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EDITED BY
GEORGE SAMPSON

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PREFACE

I N preparing this selection from Hazlitt's many essays I have had in view the possible needs of students in Training Colleges, candidates for the Board of Education's Certificate examination, pupils in the highest forms of schools, and even those general readers who may care to have certain fine prose pieces "extra-illustrated," as it were, by appropriate annotation. My actual teaching experience with the second of these groups has shown me that one can take nothing for granted in the students' general knowledge. I have found that even the simplest allusions need elucidation and the simplest foreign phrases translation. If therefore some of the notes seem unnecessary, readers should remember that what is unnecessary to them may be useful to others.

The choice of essays will be found to embody a departure from the usual procedure in the case of Hazlitt, who is generally represented in students' editions by *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*. The present selection ranges through the whole of Hazlitt's essays from *The Round Table* to the posthumous pieces. The first four essays show him as the Boswell of Lamb and the candid friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The next three are an extension of this group, forming a pleasant parallel to Lamb's *Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading* and his delightful essays on the old actors. The next three show a very attractive and original Hazlitt—Hazlitt the enthusiastic critic or "gustator" of fine pictures. The last three show us Hazlitt savouring things of the world, rejoicing in the multitude of sporting crowds and in the solitude of lonely wanderings. If it be urged that political essays have been excluded, the answer must be that there is no essay of Hazlitt that is not political. Whether his subject be Poussin or pugilism, it is odd if he cannot get in a few thrusts at apostate poets and government tools.

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Preface

The notes, I fear, will lie open to the charge of being, like Falstaff's waist, "out of all reasonable compass." But then Hazlitt is the most allusive of essayists, and to extend his snatches of quotation and expand his tantalising allusions is a pleasure as well as a duty. If the notes, beyond their immediate utility, tempt certain adventurers along some hinted paths of future reading, they will have accomplished the editor's chief intention. Says old Fuller in the preface to his *History of the Worthies of England*:

I confess the subject is but dull in itself, to tell the time and place of men's births, and deaths, their names, with the names and number of their books, and therefore this bare skeleton of *Time, Place, and Person*, must be fleshed with some pleasant passages. To this intent I have purposely interlaced (not as meat, but as condiment) many delightful stories, that so the Reader if he do not arise (which I hope and desire) *Religiosior* or *Doctior*, with more Piety or Learning, at least he may depart *Jucundior*, with more pleasure and lawful delight.

It is the first and best defence of the garrulous commentator—or at least of one such commentator's intention.

The introduction is necessarily more than a recital of personal facts, for Hazlitt was the child of his time. One can read Lamb without caring what century he was born in; but one will enjoy Hazlitt the more for knowing why his vigorous utterance is so often a challenge or a condemnation.

Some of Hazlitt's books have been constantly reprinted since the first issue; but much of his work was overlooked and almost unknown until the appearance of the *Collected Works* (12 vols., 1902–1904, Index vol. 1906), edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover. To the notes of these editors I am indebted for the identification of many quotations.

GEORGE SAMPSON

BARNES

October, 1916

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INTRODUCTION

A GENERAL SKETCH OF HAZLITT'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

Early in the year 1778 there lived at Maidstone, in the county of Kent, a very excellent Dissenting minister named William Hazlitt. He represented a union of the three kingdoms, for he was born at Shronell, in Tipperary, educated at Glasgow (where Adam Smith was then a professor), and appointed to minister in England. The Pastor was about forty-one. His wife, Grace Loftus of Wisbech, nine years his junior, was said to have been a beauty and to have resembled the younger Pitt—we must reconcile the statements as we can. What is certain is that she was an excellent wife and mother. There were two surviving children, John, then nearly eleven, and Margaret, six-and-a-half. The little family lived in amity, and in such happiness as may be enjoyed by people of strict and lofty principle inhabiting a lax and Laodicean world.

The times were troubled. George III, in natural intelligence a very limited monarch, and in purpose largely shaped and directed by his very German mother, was steadily labouring to substitute for constitutional government in England the sort of personal rule we shall find compendiously described in Macaulay's essay on Frederic. He had been partially successful, and one consequence of his personal kingship was then pursuing its course. The war against the American colonists was nearly three years old, and what may be called its crucial point was reached almost at the very moment we are now considering; for in February 1778 France signed a treaty with the Americans and threw her sea power into the scale against England. The war was popular in the worst sense. It was popular with the mob, who like to enjoy a cheap and extensive victory, and have therefore no objection to the bullying of a small power by a greater, when the greater is their own. The American war had seemed to promise this spectacle; and so its tragic failure had made the crowd both angry with disappointment and eager for reprisals.

But there was a minority. There were some, like Burke and Chatham, who from the beginning of trouble had urged a policy of magnanimity upon a court and government to which magnanimity was a thing incomprehensible. The reverses had

caused some wavering in this party. It was felt by many that there could be no drawing back after the intervention of France; on the other hand it was urged that every additional moment of civil war made peace more remote and costly. Among the sincere and consistent pro-Americans was the Rev. William Hazlitt of Maidstone; and to his zeal on the unpopular side we must doubtless attribute the disunion that presently appeared in his congregation.

At this moment the little family in the Rose Yard manse received an addition; for on the 10th of April, 1778, into a world of foreign war, colonial revolution and domestic discord, was born a boy, William Hazlitt, the future essayist, critic and revolutionist. Wordsworth was then eight, Scott six, Coleridge five and Lamb three. A day or two before Hazlitt's birth, the great Chatham, rewarded by his sovereign for a life of patriotic labour with the title "trumpet of sedition," had fallen, a dying man, on the floor of the House of Lords. Within a few weeks, two even greater than Chatham passed over—Voltaire in May, Rousseau in July. The old heroes were falling, but, across the Channel, new champions were preparing for the coming combat. Mirabeau was then twenty-nine, Robespierre twenty and Danton eighteen. Far away in his Mediterranean island, a small boy, Napoleon Buonaparte, nearly nine, was eagerly looking forward to the military school whither he was to go in the following year.

The disagreement among the congregation at the Earl Street Meeting House in Maidstone became acute; and to avoid creating a schism, the Minister resigned his charge in 1780, and sought a new sphere of labour at Bandon, County Cork, in the island of his birth. Here he was even more unhappy, for his feelings as well as his principles were outraged by the ill-treatment to which American prisoners were subjected. The indignant Pastor called public attention to these outrages, and so we shall not be surprised to learn that he soon found it necessary to leave not merely Ireland but the British Islands. Across the western waters lay a refuge for sturdy independents. In January 1783 preliminaries of peace were signed, and a new republic entered the assembly of nations. Three months later, when the child William was a little short of five, the Hazlitt family set sail for America. They reached New York on May 26th, and proceeded on a two days' waggon journey to Philadelphia.

The Pastor found no settled employment, and the family migrated often—from Philadelphia back to New York, thence to Boston, thence to Weymouth, thence to New Dorchester. The Pastor himself travelled further still. Over a wide area from Maine to Maryland he preached and lectured, contributing much to that spread of Unitarianism in America for which his more famous acquaintance Dr Priestley afterwards got most of the credit. There was near Weymouth a pleasant old nonagenarian named Gay, who

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had held that one ministerial charge for nearly seventy years. Him it was thought that Hazlitt might succeed; but the old gentleman clung to life and pulpit so immovably that Hazlitt resolved to return to England. He set sail in the October of 1786, and arrived in December. Almost immediately the sempiternal Gay died. The Hazlitt family remained in America for nearly another year—till July 1787, in fact, when they left Boston for England, reaching it the next month. William was then a little over nine.

