred with buttercups again,
The blackbirds sing.

Now spreads the month that feast of lovely things
We loved of old.

Once more the swallow glides with darkling wings
Against the gold.

Now the brown bees about the peach trees boom
Upon the walls;

And far away beyond the orchard's bloom
The cuckoo calls.

The season holds a festival of light

For you, for me;

But shadows are abroad, there falls a blight
On each green tree.

And every leaf unfolding, every flower

Brings bitter meed;

Beauty of the morning and the evening hour
Quickens our need.

All is reborn, but never any Spring

Can bring back this;

Nor any fullness of midsummer bring

The voice we miss.

The smiling eyes shall smile on us no more;

The laughter clear,

Too far away on the forbidden shore,

We shall not hear.

Bereft of these until the day we die,

We both must dwell;

Alone, alone, and haunted by the cry:

"Hail and farewell!"

Yet when the scythe of Death shall near us hiss,

Through the cold air,

Then on the shuddering marge of the abyss

They will be there.

They will be there to lift us from sheer space

And empty night;

And we shall turn and see them face to face

In the new light.

So shall we pay the unabated price

Of their release,

And found on our consenting sacrifice

Their lasting peace.

The hopes that fall like leaves before the wind,

The baffling waste,

And every earthly joy that leaves behind

A mortal taste,

The uncompleted end of all things dear,

The clanging door

Of Death, forever loud with the last fear,

Haunt them no more.