We must be grateful to the vital obstinacy of the Rev. Ebenezer Gay. Had he been cut off prematurely in the early nineties the Hazlitts would probably have settled for life in New England, and William would have been the first of American essayists. But he would not have been the Hazlitt that we know. Hazlitt without the strong stimulus of European art, literature and politics would have been merely the pallid simulacrum of our Hazlitt. In the country of Jonathan Edwards he would have become probably a theologian, and almost certainly a metaphysician, unread, and perhaps unreadable, in either capacity. As it was, America did a little for him. It counted for something that the champion of popular government had spent his early impressionable years in the first of modern Republics, one of a family self-exiled from the iniquities of European kingdoms. Naturally there is little to record of the boy's life during this transatlantic period, though it happens that his earliest surviving composition is a letter, in which, at the age of nine, he reaches the melancholy conclusion that the discovery of America was a mistake, and that the country should have been left to the aboriginal inhabitants¹.

The first London lodging of the family was in Walworth,—
 London and Wem not the sordid and swarming Walworth of to-day,
 but the semi-rural Walworth of Mr Wemmick.
 There, the flowers, cates and cream of the Montpelier Tea Gardens, once a Paradise of pleasure, and now utterly submerged beneath a dingy tide of brick, so stamped themselves on the boy's mind, that all his later joy in these "suburb delights" took their colour from the gorgeous summer hues of that first garden of his innocence². Later in the year 1787 the Pastor got a settled charge at Wem in Shropshire, and here for several years the growing boy remained, going to school, studying with his father, and learning French with the girls of a neighbouring family. These children he visited when they returned to Liverpool, and there he first encountered one abiding love and pleasure of his life—the theatre. Kemble and Dignum and Suett, players celebrated in many an essay later, swam like new planets into his astonished vision. He was then twelve or thirteen, and most of

¹ The authority for details of the American sojourn is a diary kept by Margaret, the essayist's sister.

² See *Table Talk*, "Why Distant Objects Please."

those few years had been passed far from the pleasures of cities. The Nonconformists of a century ago did not all anathematize the theatre. We hear of theatrical visits at Wem, and the reverend Pastor spoke with frequent admiration of one famous player—the Mrs Pritchard whom we know from Boswell.

It seems to have been assumed that William was to follow his father into the ministry, and so in 1793 he was duly entered as a student at the Hackney Theological College. The curriculum there, as far as his letters show, was in the best sense liberal. The classics agreeably mitigated the austerities of theology, and Hazlitt seems to have been a diligent student, though he managed astutely to substitute some cherished speculations on the political nature of man for the graver feats of exegesis expected from him. But his real education was received outside the Hackney walls. His brother John, now twenty-six, was established in London as a painter and miniaturist. The young theologian of Hackney of course paid many visits to the studio in Rathbone Place, and there encountered not only the frank-speaking and free-thinking men who gather in the rooms of young painters, but visions of the world of art, with all its happy industry and its association with beauty. The hands that should have been employed in penning theses became busy with the brushes. It was canvas, not sermon-paper that the boy longed to be filling, and so a crowning disappointment was preparing for the good old man in Shropshire. William heard the call, not of Samuel, but of Giotto. A wistful passage written many years later throws some light on the perturbations of this period. It is long, but it is so significant that it must be quoted at length :

The greatest misfortune that can happen among relations is a different way of bringing up, so as to set one another's opinions and characters in an entirely new point of view. This often lets in an unwelcome day-light on the subject, and breeds schisms, coldness and incurable heart-burnings in families. I have sometimes thought whether the progress of society and march of knowledge does not do harm in this respect, by loosening the ties of domestic attachment, and preventing those who are most interested in, and anxious to think well of one another, from feeling a cordial sympathy and approbation of each other's sentiments, manners, views, &c., than it does good by any real advantage to the community at large. The son, for instance, is brought up to the church, and nothing can exceed the pride and pleasure the father takes in him, while all goes on well in this favourite direction. His notions change, and he imbibes a taste for the Fine Arts. From this moment there is an end of anything like the same unreserved communication between them. The young man may talk with enthusiasm of his "Rembrandts, Correggios, and stuff": it is all *Hebrew* to the elder; and whatever satisfaction he may feel in hearing of his son's progress, or good wishes for his success, he is never reconciled to the new pursuit, he still hankers after the first object that he had set his mind upon. Again, the grandfather

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is a Calvinist, who never gets the better of his disappointment at his son's going over to the Unitarian side of the question. The matter rests here, till the grandson, some years after, in the fashion of the day and "infinite agitation of men's wit," comes to doubt certain points in the creed in which he has been brought up, and the affair is all abroad again. Here are three generations made uncomfortable and in a manner set at variance, by a veering point of theology, and the officious meddling biblical critics! (*Table Talk*, "On the Knowledge of Character.")

A year after his entry into the Hackney College, Hazlitt turned his back for ever upon ministry and theology, and retired to Wem, where he passed the next few years, ostensibly doing nothing, but actually busy with reading, painting, walking, brooding and struggling to express himself in words. A volume entitled *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, etc. (published in 1805) occupied his busy mind and tasked his unready pen; but he had the infinite leisure of youth, and his slow progress troubled him little. It is of this and the succeeding period that he writes in the following passage:

For many years of my life I did nothing but think. I had nothing else to do but solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled sea-side—

To see the children sporting on the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

I cared for nothing, I wanted nothing. I took my time to consider whatever occurred to me, and was in no hurry to give a sophistical answer to a question—there was no printer's devil waiting for me. I used to write a page or two perhaps in half a year; and remember laughing heartily at the celebrated experimentalist Nicholson, who told me that in twenty years he had written as much as would make three hundred octavo volumes. If I was not a great author, I could read with ever fresh delight, "never ending, still beginning," and had no occasion to write a criticism when I had done. If I could not paint like Claude, I could admire "the witchery of the soft blue sky" as I walked out, and was satisfied with the pleasure it gave me. If I was dull, it gave me little concern: if I was lively, I indulged my spirits. I wished well to the world, and believed as favourably of it as I could. I was like a stranger in a foreign land, at which I looked with wonder, curiosity and delight, without expecting to be an object of attention in return. I had no relation to the state, no duty to perform, no ties to bind me to others: I had neither friend nor mistress, wife or child. I lived in a world of contemplation, and not of action. (*Table Talk*, "On Living to Oneself.")

There were epochs in his young life marked by the days of delight when he first discovered certain treasures of great literature—the sentiment of Rousseau, the grandeur of Burke, the majesty of Milton. A sort of furious intensity characterised all he did from the days of childhood, when he fell ill through the excited exhaustion of his first studies in Latin, to the later time of manhood, when he drenched his body with the energy of his racquet-playing,

and inflamed his mind with the fierceness of his political fervour. Few men have hated so vigorously; few have enjoyed so gloriously; and for his much love much will be forgiven him. As the man, so the youth; and we discern him dimly in these days of adolescence, hot with pent-up and unknown powers, eager, yet baffled and inarticulate, lonely, yet happy with books and brushes, out of sympathy with his excellent father, and thinking himself steadily into a belief that he had a gift for philosophy. There are many melancholy and companionless youths who cherish the same delusion. Cheerfulness comes breaking in with the responsibilities of manhood. Meanwhile, in the great world beyond Wem, a new generation was springing up. In 1798, Hazlitt's wonder-year, when he himself was twenty, Byron was ten, Shelley six and Keats three.

And now there came to Hazlitt the revelation that opened his heart and mind and taught him to know himself. In 1798 he met Coleridge. The ever delightful essay in which he describes this meeting stands first in the present volume and makes any further account worse than unnecessary. The many who date an epoch in their own lives from a first reading of *Biographia* and *Lyrical Ballads* will always feel a peculiar affection for this essay, which wonderfully recaptures the thrill of youth, and mingles with its rapture so much mature and humorous wisdom. From the extent of our own vast debt to the mere printed pages of poetry and criticism we can measure the ecstasy with which young Hazlitt made his first acquaintance with poets and drank in the utterances of their own living lips. With the boy in *Comus* he could say:

His First
 Acquaintance
 with Poets

How charming is divine philosophy!
 Not harsh, and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
 But musical as is Apollo's lute,
 And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets
 Where no crude surfeit reigns.

It is Coleridge who is the hero of the story, as he always will be to ardent youth,—Coleridge “in the dayspring of his fancies with hope like a fiery pillar before him.” At that date it was gloriously apparent that the head of Coleridge was in the heavens; it was less obvious that his feet were in the mire of a road down to ignoble sloth and moral suicide. Coleridge was still *Mirandola*, not yet *Micawber*. Wordsworth is less attractive to the youthful mind. He seems gaunt, frigid and set, as if he had never been young. We have to turn often to those delightful early books of *The Prelude* to remind ourselves of Wordsworth's fiery, volcanic, youth.

To Hazlitt the wisdom of these poets had the weight of those few years' seniority that mean so much to the boy of twenty. He kindled his zeal anew at the altar fire of their genius. He felt that he must do some-

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 Paris

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thing instantly. The talk of Coleridge turned his mind again towards philosophy, and made that unfinished and apparently interminable *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* a reproach to him. This he began anew, though as a sort of parergon, for he now solemnly chose painting, and especially portraiture, as his life work. He went to his brother in London where, in the same palpitating year, a new revelation awaited him,—the glory of great art made manifest in the Titians, Rembrandts, Rubens and Vandycks of the Orleans collection then on exhibition in Pall Mall and the Lyceum. More than ever inflamed, he tramped the country, to paint if he could, and certainly to see the pictures in great collections. Startled funkeys tried in vain to check the excited young man who would insist on penetrating to the picture galleries of noble connoisseurs. Hazlitt wanted to see pictures, and, in his own wild way, almost fought to see them. So impressive was he in this artistic phase, that one trusting merchant in Liverpool was moved to offer him a hundred guineas for copies of certain pictures in the Louvre. It is scarcely necessary to say that he accepted. To Hazlitt Paris was simply Paradise writ small. Everything was propitious. The year was 1802 and Paris was at its greatest. The first phase of the war had been concluded by the Peace of Amiens. France was enjoying the only real emotions of tranquillity she had known since the first blows had fallen on the gates of the Bastille. There was an air of liberty new-gained yet well-established. Napoleon had just been declared First Consul for life and the Louvre was overflowing with the spoils of his Italian triumph. The city was crowded with visitors. English ladies and gentlemen flocked eagerly to see the land and people they had been tenacious in fighting, and listened, in Court and Salon, to stories of the Revolution related by Marshals of France who had been poor citizens or private soldiers at the time of the great upheaval.

In Paris, then, from October 1802 to January 1803, Hazlitt lived and worked, poor, cold and hungry, but intensely happy. He did not see Napoleon, nor did he penetrate to the distinguished circles of rank and fashion; but he breathed the charged electrical atmosphere, and rejoiced. He returned to England duly certified as the copyist of some ten or dozen pictures specified in a document signed by M. le Directeur Général du Musée Central des Arts, and epically dated "le 12 Pluviose, an 11." It was at this time that he made the acquaintance of one who was to prove his truest friend, one who spoke well of him when many spoke ill, who helped him in material need, and closed his eyes when peace came at last to his tempestuous spirit. There were many to whom Charles Lamb in various ways did good; there were few to whom his genial and wholesome influence was more beneficial than to Hazlitt; and Hazlitt knew it. Sometime friends of our author are often enough pilloried, not to say crucified, in his vengeful paragraphs; but it is impossible to read his references

to Lamb without discerning unaltered admiration and something like affection. Hazlitt became one of the intimates who met at Lamb's weekly gatherings. He quarrelled, in time, with all of them, even with Lamb himself, though in this instance the enmity was neither long nor bitter. Like most shy and oversensitive natures, Hazlitt was easily irritated, and much that was thought ill-temper was often no more than anger with himself for his own lack of social ease and smoothness. Moreover, there would sometimes arise in discussion, as we shall see, questions of principle about which he could make no compromise. Extremes meet. During the great eruption, both Burke and Hazlitt became socially explosive and impossible, the one with detestation for the Revolution, the other with admiration for it.

The business of portrait painting cannot be said to have prospered. What Hazlitt could do in this line may be seen in the familiar portrait of Lamb attired as a Venetian senator, now in the National Portrait Gallery and frequently reproduced as a frontispiece. Hazlitt was probably as anxious to make it like a Titian as like Lamb. The mouth and chin resemble the strong profile of Hancock's drawing, but the whole picture is rather inexpressive and might be anyone but Elia. With Wordsworth and Coleridge he was even less successful. Of the Coleridge Southey writes, "you look as if you were on your trial, and had certainly stolen the horse; but then you did it cleverly." The Wordsworth was described as "at the gallows, deeply affected by his deserved fate, yet determined to die like a man." The portrait of his father, into the painting of which went so many happy hours—hours of reconciliation, no doubt—gained the distinction of a place in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1806. It is pleasantly mentioned in the first essay on *The Pleasure of Painting*, and in a later piece, *On Sitting for One's Picture (Plain Speaker)*. The Museum at Maidstone has four of his portraits and copies. The horrible medium he used for his colour has so blackened with age that the pictures are almost buried and might as well not exist. As time went on, Hazlitt began reluctantly to realise that painting was not his real work. Titian or Rembrandt he could not be, and less he disdained to be. But his labour had not been wasted. Painting cultivated in him the seeing eye, and made him one of the soundest among our early writers on art. Sir Joshua taught in his *Discourses* the principles that he happily forgot in his studio. Hazlitt did not write like a painter; he painted like a critic. He enjoyed certain pictures immensely, and his enjoyment was the begetter both of his copies and his criticisms. There are no sublimities of rapture or flights of virtuosity in his writings on art. To him a portrait by Titian was neither a moral tract nor a study in values; it was something to be relished, like a novel by Scott or a comedy by Vanbrugh or a good meal at an inn after a long day's march. He liked pictures in a hearty

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cheerful fashion and his readers catch the wholesome infection. As for himself, his painting gave him, if not a livelihood, at least a lively joy which he never forgot. It was twenty years after his early painting days that he wrote this passage:

Yet I dream sometimes; I dream of the Louvre—*Intus et in cute*. I dreamt I was there a few weeks ago, and that the old scene returned—that I looked for my favourite pictures, and found them gone or erased. The dream of my youth came upon me; a glory and a vision unutterable, that comes no more but in darkness and in sleep: my heart rose up, and I fell on my knees, and lifted up my voice and wept, and I awoke. (*Plain Speaker*, "On Dreams.")

The prevailing interest in the Lamb circle was literature. Moving among authors, Hazlitt naturally became eager to turn certain written words of his own into print. He managed to persuade some hopeful bookseller to publish that perennial *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* in 1805, and he issued next year, apparently at his own risk, a pamphlet, now very rare, entitled *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*. It is difficult to prove that anyone bought a copy of either; but at least he had appeared as a real printed author, and went on cheerfully to perform two pieces of hack work, the first an abridgement into one volume of the original seven occupied by *The Light of Nature Pursued*, a leisurely philosophical miscellany written by Abraham Tucker; the second a compilation called *The Eloquence of the British Senate*, exhibiting the oratory of famous statesmen in specimens and their lives in brief biographical sketches. With characteristic economy Hazlitt used certain of these sketches again in later works. One, indeed, the acidulated *Character of Pitt*, crops up with unflinching regularity in so many volumes as almost to baffle enumeration. These two works appeared in 1807, the year that saw also the publication of Hazlitt's *Reply to Malthus*, the clergyman who had issued in 1798 a gloomy prognostication of human lot, based on the fact, clear to him, that population was increasing in geometrical progression, while subsistence was increasing only at the comparatively beggarly arithmetical rate. The emphatic style of the preface to Tucker and the bold, penetrating criticism of the Malthusian theories indicate the coming of the real Hazlitt, whose pen was thereafter busy for many years in many papers. Nothing came amiss to him, from parliamentary reporting to operatic criticism. He became, in fact, a professional man of letters, and was to experience very fully the intermittent joys and the unflinching chagrins of that precarious calling.

Soon after his debut as an author, Hazlitt married. In his early London days he had made the acquaintance of John Stoddart, an ardent Revolutionist who, like certain others, lived to abjure his first principles and to become a stiff champion of Legitimate Monarchy. A knighthood and a colonial judgeship were his reward. Stoddart's

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Marriages

sister Sarah had a small property at Winterslow on the road from Andover to Salisbury across the Plain. At the age of thirty-three she combined a strong inclination for matrimony in the abstract with an almost complete indifference to any bridegroom in particular. From the letters of Mary Lamb we hear of several suitors, but in the end Hazlitt was the lucky (or unlucky) man. Sarah was older than Hazlitt who, with Shakespeare's example and precepts before him, should have known better. The wooing was short, and the ceremony was performed on Mayday in 1808 at St Andrew's, Holborn. The rest of the matrimonial story had better be told at once, and then dismissed. Hazlitt married in haste and repented at leisure. The two were quite unsuited to each other. The lady found marriage in the concrete with an untidy and all-pervading man much less agreeable than marriage in the contemplative with an abstract idea of husband. She had no domestic gifts, and no sense of her deficiency. Hazlitt's own eager preoccupation with writing and painting as things-in-themselves added nothing to the household harmony and very little to the household economy. There seems to have been no violent disagreement,—nothing but a steady growth of antipathy. By 1819 they were living apart. There was no Divorce Court in England till 1857; but in Scotland, dissentient parties could be separated almost as expeditiously as eloping couples were united. To Scotland, therefore, came the inharmonious but still friendly pair, and there in 1823 they were divorced. Hazlitt ventured matrimony a second time. He was too hasty to be warned in the first case by Shakespeare, and a dozen years too early to be warned in the second by Mr Weller. He married a widow, Mrs Bridgwater, in 1824, and spent a leisurely honeymoon in travelling through France, Switzerland and Italy, combining business with pleasure by recording his impressions in some very readable sketches contributed to *The Morning Chronicle* in 1824, and collected as a volume in 1826. This second marriage was of very doubtful validity in England. Whether this weighed on the conscience of the second Mrs Hazlitt, or whether the position of being married to a man whose first wife was still living and quite friendly with him was too embarrassing for her, we do not know; but in any case the union was brief. The lady's first husband had held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and she appears, by the fleeting testimony of Haydon and Leigh Hunt, to have been a woman of much personal dignity, with whom Hazlitt would have to mend his rather Bohemian (not to say Boeotian) habits. The usual story of their final separation in Switzerland at the end of the honeymoon must be received with caution. We do not really know how, when, or where they parted. The second Mrs Hazlitt disappears from the story as mysteriously as she enters it.

One other kindred incident may have its necessary mention in this place. In 1820 Hazlitt went to live (apart from his first

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wife) in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, where a certain Mr and Mrs Walker had lodgings to let. Here he became infatuated with their daughter Sarah, and devoted a disagreeable book, half dialogue, half correspondence, to the incident.

Now revert. This digression into the backwaters of matrimony left the main stream of Hazlitt's story in the first proud days of authorship. Almost the sole benefit he derived from his union with Sarah Stoddart was the discovery of Winterslow. Thither he went after his marriage; and when in later years he wanted a lodge in the wilderness, it was to Winterslow that he turned—not then, of course, to the “small property” of Sarah Stoddart, but to the Pheasant Inn or Winterslow Hut as it is more generally known to us. Here much of his best work was written and many of his happiest hours were spent. A passage from one essay may be quoted as an illustration of what may be called his Winterslow frame of mind:

If the reader is not already apprised of it, he will please to take notice that I write this at Winterslow. My style there is apt to be redundant and excursive. At other times it may be cramped, dry, abrupt; but here it flows like a river and overspreads its banks. I have not to seek for thoughts or hunt for images: they come of themselves, I inhale them with the breeze, and the silent groves are vocal with a thousand recollections—

And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
 Hang on each leaf and cling to every bough.

Here I came fifteen years ago, a willing exile; and as I trod the lengthened greensward by the low wood-side, repeated the old line,

My mind to me a kingdom is!

I found it so then, before, and since; and shall I faint, now that I have poured out the spirit of that mind to the world, and treated many subjects with truth, with freedom, and power, because I have been followed with one cry of abuse ever since *for not being a government-tool?*....

I look out of my window and see that a shower has just fallen: the fields look green after it, and a rosy cloud hangs over the brow of the hill; a lily expands its petals in the moisture, dressed in its lovely green and white; a shepherd boy has just brought some pieces of turf with daisies and grass for his mistress to make a bed for her sky-lark, not doomed to dip his wings in the dappled dawn—my cloudy thoughts draw off, the storm of angry politics has blown over—Mr Blackwood, I am yours—Mr Croker, my service to you—Mr T. Moore, I am alive and well—Really, it is wonderful how little the worse I am for fifteen years' wear and tear, how I come upon my legs again on the ground of truth and nature, and “look abroad into universality,” forgetting that there is any such person as myself in the world. (*Plain Speaker*, “Whether Genius is conscious of its Powers.”)

The allusions in this passage lead us naturally to some consideration of Hazlitt's political principles and the bitter antagonism in which they involved him. Hazlitt was in a special sense the child of Revolution

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He was cradled in strife, and passed his earliest years in the new transatlantic Republic. He was eleven when the Bastille fell, and began his career at Hackney College in the year of the Terror. Coleridge and Wordsworth, the poetical apostles of Revolution, first taught him to know himself, and so confirmed him in his liberal faith that he went to the First Consul's capital as ardent for France and freedom as any Frenchman of them all. Even his career of authorship began with a baptism of fire, for upon his first visible publications shone "the sun of Austerlitz." The tragedy of Hazlitt is that in a changing world, a world of honest conversion and of profitable recantation, he kept his first principles fiercely unaltered. And really, seen from the angle of the present time, those principles are nothing terrible. Let us endeavour to view the whole matter as he saw it.

The picturesque reading of young people seems to create in them an impression that the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror are the same thing. To such readers the French Revolution is little more than the continuous decapitation of elegant aristocrats amid howls of execration from a stage mob of *tricoteuses* and *sans-culottes*. In the unhappy history of mankind there have been many reigns of terror with no compensatory revolutions; if the ten months of Terror could be blotted out from French history, the great achievements of the Revolution would remain unaltered. The immediate beginning of that great upheaval was an attempt to erect a workable constitution in the place of a centralised autocracy that had hopelessly broken down. That the constitutionalists were able to extort submission from what had seemed the most impregnable monarchy of Europe was hailed by all free spirits as a triumph of liberty. The subsequent troubles had their rise in the secret treachery of the French Court, and especially its collusion with the armies of Prussia and Austria, which presumed to dictate to France whether or not she should reform her government. In July 1791 Austria summoned the princes of Europe to unite against the Revolution. Hostile German troops, aided both secretly and openly by the Court and nobles, threatened the frontiers. The September massacres of 1792 were the answer of France to a German invasion; and henceforward slaughter in the name of War or in the name of Justice was to be the history of some terrible years. Hazlitt puts the matter briefly:

It has been usual (as men remember their prejudices better than the truth) to hold up the Coalition of the Allied Powers as having for its end and justification the repressing the horrors of the French Revolution; whereas, on the contrary, those horrors arose out of the Coalition, which had for its object to root out not the evil, but the good of the Revolution in France. (*Life of Napoleon*, Chapter v.)

To Hazlitt the struggle from first to last and in every phase was simply the struggle of Freedom against Tyranny:

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Let all the wrongs public and private produced in France by arbitrary power and exclusive privileges for a thousand years be collected in a volume, and let this volume be read by all who have hearts to feel or capacity to understand, and the strong, stifling sense of oppression and kindling burst of indignation that would follow would be that impulse of public action that led to the French Revolution. Let all the victims that have perished under the mild, paternal sway of the ancient *régime*, in dungeons, and in agony, without a trial, without an accusation, without witnesses, be assembled together, and their chains struck off, and the shout of jubilee and exultation they would make, or that nature would make at the sight, will be the shout that was heard when the Bastille fell! The dead pause that ensued among the gods of the earth, the rankling malice, the panic-fear, when they saw law and justice raised to an equality with their sovereign will, and mankind no longer doomed to be their sport, was that of fiends robbed of their prey: their struggles, their arts, their unyielding perseverance, and their final triumph was that of fiends when it is restored to them. (*Life of Napoleon*, Chap. III.)

That the continental despots, ruling by Right Divine over millions of subjects bound to the soil in a state with alarm the abatement of royal and noble prerogative in France was entirely explicable; but there was one country that might have been expected to sympathise with the Revolution—the country in which serfdom had long ago disappeared, in which abuse of royal privilege had led to a civil war and the execution of a king, and in which a drastic revolution had driven one ruler from the throne, diverted the succession to a foreign line, and bound all kings to come within the strictest confines of constitutional procedure. That sympathy was not withheld. The brightest spirits in England rejoiced at the downfall of autocracy in France. Some, indeed, were more revolutionary than the Revolutionists themselves. Coleridge and Southey, exalted to the heights of youthful enthusiasm, proposed to emigrate and found a Pantisocracy or Hyper-Utopia on the banks of the Susquehanna.

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
 But to be young was very Heaven!

In all this “pleasant exercise of hope and joy,” Hazlitt came to share. Younger than the poets he admired, he believed in them as fervently as in the Revolution. But “universal England” was not with them. One mighty voice had been lifted from the first against the new *régime*. Burke, who had stood for liberty in America and justice in India, now appeared as the champion of tyranny in France. Prematurely aged by a life of struggle and ill-success, he had declined to the state of political pedantry that resists any change if it is made in some other than a prescribed way, and presently comes to resist all change merely

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because it is change. Burke in his latest phase seems to be one of those described by Hazlitt as

a set of men existing at all times, who never can arrive at a conception beyond the *still-life* of politics, and in the most critical circumstances and in the convulsion and agony of states, see only the violation of forms and etiquette. (*Life of Napoleon*, Chap. v.)

Burke found many willing hearers. It is a sufficient comment upon the tendency of his *Reflections* that they were admired equally in the Court of England and the Court of Russia. England had changed. What France was rejecting, England was accepting. The French Revolution came in the midst of George III's attempt to re-erect a royal autocracy upon the ruins of parliamentary government. Thirty years of his personal rule had reduced political life in England to a degraded level of corruption and incompetence. An England governed by servile and venal "King's Friends" could have no sympathy with a Revolution. A young Englishman, travelling in 1792 with the German forces gathering to crush France, had formulated a plan for the government of that country. Its first and chief point was that "the authority of the king should be perfectly re-established, and that any liberty the people may afterwards possess should be considered as his indulgence¹." It is difficult to understand the frame of mind that could ever have held in modern times this view of liberty and government; it is still more incredible that such a proposal should date from the summer of 1792 when the immediate result of the Duke of Brunswick's atrocious manifesto against the French had been the imprisonment of Louis XVI in the Temple. It is worth noting that the young English gentleman who took this enlightened view of national liberty and royal indulgence was the person who, as Lord Liverpool, held office here as Prime Minister from 1812 to 1827.

Elated by unexpected success against the German invaders, France became aggressive, and held that those who were not with her were against her. War with England began in 1793 and lasted with few intermissions for twenty-two years. The continental powers wavered; sometimes they were leagued against France, sometimes leagued with her; but England remained steadfastly Anti-Gallican from 1793 to 1815. Her pretexts for that long animosity changed from time to time, but her undeclared and unwavering purpose never changed; and that purpose was the suppression of anything like popular government, and the re-establishment of unlimited monarchy. She warred not so much to suppress revolutionary principles in France as to suppress revolutionary principles in England. The events in France had filled the

¹ Lord Granville Leveson Gower, *Private Correspondence, 1781-1821* Vol. 1, p. 49 (1916).

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governing classes of England with panic. The excesses of the Revolution there were made the excuse for excesses of repression here. Men of honourable record were transported for advocating the measures of Parliamentary reform that had shortly before been favoured by Pitt himself; and writers of liberal tendencies were shadowed by spies and dragged before the courts upon ridiculous charges of treason. Hazlitt in his impressionable youth had met some of the sufferers. Hatred of Pitt was inhaled with his every breath. Coleridge, whom he revered, had written thus of the detested minister:

Yon dark Scowler view,
 Who with proud words of dear-loved Freedom came—
 More blasting than the mildew from the South!
 And kissed his country with Iscariot mouth
 Ah! foul apostate from his Father's fame!

Wordsworth's later confession records the horror he felt when England joined in the hunt against France:

What, then, were my emotions, when in arms
 Britain put forth her freeborn strength in league,
 Oh, pity and shame! with those confederate Powers!
 Not in my single self alone I found,
 But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
 Change and subversion from that hour. No shock
 Given to my moral nature had I known
 Down to that very moment; neither lapse
 Nor turn of sentiment that might be named
 A revolution, save at this one time;
 All else was progress on the self-same path
 On which, with a diversity of pace,
 I had been travelling: this a stride at once
 Into another region. As a light
 And pliant harebell, swinging in the breeze
 On some grey rock—its birthplace—so had I
 Wantoned, fast rooted on the ancient tower
 Of my beloved country, wishing not
 A happier fortune than to wither there:
 Now was I from that pleasant station torn
 And tossed about in whirlwind. I rejoiced,
 Yes, afterwards—truth most painful to record!
 Exulted, in the triumph of my soul,
 When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown,
 Left without glory on the field, or driven,
 Brave hearts! to shameful flight. (*Prelude*, Bk x.)

Sentiments even remotely resembling these the Government were determined to suppress. The task was easy, for they were the sentiments of a rapidly dwindling minority. It is always possible to scare the "mutable many" by assuring them that they will lose the privileges they do not possess. That well-tryed plan succeeded thoroughly in 1793. The people of England, who had

no Parliamentary representation, and, under Pitt's recent statutes, next to no liberties, were assured that the French would rob them of their rights and liberties; and so they fought tremendously.

When the needs of France produced the Man of Destiny the purpose of England was strengthened. That Napoleon France should make a Revolution was bad enough; that she should make an Emperor was worse. England became the champion of Legitimacy; and just as France, a century earlier, had warred half-heartedly to force the Stewarts back upon England, so England fought with superb and memorable tenacity to force the Bourbons back upon France. That, really, is the story of the war.

Napoleon was our great enemy for many years, yet in such a way that we have now almost forgotten the enmity and remember only the greatness. Seen in contrast to the aims and ideals of the monarchs who combined to crush him, he was a beneficent influence in Europe. There was more real personal and political liberty, more good and sane administration in the France of Napoleon, than in all the rest of Europe put together. An appalling count can be drawn against him; but like Elizabeth or Henry VIII or any other great sinner of history, Napoleon is entitled to be judged by the balance of his career; and no one now disputes that this balance is on the side of good. In the great and ever-changing world of political doctrine, it is presumptuous for anyone to say that this is right or that is wrong; but if we believe that the general course of man for the last hundred years has been wholesomely progressive, we have to admit that, in opposing France, we were opposing the ideals we now call right. Hazlitt had no doubt of it.

The rest of the story is significant. After the triumph of England and the extinction of Napoleon, night settled down upon Europe. It became evident that the liberty which had triumphed at Waterloo was not the liberty of peoples but the liberty of absolute monarchs. For a short time Europe endured the burden of this new-found freedom, and then began to stir uneasily. The three days' revolution of 1830 was the answer of France to the liberty imposed upon it by the infantry of Wellington and the hussars of Blücher. In England the struggles for the Reform Bill acted as a safety-valve of popular discontent; but the states of Central Europe, more used to unenlightened despotism, endured to 1848 before they exploded in revolt. Italy had to wait for half a century before the unity given it by Napoleon was again restored.

Napoleon! 'twas a high name lifted high;
 It met at last God's thunder sent to clear
 Our compassing and covering atmosphere,
 And open a clear sight, beyond the sky,
 Of supreme empire: this of earth's was done
 And kings crept out again to feel the sun.

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The kings crept out—the peoples sate at home,—
 And finding the long invocated peace
 A pall embroidered with worn images
 Of rights divine, too scant to cover doom
 Such as they suffered,—cursed the corn that grew
 Rankly, to bitter bread, on Waterloo.

A deep gloom centred in the deep repose—
 The nations stood up mute to count their dead—
 And *he* who owned the NAME which vibrated
 Through silence,—trusting to his noblest foes,
 When earth was all too gray for chivalry—
 Died of their mercies, 'mid the desert sea.

The words are Mrs Browning's; the sentiments are Hazlitt's.

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He grudged France her hero. He thought that inferior nation did not deserve so great a man. What he really wanted was an English Napoleon who should cleanse and purify Britain as the Emperor had cleansed and purified France. To him Napoleon was not a tyrant, but a liberator, who had to conquer Europe because Europe's kings had conspired to conquer France. The Napoleon whom Hazlitt admired was the Napoleon to whom Beethoven had first dedicated his *Eroica* Symphony. He was the symbol of the French Revolution, the embodiment of a principle that Hazlitt, as an Englishman and the inheritor of the English Revolution, held as dear as life, the principle that there is no Divine Right of reigning inherent in any special family, and that peoples, therefore, may choose their own form of government. Thus he writes:

I have nowhere in anything I may have written declared myself to be a Republican; nor should I think it worth while to be a martyr and a confessor to any form or mode of government. But what I have staked health and wealth, name and fame upon, and am ready to do so again and to the last gasp, is this, that there is a power in the people to change its government and its governors. That is, I am a Revolutionist: for otherwise, I must allow that mankind are but a herd of slaves, the property of thrones, that no tyranny or insult can lawfully goad them to a resistance to a particular family. (*Life of Napoleon*, Chap. xxxiv.)

A fuller confession of his faith appears in another place in the same work:

Of my object in writing the *Life* here offered to the public, and of the general tone that pervades it, it may be proper that I should render some account (before proceeding farther) in order to prevent mistakes and false applications. It is true, I admired the man; but what chiefly attached me to him, was his being, as he had been long ago designated, "the child and champion of the Revolution." Of this character he could not divest himself, even though he wished it. He was nothing, he could be nothing, but what he owed to himself and to his triumphs over those who claimed mankind as their inheritance

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by a divine right; and as long as he was *a thorn in the side of kings* and kept them at bay, his cause rose out of the ruins and defeat of their pride and hopes of revenge. He stood (and he alone stood) between them and their natural prey. He kept off that last indignity and wrong offered to a whole people (and through them to the rest of the world) of being handed over, like a herd of cattle, to a particular family, and chained to the foot of a legitimate throne. This was the chief point at issue—this was the great question, compared with which all others were tame and insignificant—Whether mankind were, from the beginning to the end of time, born slaves or not? As long as he remained, his acts, his very existence, gave a proud and full answer to this question. As long as he interposed a barrier, a gauntlet, and an arm of steel between us and them who alone could set up the plea of old, indefeasible right over us, no increase of power could be too great that tended to shatter this claim to pieces: even his abuse of power and aping the style and title of the imaginary gods of the earth only laughed their pretensions the more to scorn. He did many things wrong and foolish; but they were individual acts, and recoiled upon the head of the doer. They stood upon the ground of their own merits, and could not urge in their vindication “the right divine of kings to govern wrong”; they were not precedents; they were not exempt from public censure or opinion; they were not softened by prescription, nor screened by prejudice, nor sanctioned by superstition, nor rendered formidable by a principle that imposed them as sacred obligations on all future generations: either they were state-necessities extorted by the circumstances of the time, or violent acts of the will, that carried their own condemnation in their bosom. Whatever fault might be found with them, they did not proceed upon the avowed principle, that “millions are made for one,” but one for millions; and as long as this distinction was kept in view, liberty was saved, and the Revolution was untouched; for it was to establish it that the Revolution was commenced, and to overturn it that the enemies of liberty waded through seas of blood and at last succeeded. (*Life of Napoleon*, Chap. xxxi.)

If Hazlitt seems to protest too much, let us recall our incipient Prime Minister of 1792 quoted earlier, and his plan for the government of France: “the first point is that the authority of the king should be perfectly re-established, and that any liberty the people may afterwards possess should be considered as his indulgence.”

All these things are as Hazlitt saw them. We may differ from him as we please, but we must understand his point of view if we are going to read him intelligently. On the whole, however, his beliefs are just the beliefs of the average Briton to-day. Hazlitt was the first of our now many Napoleonists. If he could return to this present world he might exhibit the utmost extreme of his enthusiasm without the least singularity. He would see Englishmen thronging with reverence to the shrine at the Invalides and averting their eyes with shame from the spectacle of St Helena. Hazlitt who set so much store by his “little image” of Napoleon would find the Emperor’s portrait a popular picture in the most British of households. He would have to read ravenously to

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keep abreast of the Napoleonic literature written, translated and published in these islands. Hazlitt was cold to French tragedy but he would unbend to *L'Aiglon* of Edmond Rostand. The enthusiastic lover of Scott might care little for the Wessex novels of Thomas Hardy, but he would certainly rejoice in *The Dynasts*.

These are agreeable speculations. The dull fact is that Hazlitt held his views when they were highly unpopular and savoured of treason. And he held them the more tenaciously the more they were challenged. He began to stand alone. The glorious visions of his youth faded. The Revolution instead of being the beginning of a new life, seemed no more than the end of an old song. His friends, some revered almost to adoration, crept over to the popular and profitable side. The time was gone when

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Mundum

Coleridge and Southey, Lloyd and Lamb and Co.
 All tuned their mystic harps to praise Lepaux.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, once apostles, became apostates, and Hazlitt hated them, not only for what they were, but for what they had been. "Into what pit thou seest from what height fall'n." Wordsworth, in his view, had been bought by the Government, and had left the cause for the handful of silver he received as Distributor of Stamps. Southey, the Pantisocrat and eulogist of Wat Tyler, had become the Court Laureate, and, what was even worse, a Quarterly Reviewer. As for Coleridge!—Coleridge, who had preached in the bright dawn of life that memorable sermon against kings, had now become a pensioner of George IV¹, a pillar of Church and State, and dallied with the doctrine of Divine Right. This was the most unkindest cut of all. That Coleridge should turn traitor was the crime of crimes. It was the worse, the second, fall of man. It was sacrilege against those divine and hallowed days of youth when Harmer Hill with all its pines had stooped to listen to a poet as he passed. Upon these false friends the hand of Hazlitt was thereafter heavy. He was impatient even with Lamb, who, thinking much as Hazlitt did, nevertheless thought it more circumspectly. Hazlitt's friends certainly had much to bear. He stalked the world wrathfully, holding his pistol at the heads of all he met, demanding that they should stand and deliver a hymn to the Revolution and a eulogy of the Emperor. Certainly it must have been hard to be patient with a furious essayist who asserted that Trafalgar was a tragedy and Austerlitz a crowning mercy—who, when Napoleon's flotilla was gathered at Boulogne, insisted that all his friends should regard the prospective invader of their country as a universal benefactor. The course of events was not favourable to him. The side he took became more and more a lost cause and was at last swallowed up in total defeat. Hazlitt was not a good loser. If he did not lose his hope, he certainly lost his

¹ Not, however, till 1824.

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temper. Indeed, he confesses as much in a little passage of self-analysis:

I have often been reproached with extravagance for considering things only in their abstract principles, and with heat or ill-temper, for getting into a passion about what no ways concerned me. If any one wishes to see me quite calm, they may cheat me in a bargain, or tread upon my toes; but a truth repelled, or a sophism repeated, totally disconcerts me, and I lose all patience. I am not, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, *a good-natured man*; that is, many things annoy me besides what interferes with my own ease and interest. I hate a lie; a piece of injustice wounds me to the quick, though nothing but the report of it reach me. Therefore I have made many enemies and few friends; for the public know nothing of well-wishers, and keep a wary eye on those that would reform them. Coleridge used to complain of my irascibility in this respect, and not without reason. Would that he had possessed a little of my tenaciousness and jealousy of temper; and then, with his eloquence to paint the wrong, and acuteness to detect it, his country and the cause of liberty might not have fallen without a struggle! (*Plain Speaker*, "On Depth and Superficiality.")

It was claimed by Coleridge and others that the first great revulsion of their feelings towards France dated from the attack of the Directory on the liberty of Switzerland in 1798. That invasion, morally indefensible, is difficult to justify even on the lower ground of military or political necessity. But, even here, we should know what we are condemning. The Swiss Confederacy overthrown by France was in fact nothing like the later and excellent Swiss Republic. The peasants of Vaud and the Valais, held in subjection by the petty oligarchs of Berne, knew little of the "mountain liberty" dear to the poets. When such a man as Gibbon, the last person in the world to feel benevolent towards political discontent, permits himself the criticism to be found in that long youthful letter by him describing the Swiss constitution¹, the ordinary observer is tempted to believe that real Swiss liberty began rather than ended with the Helvetic Republic instituted by France in 1798. But the great fact remains, that interference with one independent nation by another is in general utterly wrong, and specially suspicious when lofty motives are urged in justification. Still, when we read with admiration that splendid sonnet of Wordsworth, it is well to ask ourselves whether we ought to weep for the subjugation of the Swiss Republic in 1798 and have no tears for the attempted subjugation of the French Republic in 1793.

It was this national hypocrisy or inconsistency of ours that irritated Hazlitt. He held his principles without thought of compromise, and he had to suffer for his tenacity. It is difficult for us to understand the power that was wielded a century ago by the party Reviews,

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¹ *Works*, 1814, Vol. II, Letter ix.

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by such persons as Gifford and Croker in the *Quarterly Review* and John Wilson (called Christopher North) in *Blackwood's Magazine*. The public seem really to have been terrorised by the truculence of these periodicals, and afraid to read or think otherwise than the Reviewers permitted. Ostensibly critical, these magazines had nothing to do with literature. They were purely political organs. If a writer was suspected of any leaning towards liberal views in politics, then the hirelings of Mr Murray in London and of Mr Blackwood in Edinburgh fell upon him with their bludgeons. Thus, Keats was friendly with Leigh Hunt; Leigh Hunt had been imprisoned for criticising the Prince Regent; therefore Keats must be bludgeoned; and bludgeoned he was in articles that are among the ineffaceable shames of our literary history. *The Edinburgh Review*, organ of the Whigs, must not be exempted from general condemnation, though Jeffrey and his contributors at their worst were cleanness itself in comparison with Gifford and Wilson. *The Edinburgh* cannot claim, like *The Quarterly*, to have killed a poet. Its most famous feat is the condemnation of Wordsworth's *Excursion* in an article beginning with the now historic words, "This will never do!"

The Tory reviewers hailed Hazlitt with joy as a fitting victim for their sport. Poor Keats had failed them. He had simply perished without any visible sign of anguish; but Hazlitt, though tough enough to last, was more easily hurt, and (delightful quality) shouted when he was hurt. Let us glance for a moment at the literary methods of that famous time. Perhaps the best of all Hazlitt's books is *Table Talk*. This was reviewed in *Blackwood* for August 1822 by someone who claimed to be a scholar and gentleman, entitled therefore to read the cockney Hazlitt a lesson in good style and manners. Here are a few sentences:

The whole surface of these volumes is one gaping sore of wounded and festering vanity; and in short...our table-talker "is rather AN ULCER than a MAN." Now, it is one thing to feel sore, and a bad thing it is there is no denying; but to tell all the world the story of one's soreness, to be continually poking at the bandages, and displaying all the ugly things they ought to cover, is quite another, and a far worse affair.

A little of this is quite enough. Hazlitt was maddened by these attacks. He tried to retaliate in various periodicals; but he was attempting the impossible. The rowdy blackguardism that fails may perhaps be corrected, but not the rowdy blackguardism that pays. The combination of vulgarity with success is irresistible. Wilson and Gifford were "in": Hazlitt was "out"; and neither Hazlitt nor anyone else could hurt their very hypothetical feelings.

The actual events of Hazlitt's private life are not important, and only a brief recital need be made of his personal and literary doings. He lived at Winterslow from 1808 to 1812, when he moved to York Street,

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Westminster, the house once occupied by Milton, whose noble spirit, did it haunt this sublunary world, would have consorted rather with the tenant Hazlitt than with the landlord Jeremy Bentham. In 1812 he delivered at the Russell Institution ten lectures on philosophy, some of which survived in manuscript and were printed in the *Literary Remains*. They indicate that Hazlitt's interest in philosophy was after all quite literary. The first wholly characteristic work of his to appear in book form was *The Round Table* (1817) containing matter from his contributions to *The Examiner*, *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Champion*. Here we have the essential Hazlitt, the Hazlitt of flashing, contentious sentences, full of matter, intimating intense enjoyment in the writer and inciting to intense enjoyment in the reader. The scale of the essays hardly allowed him to wind into his subject as he was to do later, but the imposed brevity gave his aphoristic genius its chance. The same year (1817) saw the publication of his *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, a book which possibly its own generation found more usefully enlightening than we do. Hazlitt's enjoyment of Shakespeare had (like Lamb's) a singular completeness ensuing from his appreciation of poetry, his sense of drama, and his love for the theatre. He lived in a fortunate hour. He beheld the sunset splendour of Siddons and hailed the meridian brightness of Edmund Kean. The classic dignity of John Kemble and the fervent emotionalism of Miss O'Neill illustrated for him the extremes of Shakespeare's dramatic art. Much that we know of these dead and gone players we learn from Hazlitt. He is, in a special sense, the historian of Kean, whose first impersonations in London he praised in *The Morning Chronicle*. *A View of the English Stage* (1818) reprints a number of dramatic criticisms from *The Chronicle*, *The Examiner* and *The Champion*. Two years later Hazlitt wrote a fine series of theatrical essays for *The London Magazine*, not fully reprinted until 1903 (*Works*, Vol. VIII).

The years 1819–1820 were in a special sense Hazlitt's "lecture years," for at the Surrey Institution in the Blackfriars Road he delivered those three sets of discourses that form the matter of three excellent and always popular volumes, *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819) and *Lectures chiefly on the Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (1820). Talfourd gives an interesting description of Hazlitt as lecturer:

Mr Hazlitt delivered three courses of lectures at the Surrey Institution ...before audiences with whom he had but "an imperfect sympathy." They consisted chiefly of Dissenters, who agreed with him in his hatred of Lord Castlereagh, but who "loved no plays"; of Quakers, who approved him as the opponent of Slavery and Capital Punishment, but who "heard no music"; of citizens devoted to the main chance, who had a hankering after "the improvement of the mind," but to whom his favourite doctrine of its natural disinterestedness was a

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riddle; of a few enemies who came to sneer; and a few friends who were eager to learn and admire. The comparative insensibility of the bulk of his audience to his finest passages sometimes provoked him to awaken their attention by points which broke the train of his discourse, after which he could make himself amends by some abrupt paradox which might set their prejudices on edge, and make them fancy they were shocked....He once had an edifying advantage over them. He was enumerating the humanities which endeared Dr Johnson to his mind; and at the close of an agreeable catalogue mentioned, as last and noblest, "his carrying the poor victim of disease and dissipation on his back through Fleet Street," at which a titter rose from some, who were struck by the picture as ludicrous, and a murmur from others, who deemed the allusion unfit for ears polite. He paused for an instant and then added in his sturdiest and most impressive manner, "an act which realises the parable of the Good Samaritan," at which his moral and delicate hearers shrank rebuked into deep silence. He was not eloquent in the true sense of the term; for his thoughts were too weighty to be moved along by the shallow stream of feeling which an evening's excitement can rouse. He wrote all his lectures, and read them as they were written; but his deep voice and earnest manner suited his matter well. He seemed to dig into his subject—and not in vain. (*Literary Remains.*)

But a greater than Talfourd was listening to Hazlitt. Writing to his brother in February 1818, Keats observes:

I hear Hazlitt's lectures regularly, his last was on Gray, Collins, Young, etc., and he gave a very fine piece of discriminating criticism on Swift, Voltaire and Rabelais. I was very disappointed at his treatment of Chatterton.

The poet was then twenty-two and had but another three years of life before him. His first slim volume had already appeared. *Endymion*, dedicated to the memory of that same Chatterton, was being hastily prepared for the printer. A few weeks earlier he had noted "Hazlitt's depth of taste" as being one of three things to rejoice at in the world of his time. The other two were *The Excursion*—and the pictures of Haydon. Upon the last we may remark that much can be forgiven to friendship.

Two other important publications by Hazlitt belong to the year 1819, *A Letter to William Gifford Esq.* and *Political Essays*. The latter work contains many pieces collected from various periodicals (together with some "characters" from his early compilation *The Eloquence of the British Senate*), and exhibits Hazlitt at his best and worst. Some pieces are little more than rancorous journalism with no permanent interest; but others are among his very finest essays. The *Letter to Gifford* was a deliberate attempt to get even with that person. The pamphlet has been highly praised as a piece of tremendous invective, but, really, it is much less vitriolic than some of

Hazlitt and
Gifford

Hazlitt's shorter pieces—the character of Gifford, for instance, in *The Spirit of the Age*. It is far too long. Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord*, which the admiring Hazlitt probably had in mind as a model of scale, is so different in scope as to afford the reader an instructive exercise in the comparison of effective and ineffective polemic. Hazlitt made the tactical mistake of attempting to argue with his adversary. With an insistence that is almost pathetic, Hazlitt tries to convince Gifford (and such of the world as might read the epistle) that he is a metaphysician of parts; and so the Letter concludes with another attempt to restate his views on the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind. As befits a now practised writer, Hazlitt is vastly more lucid than in his efforts of twenty years earlier, but he leaves us without any conviction that his alleged metaphysical discovery is either true or useful.

In 1821 appeared the first volume of his *Table Talk*, the second following a year later. Among several works of high excellence it is hard to choose one and call it best. Still, most lovers of Hazlitt, restricted to one, would probably give their choice to this body of essays, so hard to match for variety of subject, brilliance of style and valid criticism of life and letters. The *Characteristics* of 1823 was an attempt to imitate the *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld. It cannot be called entirely successful. Hazlitt's best aphorisms are to be found scattered in profusion up and down his longer essays; his deliberate attempts at epigram are more like excised paragraphs than the stamped and coined utterance of genuine aphorism.

Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England (1824) recalls the adventures of the early painting days, and confirms the view that Hazlitt was, on the whole, an excellent critic of pictures. Nowhere does he attempt a purely literary fantasia upon a theme pictorial such as we find, for instance, in Ruskin's description of Tintoretto's "Last Judgment," where much of the critic's ecstasy arises from imagined beauties that are simply not paintable. With Hazlitt a picture is never more than a picture, and so we enjoy his writing as he enjoyed the picture. Sometimes he seems to enjoy certain pictures that later, and presumably better, taste prefers to neglect, but on the whole his judgment is quite remarkably in accord with modern preferences.

In 1825 appeared *The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits*, a series of character sketches fuller, rounder and less distorted than his earlier efforts in this line. Lamb praises it highly in a letter to Bernard Barton, calling the Horne Tooke "a matchless portrait." It is indeed one of Hazlitt's best works. The essence of a whole period is concentrated in its pungent pages. It was followed in 1826 by *The Plain Speaker*, a collection of essays matching the *Table Talk*, and only slightly less excellent than its companion. To the same year belongs the *Notes of a Journey* mentioned earlier.